

**‘MAYBE NOTHING EVER HAPPENS ONCE AND IS FINISHED’:  
SOME NOTES ON RECENT SOUTHERN FICTION  
AND SOCIAL CHANGE**

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A few years ago, the critic Fred Hobson complained that, if pondering the mind of the South had been a Southern disease before 1945, since then it had become an epidemic. The historian George Brown Tindall agreed. During the last three decades of the twentieth century, he suggested, conferences on the ‘changing South’ had become ‘one of the flourishing minor industries of the region.’<sup>1</sup> I have no great desire to spread the epidemic further. Or, if you prefer, add to this flourishing cottage industry. But it’s perhaps useful to stress one point. Over the past few decades, the South has changed dramatically in terms of its day-to-day social and economic life and, at the same time, its mental and moral habits have been challenged. And the nature of the material alterations is, perhaps, clearer now than it was twenty or even ten years ago. ‘Prior to 1940,’ Leonard Reissman has written, ‘the South could fairly be described, with one or two states excepted, as a predominantly rural region here and there dotted with cities. By the 1990s, by contrast, the South could be defined by another historian, James Cobb, as a ‘conservative capitalist’s dream come true.’<sup>2</sup> By then, the collapse of the plantation system, the dispersal of the mill villages, and the breakdown of other places of settled employment had left white males exposed to the demands of the market. The civil rights movement and consequent federal legislation allowed African Americans to become a more active and fluid - if still significantly disadvantaged - part of the labour force. And the women’s movement, together with the crumbling of traditional structures, opened up female access to the marketplace. In effect, the changes in the material fabric of Southern society between the 1940s and the 1990s confirmed the transfer to the market economy, and completed the commodification, of most of the adult population of the South. In the words of one Southern historian, Numan Bartley, writing in 1995:

A dynamic free-flowing work force unburdened by labor union membership, unity, or much in the way of state protection or social legislation complemented the drive for economic growth while it undermined family, community, and the spiritual aspects of religion.<sup>3</sup>

We don’t have to agree with the assumptions evident in this description (for example, the implication that union membership is a “burden”) in order to accept its assessment of the way things have gone. For good or ill, the Southern economy has become part of the global marketplace. Or, as one unsympathetic commentator has put it, ‘the

South has been labouring mightily to re-create itself into a tinfoil-twinkling simulation of Southern California.<sup>4</sup>

Labouring mightily, it may be, but not too hard: the paradox remains that, despite exposure to the marketplace and material change, many Southerners - and, in particular, many *white* Southerners - continue to resist. 'Southerners feel,' the historian Charles Lerche wrote in 1984, 'that they are struggling against an open conspiracy and a totally hostile environment.' Five years after this, in 1989, another commentator, Sheldon Hackney added the comment that 'the Southern identity has been linked from the first to a siege mentality.'<sup>5</sup> And when, in 1986, the sociologist John Shelton Reed came to write a concluding note to a new edition of his seminal book *The Enduring South* he found similar feelings of being marginalised, and even threatened, still at work among white Southerners. More to the point, the data accumulated for this new edition only confirmed what he had claimed when *The Enduring South* first appeared fourteen years earlier. 'Cultural differences that were largely due to Southerners' lower incomes and educational levels,' Reed explained, 'to their predominantly rural and small-town residence:' these, he said, 'were smaller in the 1960s than they had been in the past, and they are smaller still in the 1980s.' 'A few' of these differences, he added, 'have vanished altogether.' On the other hand, those differences that Reed labelled "quasi-ethnic," because of their supposed origins in the different histories of the American regions: these, or many of them, persisted. On the matters of localism, attitudes towards violence, gun ownership, and religion, *white* Southerners still revealed themselves to be distinctive, different. In fact, if there appeared to be any significant change in mental maps between the 1960s and the late 1980s, Reed commented, it was among non-Southerners. 'Non-Southerners are becoming more like Southerners,' Reed concluded, 'in their tendency to find heroes and heroines in the local community, or even in the family... ; in... the... conviction that individuals should have the right to arm themselves' and in their tendency 'to have had the sort of religious experience that is theoretically central to Southern Protestantism.'<sup>6</sup> What has been called the "Southernisation of America" over the past two or three decades suggests that one response to commodification, or the globalisation of the material life, is resistance and even a kind of cultural reversion: Americans, and not just Southerners, react to the blanding of America by subscribing

to cultural values that simultaneously register their anxiety about change and measure their difference from the corporate ethos.

Even a phrase like “the Southernisation of America” is too simple, however; and, in the end, no more satisfactory than “the Americanisation of the South.” Non-Southerners have certainly gravitated towards Southern thinking in some ways. The situation is complicated, though, by three factors: the selling of the South, sometimes as a kind of giant theme park or American version of the heritage industry; our increasing sense of the pluralism of *any* culture including the Southern one; and our equally increasing sense of the transnational contexts in which it is useful, and even necessary, to place any culture. To take the selling of the South first: in Lee Smith’s 1983 novel, *Oral History*, the old family homeplace still stands, but it has become a decaying part of a successful theme park called Ghostland. Again, during an interview for the BBC in 1993, the jazz musician Wynton Marsalis, who is from New Orleans, explained, ‘I wasn’t into jazz as a kid. I thought it was just shakin’ your butt for the white tourists in the French Quarter.’<sup>7</sup> Both Smith and Marsalis are making the same point about a very particular kind of commodification that turns the South itself - or, to be more exact, an idea of the South - into a product, a function of the marketplace. ‘Music is integral to our marketing plan,’ the director of the New Orleans tourist board declared. The company that manufactures Jack Daniel’s whiskey now acts as a sponsor to the Faulkner conferences in Mississippi. Popular films, like *Driving Miss Daisy*, *Doc Hollywood*, and *O Brother, Where Art Thou?*, for all their obvious differences, all play upon the idea of the South as a provincial, peripheral, backward but essentially “homey” place. And, of course, we are all familiar with advertisements that play upon the idea of the South as both exotic and authentic - exempt, somehow, from both the banality and the artificiality of the everyday urban world. The ironies of Southern history have always run deep; and one of the deepest in recent times, I think, is this curious case of change within continuity within change. Some aspects of the South retain their grip on the imagination despite drastic economic change, but then that drift towards the past, that undertow of resistance, becomes a saleable asset. The legends of the South are not necessarily dying, in other words, or being fiercely protected; in some cases, they are simply being turned into cash.

The question that then springs to mind, really, is what *kind* of South are we talking about? Is it the South, for instance, of Lee Smith or the South of Wynton

Marsalis that is in the process of being sold? A question like that has always lurked at the back of any attempt to chart Southern thinking. It has always been difficult to talk about the South in singular monolithic terms (no matter how hard some Southerners have tried to do so). Now, with the growth of cultural pluralism, it's become impossible. Makers of the South and things Southern whose achievements previously tended to be ignored or minimised for reasons of race and/or gender now come much more into debate. And, of course, there is far more than a biracial model of the region in play. 'People speak of "American" as if it means "white" and "minority" as if means "black,"' Ishmael Reed has observed. 'I began to realise that... we had to become multicultural.'<sup>8</sup> The 'we' here is, in the first instance, all Reed's fellow Americans. But that remark applies with particular force, I think, to the state, Tennessee, and the region where Reed was born. Southerners are now, more than ever before, part of what Reed calls 'the Multinational Society,' 'the first universal nation.'<sup>9</sup> And, faced with the pressures and challenges that society provides, they are able, and even perhaps required, to create alliances, both within and outside their multiple communities, in order to make up ethnic identity. Just as much to the point as the South's participation in 'the Multinational Society,' is our vastly expanded sense now of exactly what "making" a culture involves: the recognition that a culture expresses and in fact creates itself by a variety of means - means that include the individual book or essay, of course, but go way beyond this to incorporate the artefacts of everyday life and the endless products of mass culture. What emerges from this is the possibility that even the process of commodification, the turning of an image of the South into a marketable asset, can be seen to play a part in the making of a culture. After all, whether we like it or not, Southerners are "known" to themselves and others through the mass media, among various forms of communication. And what emerges from this, in turn, is the fact that we are faced now with, not so much Southern culture, really, as Southern *cultures*.

Those cultures have, too, to be seen in terms that go beyond the immediate, the regional and even the national. 'I was born in the South,' begins a book on the American South by *The Guardian* journalist Gary Younge, '- well, Stevenage in Herfordshire, anyway.'<sup>10</sup> The book is titled, *No Place Like Home: A Black Briton's Journey through the American South*. In it, Younge describes a journey he took through the South in 1997, roughly following the route taken by the Freedom Riders

in the 1960s. Born in Great Britain, the child of immigrants from Barbados, Younge was able to bring a particular perspective to bear on the Southern states: the perspective of an outsider, perhaps, but an outsider with special knowledge. That opening remark I just quoted takes us into a story about a man confronting a history very like his own, even if differently calibrated. Stevenage, as Younge goes on to explain to those readers who might not know, was one of the new towns devised and built just after the Second World War. Conceived in a spirit of post war optimism, as what Younge calls a ‘suburban Utopia’<sup>9</sup> just thirty miles from the capital, it could hardly be more different at first sight from the ghost haunted American South that fired Younge’s imagination, while he was growing up. But Stevenage and Britain generally, Younge goes on to point out, suffered and still do from their own forms of racism and social injustice, even though segregation was never enshrined in law. Partly a history and a social document, *No Place Like Home* is above all a personal memoir: the narrative of someone who learns about himself through an encounter with different inflections of a common history. And the several possible meanings of the book’s title take on an additional coloration when we gradually realise, as Younge does, that in some ways the American South is a place rather too much like home, uncomfortably so – shaped by a shared backlog of prejudice. This is a personal variation on what a special issue of the *Southern Review* called ‘The Worldwide Face of Southern Culture.’ The South, as recent scholarship has made perfectly clear, can no longer be torn away from its transnational roots and connections. It has to be seen in terms that break open frontiers and dissolve those boundaries that keep it hermetically sealed. Those terms range from ones that place it, following the work of people like Paul Gilroy, in the context of the black diaspora, to those that put the South in the context of the entire American continent, as, say, the work of Deborah Cohn and Susan Castillo does. What I might call, using an ugly neologism, the “transnationalising” of the South also includes Andrew Hook’s unearthing of the Celtic roots of Southern literature and culture, and Helen Taylor’s analyses of a series of dialogues between Southern tropes and works and their European audiences<sup>10</sup>. “Travelling theory,” as it is termed, especially when related to interrogations of regionalism and to postmodern geographies, has helped to alter the terrain of Southern studies. The coordinates we use to map the South have altered because our charting of its cultural geography has tended to become transnational. And the

consequence has been to aggravate still further our sense of the mosaic of Southern cultures.

And it is between those cultures, as I see it, that Southerners continue to live - and, not least among those Southerners, Southern writers. They are living between them, too, in a double sense. In the regional context, they are caught between the conflicting interests and voices that constitute the region and the regional debate, all of them demanding recognition and power. Similarly, on the national and even international stage they betray intense uncertainty about whether to become assimilated or to resist: Southern books, in particular, very often become a site of struggle between, on the one hand, the culture(s) of the South and, on the other, the culture of the global marketplace. 'I shuttled between identities,' observes the title character in *Jasmine* (1989) by the Asian American writer Bharati Mukherjee, a book that begins its American journey on the coasts of Florida. And that sense of the improvisational, making up an identity, is a feature of many Southern characters and texts as they attempt to deal with their liminal condition, their position between historical borders and cultures. The task of anyone looking at those texts, in turn, I think, is to make the notion of Southernness neither too prescriptive nor so porous as to curb usable definition: to see regionalism in terms of different lines of sense, multiple anchorage. This is not the place to embark on a survey of recent Southern writers, and their representation of conflicts that go to make up the South now. But perhaps some idea of what I'm getting at can be suggested by pointing towards five different kinds of writerly practice often to be found in contemporary Southern writing - which, for the sake of simplicity, I will identify with five different characters or possible *personae*: the expatriate, the maverick, the returner, the tale-teller and the homekeeper.

The writing practice of the expatriate is implicit in his or her change of locality: Richard Ford has moved to the Northwest and then to New York, James Wilcox has gone to New York, Alice Walker to the West Coast, Rick Bass to the Far West and Cormac McCarthy to the Southwest and the Mexican border. With the change of locale has come an alteration in the fictional landscape and a shift in perspective - Wilcox, for instance, has started writing about Louisianians displaced in New York or New Yorkers marooned in Louisiana. McCarthy, in turn, has used a fresh, unfamiliar mix of anglicism and the hispanic to secrete a story of the South in

stories of the West. His border trilogy, set on the U.S./Mexico border resituates and rewrites some of the trademark themes of Southern writing: the omnipresence of evil, the immanence of the past in the present, and the compulsion to talk, to turn life into telling. In that sense, he is like those postcolonial writers – I think of Gabriel Garcia Marquez and Tim Winton – who’ve learned from Faulkner and then transplanted what they have learned. And expatriatism, I should add, is a two-way street: it involves movement, not just from the South, but to the South. One of the most interesting developments in recent writing from or about the South, in fact, has involved variations on the immigrant encounter. That encounter, in the recent South, has taken several forms. I shall be looking at one form, relating to immigration from South East Asia, a little later. All I would want to mention here is the impact that immigration from the hispanic world has had on the supposedly solid South. I am thinking, for instance, of the several waves of immigration from Cuba. And of the literature of expatriation written by and about exiled Cubans in the South, particularly in southern Florida. That literature includes *Raining Backwards* (1988) by Roberto Fernandez (a surreal tale of exile set in Miami), *Dreaming in Cuban* (1992) by Christina Garcia (where the image of a lost garden paradise is all pervasive), and *The Perez Family* (1990) by Christine Bell.

‘I need a map,’ admits one exile in *The Perez Family*, which tells the story of a “family” that, strictly speaking, isn’t a family at all, but a makeshift group of refugees put together to gain priority for sponsorship. Needing a map to chart their way through the strange land of southern Florida, these characters offer a different angle of vision on their Southern surroundings, turning them sometimes into dreamscapes. Here, for instance, is Miami as seen by one of the members of the Perez family, the self-appointed leader and matriarch called Dottie:

Miami in the afternoon sun is crayola and bright. Like a child’s drawing, the city is imaginatively colored and unimaginatively out of proportion. Slender palms stand in disbelief against giant lego constructions. Soft clouds float by garish concrete. Rows of aqua and pink houses insult the shimmering sea and the sky they frame. The streets themselves parallel and intersect with the simple logic of a child’s board game. Miami fit Dottie’s idea of

freedom perfectly – it was simple, gaudy, and close at hand.<sup>11</sup>

As this passage suggests, I think, many of the characters in these novels find a means of locating themselves in their new Southern space by relocating the emotional baggage they carry with them. In the process, they offer a fresh, hispanic spin on a cluster of tropes, gathered around the notions of a lost childhood and a dreamlike paradise, that is as old as the region. As early as 1650, for instance, an English settler in Virginia had called it a ‘Virgin Countrey.’ It was calculated, he said, to show those who emigrated there, ‘what a brow of fertility and beauty the world was adorned with when she was vigorous and youthfull.’ Characters like Dottie in *The Perez Family* reinvent these myths of emigration. Needing a map, they make one for themselves: one that recharts their new home, using fresh but somehow familiar coordinates. In the process, they offer altered geographies, another perspective on the mixed, plural medium that Southerners now inhabit. And the books that tell their stories give another spin to the theme of exile: dramatising, in the process, that rhythm of innovation and restitution, escape and recovery, that turns every day into a crossing of borders.

A different kind of relationship to the residual culture of the South – and, in some cases to the Southern writer whom Flannery O’Connor once famously referred to as “the Dixie Limited,” William Faulkner - is suggested by the people I have called the mavericks. By this I mean writers like Barry Hannah, Larry Brown, Ishmael Reed, Blanche McCrary Boyd, Harry Crews, John Dufresne and Lee Durkee. Here, too, the sense of distancing, loosening the ties with the past of the region – and, in particular, its literary past – is unmistakable. In one of his novels, in fact, *Karate is a Thing of the Spirit* (1971), Harry Crews even goes so far as to use William Faulkner as a kind of running joke. At times, though, the relation between these maverick writers and their literary ancestors can be subtler. Crews himself shows this. So does one of the best of these maverick writers, to my mind, Barry Hannah. At the opening of Barry Hannah’s *Ray* (1980), for instance, Ray, the protagonist and narrator of the book, announces himself in terms that deny the possibility of coherent selfhood, by shifting with disconcerting speed from the third person to the first person and then to the second:

Ray is thirty-three and he was born of decent religious parents, I say...

Ray, you are a doctor and you're in hospital in Mobile...

But you're still me. Say what? You say you know who I am?<sup>12</sup>

To anyone familiar with Faulkner's *As I Lay Dying* – and that includes Hannah himself – this roller-coaster shift between first, second and third person singular will recall the famous final monologue devoted to one character, Darl Bundren in that novel, which begins:

Darl has gone to Jackson. They put him on the train, laughing down the long car laughing, the heads turning like the heads of owls when he passed. 'What are you laughing at?' I said.

'Yes yes yes yes.'<sup>13</sup>

It is as though these two passages are having a conversation, I think. If they are, however, it is one that allows for disagreement. For Faulkner, these pronominal shifts – between 'he' and 'you' and 'I' to describe the same person – are a sign of Darl's mental illness, his disintegration into several distinct and warring personalities. He is, after all, on his way to confinement in mental hospital. Hannah is using exactly the same verbal device, but he is using it for a quite different purpose: to signal the protagonist's existential freedom, his immersion in process. The kind of relationship between the two texts signalled here has been called parodic. For me, though, it's subtler than that. 'Every age reaccentuates in its own way the works of its most immediate past,' Bakhtin observed. And the idioms and narrative strategies Hannah uses *reaccentuate* in just this way, I think. They are forms for engaging with the past and, in the process, making room for the Southern writer here in the present. Hannah's texts, like those of the regional mavericks and many others, exist in *dialogue* with earlier texts from the South: a dialogue founded on a sense of separateness from literary ancestors but also connection, reinvention of earlier work but also repetition. And they use verbal echoes, like the ones I have just noted, to render that dialogue even more intimate. In short, a shared language is deployed in the two brief passages I've just quoted: both to measure, and to bridge, the gap between two writers – one postmodern, the other the most famous of Southern modernists – the both of them caught up in the web of Southern writing.

If expatriatism and exile are now part of the verbal currency of writers from the South, then, just like the language of the maverick, the language of return, possibly accompanied by revival, has always been there. The return may be, and often

is, one in time as well as space. Turning back to the Southern homeplace, the Southerner may well be addressing the old coercions of their heritage as they visit the place where they were born, the family and neighbourhood, the people they knew. In “The Ballad of Billie Potts,” the Southern Renaissance writer Robert Penn Warren famously described ‘the long compulsion and the circuit hope/Back’ that Southerners are heir to. Warren also described the place the Southerner returns to as one where the father waits for the son.’ In recent stories by writers from the South, though, the place of return is not necessarily where the father waits for the son. More often than not, it’s where the mother or mother country waits for the daughter. Many of these stories are, in fact, written by and about women: women “coming home” - as one of these women writers, Ellen Gilchrist, puts it in *The Anna Papers* (1988) – “Coming home to be my mother’s friend, to stop being jealous of my brothers and sisters. To count my blessings and bestow kindness on my kin.”<sup>14</sup> The daughter returns to the mother, for instance, and the mother land, in *Black Mountain Breakdown* (1980) by Lee Smith, *The Killing Ground* (1982) by Mary Lee Settle, and *Blue Rise* (1983) by Rebecca Hill. With, it has to be said, very different results, ranging from disaster and mental breakdown to a kind of triumph and redemption. In a very different way, the daughter returns to the mother too in *Meridian* (1976) by Alice Walker. Returning to the South, Walker’s protagonist Meridian Hill never comes to personal terms with her mother. But, by returning to her mother’s history and ancestry, she does experience a symbolic rapprochement. She makes her peace with her mother’s past, and her mother’s church, and is able to move on.

The act of returning is also basic to the fiction of the African American writer, Ernest Gaines. Sometimes, as in Gaines’s first novel, *Catherine Carmier* (1964), a character actually returns to the home place. Sometimes, as in perhaps his most famous, *The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman* (1971), a character returns to the past by telling us, the readers, about it. And sometimes, as in *A Gathering of Old Men* (1983), people do not return to the past, it returns to them. Both the narrator and the protagonist of Gaines’s 1993 novel, *A Lesson Before Dying*, are compelled in this way to confront their past lives: to return, as it were, on themselves. The protagonist, for example, a young African American man called Jefferson, is in prison awaiting execution. He is encouraged to keep a diary; and, in doing so, he is brought face to face with the facts about what he has done, what has been done to him, and who he is.

He is barely literate. ‘I dont kno what to rite,’ he begins the diary, ‘I aint never rote a letter in all my life... I cant think of too much to say.’ Nevertheless, through perseverance, he learns how both to see and to state his own humanity. And this, it is clear, is a political as well as a moral act. Jefferson, we learn, has never been able up till now to know himself as a human being because his society has never allowed him to do so. His lesson before dying is to learn how to return on himself and those he loves, and to know how his identity is tied up in community with them. In the process, he achieves what Gaines calls an ‘elevation of himsel’: a turning back that’s also a revival and a redemption.

To the extent that Gaines’s characters talk themselves back into their pasts, they are tale-tellers as well as returners (many of the characters engaged in this act of return actively *talk* themselves back into their pasts – I think, for instance, of the title character in Ernest Gaines’s most well-known novel, *The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman* (1971). And to the extent they do, they are tale-tellers as well as returners) : reminding us that the five categories or *personae* I mentioned earlier are by no means mutually exclusive. ‘We need to talk,’ William Faulkner once said of Southerners, ‘to tell, since oratory is our heritage.’ And, ever since he said that, many Southerners seem to have been bent on proving him right. And, not least, recent Southern writers. There are books that incorporate the voices of different people or generations, like *Machine Dreams* (1984) and *Shelter* (1994) by Jayne Anne Phillips, *The Picture Makers* (1990) by Emily Ellison, *Crazy Ladies* (1990) by Michael Lee West and *The Patron Saint of Liars* (1992) by Ann Patchett. There are also those that trace the accents of a single and singular voice, such as (of course) *The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman*, *A Lifetime Burning* (1982) by Ellen Douglas, *Edisto* (1983) by Padgett Powell, *Almost Innocent* (1984) by Sheila Bosworth, and *Oldest Living Confederate Widow Tells All* (1989) by Allan Gurganus.

Talking shades into singing in many of these fictions, the voice becomes musical in its rhythms and intonations. Sometimes this is a matter of analogy. So a character in *1959* (1992) by the African American novelist Thulani Davis was so old, the narrator remembers, that he ‘had more recollections of slavery than freedom’ and would repeat stories and speeches from the old times that everyone around him ended up learning, ‘like a blues song passed down the hands on the levee.’<sup>15</sup> At other times, though, the music goes deeper, becomes structural. So, in the work of another African

American writer from the South, Albert Murray, what is returned to, in and through old tales and talking, is the oral tradition and, in particular, the blues idiom. The most powerful shaping factors in Murray's work have been the general, nurturing aspects of the African American community and black musical forms like the blues. For Murray, the blues idiom works like classical tragedy. It supplies the stylistic code for dramatising the most terrible, painful situations; and it offers a strategy for living with, even triumphing over them, surviving with dignity and grace. As with any developed aesthetic form, the blues idiom enables the artist to transform the grit of raw experience into significant art: to celebrate human possibility, 'in spite of the fact,' as Murray puts it, 'that human existence is so often mostly a low-down dirty shame.' Murray has realised his belief in the formal, and so moral, potential of the blues in his fictional trilogy, *Train Whistle Guitar* (1974), *The Spyglass Tree* (1991) and *The Seven League Boots* (1996). The three novels trace the growth of their protagonist and narrator, Scooter, from his childhood in small town Alabama to his maturity as a bass player in a touring jazz band. Along the way, Scooter learns lessons about living and testifying from his family, friends and neighbours: among them, the man who Scooter says, plays guitar 'as if he were also an engineer telling tall tales on a train whistle.'<sup>16</sup> That image registers the structural and moral key to this narrative: which is to present life and the telling of it as a matter of instinctive, fluid exchange between self and others: something like (and here I'm referring to an image used throughout the trilogy) the relationship between a jazz soloist and a supporting band, and between them, in turn, and their audience.

A similarly fluid exchange between the different dimensions of life is to be found, I think, in the work of the writers I have labelled homekeepers. This label is not meant to suggest an allegiance to domesticity, or nostalgic drift. What I'm referring to here is that tendency to be found, in many contemporary writers to react to the challenge of their surroundings by attempting a kind of recuperation. They offer a searching - sometimes sceptical, sometimes hopeful - examination of the degree to which moral continuity is possible in a materially changed world. What's remarkable about many of their novels is that they are full of the imagination of disaster, acknowledging all the forces in the modern world that threaten to destroy the family. Separation or divorce, as in *The Accidental Tourist* (1985) by Anne Tyler and *A Mother And Two Daughters* (1982) by Gail Godwin. War and the memory of war in

*The Floatplane Notebooks* (1988) by Clyde Edgerton. The sheer power of the media to turn the personal into the public, as in *Feather Crowns* (1992) by Bobbie Ann Mason. Or the simple impulse to move on, to go somewhere else alone, as in *The Next Step in the Dance* (1998) by Tim Gautreaux. What is equally remarkable, though, despite such imaginings of disaster, is the resilience of the family in most of these stories. Domesticity is lost, perhaps, and then rediscovered. The family unit is threatened in them or subverted and then, like some primitive, adaptive form of life, it is restored - altered, it may be, but somehow the stronger for the crisis.

More interesting still, perhaps, among the novels of homekeepers, are those stories in which domestic feeling is refracted, redirected into other social forms. The family, with its assumptions of rooted allegiance and affection, an understanding issuing out of a shared archive of experiences, is dissolved and then reconstituted. It changes into other, related kinds of mutual recognition and intimacy: if you like, a kind of substitute or “pseudo-family.” So, in her novel, *The Bean Trees* (1988), Barbara Kingsolver actually challenges and attacks traditional notions of family, notions based on blood ties or TV commercials or (as the narrator puts it) ‘acting like Blondie and Dagwood.’ Then, she goes on to relocate family feeling in a shared backlog of experience and suffering. By the end of the book, a mixed group of people consisting of two Anglo-American women, a hispanic child, a Native American child and a hispanic couple redefine the meaning of family. ‘Somebody at work said, “Do you have a family?”’, one of the women tells the group:

And I said ‘Sure’ without even thinking. I meant you all.

Mainly I guess because we’ve been through hell and high water together. We know each other’s good and bad sides, stuff nobody knows.<sup>17</sup>

Pseudo-families of this kind include the university classmates in *Superior Women* (1984) by Alice Adams; some women working in a small-town beauty parlour in *It’s a Little Too Late for a Love Song* (1984) by J.K. Klavans; and a left-wing baseball team harassed by right-wing evangelicals in *The Dixie Association* (1984) by Donald Hays. They also include, I think, what Sharon Monteith has identified as the peculiar sisterhood that exists between black and white women in books like *Can’t Quit You Baby* (1988) by Ellen Douglas, *Ellen Foster* (1987) by Kaye Gibbons and *Clover* (1990) by Dori Sanders.

‘Our family is not what it was,’ observes the seventeen-year-old narrator, Lucille Odom, of *Rich in Love* (1987) by Josephine Humphreys, after she has described how the marriage of her parents broke up. ‘But,’ she adds,

we are all gravitating back into family lives of one sort or another; it is a drift that people cannot seem to help, in spite of lessons learned the hard way... I think often of ancient times, long before Latin, when words stood for single things, “Family” meant people in a house together. But that was in a language so far back that all its words are gone, a language we can only imagine.<sup>18</sup>

For all the writers I have labelled homekeepers, this redefinition of the language of the family lies at the heart of their project. What they try to capture is a process during which the vocabulary of domestic feeling acquires new kinds of meaning. The old cultures, these writers admit, may have expressed themselves in ‘a language we can only imagine.’ But they, and the words they formulated, are still there, running like a hidden stream underneath the new regional cultures. Those words connect up to the past even while they acquire a different edge. Which is to say, they are the coinage, the verbal currency, of continuity as well as change.

The expatriate, the maverick, the returner, the tale-teller, and the homekeeper. These are convenient categories. Or, at least, I’ve found them convenient: a useful way, for me, of summing up what I see as the pluralism of Southern writing. But, like all categories, they shouldn’t be read too literally or exclusively. There is tension, instability. A constant shifting of emphasis and bias *between* texts. And there is tension, instability *within* individual texts as well. I’d like to look at this second kind of instability, briefly but a bit more closely, by looking at some of those novels written by or about recent immigrants to the South from South East Asia, notably Vietnam. The books I’m thinking of are *Monkey Bridge* (1997) by Lan Cao, *The Foreign Student* by Susan Choi (1998), *A Good Scent from a Strange Mountain* (1992) by Robert Olen Butler, *Boat People* (1995) by Mary Gardner and *Lost Armies* (1988) and *Prisoners* (1998) by Wayne Karlin. All these books register a crucial historical reality I alluded to earlier. Which is, that the South has never been simply biracial, and is even less so, even more of a racial mosaic, now. ‘One new frontier for southern historians,’ George Brown Tindall has noted, ‘is the role of ethnic diversity in the region – more than just that represented by black and white.’<sup>19</sup> And, I might

add, one group that has helped to increase that diversity, and so further break down the bipolar racial model of the American South, consists of those refugees who came over from Vietnam, either immediately after the fall of Saigon in 1975 or as so-called “boat people” in the second wave of emigration that began in 1978. More than a million Vietnamese and native-born Americans of Vietnamese descent now live in the United States. And nearly 160,000 of these have gathered in the Southern region of the country. The attraction of the South for Vietnamese refugees, and in particular of Louisiana, Florida and Texas, is not hard to fathom. As a Vietnamese character in one of the stories in *A Good Scent from a Strange Mountain*, explains:

We ended up here in the flat bayou land of Louisiana,  
where there are rice paddies and where the water and land  
are in the most delicate balance with each other, very much  
like the Mekong Delta, where I grew up.<sup>20</sup>

The shrimpers in Mary Gardner’s book, the small business owners in the fictions of Butler and Lan Cao, all migrate to the South because it feels to them that it is, or at least might become, like home. There is the heat, the nearness to water, the flat green horizons, of course. But there is also the obsession with family and ancestry, the compulsion to look backward to a past that seems to have been consumed, over and over again, by war. ‘And that of course was the beginning of the far-flung web that I’m still caught in today,’ reflects a character in *Monkey Bridge* as she recollects a past in which, she recalls, ‘*we never had peace.*’ The reflection, and even the image of the web (to describe what a character in Faulkner’s *Absalom, Absalom!* terms the ‘pattern in the rug’ – that is, the complex weave of relations that constitute history) sound distinctly Southern. So does the comment made by a character in one of Butler’s stories that ‘the souls of our ancestors need love and attention and devotion.’ ‘If we neglect the souls of our ancestors,’ he goes on, ‘they will become lost and lonely and will wander around in the kingdom of the dead no better off than a warrior killed by his enemy and left unburied in a rice paddy to be eaten by black birds of prey.’

And yet, of course, the South is not Vietnam, for all that the characters in these novels may seek to find a mirror of their past in their present. ‘Clearly he did not know his own mind,’ we learn of a character in *Boat People*. ‘That was not unusual for Vietnamese in America, who stood between two cultures.’ So, in ‘Snow,’

one of the stories in *A Good Scent from a Strange Mountain*, a Vietnamese refugee called Miss Giau, a waitress in a Chinese restaurant in Lake Charles, Louisiana, dreams of her first Christmas Eve in America, when she fell asleep at another restaurant in St. Louis, Missouri, and woke to discover snow falling. ‘I had no idea things could change like that,’ Miss Giau confesses. ‘I was terrified.’ Frightened by the snow, she reveals, she believed she would feel better, ‘if I could just go to a warm climate, just like home. So I came down to New Orleans, with my mother... and then we came to Lake Charles.’ ‘It is something like Vietnam here,’ she confides. ‘The rice fields and the way the storms come in. But it makes no difference.’ All she can feel is a strange sense of being stranded: like, she supposes, the old plantation house, converted into a restaurant, in which she now works. ‘This plantation house must feel like a refugee,’ Miss Giau surmises,

It is full of foreign smells, ginger and Chinese pepper and fried shells for wonton, and there’s a motel on one side and a gas station on the other, not like the life the house once knew, though there are very large oak trees surrounding it, trees that must have been here when this was still a plantation.<sup>21</sup>

So, as this passage suggests, I think, these novels about encounters between Vietnamese peoples and the South both reflect and subvert regional tropes and myths: the pull of the past, the strangeness of the present, the tug of land, family and ancestry, the feeling that – as Barry Hannah puts it in *Ray* – ‘It is terribly, excruciatingly difficult to be at peace when all our history is war.’ Some of these novels, like Gordon’s and Karlin’s tend to deal with the “boat people”. Others, like those of Butler and Lan Cao, concern themselves mainly with the generally more educated people who came over after the fall of Saigon. But a common thread is the sense of similarity and distance between old world and new, refugee and refuge. Stranded in a world they never made, but to which they are desperately conjoined – not least, by a common past, by what has happened between Vietnam and America – these immigrant characters seem neither to be absolute strangers to, nor absolutely to belong in, the South. Each of them recalls a memorable phrase, used by Lan Cao in *Monkey Bridge* to describe their dilemma: they are, every one of them, ‘the outsider with inside information.’

Of course, what they do with that information – and what light, however refracted they cast on the South – varies intensely. There is no corporate formula for these novels about the Vietnamese take on the South. Many of the stories of Robert Olen Butler play on the ironies of attempted assimilation. So, the narrator of one story, - the proud owner of such expensive Western memorabilia as one of John Lennon's shoes - tells us he has made 'much money' in his 'new country.' 'It is a gift I have,' he adds, 'and America is a land of opportunity.' 'It was the Vietnamese version of the American dream,' the narrator of *Monkey Bridge*, a young girl called Mai Nguyen says, of people just like him,

a new spin, the Vietnam spin, to the old immigrant  
faith in the future. Not only could we become anything  
we wanted to be in America, we could change what we  
had once been in Vietnam. Rebirthing the past, we called  
it...<sup>22</sup>

Other characters, though, never assimilate, and may not even try to. Like the narrator's mother in *Monkey Bridge*, they 'hang on to their Vietnam lives... in a way not much different,' we are told, 'from amputees who continued to feel the silhouette of their absent limbs.' And still many others, perhaps the majority, are only too aware of their divided histories and destinies; they can, as a result, neither give themselves to their new world nor hang on convincingly to their old one.

This sense of division is particularly sharply felt, I think, by those characters who reflect a harsh historical reality: children with Vietnamese mothers and fathers from the American forces, some thirty thousand of whom were airlifted to the United States following the passing of the Amerasian Homecoming Act of 1987. Born during the Vietnam War, they were called *bui doi* or 'the dust of life' by other Vietnamese because of their mixed origins. That is, they were called the dust of life until, as a character tells us in *Prisoners*, 'people found out that American features could get entry visas... Then they were called golden children. Only a lot of them were abandoned when they got here.' 'At one look we were Vietnamese and at another look we were American,' confesses an Amerasian character in one of Butler's stories 'and after that you couldn't get your eyes to stay still when they turned to us, they keep seeing first one thing and then another.'<sup>23</sup> This is the old theme of the tragic mulatto, the cornerstone of so much Southern writing about the black/white racial

divide, given a totally new spin, connecting it to another bleak moment in American history. And that connection, between Vietnamese refugees (not just the “golden children”) on the one hand, and African Americans on the other, is in fact, openly developed, even insisted on, in a number of these fictions. As one Vietnamese character says of his black neighbours, in one of Butler’s stories, ‘I have learned the lessons of history, and I felt a kinship with these people.’ African American characters act as protectors and confidantes of young Vietnamese people in, for instance, both *Prisoners* and *Boat People*. And they do so in the belief that – as an African American Vietnam vet, in *Boat People*, puts it to a young Vietnamese girl he takes under his wing - ‘We boat people, we all special.’ ‘Black people came here by boat too. Just like us,’ the young girl, called Trang Luu, replies, sensing the connection. ‘They talk funny because they have to keep their mouths shut for so long. Otherwise they get killed by the people who own them.’

But, as another Vietnamese character reminds Trang Luu, the boats bringing Africans to America and the South ‘came a long time ago.’ ‘People *bought* them,’ he points out about those early African Americans. ‘They had to work for the people who bought them.’<sup>24</sup> Even this analogy isn’t perfect; then. The connection between two dispossessed peoples in the South fails at a certain point. So these novels explore other analogies, other connections, to try to locate where on the Southern map the Vietnamese - those living embodiments of a more recent American nightmare - really are. In *The Foreign Student*, a novel about a shy young Vietnamese boy called Chuck who goes to study at a small college in the Tennessee mountains, Susan Choi uses the controlling trope of translation to suggest the intricate cultural negotiations that boy must initiate before he can even begin to cope. There is always, Chuck reflects, an ‘inevitable shifting of meaning’ in the course of translation, ‘the drift of thought from its mooring once the word that had housed it was gone.’<sup>25</sup> And *Monkey Bridge* deploys an image announced by its title as its controlling metaphor. A monkey bridge, we’re told, offers an imperfect but necessary form of transit. A ‘thin, unsteady... uncommanding structure,’ a narrow walkway made out of bamboo and vines, the secret of using it is a matter of intuition, cunning and courage – or, as the book puts it, ‘the ability to set aside the [dangerous] process [of crossing] in favor of seeing the act whole and complete.’

Like many of these stories of Vietnamese in the South, *Monkey Bridge* crosses backwards and forwards over the perilous landscapes of Asia and the United States as it tells the story of a young woman, Mai Nguyen and her mother, Mrs Nguyen Van Binh, crossing many borders and boundaries, first wartime Saigon and the Mekong Delta, then the Little Saigon of Falls Church, Virginia. What is particularly remarkable about *Monkey Bridge*, I think, is how persistently it both reflects and refracts common Southern themes and tropes. As we learn in the course of the story, which continually crosses the bridge between past and present, Mai escaped Saigon in 1975 at the age of fourteen, with Mrs Nguyen then following her. Her husband, Mai's father, was already dead when they left. But they had hoped that Mai's grandfather, Baba quan, would come to America with Mrs Nguyen. He didn't. Baba quan and Mrs Nguyen, as the novel puts it, 'missed each other at their place of rendezvous on the 30<sup>th</sup> April, 1975, and the prearranged car that was supposed to take both of them... to an American plane, had to leave without him.'<sup>26</sup> Haunted by the loss of Baba quan, terrified by what she sees as the impermanence of America, Mrs Nguyen longs to return to what she calls 'the country,' her homeplace in the Mekong Delta, 'the lushest, most tender, most compelling part of Vietnam.' Eventually, torn apart by this longing, she commits suicide. Before her mother dies, though, Mai learns something about their shared past from the notebooks her mother keeps. Crucially, she learns what, in turn, her mother learned many years before, in Vietnam, from what is called 'the book of debts:' that is, the account book of the plantation where Baba quan was once a tenant farmer and where Mrs Nguyen was born and brought up. It is the truth of a tragic history. Baba quan, Mrs Nguyen's supposed father and Mai's grandfather, was not the pious man of tradition his daughter made him out to be but a member of the Vietcong. Far more disturbing, he was also a murderer, and a man who colluded in adultery by arranging for his wife to sleep with his landlord. Mrs Nguyen and Mai are the immediate and eventual issue of this arrangement. They are, it turns out, the daughter and granddaughter, not of Baba quan but of his landlord – who, in return for sexual favours and the gift of descendants, cancelled all outstanding debts.

Learning about what her mother calls 'the karma that has pursued our family like a hawk chasing its prey,' Mai has encountered a secret, suppressed history. With this knowledge, she may, quite possibly, be able, not to exorcise her past nor evade it, but simply to accept it, in all its ugly reality, and move on. Ending on a note of muted

hope, the book sets in tension the experience of exile with compulsions of home, family and tale-telling, as it tells the story of a daughter returning to her mother in the sense of coming to know who her mother really was and so who she herself might be. It also weaves together some of the classic tropes of Southern fiction, familiar to any reader of, say, *The Sound and the Fury*, *Absalom, Absalom!* and *Go Down Moses*: the lost garden paradise, the family curse revealed in some ledgers, the sense of doom (here associated with the idea of karma), the false father, a repressed history that is at once social and sexual. And it weaves them into a new pattern. ‘If you believe a pebble dropped into a pond makes circles after circles of ripples, you are a believer in the forces of karma,’<sup>27</sup> we are told in *Monkey Bridge*. That is a haunting rewriting of a controlling image used to describe destiny, the repetitions and revisions of history in *Absalom, Absalom!*: ‘Maybe happens is never once,’ we are told there, ‘but like ripples on water after the pebble sinks, the ripples moving on spreading.’ My point is not that Lan Cao has deliberately adopted a classic image in Southern writing here, in order to bend it to her own aims. I have no idea whether this is deliberate or not. It is much simpler. In novels like *Monkey Bridge*, as I see it, what Faulkner called ‘the resonant strings of remembering’ are being played in a new key – the series of stories that make up the Southern narrative are being echoed but with an intriguing difference.

‘The day of regional Southern writing is all gone,’ a writer of an earlier generation, Walker Percy claimed, in 1971. ‘I think that people who try to write in that style are usually repeating a phased-out genre or doing Faulkner badly.’<sup>28</sup> That claim, however, rests on a familiar and surely tendentious premise. The South is seen as a monolith, under threat and perhaps faced with imminent collapse. It follows from this premise that the Southern writer, if he or she exists, is defined as someone writing from within that monolith. If nobody exists like that, then there can be no such thing as Southern writing. But the culture that, as a matter of self-identification, has defined itself as regional and Southern has always been more mixed and fluid than this argument allows. The South has always seen itself historically as different, deviant and (usually) in danger. And so it has been marked for good or ill, by its own sense, at any time, of what it was different and deviating *from* and what it was in danger *of*. Southern writing, in particular, has consistently been produced by writers who resisted the monolith – not least because they worked from both inside and outside of

their culture. That situation, of historical contingency and writerly resistance, has been exacerbated by the mix of recent social changes. But it has always been there. To assume otherwise is simply to accept a reading of Southern literature that equates it, more or less, with the Nashville Agrarian project. What we have now, in short, is what we have always had: different, developing social formations that those writers who are experiencing them choose to identify in regional terms. Or, at least, choose to mark out using words like “South” and “region” as part of their fictional vocabulary. Southerners, some of them, and Southern writers especially, may be haunted by the imagination of disaster and the sense of an ending, but what the story of Southern writing tells us – if it tells us anything – is that endings are also beginnings. To quote again from that passage from *Absalom, Absalom!* I just referred to: what Southern literature tells us now, in fact, is what it has always told us - that, ‘Maybe nothing ever happens once and is finished.’

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<sup>1</sup> Fred Hobson, Tell About the South: The Southern Rage to Explain (Baton Rouge, La., 1983), p. 297; George Brown Tindall, The Ethnic Southerners (Baton Rouge, La., 1976), p. 224.

<sup>2</sup> James C. Cobb, “The Sunbelt South: Industrialization in Regional, National, and International Perspective,” in Searching for the Sunbelt: Historical Perspectives on a Region edited by Raymond A. Mohl (Knoxville, Tenn., 1990), p. 39; Leonard Reissman, “Urbanization in the South,” in The South in Continuity and Change edited by John C. McKinney and Edgar T. Thompson (Durham, N.C., 1965), p. 79. See also, Gavin Wright, Old South, New South: Revolutions in the Southern Economy Since the Civil War (New York, 1986), p. 50; David R. Goldfield, “The City as Southern History: The Past and the Promise of Tomorrow,” in The Future South: A Historical Perspective for the Twenty-First Century edited by Joe P. Dunn and Howard L. Preston (Urbana and Chicago, 1991), pp. 29-40.

<sup>3</sup> Numan V. Bartley, The New South 1945-1980 (1995), vol. XI of A History of the South edited by Stephenson and Coulter (Baton Rouge, La., 1947-95), pp. 468-9.

<sup>4</sup> Marshall Frady, Southerners: A Journalist's Odyssey (New York, 1980), pp. 281-2.

<sup>5</sup> Charles Lerche, The Uncertain South: Its Changing Patterns of Politics in Foreign Policy (Chicago, 1964), p. 243; Sheldon Hackney, “Southern Violence,” American Historical Review, LXXIV (1969), 924.

<sup>6</sup> John Shelton Reed, “Afterword, 1986: Still Enduring?,” in The Enduring South: Subcultural Persistence in Mass Society (1972; Chapel Hill, N.C., 1986 edition), p. 100. See also, p. 91.

<sup>7</sup> Wynton Marsalis, BBC 3 interview, 11 September, 1993, cited by Connie Zeanah Atkinson, “‘Shakin’ Your Butt for the Tourist:’ Music’s Role in the Identification and Selling of New Orleans,” in Dixie Debates: Perspectives on Southern Cultures edited by Richard H. King and Helen Taylor (London, 1996), p. 155. See also, p. 154.

<sup>8</sup> Ishmael Reed, Interview with Mel Watkins in James Olney (ed.), Afro-American Writing Today, Anniversary Issue of Southern Review (1989), 26-7

<sup>9</sup> Gary Younge, No Place Like Home: A Black Briton's Journey through the American South (London, 1999; Jackson, Mississippi, 2002), p. 1

<sup>10</sup> Grady McWhiney, Cracker Culture: Celtic Ways in the Old South (Tuscaloosa, Alabama, 1988); Andrew Hook, From Goose Creek to Gandercleugh: Studies in Scottish-American Literary and Cultural History (East Linton, Scotland, 1999). See also, Pearl Amelia McHaney and Thomas L. McHaney (eds.), South Atlantic Review, 65, no 4 (2000): 2; Paul Gilroy, The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness (London, 1993); Deborah N. Cohn, History and Memory in

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Two Souths: Recent Southern and Spanish American Fiction (Nashville, Tennessee, 1999); Helen Taylor, Circling Dixie: Contemporary Southern Culture through a Transatlantic Lens (Princeton, New Jersey, 2001).

<sup>11</sup> Christine Bell, The Perez Family (New York, 1990), p. 40. See also, p. 57; Edward Williams, 'Virginia, more especially the South Part thereof Richly and Truly Valued' (1650), in Peter Force (ed.), Tracts and Other Papers Relating Principally to the Origin, Settlement, and Progress of the Colonies in North America (1836-46; New York, 1947), III.

<sup>12</sup> Barry Hannah, Ray (1980; New York, 1981 edition), p. 3. The Hamlet was first published in 1940.

<sup>13</sup> William Faulkner, As I Lay Dying (1930; London, 1963 edition), pp. 202-3. See also, Linda Hutcheon, A Poetics of Postmodernism (New York, 1988); Barry Hannah, Boomerang/Never Die (Jackson, Mississippi, 1991), pp. 137-8. See also Mikhail Bakhtin, 'Discourse in the Novel' in The Dialogic Imagination translated by Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin, Texas, 1981), p. 263.

<sup>14</sup> Ellen Gilchrist, The Anna Papers (New York, 1988), p. 206. .

<sup>15</sup> Thulani Davies, 1959 (1992), p. 35.

<sup>16</sup> Albert Murray, Train Whistle Guitar (New York, 1974), p. 84.

<sup>17</sup> Barbara Kingsolver, The Bean Trees (1988; London, 1990 edition), p. 231. See also, Sharon Monteith, Advancing Sisterhood? Interracial Friendships in Contemporary Southern Fiction (Athens, Georgia, 2002).

<sup>18</sup> Josephine Humphreys, Rich in Love (1987; London, 1988 edition), p. 260.

<sup>19</sup> George Brown Tindall, Natives and Newcomers: Ethnic Southerners and Southern Ethnics (Athens, Georgia, 1995), p. 51.

<sup>20</sup> Robert Olen Butler, A Good Scent from a Strange Mountain (New York, 1992), p. 60. See also, p. 18; Lan Cao, Monkey Bridge (1997; New York, 1998 edition), pp. 234, 235; William Faulkner, Absalom, Absalom! (1936; London, 1937 edition), p. 127;

<sup>21</sup> Butler, Good Scent from a Strange Mountain, p. 126. See also, Mary Gardner, Boat People (New York, 1995), p. 215; Hannah, Ray, p. 51; Wayne Karlin, Lost Armies (New York, 1988), p. 79, Cao, Monkey Bridge, p. 212.

<sup>22</sup> Cao, Monkey Bridge, pp. 40-41. See also, pp. 35, 125; Butler, Good Scent from a Strange Mountain, pp. 42, 139

<sup>23</sup> Butler, Good Scent from a Strange Mountain, p. 66. See also, p. 81; Wayne Karlin, Prioners (London, 1998), p. 123; Gardner, Boat People, pp. 254, 272.

<sup>24</sup> Gardner, Boat People, p. 254.

<sup>25</sup> Susan Choi, The Foreign Student (1998; New York, 1999 edition), p. 81. See also, p. 12; Cao, Monkey Bridge, p. 179.

<sup>26</sup> Cao, Monkey Bridge, p. 4.

<sup>27</sup> Cao, Monkey Bridge, p. 170. See also, pp. 69, 251; Faulkner, Absalom, Absalom!, p. 261. The Sound and the Fury was first published in 1929 and Go Down, Moses in 1942.

<sup>28</sup> Interview with Walker Percy, in Conversations with Walker Percy edited by Lewis A. Lawson and Victor Kramer (Jackson, Mississippi, 1985), p. 65. See also, Letter from John Peale Bishop to Allen Tate, 25 August, 1931, in The Republic of Letters in America: The Correspondence of John Peale Bishop and Allen Tate edited by Thomas D. Young and John J. Hindle (Lexington, Kentucky, 1981), p. 48.