

GEOCRITICISM AND THE PRODUCTION OF LITERARY SPACE

by  
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## ABSTRACT

This dissertation argues that examining literature through the lens of geocriticism enables a better understanding of the texts under examination while also providing key insights into the function of the texts' narrative structure. In turn, a dynamic understanding of narrative space as the link between author and reader necessitates a reevaluation of how novels are situated within the literary world. As a result, this dissertation follows a geocritical understanding of space to attempt to simultaneously understand the unique vision of an individual text, the way that its narrative structure seeks to position its storyworld, and the resulting evaluation of the text's literary merit. Four novels were selected because of their unique position at the nexus of factors such as their national literary tradition, breadth of circulation, and critical reception. William Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom!* is viewed as a classic of high modernism and despite its specifically Southern world within the United States, it is claimed as part of the literary tradition of countries around the world and throughout the global South. Alejo Carpentier's *The Kingdom of This World* sits at the crossroads of the Caribbean and Latin America and is seen as a precursor to the magical realism that would come to represent a burgeoning Latin American literary tradition, earning an association with the supranational region despite its more specific focus on Caribbean politics. More insular in its setting, Wilma Dykeman's novel *The Tall Woman* is primarily set in a rural world of the Southern United States with elements of the novel that nonetheless entangle the insular community in the

larger world, even as it is often cast as a regional or southern Appalachian work.

Finally, Kateb Yacine's *Nedjma* is a genre-bending novel written in French and yet seen as an attempt to forge an Algerian literary tradition alongside the nation's birth.

For each novel the salient features of the diegetic space, the narrative space, and the literary space are identified in order to demonstrate that a geocritical reading allows for these to be simultaneously analyzed, revealing insights that are often neglected when these spaces are examined individually.

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## Chapter 1

### Introduction

This dissertation argues that examining literature through the lens of geocriticism enables not only a better understanding of the texts under examination, it also provides key insights into the function of the texts' narrative structure. As a theoretical approach open to reevaluating delineations between spaces, geocriticism is particularly suited to an analysis of the interaction between texts and readers. In turn, a dynamic understanding of narrative space as the link between author and reader necessitates a reevaluation of how novels are situated within the literary world. In particular, a close reading of texts with attention to the differences between a novel's intended function as indicated by its narrative positioning and its perceived prominence in literary space challenges the notion that an author can "invent his literary freedom" (Casanova xiii). Geocriticism, informed by geographical theories that identify individual perception and the accumulation of social value at the center of how spaces are experienced and understood, positions reading as the nexus between the latent meaning of a novel's story-world and the evaluation of its literary value. Geocriticism's conception of space as constantly in formation, constantly produced, contested, extended, redefined, and reproduced, provides a context for seeing a novel, its interpretive framework, and its reception as coextensive spaces. When examined in such a way, the limitations and inconsistencies of seeing the world of the novel, its narrative structure, and its

literary reputation as separate spheres becomes more clear. Rather than embrace a New Critical understanding of the text as removed from outside considerations, or move to a model of distant reading to more effectively situate a text in comparison to others, I will follow a geocritical understanding of space to attempt to simultaneously understand the unique vision of an individual text, the way that its narrative structure seeks to position its story-world, and the resulting evaluation of the text's literary merit.

In this chapter I will identify the key components of my method for analyzing the production of space in and by four novels. The novels were chosen because they are all set in specific and identifiable eras and locations, yet they represent a range of nationalities, and their variety of critical receptions recognize their resonance as universal, transnationally regional, subnationally regional, and national, respectively. This inconsistency between the scale of their setting and their reception provides an opportunity for investigation. First, I will provide a brief overview of the conceptual development of socially constructed space and its relation to literary studies. Then, I will examine the ways that attention to space demands a reevaluation of narrative theory in order to effectively analyze narrative space. Next, I will use Pascale Casanova's conception of a "world republic of letters" to situate my analysis of literary space. Finally, I will define the three types of space that will form the basis of my analysis before previewing the following chapters.

## I. Space and Geocriticism as an Analytical Method

The usefulness of critical geography as an analytical tool for literature is based on a dynamic understanding of the concept of space. While much of literary history has emphasized the importance of place, more theoretical conceptions of space allow for both a more universal understanding of locations within literary works and the ability to analyze them with specificity. Henri Lefebvre's analysis of space identifies it as a social construction rather than as a purely abstract and absolute set of geometric coordinates superimposed on various places. Instead, the way people perceive space is through social interactions in which various ways of understanding the world are constantly produced, challenged, reproduced, and reconstructed. In this way, Lefebvre's theory can be used to see specific places/locations as iterations of space that resist the abstraction of geometry (Houston as 245 miles from Dallas or located at 29.7° N, 95.3° W) in favor of understanding a place as the accumulation of meaning produced by a constantly changing set of social interactions (Houston as oil town, city of immigrants, American urban center, home of George Floyd, flood zone, setting for Bryan Washington's novel, birthplace of the space industry, my home, etc.). Marxist theorists and geographers such as David Harvey and Neil Smith have applied this understanding to the production of culture as a key component of how space is understood.<sup>1</sup> In particular, Neil Smith applies his analysis to a piece of art

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<sup>1</sup> Harvey applied poststructuralist critiques to geography as early as 1969's *Explanation in Geography*. In *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Inquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change* he would assert that postmodernity could be understood, in part, as a result of changes in the flow of capital that altered how space was produced and understood. Neil Smith provided a theory of the uneven development of

called a Homeless Vehicle in “Contours of a Spacialized Politics: Homeless Vehicles and the Production of Geographic Scale” as he “reads” the way the vehicle both reproduces and challenges the expected ways that the homeless are situated in space. While the vehicles that were constructed by the artist Krzysztof Wodiczko accentuate an individual’s mobility outside of a permanent home, an expected circumstance for someone identified as “homeless,” they nonetheless demand a reevaluation of what could or should be available to the homeless by providing privacy, protection, and a different interaction with passersby. This close reading of a cultural product as an intervention into and disruption of space while simultaneously reproducing it in various ways is also applicable to literary texts.

Applying spatial and geographical theory to literary texts is an approach that Robert T. Tally, Jr. identifies as geocriticism. According to Tally, geocriticism is different from literary geography, which “implies a form of reading that focuses attention on space and spatiality in the texts under consideration,” and “also means paying attention to the changing spatial or geographical formations that affect literary and cultural productions” (*Spatiality* 80). While literary geography draws attention to how space functions, and may even track how it does so in a number of texts across time, the spatial analysis remains *in the text*. In other words, this closer attention to space views it as changing and produced in different ways across time,

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space along various scales in *Uneven Development: Nature, Capital, and the Production of Space*. For my purposes, these critiques of space provide a useful framework for my application to literature both because of their examination of seemingly “natural” processes that, in fact, hide the production of value and Smith’s eventual attention to culture.

however its analysis is limited to the functioning of space within the diegetic world of the text.<sup>2</sup> Geocriticism, on the other hand, brings spatial analysis to the function of a text within both the world of the text and the world of the critic:

Geocriticism or spatial critical theory, then, is broadly understood to include both aesthetics and politics, as elements in a constellation of interdisciplinary methods designed to gain a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the ever-changing spatial relations that determine our current, postmodern, world.... Geocriticism situates mapping and spatial analysis firmly within the framework of those other fields of study, while remaining pliable enough to fit instances that are not properly situated in the domain of geographic inquiry traditionally conceived, such as literature itself. (Tally, *Spatiality* 113-114)

The use of these interdisciplinary methods allows for a literary text to be analyzed both aesthetically on the basis of the internal logic of its story-world, and politically on the basis of its external evaluation as a cultural product.<sup>3</sup> While these analyses can

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<sup>2</sup> For the purposes of my analysis, I use *diegetic* to refer to the story-world of characters within the novel, as understood through traditional narrative theory. As this chapter elaborates, I find this distinction inadequate, however it serves as a useful distinction in as much as it identifies the story/discourse divide that has, in part, produced the existing understanding of a text. I elaborate further in section IV.

<sup>3</sup> The possibilities for geographical theory's application to literary texts are vast and varied and most often these attempts utilize a method located between the poles of diegetic mapping and distant reading. Franco Moretti's *Graphs, Maps, Trees: Abstract Models for Literary History*, explores a variety of positions along this spectrum, with a focus on reconceiving literary studies itself. Sheila Hones's *Literary Geographies: Narrative Space in Let the Great World Spin* provides a book-length study of Colum McCann's novel by using a range of these perspectives. This dissertation seeks to address the internal *and* external logics of space for a variety of texts to better understand patterns and disconnects between these overlapping conceptions.

be separated into the internal functioning of space within the diegetic world of the text and the external functioning of space within the literary world, a closer examination of the narrative structure leads to a better understanding of each as coextensive with the space of the novel.

## II. Spatializing Narrative Theory

Traditional narrative theory is based on a static, two-dimensional understanding of space that privileges time as the primary subject of examination for understanding the narrative function, therefore as geocriticism advocates for a more nuanced understanding of space, it also demands a reevaluation of narrative theory to accompany it. Narratology has made the distinction that “speaking of space ... a distinction should be made between literal and metaphorical uses of the concept,” and as a result “author-reader relations, literary-historical considerations, and intertextual allusions are metaphorical because they fail to account for physical existence” (Ryan 796-7). The application of Lefebvre’s theory of space as socially constructed renders this understanding incomplete and refuses the distinction between literal and metaphorical space, instead, recasting “physical existence” as affected by and coextensive with the “literary-historical considerations” that determine its meaning and how it is experienced. As a result, the “author-reader relations” that the narrative structure situates must be reevaluated with this new understanding of space. Much of traditional narrative theory relies on the separation

of the reader from the text and identifies what Joseph Frank calls the “spatial form” of the novel as “an allegorical process” by which the reader must “project a mental image, not unlike a map, in order to grasp the narrative” (Tally, *Spatiality* 159). A theory of narrative that integrates a more dynamic understanding of space can never separate a reader from the text because space is always produced not as an empty container waiting to be filled with meaning, but rather as an interaction by which a reader navigates the narrative structure created by the author and through that interaction a unique understanding of the space of the novel is produced.<sup>4</sup> A text may be understood in a particular way because of all that has been written, said, and argued about it, however readers bring their own framework with them for making meaning, and therefore produce their own understanding of a text or reproduce and reify a common way of identifying its significance. That process is no more allegorical than the interactions that people have daily with their surroundings to produce a particular understanding of the spaces they inhabit. The physical sensation and mental resonance of standing in New York’s Central Park may be liberating as an immersion in nature for one person and oppressive as a reminder of the city’s inescapability for another, however for each the interaction with their surroundings

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<sup>4</sup> An analysis that rejects the strict divide between metaphorical and “real” space thus rejects the division that Seymour Chatman identifies when he asserts that “we must distinguish story-space from discourse space” (96). Traditional narrative theory’s identification of a story that is completely separate from the discourse fails to account for texts such as *Absalom, Absalom!*, as my analysis will illustrate, yet these differences are overlooked or identified as exceptions regardless of their frequency. Identifying the story/discourse divide as the root of traditional narrative theory, I will use this point of reference to illustrate the utility of a more unified understanding of space.

is a product of both historically and socially developed ways to understand urban greenspace and their individual set of circumstances and values. This constant recasting and reproducing of meaning means that space must be understood as inseparable from time and as a “contemporaneous plurality” rather than a “static slice through time” (Massey 9), which allows for a re-casting of the interaction between author, text, and reader that narrative theory examines. Rather than fixed structures, texts are what Sheila Hones describes as “events that happen in the course of sociospatial and intertextual interactions” (11). Addressing “the novel as a spatial event” (11) thus requires a flexible theory of narrative that can accommodate the processes by which this space is created.

In order to accommodate conceptions of narrative space that see beyond a metaphorical understanding of the space within the novel, it is necessary to use a form of narrative theory that can move beyond mimesis. In an attempt to establish a theory of narrative that includes postmodern and postcolonial texts, Brian Richardson draws a distinction between mimetic, antimimetic and nonmimetic narratives. Mimetic narratives “attempt to depict the world of our experience in a recognizable manner; this is the traditional goal of works that strive for realism or verisimilitude” (*Unnatural Narrative* 3). Antimimetic narratives include “representations that contravene the presuppositions of nonfictional narratives, violate mimetic expectation and the practices of realism, and defy the conventions of existing, established genres” (3), and Richardson goes on to name canonical



postmodern texts such as Robbe-Grillet's *La Jalousie* (1957) and Beckett's *The Unnamable* (1953) as exemplars of this kind of narrative. He distinguishes these from a nonmimetic narrative, which "employs a consistent, parallel story-world and follows established conventions, or in some cases, merely adds supernatural components to its otherwise mimetic depiction of the actual world" (4). Richardson is careful to note that almost no text is completely mimetic or antimimetic, but instead antimimetic texts may "downplay their mimetic features," and mimetic texts "may disguise their artificiality; at other times they slyly hint at their own fictionality" (4). While acknowledging this interplay, Richardson nonetheless proceeds to identify whole texts as mimetic or antimimetic, largely putting aside the distinction of nonmimetic as the province of fantasy and science fiction, in order to advocate against the wholly mimetic framework of traditional narrative theory in favor of his "dual or oscillating conception of narrative, one mimetic, the other antimimetic" (xvi), which can be used to classify texts according to one of these narrative traditions that he sees throughout literary history. What Richardson's categorization elides in pursuit of an overarching theory is the complicated way that a single text can move between, combine, and set against one another the mimetic, antimimetic and nonmimetic types of narration. Rather than distinguishing a text's narration as operating as one of these types, I will use these as *modes* that a novel's narration can move between. In doing so, a close reading of a novel's narration becomes more nuanced and specific strategies that break with the overarching narrative mode are

granted more significance rather than being subsumed into a general classification.

This reading of the narrative assumes that, for example, when the line blurs between the characters of *Absalom, Absalom!* and the narrative point of view, this blurring of story and discourse should not be glossed over as an exception within a mimetic text, but instead should be examined more closely as an example of the antimimetic mode of narration being employed to produce a specific effect.

Terminology and concepts from traditional narrative theory are useful in so much as they effectively identify mimetic narrative strategies and therefore how texts may stray from these. The identification of a story and a separate discourse presupposes that these are individually identifiable and remain separate. Monika Fludernik notes that, "The story vs. discourse opposition seems to repose on a realist understanding of narrative" (334), therefore the terms remain useful for analyzing mimetic texts, but become insufficient when the two blend in such a way as to be indistinguishable. Similarly, Genette claims that a story must be told by a character within the story or "a narrator outside the story" (244), a formulation that becomes insufficient when a text's narrational perspective shifts from a seemingly omniscient narrator to a character with limited knowledge to an ambiguous focalization that reveals contradictory information, all accompanied with shifts between the first, second and third person. A nuanced understanding of the narrative strategy of a text is important not only as a key to reading the world within the novel, it also provides insights into the complex ways that novels are situated within literary space.

### III. World Literary Space

The task of navigating the complex ways that novels and authors gain literary credibility, fame, and publication necessitates an exploration of literary space that accounts for these aspects without ignoring the inner workings of a text, and Pascale Casanova's *The World Republic of Letters* attempts to provide such an account. In her analysis of world literary space, Casanova seeks to understand how authors are situated relative to one another in a uniquely literary world, one governed by a particularly literary set of rules, in which authors compete for primacy and literary capital. She does so

to provide a specifically literary, yet nonetheless historical, interpretation of texts; that is, to overcome the supposedly insuperable antinomy between internal criticism, which looks no further than texts themselves in searching for their meaning, and external criticism, which describes the historical conditions under which texts are produced, without, however, accounting for their literary quality and singularity. (4-5)

Such an account should thus allow for an analysis of diegetic space within the text without compromising the insights and spirit of the analysis of literary space, and should prove complimentary to an analysis of narrative space that explores the relationship between the two. In Casanova's literary world, no one factor accounts for an author's reputation, instead literary capital is amassed through a combination

of critical acclaim, circulation and popular appeal. This world is hierarchical, however, as literary traditions carry the weight of their age, volume of literary production and reputation (15-17). Additionally, the language in which a text is written carries with it literary capital in proportion its “literariness ... in terms of the number of cosmopolitan intermediaries – publishers, editors, critics, and especially translators – who assure the circulation of texts into the language or out of it” (21). The primarily national origins of literary traditions mean, then, that as authors compete with one another for literary prestige, their literary capital can be evaluated based on “the place occupied by his native literary space within world literature and his own position within this space” (41). Pheng Cheah takes Casanova to task for this desire to divorce texts from their political circumstances, while nonetheless reverting to national politics as the logic behind much of the center/periphery divide that effects literary circulation. She notes that Casanova’s framework does not allow for “an agonistic relation between an ethico-politically committed world literature and one produced by the commercial market, where both compete as alternative attempts in the ongoing making of the real world” (313). Similarly, Debjani Ganguly notes the anxiety of critics such as Emily Apter and Djalal Kadir in response to attempts to conceptualize world literature “as coeval with the geopolitics of contemporary late modernity” (125).

For my analysis, Casanova’s “world republic of letters” functions as a way to situate an author in literary space without equating one factor, such as critical

reception, circulation, or national politics as determinative of a place within it. While she alternately resists and embraces the incursion of politics into the sanctity of literary space, Casanova's multifaceted system is broad enough to address the unique circumstances of peripheral writers such as Kateb Yacine and Alejo Carpentier, while nonetheless remaining applicable to canonical writers like Faulkner. While the goal of Casanova's method is to provide a framework to situate texts in comparison to one another in a way that does not come at the expense of understanding the texts individually, her need to establish the overarching system nonetheless limits her treatment of individual texts, however this dissertation will proceed through detailed close readings of novels to better understand the ways that literary space informs the practice of interacting with the texts rather than vice versa. In doing so, I will examine not only the ways that an author's positioning in literary space informs a reading of a text, but also how it potentially *misinforms* a reading through positing a purely literary motive for authorial choices. Casanova claims that "understanding the way in which writers invent their own freedom – which is to say perpetuate, or alter, or reject, or add to, or deny, or forget, or betray their national literary (and linguistic) heritage – makes it possible to chart the course of their work and discover its very *purpose*" (41, emphasis mine). Casanova's identification of "purpose" as purely literary glosses over a range of possible functions for a novel and assumes that the literary market of her world republic is the only intended audience. In doing so, she ignores the fact that literary capital arises from forces that are, at

least partially, outside of the text and the literary world, and in doing so she risks reading a work as a projection of the author's reputation rather than producing an analysis based on what is within the text. Doing so potentially leaves the assumptions of the literary world and its valuation unexamined.

#### IV. Diegetic, Narrative and Literary Space

To better understand the dynamics of space and literary texts, I have identified three levels for analysis. The space of the novel, like all spaces, is not available for invention, but instead reflects the accumulation of meaning present within literary history. As a result, my identification of three separate spaces for analysis both reflects traditional narrative theory and resists it. It reflects it in the sense that diegesis, narrational strategies, and literary reception are pre-existing areas of analysis with lengthy intellectual histories. Nonetheless, I understand diegetic space, narrative space, and literary space as overlapping and shifting spaces that cannot be clearly delineated as independent of one another. In combination, they compose the space of the novel, however my goal is not to pin down which aspects of the novel belong in which category, but rather to use them as a way to see the inconsistencies of their individual application. In such a way, I will proceed through each novel with a reading according to the terms of each space, seeking to explicate the logic of the diegetic space, the logic of the narrative space, and the logic of the literary space, and to then reevaluate the text in light of the inconsistencies apparent through these

overlapping yet exclusive readings. As such, I will argue for a fully integrated understanding of space that incorporates the three spaces into a coextensive understanding of the novel's space, especially in light of what's lost without it.

In the interest of clarifying the references to these overlapping spaces, the story-world of the novel's characters will be referred to as the diegetic space of the novel. It is the space available to the characters of the story and the milieu in which they exist. As such, it may be composed of and overlap with actual spaces, for example in a novel that takes place among the nouveau riche of New York in 1922. Even in a historically specific time and location, however, it's important not to equate this diegetic space with setting. It may share many characteristics with what has typically been referred to in narrative theory as setting, but while setting traditionally indicates the time and place in which the novel's events occur, a *space* also contains the values, conflicting definitions and dynamic possibilities that its status as a social product indicates. In this way, a novel's setting can be seen as the time and place in which its events take place (New York, 1922), but its diegetic space is the specific enunciation of a group of characters and their social situation within that story-world. Traditional narrative theory identifies "diegetic levels" among the "primary narrative" (Abbott 189). For the purposes of maintaining a dynamic understanding of space, any character who interacts with the social situation within the story-world will be categorized as part of the diegetic space, which I will not categorize according

to levels. In other words, a character can be part of both the diegetic and narrative space rather being exclusively categorized as one or the other.

The narrative strategies and structures that position a reader in relation to a text are what will be referred to as the narrative space of a novel. In H. Porter Abbott's formulation, it is "the representation of a story" (193). The choice of perspective, authorial style, and the order in which information is presented can all be considered part of the narrative space. While this includes elements of narrative theory, it is also concerned with the way these strategies grant or deny access to information, and how the potential responses of readers are limited or expanded by the novel's method of presentation. Rather than thinking of this purely as a space of the author or of the reader, I identify it as a nexus between the two, a space embodied by the text as the interaction between author and reader.

The reception of a novel and the perception of its author constitute what will be referred to as the literary space of a novel. This space exists in the "real" world of the reader and contains elements of a novel's circulation, its popular and academic perception, and the canons and movements associated with a text and its author. It examines how the text is produced by the culture in which it exists and the connections that are made available to it or closed off from it on the basis of its resulting reputation.

My argument will proceed as a close reading of the overlapping spaces of four novels situated at various locations by their differing accumulation of literary capital.



Each novel is selected because of its unique position at the nexus of factors such as their national literary tradition, breadth of circulation, and critical reception. William Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom!* is viewed as a classic of high modernism and despite its specifically Southern world within the United States, it is claimed as part of the literary tradition of countries around the world and throughout the global South. Primarily set in the years surrounding the Civil War in Faulkner's famous Yoknapatawpha County, Mississippi, the novel is nonetheless considered a universal story that's been adopted into the literary tradition of authors around the world, from Edouard Glissant to Gabriel Garcia Marquez. Alejo Carpentier's *The Kingdom of This World* sits at the crossroads of the Caribbean and Latin America as a novel depicting events surrounding the Haitian rebellion. Written in Spanish, it is seen as a precursor to the magical realism that would come to represent a burgeoning Latin American literary tradition, earning an association with the supranational region despite its more specific focus on Caribbean politics. More insular in its setting, Wilma Dykeman's novel *The Tall Woman* is primarily set in a rural world of the Southern United States with elements of the novel that nonetheless entangle the insular community in the larger world, even as it is often cast as a regional or southern Appalachian work. Finally, Kateb Yacine's *Nedjma* is a genre-bending novel written in French and yet seen as an attempt to forge an Algerian literary tradition alongside the nation's birth. For each novel I will identify the salient features of the diegetic space, the narrative space, and the literary space in order to demonstrate

that a geocritical reading allows for these to be simultaneously analyzed. In doing so, I will pay special attention to the ways in which the text's narrative positioning differs from the author's perceived place in literary space. Identifying these gaps between intended and perceived audience aids in identifying the ways that the literary world elides political concerns in favor of aesthetic ones. In other words, a novel's place within the literary world is not as much a reflection of an author's strategies to position themselves within that world, as Casanova claims, as it is a reflection of the way a novel is read according to the assumptions and values of the literary world, values that often exaggerate style and misread the narrative positioning of a reader. "Inventing literary freedom" is not so much a choice of an author as it is a way for gatekeepers to promulgate the idea of genius at the expense of politics.

Chapter two addresses William Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom!* to demonstrate that traditional theories of narrative falsely differentiate between story and discourse when the narrative space of the novel often demands a more nuanced examination as it moves between mimetic and antimimetic modes and often presents information ambiguously between these methods of presentation. While Faulkner's novel can be better understood through the lens of geocriticism, it has nonetheless gained immense literary prestige and already exists as a canonical text within literary space. As such, it reveals the appeal of spatial and geographical theory for producing a more varied and informed close reading while providing a better understanding of the

author's broad appeal, but does not significantly alter the situating of the already prestigious novel within literary space.

In chapter three, I turn to Alejo Carpentier's *The Kingdom of This World* in order to illustrate the benefits of a close reading of narrative space and its impact on literary space. In particular, I argue that understanding how Carpentier moves between narrative modes allows for readers to see that he is situating the ambivalent epistemologies of the diegetic space in such a way that readers are unable to privilege one way of knowing above another. The narrative space forces readers to navigate alternative ways of knowing, and in doing so Carpentier is producing a new understanding of literary space, one in which aesthetic innovation and syncretic epistemologies depict the reality of the Americas. While this approach is largely successful in its aesthetic dimension, the ways that Carpentier is perceived within literary space illustrate that his critique of epistemologies has received much less attention, and even well-known texts from the postcolonial world are often depoliticized in the way that they are classified within literary space.

American texts without such literary recognition benefit from a literary geographical reading in other ways. In chapter four, I examine Wilma Dykeman's 1962 novel *The Tall Woman* as an exemplar of texts classified as "regional" in order to interrogate the space of the novel and its placement within the literary world. By once again examining the diegetic, narrative, and literary space of a novel, I will argue that the deceptively simple narrative structure should be read as a shifting and

sometimes communal voice that is often focalized through the protagonist but nonetheless resists a strict division of story and discourse. Dykeman uses this communal voice to enlarge the applicability of the values that her protagonist displays within the diegetic world. These universal values are nonetheless positioned in literary space as an expression of “local color” and Dykeman’s resonance is seen as purely regional, a classification that points to the ways that literary space values expressions of individual psychology over communal action.

In chapter five, I address Kateb Yacine’s 1956 novel *Nedjma* to provide insights into the ways that recognition of a postcolonial author is gained through a specific aesthetic form that is often divorced from its context and the author’s larger vision. Kateb Yacine’s complicated relationship with the French literary tradition mirrors the political independence of his native Algeria, and his recognition within literary space as the nation emerged from French rule proves exemplary of the ways in which postcolonial literary traditions are simultaneously recognized but fixed within an imposed framework of the novel’s development. Kateb’s larger project complicates such an understanding given his purposeful decision to distance himself from writing in French, to move from formal developments in the novel to poetry and theater, and his focus on more universal struggles for human rights and transnational justice.

## Chapter 2

William Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom!* and the Production of Literary Prestige

I discovered that my own little postage stamp of native soil was worth writing about and that I would never live long enough to exhaust it, and that by sublimating the actual into the apocryphal I would have complete liberty to use whatever talent I might have to its absolute top. . . . so I created a cosmos of my own. I can move these people around like God, not only in space but in time too.

- William Faulkner

Perhaps no author is more firmly associated with the setting of his or her work and life than William Faulkner. Rowan Oak, Faulkner's home in Oxford, Mississippi receives thousands of visitors curious to view the location where Faulkner produced both a family and the works for which he has long been famous. Oxford itself caters to literary tourists seeking the sites in the community that inspired the keenly observing Faulkner, still seen – in statue form – to sit and observe passersby. Faulkner's Mississippi is a quintessentially Southern world in which the past and present were compressed to show the lingering effects of a war and a way of life that divided the American nation. Yet Faulkner, winner of the 1949 Nobel Prize, has found a global audience with such resonance that writers such as Gabriel Garcia Marquez and Edouard Glissant would locate his fictions in a world similar to their own. And Faulkner's famous quote would seem to affirm the importance of *place* in his work, his immediate surroundings providing an imaginative universe in which he could create a new reality. But while Faulkner's "postage stamp" quote is usually truncated after expressing the inexhaustibility of his imaginative literary space, a

closer examination of his metaphor proves useful in understanding the exact nature of the location of his work. Equating the setting of his life to a “postage stamp” is a useful comparison in that the borders of a stamp are clearly defined, and while it occupies only a small space, it allows for communication over great distances. It bears the unmistakable traces of its origin, yet its very nature is to traverse beyond this location and to allow for delivery outside of a circumscribed locale. The quote continues as Faulkner clarifies exactly how such a metaphorical pairing of peripatetic symbol and fixed location operates, through “sublimating the actual into the apocryphal,” a process that grants him complete authorial freedom. Rather than dealing with the limiting spatial and historical realities of an actual location, the apocryphal nature of Yoknapatawpha provides freedom for Faulkner to create. He maintains the authenticity of “the actual,” however, by writing about his native land, where he can claim possession and participation. The possession of his fictional cosmos, however, is total, his control manifest in the manipulation of the two axes of experience: space and time.

This chapter will examine the overlapping spaces of Faulkner’s novel *Absalom, Absalom!* in order to gain an understanding of how Faulkner’s control of his fictional world may be total in his ability to create, but is only one factor in the way that critics situate his text and how readers encounter his work. I will use an understanding of space based on the work of philosopher and sociologist Henri Lefebvre, who explores the concept and posits that, contrary to how it is often seen, space is not simply an

empty container in which coordinates can be plotted, but instead is a socially constructed phenomenon whose perception is largely relational. Neil Smith applies the idea of the production and reproduction of space to art – art is both formed as a cultural product by the space in which it exists, but it also reciprocally alters that space: it both produces and reproduces space. A painting, for example, may reproduce an actual landscape and in some ways reinforce how it is perceived or understood, but a pointillist reproduction of a landscape also produces new understandings by drawing attention to the ways in which perception changes depending on proximity. A Cubist may then further this idea by reproducing a landscape in a still more unfamiliar way, where the reproduction of one perspective denies the reproduction of another. In this way the painter positions the viewer to access one (or multiple) perspectives, while denying access to others. This particular positioning does not guarantee how the work will be received, however, for the work is being produced into a social space in which the audience's interpretation also determines how the work is defined.

At the nexus of the relationship between an author's control of a novel and how it is received by an audience is the narrative structure, the hinge between the author and how readers encounter the storyworld, and thus the key to narrative positioning and the unique production of space that a novel embodies. Narrative theory has primarily privileged time, often at the expense of space, in theorizing the nature of this relationship. As a result, in order to escape the restrictions imposed by a strict

application of the story/discourse understanding of narrative, I will use Brian Richardson's concepts of mimesis, antimimesis, and nonmimesis as modes to describe the various ways in which a text may function at various points throughout the novel. Turning to the literary space of the novel, I will use Pascale Casanova's situating of the text within her "world republic of letters" as an example of how critical evaluations of texts are based as much on the unseen rules of the literary world as they are on the novels or authors being evaluated.

As it relates to the larger argument of the dissertation, this chapter will examine William Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom!* in order to gain a clearer understanding of the process by which novels not only reproduce space, but also produce altered or new understandings of space. By defining and examining the diegetic space of the storyworld, the narrative space of the novel's structure, and the literary space of the novel's reception, the ways that they contest and mutually construct one another will be illuminated. In particular, I will argue that the way in which *Absalom, Absalom!* is situated in literary space is not a direct product of the diegetic or narrative space, but of the relationship between the two. The ways in which the narrative space enacts and repeats the circuitous storytelling strategies and elisions of the diegetic space create a text open to a spectrum of interpretations that can be accommodated by the novel. While this allows for its critical evaluation as a work of "genius," it is nonetheless situated according to a limited view of what constitutes such an evaluation.



### Diegetic space

The storyworld of *Absalom, Absalom!* is primarily composed of the small community of Jefferson, Mississippi and the surrounding areas. While the physical space in which most of the novel's action occurs appears to be quite circumscribed, the characters' contested visions of their community's values form the central conflicts of the novel. Characters whose trajectory has taken them from the community to areas outside of it, like Quentin, have a very different understanding of the community from those who have come into it, like Sutpen, and both differ from characters like Rosa Caulfield who reside within its confines their whole life. These various perspectives create a diegetic space in which the values of home and family, race and class, and the South's innocence are contested rather than settled, however the characters' different orientations toward each topic reveals the presumptions and values of those who reside in the town.

Neil Smith defines home as "the site of personal and familial reproduction," noting, "If the size of the home, its external appearance, and location are largely a function of class difference, and in some societies racial difference, the home per se is a heavily gendered site in many societies and is viewed as the locus of female activity" ("Contours" 68). Sutpen's Hundred, the homestead that Thomas Sutpen carves out of seemingly nothing in order to start his family, is reflective of just such divisions, and the exact ways in which class, race, and gender are structured become the

battlegrounds that Sutpen and the town of Jefferson contest. Sutpen constructs his homeplace in accordance with his personal ethic of the imposition of his individual will, often neglecting the values that his wife Ellen and the town of Jefferson hold dear. The contrast is not merely between Sutpen and Ellen, however, but is derived from regional differences reflected in Sutpen's roots & experiences.

Sutpen's origins are eventually revealed to be in the mountains of West Virginia (or in what would become West Virginia, as Shreve points out to Quentin), a place "where the only colored people were Indians and you only looked down at them over your rifle sights, where he had never even heard of . . . a land divided neatly up and actually owned by men who did nothing but ride over it on fine horses or sit in fine clothes on the galleries of big houses while other people worked for them" (*Absalom* 179). For Sutpen, the difficult terrain of the mountains of the frontier, the lack of arable land, and an economy based on hunting rather than agricultural cultivation result in an atmosphere in which racial and gender differences are visible to residents, even if to a different degree, but class is largely not. There may not be slavery, and therefore Indians are only literally "looked down" upon from the barrel of a rifle, but the fact that they are the object of violence reveals that racial differentiation is indeed present, but manifest in a different way. Gender differences are similarly present but constructed in alternate ways. Women cook and birth the children, but unlike the leisurely and cherished youths of the privileged daughters of Jefferson, in West Virginia the "older daughters" join the mothers in the work of

cooking and caring for younger children (179). Ellen's role as overseer of a household that operates with the proper structuring of servants, daughters, sons and mother is much different from the motherless "passel" of children that came "sliding back down out of the mountains" (180) as Sutpen's family traversed toward the coast. The protection of femininity would have been a foreign concept for Sutpen, whose mother died while he was a child and whose older sister "had left the cabin unmarried [and] was still unmarried when they finally stopped, though she had become a mother before they lost the last blue mountain range" (181). And while Sutpen would learn of different racial and gender constructions once he reached the coast, the construction of class amongst whites becomes a much harsher reality in that there was no frame of reference among the West Virginian mountain "white trash" for such a distinction. He understood racial difference, "but he was learning that there was a difference between white men and white men not to be measured by lifting anvils or gouging eyes or how much whiskey you could drink then get up and walk out of the room" (*Absalom* 183). He had to be taught that individual will was not the only thing that distinguished one white man from another, and his experience at the front door of the plantation home where his family eventually settles in Tidewater Virginia became the object lesson that drove the point home. Attempting to deliver a message to the big house of the plantation, the youthful Sutpen is castigated by the slave who instructs him never to approach the front door (188). As Sutpen eventually builds his own family, he has thoroughly adopted the

lessons he has experientially learned about class, but his understanding of race and gender, because they have not affected him individually, are still at odds with those of Ellen and most of the town of Jefferson.

Ellen's construction of the home necessitates a separation of the roles of races and genders whose ideology must be maintained even if its reality is not. Sutpen's biracial daughter, Clytie, presents an obvious transgression of the boundaries of race, yet the fact that her position in the family is not that of a daughter, even if it is elevated above that of slave, allows for the maintenance of racial ideology. Home is constructed with access restricted to various positions. Clytie maintains her position of privilege over someone like Wash Jones because, even as she is racially constructed as inferior to him, she possesses Sutpen blood and is granted access to the inside of the home. Neil Smith observes that "[i]nternally, the differentiation of the home can vary from a simple inside/outside dichotomy to a more elaborate division; it represents a spatialization of different social experiences, activities, and functions or combinations thereof, and is furnished accordingly" (*Absalom* 69). The back door of the Sutpen home, which Clytie prevents Wash Jones from entering despite his position as a white male, demonstrates such an inside/outside division, while Clytie is located in a unique place of privilege *and* deprivation of recognition within the home. Her access to the interior of the home is a negotiation based on her invisibility within it. The recognized presence of racial inferiority within the space of the home, or the extension of the home into a place of accepted racial mixing, are

forbidden as ways to maintain the ideology of purity, an ideology Sutpen repeatedly transgresses.

Sutpen's racial naivete and his reliance on his will as an individual combine to muddle his attempts to meet the standards of Jefferson's elite for differentiation amongst races. For Sutpen, the visible differences in skin color are noted, but their import is vastly different for his individual construction of their meaning than they are for a community with a commonly held racial ideology whose social practices implement and constantly reaffirm its structure. As a result, Sutpen traverses racial boundaries in ways that are unacceptable for most in Jefferson, and especially for the tenuously constructed internal differences of a mixed-race household. Before he is married, Sutpen works alongside his slaves, and as Rosa Coldfield tells it, they are hardly distinguishable, the French architect's clothes the only thing enabling him to resemble "a human creature" (*Absalom* 28). Rosa Coldfield's apparent disdain is echoed in that of her sister, whose disapproval of her husband's racial mixing is second only to her outrage at his lack of gender propriety. Ellen, when forced to confront the fighting of Sutpen's "wild negroes," can tacitly accept fighting among the slaves, even if she can't understand it. What outrages her, and what she had not expected to see, is the racial mixing of hand-to-hand combat between "a white one and a black one" (20). Ellen's chastisement as she rescues Henry is not open anger, but rather the implication of a lack of propriety when she exclaims, "I know you'll excuse us, gentlemen" (21). The admonishment recognizes that the behavior taking

place is not gentlemanly, even as she avoids openly confronting Sutpen. What she is willing to openly confront him about, however, is the flaunting of the gender expectations among the family. Sutpen has seen fit to respect the physical boundaries of the home by housing his fights in the barn. The problem is that he has already transgressed the boundary that extends the limits of his home beyond what Ellen sees as their proper borders. Henry's inclusion as a witness to the fights is acceptable to Ellen because, even though his status as a child makes his presence dubious, his gender allows for his exposure. Judith, on the other hand, as a child *and* a female, is forbidden from experiencing the breach of racial etiquette and decency. Ellen's plea to Sutpen, "Not my baby girl, Thomas" (21), identifies Judith's position by age ("baby," even though she clearly is not) and gender ("girl," identifying her diminutive femininity).

Sutpen's breach of the proper borders of home is condemned by Ellen, but what eventually wins her over, as it has the whole community, is the base fact of Sutpen's economic success. The willingness of Ellen and her community to compromise their racial and class expectations in order to accommodate Sutpen's wealth reveals both the tenuous nature of these ideologies and their secondary importance to economic motivations. Whether Sutpen's wealth or just his racial ideology was derived from Haiti, as the town's rumors suggest, his success in Jefferson demonstrates that the most relevant force in both locales is monetary. His disregard for the existing structures of the home and community flaunt the fact that his economic success

nonetheless grants him access to his family and town. Sutpen faces sanction only when his flaunting of the constructed boundaries of home or community exceeds the benefits of the economic opportunities he provides.

Rosa Coldfield's evaluation of Sutpen is instructive in that she operates at the nexus of this community's understanding of itself, its interactions with Thomas Sutpen, and the revelation of this information to Quentin (and the novel's readers). Unlike the information revealed about Thomas and Ellen Sutpen, which comes second-hand, information about Rosa is largely from her own mouth, and therefore reflects as much about her as it does about how she sees others. Rosa has positioned herself "as the town's and the county's poetess laureate" (*Absalom* 6), the mouthpiece of the community in print and in her conception of herself. As Quentin speculates as to why Rosa would want to speak to him, he associates her motivation with that of large historical forces that have shaped the region of the South: "[S]he wants it told . . . so that people whom she will never see and whose name she will never hear and who have never heard her name nor seen her face will read it and know at last why God let us lose the War" (6, italics in the original), an act that was necessary to bring about the circumstances of Sutpen's downfall and death. But Quentin's logic is his own, attributing her motivation to larger forces that justify issues of life and death, while Rosa's motivations are much more specific. Mr. Compson corrects Quentin's assumptions about Rosa, informing him, "It's because she will need someone to go with her – a man, a gentleman . . . . And she chose you

because your grandfather was the nearest thing to a friend which Sutpen ever had in this county . . . . so, in a sense, the affair no matter what happens out there tonight, will still be in the family” (8). Rosa seeks someone to aid her investigation of Sutpen’s Hundred, but she knows that it must be a male and that the male must fit a certain class that can be considered a “gentleman.” Keeping the affair within the community, she associates anyone whose ancestry is originated within the county and whose heritage is friendly to hers as part of “the family.” Rosa seeks to be the representative voice of the community, but her revelation of information is highly motivated in order to protect her own actions against the implications of impropriety, specifically regarding her previous interactions with Sutpen and the possibility of their courtship. In this way, Rosa’s embrace of Southern innocence is instructive in that it is clearly motivated to protect her and is, by extension, instructive in understanding the town’s desire for absolution for their acceptance of Sutpen.

Rosa’s sister and Sutpen’s spouse, Ellen, is similarly persuaded by Sutpen’s wealth as her disgust with his transgressions of the boundaries of home are nonetheless placated as she “seemed not only to acquiesce, to be reconciled to her life and marriage, but to be actually proud of it” (*Absalom* 54). This change in perspective is directly attributed to her life in “a world of pure illusion in which, safe from any harm, she moved, lived, from attitude to attitude against her background of chatelaine to the largest, wife to the wealthiest, mother of the most fortunate,” a



world in which she can exercise her power by shopping the meager stores that Jefferson has to offer without ever leaving her carriage (54). Similarly, the community accepts Sutpen because of the force of economic power he brings to bear, even as he flaunts the internal values of the community in exercising such power. Ellen has to be persuaded by the economic power Sutpen provides, but most of the community is not so hesitant. According to Rosa's approximation, it was the "hundred miles of plantation which apparently moved [the Coldfields'] father" and the "big house and the notion of slaves underfoot day and night which reconciled [their] aunt" to Sutpen's presence in the family (10). Rosa escapes culpability and maintains the patriarchal structure of the community in her association of blame with her father (13). While she is no doubt correct to assign a portion of blame to her father for allowing Sutpen the status of acceptability that marrying into the family would grant him, the whole community appraises him as suspicious (33) and despite not liking him, "he was accepted" as a result of the fact that he "had too much money now to be rejected" (57). Rosa's association of blame upon the representative of community power, the white male head-of-household, is not unfounded, but is certainly incomplete. Rosa unknowingly implicates herself within her construction of community as a stratified and ordered setting of privilege. In describing the men who would come to Sutpen's Hundred to bet on the fights and races that Sutpen put on in his bachelorhood and, much to Ellen's chagrin, well into his marriage, Rosa describes them as being witnesses to the curse Sutpen embodies, alongside the

“gentlefolks, our own kind . . . the very scum and riffraff who could not have approached the house itself under any other circumstances, not even from the rear” (20). What Rosa does not realize, as she is not privy to the information of Sutpen’s background, is that access to the back of a plantation home is not only a way for her to situate class within Jefferson, but also a foreshadowing of both the revelation of the experience that motivates Sutpen’s drive for economic power and the status that brings about Sutpen’s eventual death, as his complete access to Wash Jones’s home and family are contrasted with the limited access Clytie grants Wash. In making the very distinction that acts as the impetus for Sutpen, Rosa’s attempt to alleviate any personal guilt instead implicates her, a desperate attempt to create a distinction between Sutpen and herself necessitated by the fact that she was engaged to him.

As it was with Rosa, the focus on gentility in the construction of Jefferson’s self-conception (and the South as a whole) is an attempt to justify the preservation of a way of life whose hypocrisy is made clear by the passage of time. By the time Quentin lives in Jefferson, the creation of the South as a unique and self-governing region is a way to preserve an idea that has little to do with a way of life and more to do with an economic reality. Even Rosa’s romantic and value-neutral presentation of the South alludes to some of the economic realities that construct it. Her first impressions of Quentin situate his education at Harvard as robbing him of his Southern identity and providing him with economic opportunities nonetheless. She

notes that “Northern people have already seen to it that there is little left in the South for a young man” (*Absalom* 5), the effects of the Civil War lingering in the struggling Southern economy. And she knows that the economic and moral superiority of the North are nonetheless tempered by a curiosity that produces economic opportunities. In Rosa’s telling of events, the Northern control of the economy enables their control of cultural production, as well. Shreve’s curiosity and amazement over the realities of the South give evidence that not all of her insights are misguided. She speculates that Quentin will be motivated to “enter the literary profession as so many Southern gentlemen and gentlewomen too are doing now,” that he will write about his interactions with her and that the motivation for such a publication will be economic gain, that Quentin’s “wife will want a new gown or a new chair and [he] can write this and submit it to the magazines” (5). Even as Rosa recognizes the economic realities that impose themselves on the South, however, she does not realize the ways in which the South’s very construction and downfall are, at least in part, economic processes. Instead she chooses to situate the downfall of the region as an act of God, one beyond human control and in which she is clearly not implicated.

Rosa frames Ellen’s marriage to Sutpen as a curse that God has cast on the Coldfields, Jefferson, and the South, a challenge to the ideas of home, community, and region that she wishes to maintain. The “fatality and curse on the South and on our family” is not a result of any action, but rather occurs as though Rosa’s ancestors’

family “had been coerced by Heaven into establishing itself in the land and the time already cursed” (*Absalom* 14). Rosa’s view of an empty land possessing the characteristics granted it by divine or natural processes excuses her of any guilt and frames space as possessing an innate quality that emanates through its inhabitants. The South’s curse has no divine origin, however, as Rosa’s father was made aware. Rather, his involvement with establishing Sutpen in Jefferson was a repetition of the error of economic value over all others that the South repeated en masse. Mr. Coldfield’s evaluation was that one day “the South would realize that it was now paying the price for having erected its economic edifice not on the rock of stern morality but on the shifting sands of opportunism and moral brigandage” (209), the sins of slavery finally reaping their just reward. The preservation of “the South” was an attempt not to maintain an innocent or inevitable way of life, but rather as an attempt to maintain a region constructed on the economic basis of inequality in order to prove that it existed outside of that very definition. Quentin becomes the battleground of exactly that struggle, of a generation of Southern gentility that bore the weight of the social history of “the South” but saw its construction as a purely economic one. The decision to maintain the values of his home, community, and region as they had been defined in his youth, or to flee them completely in favor of a universalism that was available to others in his position, such as Shreve, becomes the crux of the struggle within the diegetic world of the novel. It is not surprising, then, that Quentin’s attempt to make sense of his personal and regional history includes

implications of its involvement with forces that extend throughout the country and, perhaps, beyond.

Characters only obliquely reference the larger world outside of the communities surrounding Jefferson, but the impact of the outside world is clear, drawing attention to the elision. As the South moves from its operation as an independent political entity into a part of the United States, it is incorporated into a larger system of capital movement that nation-states serve to regulate and maintain. Within *Absalom, Absalom!* this emergence into the late stages of capitalism within which the final physical borders of the United States took shape is depicted the few times the nation is acknowledged. The nation's approval of the dispossession of Native Americans in favor of white settlement is alluded to by the fact that Sutpen's ownership of the land that will become Sutpen's Hundred is "a matter between his conscience and Uncle Sam and God" (33). Similarly, a veiled reference to the date on which West Virginia was admitted to the union occurs as Quentin reveals Sutpen's background to Shreve (179). Not only is the differentiation immaterial to Quentin, who seems content to cast Sutpen from a mountain town on the Appalachian frontier regardless of its exact location in any state, it is highlighted by Shreve, whose cosmopolitanism insists upon the strict definitions of borders and dates. The crossing of international borders occurs within the text, but is similarly ill-constructed by the characters within the novel. Even as Sutpen's experiences in Haiti are revealed, they are mentioned as the source of his familial troubles, but not his

wealth. Jefferson would rather attribute his possibly ill-gotten gains to an indefatigable will or the robbing of a riverboat instead of an international slave trade that would implicate the whole community and region.<sup>5</sup> As such, they refuse to look beyond the borders of their community to the global, even as Sutpen's "French" architect does his bidding for no pay, and his attempt to flee reveals that remaining on Sutpen's Hundred is enforced, just as it is for the slaves. The architect is reported to have come "all the way from Martinique on Sutpen's bare promise" (26), but Sutpen's recapturing of him makes this highly unlikely. The slaves themselves speak "a sort of French" (27), and they are wilder and seemingly more powerful than slaves born around Jefferson. The willful blindness of the community and their ability to simultaneously acknowledge and deny the impact of the world outside of Jefferson thus becomes a defining characteristic of the diegetic world. The narrative seizes upon this concept and replicates it for readers through its contested, conflicting, overlapping and revising perspectives.

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<sup>5</sup> The idea of Sutpen robbing a riverboat is put forth as an option, however unrealistic, for the origin of the furnishings of Sutpen's Hundred. The idea does not emanate from a singular character, but rather as an idea that circulates via rumors. Sutpen's foray(s) to Haiti are much more clearly identified, but nonetheless seem to operate similarly within the town's consciousness as a possibility, lest they have to consider the consequences of confirming their culpability. Within literary criticism, explorations of Haiti's significance within the novel have been put forth by Barbara Ladd, George Handley, John T. Matthews, and Deborah Cohn.

## Narrative space

Much of the focus on the narrative structure of *Absalom* has sought to clarify exactly who is speaking and when, and which version of the text most accurately represents Faulkner's vision. These attempts ignore the basic issue that Faulkner's text, whether intended or not, contains inconsistencies and contradictions that make finding a "definitive" version of the diegetic world's timeline and narrative perspective extremely difficult, if not impossible. Nonetheless, one such attempt was made by Robert Dale Parker, who provides an appendix to *Absalom, Absalom!: The Questioning of Fictions*, his 1988 monograph. In the appendix each chapter identifies "Time present," "Time past," and "Perspective" (167-9). This systematic approach is undercut, however, by the continual ambiguity in identifying the perspective, and the fact that multiple perspectives may be used, even simultaneously. Parker identifies the perspective of the first chapter as an "authorial or external narrator, though within that mostly through Rosa" (167). What could be seen as a focalization through a specific character becomes increasingly inexact and abstract in the second chapter, which Parker describes as being narrated by "first a nonomniscient external narrator telling what the town or Grandfather Compson knew and modulating ... into the satirical voice of legend" (167). Other chapters include multiple uncertainties, such as one parenthetical statement within *Absalom* whose narration Parker breaks into four main sections identified as subpoints a-d, and which include ambiguous perspectives coming from "either" one character "or" another, and "Quentin thinking and

addressing himself in the second person" (168). The seventh chapter includes "Quentin's memory of his father's or his grandfather's telling (and in one case his grandmother's . . .), of his father's retelling of Grandfather's telling, and of his father's retelling of Grandfather's retelling of Sutpen's telling" (169). Perhaps some elucidation is gained from such parsing, but in a narrative structure that so consistently resists being limited to a single, identifiable perspective, the more helpful approach is to follow Brian Richardson's advice and "ask 'What is the narration doing now?' rather than, 'Who is speaking here?'" (*Unnatural Voices* 42). Richardson then suggests that "[b]y following out the varied narrative voices ... we find that they themselves constitute a kind of narrative that complements and underscores the central events and ideas of the story" (42). Using aspects of Richardson's "unnatural narration," a close examination of the narrative space within *Absalom* should attempt to identify the existing complexity of the narrative structure rather to simplify it by identifying individual perspectives (which may not exist) at each point in the narrative.

In the novel the multiple narrative strands that repeat, overlap, negate, speculate on and even merge with one another complicate the narrative concept of a focalizing character or agent within the world of the text. Even the concept of a narrator outside of the diegesis is made troublesome by the multiple levels of character-narrated stories and the often unclear shifts in perspective between characters. As some characters such as Quentin and Shreve speculate on what could have or must



have happened, others such as Rosa Coldfield are motivated to avoid or change information, and these absences are as much a part of the text as the repetitions. As the analysis of the diegetic space has demonstrated, the perspectives of those within the storyworld are often motivated as they seek absolution, explanation, or to place blame, and the presentation of those perspectives extends those inclinations into the narrative space. The linguistic negations – Sutpen as Rosa’s “nothusband” (*Absalom* 3), for example – are coupled with multiplications – Sutpen as “man-horse-demon” (4) – that microscopically echo the overarching features of the novel. Additionally, whole sentences and paragraphs are constructed parenthetically, and at one point more attention is drawn to Quentin’s refusal to speak than to his response that eventually follows. From the building blocks to the birds-eye-view, the novel’s structure is truly labyrinthine. It demonstrates the complications of history by never allowing the novel to exist purely in the past or the present, but instead constantly mixing the two to demonstrate their coexistence.

The contrasts and difficulties of the narrative space are clearly seen through the revelation of information regarding Thomas Sutpen. Although *Absalom, Absalom!* moves around him in a number of concentric narratives, and while his actions are the origin for much of the plot and the genealogy in which it is so enmeshed, Thomas Sutpen is revealed in fits and starts throughout. The narrative continually operates on a logic of elision and the negation of opposites rather than affirmation. Even the descriptions of Sutpen’s physical characteristics that the community produces are

altered based upon Sutpen's standing within the community. When Sutpen first appears in Jefferson astride his horse, they arrive "man and beast looking as though they had been created out of thin air" (*Absalom* 24). And while the apparition proves to be real, the production of his body proves to be far from material. He arrives as

[a] man with a big frame but gaunt now almost to emaciation, with a short reddish beard which resembled a disguise and above which his pale eyes had a quality at once visionary and alert, ruthless and reposed in a face whose flesh had the appearance of pottery, of having been colored by that oven's fever either of soul or environment, deeper than sun alone beneath a dead impervious surface as of glazed clay. (24)

The description foreshadows Sutpen's revelation that he hides dark secrets (his beard as "a disguise") and positions him as a dark and impenetrable force of power (possessing "a dead impervious surface"), both of which are justified through the events of the plot. But it also presents the unresolved possibilities of the sources of Sutpen's power, for it was not merely the natural forces (the "sun alone") that hardened Sutpen into what he had become, but rather another force "either of soul or environment." The "either" remains unresolved, as Sutpen's mystery cannot be pinned down, but the possibilities of its source are clear, it must be attributed to either the characteristics of an individual soul or the construction of a surrounding environment. This description echoes the competing forces of the diegetic space,

Sutpen desiring to impose an all-powerful individual will while the town maintains its own values. In this way, the character's description echoes the conflict of the plot, but it nonetheless gives no hints to an all-knowing narrational perspective, instead leaving the possibilities open to interpretation.

As Sutpen's situation in Jefferson changes, the townspeople's descriptions of him are also altered. After Sutpen arrives in Jefferson looking haggard and hardened, he constructs his home at Sutpen's Hundred for the next two years, and then mysteriously seems to rest for a three-year period. When he then disappears for a three-month period and returns with extravagant furnishings for his home, crystal chandeliers and four ox-driven wagons loaded with items that townspeople imagine can only be stolen (*Absalom* 33), it is an affront to the town's sensibilities of itself, and while it confirms what they've suspected about his character, it alters their appraisal of Sutpen's very body. General Compson claimed that Sutpen's power was in his face (35), and while the face can act metonymically as the seat of personality, General Compson's description reverses this comparison, a new appraisal of Sutpen's personality resulting in an altered evaluation of the same body. General Compson claimed that "some of the faience appearance which the flesh of his face had had when he came to town five years ago was gone now and that his face had an honest sunburn" (36). The mention of faience – a general term for "glazed earthenware" (*Oxford English Dictionary*) – connects Sutpen's current appearance in town to his first visit and the comparison of his flesh to pottery. When Sutpen was unknown, his

flesh's appearance seemed to be the process of something unnatural. The baking that would result from either intense exposure to the sun or an oven was attributed to an oven, a product of human making rather than one of nature. Now that Sutpen is known to the town, his flesh still maintains a hardened or baked appearance, but now this is described not as the product of a human process, but rather of a natural one that equates the metaphorical "honest sunburn" to a hard day's labor outside. In the course of five years Sutpen's appearance certainly could have changed, but the extension of the previous metaphor, along with other contradictory descriptions of his body cast doubt upon actual material change as the only explanation for such differentiation. Instead, as the town's evaluation of Sutpen's character has changed, so has their very impression of his physical characteristics.

General Compson's description of Sutpen's flesh similarly changes. Five years have passed since the last appraisal of Sutpen's appearance, yet "he was not fleshier either . . . it was just that the flesh on his bones had become quieter . . . so that he actually filled his clothes now . . . as though after the three years [since he finished building his house] he could trust his eyes alone to do the watching, without the flesh on his bones standing sentry also" (*Absalom* 36-7). The fact that Sutpen, previously described as "gaunt," now fills out his clothes without having gained any flesh clearly defies logic. The amount of flesh has not changed, yet its qualities have. And the qualities that Sutpen's flesh is granted are not of a physical nature, but rather are qualities associated with volition. Flesh that was previously attentively watching is

now relaxed, as if the comforts of a furnished home have not only eased Sutpen's mind, but have done so to the extent that it is manifest in his flesh itself. Sutpen's clothes, previously ill-fitting on his emaciated frame, are now suited to his situation and therefore fit better, even as his body itself has not changed. Clothes connote a level of comfort that is not merely metaphorical, here it is also literal. The hyperbole that General Compson may be employing does not negate the impression that Sutpen grants, rather it is part of the construction of the impression itself. In creating an image that casts the same body differently, General Compson continues the ambiguity expressed through the origin of each layer of narrative. The different points of origin seem to circle Sutpen's character while producing contradictory information rather than directly approaching him and facing up to their accommodation of his demands.

While the narrative positioning of various characters such as Sutpen is ambiguous and overlapping, the language used to describe events echoes the absences, elisions and repetitions of second-hand knowledge, a constant reminder that the logic behind one version of events is not universal, its limits not necessarily those of another version. Multiplicity and compression are presented from Sutpen as "man-horse-demon" (*Absalom* 4) to the unabbreviated hierarchy of "man woman nigger mule" (12) that describes the possibilities of creatures present in the South in 1861. Parenthetical references exist inside of other parenthetical references (37, and throughout), and other sets of parentheses are used to clarify pronoun references

that remain ambiguous (15, and throughout), while the fact that pronouns sometimes *do not* need clarification is pointed out (249). In addition, the metaphors used to seemingly remove the imagery from the material circumstances of what is being described nonetheless circle back around to the situations at hand. Ellen's financial manipulation at Sutpen's hand, for example, is described in the abstract terms of personified "Fate" (54). Yet by the end of the metaphor, Fate itself has been forced to "clear the books, pay the check to which his wife, Nature, had signed his name" (54). Such misdirections create a text that calls attention to its own constructedness and signals that even the absence of information is worth comment.

From the beginning of the novel the action of the plot is shown to be of secondary importance to the way in which it is presented. As Quentin ponders exactly why Rosa Coldfield has summoned him, the events at the center of the plot are revealed to the reader. Quentin knows that Rosa is a woman with a "nephew who served for four years in the same company with his sister's fiancé and then shot the fiancé to death before the gates to the house where the sister waited in her wedding gown on the eve of the wedding and then fled, vanished, none knew where" (*Absalom* 6). While the names are not yet mentioned, the main actions by which Henry, Judith and Bon will become known are presented without the rising action associated with a traditional plot. The mystery that remains – where the murderous fiancé has fled – is only resolved after the narration has been thoroughly interrogated, undercut, and featured as the key absence at the center of the text. Peter Brooks describes the

novel as “a kind of detective story where the object of investigation – the mystery – is the narrative design, or plot, itself” (294). The fact that the narration is collaborative and is elicited from characters with competing motivations and versions of events clarifies why the various constructions overlap, reframe, and avoid information that proves to be necessary to a fully understood recreation of events. The fact that the accumulation of information provided is still inadequate is also alluded to throughout.

Each chapter in *Absalom, Absalom!* begins by situating the story in the mouth of a narrator within a few pages, and most often more quickly, refusing to situate judgments outside of any character not at least tangentially involved with the community of Jefferson and therefore the plot of the novel. Mr. Compson begins the story of Rosa’s engagement to Sutpen with a revelation of its ending, continuing the focus on how the story is told rather than what is revealed. He moves from background information into the story itself by claiming, “Now the period began which ended in the catastrophe which cause a reversal so complete in Miss Rosa as to permit her to agree to marry the man whom she had grown up to look upon as an ogre” (53). The evaluations of events and characters comes from Mr. Compson, but clearly he is framing it in a way that focuses on Rosa Coldfield’s impressions. Throughout the story the narration is placed in the mouths of those in some way related to the events, their authority undercut, often as a result of their own doing. Mr. Compson’s evaluation that Sutpen “corrupted” Ellen, that his money, position

and ability to buy her things assured her tacit approval of his actions (56-7), comes to Quentin through his father's telling of events that Quentin's grandmother observed, and involves judgments about the motivations of someone (Ellen) who is mostly known through the admittedly biased perspective of her sister, who continually refers to Sutpen as a "demon." Mr. Compson's evaluation that Ellen has been "corrupted" is third-hand knowledge framed within the story of someone who despises Sutpen and is sympathetic to Ellen. Continually, Mr. Compson's focus is on the telling of the story and its framing rather than the events at hand. Chapter four begins as he informs Quentin of the background that he'll need in order to understand Miss Rosa's requests of him. He carries the letter that Charles Bon sent Judith confirming their engagement and imminent marriage, the letter that appears to be the focus of the chapter. Yet the vast majority of the chapter passes with the first-hand account of events in the letter secondary to the framing by Quentin's father.<sup>6</sup> The narrative's constant reminders of its constructedness also extend the text beyond the narrative framework within the book. Mr. Compson, in describing to Quentin what Rosa Coldfield must have been like as a child, mentions she must have possessed "eyes like (as you put it) pieces of coal pressed into soft dough and prim hair" (51). The parenthetical reference to Quentin's observation echoes a number of

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<sup>6</sup> In the 1990 Vintage edition chapter four begins on page 70, Mr. Compson is carrying the letter on page 71, and yet he does not give it to Quentin until page 101, the letter's contents finally revealed on the following page before the chapter ends on page 106, the letter itself occupying not quite three of its thirty-five pages.



parenthetical interruptions throughout the text which frame or clarify the events at hand, but Mr. Compson's aside refers to Quentin comparing Miss Rosa's eyes to pieces of coal, a comparison of which the text has no record. Not only does the comment draw attention to the narrative structure, it particularly highlights the ways in which the narrative privileges some information, hides and reveals other. While what Quentin and Mr. Compson see is limited by their relationships to those who reveal the plot to them, and by their ability to speculate about events that occurred outside of their view, the same goes for the readers of *Absalom, Absalom!*

The presentation of contradictory information, the blurred lines between the various narrative frames, the implication of readers into the interpretation of plot events, and the violation of the expectations of realism are all aspects of the antimimetic mode of narration at work within the text. Brian Richardson identifies antimimetic texts as those that "violate mimetic expectation and the practices of realism" (*Unnatural Narrative* 3) and identifies denarration and textual generators (58) as hallmarks of this type of narrational strategy. Denarration includes the presentation of contradictory information that cannot logically be simultaneously true, while textual generators include items within the story that take on their own life and become the story itself (or at least part of it) (59). While much of *Absalom, Absalom!* includes what would clearly be categorized as a mimetic mode of narration, "systematically attempt[ing] to depict the world of our experience in a recognizable manner" (3), according to Richardson, the significant and ever-present strategies

identified as part of the narrative space are too significant to be ignored. Perhaps nowhere is this more clear than with the narrative perspectives that, being outside of Mississippi in 1910, have the largest frame of reference (other than that of readers), Quentin and Shreve.

Quentin and Shreve draw attention to the fact that their own stories are constructed, expressing the possibility of different sources and sequences of information, potentially resulting in different conclusions. As Quentin and Shreve reconstruct what must have happened between Sutpen, Henry, Judith and Charles Bon, they use the information that Mr. Compson and Rosa Coldfield have provided for them as the origins of their narrative peregrinations, but they also constantly undercut a definitive version of events. As they speculate as to how Charles Bon would have found out that Sutpen was his father, they conclude that his mother would not have told him, but the inability to settle on a motivation undercuts even this conclusion. They believe that

it wasn't her that told Bon. She wouldn't have, *maybe* for the reason that she knew he – the demon – would believe she had. Or *maybe* she didn't get around to telling him. *Maybe* she just never thought that there could be anyone as close to her as a lone child . . . . Or *maybe* she was already telling it . . . . Or *maybe* she didn't intend for him to know it then. *Maybe* she was grooming him . . . . (*Absalom* 237-8, italics mine)

The repetition of “maybe” signals the possibility of six different motivations for one action, and while Quentin and Shreve focus on the last one at the greatest length, they draw attention to a multiplicity of possibilities and in doing so cast light on the fact that they are not framing an inevitability, but rather that the past is as constructed as the present and future. The multiple possibilities provided in this instance contextualize motivation for a character who has no direct contact with any of the plot’s actors except Charles Bon.

Yet Quentin and Shreve realize that even more direct connections to events can lead to errors in reported information, as they note the error Mr. Compson makes in relating the events of the Civil War that led to Charles Bon and Henry’s return to Sutpen’s Hundred. Shreve exclaims, “[Y]our old man was wrong here, too! He said it was Bon who was wounded, but it wasn’t. Because who told him? Who told Sutpen, or your grandfather either, which of them it was who was hit?” (*Absalom* 275). Shreve concludes that it was Henry’s injury rather than Bon’s that preceded Bon’s return to Mississippi. But more important than the order of cause and effect for which Shreve argues is the fact that he has called into doubt the version of events that Mr. Compson promotes, and he does so on the basis of the impossibility of Quentin’s grandfather or Sutpen or Mr. Compson coming by any of the information directly, or even second-hand. The same critique applies to Shreve and Quentin, just as it would to the readers of the novel. The dorm room at Harvard becomes a “tomblake” container of the experiences that move through “[f]irst, two of them,

then four; now two again" (275), as if Quentin and Shreve draw Henry and Bon into existence by their retelling of events. But even though this situated and undercut retelling seems a generative act at times, it is also a negation at others. Shreve questions Quentin on the nature of what could be an incestuous relationship between Henry and Judith, his observations eventually far-reaching and abstract as he asks for Quentin's agreement – "Ain't that right?" (259). But one of the few narrative intrusions that cannot be attributed to a specific character within the plot or narrative framework comments that "[Shreve] could have been interrupted easily now. Quentin could have spoken now, but Quentin did not" (259). "I don't know," he eventually replies (259). The narrative voice draws attention not to Quentin's eventual response, but rather to the silence that precedes it, the absence of the response that Shreve attempts to elicit seemingly more powerful than the assertion that follows. Perhaps Quentin's own incestuous feelings, powerfully revealed in *The Sound and the Fury*, which preceded *Absalom, Absalom!* by seven years, mitigate his response and cause him to prefer avoidance to confrontation. Or perhaps he is reminded of his feelings for his sister and becomes empathetic toward Henry, an empathy he cannot reveal for fear of censure. Perhaps he's grown tired of Shreve's assumptions that he knows the South and Jefferson without having ever been there – the beginning of Shreve's rambling narrative (that ends with his question to Quentin) makes mention of "Aunt Rosa" (258), an error that Quentin doesn't correct for the first time – and prefers not to confront Shreve. Or perhaps he knows Shreve's

question is rhetorical – Shreve responds to Quentin’s lack of certainty with, “Maybe I don’t either” (259) – and does not see the point in voicing his opinion. The exact reasoning behind Quentin’s silence is not the point, but through interrogating his narrative absence, readers become the interpreters of narrative events in the same way that the characters who exist within the narrative framework have sought to interpret the level of plot in which they are ambiguously involved and implicated. The numerous “maybes” that Quentin and Shreve produce in attempts to fix the motivations and interpretive framework with which Sutpen, Judith, Henry, Charles Bon, and his mother evaluate their locations become the “perhaps” that readers are forced to speculate on in order to interpret Quentin’s silence, Shreve’s self-assurance, Mr. Compson’s seeming disinterestedness, and Rosa Coldfield’s motivated depictions.

#### Literary space

Despite – or perhaps because of – the complications of the narrative structure of *Absalom, Absalom!* and the contested ways in which it can be understood, it has received praise as an exemplar of Faulkner’s high modernism and his impact on American literature and literary traditions around the world. Faulkner’s critical praise, his place as one of the forefathers of American literature, and his broad audience were not present from the beginning of his literary career. Instead, he toiled as a writer for many years before finding critical acclaim and winning the 1949

Nobel Prize for literature. Faulkner's proponents, including prominent critics such as Malcolm Cowley and Robert Penn Warren, provided a narrative to this rise, describing "in almost mythic rags-to-riches terms," that after beginning his publishing career in the 1920's and reaching a limited audience in the 1930's, "Faulkner struggled in obscurity in the early 1940's until a few writers and critics without the blinders of 1930's Marxism recognized his achievement, though at first these adherents had trouble enlisting support for the novelist. But eventually the 'truth' won out and Faulkner gained the deserved recognition" (Schwartz 2). This idea of the struggling genius toiling in obscurity prior to belatedly finding an audience of astute admirers echoes the mythology of many great artists, and seems to find support in the details of Faulkner's career. By the conclusion of World War II, *Absalom, Absalom!* and the other novels that would become his "major modernist achievements were out of print" (Duvall 123). At this point, "[b]ooksellers, librarians, and publishers all apparently had little interest in [Faulkner]" (Basset 26). However, Malcolm Cowley advocated for the publication of Viking's *Portable Faulkner* in 1946, and in just four years Faulkner would become a Nobel laureate. Faulkner supported Cowley's primacy in this process, claiming that "I owe Malcolm Cowley the kind of debt no man could ever repay" (Krebs). In championing this view of Faulkner's prominence, Cowley not only asserted his own importance, he identified the unrecognized literary genius of Faulkner's fiction as the unstoppable impetus of his inevitable critical recognition.

Almost six decades later, Pascale Casanova's understanding of Faulkner similarly focuses on the genius of his individual contribution, albeit within the context of a worldwide impact much more fully realized by the time of her 2004 *The World Republic of Letters*. She identifies Faulkner as being "responsible for one of the greatest revolutions in the world of letters" (336), and she recognizes his primary innovation as the unique combination of depicting a "primitive and rural world" as the "privileged object of one of most daring exercises in style of the century" (337). For Casanova, however, the genealogy of his recognition went, like all literary capital, through Paris. Citing his warm reception in France prior to Cowley's influence, as well as the number of French studies that had been done on his work, and Sartre's review of him as one of the greatest novelists (130), she sees the French critical reception of Faulkner as a precursor to the process that Cowley and others would bring to America. Faulkner seems to give credence to this idea when he wrote to his agent, Harold Ober, that "In France, I am the father of a literary movement.... In America, I eke out a hack's motion picture wages by winning second prize in a manufactured mystery story contest" (*Selected Letters* 217-8). While Faulkner's genius was deservedly noticed by the French and then a wider audience, Casanova finds his particular resonance to be with a specific group of authors across the developing world.

Following Casanova's theory of literary influence, she finds Faulkner particularly well-received throughout the world because his innovation could be duplicated and adapted in other countries and regions. She notes that

while in the centers, and especially in Paris, the technical innovations of the American novelist were understood and valued only as formalistic devices, in the outlying countries of the literary world they were welcomed as tools of liberation. Faulkner's work, more than that of any other writer, henceforth belonged to the explicit repertoire of international writers in dominated literary spaces who sought to escape the imposition of national rules, for he had found a solution to a commonly experienced political, aesthetic, and literary impasse. (336)

Casanova then proceeds to trace Faulkner's influence on far-flung examples such as Juan Benet in Spain, Rachid Boudjedra in Algeria, and the writers of the Latin American Boom (338-45). What Casanova fails to provide, is any explanation of *how* stylistic innovations applied to a rural setting are particularly revelatory and yet universally applicable as these "revolutionaries" (as she titles her chapter that includes Faulkner's innovation) apply stylistic flourishes to their local settings. Perhaps the utilization of "technical innovations" demonstrates an authorial presence that's surprisingly learned to urban readers. Or perhaps the "violent, tribal civilization, impressed with the mark of biblical mythologies, opposed in every respect to urban modernity (which was typically associated with the stylistic avant-



garde)" (337) is revealed not to be such a backward locale, after all. Yet, because Casanova provides no explanation or close reading of how this flourish of narrative style is "formalistic" for an urban author and "daring" for one perceived as rural, readers are left to ascertain for themselves or trust her evaluation. Casanova's appraisal, however, is based on a rather unexamined yet critically accepted version of Faulkner's prominence that has become increasingly challenged.

The "rags to riches" version of Faulkner's rise can only be constructed by delimiting both the breadth of his reach and the type of acclaim that he received based not on publications and widespread acceptance, but rather on a particular kind of critical consensus. In 1966, Malcolm Cowley claimed that when he began his research for *The Portable Faulkner*, "'His seventeen books were effectively out of print and seemed likely to remain in that condition, since there was no public demand for them'" (qtd. in Schwartz 9). Yet Cowley's evaluation of "public demand" grossly misstates the situation, with an Armed Service Edition of *A Rose for Emily and Other Stories*, mass-market paperbacks, and a number of mystery stories accounting for much of Faulkner's familiarity to a wider audience. While *The Portable Faulkner* sold 20,000 copies in four years (Schwartz 55), Signet's Faulkner paperback reprints sold "nearly 3.3. million copies" between 1947-51 (Rabinowitz qtd. in Duvall 134). Faulkner's *Sanctuary* was derided as sensationalist by critics, yet it sold 470,000 copies by May 1948 (Schwartz 58), and "all of [his] paperbacks from the late 1940's and throughout the 1950's carried the byline 'By the Author of *Sanctuary*'" (Earle

197). Cowley's claim, then, is inaccurate in asserting that his reevaluation saved Faulkner from oblivion, rather, he seems to be referencing a particular kind of critical acceptance that Faulkner had previously lacked. Lawrence H. Schwartz's *Creating Faulkner's Reputation* provides an alternate account of Faulkner's prominence, noting that "he was not a 'great' writer just because he wrote fiction of high quality. . . in the context of the postwar era, and the emergent cultural cold war, there was a need to find an important American nationalist writer" (3). Schwartz cites Faulkner's pre-existing mass-market appeal as one of the factors that, along with a cultural shift that pitted capitalism against communism and a corresponding critical shift toward formalism and modernism and away from the "socially conscious literary traditions of naturalism/realism" (5), combined to give impetus to Cowley and Warren's promotion of Faulkner. In pursuit of this ideal of a great, modernist American writer, critics had drawn a distinction between the "high" and "low" works in Faulkner's oeuvre, but perhaps "Faulkner's relationship to popular culture was much more complex" (Earle 200). While working on his "pulp" stories may have enabled Faulkner to earn a living, even as they distracted from his more "serious" work, David M. Earle argues that "it could also be true that they allowed him to write on multiple levels. And on the most pragmatic level, the pulp/popular form aided in the construction of Faulkner's reputation, which complicates our understanding of his traditional position as *the* American elite modernist" (201, italics in the original). If this richer and more complicated understanding of Faulkner's reception lends to a reevaluation

of his reputation in literary space, it thus requires a reevaluation of Casanova's claims that base their evaluation of Faulkner on this incomplete history.

Faulkner's importance for a number of literary traditions is indisputable, however Casanova's attribution of this relevance to the application of formal stylistic innovations to a rural setting bares investigation. In the collection *William Faulkner in Context*, several essays identify the ways in which literary traditions throughout the world have adopted Faulkner as a progenitor. Emron Esplin traces the numerous authors within Latin America who have cited Faulkner's influence, Takako Tanaka comments on Faulkner's relevance to Japanese fiction, and Hosam Aboul-Ela notes the variety of postcolonial contexts in which Faulkner's fiction has served as a model, point of reference, or point of contrast. In particular, Aboul-Ela draws attention to the shifting scales at which Faulkner's influence can be examined as a writer who resonates for others who see him as postcolonial, neocolonial, Southern, (US) American, Latin American, and of the Global South, among others. While this breadth of resonance perhaps points to something uniquely universal in Faulkner, it's worth noting that of those who claim Faulkner as an influence, Casanova's assertion that they adopt Faulkner's stylistic innovations and apply them to a rural setting is often inaccurate. Tanaka posits that in post-World War II Japan, even urban residents saw similarities with "a Southern writer who could sympathize with the condition of the defeated" (279). Edouard Glissant's *Faulkner, Mississippi* provides an influential author and theorist's multifaceted evaluation of Faulkner's influence, one that often

operates on a personal level, but simultaneously “amplif[ies] the immanent presence of globalized histories in Faulkner’s ostensibly highly localized milieu” (Aboul-Ela 290). The sheer breadth of Faulkner’s influence makes generalizing about his appeal difficult when authors claim personal, historical, and geopolitical reasons alongside stylistic choices as the manifestations of that influence. While Casanova’s attempt to situate Faulkner and categorize his influence is admirable in its scope, it nonetheless bases its evaluation on promulgating the idea of individual authorial genius, a claim that a closer examination of Faulkner’s rise to prominence significantly complicates, and then extends the most commonly cited distinctions of Faulkner’s work, his setting and style, to those who claimed his influence without actually examining those aspects of his work. Having examined the narrative space of Faulkner’s *Absalom, Absalom!* in detail, it is useful to understand the ways that the novel’s unique construction lends itself to adoption by other traditions.

The significance of understanding the narrative space of *Absalom, Absalom!* according to nontraditional narrative theory is that it eliminates the need to establish a strict story/discourse distinction in favor of identifying the novel’s strategy of implicating readers through the presentation of multiple narrative strands that compete for prominence. Faulkner’s competing narrative strands highlight one of the hallmarks of high modernism, the privileging of the subjective, individual experience of reality, most famously understood through the “stream of consciousness” narrative presentation. While this narrative choice fit with the uniquely American

modernism that Schwartz argues Cowley, Penn and others saw in Faulkner, it also provides opportunities for the competing narrative strands to be adapted to a variety of contexts and to represent possibilities in what no longer has to fit within the strictures of realism's "definitive" version of events. In other words, Faulkner's narrative strategies in *Absalom, Absalom!* resonate with such a variety of authors because they create competing scales of understanding. In addition to similarities with historical circumstances, colonialism, class, and race, among others, these positions each seem to have resonance and compete for attention. As a result, there are many different ways that readers can identify similarities between their own situation and that of Faulkner's diegetic world, without that perspective being specifically identified as either the authoritative version of events or one that's at odds with a definitive account. The multiple possibilities for interpretation of the narrative space lends credence to stylistic innovations that may have little significance on their own for readers across the world. Casanova's lack of attention to the details of the narrative space means that she doesn't see this "formal innovation" as different from a number of others. Coupled with her acceptance of tradition narrative theory, she represents the inability of critics within literary space to see the motivations of their own assumptions, and thus fail to give an adequate explanation of why the novel works a particular way in literary space. For Faulkner, the assumptions of the literary world provided a path to fame, prominence, and incredible attention to his texts, however for other authors, well-known and

otherwise, the motivations of the literary world situate their texts and reputations in very inaccurate ways.

## Chapter 3

## Authorial Vision and Literary Recognition in Alejo Carpentier's

*The Kingdom of This World*

Having examined the necessity of moving past traditional narrative theory in order to accurately depict the complex and dynamic narrative structure of a text such as *Absalom, Absalom!*, I turn now to Alejo Carpentier's *The Kingdom of This World* in order to illustrate the benefits of a close reading of narrative space and its impact on literary space. In particular, I argue that understanding how Carpentier moves between narrative modes allows for readers to see that he is situating the ambivalent epistemologies of the diegetic space in such a way that readers are unable to privilege one way of knowing above another. The narrative space forces readers to navigate alternative ways of knowing, and in doing so Carpentier is attempting to produce a new understanding of literary space, one in which aesthetic innovation and syncretic epistemologies depict the reality of the Caribbean. While this approach is largely successful in its aesthetic dimension, the ways that Carpentier is perceived within literary space illustrate that his critique of epistemologies has received much less attention.

In this chapter, I will present relevant contextual information about Carpentier's most widely published text, *The Kingdom of This World*, before proceeding through a close reading of the novel's diegetic space. This reading will provide an overview of plotting and the primary focus of Carpentier's storyworld, the ways in which his

characters navigate their surroundings through competing epistemologies. Turning to the narrative space of the novel, I will examine the narrative techniques that Carpentier employs to move between the modes of narration that Brian Richardson identifies. Carpentier's shifting focalization and neutral presentation of information places readers in a situation parallel to that of the storyworld in which contradictory ways of knowing must be engaged. Lastly, moving to an analysis of the literary space, I will examine Carpentier's presentation of *lo real maravilloso*, its absorption into magical realism, and the ways in which the aesthetic achievement of its prestige within literary space came at the expense of its political relevance. As this reading of the spaces within the novel identifies, a dynamic understanding of narrative space necessitates a reevaluation of the ways that literary space functions, especially for an author from the periphery seeking to produce new space within the literary world.

Alejo Carpentier's 1949 novel *The Kingdom of This World* is a useful text to parse since it exists at the crossroads of a number of spatial concerns, and has been classified in a variety of ways as a result. The novel has been identified as a precursor to the Latin American "boom," an early example of the style of magical realism that would later reach beyond the borders of Latin America, and was written, in part, as an alternative to European ways of thinking about realism and surrealism in art and literature. Carpentier himself has been identified in a number of different ways, born to European parents, living throughout Latin America and considering himself Cuban his entire life, he wrote extensively on art forms other than literature, composed



music, oversaw radio programs and art journals, and incorporated music and lyricity into all of his novels. The text's characters also exist at the crossroads of the Caribbean, a cast of Africans, Europeans, and expatriates moving among Haiti, Cuba, and what would become the Dominican Republic. In the midst of these various countries, regions, national identities, and conceptions of art, the brief novel provides ample room to explore the relationship between the diegetic, narrative, and literary spaces it inhabits.

*The Kingdom of This World* takes place in the years before and immediately following the Haitian revolution and the events of the novel primarily take place in Haiti or the islands and waters nearby. The time frame of the novel overlaps with most of the lifetime of the primary character, a slave named Ti Noel, who is in his youth when the novel begins in approximately 1758, and who is nearing his death as the novel closes around 1821. Ti Noel's life takes him through fictionalized accounts of historical events and into contact with historical figures during these years. The novel is composed of four parts, each set in the years surrounding significant events leading up to or immediately following the Haitian revolution. Part one takes place in Cap Francois and on the plantation of Ti Noel's master, Lenormand de Mezy in the years before 1758. The events surround the attempt led by a maroon named Macandal to poison all of the white slave owners on the island. Part two takes place in approximately 1790-91, in the years surrounding the revolt initiated by a Jamaican slave named Bouckman. After fleeing his plantation during the revolt to Cap Francois,

de Mezy manages to escape to Santiago, Cuba with Ti Noel in tow. Part three begins with Ti Noel, who has purchased his freedom from a Spaniard after his master lost him in a card game, arriving back in Haiti between 1810-13, during the construction of King Henri Christophe's palace at Sans Souci. It closes in 1820 with Henri Christophe's death, and part four begins the following year as his wife and daughters are in exile in Pisa, Italy, before returning to Ti Noel during the closing years of his life on the former de Mezy plantation. The briskly paced novel covers all these events and locations in 180 pages in the 2006 Farrar, Straus and Giroux edition.

#### Diegetic space

The opening chapter of *The Kingdom of This World* presents a few quickly paced scenes that introduce readers to Ti Noel, the slave who will be the primary point of access to the narrative events, his master, Lenormand de Mezy, and the Haitian city of Cap Francais. It is light on plot, with the central action composed of the slave's choice of a horse from a recently arrived ship and his master's stop into a barber before they both leave to return to the de Mezy plantation. The chapter nonetheless adequately foreshadows the focus of the novel's diegetic world, the thoughts, impressions, and competing epistemologies of the characters of the storyworld. In doing so, the novel establishes that the *action* of the characters does not occur only when they physically interact with one another, but rather it presents mental activity as the primary area of investigation. Characters' thoughts depict how they engage

with their surroundings, even as those thoughts at times do not result in physical action. As such, the internal dilemmas, observations and ways of engaging with the storyworld become the primary location of action and conflict. As Ti Noel waits while his master is shaved, he observes four wax heads in the barbershop. He notices “[t]he curls of the wigs, opening into a pool of ringlets on the red baize, framed expressionless faces. Those heads seemed as real - although their fixed stare was so dead - as the talking head an itinerant mountebank had brought to the Cap years before to promote the sale of an elixir for curing toothache and rheumatism” (*Kingdom* 4). Ti Noel’s closest comparison to the wax heads, which seem to exist in a limbo between their aesthetic realism and their lifeless gaze, is the memory of a disembodied talking head, similarly existing halfway between life and death. Ti Noel’s thoughts next wonder to the neighboring storefront, where “there were calves’ heads, skinned and each with a sprig of parsley across the tongue, which possessed the same waxy quality.” As he continues to take in his surroundings, Ti Noel finds that “[t]he morning was rampant with heads” (5), with a bookseller’s shop displaying prints from France that depicted the face of the King of France and many other courtly officials. Ti Noel’s equalizing gaze, which takes interest in the heads of wax figures, slaughtered calves and the King of France, pauses, however, when he comes across “a Negro framed by feather fans and seated upon a throne adorned with figures of monkeys and lizards” (6). Ti Noel’s thoughts travel to the tales of the older slave Macandal, whose stories about African kingdoms and epic battles include

heroic kings, unconquerable warriors, and gods directly intervening in the events of history. In his estimation, the kings of Popo, Arada, Angola, the Nagos, the Fulah, and the Mandingues were “true kings, and not those sovereigns wigged in false hair who played at cup and ball and were gods only when they strutted the stage of their court theaters, effeminately pointing a leg in the measures of a rigadon” (8). With his comparison, Ti Noel draws attention not only to the physical surroundings of Cap Francais in the mid-18th century, but also to the competing cosmologies and epistemologies that are part of its diegetic space in *The Kingdom of This World*.

Ti Noel’s impressions present an introduction to a way of ordering the world that directly competes with the rationalism of European thought. The connection of this historical setting to a mystical African past is “the very opposite of Cartesian thought” (Paravisini-Gebert 115). This competing epistemology is revealed gradually as Ti Noel’s thoughts and impressions sprinkle evaluative judgments among the seemingly unambiguous surroundings of Cap Francais. He inhabits the same physical surrounding as de Mezy, observes the same wax heads, butcher shop and bookseller, but the world that is constructed from these same surroundings is drastically different. Ti Noel’s way of understanding the wax heads is to acknowledge that they are not alive, but to admit that they “seemed as real ... as the talking head” of his memory, “although their fixed stare was so dead” (*Kingdom* 4). In doing so, Ti Noel identifies that disembodied heads that speak are within the realm of his reality. He understands that the wax heads are not real, however, because they do not contain

the live eyes of the talking head. Yet even in this observation there is doubt, for the use of the word “seemed” positions the observations ambiguously by introducing an element of uncertainty - are they as real as the talking head, or do they only *seem* to be as real? Even the “real” in this comparison is suspect, as it would be for both his master and for a reader outside of the diegetic framework who may doubt the existence of a talking disembodied head, especially considering that none of the circumstances of Ti Noel’s knowledge of the talking head are explained. Ti Noel could have directly observed the head or he could have heard of it from others. The lack of specificity allows for ambiguity and the potential of corporate knowledge that Ti Noel identifies as “real.” As a result, the chain of impressions moves from fake heads that seem real (the wax heads of the barbershop), compared to a real head that may be fabricated (the talking head to which Ti Noel refers), to real heads that seem fake (the calves’ heads in the butchershop), and finally to a representation of the head of a real person (the print of the King of France). While the string of impressions provides for the development of the character, it also maps his unique way of encountering the world and identifies one of the possible epistemologies of the diegetic world.

As Ti Noel’s impressions move from physical objects in the diegetic world to representations, the socially produced significance of these representations finds multiple interpretations. In the print, the King of France is surrounded by “a border of suns, swords, and laurel,” while the depictions of other “bewigged heads” similarly

contain symbols and signs that are meant to communicate meaning to a viewer: “the warriors could be identified by their air of setting out for battle; the judges, by their menacing frowns; the wits, by their smiles” (*Kingdom* 5). These signs, along with the written verses that the illiterate slave cannot read, mean nothing to Ti Noel as his eyes instead find meaning in the depiction of the only black face that he sees. After inquiring about the identity of the print’s subject, the bookseller tells him, “That is a king of your country” (6), a confirmation of Ti Noel’s impressions since he recalled the tales of the elder slave Macandal about the African kings of their ancestry. Ti Noel’s thoughts elide the bookseller’s imposition of the European concept of “country” onto the legendary kingdoms that Ti Noel imagines. Instead, he contrasts the idea of a European king with that of an African king:

In Africa the king was warrior, hunter, judge, and priest; his precious seed distended hundreds of bellies with a mighty strain of heroes. In France, in Spain, the king sent his generals to fight in his stead; he was incompetent to decide legal problems, he allowed himself to be scolded by any trumpery friar. And when it came to the question of virility, the best he could do was engender some puling prince who could not bring down a deer without the help of stalkers, and who, with unconscious irony, bore the name of as harmless and silly a fish as the dolphin. (8-9)

These impressions recast the “civility” and “enlightenment” of Europe as weaknesses that demonstrate the inadequacy of its rulers. Delegation of duties is seen as cowardice, separation of government functions and religious administration is seen as dereliction of duty, and the selective breeding of royal families with one another begets a weak and ineffectual lineage rather than a prestigious name. Ti Noel’s disdain for the dauphin, whose lack of authority he partially attributes to the “silly” fish with whom he is associated, continues his observations and forces the acknowledgement that, as with the other apparently ambiguous signifiers of power and authority, this term holds no sway in an oral culture for whom a synonymous term does not exist.

While Ti Noel’s observations could potentially be seen as the purposeful exaggerations of a justifiably bitter slave, he reveals that they represent a completely alternative cosmology to the rationalistic Christianity of post-Enlightenment Europe. Ti Noel refers to “Back There” as the abode of the royals who embody the characteristics that he finds so lacking in European monarchs. This term enforces a double remove from his current surroundings, one of a previous time and another place. While he has mentioned specific kingdoms in his comparison, here he moves to a greater level of abstraction than just the specific location of Africa. Instead, Ti Noel refers to the idea of Africa, or of a world in which life is ordered according to “African” priorities. The capitalization of “Back There” identifies its significance as an idea that transfers the words from the ordinary by their iteration, an African “I Am.”

And while he has previously contrasted the earthly attributes of monarchs, he moves to the cosmologically significant differences of European princes and those “Back There,” describing “princes as hard as anvils, and princes who were leopards, and princes who knew the language of the forest, and princes who ruled the four points of the compass, lords of the clouds, of the seed, of bronze, of fire” (*Kingdom* 9). Ti Noel’s way of representing kingly behavior is not simply a way to insult his masters, it’s a manifestation of a completely different ordering of the world and of knowledge. Aristides Dimitriou notes that

[w]ith this passage, *Kingdom* introduces an alternative relation to the present by using a layered narrative texture ... through which it reaches back into the deep past. That is, Macandal's testimony of the "things that happened ... Back There" presents a narrative within a narrative: a nested oral transmission that casts a very different past than the present which governs the written frame narrative.

Importantly, this narrative is delivered contrapuntally, intercepting the representation of [the] present. (118-9)

This juxtaposition of knowledge identifies that there is a history to Ti Noel’s way of seeing the world. He is not simply an ignorant slave, he is accessing a way of encountering the world that has its own glorious history, and he is bringing that history to bear on the present, just as de Mezy’s mode of thought sees “countries” in the kingdoms of Africa. This alternative epistemology changes what’s believable,



what's trustworthy and what's real for the slave. Yet, as Ti Noel's thoughts are interrupted by the voice of his master emerging from the barbershop, the undeniable reality of his status as a slave is brought back to him.

What de Mezy cannot control, however, is the reality of the meaning with which Ti Noel's thoughts imbue the world. As the two ride back to the plantation, de Mezy whistles a fife march as "memories of his days as petty officer stirred in the master's breast" (*Kingdom* 10). At the same time, Ti Noel, "in a kind of mental counterpoint, silently hummed a chanty that was very popular among the harbor coopers, heaping ignominy on the King of England." While de Mezy may be the master of one iteration of the diegetic world, he certainly is not the master of them all. Ti Noel's disdain for European kings exists in a world that is inaccessible to de Mezy, and this internal world that cannot yet find a physical manifestation nonetheless seeks an opportunity to order the world according to its principles. As Ti Noel carries a calf's head that de Mezy has purchased from the tripe shop, he continues his ruminations on the heads that he's seen, imagining how much the calf's head under his arm "probably resembled the bald head of his master hidden beneath his wig" (9). With its expression in the world of the text, the latent threat of the slave carrying the severed head of his dead master thus becomes a part of the diegetic space that Ti Noel helps create. This *possible* world soon becomes indistinguishable from the "real" world, but as Ti Noel's wandering thoughts have brought into consideration, perhaps the

distinction between the two is more a manifestation of the beholder's epistemological framework than it is an establishment of what's real.

Ti Noel's way of knowing the world contrasts that of the French of the storyworld, and as the novel proceeds, the diegetic space is seen to be a highly contested space with multiple possible ways to understand the same people, locations, and events. While Ti Noel's initial observations reflect the most stark divide in understanding the novel's world, that between the French masters and their slaves, new characters and historical events throughout the novel introduce possibilities for reinterpretation and alternative possibilities for seeing understanding the diegetic space. As the novel explores the plantation of Leonormand de Mezy, Ti Noel's reverence for the older slave Macandal gains greater relevance. Macandal is based on the historical Francois Mackandal, and the details of the novel follow the little information that is known about his life (Burnham). A slave brought from West Africa at the age of twelve, Francois Mackandal lost his arm in a sugar cane press and took advantage of the lax oversight of his ensuing role herding cattle to gain an understanding of the island's flora. He eventually became a maroon and helped to organize and unite maroon communities in the hope of using poisonous plants and fungi to kill Haiti's white inhabitants. He claimed to have supernatural abilities and sought liberation for all slaves. His success in progressively killing many animals, slave owners and fellow slaves suspected of aiding the masters led to his execution in 1758 when he was burned at the stake. In the process of his execution, however, he broke free from his

ropes before having to be secured on a different board. In *The Kingdom of This World*, Macandal's life is accessed through Ti Noel's knowledge of him, first as a mentor whose tales of African glory help shape Ti Noel's understanding of the world, and then as a legend who he periodically hears magical tales about, and then as a co-conspirator to mislead the slave owners. When an increasing number of animals on the plantation become sick, Ti Noel's expertise is sought. He advises his masters that "animals brought in from foreign parts often could not distinguish between good grass and certain plants that poisoned their blood" (27), leaving his masters unaware as Macandal enacts his plan to poison the slave owners' animals. Here the alternate interpretation of the same event is controlled by the slaves' manipulation of their masters' assumptions. While the masters assume their slaves are puerile and subservient, they also seek to take advantage of their supposed closer relationship to the natural world, as embodied by their knowledge of animals, the same knowledge that allowed Ti Noel to select a horse to breed at the de Mezy plantation in the opening scene of the novel. Ti Noel's understanding of how he is seen allows him to hide the spread of poison and delay the owners' detection of it until it has simultaneously been used on many of the island's slave owners themselves.

As Macandal's plot unfolds, the characters of the storyworld cannot settle upon a single version of events, and the mapping of the novel's setting is seen not as an understanding of a variety of locations, but rather as a process of understanding the various perspectives and thought processes that determine characters' realities.

After the poison spreads throughout the island and to many of the slave owners, a tortured slave finally identifies Macandal as the cause, and after a long search in which Macandal avoids capture by shifting in the shapes of various animals, he is finally caught and brought to Cap Francois to be executed. The scene of his execution includes his ropes falling off and soldiers thrusting him back into the fire where he is killed, but it also includes additional details. As the ropes fall off, “the body of the Negro rose in the air, flying overhead, until it plunged into the black waves of the sea of slaves. A single cry filled the square: ‘Macandal saved!’ Pandemonium followed” (*Kingdom* 45-6). These two accounts exist side-by-side in the text without the resolution of which is a misinterpretation as a result of the pandemonium. Instead, the unresolved competing histories result in competing reactions. The slaves “returned to the plantations laughing all the way” (46) at Macandal’s ability to outsmart the whites. The slave owners, on the other hand, interpret the situation not only as the death of Macandal, but also as an affirmation of the character of their slaves, who de Mezy identifies as without feeling even as one of their leaders is tortured, and he proceeds “drawing therefrom a number of philosophical considerations on the inequality of the human races which he planned to develop in a speech larded with Latin quotations” (46-7). For each group the same event does not alter a way of ordering the world, rather the interpretation of the event is fit within the context of how the world is already ordered. For the slaves, the physical transformation of Macandal proves that he has stayed with them rather than

abandoning them and will urge them on to freedom, despite the fact that his physical body has been destroyed. For the masters, there is no possibility of breaking the laws of the physical world, Macandal has been destroyed, and the slaves' lack of feeling is a symptom of their inferiority. De Mezy maintains this despite the fact that his previous misinterpretation of Ti Noel's motives allowed for more animals and masters to be killed. While these two groups' diametrically opposed purposes manifest themselves in very different understandings of the same world and events and provide the primary conflict of the novel, the novel's diegetic space expands to accommodate a variety of epistemologies in between these extremes.

As the slaves of Haiti revolt and seek to upend the order imposed upon them by their French masters, each side of the conflict is forced to encounter ways of thinking about their surroundings that were previously foreign to them. After the slaves have revolted, Lenormand de Mezy, finding his wife raped and murdered and his plantation abandoned, makes his way to the relative safety of Cap Francois. Hearing the mention of voodoo, de Mezy reflects that he "had not given [it] the least thought up to that moment," yet "[n]ow that he remembered this, it filled him with uneasiness, making him realize that, in certain cases, a drum might be more than just a goatskin stretched across a hollow log" (*Kingdom* 72). De Mezy for the first time considers that the signs and symbols of his epistemology may mean something completely different according to a different ordering of the world. He simultaneously excuses himself for the oversight, wondering how a "civilized person"

(73) would be expected to understand such things, but its possibility is nonetheless acknowledged. As de Mezy makes an escape to Cuba with some of his slaves still in his possession, he finds that Santiago is full of former Haitian slave owners who similarly cannot make sense of their disordered world. Instead, “[a]ll the bourgeois norms had come tumbling down” (77) as the survivors of the slave revolt live for the moment, giving themselves to the pursuit of pleasure with no thought for the future. With their way of seeing the world destroyed, the slave owners seem helpless to replace it with another system that can make sense of their predicament. Ti Noel, in the meantime, finds “Voodoo warmth” (80) in the Spanish churches and prays to St. James for war and the revolutionary Bouckman who will lead the next wave of the slave revolt.

As the focalization of the novel shifts drastically, even within the same section, Pauline Bonaparte becomes the focus of the storyworld and her interpretive framework for understanding slavery is vastly different from that of Lenormand de Mezy. Aboard the ship of her husband, General Leclerc, who has come to suppress the rebellion, she sees Haiti from the deck and her first view of the island “delighted Pauline, who had read *Paul and Virginia*, and had heard *L’Insulaire*, a charming Creole *contredanse* of exotic rhythm published in Paris on the rue du Saumon” (*Kingdom* 87). Pauline’s point of access to understanding Haiti is the romanticized French colonial island paradise of the world of arts, her association of the island’s natural aesthetic beauty moving immediately to the novel by Jacques-Henri Bernardin de

Saint-Pierre and the sounds of a dance that translates as “The Islander.” Bernardin de St. Pierre’s novel is set on the French colonial island of Mauritius and tells the story of two children raised against the backdrop of the egalitarian native culture. When the two fall in love as adolescents, Virginia is sent away, and upon her return she drowns off the coast of the island as Paul watches when she refuses to disrobe in front of the sailors to swim to shore. The melodrama was an immensely popular novel contrasting the constraints of virginity and modesty against the romanticized naturalism of the island and its inhabitants. Pauline pictures herself as the chaste Virginia of Bernadin de St. Pierre’s novel, or Atala, the Christian native heroine of Francois-Rene de Chateaubriand’s novella of the same name, who chooses to kill herself rather than to revoke her vow of chastity (89). She embraces this ideal of the “noble savage” as an expression of Enlightenment principles, but also flaunts her body in front of Soliman, the servant who is forced to bath her and rub her with cream, and “console[s] herself with the youthful ardor of some handsome officer” when her husband is away (89). Pauline’s exposure to European artistic depictions of romanticized natives color her view of both her surroundings and herself, as her system of values shifts from the noble to the self-serving depending on her mood. While Pauline’s system of interpreting the world is based on European archetypes, it’s also deeply malleable as her circumstances and desires change. By the time her husband has died and her surroundings are engulfed with a plague, she is more receptive to different ways of seeing the world, and when there appears to be no

escape, she turns to “the living cosmogony of the Negro” (93) for escape. Now, she turns to Soliman to perform “Vodou” rituals to protect her from the spreading plague. While the rituals shock those around her, Pauline demonstrates that with her privilege comes the benefit of selecting the type of knowledge that best suits her needs. When the romance of purity allows her to see herself as a paragon, she embraces it, when physical desire overcomes her, she indulges, and when mystical power can protect her, she takes advantage. What she presents, in contrast to the staid de Mezy, is a more dynamic and individual adaptation of a European epistemology, one of many competing to be heard in the diegetic space.

As the novel traverses between the various settings of the four parts, it adds to its depiction of the internal thoughts of individual characters by including what appears to be the communal impressions of Haiti’s fragmented inhabitants and expatriates. After the slave’s revolt and the plague has spread across the island, the European way of structuring the world appears to be falling apart. The landowners no longer structure their lives by the time of the clock, they ignore previous racial distinctions, give themselves to orgies, and indulge themselves in the food, wine or pleasure of the moment (*Kingdom* 96). In this atmosphere the epistemology of the former Africans takes precedence, as “[v]ictory went to those who had warrior gods to invoke. Ogoun Badagri guided the cold steel charges against the last redoubts of the Goddess Reason” (97). In this atmosphere the African gods enact unthinkable feats such as soldiers who deflect bullets, just like trumpets brought down walled cities in



the Biblical past. In this time of uncertainty, these two previously competing ways of knowing appear precarious, unstable, and complimentary. Rather than competing for exclusive primacy, the rationality of European reason has created a new logic for racial hierarchies while the magical spirit of African myth is present in the prayers of the Catholic service (96-8). As the slave's revolt creates an uncertain present, it seems not only to have come as the result of competing ways of previously seeing the world, it also creates an uncertain future. With the future unknown, there is no self-fulfilling way to see the world, and individuals who have placed their trust fully within European's rationalism appear lost when facing this incomprehensible defeat.

As this new reality takes shape, Haiti's inhabitants attempt to understand the world with a syncretic value system. Henri Christophe, for example, becomes elevated to king from his beginnings as a simple cook. Yet, as he seeks to change the role of king into one in which black men and women can take pride because of the glory he displays, he nonetheless adopts much of the value system of his European counterparts. His son, for example, receives his moral education from a chaplain reading Plutarch's *Parallel Lives* (*Kingdom* 111), a book that highlight the universal moral values of great leaders. In this way, Henri Christophe seeks to change only the color of the king who rules over Haiti, not the way of encountering the world and others in it. He doesn't seek to eliminate slavery, he seeks to give it meaning. Yet, as Ti Noel is conscripted to work on the construction of Sans Souci, it becomes clear that

this strategy does not imbue the lives of most citizens with meaning, and, instead, it appears to be another way for an individual to justify their position of privilege.

As *The Kingdom of This World* approaches its conclusion, it circles back to Ti Noel as the primary focalizing agent and follows his navigation of the island's new reality, with a black king enacting a European understanding of how to rule the island. Ti Noel encounters the Surveyors, who arrive on the former de Mezy plantation to reestablish boundaries and subdivide the land in support of the recently imposed racial codes that divide mulattoes from Negroes. Ti Noel, assuming the powers invoked by Macandal to shift into the shape of animals, decides to become a goose since "[g]eese were orderly beings, with principles and systems, whose existence denied all superiority of individual over individual of the same species" (176). But as he navigates the community of geese, he learns that even there he will never be accepted without discrimination between species and castes. Reflecting on his motivations, he compares himself to Macandal and finds himself lacking, knowing that "Macandal had disguised himself as an animal for years to serve men, not to abjure the world of men" (178). Ti Noel's access to a powerful epistemology with African roots is not significant because of its shape shifting and magical elements, instead he proffers that its relevance is only as significant as its ability to help the world of men.

Ti Noel's realization helps him not to purely accept one way to know the storyworld in which he exists, but instead to see the competing epistemologies as

only as valuable as they are able to better the situations of the humans around him.

Carpentier's construction of the diegetic space echoes the competing ways of accessing and interpreting information, eschewing one mode of narration in favor of moving between them, shifting focalization between major characters, less significant ones, and collective voices, and maintaining a neutral presentation through inhibiting the clear identification of a narrational perspective outside the diegetic world.

#### Narrative space

While the diegetic space of the novel identifies a number of ways of knowing its world, the narrative space positions these various epistemologies as inevitable products of the social forces within the world. Rather than pinpointing a value system as a manifestation of one character's thoughts, desires and motivations, the shifting focalization and matter-of-fact presentation often position these ideas in the spaces between characters, as if both the narration and the interpretive systems of the storyworld arise naturally. I have defined narrative space as the nexus of text-reader interactions in which narrational strategies position readers' possible understandings of the text. The goal of explicating the narrative space is therefore not to identify authorial intent or an inevitable reader reaction, but rather to identify the ways that the narrational strategies position a range of possible responses to the text. In doing so, I will demonstrate that the text often does not fit easily into the mimetic mode,

and as a result, efforts to identify a distinct narrator existing solely in the story's discourse are misguided, and attempts to do so will have an impact on the location of the novel in literary space.

In *The Kingdom of This World*, the shifting focalization is the most significant narrational strategy. Focalization can be considered "the lens through which [readers] see characters and events in the narrative" (Abbott 66). While this is commonly done through a narrator outside of the storyworld, focalizing characters who exist at varying levels of access to information complicate this generalization and often demand a more nuanced examination of how information is revealed to readers. *The Kingdom of This World* does not identify a single protagonist or clearly delineate the position of an all-seeing narrator. Rather, the information to which readers have access, or from which they are restricted, seems to vary between both the focalization on a shifting cast of characters and a free indirect discourse with a varying level of access to information outside of the perspective of the focalizing character. The novel's shifting focalization is primarily achieved by the text's depiction of a character's thoughts as they observe and interact with the surrounding world. The previously discussed passage of the novel's opening scene is an example of this, with the narrative perspective focusing on Ti Noel's thoughts as he goes about his day in Cap Francois. While the text also depicts the thoughts of Lenormand de Mezy, his internal monologue is addressed briefly in two sentences while Ti Noel's train of thought provides the ongoing commentary of the whole chapter. In this way,

the narrative perspective is focalized primarily on Ti Noel, but it is also more expansive, able to access other characters' thoughts and motivations, and as such, seems to lie between characters as much as with any of them. At times, this intermediary position further complicates the ability of readers to identify which character the text is identifying as its point of focalization, or if an abstract narrator's perspective is at times in use.

The narration of the majority of the first two parts of the book (and to a lesser extent, the whole text) uses Ti Noel as the focalizing character. When Macandal first disappears from the plantation, for example, Ti Noel is "distressed" and is disappointed that "Macandal had thought him too poor a thing to give him a share in his plans" (*Kingdom* 23). As a result, "[t]he disappearance of Macandal was also the disappearance of all that world evoked by his tales," so for both Ti Noel and readers, access to stories of African kingdoms, celebrated royals, and shape-shifting gods also disappears. But even as readers' access to information seems to be limited by Ti Noel's perspective within these sections, the focalization often strays from Ti Noel, granting access to information he would not know, before returning to focus on his impressions. In one such instance, the distress of the colonists as they seek to pinpoint the source of the poison spreading from plantation to plantation is depicted with vignettes that move quickly from location to location containing tales that would not be known to anyone not on hand to witness the events. Similarly, as Macandal's legend grows, an unidentified voice relates the mythical tales that must

be circulating among the slaves: “The dogs did not bark at him; he changed his shadow at will. It was because of him that a Negress gave birth to a child with a wild boar’s face. At night he appeared on the roads in the skin of a black goat with fire-tipped horns” (36). Yet as the lengthy list of exploits comes to its climax with Loas drinking freely from the blood of the whites, it is punctuated by an attributive tag: “In that great hour - said Ti Noel -” and the list is identified not as an expression of an omniscient narrator or a communal voice, but as Ti Noel himself reciting the legends that must be circulating. By placing this unknowable information in the mouth of a character, the text not only situates Ti Noel as the voice of his community, it also posits the possibility that the information presented by what appears to be, at times, an omniscient narrator, may perhaps be a communal voice relating the events that occur across the Plaine du Norde that surrounds the de Mezy plantation. Much like when Ti Noel passes along the news of Macandal’s movements to other slaves, the tales of distressed colonists could also be the communal news that is passed between the white inhabitants of the island.

It is paradoxically when the narrative perspective is undeniably omniscient that is also becomes unreliable. In very few instances does the text posit a single or absolute view of events. Yet when it does, it provides a contradiction, not clarity. This contradiction is made apparent when Macandal is burned at the stake. As his ropes fall off, “the body of the Negro rose in the air, flying overhead” (*Kingdom* 45), before disappearing into the crowd of slaves. While the slaves celebrate his freedom, the

scene continues as “the noise and screaming and uproar were such that very few saw that Macandal, held by ten soldiers, had been thrust head first into the fire, and that a flame fed by his burning hair had drowned his last cry” (46). Each scene is presented without hesitation as the definitive account of events. There is no “seemed” as when Ti Noel’s impressions in the first chapter are depicted. Yet the content of the definitive versions of events is contradictory - either Macandal contained supernatural powers and flew away, or he did not and he was burned at the stake. Such a stark contrast seems to leave little middle ground for interpretation, but the two interpretations nonetheless persist in both the text of the novel and in the minds of the observers. For readers, who are forced follow the shifting focalization and revelation of information, this can be seen as an example of Brian Richardson’s denarration, however readers have already been introduced to the competing cosmologies of the characters, so they may also associate the “truth” with one version of events or the other. In other words, the novel situates readers as interpreters of not just a plot, but also of a particular way of thinking that finds its expression in the stark reason of the Europeans, the enlivened mythology of the slaves, or a combination that somehow must navigate the tension between these perspectives. As the chapter containing Macandal’s death closes, de Mezy, clothed in his nightcap, expresses his desire to write an academic treatise on the differences between the races, while Ti Noel “got one of the kitchen wenches with twins, taking her three times in a manger of the stables” (47). These closing scenes are depicted

without judgment, yet not only does the content of the scenes greatly contrast Ti Noel's virility and action in his rustic sleeping quarters with the impotent bookishness and passivity of de Mezy's civilized chamber, it is one of the few times that the perspective is undeniably that of a narrator. The two simultaneous events taking place in different locations could not be known by Ti Noel or de Mezy, thus the stark contrast is presented without any framing comments, but the contrast itself clearly distinguishes between the two primary subjects of focalization up to that point in the novel.

It is worth noting that a number of critics identify Ti Noel as the sole protagonist within a single narrative arc, however these attempts are often a result of attempting to fit the novel's plot into a traditional mimetic framework instead of developing a theory of narrative that reflects how the existing narrational components function. Victor Figueroa's account of how the narrative perspective presents Macandal's death is exemplary. Figueroa sees the ongoing narrative structure as one in which "Carpentier is able to skillfully sustain throughout most of his novel a dual perspective: that of the third-person narrator, who clearly does not share the 'faith based' outlook of his characters ... and that of the rebellious slaves whose Afro-Caribbean religion shapes and articulates their experience" (56). As a result, he casts the scene of Macandal's ambiguous death as one in which "Carpentier is able to present his characters' perspective (a perspective that has total faith in Macandal's miraculous escape; in other words, a perspective that is grounded on the 'marvelous



real'), while keeping his distance behind the narrator who knows 'what really happened'" (57). That Figueroa spends no time arguing for the existence of a third-person narrator is illustrative. In identifying two contradictory pieces of information brought forth by the narrative, a mimetic mode necessitates that the conflict be resolved, and traditional narrative theory provides an answer: one piece of information is believed within the story, and one is *known* in the discourse. However, as the complicated focalization demonstrates, this distinction is hardly satisfactory. Information beyond the scope of a character's knowledge is presented as reported speech, while the narrational framing presents contradictory information. As a result, the narrative is positioning a reader in much the same way as a character in the storyworld, as having to choose between competing ways of knowing. For Brian Richardson, a unified alternative cosmogony could constitute a nonmimetic text, one in which an "alternate world" operates by its own rules. This alternative is complicated by the fact that the focalizations are not simply contrasts between Ti Noel as a representative of a "magical" African mysticism and de Mezy as a rationalistic European, instead the focalizations expand to include a range of syncretic perspectives.

As the events of the novel travel an increasing distance from the de Mezy plantation, so too does the focalization shift beyond Ti Noel and Lenormand de Mezy. Nearly halfway through the novel, as Ti Noel is out doing errands for his master in their relocated home of Santiago, he encounters a ship of dogs destined for Haiti.

Suddenly, the next paragraph shifts to a scene on the deck of a ship with “Pauline,” who is not identified as Pauline Bonaparte for another two pages. As the story of her trip to Haiti and the sickness and calamities she encounters there are recounted, there is no mention of any characters who have previously been introduced. Other than its location off the coast of Haiti, her story seems to have no relevance to the plot points involving Ti Noel and de Mezy. Only after Pauline has departed and the situation in Haiti is so bad that Governor Rochambeau sends for a ship of dogs to keep the revolting slaves in their place does the story wind back to Ti Noel. While what at first appears to be a digression eventually returns to Ti Noel as the focalizing character, it becomes the first of several overlapping and intertwining narrative strands in the second half of the book. After Ti Noel is conscripted to help build Henri Christophe’s Sans Souci palace and then returns to the former de Mezy plantation, the narrative remains with the royal family for twenty-one pages without mention of Ti Noel. Soliman, previously Pauline Bonaparte’s servant and then Henri Christophe’s valet, becomes the focus of the text for nine pages as he serves Henri Christophe’s exiled Queen Marie-Louise in Pisa, Italy. The novel returns to Ti Noel for the final seventeen pages. The exact amount of textual space spent on each focalizing character is not necessarily significant, but the fact that it shifts so greatly and completely abandons Ti Noel for significant periods of time indicates that he could hardly be considered a traditional protagonist.

With the narrative focalization shifting frequently and with apparent limitations of the narrative point of view, the judgments and values expressed in the text become difficult for readers to identify who they're coming from and to evaluate for reliability. This creation of ambiguous narrative space is accentuated by the stylistic ambivalence of the text, which not only reflects the free indirect style of the focalized point of view, it also presents information without judgment or makes it difficult to identify whether judgment is coming from a character or a narrator's point of view. In the previously examined opening passage, Ti Noel's evaluations of his surroundings in Cap Francois are presented without comment, the string of associations following his train of thought without the interference of a narrator. The choice of words and style of presentation, however, bring this into doubt. Describing the wax heads in the barbershop, the text notes, "The heads seemed as real ... as the talking head" that Ti Noel had seen or heard about (*Kingdom 4*). Upon closer examination, the use of "seemed" makes the statement more ambiguous since it is unclear to whom this "seems" to be the case. "Seems" expresses not that something "is," but rather that it "appears to be." It introduces an element of uncertainty, and with it, the possibility that the uncertainty could lie with a Ti Noel, or with the narration. In other words, from a completely removed narrator's point of view, the sentence could be restated as either, "While it seemed to Ti Noel that the heads were the same, we know they were not since disembodied heads can't talk," or "While it seemed to Ti Noel that the heads were the same, he knew that it only

appeared that way.” The choice of the ambiguous term allows for either of the readings, and not only does the narration take on the tone and characteristics of its focalizing character, it often does so in ambiguous and unclear ways. The description continues: “By an *amusing* coincidence, in the window of the tripe-shop next door there were calves’ heads . . . which possessed the same waxy quality. They seemed asleep among the pickled oxtails, calf’s-foot jelly, and pots of tripe *a la mode de Caen*. Only a wall separated the two counters, and it *amused* Ti Noel to think that alongside the pale calves’ heads, heads of white men were served on the same tablecloth” (4-5, emphasis added to “amusing” and “amused”). Again, the use of “seemed” introduces more ambiguity as to which perspective is evaluating the scene in this way. This usage, however, is also between the repeated observation of the “amusing” juxtapositions of the various heads. In the second usage, it is directly reported that Ti Noel was “amused” to think of the calves’ heads and the disembodied heads of white men like his master lined up along the same table. In the first usage, however, it is not clear if Ti Noel or a disembodied narrator finds the neighboring heads “amusing.” The following sentence’s description of European meats, including a tripe “*a la mode de Caen*,” would surely not be familiar to the slave. While the sources of the different evaluations of the scene may be impossible to pinpoint, clearly the perspective moves from a narrator closer to Ti Noel at times, and at others moves further away from his perspective. The whole scene is identified as a “coincidence,” yet readers know that this fictional world has been constructed

according to an author's design. What remains ambiguous is the exact location of where the author has positioned these observations and evaluations. The stylistic choices of the text, the choices and locations of words, accentuate rather than reduce the ambiguity of when the perspective is shifting.

Amid the shifting focalizations from character to character, the free indirect style changes not only between characters, but also according to each character's frame of mind. In the sections of the text that follow Pauline Bonaparte, the narrative style echoes her state of mind as she is introduced to Haiti, and then shifts once she has experienced it. Pauline's romantic notion of the island and all of her surroundings is reflected in the long and sonorous sentences that allude to the authors from whom her impressions have been gathered. In describing her treatment of her servant Soliman, the text notes that "at times she permitted the Negro, in return for an errand quickly carried out of a devoutly made communion, to kneel before her and kiss her feet in a gesture that Bernardin de Saint-Pierre would have interpreted as a symbol of the noble gratitude of a simple soul brought into contact with the generous teachings of the Enlightenment" (*Kingdom* 89). The description's overwrought expression of a simple gesture reflects Pauline's desire to imbue every action with symbolic meaning, in addition to maintaining the image of the noble servant whose humility in the face of European Enlightenment is its own reward. Soon, however, the pleasant expressions that characterize Pauline's way of encountering the world are contrasted with the reality of her surroundings as

sickness begins to engulf the French, who begin collapsing as they vomit blood. The text summarizes, “A terrible killjoy in silver-spotted basque had come to disturb Pauline Bonaparte’s tropical dream with its buzzing” (90). The high-minded language and roundabout way of describing the scene using language that is as gentle as possible now seems not only to understate the seriousness of the situation, but also to mock the inadequacy of such language to represent the harshness of reality. As the sickness spreads and General Leclerc, her husband, becomes one of the epidemic’s victims, Pauline abandons her Enlightenment principles and consults Soliman for help from other less rational gods. The narrational style reflects this change with more direct and staccato language, punctuating sentences with paranoid interruptions (“-- as everyone knew --”) and listing the “salves of brandy, crushed seeds, oily juices, and the blood of birds” that have replaced the “scented perfumes, cool mint water” as anointments for Pauline’s breasts (94). When the French maids find Soliman in her bedroom dancing around her in a loin cloth, chanting and wielding a machete, they’re horrified. The language in which it is described, on the other hand, remains neutral and describes the scene without comment: “A decapitated rooster was still fluttering amid scattered grains of corn” (94). In such a scene the narration not only echoes Pauline’s sense of panic and claustrophobia with the short, straightforward bursts of information, it also refrains from using language that could be interpreted in multiple ways. The scene is left to speak for itself, its lack of guiding comments forcing readers to evaluate the situation for themselves.

Similarly, when the narrative's focalization switches to Soliman, his surroundings and state of mind are reflected in the style in which information is presented. Having travelled with Henri Christophe's exiled wife and daughters to Pisa, Italy, he is an oddity in a country where most have never seen a "real Negro" (*Kingdom* 155). In this dramatic setting, surrounded by the ancient city and all the culture of Europe, he embraces the attention he receives. The sentence describing his interaction with Pisa's inhabitants continues as breathlessly as Soliman himself must have been: "he was asked to tell his life story, which he did with gusto, embellishing it with the greatest lies, passing himself off as a nephew of Henri Christophe who had miraculously escaped the slaughter of the Cap the night when the death squad had had to finish off one of the King's natural sons with bayonets because several volley had failed to bring him down" (155). But Soliman's life of notoriety and leisure is short-lived, his advancing age and unfamiliar surroundings stoking his desire for the past. One night as he wanders through the palace with a paramour, he encounters in a sculpture garden the shape of the body that he used to bathe, a statue of Pauline Bonaparte. Soliman feels the cold marble and as the wine swirls in his head and a chill that will take him to his death sets in, Soliman and his surroundings are described in terse, abrupt sentences: "Soliman was cold. An unseasonable fog was chilling the marbles of Rome. The summer was veiled by a mist that thickened by the hour" (161). The sequence of images is presented without comment, the connections between them left for readers to interpret.

This neutral presentation of a portion of the text focalized on a character who is largely inconsequential to the events of the plot is exemplary of the way the novel positions readers and demands a willingness to move between the various modes of narration. As the characters join the action, are quickly abandoned by the novel, at times rejoin, but often do not, the novel's focus is clearly not on developing well-rounded characters, it's focused instead on their very act of interpreting the novel's ambiguous events and on situating readers within that world of contrasting evaluations. According to Brian Richardson, the mimetic mode of narration "strive[s] for realism or verisimilitude" (*Unnatural Narrative* 3), and information is presented in this way throughout large portions of *The Kingdom of This World*. The supernatural elements of the text clearly complicate this, however, as the narrative perspective fails to clearly distinguish between what is real and what is not. While the world of African mysticism that Macandal embodies could constitute a "parallel storyworld ... [that] adds supernatural components to its otherwise mimetic depiction of the actual world" (4), a non-mimetic text must also remain "consistent" and "parallel" to a realistic world, and the novel violates both of these standards as it refuses to identify this way of encountering the world as the only legitimate option. When presenting contradictory information simultaneously the text fulfills the requirements of an antimimetic narrative that "violate[s] mimetic expectation[s] and the practices of realism" (3), however it does so sporadically and inconsistently. What becomes clear when looking at the text through the possibilities of these modes is that it operates in



each of them at various times. The narrative strategies do not fit a fixed schema of traditional narratives that clearly delineates between the story and discourse, and while they resist falling into only one of Richardson's categories, these are nonetheless useful to identify the ways that the novel's inconsistencies are strategic. As the characters within the storyworld have navigated a range of epistemological categories, so the narrative situates readers to make choices in how they interpret the novel. Yet the choices are not between two alternatives, but rather where along the spectrum of possible understanding do readers choose to position themselves. The construction of the narrative structure can thus be seen as a purposeful attempt to enact the lessons of the storyworld in the world of readers. What enables this attempt to be successful or not, however, is the way in which the novel is understood in literary space and how its reception is affected by the values of the literary world.

#### Literary space

While the diegetic space of *The Kingdom of This World* exists wholly within the text, and the narrative space spans the nexus of authorial positioning and readerly reception, what I have labelled the literary space exists fully outside of the novel within the realm of its reception, the author's life and reputation, and the coordinates by which it's positioned within the world of literature. To best understand how Carpentier saw the role of his work, some brief background information is helpful. Alejo Carpentier was born in Switzerland in 1904 to a French

father and Russian mother, although he claimed throughout his life to be Cuban-born (González-Echevarría 96-109). He was taken to Havana as an infant where he lived and received an excellent education in private schools and at the University of Havana. He first spoke French and then Spanish, and travelled frequently to France throughout his life. He studied music and architecture, but was forced to support himself as a writer, and became involved with the Afro-Cuban movement that sought to incorporate African and Cuban forms into avant garde art, music, dance and literature. Carpentier continued to write, primarily in periodicals, as he lived in Paris from 1928-39, Cuba from 1939-1945, and Venezuela from 1945-1959 before returning to Cuba. He published *The Kingdom of This World* in 1949, and it included a prologue in which he proposed the concept of *lo real maravilloso*, “the marvelous real,” as a uniquely Latin American contribution to the arts, one contrasted with the forced juxtaposition of images in works like those produced by surrealism. The manifesto laid out what Carpentier wished for his artistic interventions, including *The Kingdom of This World*.

In his manifesto elaborating on *lo real maravilloso*, Carpentier contrasts the staid traditions of Europe and the hollow attempts to artistically subvert them with the naturally existing creative impulse in Latin America, a manifestation of myth in customs and everyday life that still found expression in the Americas even as Carpentier wrote the original preface in the late 1940's. Carpentier first began to formulate this idea during a visit to Haiti in which he toured the ruins of Henri

Christophe's Sans Souci palace and was surprised to find Pauline Bonaparte's historical footprint in a place so far removed from Europe ("On the Magical Real" 84). Carpentier's goal became to reverse the flow of inspiration that has presupposed the Americas as a source of authenticity and natural expression for Europe to use as an artistic resource, largely because it had no tradition of its own. Instead, Carpentier's vision seeks to find expression for "certain European truths" within the American context. Unlike the artificial juxtapositions of artists like the surrealists, the truth was manifest naturally within the Americas. For Carpentier

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 [*estado limite*]. (85-6)

Unlike the surrealists' use of the unnatural, the "marvelous real" was an alteration or exaggeration of reality that remained within the naturally occurring world of its surroundings. As a precondition, "the phenomenon of the marvelous presupposes faith" (86).

The ground that Carpentier is laying is in part an artistic manifesto for a particular style of novelistic presentation, but it's also an attempt to place the Latin American

literary tradition as a successor to the European tradition. While the “marvelous real” is often depicted as a precursor to or different manifestation of what would become known as magical realism, the label is primarily used to identify stylistic choices from a variety of authors across various canons. Carpentier, on the other hand, is not elaborating on a stylistic practice, instead he is historicizing texts which depict the marvelous real as successors to a pre-existing European canon. In the prologue, Carpentier traces his impressions of art, architecture, and literature as he journeys across the world. Chinese and Islamic art are unfamiliar to him and, while often refreshingly free of “worn-out *realisms*” (“On the Magical Real” 78, emphasis in the original), he admits himself incapable of intuitively understanding them without “certain indispensable knowledge” or the study “of virtually an entire lifetime” (79). When he comes to the Soviet Union, however, and especially in Prague as he approaches the center of Europe, he recognizes the forms of the architecture, the subtleties of the art, and the nuances of the literature almost intuitively since they are part of his tradition. But Carpentier does not stop in Europe, instead he traces this tradition through Don Quixote to Bernal Diaz de Castillo, the conquistador whose *The True History of the Conquest of New Spain* links Europe and the New World. Eventually he reaches Jose Marti, Ruben Dario, and, finally, his trip to Haiti. In tracing this lengthy heritage through vastly different works of architecture, art, and literature, Carpentier is not tracing a style so much as a spirit. He values the mythical - the golem of Prague’s Jews and the absurdity of Kafka - but also the more ineffable

artist's eye for producing something truly *new*. It is this creative spirit that Carpentier sees as the inheritance of the Americas. In Haiti, he observes,

I found the marvelous real at every turn. Furthermore, I thought, the presence and vitality of this marvelous real was not the unique privilege of Haiti, but the heritage of all of America, where we have not yet begun to establish an inventory of our cosmogonies. The marvelous real is found at every stage in the lives of men who inscribed dates in the history of the continent and who left the names that we still carry .... After all, what is the entire history of America if not a chronicle of the marvelous real? (86-8)

Carpentier's use of the "marvelous real" is deeply reflected in his style, as the discussion of narrative space makes clear. But it is not merely a stylistic flourish or for purely aesthetic purposes, for Carpentier it is also an attempt to create an identity for Latin American literature as the heir to European literature, one that avoids the excesses of dogmatic realism or absurd experimentation. John Kirk identifies Carpentier's goal as *Concientización*, a concept that can be "loosely translated into English by the rather awkward phrase 'consciousnessraising,'" and that "people who experience this process—generally in the spheres of social, political or moral questions—become more 'conscious' or 'aware,' both of the external reality surrounding them and of the internal reality of their own character" (106-107). In this way, Carpentier is seeking to both create literary space for his novel and for other

Latin American authors and artists by claiming ownership of the European canon for his own purposes. This reappropriation is a powerful act of claiming that not only can knowledge and artistic innovation be produced from the periphery, the Americas and the Caribbean can claim as its own the historical and literary heritage of its predecessors, which are both African and European. Rather than seeking an “authenticity” in a purely Caribbean identity, Aristides Dimitriou identifies Carpentier’s works as “a life-long attempt not only to utilize, but also to question and problematize autochthonous origins, together with any promises they may have held, whether cultural, as in *The Lost Steps*, or political, as in *The Kingdom of This World*” (99). While Carpentier’s attempt to syncretize European and African cultural energies through *lo real maravilloso* has cemented his standing as a predecessor to magical realism, his more political attempt to conceive of Caribbean and Latin American literature as an extension of an existing tradition rather than reacting *against* it has been rebuffed.

Carpentier’s goals for this different conception of his literary heritage found mixed results, with Latin American authors enjoying immense success in the decades following the release of *The Kingdom of This World* and its prologue espousing the “marvelous real,” but the concept itself would be subsumed into the stylized supernatural plot points of *magical realism*. In fact, Mariano Siskind argues that magical realism has become its own genre of postcolonial writing and cites that “a number of comparative literature scholars have characterized magical realism as the

emblematic genre of a postcolonial world literature and, more generally, as a global literary currency ... now emancipated from the Latin American determinations that had launched it into the world scene," and continues with references from Homi Bhabha, Gayatri Spivak, Fredric Jameson, Lois Parkinson Zamora and Wendy Faris, David Damrosch, and Franco Moretti, among others, describing its universality. There is clearly ample evidence of magical realism's spread, but what Siskind elides is the way that *lo real maravilloso* has been subsumed into the discourse of magical realism. Siskind uses the terms interchangeably once he has traced the genealogy of magical realism, and while others acknowledge it as a theoretical precursor (Zamora and Faris 7), it is worth noting that the distinction between the use of "magical realism" as a genre with certain characteristics, and Carpentier's *lo real maravilloso*, which functioned as theoretical background to identify the purpose of the strategy as Carpentier employed it. The desire to communicate the syncretic nature of Caribbean reality is a common theme, as Lois Parkinson Zamora observes that "the anxiety of origins [becomes] an inclusion," as a deficit of historical knowledge results not in "homogenization or unification but the countenance of multiple, coexisting, conflictual unfinished histories" (196). Thus it is possible to say of Carpentier's novel, as Richard Young does, that "[a]n anti-Cartesian stance is not explicitly elaborated in *El reino de este mundo*. But by showing how the history of Haiti, in the Age of Reason, is determined by myth and religion, the novel illustrates the importance of irrational forces in shaping history" (83), while also observing of Haiti's inhabitants that

“intellectual and cultural achievements of the black Atlantic populations exist partly inside and not always against the grand narrative of Enlightenment and its operational principles” (Gilroy 48). In other words, Carpentier’s *lo real maravilloso* is not an attempt to spawn a genre, it’s a theoretical underpinning that posits cultural syncretism as not only a reality of Caribbean and Latin American life, but also as a narrational method.

The “marvelous real” is, in part, enacted by the uncertain narration and shifting focalization of the narrative space. The ambiguous positioning of the narration means that there are almost always multiple interpretations open to readers, which in turn means that there is almost always a rationally plausible reading. If readers are inclined to believe that the storyworld, as a depiction of historical events that have occurred in the “real” world, must follow pure rationality according to the physical laws of the universe, the narration makes it entirely possible. The conflicting accounts of Macandal being burned at the stake could be explained by the slaves mistaking Macandal’s ropes breaking in the fire for his escape in the midst of the pandemonium, while instead he clearly was re-secured and burned, as the narration states. Ti Noel’s ability in his old age to turn into an animal, could very plausibly have been the delusion of an old man living outdoors as dementia overtakes his mind. The baby born with the head of a pig, animal manifestations of Macandal, and direct interactions of African gods into the lives of the slaves could simply be the collective mythology of the slaves that is viewed through the text’s focalization on Ti Noel.



Thus, while magical realism is often distinguished by its presentation of magic as the *only* explanation for plot action, *lo real maravilloso* is an “alteration” or “revelation” of reality, an “insight” into reality, or an “amplification” of it (“On the Magical Real” 86), rather than a completely new reality. In the way that faith causes the believer to see purpose when the cynic sees only chance, so the “marvelous real” expresses the vision of Latin America.

The difficulty for the purely rational reader of *The Kingdom of This World* is that the characters who seek Enlightenment principles and the world they’ve made are gravely inhumane. Ti Noel’s belief in African gods and warring kings may contain a desire for glory, but it is rooted in a desire for justice in a world where very little exists. Macandal’s apparently magical powers were used only for the benefit of those around him, and when he disguised himself as an animal, it was “to serve men, not to abjure the world of men” (*Kingdom* 178). While the novel makes multiple interpretations of events possible, it makes the ramifications of the two primary epistemologies clear. While the mythical beliefs of the slaves may seem implausible, they are at least oriented toward an idea of justice that benefits humanity. The rational ideas of the Enlightenment, on the other hand, have created a world that divides humanity and justifies the ill treatment of men and women on the basis of an idea, the creation of race. If choosing one interpretation of events means choosing one interpretive system over the other, then Carpentier’s orientation seems clear as indicated by the novel’s title and one of the closing pieces of narration. As Ti Noel

ponders his time in this world, the narrative voice becomes increasingly removed from any plot points, eventually observing that “bowed down by suffering and duties, beautiful in the midst of misery, capable of loving in the face of afflictions and trials, man finds his greatness, his fullest measure, only in the Kingdom of This World” (179). Carpentier’s choice of title reaches into the diegetic space and emphasizes an aspect of it that resonates with his goals in literary space, to privilege the reality of Latin American life as it was lived.

Carpentier’s choice of title is also an attempt to situate his novel within literary space, and the epigraphs to each of the four parts of the text serve much the same function, identifying a European literary precursor commenting on the events depicted in the following section. Part one begins with the Devil and Providence discussing Columbus’s trip to America in an excerpt from seventeenth century Spanish playwright Lope de Vega’s *The Discovery of the New World by Christopher Columbus*. Lope de Vega was a contemporary of Shakespeare and the play is perhaps the first to be written about America. Beginning with this choice, Carpentier identifies a starting point for his literary lineage that is historically significant. Additionally, in the dialogue the Devil identifies himself as “The King of the West,” yet also questions the need to send Columbus to the New World since he already rules there (*Kingdom* 1). For Carpentier, Lope de Vega’s depiction of the Devil as the ruler of the earthly realms also doubles as an affirmation that, from the beginning, the animating spirit of the West has been present in the Americas. Part two opens

with a description of the Antilles from the memoirs of the early nineteenth century French Duchess of Abrantes, Laure Junot. Her *Memoirs* were primarily of court life in France, but the epigraph is taken from a romanticized description of the islands as snake free with friendly “savages” and the opportunity to “be a queen out there” (49). The epigraph is immediately followed by the opening scene of part two in which Lenormand de Mezy’s second wife arrives on the island. The section also contains Pauline Bonaparte’s brief time on the island, and the epigraph foreshadows the destruction of these women’s naive expectations for Haiti. The epigraph for part three comes from German geographer Carl Ritter, who witnessed the sack of Henri Christophe’s Sans Souci palace in 1820, and describes the scene of gold crowns scattered on the ground as the palace was raided. In the section, Ti Noel is forced to work on the construction of San Souci and later it is overrun as Henri Christophe falls from power. Finally, part four opens with a quote from Pedro Calderon de la Barca, the great seventeenth century Spanish dramatist, and provides a foreboding warning that the fear of the past only increases as new visions are revealed. Ti Noel has found the succession of rulers increasingly unbearable, yet after Henri Christophe even he is surprised by the “spurious aristocracy, this caste of quadroons, which was now taking over the old plantations, with their privileges and rank,” enforcing mandatory labor (171). Besides referencing some aspect of the upcoming plot, it is clear that the epigraphs also serve to place the events of the Americas within the intellectual and artistic history of Europe, and to demonstrate the centuries of intermingling between

the two. Despite this overt attempt to adopt the European tradition into the genealogy of this very Latin American literary expression, Carpentier has been identified as created a complete break with the tradition rather than an adaptation to it.

Pascale Casanova situates Carpentier within her literary world as a rebel, someone who, like Faulkner, invents difference in order to distinguish himself or his movement. She cites Carpentier's 1931 essay, "America ante le joven literatura europa" as evidence. In this essay Carpentier states that "unfortunately it does not suffice to say 'Let us break with Europe' to begin to express ourselves in ways that are genuinely representative of the Latin American sensibility" (56). This can be read, as Casanova sees it, to call for not only saying that a break with Europe is needed, but also that it must engender a complete break since saying it is not enough. However, I read this to mean that a complete break with Europe is not enough to create a uniquely Latin American form of expression, and, in fact, Carpentier calls for an adoption of the European tradition, not to produce derivative art, but rather to gain mastery of the various roots of Latin America's history in order to utilize those sources of artistic inspiration. Carpentier signals his resistance to break completely with Europe, and instead identifies that a multiplication or intensification of the same content might nonetheless create uniquely Latin American art because of its combination with the other historical legacies that influence the region and their possibilities for new forms of expression. Casanova, on the other hand, sees this as

an “appeal for an entirely new direction in Latin American letters [that] made him at once the leader of the campaign to build a fund of artistic and literary wealth in Central and South America” (233). Casanova describes the way this wealth was accumulated as the result of “developing a style common to a whole group of writers, and so attaining a genuine aesthetic autonomy” (233). This move to say Carpentier is breaking from European tradition seems aesthetically motivated and historically apolitical, but it negates Carpentier’s claim that Europe is always present in the Caribbean based on its colonial roots, and as a result the literary tradition of Europe belongs as much to the periphery as to the center. Casanova wants to depict the literary world as apolitical, but in Carpentier’s art her method faces a dilemma: politics are part of Carpentier’s aesthetic, so even a purely aesthetic understanding of him without politics is incomplete.

The novel’s position in literary space owes a debt to Carpentier’s proposal of the “marvelous real” as a mode of literary expression, but an example of his current position in literary space is clearly communicated by his publisher’s depiction of him as an author. The 2006 Farrar, Straus and Giroux edition of *The Kingdom of This World* contains a preface by Haitian-American author Edwidge Danticat. Danticat’s preface contextualizes the novel by hailing its continued relevance to Haiti and a world still seeking to make sense of Haiti’s past, while also praising Carpentier’s “meticulously detailed facts and astonishing lyricism,” and the cast of interesting characters he’s created (ix). While the gracious comments rightly identify the

cohesive yet briskly paced and far ranging scope of the novel as a feat of craftsmanship, they situate the novel firmly within the comfortable bounds of traditional narrative structures and literary canons. Danticat claims that “[t]hrough the eyes of Ti Noel” readers are afforded a ground level view of the leaders of the Haitian revolution (viii). While this incomplete understanding of the narrative space is perhaps understandable when writing for a general audience to whom the term “focalization” may not be familiar, it is nonetheless a normalizing generalization. Macandal, Bouckman and Henri Christophe are identified as “memorable architects of the Haitian revolution” (ix) and it is certainly their import in Haitian history that Danticat wishes to stress given that Bouckman barely appears in the novel, while Soliman and Pauline Bonaparte, around whom the novel focalizes for pages at a time, are not mentioned at all. Danticat’s desire to educate readers to the events of the Haitian revolution is understandable in light of the fact that “a revolution that some consider visionary might appear to others to have failed” (ix), however in doing so she risks placing the novel in the category of “historical fiction.” When explaining Carpentier’s *real maravilloso*, she states, “The real marvelous, which we have come to know as magical realism, lives and thrives in past and present Haiti, just as it does in the novel” (xi). Many other have equated the “marvelous real” with magical realism, and my intention is not to single out Danticat as misrepresenting Carpentier to serve her own purposes, but in simplifying the understanding of the novel’s diegetic space to a historical depiction of the events of the Haitian revolution

("meticulously detailed facts" would perhaps be better rendered as "meticulously detailed fictions"), eliminating the complexities of the narrative space, and rendering the literary space as historical fiction with elements of magical realism, she robs the novel of much of its literary complexity, and identifies the results of the purely aesthetic classification that Casanova provides. What Casanova doesn't say that Carpentier does, is that there is a political component to his aesthetic choice: there is a rejection of a purely rationalistic epistemology for syncretic knowledge. The narrative structure enacts this, but when the narrative is read as a recounting of facts through an aesthetically pleasing style, as Danticat reads it, the political dimension is lost. Carpentier's is not only a choice to affect literary space, it's also a choice to affect his readers, and manipulating the narrative space is a way to do so. To ignore the narrative functioning of the text thus divorces the literary space from the narrative space and the literary choices from their impact on readers. In other words, it situates a novel in literary space retroactively to fit it into a particular understanding of fiction as the apolitical stylistic innovations of individual writers rather than as motivated texts that seek to implicate readers into the act of interpretation.

## Chapter 4

Regionalism and the Voice of the Community in Wilma Dykeman's *The Tall Woman*

A literary geographical reading of a text not only provides a more nuanced understanding of a novel's narrative construction, it also aids in identifying the elisions and omissions of the logic by which novels garner recognition and literary value. Using literary geography as an interpretive framework with which to examine William Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom!*, chapter two demonstrated that traditional theories of narrative falsely differentiate between story and discourse when the narrative space of the novel often demands a more nuanced examination as it moves between mimetic and antimimetic modes and often presents information ambiguously between these methods of presentation. While Faulkner's novel can be better understood through the lens of geocriticism, it has nonetheless gained immense literary prestige and already exists as a canonical text within literary space. In chapter three, a close geocritical reading of Alejo Carpentier's *The Kingdom of This World* to examine the ways that even well-known texts from the postcolonial world are often depoliticized in the process of their classification within literary space. American texts without such literary recognition benefit from a geocritical reading in other ways. In addition to providing a more detailed understanding of a text's narrative space, geocriticism begins to clarify some of the ways that novels are situated in literary space not by their author's genius alone or according to a purely literary set of standards, but rather by a scale of literary values that echoes political



machinations even as it denies their impact. This chapter examines Wilma Dykeman's 1962 novel *The Tall Woman* as an exemplar of American texts classified as "regional" in order to interrogate the space of the novel and its placement within the literary world. By once again examining the diegetic, narrative, and literary space of a novel, I will argue that the deceptively simple narrative structure should be read as a shifting and sometimes communal voice that is often focalized through the protagonist but nonetheless resists a strict division of story and discourse. Dykeman uses this communal voice to enlarge the applicability of the values that her protagonist displays within the diegetic world. These universal values are nonetheless positioned in literary space as an expression of "local color" and Dykeman's resonance is seen as purely regional, a classification that points to the ways that literary space values expressions of individual psychology over communal action.

*The Tall Woman* is Wilma Dykeman's novel about the Civil War era life of Appalachian homemaker Lydia McQueen. Lydia lives in the rugged mountains of western North Carolina, and the novel follows her from her time as a newlywed 18 year-old during the Civil War to her 1896 death as a grandmother and matriarch of the community. The scope of the novel reaches back to Lydia's reminiscences to her youth a few years before the war, however Lydia's life and the story's plot never stray from the immediate surroundings of Thickety Creek, the fictional town in Nantahala County. No county of this name exists in North Carolina, however a small town, river, lake, and national forest do actually bear the Nantahala name in the far

western counties of the state. The fictional community surrounding Thickety Creek is often referred to as “the valley,” as the area is defined more by the mountainous barriers that surround it rather than its inhabitants’ physical proximity to one another in an established municipality. While most of the homesteaders are spread across the valley, very few choose the isolated and difficult life in the surrounding mountains. The contrast between the lives of those in the industrializing valley and those who, like Lydia and her husband, live in the remote mountains becomes central to understanding many of the conflicts in the story. The values of the community compete with those of characters who pursue capital at the expense of human and natural resources, and the deceptively complex narrative depicts this competition through language that subtly reflects the shifting focalization and applies the struggle more broadly. Dykeman’s position in literary space has not found a broader audience, however, as her work’s privileging of communal values over individual psychological depictions puts it odds with the values of a supposedly apolitical literary world.

#### Diegetic space

The diegetic space of *The Tall Woman* is composed of little outside of the small community around Thickety Creek and the values that are espoused through Lydia McQueen. In many ways, Lydia’s life fits the gendered expectations of her era. Lydia is a loyal and hard-working daughter who learns quickly and diligently works to

maintain the domestic space of her parents' home. She marries at eighteen and soon becomes a mother, eventually giving birth to six children. She is a dedicated matriarch and home maker, roles made more difficult by the absence of her husband, Mark, as he served as a Union soldier during the Civil War, and his insistence on living independently once he returns. Mark's desire to live self-sufficiently by the results of his own labor is rooted in his suspicion of his neighbors, one of whom shared information that led to his imprisonment during the war. Lydia's desire to live independently comes not from resentment of others, however, but from her love of nature, her enthrallment with the sensations of her own body as part of the natural world, and her ability to provide for her family, just as the land and water around them satisfy the family's needs. For Lydia and Mark, independent living thus takes the form of living high in the remote mountains surrounding the more populated valley below. In this setting, Lydia demonstrates that she follows many of the gendered expectations of a mountain woman, however her values and inner life establish that her motivations are hardly typical. Not only does Lydia see value in the natural world which provides for her family as they farm their plot of mountain land, she also espouses a kind of natural philosophy that sees universal value in humans regardless of race or gender, but instead judges them by their ethical motivations. As such, she is suspicious of organized religion and social mores that appear to be intended to establish hierarchies rather than to serve practical purposes.

While the plot of *The Tall Woman* does not stray from its immediate setting, it spans approximately fifty years and includes numerous characters, all depicted in a quickly paced prose. While the outlines of the plot are important to understanding the novel's impact, the focus of the text is clearly on its protagonist, Lydia McQueen, and the impact that the plot's events have on her inner life. Nonetheless, understanding an overview of the plot's events helps adhere the different aspects of Lydia's life into a more complete picture. Lydia Moore, the oldest of five siblings, was raised by a kind mother and a bookish father who had travelled to the mountains from the Virginia coast before her birth. Lydia's earliest recollections presented in the novel are of her pursuit by Hamilton Nelson, the son of the wealthiest landowner in the area, and her rejection of him in favor of the reserved and strong-willed Mark McQueen. Soon after Lydia's marriage to Mark, he, Lydia's father and Lydia's brother leave to fight in the Civil War, leaving Lydia and her mother to fend for themselves on their respective farms. Outliers, men with no loyalty to either side of the war, raid Lydia's mother's farm, torturing her in order to find out where the family's food is hidden and harming her body and mind irreparably as a result. The community's men eventually return to Thickety Creek, but Mark is the last to come back since he had been captured and imprisoned for years due to what he suspects is a tip provided by someone in the area. Mark's bitterness leads him to move the family to a remote mountain homestead close to only the mysterious Bludsoe family. As the years pass, the family grows, their farm develops, and Lydia raises her children while working to

improve her community. She advocates for a school so the community's children can be educated, but finds opposition from Ham Nelson, who fears taxation on his extensive land holdings. Eventually Lydia is able to confront Ham and to use information about his financial wrongdoings to force him into building a new school. With most of her children grown and her community at peace, Lydia catches typhoid fever and passes away, the entire community coming to mourn her passing. Dykeman's novel never strays far from Lydia, and her thoughts and impressions shape the diegetic world of the novel and its arrangement of value.

However limited the world of Thickety Creek may appear to be to an outsider or one of the novel's readers, within the community there is ongoing debate about universal values that extend beyond the borders of the community and region. Environmental preservation, free public education, provision for the poor, women's rights, and racial equality are all debated and advocated for within the community. Because of its remoteness, Thickety Creek engages with each of these issues as they arise within the community rather than as they are imposed by a distant state or federal government. In each of these debates Lydia advocates for others as the result of her value system that she's derived from the natural world around her. This "natural philosophy" of ethics focuses on the human impact of decisions rather than their economic impact. Because this system manifests itself in nature, it does not bear the name of progressive causes, but instead is displayed as Lydia's personal system of values. For example, Lydia derives gender roles from necessity, so even if

she works in the field or sells herbs to provide extra income, these are simply seen as expressions of care for her family rather than advocating for women's rights or their economic independence. She acts according to need in each set of circumstances rather than limiting herself by imposing propriety on her demanding responsibilities. This extends to her view of the natural world, which she sees herself as part of and thus struggles to preserve. The maintenance of her surrounding resources is more important than economic development and accumulation since maintaining the natural world extends its provision rather than exhausting it. This evaluation on the basis of practicality and sustainable usefulness includes how people are evaluated, as well. Economic ownership of other people and their resources is rejected, while Lydia's value equalizes gender and racial categories since the small community's human resources are limited and these seemingly arbitrary designations restrict how people can interact with and support themselves. A closer examination of the diegetic space thus reveals that progressive and equalizing ways of encountering the world already exist within the small community of Thickety Creek, and Lydia becomes the mouthpiece of their expression.

The storyworld of *The Tall Woman* is very circumscribed in that it rarely extends outside of the community of Thickety Creek. When it does, it strays close by, mentioning the county seat and, more rarely, state politics in the years after the Civil War, but there are very few mentions of national politics or international events that may affect the insular community. In fact, when state politics are mentioned, such as

the passing of laws requiring that children attend school, they're referenced to cite Nantahala County as the exception where the enforcement of the laws passed in the capitol had yet to be applied in the remote county (240). The community is rarely directly associated with the nation, state, or an idea of "the South" in the years surrounding the Civil War, rather, it is the mountainous landscape that is referenced as the source of Lydia's identity and the root of her community's character.

"Appalachia" is never named in the novel, but Lydia's mother recounts her family's journey from the Virginia Tidewater, through the Valley, and into the mountains. Recalling her own mother, Lydia's mother remembers that as the oldest child she "was the only one [who] remembered the softness and sweetness of her before the mountains wore it away. I learned the costs of new country to a woman – and to a girl-child" (16). The mountains themselves necessitate a way of life that wears on inhabitants of the region, especially women and girls. But this way of life comes naturally to Lydia, who has been born and raised in Thickety Creek. Her brother, Robert, comes to visit her in the far-removed mountain homestead, observing that she "seemed thinner, more subdued," but he also "saw the brightness still in her eyes, although they were swollen from tears; the eagerness still in her voice" (136-7). Unlike her mother who "never got used to the mountains," Lydia was "her mountain girl – a mountain mother" (137). Lydia and Thickety Creek thus embody the demands of the way of life required by the mountains of southern Appalachia.

While Lydia continues to be associated with the mountains and the natural world around her home, she and her family defy many of the stereotypes of “the South.” Before heading off to fight in the Civil War, Lydia’s husband Mark and her father discuss their allegiances in a war that seems to have been thrust upon them. Lydia’s father insists that state’s rights must be maintained and he “couldn’t fight against [the governor of North Carolina] Zeb Vance and all my neighbors” (17). Mark is more ambivalent, but cites values more universal than states’ rights and affinity for his immediate community in his reasoning. He says, “I don’t feel strongly one way or the other. If it comes to choosing, I reckon I’d have to stand by union” (17), explaining that “I worked for too many men when I was a chap, and after I come to manhood, I said no man ever again would own the strength of my muscles. That’s my way of thinking: every man’s stoutness belongs to himself” (18). Mark thus asserts a moral system by which the autonomy of the individual should be respected and should not be divorced from the value of its labor. Lydia does not have the choice to go to war, but her choice of Mark as her spouse, and their independence throughout the novel associates her with the same system of universal human value. Lydia’s references to the mountains as the source of her independence and values echoes this broader set of concerns. The setting is never identified as part of “the South” or “Appalachia,” instead the natural world of “the mountains” maintains a breadth of applicability that echoes the moral concerns of Lydia and Mark’s value system. Similarly, the community where Lydia and Mark live is referred to by its geography, as “the valley,”



rather than as the name of a municipality. This both more accurately represents the pattern of settlement in the area, and the relationship between Lydia and her family and the surrounding landscape. Lydia and Mark's homestead is far enough removed from the center of Thickety Creek that journeying to see them requires an excursion that takes most of the day and often requires an overnight stay. In other words, their relationship with the natural features of their world is of more importance to them than their proximity to and association with a specific municipality and the associated governmental regulations on their conduct.

Lydia's focus on the naturally occurring geographical features associated with her identity and her community rather than a politically or cartographically identified area such as the South or North Carolina indicates her focus on the natural world and its importance to her. The first description of Lydia in the novel explores her thoughts about nature. As she sits in her bed on her corn shuck mattress, she was "[l]ike a seed, she felt, one of those sun-warmed seeds in the spring ground, growing, ready to give forth new life," and her thoughts continue to wander, thinking about the previous spring (13). She observes that "[s]pring was chancy, but she liked it best of all the seasons" (14). Throughout the many years that the novel covers, Lydia's preference for spring is emphasized, sometimes directly, sometimes through her enthusiasm over the planting and growing of the crops on which her family subsists. Additionally, she displays enthusiasm for a different kind of spring, the source of their water on each of their house sites. When she and Mark look over the property at

their first home together, Lydia discovers the small stream that will be the source of their water and the sight of it comforts her. Mark tells her, "That'll be your spring .... And a fine bold one it is, too" (81). Throughout the novel Lydia returns to this spring, and then the one alongside their mountain homestead. Each time, the spring is a source of strength and inspiration for Lydia, it's clarity, consistency, and support for their way of life all resulting in her admiration. The spring's ability to thrive and support life is associated with Lydia's own well-being (Rouse 42). Later in life, Lydia passes by their first home to find the surrounding area logged of all trees bigger than a sapling, and "[i]nstantly she looked toward the spring down near the field .... She wondered what had happened to that bubbling vein of water since all its protection had been taken away" (294-5). Eventually, she discovers that the nearby logging has polluted the spring and made the water unusable. Returning to her own home up the mountain, she immediately cleans out her own spring to make sure that it's maintained. "'I reckon I'm plumb foolish about this spring'" (305), she observes, before noting that "'A good spring *is* mighty hard to come by'" (306). Lydia's system of value differs greatly from the landowner whose deforestation has destroyed not only the natural resource of the forest, but also the life-giving water of the nearby polluted spring, a conflict that will continue to echo through the diegetic world.

Lydia's embrace of nature is not merely a preference for particular surroundings, it forms the root of her value system, how she evaluates others, and the conflicts this brings about within the industrializing diegetic community. After Mark has gone West

to see if he can find a place to make a life and peace with himself after the Civil War, Lydia is left alone with their children on their farm. She is somewhat anxious, but despite this, and the doubts of her neighbors and relatives, she embraces the opportunity to work with the land. Once again, it begins with spring:

Fresh, sweet smells of late spring rode on the gentle wind. ... Above her and beyond her and all around, the mountains were stirring with life, thrusting up shoots and leaves and blossoms, feeding roots, soaking up pockets of spring rain for dry times ahead, yielding small animals that had burrowed away for the winter. Lydia felt the surge of life – as she had felt it in previous springs. No matter who came or went, what crops were planted or unplanted, who was meted justice or injustice, this would always return. She felt as small as an insect curled in the leaf at her foot, knowing that all of this went forward without knowledge of her. And yet she felt large, too, as great and grand as the green peak of the mountain looming above her because she was part of it all. She was here and now and alive! (150-151)

As Lydia's thoughts range from the sensations of her immediate surroundings to her own body, they then enlarge into considerations of her place in the world and the relationship between her natural surroundings and her own importance. While Lydia embraces the duality of her lack of importance in light of nature's indifference and her simultaneous value as a part of this grand process of life and birth, she concludes her rapture with her focus on the value of her present circumstances, location and

livelihood. Immediately following her observations, Lydia runs until her lungs burn for breath, embracing the ability of her body. Then, she begins her work of managing the livestock and making sure her land is productive. Nature doesn't just give Lydia pleasure in her bucolic surroundings, it also forms the basis for action, an impetus to move forward despite the ease or difficulty of her immediate surroundings. This focus on productivity and practicality while simultaneously acknowledging the value of nature and need for sustainability forms the basis of her ethics and the way that she judges not just nature, but also the people she encounters and their actions.

Lydia's respect for the natural world is often expressed through her desire for sustainability rather than economic accumulation. As she, Mark, and their children plant and harvest crops, raise livestock, and rely on their small farm for subsistence, they must plan to use their resources wisely or their lives and well-being may be in danger. In addition to maintaining the resources available on her own land, Lydia advocates for sustainability in using the freely available bounty of her surroundings. Following her Aunt Tildy's advice, Lydia identifies beds of ginseng high in the mountains and trains her children to help dig them out so that they can be brought into town and sold. But, she explains to her children, "'you have to leave some roots to make new plants for the coming years. Otherwise, pretty soon we could have the mountains scoured and there wouldn't be any more to come'" (208). Upon discovering a bed of "sang" that someone else completely dug up, Lydia is sad at the loss of money, but is angry at the destruction and lack of care that assures that no

more ginseng will grow in the destroyed patch. This dilemma plays out on a larger scale when tobacco becomes an extremely profitable crop. While the crop brings significant earnings, Lydia worries about the consequences of cutting forest land to make it profitable for a monocrop, and her fears are confirmed when the market collapses and the deforestation pollutes the stream she so loved. While subsistence farming proves more sustainable, it also forces Lydia and Mark to make hard decisions as they work to provide for their family, yet Lydia does so with her respect for the natural world intact. Twice in the novel animals attack the family's livestock, once a hawk that Mark shoots and kills, and once a bear that she shoots at in the dark and wounds. She mourns the hawk that Mark kills, the beauty and freedom that has been sacrificed for the maintenance of their chickens, which are petty and domesticated by comparison. The bear Lydia hopes has either died quickly, "or better and more likely, that she had only flesh-wounded it," and the "fine, free, wild animal" was still alive (153). These forced confrontations with animals sadden Lydia, but they were also necessary for the family's survival. What meets with her strongest disapproval, however, is wasteful or unwarranted destruction of the natural world. When Lydia and Mark have others in the community come to help raise their barn, Mark refuses to allow anyone to work without recompense, and as a result he kills the milking cow that he gave Lydia on their wedding day so that they will have beef to serve their guests. Lydia is saddened and angry at the death of "a gentle beast that had fed them, nourished Lydia's baby when food was scarce, and had been ready to

do so again – until last night” (90). When Mark insists that he wants to be proud of what he can serve others, “[h]e overrules long-term gain for short-term gratification and the saving of face” (Rouse 44), and Lydia snaps back, “Pride’s a poor bone to gnaw on an empty stomach” (90). Death is a part of nature and Lydia has demonstrated her willingness to kill animals to defend her family, but killing for the sake of pride and others’ perception is something that Lydia’s practicality cannot abide.

Lydia’s focus on sustaining the natural through practical action also provides her ethical guidance in dealing with other people. During the time that Lydia was being wooed by Ham, he took her to an overlook above Thickety Creek and said “that’s mine” (25). Lydia is confused by his idea of ownership of the natural surroundings, but gradually comes to understand that he means something different from “the way the flag was his – and hers too, and everyone’s who lived under it – or the air was his, and everyone’s who breathed it.... [S]he realized that he meant this was to be *his*, the creek and earth a personal possession as though it were a land-deed to fold and put in his pocket, or a hat to keep in his closet” (25). Immediately afterward she reevaluates him, identifying that “neither nature nor need had inclined him toward thoughtfulness toward other people” (26), and rebuffs his advances when he asks her to “be mine, too” (27). Lydia’s understanding of the natural world, in which air and land sustain, but are not possessed by anyone, provides guidance for her understanding of Ham and establishes her unwillingness to be anyone’s possession.

Later, when Lydia's mother is attacked by the outliers during the Civil War, Lydia contrasts them to her husband and father who, even if they were on different sides of the war, fought for ideas of states' rights and human autonomy and for the men around them. The outliers were cruel and, according to Lydia, "'there's no why to it'" (31). The men would rather that helpless women and children starve than to go to war, and their violence toward Lydia's mother reflected that they were worse than nature's perpetrators of violence who are driven by need. The men were "savages, beyond all the little wild varmints living by nature in the woods" (37). Again, Lydia's understanding is framed by her point of comparison to nature, the men's cruelty serving no purpose and therefore unnatural to her way of thinking and evaluating animal and human behavior. While Mark's ethical reasoning differs somewhat from Lydia's, he nonetheless saw a retreat to nature as a way to escape human cruelty. After getting into a physical altercation with Ham Nelson, Mark returns to his home and declares, "'We're going up on the mountain. I've had enough of the swinish ways of men. We'll take to the woods and the beasts that have natural cruelty and cunning'" (73). Mark realizes that violence and death are a part of the natural world, but they're preferable to the selfish accumulation of men, and as a result, he'd prefer to withdraw from interactions with others. Lydia's understanding of the natural world echoes Mark's values, but comes to different conclusions. Rather than seeing nature as a way to escape human interactions, she desires to impart a more natural justice onto human interactions. When Mark still can't find peace and decides to go

West, she stays behind with her children, elaborating that her goal is to “leave behind our children, stronger and knowing more than we. We want to leave some mark on the place we’ve been” (145). Her rootedness in the mountains keeps her from relocating to pursue freedom from human cruelty, instead she’d prefer to combat it. Later, when she comes into a sum of money, she decides that rather than spend it, she will give it to her brother, Robert, so that he can pursue a law degree. The decision is, in part, for Robert, but also for her father, who wanted to see his children educated, and for Mark, “who needed to see that there were rules for meting out justice” (161). This desire for justice led her to help Robert pursue his education, a path to the practical application of ethics much more direct than the practice of Christianity that Lydia saw around her.

Rather than overtly challenge the gender roles that have designated Lydia as a homemaker from her youth, she instead seeks to inhabit femininity in a way that both amplifies its natural characteristics and subtly imbues it with characteristics those around her would consider more masculine. For women in the mountains certain ideas of femininity, of being removed from physical labor, of maintaining a domestic sphere free of masculine interference in which children are protected from all danger, of cultivating one’s appearance, would be luxuries that could not be afforded, a distinction that Lydia’s mother stresses to her before she marries. Interrogating the idea of romantic love, she tells Lydia “there’s something beyond even love, for a woman as well as a man. A body’s personhood” (16). In the same



way that Mark advocates for the ability of individuals to control their own bodies and the products of their own labor, Lydia's mother sees the importance of personal agency, even in a relationship brought about by love. Mark lives up to this idea of independence, in many ways, albeit often only after Lydia has forced him to. When Mark leaves their home to confront Gentry Caldwell about his role in the outliers raiding of the Moore family farm, he tells Lydia, "This is men's affairs" (284). She advocates for her right to go, as she, not any of the men, was the one present on the night of the raid. Mark relents, saying, "Whether you go or stay is not for me to say" (284). While Mark's egalitarianism does not come easily to him, he is willing to acknowledge Lydia's independence in many of the same ways that she has allowed him to pursue his own needs. When Mark decides that he needs to explore the West to see if he can find peace and a home for the family free of human interference, Lydia discusses the decision with him and allows him to pursue his happiness in the way that he sees fit. She does not call him to account for providing for the family, instead she decides that she will "not make love a tether rope" (131), supports Mark's decision, and takes the responsibility of providing for her children on herself. Even as others express that it's a "sorry way to live" with her "man out traipsing," she simply leaves the company of those who doubt her and heads home, enthralled with the natural world around her, as "she could not remain downhearted, for it was June" (150). Lydia's embrace of work and independence that many would consider masculine was not without precedent in her family. Her Aunt Tildy was unmarried, a

hard worker and a constant help for the family. As she works in the fields long enough to develop tough, muscular arms and tanned skin, her father jokingly calls her “the best man I got around the place” (40). She’s described as verbally blunt and physically active, characteristics typically reserved for the boys with whom she competes as a youth, and she never fixates on marriage. She seems to hold a certain contempt for the pride that she associates with men, musing about the Civil War that if “men set aside looking after the affairs of the big world long enough to stay home and look after their own little plot and parcel, appears to me things would be a heap better off, North and South” (47). Lydia’s embrace of femininity follows Aunt Tildy’s philosophy. She is not concerned with the way others perceive her roles as mother, daughter, and wife. Instead, she works diligently to inhabit them fully in order to provide for those around her out of respect for the provision of the natural world.

Lydia’s respect for the natural world is expressed through her hard work in support of creating and providing for life, characteristics that supersede the constraints of typical gender roles. When Lydia goes into labor with her second child while Mark is away, she knows what needs to be done and “could not let even Mark’s absence dim the joy her body and spirit felt in this moment” (53). Her joy is not naïve of the task she must perform, instead she embraces the difficulty because of the outcome: “She had work to do, hard work. But it was something only she could do – she and the little body here within hers. Together they must bring forth life” (53). For Lydia the idea of being a “mountain mother” (131) supersedes the

acceptance or rejection of a societal standard of femininity or masculinity, instead it is an embrace of the opportunity that nature has provided for her. Embracing motherhood is not a male imposition that restricts her freedom, it's a natural process that allows her to provide for her family. As a woman, she is able to bring life into the world, so she gives birth and cares for her children. Her farm is also able to bring life into the world, so she will work to gather from it in order to provide for her family. Her husband needs to find peace, so she provides the space for him to do so. In each case she prioritizes meeting a need rather than filling a role, acknowledging that none of the needs can be met without personal sacrifice. While she in some ways expects the same of Mark, and in many ways he fulfills those expectations, she nonetheless identifies a particular connection between her selfless provision for others and the natural world's ceaseless provision, both of which exist outside of the value judgments associated with human gender roles. As Lydia ponders the sounds that surround her, she acknowledges the existence of a world completely outside of gender expectations:

There was the rustling and scurrying of a hundred unseen feet and wings in the woods and fields through which she passed. Often before she had listened to these whispers of little hidden lives going forward with no need or knowledge of the man-world all around, and the thought pleased her. Under fallen leaves and bits of bark and log, through tufts of weeds in the fields and over pads of moss in the woods, their tiny feet scampered, their noses

sniffed, they ate and sheltered themselves and bore young and fought and died. (36-7)

The natural world is not outside of death and difficulty, but it does elide the expectations of the “man-world,” and Lydia appreciates and emulates the lack of a need for the propriety of roles. This is not to say that Lydia avoids gender roles completely in favor of absolute egalitarianism. She at times reinforces the idea of females as caretakers, urging her sister to look after her feeble mother, and encouraging her daughters to be generous mothers. Her focus, however, is always on the fulfillment of a need rather than meeting the expectations of others.

Lydia’s expansive and democratic understanding of gender roles is echoed in her understanding of race. While Thickety Creek and the surrounding valley are almost exclusively white spaces, the one exception is the Bludsoe family who lives on the remote outskirts of the mountains. Less than a part of the community, the Bludsoes are outcasts who live high up in the mountains on Stony Ridge and who produce illegal whiskey. Their race is ambiguous, but Lydia has heard that the women had come from the Lowcountry of South Carolina and the rumors circulating that “[t]hey’ve got dark blood in them from somewhere . . . They’re mixed. They claim from Indian or Portugee, I’d say more likely from the Guinea Coast” (39). While Lydia “never uses the word ‘Melungon’ to describe the Bludsoes, ... scholars recognize the lore” (Rouse 45) surrounding this small community isolated in the mountains. They have dark features and light eyes, are seen as evil by many and are blamed whenever

a crime occurs. Lydia is curious about their life, however, and wonders how the women “endured the wildness and the loneliness of the mountains and the hard men who ruled their lives” (38). Mark’s attitude runs contrary to the rest of the community, and he associates with the Bludsoes, albeit discreetly. When explaining to Lydia’s father his decision to fight for the Union, he counters the claim that various races should be valued differently, arguing instead that “I know they’re men, no matter the color of the hide covering their muscle” (18). Mark’s physical confrontation with Ham Nelson seems to have come, in part, from something Ham said to one of the Bludsoes, and Matt Bludsoe fights with Mark against Ham. Mark then buys the land that he and Lydia build their homestead on from the Bludsoes. Later, when Lydia’s mother dies, one of the Bludsoe children delivers a side of deer meat, noting that “[Lydia’s mother] done the Bludsoes a good turn once. They recollect her kindly” (142). The women gathered at the funeral disapprove of the McQueen’s association with the Bludsoes, but Lydia ignores their talk and accepts the gift. These limited interactions compose the whole of what the community knows about the Bludsoes, but when a fire destroys the community’s first school, Lydia finds out a deal more. A group of men ride up the mountain to confront the Bludsoes and plan to burn down the homes of the “half-breeds” (244). Mark confronts them, claiming, “The Bludsoes don’t lie.... You all know that. Fight and kill and make liquor, yes, but their word’s their bond” (244). And despite Mark pointing his gun at the men, they only back down when Lydia asserts herself and confronts them.

Following their defense of the Bludsoes, Lydia and Mark learn more about the circumstances of the community's only nonwhite residents when they pay them a visit to resolve the matter of the burned school building. The stories Lydia has heard are quickly dispersed as "she found that they were not the stuff of mysterious legends but miserable subjects for pity. They were outcasts, and nature had not redeemed them from the wildness and poverty to which men had sentenced them" (247). Lydia's observation reverses the town's assumption that the source of their difference was nature's "curse" of their dark skin. Instead, their difference and poor condition was a result of the laws of men. The Bludsoes homes are in disrepair, their yards are hard-packed dirt with no plants growing, their surroundings harsh. Yet, a "bold, clear stream" with beautiful flora on each side sat not far away. For Lydia's way of evaluating the world, the Bludsoe's lives were harmed not by the difficult terrain that surrounded them, but rather by the attitudes that had condemned them to their status as outcasts. At the heart of their small settlement is natural beauty and the clarity of a spring, but their decrepit homes reflect the harsh way they have been treated and the brutal relationships between them. The family's patriarch, Big Matt, bluntly answers Mark and Lydia's questions, citing his murder of his son, Euell, for breaking his word as proof of his honesty. This severe justice and brusque tone of the Bludsoes settle the question of their involvement with the burning of the school, but Lydia still lingers on the interaction. Lydia helped the other women tend to an injured hunting dog as Mark spoke with Big Matt, and reflecting on their need and

ignorance, she tells Mark that she's ashamed of the way the community has treated the Bludsoes, saying, "We've packed off on them everything bad we didn't admit of doing ourselves.... We didn't have to look for any wrong we might be doing. All my life I've heard tell how black-hearted were the Bludsoes. Now I know that they're just people, poor miserable people. And so are we on Thickety!" (251). Lydia's examination of the community's attitudes on race parallels her evaluation of gender in that she finds a great difference between the standards set by her community and the reality of how race and gender express themselves. The Bludsoes are not different because of their race, but their exclusion from Thickety Creek has made the Bludsoes' lives more difficult and the town less culpable.

Lydia's realization about the Bludsoes accentuates her understanding that nature mandates equal treatment even when humans do not. The Bludsoes connection to their beautiful spring, clear despite its decrepit surroundings, symbolizes their value and reminds Lydia that human categories like race and gender are moot when individuals are valued as a part of the natural world rather than for their adherence to society's standards. Within the small community and within the diegetic world, a value system exists that complicates the typical understanding of how people within Southern Appalachian communities thought and acted in the years following the Civil War. Similarly, the narrative space of *The Tall Woman* depicts a seemingly straightforward space that becomes more complicated on closer inspection.

### Narrative space

The narrative space of *The Tall Woman* appears quite simple, with an omniscient narrative perspective that primarily focuses on Lydia McQueen's experiences and her impressions of them. A closer examination, however, reveals that while the focalization occurs through Lydia the vast majority of the time, Dykeman's use of language blurs the distinction between Lydia and a disembodied narrative voice. Instead of a clear distinction between story and discourse and between the narrative perspective limited to one character within the diegetic world and a narrator outside of it, the narrative space should be read as vacillating between Lydia's perspective and that of the larger community around her. The community's perspective is similar to Lydia's in voice and use of language, but has access to information that is either outside of Lydia's immediate knowledge or her possibility of knowing it. In other words, just as Lydia derives her "natural philosophy" of ethics from her surroundings within the diegetic world, the narrative space positions Lydia as the primary perspective through which readers receive information, but she is simultaneously imbedded within and a part of the community that surrounds her. This narrative positioning echoes Lydia's role within the diegetic world as mouthpiece of and advocate for Thickety Creek. While the novel largely fits within Brian Richardson's category of mimetic texts, it hints at the possibilities of breaking this appearance and blatantly does so only once, after Lydia's death, the narrative rupture echoing the loss within the community. The perspective broadens, at times, to reference events



outside of the scope of the small community of Thickety Creek, but even this information is often framed through what Lydia has heard about it. Additionally, the language of the narration is straightforward, concise and quickly paced. It is mostly free of value judgments outside of Lydia's perceptions. The language used by the characters is often grammatically incorrect and includes terms that are specific to an Appalachian dialect or to the era in which the story is set. As a result, there appears to be a clear distinction between the language of the storyworld and that of the narration. A closer examination of the metaphors used throughout the novel, however, reveals that Lydia's plain spoken and straightforward style of thought and communication is used to focalize the narration as it moves between her knowledge and that of a narrative perspective in a free indirect discourse.

The novel's narrative voice is clear, straightforward, and moves quickly through plot information in order to cover the approximately fifty years that the novel traverses. The novel covers the years of Lydia McQueen's adulthood, from her memories of her youth through her death, however these years are also significant because they encompass the immense changes occurring around the small mountain community from roughly 1860-1910. While the novel is somewhat episodic, focusing more time on certain significant events and establishing the qualities of the main characters in the extensive Civil-War era opening chapters, it never skips more than two or three years at a time, which means that information must be conveyed quickly within the 302 pages of text in the 1982 Wakestone Books edition. For

example, when Lydia and Mark have established their homestead on the mountain, the next chapter opens by compressing more than two years into four sentences. The chapter begins, “In April, a year after the end of the war, Dr. Hornsby delivered Lydia of a girl” (92). Noting the origin of the child’s name, the chapter moves on, stating, “Two summers later, Dr. Hornsby rode up the mountain again, and Burnett Moore McQueen was born” (92). Other chapters begin similarly, with time condensed as the story progresses, changes summarized to set the next plot points within the context of Lydia’s life. This quick movement also occurs within chapters, at times, but as a rapid succession of scenes with contextualizing information rather than as a simple summary of elided time.

This concise narration is also mostly free of dialect, speaking straightforwardly and, at times, in an elevated tone using language that would not be available to most of the novel’s characters. During an Independence Day celebration several years after the conclusion of the Civil War, Lydia’s brother, Robert, reads from the Declaration of Independence as part of the festivities. The scene is described loftily: “This Declaration to which they listened was more than ink scrawls on a piece of paper. It was a dream set down in plain words for all time – for men to read and ponder. More than that, it was a fact, a truth, as certain as tomorrow’s sun – and as necessary to human growth” (192). The applause that greets the address is described as a “tribute not only to his voice and reading which had moved them deeply, not only to the Declaration which they had always revered, but also, perhaps, to the unknown

defenders who had gone before them, unnamed, and those who would come long after, quiet, anonymous, but constant as breath itself" (192). This language is quite different from that spoken by the novel's characters, who use words and sentence constructions that would have been familiar in the mid-nineteenth century, along with others specific to southern Appalachia, to construct a dialect specific to their time and location. Some of these constructions include different verb forms, such as "quieten down" (22 and 61), that are no longer used, or that are not typically used as verbs, such as "pearten up" (262). Additions are made to other verbs, such as an "a" before continuous verbs, such as "a-building" (81), and "a-celebrating" (218), and some are used in the past tense, as with "the baby was twenty-four hours a-borning" (53). Other aspects of the dialect are recorded as alternate spellings to identify the pronunciation, such as "quare" used in place of "queer" to describe something odd or out of place (57, 68, 157, 198, et al), and "a-holt" in place of ahold (23). Other antiquated phrasal verbs that are no longer in use are included. For example, Lydia tells her sister-in-law to "[/]*ay by* your selfishness just this once" (109, italics added), meaning "put aside" her selfish behavior. Even when the words and pronunciation are familiar, the speech patterns reflect a dialect of English that follows different grammatical patterns than standardized English.

While the different registers of language seem to indicate a sharp differentiation between the diegetic world and that of the narrative perspective, the use of metaphors and their close association with Lydia blurs this distinction. From the

opening pages of the novel, Lydia's perceptions of her surroundings are expressed metaphorically in her thoughts. In particular, she uses similes to compare an abstract feeling or thought to a more concrete object from her experiences. As Lydia lies nestled in bed in the novel's opening scene, her thoughts wander and "[s]he thought about the wind – like the great fine horse Papa had owned once, strong and willful with no bit or stirrup that could tame it" (13). The impalpable wind is compared to Lydia's father's horse because both possess the same characteristics, they are strong and unable to be controlled. As her thoughts continue to meander, tucked in her bed, Lydia is "[l]ike a seed, she felt, one of those sun-warmed seeds in the spring ground, growing, ready to give forth new life" (13). Eventually, the novel reveals that Lydia is pregnant, her prior comparison fitting in that she is literally ready to bring new life into the world, she is warmly buried in the covers of her bed like a seed buried in the ground, and she *feels* an emotional warmth and expansion. Here, the narration directly states that this figurative language occurs within Lydia's thoughts and feelings, but as the novel continues the source of the figurative language becomes more ambiguous and varied. As Lydia's mother gives her uninvited advice about her upcoming marriage, the situation is described metaphorically: "Driving straight ahead, like a plowman behind oxen, she spoke again" (16). Later, when one of Lydia's sons steps on a sharp stick, it's described figuratively, "It had punctured his bare foot like a wedge driven into soft pine" (182). In each of these instances the figurative language is in the description of events within the plot, seemingly from a

narrative perspective outside of any one character. Yet, the similes use comparisons that would have been imminently familiar to Lydia, plowing a field and splitting firewood. Similar comparisons are made by other characters, as well, with Mark threatening Ham Nelson that he would break him “like a tallow candle” (73), and Lydia’s Aunt Tildy describing a vapid woman’s eyes as “as blue and blank as painted china” (45). As information is communicated by other characters, the source of the figurative language is often difficult to pin down. When Lydia’s brother tells her of her mother’s death, it’s described using another simile: “Robert told them about her last days in bed. Sarah Moore had slipped away as quietly and naturally as a leaf swirling along on a stream, neither able nor wishing to delay the journey” (134). Because the information is included in reported speech rather than direct dialogue, it is unclear who contributed which information. Robert communicated to Lydia the details of their mother’s death, but is the following sentence a summary that is provided by Robert, or the narrative? This ambiguity is illuminated by examining the way that the narrative is focalized and information from outside the community is communicated throughout the novel.

While some of the figurative language used in the novel is attributed directly to Lydia, and some is removed from her immediate situation, the blurring of these two and the consistent use of natural similes serve to position Lydia as the sole point of focalization through most of the novel. Lydia’s appreciation of nature manifests itself in the way she understands the world around her, which she often expresses through

figurative language with nature as her point of comparison. Her marriage ceremony to Mark “binds them together with an invisible cobweb of words” (18), the rooms of their first house are “bare as a bone picked by varmints” (21), she hopes their child will be “tough as a laurel burl” (53), her next child’s arrival was “as inevitable as morning, as sure as spring” (86), her needy sister-in-law is like a pretty vine of mistletoe that drains the life from the stronger tree on which it clings (97), and her flowing white dress is “like a summer cloud that has no meaning” (106), and so on. Constantly, as Lydia searches to understand the people around her and the situations in which she engages with them, the natural world is her point of reference. Elizabeth Engelhardt notes that “Wilma Dykeman is explicitly nonanthropocentric in her storytelling . . . [S]he weaves stories in such a way that neither human nor nonhuman is privileged. She thereby recognizes the interdependence of both” (159). With the narrative focalized through her character, this figurative language with nature as its constant referent also becomes the way that the narrative voice describes action within the plot and creates associations with characters. When Lydia is deciding whether or not to accept Ham’s pursuit of her, her thoughts wonder to the “high spirited horse” she once saw him permanently damage because he rode it too hard along a rocky and difficult road. Lydia is not cognizant of the direct comparison, but it’s clear that the juxtaposition of her memory and her current situation align her with the strong but stubborn animal that Ham’s unrelenting ambition lamed. Lydia’s association with the life-giving springs at each of her

residences, which she cares for and praises within the diegetic world, is amplified by several passages in the novel that identify water and springs with comfort, provision and life. Violin music, for example, is described as “clear and limpid as the water from her mountain spring” (142), and the community’s will is like a “bold stream” that washes away an obstructing log, like Ham Nelson, after building up enough pressure (255). Characters more associated with the human world outside of nature, however, are presented more negatively. The human anxiety over how other people perceive you is not a concern for nature, and similarly Lydia sees it as a waste of time, focusing on providing for others instead.

Lydia’s appreciation for nature is part of an ethic of provision for others that demands the division of oneself so that others can be sustained, and the narrative focalization finds its expression through this same impulse. Part of Lydia’s appreciation for nature is that, while it can be cruel, if it’s carefully maintained, it will always provide. The spring gives water for crops, for hydration, for cooking, and for cleaning, her livestock provide food and milk to her, just as she does for her family. Her mourning for Pearly, her milk cow, was motivated by the grief and anger that realized that ongoing provision had been sacrificed by violence for the immediate satisfaction of prideful desire. Lydia sees herself as part of the ongoing natural provision that must be available to her family. Early in her marriage, when she and Mark have only their firstborn son, David, she acknowledges that “[s]he was no longer only herself. She was already divided into three: herself and Mark and David”

(74). This division can be projected forward to Lydia's other children, and even to the community as she fights to bring education to all of the area's children. While this continual division could minimize Lydia's ownership of her life, she instead sees this as part of her role is sustaining others, noting, "It's not the ease to do less that we need; I reckon we need strength to do what we can" (137). Like the spring that continually produces water from an unseen source, Lydia and the other women of the community sustain their families from their own resources. It's an association that one of Lydia's young sons makes when she and other women are gathered to prepare for her daughter's wedding. Seeing the numerous trips to the spring, he asks, "How come women be so partial to water?" (218). In the same way that nature dispenses bits of itself to provide for others, so do these women distribute their resources to their families and communities. This allusion to nature directly links Lydia with others in her community, a connection that the narrative perspective also begins to make clear.

The narrative's focalization on Lydia can thus be seen as not only the viewpoint of an individual, but of an individual dispersed throughout the Thickety Creek area, a communal voice that finds its most direct mouthpiece in Lydia. Throughout the novel, information from outside of the area is distributed piecemeal rather than as one coherent message from a specific individual. The isolation of the area, the difficulty communicating expediently across long distances at the time, and the scattered population mean that news travels partially and by word-of-mouth,



accumulated over time to form a more complete picture. When mourners sit gathered for Lydia's mother's funeral, they discuss community matters, and they also "spoke soberly of politics and President Grant in Washington and secret societies that were reported organizing in neighboring states and towns" (141). Lydia and her children can overhear parts of the conversation in the neighboring room, but the information ceases as Lydia falls asleep. In other parts of the text, however, communal information seems to be reported by a narrative perspective other than Lydia. As Reconstruction continues, men in the town complain about Northern control of North Carolina, their debate moving back and forth between speakers with Lydia apparently not present, but her father and brother involved. The debate eventually devolves into old stories about Zeb Vance during the Civil War (193-4), but in this instance, the circle of men become the focus of the narrative perspective rather than Lydia. At other times, the conversations of multiple women seem to be the focus, even with Lydia present. As Lydia lays sick at the end of her life, however, the narration moves completely away from her perspective for the first time. The section begins with information communicated among the different members of the area: "Word circulated that Robert Moore had brought the doctor out from town up to the mountain and Lydia McQueen had typhoid. Many memories were stirred" (311). The perspective then shifts through various members of Thickety Creek in private conversations, a truly omnipresent perspective:

"It was typhoid carried away my pappy over forty year ago," Emma Caldwell told a neighbor.

"My folks had the fever once when I was a young'un," Ruby Nelson told her husband, Ham, as she served him supper one night. . . .

"Typhoid fever took two bothers older than er-ah Alec or me either one," Clay Thurston said to Sue. "I hate to hear that er-ah Lydia..." His stammering had overcome him for the moment.

Sue Thurston was combing her hair and winding it in a fresh tight knot.

(311)

The changes in perspective continue, some with specific names, such as Big Matt Bludsoe's wife Callie, others with anonymous statements about Lydia. "'She never was one to say 'no' to a body in need'" (312), says one. As the community discusses Lydia, and she eventually dies, the narrative perspective seems distant and matter-of-fact, removed from Lydia's influence completely. But determining when the narrative point of view is Lydia's and when it is an abstract narrator's – or the voice of the community, for that matter – is quite difficult when the narration adopts the linguistic devices also used by the primary perspective within the diegetic world. The narrative space, it turns out, is much more fraught than at first glance. While the narrative perspective is clear and plain-spoken, so is Lydia. She can be ponderous, thoughts wandering from idea to idea and person to person. At other times she withholds information in order to protect her family, and similarly information about

the resolution of conflicts within the plot is withheld for years. Lydia, as a mother, would mark the passage of time by the births of her children, as the narrative perspective does in moving quickly through the years not detailed in each chapter. In other words, as the narrative presents the primary character within the diegetic world, it also takes on her characteristics, her way of speaking, inhabiting her way of thinking, presenting information about others in the community in the same way that it would have been revealed to Lydia, by word-of-mouth. As Lydia becomes the mouthpiece of her community, the narration enacts this process, becoming the voice of its character more than the container in which she speaks. The apparently simplistic presentation of a chronological plot thus becomes a more interesting narrative space, one that moves in and out of the diegetic space as its voice not only focalizes through Lydia, following her actions and thoughts, but also reflects her very thought process in a subtle free indirect discourse.

Dykeman's construction of the narrative space depicts a type of psychological realism that is often misread because of its lack of extended interiority from one character. Modernist texts emphasized the depiction of a protagonist's interior life and the shaping of the outside world according to their impressions. In particular, modernist archetypes such as *Mrs. Dalloway* and *Ulysses* privilege the manipulation of time according to how it is perceived from within a protagonist's mind rather than how it is imposed upon the protagonist. Postmodernists conscientiously broke with the artifice that this transaction with readers was more "real." The narrative of *The*

*Tall Woman*, however, fits with neither of these ways of understanding the progression of narrative. While Dykeman constructs a type of psychological realism for Lydia, it is not that of an unfettered individual, but instead is constrained by the demands of her surroundings and community. The perspective pushes against the purely mimetic understanding of narrative, but it also avoids the self-conscious antimimesis of the postmodernists. Thus, the novel presents a uniquely communal perspective, but also one that does not fit neatly within categories available for classification. Brian Richardson notes that communal narration “is equally effective in portraying one group’s inability to comprehend another as it is in forging understanding between disparate individuals. It may either bridge or ossify difference” (*Unnatural Voices* 53). Dykeman’s innovation is that rather than use a communal narration through an overt “we” that readers readily recognize, she inserts into what appears to be a purely realist text a more subtle form of free indirect discourse by which the main focalizing agent becomes the voice of the community, and her values seem to seep into the narrative even as it periodically strays from her. The narrative space presents an individual situated within a particular milieu and, in doing so, makes an argument for communal responsibility and an ethical system derived from a specific context. This counters the idea of an unfettered individual, psychologically independent from their surroundings and imposing their will and impressions on them. The narrative space presents a subtle argument, but the ways in which the novel has been received may not be due to the

subtle innovations of the presentation, instead the reception may result from an inability to see the literary value of communal representation within an already fixed regional identity.

#### Literary space

While the diegetic world of Thickety Creek includes a variety of Lydia's ideas that counter common depictions of its setting in southern Appalachia, and the narrative space of the novel proceeds from a seemingly simplistic omniscient, third-person narrator to a focalized and dispersed free indirect discourse, the literary space of *The Tall Woman* has nonetheless been directly determined by its specific setting, apparently straightforward style, and supposedly gendered concerns. The novel and its author have received very little critical attention, and that has been exclusively in publications focused on Appalachian literature, such as *Appalachian Heritage* and *Iron Mountain Review*, and the collections *American Vein: Critical Readings in Appalachian Literature* and *Beyond Hill and Hollow: Original Readings in Appalachian Women's Studies*.<sup>7</sup> Other authors from the area, such as Thomas Wolfe, Cormac McCarthy, and Charles Frasier, have received much wider acclaim and have gained

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<sup>7</sup> While many interviews with Dykeman have been published in newspapers and regional literary publications, literary criticism on Dykeman that focuses on more than plot summary or the locations within her texts consists of the texts cited in this chapter and the collections mentioned above, as well as Jim Gage's attention to place in *Iron Mountain Review* and Dykeman's "poetics of place" in a book collection. Elizabeth Engelhardt's attention to her environmental activism and Patricia M. Gantt's attempt to contextualize her more broadly were the only sources that attempted to situate her within a context that extended beyond Appalachia.

the literary capital that Pascal Casanova identifies as crucial for recognition in her “world republic of letters,” despite writing novels set exclusively in Appalachia.<sup>8</sup> A closer look at the reception of *The Tall Woman* allows for an examination not only of how Wilma Dykeman has attempted to “invent [her] literary freedom” (Casanova xiii), but also how the political constraints of the literary world allow for individual freedom to be seen and advocated for while communal representation is cast aside.

Dykeman’s reputation as an author seems to have as much to do with the breadth of her writing and her apparently straightforward style as with the geographically specific setting. Dykeman lived the vast majority of her life in western North Carolina and eastern Tennessee, writing books while her husband was at work and her sons at school. She was born in 1920 outside of Asheville, North Carolina, to a mother who traced her family roots in the area to the eighteenth century. She passed away in 2006 in the same area after publishing sixteen books and numerous pieces in newspapers and periodicals (“Wilma Dykeman”). She studied journalism at Northwestern before publishing in *Harper’s*, *The New York Times Magazine*, and then her first book, *The French Broad*, in 1955. The nonfiction book is named for the river that flows through Asheville and the surrounding area, and it includes chronicles of the region’s history, praise for its people, and, seven years before Rachel Carson published *Silent Spring*, stark calls to halt pollution of the river to ensure its preservation. She would go on to publish in a variety of genres, including a nonfiction

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<sup>8</sup> Dykeman was actually introduced to her husband by Wolfe’s sister

account of integration in the South, *Neither Black Nor White* (1957), co-authored with her husband James Stokely, Jr.; biographies of progressive racial and reproductive rights activists, *Seeds of Southern Change: The Life of Will Alexander* (1962), also co-authored with her husband, *Prophet of Plenty* (1966), about W.D. Weatherford, “a Southern leader who worked for racial peace and justice” (“Wilma Dykeman”), and *Too Many People, Too Little Love: Edna Rankin McKinnon, Pioneer for Birth Control* (1974); a memoir about Dykeman’s life and convictions, *Look to This Day* (1967); works of history, such as *Tennessee: A Bicentennial History* (1976); two works of oral history, one with each of her sons; and fiction, including *The Tall Woman* (1962), *The Far Family* (1966), which continues the story of Lydia McQueen’s descendants several generations later, and *Return the Innocent Earth* (1973).

Dykeman would also write for the Knoxville *News Sentinel* from 1962 until 2000, including a recurring column as often as three times per week, and speak as many as fifty times per year after the death of her husband in 1977 (Stokely 31). She received numerous minor awards, in addition to a Guggenheim Fellowship, the 1985 North Carolina Award for Literature, and the honorary title of Tennessee State Historian from 1981 until her death.

As the breadth of Dykeman’s output illustrates, she was concerned not only with the production of a literary reputation, but also with social change. Dykeman’s biographies of W.D. Weatherford and Will Alexander, both educated white men who were outspoken leaders for racial equality, provided evidence of a history of activism

for racial equality within the white South, and *Neither Black Nor White* chronicled that history at the time of its publication. Her biography about Edna Rankin McKinnon, an early advocate for birth control, leader of Planned Parenthood, and close associate of Margaret Sanger, was of a kind with her histories, which dignified the poor and working class while identifying ways to improve their lives. *The French Broad* foreshadowed this engagement with working class people and their history, as it praises the legends and lifestyle of the residents around the river. It also issued a direct call for the ecological conscientiousness that would become a recurring theme in her works of fiction and in some of her nonfiction, as well. In her body of work, Dykeman seeks to identify the need for change in the South and in southern Appalachia, while simultaneously demonstrating that progressive movements have long been present within the regions. This two-pronged approach positions Dykeman as a native whose desire for change is couched in knowledgeable appreciation rather than an outsider's condescension. Certainly her literary output and her goal are admirable, but they also place her fiction in a precarious position. Part of Dykeman's reputation as an author is affected by her role as an advocate for change, and someone who writes in multiple genres. While literary nonfiction found welcome audiences in the '60's with works such as Truman Capote's *In Cold Blood* (1965), Joan Didion's *Slouching Toward Bethlehem* (1968), Norman Mailer's *The Armies of the Night* (1968), and the New Journalism of Tom Wolfe, Hunter S. Thompson, and others, these were often couched as investigations of individual psychology rather



than as advocating for a particular change. Dykeman's reluctance to focus on the individual in her advocacy thus cast her works as separate from the standard works of the "me" generation.

Dykeman saw her role as an author as one of advocacy, especially in providing alternate representations of Appalachia to counter stereotypes and to question the region's relationship with readers and their perception of America. Dykeman sought to address a long history of stereotypes about Appalachians, many of which were the result of a tradition of local color writers who were often visitors who did not understand the area and its people but who would nonetheless publish stories about them. In traditional local color depictions of Appalachia, David Whisnant identifies two competing stereotypes in which "[o]ne view saw mountaineers as 'backward,' unhealthy, unchurched, ignorant, violent, and morally degenerate social misfits who were a national liability,' while another saw them as 'pure, uncorrupted 100 percent American, picturesque, and photogenic pre-moderns who were a great untapped national treasure'" (110). Dykeman sought to challenge both the perception of Appalachians as purely backward as well as the perception of them as idealized but frozen in time, instead seeking to reveal that the same forces at work throughout America were at work in Appalachia, and that locals sought unique solutions to these problems and therefore did not need for solutions to be imposed. Rather than depicting a single Appalachian experience with its own set of "pre-modern" issues,

Dykeman presents varied experiences that are engaging with the same issues as the rest of the South, the United States, and the world. Dykeman noted that

even those of us who have been thinking and writing about it for a long time, and certainly those without the region, very often look at just *one* Appalachian experience - and we think of it as the coal mining experience, which, of course, much of the literature falls into - but it's also now the small town experience, it's the urban experience, it's the place of women in society, the place of Blacks in society, the place of the rural uneducated but *not* unintelligent person in society, around the world. . . . in other words, the Appalachian experience is not as limited as we've often tended to see it. (Miller and Dykeman 48, italics in the original)

As Dykeman observes, these various experiences are already present within Appalachia, but they also connect to experiences outside of Appalachia and therefore necessitate a reevaluation of larger scales of analysis. For Dykeman, "While there is 'a South,' there is no 'the South,' but many Souths and many variations of thought, life, opinion, and action in these many interesting Souths" (Gantt 204). Similarly, reevaluating Appalachia challenges uniform conceptions of not only "the generally accepted image known as the Solid South," but also "the notion of an ever-progressing, inevitably successful, invariably happy America; and . . . to the shadowy threat/opportunity of an emerging Third World 'out there,' pressing ever more forcibly upon our consciousness and our conscience" (Dykeman qtd. in Gantt 204-5).

As such, Dykeman's work actively engages with a variety of social movements from the perspective of her local experience, but in ways that are applicable for other individuals and regions.

Dykeman's motivation to address issues of race, class, gender and the environment have led to her perception as an activist as much as or more than as an author. The small amount of literary criticism that has been written about Dykeman mostly celebrates her foresight in addressing social issues that others ignored or that have been seen as absent from Appalachian literature. Elizabeth Engelhardt, for example, identifies Dykeman as a feminist and an environmentalist, noting that "taking Dykeman seriously helps us understand that today's various movements for the environment in which women participate do not emerge from a vacuum. Dykeman can help us expand beyond the myth of Rachel Carson as sole foremother for women's environmental activism" (167). Dykeman resisted the label of "feminist" (Miller and Dykeman 50), but Patricia M. Gantt observes that even though "the women in her literary landscape are typically found in domestic settings [this] does not undermine Dykeman's inherent feminism" (212). Regardless of her label, Dykeman purposefully represented women as leaders in her work. Speaking of Lydia McQueen's role in bringing a school to her community in *The Tall Woman*, Dykeman explains, "Women were very often leaders in the community. . . . What more vital to a society than helping establish and sustaining the schools, the churches, the community sense there? And I think that's been overlooked in looking at part of the

experience, as outsiders have seen it, as sociologists, as literary people, and certainly as journalists have seen it" (Miller and Dykeman 51). Dykeman saw her representations as correctives to the lack of depth granted to Appalachia, but she did not find this to be an issue with only her own region. Rather, her corrective is a response to what she sees as a larger issue with how the specificity of a location is often coopted by those who do not understand it but nonetheless seek to represent it. Speaking of previous representations of Appalachia, she posits a cause and a link to a larger pattern of journalistic and literary misrepresentation:

I think a great deal of this came from the travel writers who came through and spent a couple of nights in a mountain cabin and went back and wrote an article for *Harper's* magazine. And this was very often the vision that the woman was serving the evening meal from the stove and had very little to say, and therefore she was a very timid, backward person who only tended to the garden and to the children and was bossed by her husband. And again, this, of course, is always the danger of people trying to interpret a society from a very limited experience - as I said, the three-day-experts, or even the three-week-experts. We're doing it now around the world, and I think this is an important experience we've had in Appalachia from which we should learn something: that the people who did come in and try to look at it in three days had no idea of the undercurrents . . . (Miller and Dykeman 51)

In countering such a misrepresentation Dykeman is not only advocating for a more feminist understanding of women's agency, she is also advocating for a more nuanced understanding of Appalachia *and* a particular orientation toward literature. For Dykeman, literary representation should be undertaken with nuance and caution because it has power, an orientation that places her at odds with the larger world of a supposedly apolitical literature.

According to Pascale Casanova's understanding of literary space, literature is most developed when it is increasingly separated from national politics. She argues that although literary space "is not altogether free from political domination, literature has its own ways and means of asserting a measure of independence," and that this autonomy from politics is a necessity for a developed literature so that it can "evaluate works and pronounce judgments without regard for political and national divisions" (86). In fact, "autonomy amounts to its own categorical imperative, enjoining writers everywhere to stand united against literary nationalism, against the intrusion of politics into literary life" (86). By this standard, Wilma Dykeman's conscientious inclusion of an agenda for her representation flies in the face of the standards of the literary world. In regard to her nonfiction books addressing race and the environment, *Neither Black Nor White* and *The French Broad*, she claims that she knew "these in a sense would be social studies, they'd be 'activist' kinds of books, but I consider all of them simply part of a larger mosaic" (Miller and Dykeman 57). *The Tall Woman* is also part of Dykeman's mosaic and, while its content is fiction, it

nonetheless falls into the category of the political given the author's ambitions for her representation. Dykeman argued that literature is perhaps the most effective way to bring about social change:

What has always stirred action? What usually stirred societies, historically, to action? We had any number reports about slavery, but it was *Uncle Tom's Cabin* that lit the fuse. We had any number of studies about the meatpacking industry, what happening in Chicago - there were reporters, there were economists, any number of people who had protested. What lit the fuse? *The Jungle* by Upton Sinclair, showing what [was happening]. A novel, really galvanized the whole action. What is it that we have from societies today that we remember, that we know about societies of the past, conflicts? It's the literature. .... I do not think we need to polarize our interests in Appalachia. And I think to assume that people who are working in literature are not interested in action is the greatest [mistake] - again, why do many stay here, who are interested in these things? Because we want to make our contribution as we can, where we are. Sometimes, I think, it's really a kind of action, too. That you become interested and make your contribution at the local level and as much as you can throughout the region as well as writing. (Miller and Dykeman 54)

This vision of literature as motivation for social change is at odds with the aesthetic values of literary space and has caused Dykeman's fiction to be classified as a depiction of a region, not of an individual or a universal state of humanity.

According to the values of literary space, Dykeman's insistence on community has been elided in favor of classification as a purely regional work. While Alejo Carpentier's *The Kingdom of This World* had its vision of *lo real maravilloso* subsumed into the larger, apolitical movement of magical realism, Dykeman's novel finds its unique vision labeled as "regional" despite its progressive outlook within the diegetic space of the novel and the deceptively complex functioning of the narrative space. Dykeman's novel challenges the supremacy of the viewpoint of the individual in favor of the communal, and in doing so draws attention to the political nature of literary space's supposedly purely aesthetic sense of value. Her incorporation of the individual and the human into the natural world makes it easier to see the separation of these spheres in most other literature. She "counters any absolute separation of nature and culture - her nature incorporates human community members just as her culture includes the voices of nonhuman nature" (Engelhardt 162). In this way, Dykeman challenges a hallmark of capitalism, the separation of nature from the human world so that nature can be used as a resource. Dykeman's equalizing vision is not only a narrative strategy, it is also a challenge to a capitalist way of viewing the world and thus draws attention to this assumption in other works. Her novel also identifies the fact that the improvement of a small community in southern Appalachia may not simply fall into the narrative of constant capitalist development, and instead the values and resources needed for the community to best function may already be present within it. In fact, the economic advancement of the

community may even be an obstacle to the maintenance of the citizen's well-being.

Identifying such a vision as purely regional and thus not applicable to other areas

limits the impact of the work and maintains a vision of a purely aesthetic system of

literary value.



## Chapter 5

Kateb Yacine's *Nedjma* and the Limits of Literary Space

Wilma Dykeman's *The Tall Woman* demonstrates that even texts that address seemingly universal topics can nonetheless be categorized according to strict regional limitations if their narrative presentation does not fit with a specific expectation for stylistic innovation. More specifically, even if the narrative uses techniques associated with the stylistic innovations of the novel's era, there remains an expectation for what should be depicted and that the individual should be privileged. In the context of an author identified with a transnational region, Alejo Carpentier's work came to be known as a precursor to the Latin American Boom and the development of magical realism, a designation that provided a level of literary prestige, but at the expense of the unique features of his artistic vision. Similarly, other authors of the Global South became emblems of their own postcolonial locations and conditions, however these authors are most often evaluated on the basis of their location as representative of a national situation, rather than being evaluated on the merits of their own artistic vision. Algeria's Kateb Yacine provides a useful example, in this regard, in that his novel *Nedjma* received wide acclaim within Francophone literature, however once its position was fixed as a representative of the Algerian literary expression of nationalism, the author's vision for his work was of no importance in terms of its value in literary space. In this way, the novel demonstrates that the idea of "inventing literary freedom" is far from an expression

of individual genius or will, rather it is often a product of the literary world's need to acknowledge authors throughout the world while fixing their meaning within a framework of national literatures.

The emergence of postcolonial literatures followed the independence of the nations themselves, as postcolonial texts became directly emblematic of their national origin. This process was delineated by Frederic Jameson's famous proclamation: "Third-World texts, even those which are seemingly private and invested with a properly libidinal dynamic — necessarily project a political dimension in the form of national allegory: the story of the private individual destiny is always an allegory of the embattled situation of the public third-world culture and society" (69, italics in original). As Jameson suggests, a postcolonial novel may project the concerns of the storyworld as emblematic of a national struggle for independence and identity, but whether this is "necessarily" so remains questionable, and draws attention to a critical consensus regarding how postcolonial literature is understood that is imposed without specific attention to the text itself. Literary, artistic and cultural production were certainly important in the development of postcolonial national identities, however the granting of prestige within world literary space was much more circumscribed than the complicated development of a national literary tradition from within the borders of an emerging nation. In this respect, Kateb Yacine's complicated relationship with the French literary tradition mirrors the political independence of his native Algeria, and his recognition within literary space

as the nation emerged from French rule proves exemplary of the ways in which postcolonial literary traditions are simultaneously recognized but limited within an imposed framework of the novel's development.

In particular, Kateb Yacine's 1956 novel *Nedjma* provides insights into the ways that recognition of a postcolonial author is gained through a specific aesthetic form that is often divorced from its context and the author's larger vision. In this way, Kateb's recognition mirrors Carpentier's, whose specific vision of *lo real maravilloso* was recast within the later development of magical realism.<sup>9</sup> Kateb gained less recognition, however, because his reputation within world literary space rests almost solely on his novel *Nedjma*. While Carpentier's project found expression throughout his journalistic, musical and literary output, his recognition rests primarily on the handful of lyrical works that often defy traditional plot conventions, but are nonetheless classified as novels. Kateb wrote *Nedjma* and one other novel in French, with the rest of his project finding its expression through poetry and drama written in French and, increasingly as his work progressed, in classical Arabic, Tamashek, and colloquial Algerian Arabic. *Nedjma* found acceptance within world literary space because of the prestige and access that came along with its publication in French, and its classification as a nouveau roman. Bernard Aresu, in the introduction to the

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<sup>9</sup> The author's given name is Yacine Kateb, however all but two of his earliest pieces were signed Kateb Yacine, a *nom de plume* that Bernard Aresu notes as a "peculiarity impishly perpetuated in memory of the administrative practice current in the French schools Kateb briefly attended" (xiv). It is also worth noting that the Arabic word transliterated as "kateb" can be translated as "writer" (I am indebted to Dawlat Yassin for this observation). While various works refer to him by either name, I will use Kateb throughout.

1991 Caraf Books edition, situates the novel as part of the development of formal experimentation that was ongoing in France and also cites the contributions of Claude Simon, Michel Butor, Alain Robbe-Grillet, Nathalie Sarroute, and Robert Pinget as following the “lessons of James Joyce, William Faulkner and Virginia Woolf,” as well as those of photography and cinema in the development of the nouveau roman (xxx). Additionally, the novel found a publisher and audience in France because of the contemporaneous Algerian war that eventually resulted in independence from French colonial rule. Kateb had been submitting the manuscript to publishers for seven years, noting that “*Nedjma* would never have been published that early without the war” (xxxi). These conditions are worth noting because they form the context of how a postcolonial novel may enter world literary space and question Jameson’s assumption about the relationship between this space and postcolonial author’s.<sup>10</sup> Jameson posits a projection of the nation-building project from within the postcolonial author onto the text, but if the conditions of world literary space demand that postcolonial authors are understood by their national affiliation, the claim becomes a tautology: postcolonial authors must address their national identity to gain access to literary recognition, and then are categorized as representative only of their national identity as a result. Kateb’s larger project

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<sup>10</sup> Robert T. Tally, Jr. traces the critiques of Jameson’s claim in “Frederic Jameson and the Controversy over ‘Third-World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism,’” acknowledging the blunt generalization but placing it within the context of Jameson’s eventual development of cognitive mapping.

complicates such an understanding given his purposeful decision to distance himself from writing in French, to move from formal developments in the novel to poetry and theater, and his focus on more universal struggles for human rights and transnational justice.

*Nedjma* provides a useful starting point for understanding Kateb's literary output as a larger project, both in terms of the novel's specific resonance within literary space and its dissonance with his eventual project. The diegetic space of the novel certainly connects the stories of its four protagonists to the development of the nation's identity, but it also follows their personal desires, explores their ambiguous backgrounds, and creates a series of competing perspectives that are sometimes complementary and sometimes at odds with one another. Within the storyworld, time is ambiguous and fluid, stories are retold as details accumulate, building truth piecemeal, only to contradict or undermine these revelations in the pages to follow. The formal complexity of the narrative space accentuates this fluidity of perspective, shifting between characters, divided by an ambiguous chapter structure oriented to the clock by a logic that is difficult to follow. The diegetic space and narrative space provide the ambiguous plot and shifting perspective of a developing Algeria, but it is in an examination of the literary space that the competing understandings of the novel's larger significance becomes clear. Kateb's vision for the function of his literary output is at odds with the fixed position that *Nedjma* attains within world literary

space, a position that reveals the logic demanded of postcolonial texts, to privilege aesthetics and the nation-state above all other concerns.

### Diegetic Space

The diegetic world of *Nedjma* revolves around the cities of Constantine and Annaba, which is referred to by its French name, Bône, throughout the book, and the surrounding villages and countryside of eastern Algeria. Rather than a single protagonist, the novel's storyworld is divided between four friends, Mourad, Rachid, Mustapha, and Lakhtar, and their overlapping interactions with one another and the titular character. Each character's background is gradually provided, including their relationship to Nedjma, and the experiences that have led them to interact with one another. This background information reaches back to the characters' childhoods in the 1920's, while the majority of the events take place in the 1940's-1950's (Aresu xli), leading up to and following the May 8<sup>th</sup>, 1945, Setif and Guelma massacres, during which as many as 45,000 Algerian civilians were killed by the French, an event often seen as the turning point in French-Algerian relations that eventually led to the 1954-1962 war for independence. The events of the diegetic world unfold in complex and overlapping ways, therefore it is worth mentioning that a linear presentation of the events communicated about each character, while potentially useful in identifying the events and relationships within the storyworld, is in some ways a mischaracterization of the diegetic space of the novel. The overlapping plotlines,

repetition, evasiveness, and fragmentation of information revealed to readers will be discussed in the section on narrative space, but each of these characteristics is also present within the actual diegetic world of the novel, as an elaboration on the characters' individual stories will elucidate.

While each character is differentiated by their experiences, there are many similarities between them that lead to their characterization as different iterations of similar sets of circumstances. Foremost among their similarities is their obsession with Nedjma, the mysterious and appealing woman whose path crosses with each of the protagonists individually, and then again as they all reside in Bône. Nedjma is married to Kamel, but her appeal, apparent independence, and ambiguous parentage all intrigue the men who obsess over her. The novel begins with these four men working at manual labor in the countryside in eastern Algeria. Gradually, their individual stories coalesce – not without contradictions and repetitions – but into a tentative understanding of each man's background. Mustapha was raised as the son of an expert in Koranic law, moving from a Koranic school to a French one where he meets Lakhdar, a poor classmate whose relatives can barely afford to clothe him to send him to the *lycee*. At school Mustapha and Lakhdar wonder into the crowd one day as the protests of the 8<sup>th</sup> of May spread throughout the region, but each is captured by the French and tortured as a result. Mourad is raised as Nedjma's cousin, having been adopted by her family. He is confident and better off than Lakhdar, but eventually he finds himself in jail for the murder of a Frenchman. Mustapha, Lakhdar,

Mourad, and the fourth man, Rachid, eventually identify that Nedjma's mother, Lella Fatma, is actually an adoptive parent and Nedjma is in fact the daughter of a Frenchwoman whose four lovers included Rachid's father and the man who becomes his guide and mentor of sorts, Si Mokhtar. Nedjma was conceived in a cave during the night that Rachid's father was murdered in the same cave. This ambiguous lineage situates Rachid as the potential sibling to the woman of whom he obsesses. The men end up separated once again, each reflecting on their time with one another and with Nedjma, moving in their thoughts ambiguously between the past and present, speculating and what could have occurred and projecting their hopes, fears, and accusations onto the others' intentions. With four protagonists and a tangled and convoluted plot, a clear and linear progression of events is difficult to identify in *Nedjma*, but while the sequence of plot points remains convoluted, the characteristics of the diegetic world become clear by the interactions of the characters and their relation of events. In those characters' storyworld, their interactions consistently stress the fluidity of time, the multiplicity of similar events, and an investigation of storytelling as the revelation of truth through the retelling of stories, even as they struggle to elucidate one version of events without contradictory details.

Within the diegetic world it becomes apparent that there is a fluidity to the understanding of time that the characters identify as they proceed through what would typically be identified as plot events, but seem, in *Nedjma*, to instead by



symbolic or mythical events. The lack of distinction between “real” events in the plot and those that take place within characters’ memories or reveries is often a result of a character’s ambiguous state of mind. Rachid, for example, lies engulfed in hashish fumes in the second half of part four as he meditates on Nedjma’s significance and what she means. This is presented in the latter half of a chapter in which Nedjma is recounted in what seems to be a straightforward account of her actions, but in retrospect, must be questioned. At the beginning of part four, Rachid had travelled with Si Mokhtar and the kidnapped Nedjma to take her back to her ancestral home. In this setting, she performs symbolic acts, taking a ritual bath of purification, for example, however the line between these acts within the diegetic world and their significance as symbols becomes blurred. Nedjma’s symbolic bath is clearly an event within the plot because it causes other actions to occur. For example, she is seen nude by a black African who murders Si Mokhtar and eventually escapes with Nedjma to live with the sacred virgins of whom he is the protector. But this sequence clearly has resonances beyond the plot, as Rachid later ponders Nedjma’s significance for the history of the Carthaginian cities that would eventually become Anaba and Constantine. In other words, characters within the diegetic world are pondering the significance of plot events to the nonfictional history of what would become Algeria, and in doing so they recast plot events as not only symbolic within the diegetic world, but also potentially representative of historical tribes, regions, and countries.

In addition to symbolic events within the diegetic world that resonate throughout the framework of the novel, events accumulate through multiplicity rather than linear plotting as a way to emphasize their importance. In part one, Mourad is placed in jail for killing a Frenchman at a wedding party. The other characters leave the small town where they've been doing manual labor, but as the other three characters disperse, the scene shifts and three years later Rachid is imprisoned after he's picked up by the police and identified as a deserter. In jail he once again finds himself with Mourad, but they argue and Mourad is stabbed. Part two begins with Lakhdar in prison, but in that location he remembers different incidents, some with the others, who seem to reenter the story as Lakhdar recounts their experiences. He also remembers his first arrest after the riots in Sétif. Much later, in part four, Mustapha recalls his trial that led to his own imprisonment, but it isn't until part five when readers are given background on Mustapha's childhood in the same village as Lakhdar. This background leads, in part six, to Mustapha's arrest during the demonstrations around the May 8<sup>th</sup> uprising. In these various observations around the characters' time in prison, the chronology does not provide a consistent sequence of events, but rather provides multiple instances of the characters in jail for reasons that are unclear. As the chronology circles back to these stories, readers can identify a cause and effect relationship, for example, between Mustapha's involvement with protests, his arrest, trial, and then time in jail, however this linear progression is deemphasized in favor of the magnification of the experience of being jailed for ambiguous reasons.

Readers encounter multiple iterations of the characters in jail, often for dubious, unclear, or seemingly unfair reasons, an experience that is emphasized much more than a logical sequence of events that would explain *why* a character is put in jail. In this way, the multiplicity serves to disrupt the cause and effect of laws being implemented and justice carried out in a way that makes sense, and instead substitute the confusing reality of losing personal freedom as an experiential reality.

The novel's focus on storytelling, the retelling of events, and the contradictions within various versions of the same events similarly focus on the confusion of being immersed in an experience rather than having it carefully explained in a linear fashion. The characters debate Nedjma's origins, and in doing so they do not establish a clear lineage, rather they provide a range of possibilities that is couched within the unclear and often unreliable circumstances in which the characters find themselves. In part three Rachid reminisces about Nedjma's origins, however even this attempt to establish a genealogy is tempered in doubt due to the fact that he begins his speculations about her origins when he's sick and in a sort of fever dream in which reality and speculation may be mixed. In that state, he nonetheless recaps the uncertainty of Nedjma's parentage. Nedjma's mother is kidnapped by two men, one of whom is Rachid's father, and when they stop in a cave, one of them impregnates her, but the circumstances are unclear. The next day, Rachid's father is found dead. Complicating matters is the fact that the men who may be Nedjma's father also have mistresses, some of whom are the wives of the other potential

fathers. In other words, the mixture of possible parentages is impossible to identify for both Nedjma and the four protagonists, who may be closely related to this woman whom they obsess over. It is eventually established that Nedjma “is the daughter of either Si Mokhtar or Rachid’s father; while the father of Mourad and Lakhdar is also one of [Nedjma’s mother’s] lovers. Nedjma may be Rachid’s half-sister, and may also be married to her half-brother, since Kamel’s father was also one of [Nedjma’s mother’s] lovers” (Salhi 30). In other words, there is the possibility that all of the four main characters are closely related to Nedjma, but which one remains uncertain and, based on the intermingling of their parents and ancestors, unknowable in the end. In the same way that the experience of being jailed is presented as more relevant than the actions that led to characters’ finding themselves under arrest, establishing a clear genealogy for Nedjma seems to be secondary to the emphasis placed on both the fact that all of the characters are deeply intertwined in one another’s ancestry, and the fact that each nonetheless contests it and seeks to identify a clear lineage for their relationship to Nedjma. Largely because of the contradictions between characters’ stories, even when the truth can be known, it is only revealed after a long process during which various possibilities are identified as more or less viable. With this contested storyworld echoed in the narrative space, the novel’s structure provides an affirmation of the contested storytelling of the diegetic space.

## Narrative Space

The diegetic world of *Nedjma* proves complex in its overlapping and ambiguous plotlines, and the narrative space of the novel accentuates this complexity. One of the primary features of the narrative space is an organizational structure with chapters ambiguously aligned with the hours of the clock. This orientation accentuates the role of time, but not in a way that provides clarity or aids a reader in establishing a complete, linear sequence of events. There are six main sections in the novel, each with one or two sub-sections of twelve parts. The length of the larger chapters and their sub-sections is inconsistent, ranging from a single question ("Will the new men be sacked?" 339), to twelve pages (Aresu xliii). Chapters 1, 2, and 5 have 12 sub-chapters/fragments in each, while in chapters 3, 4, and 6 there are two such clusters of 12 fragments for a total of 108 fragments (xliii). The sections of 12 fragments thus echo the hours of a clock, yet there is apparently not a consistent organizational logic. Instead, a plot line from one character's perspective will start in one fragment, continue for several more, and then abruptly end as another character's perspective along another timeline begins, continues for several fragments, and ends as abruptly as it began. Eventually, a more consistent plotline develops as a reader is able to use context clues to figure out that, for example, the novel's opening sequence when all the protagonists work together performing manual labor in a village actually comes after the stories about their first interactions, which are gradually revealed throughout. While the structure still leaving several plot

points ambiguous, Kateb nonetheless noted that the orientation of the 12-part sections was appropriate because the chapters “rotate, as in the motion of time” (xliv), and that rather than providing a clear chronology of events, the text “privileg[es] narration as process over text as product . . . favoring textual motion over narrative completion, continuity over closure” (xlv). The goal appears to be a dynamic relationship with a reader that Kateb identifies as “textual motion” in contrast to “narrative completion.” That is, if a text contains inconsistencies, contradicting information, and incomplete timelines, these are not obstacles to making meaning, but instead keep readers engaged with the process of moving back and forth within the text in order to make meaning. This engagement is more dynamic than the idea of a literary text as a complete, contained, and consistent receptacle of meaning, instead Kateb’s narrative structure demands active engagement to make meaning as readers moves between the revelation of new information and the recontextualization of pre-existing knowledge.

The inconsistent revelation of information and chronology are, in part, due to Kateb’s genre experimentation, which extends his earlier poetry into what became the novel. Kateb published poetry that revolved around a central figure named Nedjma as early as 1948, however these would find expression as a novel by 1956, albeit one that was structured as a series of poetic fragments. As a result, the “novel” took on many characteristics associated with poetry, namely the fractured and

impressionistic revelation of information instead of a chronological narrative. In other words,

As a fictional text, *Nedjma* poetically explodes a plot whose elements cohere only in synchrony and whose narrative finality Kateb may indeed never have intended. The novel's self-conscious reflexivity in fact provides important clues as to the open-ended, elaborative intent of its narrative process. . . . Its strategy of narrative modification and diffusion is both play and source of interpretive multiplication, the novel's incomparable allusiveness . . . . Kateb also frequently resorts to a discourse of equivocation and dubitation that strategically foils or postpones the narrative clarification about to take place. (Aresu xl)

The novel's poetic resonance thus means that the presentation of time and space are constructed differently by the narrative structure. Rather than the plot expected by a traditional narrative structure, in which a sequence of events is arranged in time and the attention to space is minimized, Kateb's novel provides a sequence of perceptions that are arranged as a contemporaneous plurality, one that emphasizes "the poetic nature of the text as a free flow of expression transcending literary conventions" (Salhi 22). Kamal Salhi goes on to evaluate this poetic aspect of the text by asserting that "this fragmentation does not always work well. Brief anonymous dialogues occasionally create confusion about who is speaking, removing distinctions between particular characters" (23). While this observation is true in terms of the

lack of clear connection between portions of the text and which characters within the diegetic world are producing the thoughts, evaluations, and observations of their surroundings, it also assumes that the narrative space of the novel should make such a distinction, an evaluation that would be challenged by the narrative structures of the *nouveau roman*.

Kateb identified the prominence of the French “new novel” as one of the motivating factors for his structure of his text (Aresu xxiv), and as such understanding its characteristics can be useful to see which aspects Kateb adopted, which he rejected, and which he adapted for his own purposes. Laurent Le Sage notes that “the ‘new novel,’ the *nouveau roman*, . . . was noticed first in the mid-1950’s” (1), and can be identified by “a new approach to characters, disregard for chronology, prominence given to objects and space, substitution of pattern for plot, and unorthodox treatment of dialogue. Craftsmanship, in all its aspects, seems to be a matter of primary concern” (5). *Nedjma* largely echoes these characteristics in that it neglects the psychological depth of characters, alters a chronological presentation of time, emphasizes repetition and multiplicity rather than a linear plot, and often situates dialogue ambiguously between that narratorial perspective and that of characters within the diegetic world. The novel does not focus as much on objects as those identified as exemplary within the early French tradition, such as the novel of Alain Robbe-Grillet, however, as the poetic elements accentuate, experimentation in the form of the novel was at the forefront of Kateb’s intentions. Brian Richardson



classifies the nouveau roman as a work that operates according to his principle of antimimesis (*Unnatural Narrative* 9), “violat[ing] mimetic expectations and the practices of realism” (3), categories that would certainly apply to *Nedjma*. For those at the forefront of the nouveau roman’s development in the 1950’s, authors expressed that “new techniques are not just new ways to present old material; they are devices to express a new concept of the novel and a particular philosophical attitude” (Le Sage 5), one that demanded a “new hero” (18). Le Sage goes on to identify this “new hero” as someone who is typically a detached outsider, such as Meursault in Camus’s *The Stranger* (18). In this distinction Kateb’s differences begin to be seen, for while he embraced the formalistic changes that altered the narrative structure of *Nedjma*, he presents a quartet of protagonists whose psychology may be as unknowable as that of Meursault, but who also present an approach that is not individualistic, nor is it purely philosophical. For Le Sage, when the author of the nouveau roman “finishes his book, he has given us a glimpse of how reality appeared to him at a given moment and of how he tried to make some sense of it” (11). In this way, the focus on artificiality in the narrative structure of the nouveau roman moves the psychological focus from the characters to the author. Readers are still interpreting a text by engaging with the psychological perspective that’s presented to them, but the nouveau roman brings the interpretive framework of the narrative space into direct questioning. While this narrative positioning may seem liberating in its escape from apparent artificiality, an examination of the literary space of *Nedjma*

nonetheless reveals that the author's positioning of himself and his text is often subsumed into the expectations and limitations of its critical reception.

### Literary Space

The complexity of *Nedjma's* diegetic and narrative spaces have led to its categorization as an Algerian iteration of the formal experimentation of the nouveau roman, however Kateb's larger goals, present from his first poems to his final plays, provide useful context for understanding the incompleteness of understanding the novel purely on the basis of nationalism and form. Yacine Kateb grew up in Constantine, where much of the novel is set, and shares commonalities with several characters. His father practiced Koranic law (Aresu xiv), like Mustapha's, and he moved from a Koranic to French school and was then "a boarder in the *college* (secondary school) of Setif on 8 May 1945, when the first anticolonial uprising in modern Algeria took place" (xv). Like Lakhdar and Mustapha, he was arrested for demonstrating afterward, thrown in jail, interrogated, and told that he would be executed before being released (xvi). He also apparently had a "short-lived passion for a married cousin ... thereafter in Annaba (Bône in the novel), where he was sent to the *lycee* after being expelled from the school in Setif" (xvi). At the age of 18, in 1947, he gave a speech on Abdelkader El Djezairi, "the first organizer of substantial resistance to French colonial expansion in Algeria and the father of Algerian nationalism" (xiii). As Kateb's literary output began, these personal experiences

found their way into his work in which personal and political desires were inextricably woven.

Kateb's first publication occurred in 1948, when he published a dense, lyrical, love poem titled "Nedjma ou le poeme ou le couteau" (Nedjma or the poem or the knife) (Aresu xiii). From this poem through the titular novel and several other poems and plays, the figure of Nedjma reappears in Kateb's work multiple times as a feminine character of ambiguous qualities, ranging from vulnerable, to defiant, but always mysterious and arousing desire, be it sexual or for knowledge, in the men who interact with her. Nedjma, meaning "star" in Arabic, seems to be the point of orientation for the characters who surround her, distant but constantly within view. For Bernard Aresu, she is "a unitive principle that stands for the Algerian nation," however her meaning is multiplied as "[t]he background of colonial domination against which the story of romantic rivalry unfolds singularly pluralizes one's psychological perception of Nedjma" (xxxv). Kateb's works return to Nedjma repeatedly, as he often returned to the lyricality of poetry, as well, either by periodically publishing poetic works or by incorporating long sections of descriptive and ornamental prose within his novels.

After seeking a publisher in Paris for several years, finally Kateb's breakthrough into French letters came when *Nedjma* was published in 1956. As an extension of his earlier poem, it pushes the boundaries between the form of the novel and poetry, a boundary that he would continually push against. His following novel was eventually

published in 1966, but *Le polygone étoile* (The star-shaped, starlit polygon), “an arcane collage that explodes the notion of genres” (Aresu xxiii), originally began as an extension of *Nedjma*. In fact, the complicated narrative structure of *Nedjma* was as much a function of a publisher looking to impose a novel’s form onto Kateb’s work as it was a stylistic or narrative choice. Kateb had written *Nedjma* and *Le polygone étoile* as one book, but “probably for commercial reasons, the editor limited [Kateb] to two hundred and fifty pages” (xliv-xlv). Faced with the arbitrary notion that a page count is what constitutes a novel, Kateb would instead push against the boundaries of the publishing industry, returning to the same characters and themes in a number of works, pushing against the divisions between genres, and challenging the supremacy and efficacy of French as a literary language. Kateb categorized *Le polygone étoile* as “neither a novel, nor a play, nor a collection of poems but all at the same time,” arguing that

it seems that art forms thrust themselves upon us with stifling excess.

Creative writing invariably reduced to the production of genres: are we dealing with theater, poetry, or fiction? For the sake of marketing or publicity, a writer is today forced to truncate his work before being able to achieve creative unity. . . . *Nedjma* is not what is normally called a novel, and “Le cadaver encircle” is as antitheatrical as anything one can find. I am presently pursuing this experiment in order to explode the formal limits that strangle literature. (xxxviii)

Thus, Kateb's idea of "creative unity" was not specific to an individual text, but rather to an author's whole project of literary production. Kamal Salhi argues against "the assumption that 'the world of *Nedjma*' and by implication [Kateb's] major achievements, are found solely in his early works," advocating instead that "the theatre works he created from 1970 until his death in late 1989 represent a continuation, and, in some senses, a realization of the concerns and hopes expressed in his fiction and drama of the 1950's" (1). The development of his formal innovations, then, can be seen as a response to his circumstances and simultaneously as innovations within his French context, and limitations to his individual priorities.

As Kateb's development continued, his immediate circumstances changed in the midst of the Algerian war, as did his authorial focus. Soon after publishing *Nedjma*, Kateb's Paris apartment was searched by the police, and in the following years he moved often, living throughout Europe and North Africa, trying to find time to write as he "labored as a construction worker and migrant field hand, and even worked briefly in the electronics and metallurgical industries" (Aresu xvii). Kateb's focus turned to theater as he wrote plays in French that were performed in French, classical Arabic, and colloquial Algerian Arabic, turning to political themes based on the locations of his frequent travels from the increasingly repressive religious government of a now independent Algeria, and stagings of the historical and mythical heroes of North Africa's past. Kateb's political plays addressed the condition of Palestine, the Vietnam War, and the struggle for independence throughout North

Africa (xviii-xix), while his attempts to draw attention to his region's historical heroes often referenced Jugurtha, "who unified Numidia before being defeated by the Romans in 105 A.D." and the Kahina, the "legendary *nom de guerre* of Dihya, a Berber woman from the Djarawa tribe in the Aures mountains" who "organized fierce resistance against Arab conquest before being killed in 702 A.D." (xxi). In this way, Kateb "refuses to date the beginning of the nation's history from the watershed of colonization and sidesteps the problematic of post-colonialism, which is its continuation. For him, colonialism is not the defining moment from which all else follows" (Majumdar xiv).

Disillusioned by his treatment in France and desiring to make an impact in his newly independent homeland, Kateb's thematic, formal, and linguistic choices were purposefully taken regardless of the limitations they placed on his options for publication in France. In fact, Kateb's choice was in response to the direct connection he saw between Algeria's political relationship to France and his ability to find a publisher. He notes that his publisher

kept on telling me: But since you have such beautiful sheep in Algeria, why don't you write about them? That was it, textually. . . . There was radical ignorance, and such ignorance disappeared as if miraculously with the war. . . . With the first ambushes and France starting to lose her children, Algeria became commercialized, turned into something in which publishers were interested. . . . And the book was a success to the extent that I intended it to

be a novel that would show French people, in their language, that Algeria was not French. I wanted to give French people, in book form, an idea of what Algeria was really all about. And the goal was basically achieved, but . . . the book's reception was after all marred by paternalism. (Aresu xxxi)

Kateb's desire to publish in France had originally been motivated by the desire to complicate the French understanding of Algeria and to provide a more complete picture given that "up to that point, in France, Algerian literature was Albert Camus" (xxxii), someone whose work he saw as tangentially Algerian, with the country used as a setting in which the protagonist of his *nouveau roman* worked out a theoretical existential problem with no understanding of or engagement with Algerians (xxiii). Yet, even when presented with the opportunity to publish *Nedjma*, Kateb was greeted with the paternalism and self-interest of Algeria's colonizers.

The ensuing shift in Kateb's focus moved from humanizing Algerians for an audience in France to communicating the need for change to a global postcolonial audience, albeit with a focus on the history, language, and human rights of his native Algeria. Kateb noted that the French reception of the novel "emphasized the fact that *Nedjma* was written in French, which is a fact. But a kind of paternalism permeated this way of using and enhancing the notion of *francophonie*. . . . I then felt that mine was a tainted success since *Nedjma* was published when Algeria was at war, when blood was being spilled on a daily basis" (Aresu xxiv). This reception in the midst of

Algeria's struggle for independence led to the shift in Kateb's choice of literary language:

'When independence was proclaimed . . . was I to stay in France and continue writing in inevitably elaborate French forms? For an Algerian writer who would have expressed himself in anything but a very refined form (like the new novel) would not have succeeded there, and I would have had to write something still more complex and difficult than *Le polygone étoile*, for instance. . . . As soon as opportunity knocked, I returned to Algeria in order to attempt writing in languages that the Algerian people could understand, without giving up French entirely.' (xxiv)

In addition to elucidating Kateb's choice, what is interesting about his decision is the direct association of the form of the novel with its acceptance within French critical circles and the ways in which that choice was, for him, a conscientious decision of choosing his audience. Rather than an apolitical aesthetic choice to represent a particular philosophical point of view or to embody what it means to be Algerian for a French audience, Kateb was seeking an audience for his literary production who would be willing to see it as directly applicable to the politics of Algeria. Perhaps the success of Kateb's project of advocating for universal human rights within Algeria and the postcolonial world could be categorized as meeting with mixed success, at best, but critics acknowledge that his literary production "opened wide the gates for the type of postcolonial literature that has blossomed unabated through a singularly



productive generation of writers,” attributing his influence to the development of Abdelkebir Khatatibi, Rachid Boudjedra, Assia Djebar, Tahar Ben Jelloun, Abdelwahab Meddeb, and Rachid Mimouni (xxxii).

With recognition as a literary progenitor of a successful generation of North African writers and having been awarded the French Grand Prix National des Lettres in 1986 (Aresu xxxi), Kateb has received recognition within the very Francophone literary tradition about which he felt such ambivalence. As such, Pascale Casanova accurately identifies that Kateb “owed his universal recognition to a huge misunderstanding of what he was trying to do” (354), with his formal experimentation leading to an understanding of his work as universally applicable. While Casanova identifies that reading Kateb as “universal” is a mischaracterization of his vision’s particular applicability to Algeria, she nonetheless identifies his role as one to “affirm the difference and importance of a national literature” (41), a significant misunderstanding of his role in Algeria and elsewhere as he sought for Algerians and postcolonial peoples to be seen on their own terms. Casanova’s evaluation of attention to Kateb focuses almost exclusively on his similarity to Franz Kafka and Ngugi Wa’Thiongo, a threesome she groups together because of their use of theater within the context of a “small literature” (229-31). Identifying this move as “far from being a historically and culturally specific event, recourse to the theater is an almost universal move for founders of literary traditions in emerging nations” (230). Neglecting to see the continuities between *Nedjma* and his later works, she

argues instead that Kateb “broke completely with his prior literary activity . . . helping in this way to lay the foundations for a new national literature. But in order to do this he had to renounce a number of prior attachments, abandoning formal experiments in fiction, converting from French to Arabic, and campaigning for a national language freed from traditional constraints” (230). As the earlier quote identifies, Kateb was conscientious of the need to break with formal experimentation and writing in French, and openly chose to do so. However, Casanova applies a critique to Algeria that is based on the model of European national literary development, basing her theory on Johann Gottfried Herder’s late eighteenth century association of a nation with a language (75), and eventually adding a literature and a people to the list of characteristics that helped create a nation (224). Applying this model of development to the “small literatures” of Kafka, Ngugi, and Kateb seems suspect, considering the lack of a national project in the literature of each author, and it also depoliticizes the impact that each intended, as an examination of Kateb demonstrates.

By viewing literary space as a reflection of national traditions, Casanova delimits the possibilities for authors of the postcolonial world. Within her “world republic of letters” national traditions are developed as individual authors fight for recognition and gain literary capital through their formal developments, yet those developments are only recognized if they fit within the forms that are recognizable to those already within literary space. In other words, innovation is seen as the characteristic of an author’s ability to “invent their own freedom,” yet that innovation is constrained to

begin with. Kateb's development of *Nedjma* demonstrated that he understood the expectations for the nouveau roman and was able to produce critically acclaimed work. Yet, as he continued his individual development, it did not include recognition for works that required knowledge of the conditions within his country. Having produced a novel that fit with France's understanding of Algeria's development, his further project was seen as an attempt to develop a literature representative of his nation, yet he "explicitly positioned himself against the official language of the Algerian state" (Harrison 41). Kateb's simplistic association with the process of developing a national literature is better understood as both a more universal project of anticolonial solidarity, and a more specific struggle for the rights of all Algerian citizens in the midst of governmental repression.

As Kateb's output shifted to the theater, he addressed social issues that related to the effects of French colonialism, as well as those that needed to be addressed by the Algerian government's own creation of inequalities. In keeping with his view of Algerian history as a continuation of forces that existed before French occupation and that had continued after, Kateb did not limit his critique only to the historical framework that applied to France. Instead, his work addressed "both external (French . . .) and internal (Algerian) forms of repression, in the service of Algerian decolonization" (Harrison 59). Kateb's play "Mohamed arfad valiztek"/*Mohamed prends ta valise*/ "Mohamed Pack Your Bags" compares the situation of a Palestinian in Israel and an Algerian in France in an effort to draw parallels and distinctions

between the two colonial situations. The popular audience for Kateb's plays would have participated in the production itself,

“[b]orrowing the storytelling form known as al-halqa —literally, the circle that designates the audience of the storyteller, and, metonymically, the act of storytelling itself— the troupe most often performed in outdoor, public spaces such as marketplaces or school yards. As in traditional storytelling performances, the audience would frequently interject and participate through laughter, song, and dance. In addition, performances usually ended with a rendition of the Communist International hymn in Darija or Taqbaylit, followed by a public debate. Performed in popular languages and using popular comic and storytelling genres, the . . . plays were explicitly aimed at shaping a public and public sphere. (45)

The play's focus was on Algerians living in France, yet rather than a simple critique of the French, it also implicated the Algerian government in creating the circumstances that limited opportunities in Algeria and necessitated search for work abroad that the play identified as a result of “exporting cheap labor to France in exchange for lucrative oil contracts” (47). Kateb advocated for a unified Algeria and on behalf of the Berbers against a vision of a country as an Arab-Islamic state, and “[e]ven after Kateb's posthumous canonization by the Algerian authorities, his work remains caught within categories created through colonial divide-and-rule policies” (56). In such a way, the French division of Berbers and Arabs allowed Kateb's compatriots to

identify his work as representative of a subnational division, while his place in literary space assured his resonance with Algeria, even as his vision for class and ethnic solidarity sought a universality that superseded both.

As it relates to his critical reception in literary space, Kateb illustrates the opportunities for recognition that are available for a postcolonial author and their limitations. Kateb acknowledges that he followed the path that Casanova identifies to attain recognition within literary space, he sought to invent his own freedom, and in identifying the salient features of the *nouveau roman* and applying them to a story set within Algeria with the appropriate formal characteristics, he received literary recognition, as did his native country. The limitations of that recognition, however, identify Kateb as representative of Algeria, even as he seeks to both depict the variety of experiences that exist within his home country and to communicate a more universal vision of the history of the broader Maghreb. When he sought to communicate a more universal vision within the context of languages with more limited reach, he nonetheless maintained his position as a literary beacon of his home country, positioned within literary space according the ways that he was capable of being seen, not those to which he aspired.

## Chapter 6

## Conclusion

This dissertation has examined four disparate novels in an attempt to demonstrate the ways in which geocriticism and a more detailed and theoretical understanding of space can elucidate texts that are set in a variety of locations and understood in a variety of ways. While the setting of these novels resonates in a variety of ways throughout the storyworld, it is not indicative of the values that are espoused in the diegetic space and is certainly not determinative of the relative importance that it has as a work of literature. That recognition of importance within literary space operates according to values that these readings have investigated, and in doing so have identified that the rules of literary space, embodied here through Pascale Casanova's accumulation of literary capital within the "world republic of letters," apply unequally to texts and yet reproduce a vision of literary value that denies political influence. While the narrative spaces of these novels use different strategies to position readers between the internal storyworld and the external space of the novel in the world, they nonetheless create opportunities for the diegetic space to be extended into the world of readers, or at other times limit its applicability outside of its specific vision of mimetic reality.

In describing these spaces and progressing through a close reading of these texts, I have attempted not to define these three spaces as clearly delineated from one another, but rather as overlapping in specific and strategic ways that lend to readers'

possible experiences with a text. As such, I have used geocriticism as a tool to push against the edges of diegetic space and to see it bleeding into the categories of narrative that have traditionally been discretely separated from it. Similarly, as the narrative space extends to characters within the diegetic world, it has also been demonstrated to situate a reader with a range of possible interpretations, but in limiting and allowing those it provides credence or doubt to a possible understanding of how literary space contains a novel and its author. Literary space is not merely an after-effect where the inevitable relevance of a novel is situated, it is a motivated and contested space whose examination reveals particular logics and elisions.

Geocriticism allows for these spaces to be mutually constructive of one another rather than isolated to fit within a system of interpretation, and in doing so it demands a reevaluation of the concepts used to analyze literary texts. A diegetic world in which facts are contested and information is presented in ways that challenge chronology demands to be viewed outside of the limitations of the strict divide between story and discourse. If a novel's resonance within literary space is politically motivated, then an examination of literary history is necessary. And a narrative structure that serves as the nexus between a novel's ability to produce a particular understanding of space and a reader's openness to reproducing, extending, or denying that understanding of space calls for a reevaluation of a novel's meaning as determined by an author's genius. As such, geocriticism has the benefit of not only allowing for new understandings of the texts that it is used to examine,

because it extends to literary space, it also creates opportunities to situate readers as active participants in the production of literary space rather than as passive recipients of it.



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