

NORMATIVE DISRUPTIONS:  
THE DIEGETIC READING OF ANACHRONISM IN TWENTIETH-CENTURY  
AMERICAN NOVELS

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A Dissertation  
Presented to  
The Faculty of the Department  
of English  
University of Houston

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In Partial Fulfillment  
Of the Requirements for the Degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy

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By  
Jeffrey R. Villines  
May, 2018

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## ABSTRACT

Much of the discourse on literary anachronism remains fixated on questions of error and intent: Anachronisms are assumed to be flawed attempts to recreate the historic real, and scholars who deal with them tend to insist an anachronism can only be meaningful if it was placed intentionally by an author for a specific purpose. This is not only a reductive understanding of what anachronisms are, it limits the range of critical and theoretical approaches by which an anachronism can be discussed. This dissertation addresses this problem by asserting a new way of approaching anachronism that bypasses the question of authorial intent entirely. This dissertation contends that anachronisms should be read, not as errors in history, but as wholly accurate depictions of a different history which, instead of being subordinated to the historic real, can be compared to it as a distinct reality. The first chapter demonstrates the process of reading an anachronism diegetically by applying it to William Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom!* Subsequent chapters complicate the same process by exploring anachronisms that deviate from our understanding of anachronism in key ways. Chapter Two uses Kurt Vonnegut's *Timequake* to examine the potentials for an anachronism that does not depend on historicism to reveal its divergence. In Chapter Three, anachronistic racial attitudes in Harry Turtledove's *The Guns of the South* allow us to consider how the discussion of anachronism is complicated by an absence of agreed-upon historic facts. Finally, Chapter Four reads Margaret Mitchell's *Gone with the Wind* as the narrative of an attempt to construct an anachronism, and consequently analyzes the effects of an anachronism that is attempted by the characters, *within* the diegesis of a work. This dissertation represents the beginning of a larger project, considering new articulations and applications of a misunderstood temporal paradox.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank W. Lawrence Hogue, who worked with me so patiently across all my years at the University of Houston. His diligent (sometimes merciless) questioning really put me through my paces and helped me be certain of my scholarship and preparation. My understanding of Barthes and Bakhtin, as well as of Postmodern literature, owes much to his instruction, and I do not think my critical history of anachronism would be near so complete without the variety of critical approaches I studied in his class.

Maria Gonzalez, though I never had her in class, has been a guiding presence throughout my career at UH. Time after time, she has stepped in to help me with my pedagogy, professionalism, and scholarship. She selflessly stepped into my prospectus committee at the last minute, and even more selflessly agreed to take on the role of my dissertation director in this last semester. Though most of the research for this dissertation was performed under the guidance of Professor Hogue, most of the pages were written under Professor Gonzalez. She really helped keep me on track when things looked bleak, and convinced me that finishing was possible.

Without my committee—Lorraine Stock, James Zebroski, Cedric Tolliver, and Steven Deyle—there would be no completed dissertation. They are more, though, than signatures on the page. They have each let me voice my ideas about time and anachronism around the halls of UH, and have recommended views or scholars that I should consider in my work.

Of course, I mustn't neglect Karen Fang, who served on the committee for my prospectus (which was partially cinema-focused) but not on the committee for my dissertation (in which film is almost completely absent). There was half a sentence in my prospectus in which I took it for granted that anachronisms are never errors, but wholly accurate depictions

of a different reality. Although my committee unanimously advised me to narrow my focus as I moved forward to the dissertation, it was Professor Fang who called particular attention to this half-sentence... which proved to be the genesis of this entire dissertation.

Special thanks to my colleagues in the International Association of the Fantastic in the Arts, but most especially to Andrew Ferguson, who guided me through my first conferences and pointed me to my first temporal theorists, and to Arthur Evans, editor of *Science Fiction Studies* whose own work on anachronism confirms the relative silence on the subject.

Thank you as well to my fellow Ouachita alumni, Benjamin Utter and Brandon O'Brien, who were helpful with the theology in Chapter Two.

Thank you to my mother-in-law, Mary Partin, who for the past five years has generously shared her home, her car, and her coffee.

But most importantly, thank you to my wife of nearly ten years, Alli. She has been my most persistent sounding-board, therapist, and proofreader. She kept me from hiding in the bushes of jargon, and constantly encouraged me to pursue the more exciting parts of my research. She has seen to it that I am more than my bibliographies, and more than my CV. She gave me my accordion so I didn't go crazy for lack of an outlet in these past few months. There is much she has done for which I am both thankful and impressed. Particularly since, in nearly a decade of marriage and seven years of graduate study, not once has she ever murdered me.

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## INTRODUCTION: ON ANACHRO-DIEGETIC READING

Anachronisms are long-misunderstood devices. For many modern readers or audience members, seeing Shakespeare's Cleopatra play billiards or reading where Proust's narrator inverts the order of two French political crises is a harsh reminder of the fictionality of the literary experience: the narrative world is disrupted as it deviates from history and presents us something contrary to expectations of what is historically normal for the setting. The work is, in some small way, suddenly flawed. However, what we perceive as anachronisms are only flaws if we assume that the narrative we are engaging with *must* be set in the world we inhabit—and thus beholden to its history or cosmology. This dissertation advocates a system of reading in which this assumption is set aside (even temporarily) and replaced with the view that each literary diegesis is distinct and complete in and of itself. In this light, anachronisms, though still departures from perceived historical norms, cease to be errors; they become conceits which indicate or pledge the ways in which that particular diegesis departs from the external—they tell us precisely *how* that particular universe is distinct. This different understanding of anachronism has an exciting utility, for it allows us to get away from the fixation on error and intent that has dominated discourse on literary anachronisms. By freeing anachronism from the specter of authorial intent, these anachronisms consequently allow us to read them (and the texts in which they appear) in a manner independent from—or even contrary to—the philosophical designs of an author. Thus, the reading advocated in this dissertation finally allows discourse on anachronism to have the same counter-intentional potential that has already been possible and usual in the discourse on other literary questions.

## A Definition of Anachronism

In his *Confessions*, St. Augustine remarks “What then is time? If no one asks me, I know what it is. If I wish to explain it to him who asks, I do not know” (XI.xiv.17). Before progressing, it will be helpful to state directly the definition of *anachronism* in force in this dissertation, lest it become what *time* was for Augustine—a thing which we only think we understand until we try to discuss it.

Here is the definition in force in this dissertation:

*Anachronism is the effect of a paradoxical tension between an artifact and the setting which contains it despite a temporal impossibility or unlikeliness for that containment.*

The definition I supply here is certainly more unwieldy than anything the OED has to say on the topic. However, the rearticulation is necessary—which I shall demonstrate by breaking this definition down to its constituent parts and explaining them more fully.

*“The effect of a paradoxical tension...”*

The *Oxford English Dictionary*’s second definition of *anachronism* is “anything done or existing out of date.” There is a central problem in this definition in that it assumes that the anachronism is the thing itself, as opposed to a result of the thing’s presence.

For a clearer picture of what I mean by this, consider a touchstone of anachronism: the chiming clock in Shakespeare’s *Julius Caesar*. The paradoxical element there is clear: there could have been no such clock contemporary with Brutus and Cassius. Thus, if we accept the ancient Roman era as the setting of the play, we recognize the clock is out of

place (or, out of time). Consequently, the temptation is to identify the clock as the anachronism (Figure I-1). Indeed, according to the above OED definition, it is.



Figure I-1: The traditional conception of anachronism—"the thing out of time"

However, to say that the clock is the anachronism is to elide over what the setting contributes to the paradox. In numerous other settings, the same clock would be perfectly in keeping with its containing timeframe; in and of itself, it contains no paradox. The paradox is only introduced when the setting *cannot* or *should not* contain the artifact, due to some temporal contradiction. Both setting and artifact are needed to engender anachronism—both contribute, but neither are the anachronism proper.

Consequently, the anachronism itself can never be a material object. While a material object can contribute, anachronism does not truly occur until there is that abstract linkage between container and contained (see Figure I-2). The relationship is much like that which Saussure posited for the sign. We can point to the word *tree* where it is written, just as we can point to a tree out the window, yet the sign resides in neither. The sign only occurs when the signifier (the word *tree*) is paired with the signified (the object out the

window). Thus, the sign is found in an abstract linkage. In these terms, the casual insistence that the artifact is the anachronism is tantamount to insisting that the tree is the linguistic signification of itself. Rather, in the definition I advance, anachronism is the *sign*—the abstract linkage.

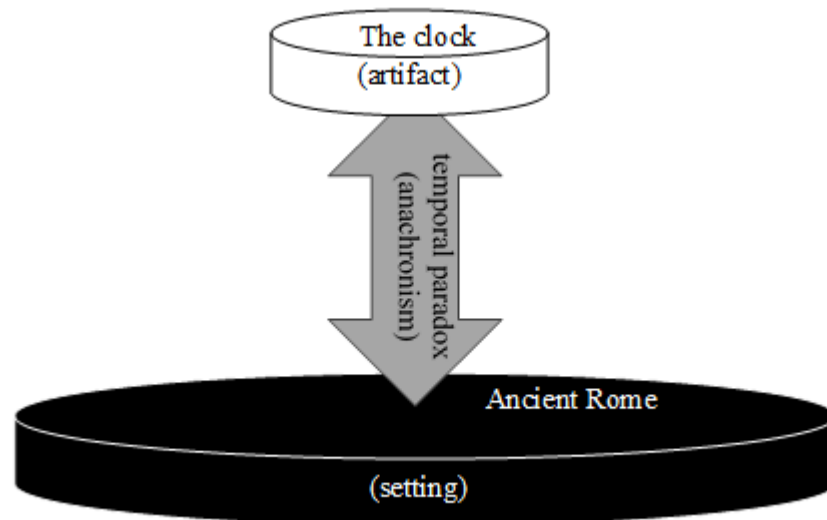


Figure I-2: The conception of anachronism in force in this dissertation—anachronism is the abstract linkage between artifact and setting.

To put it in less abstract terms, think of a pearl. A pearl is the result of a small irritant, say a parasite or a piece of grit, getting stuck in the maw of an oyster. This foreign element disrupts the oyster's biological processes, and as an immune response, the oyster releases nacre to coat the irritant. Layers of nacre build up, then harden, and when it is harvested, we have a pearl. The pearl cannot come to be without both the oyster and the grit. However, the pearl is not the grit. Nor, for that matter, is it the oyster. Rather, the pearl is the result of the one being contained by the other, despite it not belonging there.

When, instead of saying that the clock in *Julius Caesar* is anachronistic, we say that it is the anachronism, we are saying that the grit is the pearl—a lamentable conflation that would leave us short changed at every jewelry counter. For the purposes of this dissertation,

anachronism is a process. There are two forces that must come into contact for this process to occur. Here, I have referred to them as the *artifact* and the *setting*. First, let us discuss the artifact.

“...*between an artifact...*”

I use the word *artifact* where many have used the word *anachronism*: to refer to the “thing out of time.” Admittedly, *artifact* approaches misnomer, because the word implies that the anachronistic element will always be a physical object. To be fair, tangible objects are by no means uncommon artifacts—indeed, they are often the ones that most quickly capture our attention. The aforementioned clock in *Julius Caesar*, an AK-47 in the hands of Robert E. Lee (in Harry Turtledove’s *The Guns of the South*, the focus of Chapter Three), or the wristwatch on the arm of an extra in Cecil B. DeMille’s *The Ten Commandments* are all anachronisms centered on physical artifacts. The physical or material artifact gives us something to point to and say, “That shouldn’t be there.” But even though the materiality helps make the paradox more concrete and visible, that physicality is not a concomitant aspect of anachronism. Anachronism can be effected with more abstract artifacts, whether that be an ideology (such as Merlin’s devotion to the scientific method in T. H. White’s *The Once and Future King*), or even a turn of language (such as the modern idioms used by the primeval monster in John Gardner’s *Grendel*, or the sing-along of “We Will Rock You” at a jousting tourney in the film *A Knight’s Tale*.)

Although *artifact*, as a word, has the connotation of materiality (which problematizes its use here) it also has other connotations which recommend it. By invoking the archaeological dig, or the museum piece, *artifact* suggests the reminder of a culture,

place, or even time distinctly other from that in which it is being viewed. Thus, with the small caveat that my use of the word *artifact* should not be taken literally, it remains a fitting word—a succinct reminder of the foreignness (temporal, though, instead of geospatial) of that odd element which invites our consideration of anachronism.

*“...and the setting which contains it...”*

The word *setting* is favored over *diegesis*—which may be the narratologist’s first impulse—because identifying the temporal container as the diegesis presupposes that the artifact cannot be diegetic. This is, of course, contrary to my core assertion that all anachronisms are declarations of the normal within a work’s diegetic reality, and thus always already a part of that diegesis. To that end, I favor the word *setting* to describe that which invites paradox by containing the artifact. Although temporality is only one aspect of setting, please take it as written that I am referring exclusively to the temporal when I use this word, unless I qualify it in some way, such as by referring to the “geospatial setting.”

*“...despite the temporal impossibility or unlikeliness for that containment”*

The containment of the artifact by the setting must be impossible or unlikely, otherwise there is no paradoxical tension which results from that containment. The impossibility or unlikeliness must be temporal in nature, for otherwise the resulting paradox would also not be temporal—thus, we would have no anachronism.

### *Notes on Direction and Kind*

Even given the precise definition above, there are numerous varieties of anachronisms possible. I would like to take a moment to indicate two means of distinguishing anachronisms which will be helpful in this dissertation. I call these distinctions *direction* and *kind*.

Direction is straightforward: The artifact will have a temporal relationship to the setting—coming from that setting's future or past. If the artifact is more usual to a later period than the setting, this is *prochronism*. If, however, it comes from an earlier period, this is *parachronism*. These are pre-existing terms, both dating back to the mid-seventeenth century with these meanings.

Kind, on the other hand, is a model I am originating in order to speak to the order of magnitude of the historical disruption suggested by the anachronism. Anachronisms of the first kind are those which are impossible, and anachronisms of the second kind are those which are merely unlikely.

Consider common calculators. When I tally my grades at the end of each



Figure I-3: My addiator, being used for grading.

semester, I use a small brass addiator. An addiator is a digital abacus of sorts, which uses a simple system of sliding, notched rules to assist in addition and subtraction calculations (see Figure I-3). Addiators had a brief popularity in the early-to-mid twentieth century—a popularity that fell off when technology permitted the affordable miniaturization and proliferation of electronic pocket calculators. That I should use one now, a good thirty-five years after they were last manufactured—instead of one of the aforementioned pocket calculators or even the calculator app natively installed on my iPhone—is an anachronism. Specifically, it is a parachronism—the addiator suggesting an earlier period. However, while it is *unusual* for a person in the present age to prefer an addiator, it is not *impossible* for me to use this device. Thus, this is an anachronism of the second kind. But if we were to flip the tables, answering this parachronism with its complementary prochronism, we would find the opposite to be true. Suppose another teacher, working in the 1950s, should calculate his grades with an iPhone 5. This, too, is anachronistic, but we can see that it is an anachronism of a completely different order of magnitude. For me to participate in my anachronism, I merely needed to win the addiator in an eBay auction. But no action available to our hypothetical teacher in the 50s will allow him to participate in his—the device is several technological generations removed from his period; his use of the phone is impossible, and it is therefore an anachronism of the *first* kind.

It will be noted that most of the examples that I use in this introduction—such as Caesar’s clock or the problematic tarot cards in *Blood Meridian*—are anachronisms of the first kind. This is because the impossibility of their appearance tends to make them the most disruptive—more greatly calling attention to the fictionality of the diegesis and challenging attempts to square the diegetic chronology with some stable notion of historical



fact. Furthermore, they have a measure of conspicuousness which greatly adds to their demonstrative utility—as the act of disruption, taking the reader out of the story, tends to call attention to the instrument by which that disruption was achieved. While I am personally more interested in first-kind anachronisms—largely because it is with them that there is the greatest need for the anachro-diegetic reading advanced in this dissertation to be applied—my chapters will use both first- and second-kinds. While my system of reading can be applied most readily to impossible anachronisms, it does not depend on that impossibility.

It may also be noted that first-kind anachronisms tend to be prochronisms, while those of the second kind tend to be parachronisms. This is understandable, given the mono-directional nature of time. That which is future is, by definition, not yet to be, but that which is past leaves enduring markers for us (and our literary characters) to interact with. There can be no iPhones before iPhones are invented, but the obsolescence of addiators does not remove them from existence. This may be why the word for a past-facing anachronism is *parachronism*, despite a subtle misnomer. *Prochronism* comes from *pro khronos* (ἡρό χρόνος) meaning “before [its] time,” but the *para khronos* (ἡαρά χρόνος) which gives us *parachronism* does not mean “after [its] time” (that would be *meta khronos* [μετα χρόνος])<sup>1</sup>—rather, it means “beside [its] time.” While this is counterintuitive, it does evoke the way artifacts of the past (be they technologies, other physical reminders, or ideologies) continue to exist alongside the artifacts of the ages that supplant them.

<sup>1</sup> Humorously enough, *metachronism*, as a word, is something of an anachronism today. It once meant the anachronism from the past, but *parachronism* has completely taken over that definition, rendering *metachronism* an anachronism among anachronisms—a meta-anachronism.

But while anachronisms of the first kind tend to be prochronistic and second-kind anachronisms tend to be parachronistic, direction and kind are necessarily distinct as categories because this is only a tendency, not a definitional requirement. Jeffrey Insko enumerates certain anachronisms in the 1827 novel *Hope Leslie*—articulations of Revolutionary and Constitution-Era political opinions occurring over a century before these opinions were documented. These are prochronistic. However, while the appearance of these opinions is unlikely, their formulation in this setting is not strictly impossible. Thus we have a prochronism of the second kind. My chapter on Harry Turtledove's *The Guns of the South* will work with a similar prochronism.

Because of the persistence of artifacts, though, parachronisms of the first kind are more challenging to conceive of or find. Consistent with the earliest definitions of *anachronism*, the postdating of events—such as Marcel's juxtaposition of the Dreyfus affair and the Eulenberg scandal in *Remembrance of Things Past*—is one likely form. But beyond this style of anachronism, difficulties present themselves. As has been stated, technologies and ideologies can persist or be rediscovered long after they are current, which obviates the most common forms anachronisms take. However, larger events—such as the alterations of national borders or landmasses over time, or the evolution and extinction of species—can provide new avenues for first-kind parachronisms to assert themselves. For instance, in Steven Spielberg's 2001 film *A.I.: Artificial Intelligence*, the portrayal of the Twin Towers as still erect over two-thousand years in the film's future was retroactively made a parachronism of the first kind when the World Trade Center was demolished in a terrorist attack in the months after the release of that film.

I should mention that there could also be a third, informal kind: the *misidentified*—which is to say, that which has been incorrectly identified as an anachronism. I describe it as “informal” for the obvious reason that the “anachronisms” in this category are definitionally *not* anachronisms. But I include it regardless because even a non-anachronistic element, if *perceived* as an anachronism, can have the same disruptive effect—heightening the reader or audience member’s awareness of the artifice of the experience, and taking them out of the story. In the opening chapter of his novel *The Princess Bride*, William Goldman (or, at least, that fictional version of Goldman who voices the novel’s frame narrative) recounts a producer’s objection to a line he had put in the screenplay for his Western *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid*:

There was a line in *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid* where Butch said, “I got vision and the rest of the world wears bifocals,” and one of my genius producers said, “That line’s got to go; I don’t put my name on this movie with that line on it,” and I said why and he said, “They didn’t talk like that then; it’s anachronistic.” (293).

Whether entirely an invention or not, this exchange typifies an anachronism of the third kind. The invention of bifocals is often credited to Benjamin Franklin, and the term first appeared to describe them in the year 1824, a good sixty to seventy years before the setting of *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid*. However, if this unnamed “genius producer’s” perception of the era is largely decided by the mythical version of it presented in previous Westerns, and if bifocals never appear in those Westerns, then the producer’s misapprehension becomes understandable as the result of a limited perspective of what is possible “back then.” Consequently, this limited perspective pushes the reference to

bifocals beyond the executive's willing suspension of disbelief, and the entire diegesis becomes flawed and implausible to him. It does not matter that the reference is historically sound—the narrative and the world that contains it have been disrupted for him.

A similar misapprehension is common with Akira Kurosawa's 1961 film *Yojimbo*. The film follows a masterless samurai who involves himself in the feud between two rival gangs vying for control of a Japanese village. There are no title cards at the outset of the movie to indicate the period in which the film is set. Furthermore, there are almost no references to events that occur outside of the insular village where the action takes place—meaning a dearth of recognizable historical markers by which to fix the setting. As such, it is easy for a Western audience member (ignorant of how to read any visible cultural markers) to observe the proliferation of swords, the period dress, and the depiction of peasantry and misread the film as being set in the Medieval period—being the period with which swordplay, courtly dress, and an impoverished peasantry are most readily associated in the Western imaginary. However, this perception is fatally disrupted nearly halfway through the movie, when the antagonist Unosuke, returning from a recent trip abroad, produces a souvenir from his voyage: an American revolver. This is not an anachronism at all—if anything it is an *anachorism*<sup>2</sup>—but if a viewer has misidentified the setting, the artifact of the gun disrupts that perception and derails his experience of the film.

Anachronisms of the third kind may seem an odd inclusion since they are, by definition, not truly anachronisms. However, I list them here for three reasons: The first is, quite simply, for the sake of completeness. The second, though, is to illustrate the necessary

<sup>2</sup> Whereas *anachronism* comes from *ana khronos* (ἀνά χρόνος) meaning “against time,” *anachorism* comes from *ana khora* (ἀνά χωρη) meaning “against space.” Thus, *anachorism*, a distant cousin to *anachronism*, involves a thing which appears in an unexpected space, as opposed to an unexpected time.

influence of historicism on the question of anachronism. Although this dissertation works to deprivilege certain historical assumptions about anachronisms, historicism can never be entirely absent in their study. Without first grounding a text in our understanding of the historic real implied by its setting, we cannot even identify the anachronisms it contains—anachronism being a noted deviation *from* that real. As we see in *The Princess Bride* and in *Yojimbo*, the correct identification of anachronism depends on an informed understanding of the relevant history—without this grounding, and subject only to our vague impression of what “feels right” about a particular setting, we will be plagued by countless false positives and (even worse) false negatives.

The third reason I bring up misidentified anachronisms is to call specific attention to the third-kind prochronism in *Yojimbo*—the revolver that unexpectedly appears in the middle of a samurai movie—in order to demonstrate the further effects the sudden introduction of the revolver can have on an audience member. Once antagonist Unosuke produces the problematic gun, the audience member who has misidentified the setting of the film has two options: The first is to double down on his initial misidentification, in which case the revolver remains a glaring and irredeemable flaw. The second is to see the revolver as an invitation to reevaluate his initial impressions of the setting. To put it another way, it gives him opportunity and incentive to inform himself on the proper setting of the film and to realign his expectations accordingly—resulting not only in a more cohesive viewing experience, but in a greater understanding of a portion of history that had previously been neglected and left to uninformed assumptions.

In the first case, the gun is a flaw which is wholly inconsistent with the setting and which makes the narrative less real. In the second case, though, the gun does not disrupt

the setting, but instead *defines* it by fixing it more precisely with a recognizable artifact. As already stated, meaningful markers of temporality are (for certain viewers at least) difficult to come by in this film. In this case, the pistol becomes the most reliable means of determining the setting. We can see that the film is set in the mid-nineteenth century precisely *because of* that troublesome artifact.

It is precisely this *Yojimbo*-effect that I want to achieve in my dissertation—only with first- and second-kind anachronisms, instead of third. When we divorce literary texts from the expectation or assumption that they must eventually align with the historic real, we can go beyond seeing anachronisms as flaws (intentional or otherwise) that frustrate the eventual union of the diegetic and the real. Instead of a flawed presentation of the historic, the anachronism-invested text becomes a wholly accurate depiction of a diegesis with a *different* historic real. By seeing the diegesis as a distinct universe and refusing to subordinate it to our own we can, at least momentarily, compare the two and be informed by the implications of the deviation. But we shall return to this idea later.

### *Departure from Previous Definitions*

Popular definitions—by which I mean the non-specialized definitions found in most dictionaries—tend to be insufficient to the task of discussing anachronism as a meaningful feature of literature.<sup>3</sup> Earlier, I referenced the OED's second definition of *anachronism* as a jumping-off point for my own. However, the first definition is worth

<sup>3</sup> I do not mean to commit the lexicographic fallacy—the erroneous assumption that dictionaries enjoy some special status as arbiters of reality. However, since dictionaries distill their definitions of terms from a broad observation of how the contained terms are used, they are nonetheless helpful in identifying how specialized terms are used and understood in common discourse.

including as well: “An error in computing time, or fixing dates.” Here, in a dictionary that is both a popular reference work and an internationally-recognized compendium of English word histories, the notion that anachronism is necessarily a form of error is not even an assumption—it is the declared norm. The inherent, temporal nature of anachronism is here a subordinate quality—a mere description of the kind of error. Consequently, this definition typifies the limited view that this dissertation is reacting to: the casual assertion that anachronisms are guilty of being flaws until proved otherwise—a view which leads us toward eliding over the anachronism and apologizing for it, as opposed to embracing its paradoxical presence for the new readings it invites. Of course, this definition’s preoccupation with “fixing dates” tellingly positions it as addressing an error that disrupts a utilitarian, even objectively quantifiable, practice—such as time-keeping or scheduling. Thus, this definition may be less problematic in other fields wherein there may be a more stable or necessary notion of history (even if certain of its qualities are hotly contested) against which the depiction can be “checked” for fidelity. In other words, it may be necessary for the historian to view anachronism as error, but for the literary scholar, the insistence that literature is bound by the same standards of accuracy as history is a reproduction of Plato’s insistence that the preservation of history is one of the two functions (along with the transmission of public morals) that justifies the existence of poetry.

Regardless, though, of whether anachronisms are considered primarily in a historical sphere or in a literary one, these early definitions of anachronism as a form of error cast a long, lingering shadow. As Jeremy Tambling says in his 2010 book *On Anachronism*, the word tends to be “used as a term of criticism from those who consider themselves happily within chronology” (2). For Samuel Johnson, anachronism is

indisputably an error: In his 1755 *Dictionary of the English Language*, he defines it as “An error in computing time, by which events are misplaced with regard to each other.” And lest this definition should again seem more inclined towards historical writing than literary, we again have the words of Dr. Johnson. In his “Preface to Shakespeare,” a watershed work of Shakespearean criticism and an early defense of Shakespeare as a dramatist, Johnson specifically lists the appearance of anachronism as one of those faults he will not defend: “He had no regard to distinction of time or place, but gives to one age or nation, without scruple, the customs, institutions, and opinions of another, at the expence not only of likelihood, but of possibility” (427).

However, elsewhere in the same essay, Johnson dismisses the critical position that Shakespeare’s departure from the Aristotelian unities (or at least, from the dogmatically prescriptivist view of them common to the Neoclassical aesthetic) should in any way disqualify his works from artistic merit:

The objection arising from the impossibility of passing the first hour at Alexandria, and the next at Rome, supposes that when the play opens the spectator really imagines himself at Alexandria, and believes that his walk to the theatre has been a voyage to Egypt, and that he lives in the days of Antony and Cleopatra. Surely he that imagines this, may imagine more.... There is no reason why a mind thus wandering in extasy should count the clock, or why an hour should not be a century in that calenture of the brains that can make the stage a field. (431)

That the audience’s imagination is sufficient cover for Shakespeare’s disrupted unity of place or time—a lapse of a century would be allowable to Johnson—yet is not even considered as an excuse for his anachronism indicates that the disruption occasioned by



anachronism is greater by an order of magnitude that extends beyond the limits of Johnson's *apologia*.

One essay that is centrally interested in defining anachronism, and which I have found indispensable as I frame my own understanding of the specific components of anachronism, is Annette and Jonathan Barnes's 1989 "Time out of Joint: Some Reflections on Anachronism." This essay begins with the question of how to distinguish anachronism from a mere slip of the tongue—such as accidentally stating that the Battle of Waterloo occurred in 1869 as opposed to 1815. Admittedly, this problematizes the utility of Barnes and Barnes to the present dissertation from the outset, as once again the question of error is made central to the discussion of anachronism. However, even though their essay assumes that all anachronisms are errors, it specifically rejects the notion that all errors, even temporal ones, are anachronisms. The resulting articulation of how an anachronism differs from more general, temporal errors is consequently a useful rumination on the essence of anachronism.

The definition they ultimately arrive at is as follows:

Something is an anachronism or anachronistic if and only if it implies

(1) the ascription of "F" to a at t, where

(2) "F" is not of a sort to hold of anything at t, and

(3) "F" is of a sort to hold of something at a time other than t. (258)

Unfortunately, this definition itself is less useful than the journey leading to it, in no small part because the authors' decision to explore anachronism within a framework of Propositional Logic renders the ultimate findings inaccessible to those who do not have extensive prior grounding in this particular rhetorical mode (and thus, who don't know to

read *area* or *location* for “a” and *time* for “t”). This is true of the entire essay and has, I believe, limited the literary application of what is otherwise a very thorough consideration of anachronism. However, even when their definition is translated into more relatable terms it does little more than restate the popular “thing out of time” definition, even if it is less restrictive of what constitutes a “thing” and more descriptive of what is meant by “out of time.”

One of the useful observations of this essay is that anachronism, as a quality, is dependent on context:

That a person’s  $\phi$ ’ing was not anachronistic at one time, then was anachronistic, does not rule out the possibility that  $\phi$ ’ing will no longer be anachronistic at a later time. [...] Portraying a clock as striking may, given the trend towards digital time pieces, be anachronistic in 44 B.C., not anachronistic in A.D. 1944 and anachronistic in A.D. 2044. (258 B)<sup>4</sup>

This speaks to my earlier point that anachronism depends on context just as much as it does on the object itself—that it is the linkage between artifact and setting in which anachronism truly resides. And while Barnes and Barnes believed this was a salient clarification to make about anachronism, they did not see fit to incorporate this clarification into their definition, as I have done.

Furthermore, by seeking to “indicate why some anachronisms please while others merely provoke” (260), “Time out of Joint” presents an understanding of the effects of

<sup>4</sup> Here, “ $\phi$ ’ing” is a logical shorthand referring to the anachronistic action. Also, the “person” here is not the character diegetically associated with the anachronism, but the author-figure who places it within the text.

anachronism on the reader, framed by an attempt to arrive reliably reproducible logical dicta—effectively working to free the conversation about anachronism from the murky language and idiosyncratic readings of intuitive impression.

### **Previous Scholarship and Conceptions of Anachronism**

Anachronism has been the subject of a rich history of scholarship in which it is seldom discussed. This is to say that while there are numerous essays, monographs, and studies looking into individual anachronisms (note the plural), not a lot of attention has been paid to anachronism itself (note the singular)—especially anachronism as it applies to literature, as opposed to history. The discussion of single instances eclipses and even replaces consideration of the concept. Perhaps, as suggested by the above examination of previous definitions of *anachronism*, this is because the substance of anachronism is believed to be a known and solved thing—and it is “known” to be an error. As such, anachronism is undiscussed in its own scholarship not only because instance eclipses concept.

#### *The Specter of Intent*

When I insist that literary anachronisms be read as wholly accurate depictions of a different historical reality, it may at first appear that I am saying nothing more groundbreaking than “fiction is fictional.” After all, we can read *Pride and Prejudice* with no expectation that Austen is trying to get us to believe that there was such a person as Elizabeth Bennett. We do not read *Frankenstein* as a manual for the reanimation of dead flesh, and then rail at Shelley when we fail to reproduce her title character’s results. Why

then should it be meaningful, let alone necessary, to lay out the approach to anachronism that I advance here?

The answer is that while my insistence on the diegetic non-error of anachronism may, once expressed, seem self-evident, discourse on this topic has been historically obsessed with error and intent. *Error*, as stated above, is the presumed default state of the anachronism. Sure, there may be no reason to assume that the diegetic reality *must* line up with the historic real—but that assumption has nonetheless always been in force. We may not expect there to *be* an Elizabeth Bennett, but we still insist she does not write her letters in cuneiform. When the damning error of an anachronism is detected, a beloved author may be spared perdition if a case can be made that the anachronism was placed there *by design*. Thus, *authorial intent* joins *error* in an oppositional dichotomy throughout the dialogue on anachronism. If *error* is the overarching theme of anachronism's definitions, then *intent* is the theme in its literary discussion.

Sigurd Burckhardt, in his *Shakespearean Meanings*, does not neglect Shakespeare's anachronisms. In fact, in his chapter on *Julius Caesar*, the anachronistic clock is the capstone of his reading of the play. He maintains that *Caesar* can be read as a clash between the norms of classical, Aristotelian tragedy, in which “only the tragic hero is to be killed, and the killing itself is to be a ritual, a sacrifice, formal and even beautiful,” and of later tragedies (such as *Hamlet*), involving “the curtain coming down [...] on a heap of corpses” (8). The assassination performed by Brutus and his co-conspirators is Aristotelian in its simplicity and surgical exactness. However, it is precisely because they leave Caesar's supporters alive and do not degrade his character afterwards that Mark Anthony and Augustus are able to turn the Roman populace against them. The conspirators

ultimately fail because they choose to do things the old way instead of the new way. This course of action is decided in Act II, scene ii of the play—not coincidentally (for Burckhardt) the same scene in which the anachronistic clock strikes:

That is why Shakespeare makes the clock strike at the very moment when Brutus has persuaded the conspirators to adopt the classical style for their performance. The political point of the play is not that the monarchical principle is superior to the republican—nor the reverse—but that the form of government, the style of politics, must take account of the time and temper of the people, just as the dramatist's style must. (9)

I will leave it to other scholars to determine whether it is plausible that Shakespeare was playing the subtle, meta-historical commentary games that Burckhardt ascribes to him. What is important is that *any* rationale has been assigned to the anachronism, and attributed to Shakespeare himself. In this case, Shakespeare is absolved of the “sin” of anachronism by having *intentionally* inserted the anachronistic clock at a point in the play where it would be most meaningful.

The tension that Burckhardt (and other critics) is responding to in his urgent defense is likely of a kind with that addressed by philosophy scholars Annette and Jonathan Barnes. In their aforementioned essay, they separate anachronisms into the “virtuous” and the “vicious,” depending on whether the anachronism “contributes to the work’s point” (260) or is only a “blemish” (253), respectively. Using this dichotomy, their essay seeks to form a somewhat objective demarcation between the two sorts of anachronisms. However, even when this sort of definitional rigor is not the central concern of a given critical work, the “virtuous/vicious” dichotomy is nonetheless in force. By arguing for the thematic

poignancy of the clock in *Julius Caesar*, Burckhardt is working actively to move a perceived anachronism decidedly into the “virtuous” column. But I argue that the important question is not where the line is between the virtuous and the vicious, but why there should be a vicious category at all. For the mode of reading to be explored in this dissertation, the notion of error is entirely abandoned. Error is useful for discussion when diegeses are held to the expectation of some measurable fidelity to the historic real, but once this assumption is put aside, then the corollary insistence that anachronisms are errors becomes extraneous. Consequently, in this consideration of what anachronisms communicate about the particular diegeses in which they appear, there is no pressure to ascribe an anachronism to authorial design, nor any need to defend an author when such design cannot be argued.

But this critical tendency is by no means limited to Shakespearean criticism. Writing in 2004, scholar Jeffrey Insko immediately frames “the *self-conscious* use of anachronism” as the primary narrative strategy of *Hope Leslie* (179, emphasis mine). In a pivotal scene, a Native-American character insists on her rights by echoing Patrick Henry’s famous “liberty or death” line, and then paraphrasing language from the Declaration of Independence. It is not enough for Insko that anachronisms in the novel put its seventeenth-century, Native-American heroine in conversation with the foundational political philosophies of the not-yet-formed United States of America—these anachronisms have to be declared (even if only gesturally) as willful authorial insertions. With authorial deliberateness assumed, anachronisms can be tools, self-consciously used; without this deliberateness, they are the oversights of a careless writer. Authorial intentionality is the assumed prerequisite for their meaningfulness in the text.

The problem is not that meaning should be found in anachronism. After all, each of the chapters in this dissertation is centrally interested in identifying meaningful potentialities. The problem is that meaning should always be assigned to the author—that it is assumed that the author’s will must be present to make an anachronism meaningful. In the above sample from Burckhardt, we asked to believe that it is Shakespeare, not Burckhardt, who first saw the grand, political implications of a well-placed clock chime. This is a difficult enough proposition to accept for Shakespeare, whose methods and interiority are largely unknown to us, but what does this mean to authors who left a more definite documentary footprint, and whose opinions are concretely recorded? If we must always argue authorial intent for every anachronistic reading, then it becomes impossible to read an anachronism in a manner not already contained by that author’s philosophies. Chapter Four of this dissertation will use an anachronism in *Gone with the Wind* to read that novel as an indictment of the Lost Cause narrative of the Civil War—but this would be impossible if I were forced to only read the anachronism in a manner consistent with Margaret Mitchell’s intent.

In 1985, Gayatri Spivak famously demonstrated how Jane in *Jane Eyre* was a beneficiary of the British Empire’s exploitation of indigenous peoples. To do this, Spivak was under no obligation to argue that Charlotte Brontë had carefully placed long-hidden clues, that she had intended her novel to be an indictment of empire all along. The economic realities Spivak builds on are always already in the novel; they do not require Brontë’s posthumous blessing to be meaningful, or to have the meaning that Spivak argues for them. In fact, Spivak is careful to state, at the outset of her essay, “the object of my investigation is the printed book, not its ‘author’” (244). She is able to read in Brontë’s novel a meaning

the author perhaps did not intend—a meaning which the author *may have* specifically opposed. This is an ability—a freedom—which is essential to the modern critic, but it is one that has either been denied the anachronism-interested scholar, or one that those scholars have historically abdicated. The diegetic reading of anachronism is therefore more than just a clarification of picayune theoretical details—it plays directly into critical practice. By insisting that anachronisms can have meaning without authorial intent, I am inviting future scholars to read anachronism-invested texts in ways that are not only independent of authorial intent, but opposed by an author’s known intentions and beliefs.

Even now, the preoccupation with error and intentionality persists. In a 2015 article on the source material for Shakespeare’s histories, Kathryn Jacobs and D’Andra White defend Shakespeare on charges of anachronism that had been leveled against him by none other than Ben Jonson. For Jacobs and White, Shakespeare’s anachronisms “largely disappear” (209) when we view his histories as faithful adaptations of his medieval sources—sources in which historical fidelity was spotty and anachronism common. First of all, I am not convinced that the anachronisms disappear in any degree just because they are repeated from previous sources. But more importantly, why do the anachronisms need to disappear, or be otherwise explained away (as Burckhardt explained them away)? It is as if this crime must be struck from Shakespeare’s record if he is to be allowed to continue his membership in the English Renaissance Canon.

Even critics who nominally resist the implication that anachronisms are allowable only if they are deliberate do so in ways that underscore the assumption that the presence of an anachronism is an offense requiring a beloved author to be cleared of wrongdoing. In a 2017 essay on Cormac McCarthy’s *Blood Meridian*, Robert Kottage demonstrates that a



tarot deck used in a part of that novel contains cards that would not appear in any tarot deck until about sixty years after the scene takes place. Interestingly enough, Kottage does not insist that the anachronism occasioned by those cards was intentionally placed by McCarthy. “His ‘error’ is a happy one,” he says (4), because the anachronistic cards mirror the archetypes and narratives of the main characters in ways not possible with those cards that would have been historically available. Kottage is rejecting both the insinuation that an anachronism cannot be meaningful without McCarthy’s blessing and (by use of his quotation marks) the basic assumption that anachronisms are inherently errors.<sup>5</sup>

Nonetheless, Kottage’s essay begins with a thorough articulation of McCarthy’s meticulousness as a researcher, and of the advances and discoveries that have been published in the history of cartomancy since the 1985 publication of *Blood Meridian*. Thus, we see that even though Kottage does not attempt to frame the anachronism as intentional, he does show that the historical impossibility of this tarot deck would not have been known to McCarthy (since the research that revealed it had not yet been published), and effectively implies that had the research been available, McCarthy (owing to his meticulousness) would have incorporated it into his text. And in this we may hear the same critical melodies present in Jacobs and White’s defense of Shakespeare: that the anachronisms are the fault of shoddy source material, and should not be taken as evidence of an unthinking author.

The perception that anachronisms are inherently errors leads to the corollary perception that the presence of an anachronism indicates artlessness or imprecision on the

<sup>5</sup> This is, admittedly, a generous reading of Kottage’s quotation marks. A more cynical reader may insist that the quotes do not dismiss the anachronism/error conflation, but only state that *this* anachronism is not an error, because it is consistent with the themes of the novel, and is therefore (to return to Barnes and Barnes) “virtuous.”

part of the author who penned it. In both historical and contemporary criticism, this perception often asserts itself in the form a critic's urgent need to defend the author in whose works a notable anachronism can be found—often by insisting on intentionality. In this dissertation, though, I aim to advance the scholarship on anachronism by leaving behind entirely questions of intention and error.

### *Why Assumptions Have Gone Unquestioned*

It is not surprising that basic assumptions about anachronism should go so long unquestioned. By proceeding from an assumed known definition of the word, theorists have been able to use the language of anachronism as a vehicle for bringing new insights on subjects that aren't anachronistic at all—in effect, using “anachronism” figuratively. This, I would argue, has been a relatively common usage lately, as anachronism has become a useful means of examining attitudes towards queerness and otherness. For instance, in her 2009 *Anachronism and Its Others*, Valerie Rohy uses the language of anachronism to call attention to the historical erasure of queer (and other culturally non-dominant) identities. That she labels these identitive others as anachronisms perfectly illustrates the perceptual effect of encountering these identities in periods or canons where the dominant narrative has been that they never existed. However, another part of her work in the same book is calling attention to this act of erasure *as* erasure, and thus re-historicizing these identities. Consequently, insofar as her book does this, it demonstrates that there is nothing anachronistic to her anachronisms.

Jeremy Tambling, in his 2010 *On Anachronism*, takes a very broad view of the temporal paradox, exploring many disparate literary and social concepts in terms of their

anachronistic implications. The temporal ramifications of some of these are immediately clear—such as the reordering of events in Proust or the preservation of antiquated ways of life in Dickens and Faulkner. However, so broad is Tambling’s scope that he also sees anachronism at work in the specter of madness (“since it points to a past not established on any principle of reason” [77]) and in bastardy (perhaps because it can make a second-born son into a first-born heir—as shall become immediately relevant in the chapter on *Absalom, Absalom!*).

The openness of this scope has an interesting effect on the question of anachronism, for by identifying how far the implications of anachronism reach into the foundations of literature and literary discourse, Tambling makes it very difficult to dismiss anachronism *en masse*. Consequently, though his book is not framed as an apologetic, it nonetheless implies a defense of anachronism against those who would reduce it to a lamentable error, preferably to be avoided. Insofar as Tambling’s book functions as a defense of the stylistic and structural utility of anachronism, this dissertation is a complement to that effort—though my own defense will be achieved with a much narrower scope, which will in turn demand a completely different approach. This is because the very same scope which defines Tambling’s book and makes its findings so intriguing complicates its usefulness to the present dissertation.

Applying the concept of anachronism as broadly as Tambling does necessitates a very general description of the concept, which may be better described as a “*sense* of anachronism” rather than a definition. Indeed, his book opens with the idea of “being made to *feel* anachronistic” (1, emphasis added) and seems to depend on a reader’s innate sense of when this feeling is appropriate in order to identify when the anachronistic is at work.

We are told that “anachrony starts with [...] a double perception of time” (1), but beyond that, we must make do with descriptions of what anachronism is associated with, or functions it can potentially serve. Tambling tells us that “anachronism, in literary terms, starts with Shakespeare” (5), indicates that Thomas Hardy missed an opportunity by not allowing the anachronistic (here used as an appositive to “the heterogeneous”) to help him “critique modern life” (2), and refers to how anachronism “counters a reading where events happen within a definable historical framework” (6). But he does not elucidate the concept itself. He traces the history of shifting understandings of anachronism without communicating which understanding is in force in his writing (6-9).

Furthermore, Tambling states that *anachrony* “arises from the disparity between events and their narration” (5), and this word choice is curious. *Anachrony* is a term coined by French Structuralist Gérard Genette in his 1980 book, *Narrative Discourse*, to describe the various processes by which a literary work’s *story* (the order of events as they diegetically occur) is transformed into its *narrative* (the order of events in which they are related to the reader). Genette’s wording is interesting because the term *anachrony* is close to the word *anachronism*, and yet it is not *anachronism*. Genette is inviting us to see his deformances as relative to anachronism, but does not want us to assume that they are forms of anachronism. Neither does he list anachronism as one of his anachronies. The two temporal features abut, but do not intersect. And this is what makes Tambling’s use of *anachrony* so curious, because he does not indicate how it is, for him, distinct from *anachronism*—or even if he sees any distinction at all. Indeed, he uses the two terms interchangeably throughout the book.

But returning to Tambling's scope, I do not mean to list these as faults of his intriguing book—as previously stated, an appeal to the ubiquity of literary anachronism demands this generality. But it does present a problem for the present dissertation. Reading through Tambling's book, one ceases to marvel at previously unobserved instances of the anachronistic and begins instead to wonder where the anachronistic *isn't*. His sense of the anachronistic becomes so all-encompassing that the term loses meaning for want of something to be contrasted to. Also, those scholars and readers who object to anachronism aren't objecting to the presence of fools or bastards in Shakespeare, but rather to the paradoxical and distracting presence of something ahistorical. It is by addressing this very presence explicitly that I conceive of the implicit defense of anachronism in this dissertation as a complement to that in Tambling's book, whereas this dissertation seeks to reframe the specific disruption occasioned by anachronism, and Tambling's book reframes anachronism's general presence.

### **Anachro-Diegetic Reading: A Methodology**

This dissertation advances a special kind of reading for anachronism-invested literature. This kind of reading, henceforth referred to as *anachro-diegetic* reading, begins by identifying an anachronism within a text, and then resisting any critical impulse to dismiss the anachronism as a flaw. Understandably, the “misplacement” of an event, technology, or idea in the chronology of a literary work necessarily complicates—sometimes to the point of impossibility—any attempt to marry the events and setting of a literary work with the history or cosmology of the external world of the reader (henceforth, the “historic real”), which the literary work is assumed to be an attempt to reproduce or

imitate. Instead of flaws, anachronisms are read as pledges or indicators of what is normal or historical within a specific diegesis. The text becomes a perfectly accurate depiction of a different history. By (at least temporarily) assuming a distinct and autonomous existence for the diegesis, we can consider further-reaching implications for the variance between it and the historic real, inviting a comparison of the two universes. This is the “*Yojimbo* effect” described at the end of my discussion of direction and kind: the artifact is seen as an invitation to understand the world more, rather than an excuse to value it less.

What I am proposing is in essence a very specific application of Deconstruction. In this case, the dichotomy being inverted is that which subordinates the fictional (the diegesis) to the actual (the external or historic). This act of inversion (effected through the comparison) will potentially allow new insights and forms of engagement for our texts. Like Derrida with Deconstruction, though, I make no attempt to frame anachro-diegetic reading as the culmination of theoretical practices or as a replacement for all other methods. Anachro-diegetic reading most readily pushes against the basic assumptions and practices of historicism, largely by resisting the notion that the historic real enjoys a primacy which the text can and should be incorporated into. This does not require an out-and-out rejection of historicism, just a recognition that certain views of the text (those generated by anachro-diegetic reading) will be inaccessible so long as the primacy of the historic real is assumed. Furthermore, there are understandably limits to how well any given text can respond to this reading. But while some texts will yield better results than others, anachro-diegetic reading can be performed with any literary anachronism.

As stated earlier, historicism can never be entirely absent in the study of anachronism. Regardless, the definition of anachronism I advance in this dissertation is

decidedly influenced by Post-Structuralist methodologies and narratologies. Consequently, this dissertation attempts a tight-rope walk between two camps: historicism and narratology. On the one hand, I cannot ignore the historic real in the anachro-diegetic reading of literature, because to do so would make me incapable of identifying the anachronisms on which my readings depend.<sup>6</sup> However, leaning entirely into historicism would, in this case, mean not only comparing the diegeses to the historic real (in order to identify the discrepancies) but also expecting those diegeses to conform to that real. Instead, I only want to meet historicism halfway—identifying the anachronisms but stopping short of any expectation that the presence of an anachronism presents a flawed attempt to portray real history in an accurate way.

### **The Arrangement of This Dissertation**

Each chapter of this dissertation will apply anachro-diegetic reading to a different American novel of the twentieth century: William Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom!*, Kurt Vonnegut's *Timequake*, Harry Turtledove's *The Guns of the South*, and Margaret Mitchell's *Gone with the Wind*. This is, admittedly an eclectic arrangement of texts, and the commonalities which would recommend their inclusion in the same dissertation project may not be immediately apparent. Certainly, three of these novels are invested in the Lost Cause narrative of the American Civil War, but Vonnegut's novel is not. The Faulkner and Mitchell novels both came out in the same year, but Vonnegut's and Turtledove's came out decades later. *Timequake* and *Absalom, Absalom!* both manifest a Postmodern sense of

<sup>6</sup> Exceptions to this tendency are possible but rare, as will be more explicit in Chapter Two.

play in regard to their temporalities and narrative levels, but *The Guns of the South* and *Gone with the Wind* are relatively straightforward in both regards. However, while I generally embrace the eclecticism of my selections, there is a common thread—other than their conspicuously placed anachronisms—that binds these novels together: all four of them are preoccupied with the idea of the past as a space with persistent existence—a *locus* which can be lingered in and even returned to.

This “returning” is literal in Turtledove and Vonnegut. Turtledove’s novel is a time-travel narrative involving an attempt to alter the past, and in Vonnegut’s novel the entire Universe returns to a point in time ten years previous. Returning is a *structural* concern in Faulkner, as the reader constantly revisits the same events over and over again from different perspectives, gaining new details and shades of meaning with each repetition. In Mitchell, the return to the past is an absurd fetish which drives the characters and impels the action in the latter half of the novel. At all points, the ability of the past to intrude into the present or be intruded into by the future leads us to meditate the specific forms those intrusions take—the anachronisms of interest in each text. Furthermore, these novels have also been selected to represent a broad variety of critical needs, allowing me to show the breadth of texts to which this reading can be applied and to explore the limits of the system of reading itself.

In Chapter One, reading an anachronistic slave uprising in William Faulkner’s *Absalom, Absalom!* will allow me to show the theoretical steps of anachro-diegetic reading in practice, thus making its processes and claims more clear. This chapter will also be an analysis of that Faulkner novel, and will make the case that the parachronistic placement of the colonial slavery system in Haiti, though it erases the independence of that nation,



relocates to American soil the racial reckoning engendered by the Haitian Revolution, by which relocation it is given a less ignorable face in the persons of the Sutpen clan. Whereas the first chapter is a direct application of the reading, subsequent chapters will be edge cases, working with exceptional texts whose peculiarities test and define the limits of anachro-diegetic reading.

Chapter Two will be a reading of *Timequake*, the last novel Kurt Vonnegut completed and published. Here, we will push back against the inherence of historicism in anachronism by examining an anachronism in which history is irrelevant. In this text, the temporal paradox is the result of a cosmological inconsistency. The artifact of the central anachronism in this novel is nothing less abstract than human consciousness—which, in *Timequake*, is shown to be both independent from and a product of the physical universe, simultaneously superior to and subordinate to physical laws. That consciousness should be both dependent and independent gives us the paradoxical tension of a temporal impossibility, consistent with the above definition of *anachronism*. A consideration of the anachronism in this novel consequently allows not only the discussion of a non-historical artifact, but also a test of how well this system of reading can be applied to a novel with the post-modern distrust of form and the meta-narrative consciousness that typifies Vonnegut's late works. By focusing on the text's central anachronism, I find that although *Timequake* is Vonnegut's most Postmodern novel, and thus his most resistant to easy generic assignment, the commonality of the central paradox in time-travel literature actually results in this hard-to-place text being aligned more closely within a clear genre tradition.

In Chapter Three, I will work with Harry Turtledove's 1992 time-travel novel *The Guns of the South*, which I will use to explore the challenges posed to the analysis of anachronism by the absence of agreed-upon history. Contrary to expectation, the anachronism of interest in this novel will not involve any of the artifacts rendered anachronistic by the time-travel act—these already have a diegetic explanation within the novel. Rather, the chapter will focus on ahistoric attitudes towards race which this novel presents as already existing in its Confederate characters before the initiation of the time-travel act. These attitudes constitute an artifact which is not only abstract, but contentious—given the rising popularity of the Lost Cause narrative, which seeks to diminish or eradicate the role of slavery and racist politics as factors contributing to the Civil War. Here, reading the novel's anachronism involves a careful exposure of the act of historical revision that that anachronism engenders. This is a lengthy process, and what I ultimately find in this chapter is that many discussions built on contentious anachronisms may not be worth the onerous task of setting the historical premises of that discussion. However, in this case, articulating those common revisions of the Civil War has the happy consequence of laying track for the next chapter.

The central text for Chapter Four is Margaret Mitchell's *Gone with the Wind*, which I argue is a narrative about the attempt to construct an anachronism. The artifact is the genteel, antebellum existence of Scarlett's memory—which she and her neighbors attempt (by a variety of means) to recreate in the new setting of the Reconstruction. By reading this novel as a narrative about anachronism, I will test how well anachro-diegetic reading can be applied to anachronisms that are constructed within the diegesis, by the characters, rather than by the presumed external act of an author figure. Additionally, analyzing the

mythic import of this attempted anachronism presents a means of engaging with this novel without accepting the Lost Cause assumptions that dominate its discussion and readership—thus allowing the novel to provide textual evidence that pushes back against the historical claims of its own surface narrative.

Finally, in the conclusion, I will lay out plans for my future work on anachronism: themes from this dissertation I plan to explore more fully, as well as new forms of temporal paradox that need finer definition for more specific critical needs.

CHAPTER ONE: DEMONSTRATING ANACHRO-DIEGETIC READING WITH  
WILLIAM FAULKNER'S *ABSALOM, ABSALOM!*

To make less abstract the process of reading a text in terms of the diegetic alteration enacted by its anachronisms, let us immediately demonstrate this process by applying it to an influential literary text of the American twentieth century—a text, more importantly, which has been invested with a significant anachronism. In this chapter, I read William Faulkner's 1936 *Absalom, Absalom!* in terms of an anachronism which, though easily overlooked, is significant both in terms of its contribution to the plot and its suggested variance from the historic real. In doing so, I will make anachro-diegetic reading more clear, which will then allow me to complicate the process in future chapters by working with anachronisms that test our understanding of how literary anachronisms work.

In essence, this chapter is invested in two simultaneous tasks: using anachro-diegetic reading to resolve a persistent problem with Faulkner's anachronism, and using that anachronism to resolve a persistent problem with the text. On one level, it will demonstrate the processes of anachro-diegetic reading more fully by showing those processes in action. At this level, *Absalom, Absalom!* is a more-or-less convenient text selected for its large, centrally-placed anachronism. But on another level, this chapter will also be a legitimate analysis of *Absalom, Absalom!* On this level, anachronism is a convenient lens for resolving one of the central mysteries of the novel—the enigmatic relationships and racial politics of the Sutpen clan.

Though obscured behind the novel's various narrators and interlocutors, the anachronism of *Absalom, Absalom!*, once observed, is large and decisive: a parachronism of the first kind, on a national scale. I speak of the Haitian system of colonial slavery, made

anachronistic by its diegetic appearance in 1827—twenty-three years after the termination of the Haitian Revolution, which had not only emancipated the population but also driven out the colonizers. In this chapter, I will make explicit the structural import of this anachronism, using the anatomy of anachronism laid down in the introduction. I will then gloss several critical approaches and potential readings of this anachronism, calling attention to the shortcomings of those approaches. Then, I shall begin the anachro-diegetic process in earnest—considering how the single point of variance focused on in this chapter (the anachronism of interest) demands a different history, and how this difference is meaningful for the reading of *Absalom, Absalom!*

It is the position of this chapter, arrived at by a studied consideration of the diegetic effect of the text's central anachronism, that the anachronistic continuation of Haitian slavery in this novel, rather than erasing a source of resistance to white supremacy as may at first appear, actually results in the relocation of that resistance to Yoknapatawpha County. Though these Southerners have never had to contend with the fictiveness of white supremacy in the aftermath of a successful, national-scale slave revolt, this contention is made more immediate and more destructive by its reappearance in the struggles of the Sutpen family.

### **Designing Sutpens**

At its core, *Absalom, Absalom!* is a story of origins. The novel centers on the Sutpen family, an upstart (but propertied) family that has established itself in Jefferson, Mississippi, the seat of Faulkner's ubiquitous fictional construct, the metonymous Yoknapatawpha County. In 1833, Thomas Sutpen arrives from parts unknown with little

more than a few enslaved laborers (also of unknown origin). With them, he builds his plantation, Sutpen's Hundred, and within twenty years is an economic force in the county. By the end of the novel, only seventy-six years after Sutpen had first established himself in the county, there is nothing left of the Sutpen line—even the plantation has been burned to the ground—as the fledgling dynasty collapses in the wake of a duel between Henry, Sutpen's son and heir, and Charles Bon, Sutpen's son from a previous marriage. Bon had been disinherited by his father—who refuses to even acknowledge their relationship, owing to his previous discovery that Bon's mother had had black ancestors some undisclosed number of generations prior. It is this same discovery that led him to divorce her and re-establish himself in Mississippi. Henry fatally shoots Bon on the eve of Bon's marriage to Judith Sutpen, Henry's sister (Bon's half-sister). He then flees the area to avoid execution, and only returns to Jefferson as an old man. Henry Sutpen dies in the fire that destroys Sutpen's Hundred, a fire set by Clytie (former servant to the Sutpen's, and another unacknowledged half-sister to Henry, Judith, and Charles) in order to prevent Henry's arrest.

These are, of course, only the broad strokes of the plot. And although *Absalom, Absalom!* does indeed have a memorable plot, the novel is more remembered and celebrated for its means of narration: a complex continuum of unreliable narrators, conjectural episodes, interruptions, fragmentary letters, and conflicting accounts. The reader must piece together the above story (to use Genette's term for the ordered, temporal version of the events of the novel) with these pieces through dizzying layers of mediation, reevaluating old accounts as new information comes into light.

One such piece of new information that surfaces relatively late in the novel is the mysterious origin of Thomas Sutpen: born around 1807 in that portion of Virginia that would later come to be known as West Virginia (229), young Sutpen moves with his family in 1817 to the tidewater region in eastern Virginia, where they live as tenant farmers (232). Then, in 1820, he moves again—this time leaving his family to relocate in the West Indies. In 1827, he is employed as an overseer by a family of French colonials in Haiti. The family's plantation is surrounded by enslaved laborers in revolt when, on the eighth day of the siege, Thomas Sutpen quells the uprising singlehandedly.

Not how he did it. He didn't tell that either, that of no moment to the story either; he just put the musket down and had someone unbar the door and then bar it behind him, and walked out into the darkness and subdued them, maybe by yelling louder, maybe by standing, bearing more than they believed any bones and flesh could or should [...] and then daylight came with no drums in it for the first time in eight days [...] (264-65)

This is a significant episode for three reasons: First, in recognition of this action, Sutpen is allowed to marry a daughter of the family, putting him in legal possession of other human beings—thus, this marks his transition from yeomanry to mastery. Second, after Sutpen's origins being the subject of much consternation and conjecture throughout the first two thirds of the novel, here the mystery is finally—more or less—cleared up. But third, and most important to the present chapter, is that Sutpen's actions and the slave uprising itself have inherent anachronistic import, because there was no slavery in Haiti (nor French colonials) after 1804—three years before Thomas Sutpen would even be born.

Note an important distinction: to say that the slave uprising is anachronistic is not simply a different way of saying that it is fictional. By this, I mean that the anachronistic import does not stem from the fact that it *did* not, historically happen. Instead, it is anachronistic because it *could* not happen, given the well-established, previous event of the Haitian Revolution. That Revolution, as revolutions tend to do, split the history of its locus, rendering certain conditions that existed before it impossible to replicate after it. Slavery is the chief of these precluded conditions. Thus, the continuation of slavery beyond the line drawn by the Revolution of the historic real represents the existence of something despite a temporal impossibility. To put the anachronism in terms of the anatomy I put forth in the Introduction, slavery here is the *artifact* and Haiti in 1827 is the *setting*. Haitian slavery is a thing of the past, and so we have a parachronism. What's more—although *kind* is debatable—the scale of the anachronism, and the significance of the event that would have to be different in order for events to be configured this way, leads me to conclude that this is an anachronism of the *first kind*—the impossible anachronism.

This anachronism has much to recommend it for sustained meditation and study. First of all, as stated above, it's significant to the narrative in which it appears. Also, as stated in the outset of this chapter, *Absalom, Absalom!* has a certain cultural cachet that prevents us from dismissing this novel or its curious features easily. But equally important, this anachronism is very definite. Granted, it does not hinge on a concrete artifact, such as the clock that figures into *Julius Caesar's* famous anachronism, and thus may not be as immediately visible as a more “tangible” anachronism might. But neither does it turn on a picayune point of historical detail. The Haitian Revolution was an event with political impact on a global scale: “[Sutpen's journey to Haiti] operates to deny the Haitian



revolutionary war of independence, writing out of existence the Western Hemisphere's first black national state" (Raiford 101). To say that it did not occur, then, is to consider an alteration effected by large, exaggerated movements.

#### **Four Views on an Anachronism**

There is, of course, a fourth reason why an anachronism in *Absalom, Absalom!* should be so attractive to a demonstrative chapter such as this one: given the narrative techniques, multiple perspectives, and temporal play to be found in this novel, there are multiple ways of approaching this anachronism—multiple theories to explain (or explain away) its presence. Thus, focusing on this anachronism instantly allows us to bring to bear a variety of competing readings, consequently helping us to see the effects of anachro-diegetic reading by contrast.

Of course, approaching the anachronism first requires observing it—but the divergent history of *Absalom, Absalom!* with regard to Haiti went unobserved for decades after the novel's initial publication:

Earlier critics [...]—for a generation from 1936 until the mid 1980s—had combed the novel closely enough to comment in earnest on a range of matters, even questions as arcane as the likely and recorded troop movements of the Confederate army's 23rd Mississippi Infantry, without appearing to notice that historical Haiti was missing. (Raiford 101)

But even when the political alteration of Haiti is noted, it is often dismissed. This dismissal represents the first means of engaging with the anachronism: the critic acknowledges the

divergence (though he may not label it explicitly as an anachronism), but refuses to observe how this alteration to history demands any alteration in the text's reading. We see this in an article for *New York Times Magazine*, in which John Jeremiah Sullivan says:

After Sutpen ran off to Haiti as a young man—it emerges that a humiliating boyhood experience, of hearing a black slave tell him to use the back door of a big house (he wasn't good enough for the front), had produced a shock that propelled him to flee—he married a girl there and fathered a son with her. Soon, however, he discovered that she had black blood, and that his son was therefore mixed, so he renounced them both. He sailed back to the South to become a planter. A plausible thing for a white Southern male to have done in the early 19th century.

For Sullivan, the idea of plausibility is a sufficient figleaf to cover the alteration and forestall any needful conversation about its ramifications. But more substantially, in a study on *Absalom, Absalom!* that appeared in a 1965 issue of *PMLA*, Melvin Backman glossed the history of slavery in Haiti going all the way back to Christopher Columbus. He even connected slavery to some of the prominent revolutions that influenced its development—the Commercial Revolution, in which Europe looked for new sources of exploitable resources, the American Revolution, which made the new nation of the USA one of the largest markets for enslaved labor, and the Industrial Revolution, which revitalized the cotton market and created a new demand for that labor (600). However, despite the discussion of Haitian history, Haitian slavery, and its relevant revolutions, there is no mention in the entire essay of the Haitian Revolution as a historical event—overlooked by the novel or no. The problem of an approach which does not observe anachronism is

perhaps self-evident—at least in the context of a dissertation expressly interested in engaging the ramifications of anachronism—so let us move on to a more curious view.

Our second approach is a relatively rare one, in terms of the discussion of anachronisms *as a whole*, but is an especially interesting one in the specific context of the discussion of the anachronism in *Absalom, Absalom!* Wanda Raiford's solution for the problem posed by the novel's anachronism is an interesting example of what I mean by this. For her, the best explanation for why there was no Haitian Revolution is that... there *was*, but the dominant culture is willing to forget about it—and thus remove an historical challenge to the “sanctity” of white supremacy. Though Shreve corrects Quentin's narration at various points—clarifying that there was no such Appalachian entity with the appellation *West Virginia* in 1808 (Faulkner 230), or challenging Quentin's account of whether it was Bon or Henry who was wounded at the Battle of Shiloh (360)—he does not correct him on the non-existence of Haiti as a self-governing nation-state. Haiti, after all, was a thorn in the side of the American white-supremacist mind, owing to how it challenged notions of whiteness as an essential factor in philosophical political action:

“Slaves” might tend to be impulsive, vicious, or “savage” but are constitutionally unable to use violence deliberately (or with success) as a political maneuver because to do so would transgress the boundaries of the conceptual category that contains them and by extension destroy the conjoined category of “master,” revealing it, too, to be a fraud. (Raiford 106)

For Raiford, the absence of an independent Haiti is the product of the novel's unreliable narrators more than it is a sign of a diverging history. Shreve's non-correction does not indicate any deviation at all from the historic real—it proves only that the white

protagonists in the novel are perfectly happy to support each other in the fiction of white-supremacy. That Shreve corrects Quentin in other matters lends the novel an air of accuracy; it is this faux accuracy by which Faulkner has “manipulated” readers for decades to accept his version of history—thus resulting in the incredible lateness of the anachronism’s discovery.<sup>1</sup>

Raiford’s reading—that the perceived inaccuracy of history is only a function of unreliable narration—is elegant, generative, and powerful. However, it also depends on the dismissal of the anachronism as an anachronism—though in this case, it may be more accurate to say that she is reclassifying it as an anachronism *of the third kind* (that incorrectly identified as anachronistic). This is a reading that will not always be available for anachronisms, as not all such paradoxes are conveniently accompanied by Faulkner’s narrative games. Therefore, we still need an approach that doesn’t dissolve any anachronistic import.

The third way of responding to this anachronism is insisting that it is an error. At least as regards this text, discussions that take this approach tend not to be very substantial. For instance, David Paul Ragan’s annotations to *Absalom, Absalom!* note that the presence of the enslaved is “historically inaccurate,” but does not go on to state what this inaccuracy should mean—for the text, for Faulkner, or for Faulkner studies (103). Robert Dale Parker, writing about disagreements between events in the novel and the printed chronology and genealogy that accompanies most editions similarly describes this as “an anachronism that the book never acknowledges, as it acknowledges that there was no West Virginia” (193).

<sup>1</sup> In Chapter Three of this dissertation, we will see again how fidelity in minor details covers for deviation or revision in larger things.

He quickly moves on to discuss the conflicting dates on Charles Bon's tombstone. Though he poses theories as to why those dates should conflict, he does not similarly speculate on the roots of the massive anachronism he has just glossed over. Likely, both scholars assume the deviation from history to be an error, and though neither comes right out and says, "Faulkner was mistaken," they both change the subject with uncharacteristic urgency. Perhaps this urgency suggests their unwillingness to address the obvious "truth" that a major author of the American canon had been spoiled by gross anachronism.

The fourth approach is not appreciably different from the third, even though it would seem to be its opposite. This is the insistence that the anachronism must be intentional—often accompanied by compelling textual or biographical evidence. Richard Godden adroitly resists the error reading of *Absalom, Absalom!*, which he had seen as prevalent in his day (685),<sup>2</sup> but does so in a way that does not ultimately *refute* it:

In the South, Haiti is synonymous with revolution, and whether that be positively or negatively viewed it is not something about which Southern authors with an interest in antebellum history lightly make mistakes. Moreover, the evidence of *Absalom, Absalom!* suggests that Faulkner knows more than enough about San Domingo to put its revolution in the right century. He knows that Haitian soil is a cemetery on the grandest scale. [...] Faulkner notes that the earth, "manured with black blood from two hundred years of oppression and exploitation [...] cried out for vengeance. " He knows that French planters were leading purchasers in the

<sup>2</sup> So transformative were Godden's observations about anachronism in *Absalom, Absalom!* that most Faulkner scholars simply quote his essay as sufficient evidence for the prevalence of error-readings and the lateness of the anachronism's discovery.

eighteenth century slave trade [...] It is likely that he knows that Vodûn (voodoo) was the initial language of revolt on San Domingo (during the days prior to the insurrection, Sutpen finds signs made from pigs' bones, feathers and rags, signs which he does not recognize as such), and that the French territory was adjacent to a Spanish colony (Sutpen's mother-in-law "had been a Spaniard"). Knowing even part of this, he surely knows "1791." (686).

Here, Godden gives an exhaustive defense of Faulkner, but ultimately his position is not that the absence of an independent Haiti is not an error—it is only that Faulkner made the error intentionally. But we will return to this point in a moment.

What is interesting, but by no means curious, is that in the article in which the above appears, Godden is not interested in examining the anachronism as a form of temporal displacement (which can be a strong question for Faulkner). His primary interest is Sutpen's efforts to transcend his working-class origins by passing into the master class—particularly Sutpen's active resistance to admitting that his social advancement is the product of black labor. For Godden, the anachronism of Haitian slavery is simply a means of easing Sutpen's transition—of making him able to effect it by an act of individual will and talent. In this, we hear shades of Sullivan's simplistic "plausibility." Godden acknowledges the anachronism, defends Faulkner's use of it, but the anachronism itself is only a means of transitioning into a different discussion. His argument does not depend on the anachronism, and his reading of *Absalom, Absalom!* does not depend on a historically different Haiti.

Both of these previous readings—assertions of error and insistence on intentionality—though they appear to be polar opposites in their approaches are in fact two

variations on the same idea. In both cases, the implication is that we read the text *in spite of* its anachronism. We are always supposed to know the *true* history which the text fails to replicate. The only difference between error and intent is whether we have to compromise our belief in the author's creative genius. The problem with these approaches is not one of factuality. Logically speaking, one of them has to be right: the alteration of Haiti must result from Faulkner's oversight (whether *oversight* is defined as "overlooking" or "careful management"). The problem is that both of these approaches assume that the most important factor in anachronism, as a literary feature, is authorial agency.

It is an article of faith among New Critics that every literary work (or, at least, the "good" ones) has a discrete meaning that can be arrived at through close reading—to the exclusion of historical context, readerly bias, or authorial intent. This assumption would be most rigidly codified by later New Critics W. K. Wimsatt and M. C. Beardsley in their 1946 essay "The Intentional Fallacy"—which has since given its name to the concept of an undue emphasis on the intentions of an author as a determiner of literary interpretation.

On the other end of the theoretical spectrum, we have Roland Barthes (at least, when he had entered his Post-Structuralist phase). In his 1968 "The Death of the Author," Barthes also rejects the primacy of authorial agency in literary interpretation. The source of his objection is diametrically opposed to that of the New Critics. For Barthes, there *is* no discrete meaning, stable and universal, to any text—and an author's declaration of intent does not change this.

Here we have two, vastly different theoretical models, but they are united on two points: First, they both reject "What did the author mean by doing X?" as a worthwhile question. Second, they both originate in the twentieth century. If a critic cannot discuss an

anachronism without first settling whether an author-figure has planned that anachronism then, at least as far as the anachronism is concerned, it's as if none of the theoretical movements of the twentieth century ever happened. No matter what lens the critic is engaged with—Postcolonial theory, Queer theory, Deconstruction—when it comes to discussing the anachronism, the critic must (at least momentarily) part from his assumptions and make quick obeisance to pre-New Critical assumptions about the primacy of the writer as an all-knowing *auteur*.<sup>3</sup>

Anachro-diegetic reading, by providing a means of reading anachronism that does not depend on forces external to the text, thus can be a useful tool to those scholars who wish to discuss anachronism without compromising the cohesion of their theoretical or critical frameworks. Also, it can allow anachronisms to be interpreted in ways completely inconsistent with an author's philosophies or political designs. In short, it can make a work work against its creator.<sup>4</sup> Although, as indicated in the Introduction, this method is at its core an act of deconstruction; the process itself is syncretic, and can be used with any critical lens or theory (in theory). But to better illustrate how this approach can work—for whatever critical model is important to the critic—let me now demonstrate how examination of *Absalom, Absalom!* in terms of an anachronism that alters the narrative reality of the novel led me to see how the novel relocates the South's reckoning with its own understanding of whiteness.

<sup>3</sup> Consequently, the discussion of anachronism, in a theoretical sense, has itself been kept anachronistic. If you find this observation a little too precious or on-the-nose, surely you understand why I had the good taste to hide it in a footnote.

<sup>4</sup> This will be particularly relevant in Chapter Four, where an anachronism in *Gone with the Wind* allows us to push back against that novel's surface narrative and historical revisions.



### **Incident, Reckoning, and Fortification (a Fifth View)**

Once the anachronism of interest has been identified, reading it diegetically involves projecting from what is known (the observed alteration of the anachronism) to the most likely and relevant implications of that alteration. In this case, as previously indicated in introducing the anachronism, we may consider the effect the Haitian Revolution had on the white, slaveholding class of the American South—the same class Sutpen is so eager to join in the novel. For the purposes of this chapter, we may consider the Haitian Revolution as an *incident* which invited a historic *reckoning* with contemporary models of whiteness—a reckoning that was deliberately avoided in America by *fortifying* those legal frameworks which made whiteness politically meaningful.

#### *In the Historic Real*

In the historic real, one effect of the Revolution was a notable anxiety regarding Haiti as a model for black action amongst the enslaved population of America.

The Haitian revolution had lasting consequences for the slave holding states of the South where, during the 1790s, white panics about slave revolts were endemic. [...] Gabriel Prosser in 1800, Denmark Vessey in 1822, Nat Turner in 1831; to turn to the major North American black rebellions is to discover allusions to Haiti. Nor does the Haitian example fade with the onset of Civil War; in 1864, in Natchez, ex-slave Mississippi soldiers in the Union Army reacted violently when the city's military commander tried to force freedmen to work abandoned plantations: a

Northern missionary, S. G. Wright, “trembled” fearing “blood equalling the day of vengeance in the island of Hayti.” (Godden 685)

As articulated by Raiford in her analysis of Faulkner’s Haiti, one of the most salient features, historically, of the Haitian Revolution was “violence used deliberately (or with success) as a political maneuver” (106). This is why Raiford sees Faulkner’s erasure of Haiti as a self-governing nation-state as particularly heinous—erasing the Revolution doesn’t erase resistance among the enslaved, but it does erase a path to success for that resistance through organized, political action. What’s more, it erases the black man as a fully aware political actor on the international stage. Without the possibility of organized, political action among enslaved blacks (a possibility that Haiti proves), then those acts of resistance will only ever be “savagery” (105). For the white slaveholding class, the Haitian Revolution is a dangerous precedent not because of its violence, but because of the political implications of its organization.

We may consider this political anxiety as a reckoning of whiteness: the white America of history was forced to grapple with their underlying philosophies of political whiteness—namely that whiteness was a necessary factor for political statesmanship: That Haiti can claim its political independence from its European authority—only a quarter century after the Americans themselves had done this—shows white America that it is not unique in its desire for self-government or its ability to effect change through concerted, directed effort. But should the slaveholding class acknowledge this, what happens to their justifications of slavery? Many of them were rooted in a model of white supremacy in which the white man, alone in his ability to see “the big picture” or to fully understand the world, was under the “burden” to direct “lesser races” on the path to civilization—or at the

very least to protect them from themselves. But if Haiti is accepted, and the black political self is legitimated, then assumptions about the need for the white man to lead are shown to be groundless. The legal, social, and political distinctions between white and black are exposed as arbitrary. It is this exposure that is at the heart of the reckoning of whiteness.

Historically, this reckoning did not result in an alteration of those definitions to account for the complication afforded by the incident of the Revolution. Instead, it resulted in the enactment of several laws meant to limit the influence of events in the West Indies on enslaved populations stateside:

In the aftermath of 1791, North Carolina passed a law prohibiting the entry of all West Indian slaves over the age of fifteen, for fear that they might incite a general slave rebellion; three years later (1798) Governor Samuel Ashe, “Seeking to suppress the ideology of the Haitian Revolution” issued a proclamation urging that the landing of all negroes from the islands be stopped. To suspend the importation of bodies is not to block news of their acts; as late as 1840, slaves in South Carolina were interpreting information from Haiti as a projection of their own freedom. (Godden 688)

These new laws are, in effect, large-scale rejections of the reckoning. Instead of reconsidering their politics of race, the Americans fortified whiteness—shoring it up against the onslaught of new developments and facts that would compromise it.

*In the Diegesis*

On the historical effect of the Revolution on political whiteness, Raiford and I agree—although the precise language of incident/reckoning/fortification is my own. Where we part is our reaction to the anachronism of interest in *Absalom, Absalom!*: She sees Faulkner's treatment of Haiti as an erasure, wholly consistent with the protection of white-supremacy as a fantasy of power. Conversely, my insistence that there has been an alteration effected by the anachronism implicitly rejects her reading that the apparent absence of an independent Haiti is only a polite fiction among white gentlemen. I also do not see this alteration as an act of erasure to the degree that Raiford insists it is. After all, the historical fortification of whiteness was already an attempt to erase Haiti. While the novel's reimagination of Haiti, in some ways, extends this erasure, most of that work had already been done before Faulkner's novel came on the scene. Instead, I maintain that the novel's anachronism enables the reckoning of whiteness to be *repositioned*.

The historical incident was distant and abstract, and this allowed its reckoning to be easily forestalled in a way that kept the challenge abstract to most of the population. The diegesis gives us something completely different. Here, the incident occurs on America's shores, among America's populations (free and enslaved). Since the reckoning is not brought about in a distant space with an unseen people, it is much harder to contain with political fortification. Though this fortification does, finally, occur, it does not occur in a way that lets the Sutpens turn a blind eye to it; they must actively participate in the act of fortification, and thus on some level be aware of the concealment of their actions, instead of having a system of laws enacted on their behalf that allows them to passively disengage from the challenge to their notions of whiteness. Furthermore, since the reckoning is

brought about in a diegesis without a political Haiti, it occurs in an America where whiteness has not been already fortified. After all, Sutpen imports West Indian slaves in 1833 despite the historical instance of laws that would have contravened this, indicating that none of the strictures limiting West Indian influence are in place. The diegetic America of *Absalom, Absalom!* has not inoculated itself against potential complications of white/black power binaries, and thus is more vulnerable to the disruption occasioned by the exposure of those binaries' arbitrariness.

Here, the incident is made manifest in a single person—Charles Bon, Sutpen's unacknowledged son with his technically black Haitian wife. He invites a reckoning with whiteness by moving freely within white society, earning his acceptance through a series of milestones that mirror his father's social climb, and consequently challenging the assumption that he should be limited in his talents and successes by his race. The diegetic fortification is found in Thomas and Henry Sutpen's persistent refusal to acknowledge or validate Bon in his social progresses (once his racial categorization is known). Although the historic process of incident/reckoning/fortification has been suppressed by the anachronism, that same anachronism allows the process to be reimagined on a smaller scale—which in turn makes it more emotionally immediate, swifter, and more visible. The near-final collapse of the Sutpen family is a direct result of their unwillingness to leave off a troubling obsession with heredity and race—just as the South itself is in the process of a similar collapse brought on by a similar refusal.

At the heart of this reckoning is the idea of miscegenation. It is not unusual to read *Absalom, Absalom!* in these terms: For Lennart Björk, miscegenation is “perhaps the most important factor” that distinguishes the “Southern curse” in the novel from the Davidic

counterpart in the biblical story of Absalom (200). Julie Beth Napolin reads “miscegenation and interracial desire” as “the foundational and collective repression of the world of *Absalom*” (176). And according to Daniel Spoth, it was the twin themes of miscegenation and Faulkner’s agrarianism that led Nazi censors to allow the book’s publication in Germany (246). However, anxieties over sexual relations across racial lines are insufficient to account for the challenge to models of whiteness posed by Bon. Were the specter of miscegenation enough, then this challenge could have been brought about by Clytie.

Clytie (short for Clytemnestra) is Thomas Sutpen’s daughter with one of the enslaved Haitians he brings with him to build Sutpen’s Hundred. Although she is the offspring of a white father and a black, enslaved mother, she does not create the disturbance in Yoknapatawpha that her half-brother later will. This is because she is visibly black, and born to a mother who is also visibly black. She is also socially black which, in Antebellum Jefferson means she is enslaved. In keeping with the laws of the period, the free-or-enslaved condition of the child is determined by the condition of the mother. Since the mother is enslaved, the daughter is as well. Thus, Clytie is easily placed in a role that conforms with the slaveholding society’s expectations of the “natural” role of races. Clytie poses no significant challenge to this society, and she disrupts none of its categories.

Bon, on the other hand, disrupts racial expectations at every turn. Even before his birth, Bon is inextricably bound in the exposure of race as a meaningless categorization, for just as Clytie inherits the condition of her mother, so too does Bon inherit the condition of his. Thomas Sutpen is surprised to learn that his first wife, Bon’s mother, has a black ancestor. If Sutpen has been told how many generations back this ancestor was, that information does not get to the reader. We only ever learn that his first wife was “part

negro” (371). Sutpen retroactively sees his wife’s passing as a trick—a fiendish and deliberate deception. But it is more than her ancestry that has been revealed: She was able to pass as white, hold property as white, enter into a marriage contract as a white woman. And, tellingly, Sutpen seems to have encountered no visual indicators of blackness. That she should look white and function in society as white yet meet Sutpen’s definition of blackness challenges Sutpen with a question of whether that definition has any real basis, and if the racial categories that he is so fixated on have any meaning. Sutpen answers this challenge by avoiding it—leaving for Mississippi and nullifying the marriage (mentally, if not legally). And in this avoidance we see a parallel to the actions of the historic South—a fortification of Sutpen’s whiteness effected *individually* instead of nationally. The reckoning is beginning, and in this temporality, it is *personal*.

Sutpen is not allowed to persist in avoiding this reckoning, for it returns to him in the person of Charles Bon. The marriage plot between Bon and Judith makes this process explicit by forcing us to ask three questions: First of all, why does Charles even pursue a union with a woman whom he knows to be his half-sister? Second, why does Colonel Thomas Sutpen take none of the easy actions that would instantly obviate the union without the death of Bon or the exile of Henry? Third, why should Henry only resist the union when he learns Bon’s arbitrary racial category? The answer to all three of these questions is the same: Charles Bon’s marriage to a white woman—especially a white member of the Southern aristocracy—will constitute his final legitimization as his father’s heir and (more importantly) as a white man. This would consequently break down the white/black demarcation in which the Sutpens (and the South [and America]) are so invested in policing, and would be tantamount to the completion of their reckoning with whiteness.

First let us examine Charles Bon himself, who, as the incident incarnate, performs the same function of the erased Haitian Revolution from the historic real. His personal advancement *should* invite the Sutpens' reckoning with their notion of whiteness. Coming up from Haiti, entering Southern society with no father to recommend or introduce him (like his father before him), Bon's ability to move among the elites at the University of Mississippi, to be approved of by Ellen Coldfield-Sutpen as a suitable match for her daughter, shows an ability to gain acceptance that is apparently uncomplicated by an ancestry Thomas Sutpen (and later, Henry) finds problematic.

In his military service, Bon not only secures an additional form of acceptance by the community—he does so nearly simultaneously with his father. All the “Sutpen” men rush off to join the Confederate army, and though they may not do so with patriotic aspirations as their leading motivations, nonetheless this service marks them as men committed to the South and decidedly part of Yoknapatawpha as a Southern community.<sup>5</sup> While serving, Thomas Sutpen is elevated to the rank of Colonel, thus achieving an ersatz *title*. What's more, he does not come to this rank by appointment, but by election. Thus, his rank is an indicator of community approval—a recognition on the part of the Twenty-third Mississippi that he is one of them. With Bon, the elevation is again of a humbler sort—after all, he is only made lieutenant. Regardless, it is telling that in his promotion, Bon is elevated above his half-brother, Sutpen's acknowledged heir, who is still only a private. Here, we see not only another step in Bon's advancement towards legitimacy, but

<sup>5</sup> Contrast this with Goodhue Coldfield, Thomas Sutpen's father-in-law, who makes himself an outsider in Jefferson by first closing his store (so that it will not supply the Confederate army), and then locking himself away in it (so that he cannot be forced to serve).



also a partial restoration of birth order, with Bon—Sutpen’s firstborn—holding a higher rank than the second son.

But Charles Bon’s most audacious bid for legitimacy is the one he never completes—and that is his pursuit of Judith’s hand in marriage. At least by the time he joins the army, if not before, Bon knows he is the son of Colonel Thomas Sutpen. Consequently, he also knows of his relationship to Judith. His father, who named Charles Bon, is also aware of both relationships. By pursuing Judith under the nose of their father, Charles Bon is challenging Thomas Sutpen to a family game of chicken, with the approach of the marriage to Judith serving as the stretch of highway along which they both race towards each other. Thomas Sutpen can prevent his daughter’s incestuous marriage at any point by simply acknowledging Charles as his son. Even the slightest form of acknowledgement—not even public or formal—would be enough to satisfy Charles, desperate for any kind of recognition from his father:

*He would just have to write ‘I am your father. Burn this’ and I would do it. Or if not that, a sheet a scrap of paper with the word ‘Charles’ in his hand, and I would know what he meant and he would not even have to ask me to burn it. Or a lock of his hair or a paring from his finger nail and I would know them because I believe now that I have known what his hair and his finger nails would look like all my life, could choose that lock and paring out of a thousand. (341)*

Sutpen doesn’t do any of these, at least not to Charles. He *does* tell Henry that Bon and Judith mustn’t marry, and tells him also that Bon is his son. But he takes no direct and public action against the union personally, leaving Henry to sort that out for himself.

Sutpen's inactivity makes sense when you consider that whether he acknowledges his first-born or not, Charles will win this game: If Sutpen doesn't acknowledge him, then there is no impediment to the marriage, and Charles gains the legitimacy of a society bride—much as Thomas had previously achieved the same legitimacy by marrying Ellen Coldfield. If, however, Sutpen does acknowledge (even privately) that Charles Bon is his son, then Charles once again wins by gaining the paternal recognition he ostensibly seeks. It isn't just obstinacy on Thomas Sutpen's part, though, that keeps him from yielding to his firstborn here. Rather, it is his awareness that either eventuality in this scenario, if allowed to proceed to its logical conclusion, will fatally complicate the notions of race that he and his burgeoning empire are so invested in.

It is, admittedly, difficult to see how acknowledging Bon as his son is a complication on the same order of magnitude as Bon marrying Judith. In ludic terms, it may appear that acknowledging Bon's parentage would be the "winning" move here for Sutpen. For by acknowledging the paternity, Sutpen could quite possibly undo all the forms of community acceptance that Charles had achieved. Charles would suddenly be "known" to be black, and the marriage to Judith by which he would gain legitimacy would be prevented. It is not at first apparent how acknowledging Charles as his son will be destructive to Sutpen's design of an aristocratic legacy—after all, Charles Bon is not Thomas Sutpen's only "black" child. Clytie is known to be his daughter, and this has not been his ruination. But Clytie, as discussed above, does not complicate the convenient fictions of race the way her half-brother Charles does. Clytie does not pass for white, nor does she fill the social role of a white woman. She does not challenge the categories of race—she has inherited the condition of her mother, as is the law, and the irrelevant

condition of her father does not obviate this inheritance. Charles, meanwhile, has successfully passed as a white man—even been elevated to a position of trust, honor, and authority by his community. Though exposing him as black would be to the short-term advantage of Thomas Sutpen, it would retroactively expose the myth of white supremacy. In the slaveholding society Bon successfully navigates for so long, his negligible blood quantum *should have* rendered him incapable of success or acceptance. In a white-supremacist model of race theory, this genealogy should have a deleterious effect. That it has no such effect on Bon or his social movement should be a fatal complication to that model. In this way, Bon's movement in Mississippi society should invite a reckoning with notions of whiteness.

In forcing his father to intervene, Charles Bon is also forcing his father to acknowledge a *need* to intervene. By this I mean, he is forcing Thomas Sutpen to acknowledge that his technically black son has it in his power to achieve everything his father has achieved—thus that his blackness does not inherently limit his ability to achieve his designs through concerted effort. Were Sutpen to cancel Bon's social advancement by saying, "This is my son, and he is black," then he would not only be acknowledging the relationship, but acknowledging that the impediment to black advancement must come from externally applied social constructs—that the inability to succeed is not a concomitant trait of race.

It is precisely precipitating this dilemma that is Charles Bon's aim—this is the reckoning. Sutpen's refusal to offer any direct impediment to his son's progress mirrors historic America's refusal of its own reckoning. But whereas the historic act of fortification consisted of the enactment of a system of laws to delay dealing with the problem of Haiti,

Sutpen's contribution toward the fortification of his own notions of whiteness takes the form of his foisting the dilemma on his son Henry. Thus, he absolves himself of the burden of grappling with this alteration of definitions, and he breaks the stalemate with Charles.

Having considered Bon's and Sutpen's motivations, let us now look to Henry, who breaks their stalemate by murdering his brother. His participation in this system of incident/reckoning/fortification is bound up in his continuing support for the design of Charles and Judith's marriage. One of the most curious features of this "courtship" is how race forces Henry to resist it after two other complications—bigamy and incest—completely fail to do so. Of course, as we shall see, the reason for this is that neither bigamy nor incest challenges contemporary notions of whiteness and blackness—only miscegenation does.

Traveling with Bon in New Orleans, Henry learns that his friend is already married to an unnamed "octoroon"—a woman with a single black great-grandparent. Furthermore, he learns that Bon has a son with her. This disrupts Henry's designs to let his best friend marry his sister, but this disruption is only momentary. Henry is able to get past it by deciding that, given the perceived racial disparity between Charles Bon and his "mistress," the marriage is not legal—and thus there will be no bigamy. Henry's only lasting bone of contention is that Charles has gone through a marriage *ceremony* which, though apparently meaningless, gives an air of legitimacy and preferment to the mother of his child.<sup>6</sup> But this is a minor quarrel that does not result in Henry's opposition to Bon's engagement to Judith, because the familiar racial categories are allowed to persist.

<sup>6</sup> By dismissing the legitimacy of Bon's marriage, Henry replicates his father's informal annulment of his union to Bon's mother—as does Bon himself in his pursuit of Judith.

The next challenge is more serious, and cannot be waved away so easily by legal technicality. I speak of the incest that will occur between Bon and Judith, should their relationship be allowed consummation. When Sutpen informs Henry of his relationship to Charles Bon, this revelation is more troubling to Henry than had been the discovery of Bon's marriage, yet still does not result in him exposing the relationship to Judith or otherwise demanding the wedding's immediate cancellation—as his father had insisted at the time of the revelation. Troubling as it is, this new knowledge only pushes Henry to delay making any decisions about it for four years—his and Bon's period of service in the Civil War.

Of course, on some level Henry is aware that it would be perhaps hypocritical for him to oppose the union on the grounds of incest, because incest (along with a latent homosexual desire) was one of his initial motivations for approving the courtship:

In fact, perhaps this is the pure and perfect incest: the brother realising that the sister's virginity must be destroyed in order to have existed at all, taking that virginity in the person of the brother-in-law, the man whom he would be if he could become, metamorphose into, the lover, the husband; by whom he would be despoiled, choose for despoiler, if he could become, metamorphose into the sister, the mistress, the bride. (98)

Henry's incestuous desires are not a complication to the Sutpens' unwillingness to reckon with the concept of their own whiteness. They are, in fact, the extreme application of the obsession with racial purity that motivates that unwillingness. After all, what, in simplest terms, *is* incest except an extreme form of policing bloodlines? Yoknapatawpha County is a community concerned with pedigree. We see this in the consternation Sutpen's unknown

parentage causes on his arrival, and how he finally achieves lasting acceptance when he marries a woman from a known (and accepted) family. In a setting so concerned with pedigree, and in a narrative where parentage can be so easily made suspect, incest becomes a safe genealogical bet. It represents the union of two known quantities.

Thus, the incest itself does not disqualify the union in Henry's eyes—though the social effects of such a marriage do give him pause. Like his father before him, though, he deals with a difficult philosophical question by avoiding it completely. In this case, that avoidance takes the form of military service. When he and Bon go off to fight in the Civil War, they are effectively entering into a suicide pact whereby death ends the moral conundrum: Should Henry die, he is absolved of any responsibility to act. The wedding may still occur, but Henry will not have contributed to it. Should Bon die, then there will be no wedding, and again Henry needn't act. Unfortunately, the universe is not so obliging as Henry would have hoped, and both men survive the war. Still, as the war draws to a close, Henry directs Bon to write a letter to Judith telling him he is well—implying that Henry has on some level made peace with his own conflicting feelings about incest.

However, when Colonel Thomas Sutpen tells Henry that Charles Bon's mother had a black ancestor (again, the number of generations between her and this ancestor is not expressed), and thus that Charles is black in the eyes of the law, Henry's response is relatively immediate—for it is shortly thereafter that Henry shoots Bon dead. Race has managed to rouse his opposition in a way that law and blood had failed to do.

But even though Henry's final action is *direct*—shooting his brother and best friend in cold blood—it still does not constitute an act of engaging with the reckoning of whiteness that Bon demands. Murdering Bon is simply another way of avoiding the

question—the incident that brought up the moral dilemma has been removed, and even though the philosophical questions raised by his presence still remain, there is no persistent incident forcing anyone to reckon with those questions, allowing the characters to continue as if the questions had never been asked. Historically, this act of concealment was effected by forbidding the importation of enslaved West Indians. Diegetically, it is brought about through the death of an individual. But both amount to the same thing—a refusal to grapple with serious challenges to the philosophical underpinnings of white supremacy.

So it is that, while an anachronism removes Haiti as a political entity from the narrative reality of *Absalom, Absalom!*, it does not necessarily erase Haiti's political effect. Instead, it causes that effect to be reimagined in terms the American reader is less able to ignore—the intergenerational struggles of an American family on American soil. Of course, if the Sutpens are here performing the role of the historic United States, it is troubling that they should not pursue a different outcome. Instead, like America, the Sutpens consistently avoid reckoning with their notions of whiteness, choosing to fortify those notions instead. Consequently, at first blush it may seem that the diegetic reimagination of Haiti's political effect has not advanced the conversation. Rather, it has only restated the initial problem. However, letting these struggles play out in the lives of individuals instead of slow-moving nations allows the cycles of incident/reckoning/fortification to play out more quickly. Thus, the narrative is not mere replication. By moving more quickly, the narrative can also prognosticate.

Therefore, the collapse of the Sutpen line becomes a warning—a grim prophecy of what shall befall America if America does not give up its systems of pedigree and

categorization. The family turns incestuously inward, brother murders brother, and every last physical reminder of its former splendor burns down to the ground.

The anachronism of Haiti is not some mere tangent to this reading. The interpretation that I have extrapolated here depends on the novel's notable divergence from the historic real. Without the continuation of colonial slavery in Haiti, Sutpen neither can transcend his humble origins, nor does he have his first encounter with the reckoning of his whiteness. Without the non-American space afforded by a still-Colonial Haiti, there are no parts unknown to give us Charles—that philosophical complication made manifest.

This has been a demonstration of anachro-diegetic reading as a process—here occasioned by a fairly inarguable anachronism—which is to say, an anachronism that is not only easily seen, but which fits very neatly with the definition of anachronism laid out in the introduction. In the following chapters, I shall apply this process to more complicated anachronisms—ones that challenge various parts of the definition. Of course, I shall not be so explicit in the various steps and phases of anachro-diegetic reading as I have been here. I shall, instead, focus on those alterations necessitated by exceptional anachronisms. In doing so, I shall give my method an acid-test, and demonstrate its applicability, even to problematic texts.



## CHAPTER TWO: ANACHRONISM WITHOUT HISTORY IN KURT VONNEGUT'S *TIMEQUAKE*

Having made the process of anachro-diegetic reading more explicit in the previous chapter, we shall now begin considering ways in which more complicated anachronisms lead to a more complicated process of reading. The first complication is a curious one: the anachronism that does *not* depend on historicism for its discovery. The definition of anachronism laid out in the Introduction refers to a “temporal impossibility or unlikeness” for the setting to contain the artifact. This usually takes the form of a deviation from the historic real—as we explored in the last chapter—but it doesn’t have to. Although it is a comparatively rarer manifestation of anachronism, it is possible to have a temporal paradox that results from an internal inconsistency. This chapter will detail how such an anachronism differs from the historically-focused one, and how it complicates our approach.

One such anachronism is to be found in Kurt Vonnegut’s final novel, *Timequake*. Here, the temporal positioning of the artifact does not generate a paradoxical tension by deviating from the historic real, but by indicating an inconsistency in the novel’s own declared cosmology. The inconsistency is this: The setting is a strictly material existence governed by scientific determinism, but human consciousness (our artifact) is both independent of this determinism *and* subject to it. That consciousness should simultaneously manifest these logically mutually exclusive states gives us the temporal paradox that constitutes *Timequake*’s anachronism. Consequently, this is the rare anachronism for which historicism is practically irrelevant.

The anachro-diegetic reading of this paradox is further complicated by Vonnegut's specific Postmodern approach, which, in the tradition of his earlier *Slaughterhouse-Five* and *Galápagos*, skirts the edges of the fantastic, problematizing the assignment of *Timequake* to a widely recognizable genre. Essentially, *Timequake* is a novel that enjoys its paradoxes, and mobilizes them specifically to prevent the easy identification of the fictional, the real, and the line between them. Thus, resolving one of these paradoxes—even the temporal one at the very core of the novel—will not yield a stable diegetic reality as it will in other works.

However, this is not to say that anachro-diegetic reading cannot be applied to *Timequake*, or that it will have no effect. By focusing on the central anachronism of the novel, we can see that the temporal paradox in *Timequake* is consistent with a similar physics/awareness disconnect that is not only common but also tropic in popular time-travel narratives. Thus, despite Vonnegut's resistance to being labeled an author of science-fiction, *Timequake*'s central paradox effectively *resists* this resistance—making *Timequake* more noticeably a science-fiction time-travel novel in spite of its occlusive Postmodern flourishes.

### **The Tropic Recurrence of Awareness, Paradox, and Awareness Paradoxes**

Although it may sound incredibly specific, even unique, to describe a temporal paradox in which consciousness and matter operate under conflicting rules, such dualistic cosmologies are in fact quite common in time-travel narratives. In some narratives, human consciousness is the deciding factor of whether a paradox will even occur. One common paradox is the Bootstraps Paradox—a form of predestination paradox wherein an object

can exist without being created. For instance, in William Tenn's "The Discovery of Morniel Mathaway," an art historian travels back in time to meet his idol, Morniel Mathaway, only to discover that there is no such person, and that he has become stranded in the past. He decides to start painting and ends up *becoming* the Morniel Mathaway he had been studying. Now, if Mathaway can only come to exist because someone in the future has studied Mathaway, this raises the question of where the *original* Mathaway could have come from—hence the paradox. But the art historian has a bad memory, and since he doesn't have a clear recollection of the works of Morniel Mathaway, and is in fact making a conscious effort to create something *original* in his own art, Mathaway's paintings are not exactly copies of themselves with no original (even if Mathaway himself is). If the historian had an intact *awareness* of past events, the bootstraps paradox would be inescapable, but his memory lapses lessen the paradox. Thus, the quality of his awareness in this story is a determining factor of whether paradox occurs, or at least to what degree.

We can also see this in the most famous Bootstraps Paradox story, Robert A. Heinlein's "By His Bootstraps," in which the protagonist is abducted to the future by a mysterious old man called Diktor, who trains him in government theory and the operation of his time machine. The protagonist escapes Diktor and sets himself up in a time of his own, where he becomes the leader of a tribe of future folk who have no ability to govern themselves. As their leader, he is given the title of *diktor* and leads them into a golden age (and as an old man, sets in motion the machinations of his own temporal abduction). Though we can see the Bootstraps Paradox at work in the actions of protagonist-Diktor, the various younger versions of himself who interact with each other throughout the story are too sleep-deprived, drunk, angry, obstinate, or concussed to truly grasp what's going

on around them. Thus, while the story hinges on a central predestination paradox, the lesser paradoxes that should result from the younger protagonist's actions (in his various manifestations) are again lessened—as he is not fully aware of the temporal context of his actions, he can act without consciously trying to fulfill a predestined path that depends on his willful engagement.

The importance of this carefully maintained ignorance can be seen in some of those works in which “the due course of events” is knowingly subverted by a character. In “Father’s Day,” a 2006 episode of the new run of *Doctor Who*, the Doctor’s companion, Rose, knowingly prevents the accidental death of her father. This causes a collapse of the cosmological norms, owing to a sort of causal feedback loop: Since Rose’s father doesn’t die, she is not compelled to travel back in time to prevent his death. If she doesn’t have this compulsion, and thus doesn’t travel back, then his death is not prevented. Repeat *ad infinitum*. *Doctor Who*, meanwhile, is a time-travel show that first premiered in 1963 and went until 1989 in its original run. In those twenty-six years of adventures (and in thirteen years since the start of the new run), the Doctor and his companions do not just sit on the sidelines, watching things occur—they engage with the period and its people, preventing catastrophes. Yet paradox never occurs until “Father’s Day,” part of the first season of the new run. The difference is that in all of those other stories, the characters act in ignorance of what the “due course of events” is supposed to be for the adventure they have found themselves in. Even if they have some vague notion of the period they find themselves in (as is the case in the masterful 1963 storyline, “The Aztecs”), they are ignorant of its day-to-day details. Thus they act in relative ignorance, and any alterations they make (if there

be alterations) do not invite the same causal loop that Rose Tyler nearly destroys the universe with in 2005.<sup>1</sup>

Not only does awareness or consciousness often determine the presence or absence of paradox in a time-travel narrative, but there is also a strong tradition of time-travel narratives in which that consciousness is not bound by the same rules that limit the physical universe. In Richard Matheson's *Somewhere in Time* (originally published as *Bid Time Return*) Richard Collier is able to travel back nearly a century through nothing more than a concerted marshalling of his will through an act of self-hypnosis. In the Netflix series *Travelers*, physical artifacts cannot be transported back in time, but the consciousnesses of the various time-travelers *can* be—overwriting the consciousness of a pre-selected host-body in order to effect change in the past. In the 1993 film *Groundhog Day*, Phil Connors continually relives the same day for an untold number of iterations—each morning, the physical world reverts back to its previous state; the only persistent feature is Phil's growing consciousness *of* those previous iterations.

But just as consciousness-centered paradoxes are not unique (and consciousness operating under its own laws is also not unique), neither is it unique for the separate laws that govern consciousness to result in serious, logical complications that threaten the perceived integrity of a diegetic cosmology. The example *par excellence* is one that occurs in Rian Johnson's 2012 film *Looper*, where we find a cosmology in which human consciousness not only breaks with physical laws, but with its *own* as well.

<sup>1</sup> Note that since time travel is entirely a fictional construct, its rules are whatever the author says they are. In many time-travel narratives, alteration—even *informed* alteration—has no devastating effect. In Harry Harrison's *The Stainless Steel Rat Saves the World*, self-causing time-travel loops are written off as just one of those things that happen from time to time. Even *Doctor Who* is not near as consistent in its cosmological rules as this brief sketch may suggest. Thus, this discussion of the effects of time-travel paradoxes is limited only to those diegeses in which time-travel paradoxes *have* an effect.

In this film, we have two iterations of the character Joe: the younger one, who is native to the present of the film, and the older one, who has traveled back in time. When Young Joe needs to meet up with Old Joe, he gets his attention by carving a message on his own arm. The message appears on the arm of Old Joe as scar tissue. That it is a thirty-year-old scar suggests that Old Joe should have had it for the past thirty years, but he is nonetheless surprised to see it. It is simultaneously old and new, and his awareness does not match the alterations performed on his physical body. Here we can see human consciousness operating under a different set of rules than those which govern physical matter—even the body that contains that mind. We do not, however, see how consciousness breaks its own laws. For that, we need to look to an earlier scene in the same film, where the same paradox is demonstrated in a more complex form.

Again, we have two iterations of one character—in this case, Seth. Young Seth has been abducted by the mafia, who want Old Seth dead. They do not kill Young Seth, though, because they do not want to risk a paradox on such a grand scale. Instead, they torture the young version to get the old version's attention and to demonstrate their seriousness until Old Seth turns himself in. We do not see the torture performed on Young Seth, but we can deduce what is happening to him by the effects it has on Old Seth. At first, as with the old and young Joes, there's a message on his arm, but the scars get more serious. Old Seth tries to climb over a fence, only to find that he doesn't have fingers on one of his hands. Between cinematic cuts, the audience may notice his nose has disappeared. These parts do not fall off, for he is not losing them *now*—he is losing them thirty years ago. The physical effect occurs simultaneously to its causative action in the present. Though the scars are retroactively old, Old Seth is aware of them as something new.

So far, we are working with the same causal relationship described above—albeit in more graphic detail. However, as his body changes, Old Seth’s movement patterns alter to the patterns of one already habituated to his new-old disabilities. When he loses his foot,<sup>2</sup> he does not lose his balance. Instead, he hobbles to his fatal destination as one practiced in that movement. On one level, his awareness has not altered to match his body—hence his surprise. However, on another level, the changing of his movement suggests he is nonetheless aware *of* his body. While some of the previous examples suggested that the mind/body problem may be a matter of simple dualism, the travails of Old Seth suggest it is much more complex than that—that the time travel paradox has resulted in a collapse of the superior laws that govern human consciousness.

Of course, Johnson’s film postdates *Timequake*, and so is a problematic example of the generic conventions that novel was released into. It is chosen because it is such a succinct and *visible* example of a similar paradox, but antedating examples can still be found: In the *Back to the Future* movies, physical artifacts that travel through time with Marty are affected by alterations in the timeline, as is Marty’s very existence, but his memories remain unchanged. In Robert Silverberg’s “Needle in a Timestack,” there is a brief grace period once history has been changed in which all people whose lives have been altered are aware of the alteration—remembering the previous historical configuration even though their entire physical existences are now different. In all of these cases, we have a paradox similar to that found in *Timequake*: one in which the laws that govern the time traveler’s consciousness are different than those that govern all physical reality—even the

<sup>2</sup> Again, the foot does not fall off, for it has been altered to have never been there. His *shoe* however, does fall off. So, paradoxically, he is now a man who hasn’t had a left foot in thirty years, but had put on a left shoe that morning.

traveler's body. While there are specific articulations of the paradox more or less unique to *Timequake*—the relativistic physics underpinning the scientific justification for time travel, or instance—this paradox is always clothed in the slightly different dress demanded of it in its various appearances.

As I shall make more clear in the remainder of the chapter, Vonnegut's deviation from this tropic norm is a standard one. He effects his deviation by means of Postmodern narrative flourishes and pursues it (presumably) as a means of distancing himself from science-fiction as a genre. But when we read *Timequake* in terms of its central paradox—and approach that paradox in a way that does not depend on authorial intent or design, we can see that he fails in this distancing effect, and only identifies his swan song with a that troublesome genre *more fully*.

### **Vonnegut's Most Postmodern Novel**

Throughout his career, Vonnegut was resistant to—sometimes even resentful of—the appellation “science-fiction writer,” which he believed was not only a dismissal of his work, but wasn't even a fair description of his oeuvre. In his biographical collage *Wampeters, Foma & Granfalloon* (*Opinions*), he notes:

Years ago I was working in Schenectady for General Electric, completely surrounded by machines and ideas for machines, so I wrote a novel about people and machines, and machines frequently got the best of it, as machines will. [...] And I learned from the reviewers that I was a science-fiction writer.

I didn't know that. I supposed that I was writing a novel about life, about things I could not avoid seeing and hearing in Schenectady, a very real town,



awkwardly set in the gruesome now. I have been a soreheaded occupant of a file drawer labeled “science fiction” ever since, and I would like out, particularly since so many serious critics regularly mistake the drawer for a urinal. (1)

This is not the only label that Vonnegut would disagree with having applied to his work, but it is the only one he would push back against so actively. In a 1974 interview with Joe David Bellamy and John Casey, he was asked how he felt about being described as a “black humorist”: though he didn’t agree with the description itself, he wasn’t bothered by its application to him, saying “the label is useless except to the merchandisers” (“Kurt Vonnegut” 156). But while he could be indifferent to, even magnanimous about, the term “black humorist,” he was by no means unconcerned by the term “science-fiction writer.” This was a word with some power, and a power that he did not want exerted over him.

Regarding those novels which would invite the label, he usually had at hand some convenient rationalization for why their fantastic elements should not *count* toward their arbitrarily assigned genre: Of *Player Piano* and *Cat’s Cradle*, he said that he was only writing about behaviors that he had seen in his time working for General Electric (as we see above). Of *Slaughterhouse-Five*, supposedly a masterpiece of time-travel literature, his dismissal is equally flimsy:

The science-fiction passages in *Slaughterhouse-Five* are just like the clowns in Shakespeare. When Shakespeare figured the audience had had enough of the heavy stuff, he’d let up a little, bring on a clown or a foolish innkeeper or something like that, before he’d become serious again. And trips to other planets, science fiction of an obviously kidding sort, is equivalent to bringing on the clowns every so often to lighten things up. (*Wampeters* 262)

Here he acknowledges the presence of science fiction in his writing, but this presence should not influence the reading of the work as a whole, for it is “of an obviously kidding sort.” Yes, he did commit *Rocket Ship Most Foul*, but he didn’t mean it, so it really shouldn’t count. The trappings of science fiction are things the novel can insincerely take up and discard.

Vonnegut’s self-distancing from the science-fiction genre may well have been aided by his work as a Postmodern author. Postmodernism is specifically a reaction to (and often rejection of) certain Enlightenment attitudes “[such as] linearity, notions of progress and closure, as well as white supremacy” (Hogue “Postmodernism” 169). Therefore, it allows for the exploration of “nonrational human dimensions and experiences,” allowing or even requiring it to expand beyond the limitations of Enlightenment rationalism and metaphysics (Hogue *Postmodern American x*).

Meanwhile, as Veronica Hollinger observed in 1990, science fiction as a genre has historically been resistant to Postmodernism, largely because “Genre science fiction thrives within an epistemology, which privileges the logic of cause-and-effect narrative development, and it usually demonstrates a rather optimistic belief in the progress of human knowledge” (30). In most science fiction (hereafter SF), the universe is knowable—or at least discoverable. Problems can be solved through ingenuity and improved technology. A rational, scientific methodology is frequently the salvation of mankind. In this way, SF during Vonnegut’s lifetime tended to descend from the same rationalist assumptions and approaches that defined the Enlightenment. Thus, rejecting those assumptions—embracing the inherent rejection concomitant with Postmodernism—allowed Vonnegut to markedly separate himself from SF. Though I do not claim this was

Vonnegut's primary motivation for writing in Postmodern modes, I do contend that it was at the very least an attractive and not-unwelcome collateral effect.

And of Vonnegut's fourteen novels, perhaps none of them exemplifies this rejection of Enlightenment rationality more than his 1997 novel, *Timequake*. Here, the Postmodernity is most apparent through the novel's insistence on its own fictionality; *Timequake*, as we know it, is more of a commentary on an unseen novel than it is a novel in its own right. Consequently, this presents a challenge to the diegetic reading of the novel's anachronism, for it is not a given that the effects of the anachronism in the diegesis of the *reported-on* novel can have any effect on *Timequake* itself—the novel doing the reporting. However, as this section argues, *Timequake* overplays its hand with its complicating paradoxes, and is so laden with logical contradictions that the distinction between the novel and its commentary collapses, and much of the narrative division that would have prevented the anachronism from the diegesis of the reported-on novel from affecting the novel as a whole collapses as well. But first, let us examine more fully those narrative paradoxes and explicate how they should pose a challenge to anachro-diegetic reading.

#### *Summary of a Non-Existent Novel*

Whereas Vonnegut had a tradition of speaking directly to his audience, dating as far back as the 1966 reissue of *Mother Night*, here Vonnegut's fourth-wall-breaking addresses to his readers are not confined to a frankly written foreword (as had been the case in 1979's *Jailbird* or 1982's *Deadeye Dick*), nor even to a single chapter (as in his

1969 masterpiece *Slaughterhouse-Five*). Instead, Kurt Vonnegut is our narrator throughout the book.<sup>3</sup>

The core narrative, the never-seen novel that narrator-Vonnegut reports on, concerns Kilgore Trout—Vonnegut’s pulp-writing alter-ego who has appeared in half of his novels. Trout, along with the entire population of Earth (and, presumably, the rest of the universe as well), experiences a timequake—a universe-wide event which strikes in 2001 and instantaneously sends everybody on Earth back to 1991. Once everyone is in 1991, time moves forward as normal again. Everybody re-experiences the last ten years of their lives, fully aware that they are experiencing a “rerun” (as the ten-year repetition is referred to throughout the novel), but incapable of acting differently the second time around.

After the rerun, humans suffer from a condition referred to as “Post-Timequake Apathy,” or PTA. Ten solid years of being only spectators in their own lives has led humanity to forget what action *is*. When the rerun ends and free will resumes (or at least the illusion of free will enabled by a lack of foreknowledge), everyone remains inert. Cars ram into buildings as their drivers forget it is in their power to steer or brake them. People fall in the streets and make no effort to restore themselves or avoid oncoming traffic. The only person who can act is Trout, whose own life has for so long been a meaningless, mechanical slog that he is not affected by PTA—even though he experiences the rerun, same as everyone else. He is able to rouse PTA sufferers from their catatonia with the well-

<sup>3</sup> Because of Vonnegut’s conspicuous narrative presence, this chapter cannot dispense with the idea of the author as easily as other chapters do. Regardless, the anachronism of interest will still be explored in terms of its diegetic effect, and questions of whether it is intentional or accidental will not be entertained. Vonnegut is discussed, not as an authorial force, but as a narrator and a character in the novel.

meaning lie, “You were sick, but now you’re well again, and there’s work to do” (167).<sup>4</sup> He mobilizes the newly “resurrected” to get everything back in order. The novel ends in 2011 with the death of Trout, now a world-class hero, at a clambake attended by Vonnegut’s friends and family.

If we retreat from this core narrative, to the novel that does the reporting, we have the story of the novel itself. *Timequake*, Vonnegut’s narration informs us, is not primarily about the timequake. Rather, it is about an unfinished novel, also titled *Timequake*, which we never see, but which we are told about through Vonnegut’s summaries and a few preserved snippets of dialogue and action. It is from these snippets that we must assemble the core narrative summarized above.

#### *Clean, Concentric Circles: The Purported Structure*

It may help to think of *Timequake* as a series of concentric circles—at least when considering the structure that the novel claims to have (Figure 2-1). According to narrator-Vonnegut, the incomplete novel that he is telling us about is *Timequake One*; the novel that we are reading, though, is *Timequake Two* (xii). *Timequake Two* is about *Timequake One*, and thus, the circle which represents *Timequake One* is wholly contained in that which represents *Timequake Two*. Furthermore, *Timequake Two* (the outer circle) is supposedly

<sup>4</sup> This phrase comes to be known as Kilgore’s Creed, which gains a near-scriptural importance in post-timequake society:

Teachers in public schools across the land, I hear, say Kilgore’s Creed to students after the students have recited the Pledge of Allegiance and the Lord’s Prayer at the beginning of each school day. Teachers say it seems to help.

A friend told me he was at a wedding where the minister said at the climax of the ceremony: “You were sick, but now you’re well again, and there’s work to do. I now pronounce you man and wife.” (169)

a non-fictional memoir of Vonnegut's attempt to write a novel; thus the division between *Timequake Two* and the external reality of the reader is presumably a porous one.

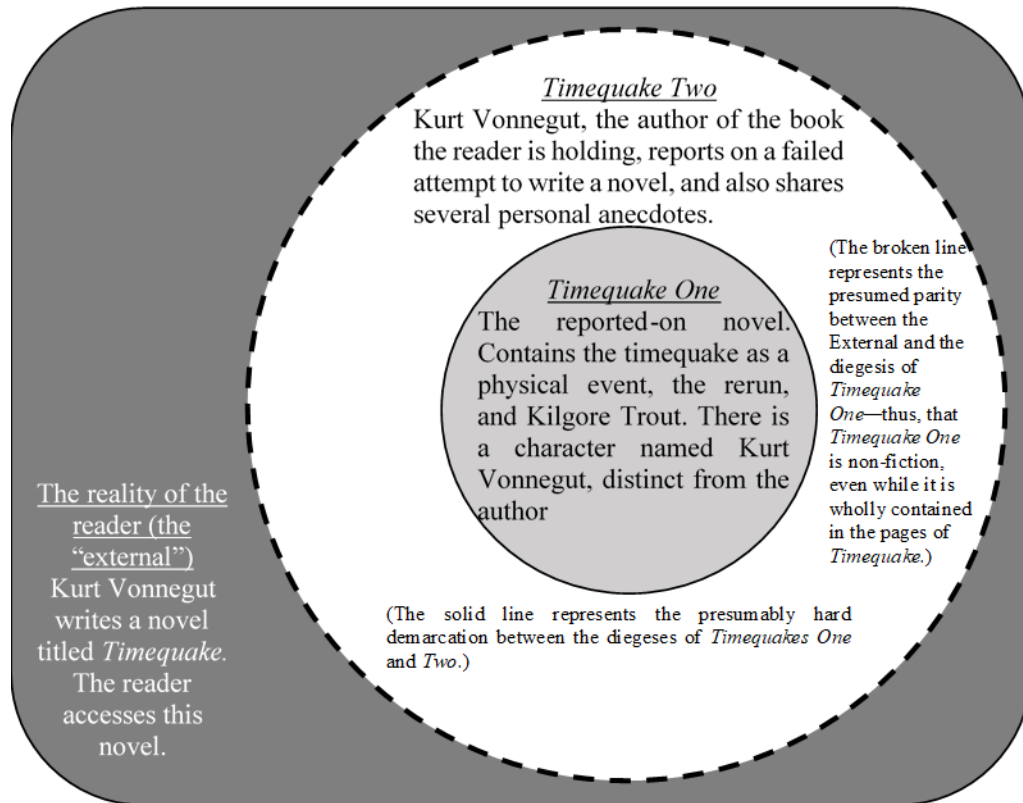


Figure 2-1: The structure the novel claims to have.

Meanwhile, *Timequake One* would have been about Kilgore Trout, and Vonnegut himself would have been a character (as he had been in *Breakfast of Champions*), if narrator-Vonnegut had been able to make himself finish writing it. Since *Timequake One* is acknowledged to be a novel (a work of fiction) within the text of *Timequake Two*, we may presume the demarcation between *One* and *Two* to be more substantial than that between *Two* and the external (hence its *unbroken* border). To put it another way, the reader is asked to believe that narrator-Vonnegut is author-Vonnegut, and thus is real. The reader is not asked to believe that Kilgore Trout (the protagonist of *Timequake One*) is also real.

*A Messy, Liminal Space: The Actual Structure*

However, although the distinctions between our two *Timequakes* and two Vonneguts seem meaningful in theory, in practice these distinctions are not stable. Levels of reality are not so neat as the novel may claim, as there is an additional layer—an unacknowledged liminal space—that the novel neglects to mention (Figure 2-2).

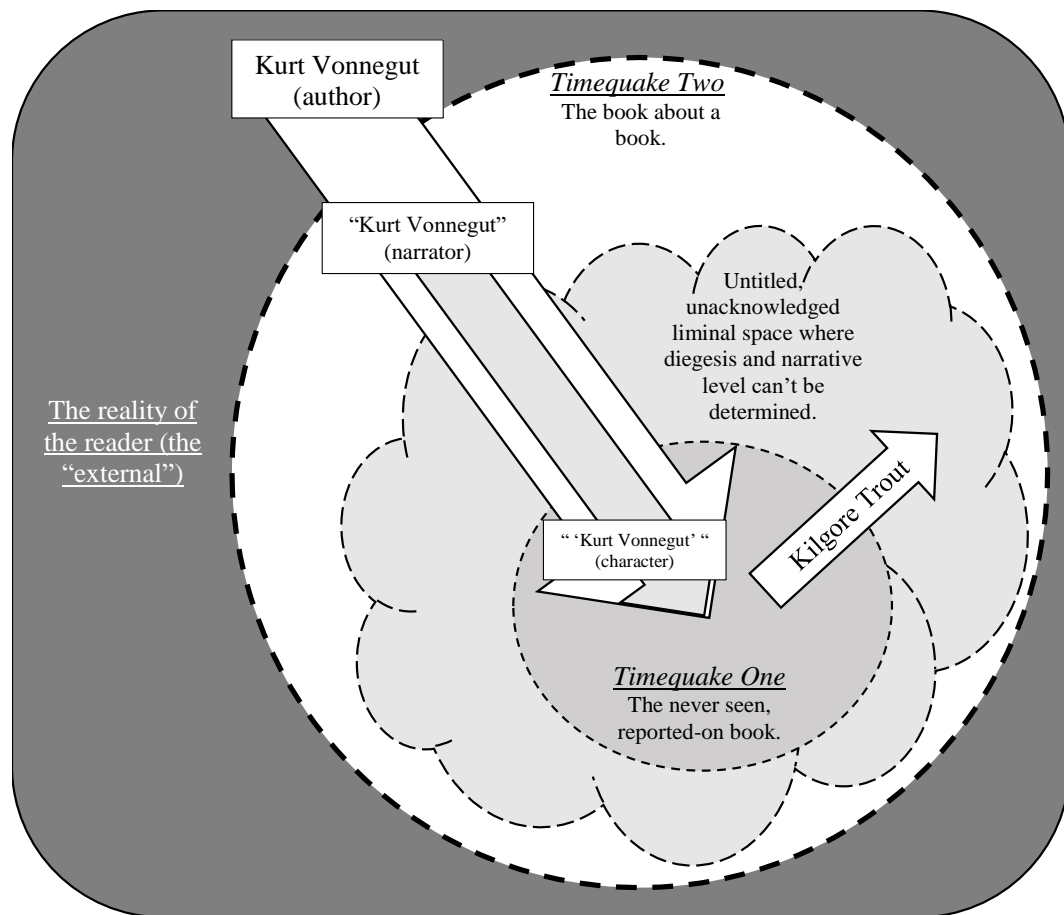


Figure 2-2 The actual structure of the novel.

*Timequake One* (the contained novel) is consistently subordinate to *Timequake Two* (the containing meta-novel), but narrator-Vonnegut and character-Vonnegut are indistinct. Both are referred to in the first person and treated as one character. The result is that even though *Timequake* is invested in maintaining a categorical distinction between *Timequake*

*One* and *Timequake Two*, the ability of the Vonnegut figure to be both character and narrator—existing in both novels equally—exposes the lie of this purported separation.

This demarcation is further blurred by the temporal bounds of the rerun: It begins in 1991 and ends in 2001. The novel, meanwhile, was written in 1996—a point expressly stated by the narrator in the preface:

So now my last book is done, with the exception of this preface. Today is November 12, 1996, about nine months, I would guess, from its publication date, from its emergence from the birth canal of a printing press. (xiv)

It is, perhaps, the last joke in Vonnegut's last novel that its authorship should occur right in the middle of the rerun it describes. Thus, by implication, the novel is subordinated to itself. Vonnegut has written his novel and, come the rerun, will have to write it again. He cannot avoid writing *Timequake*, because the authorship of *Timequake* is something that occurs within *Timequake*—and everything that occurs in *Timequake* is bound to happen. *Timequake* is potentially subject to the very event it fabricates, just as the character Vonnegut is subject to the events Vonnegut the narrator describes.

The introduction of Trout is a fine, compact example of *Timequake's* blending of the real and the fictional:

[i] Trout doesn't really exist. He has been my alter ego in several of my other novels. But most of what I have chosen to preserve from *Timequake One* has to do with his adventures and opinions. [ii] I have salvaged a few of the thousands of stories he wrote between 1931, when he was fourteen, and 2001, when he died at the age of eighty-four. A hobo for much of his life, he died in luxury in the Ernest



Hemingway Suite of the writers' retreat Xanadu in the summer resort village of Point Zion, Rhode Island. That's nice to know.

[III] His very first story, he told me as he was dying, was set in Camelot, the court of King Arthur in Britain. (xiii, Roman numerals added)

In the excerpt above, I have labeled as Part I that portion in which Kilgore Trout is decidedly fictional and Vonnegut, by implication, is the presumably real narrator of *Timequake Two*. In Part III, Vonnegut speaks of having conversations with Trout—suggesting that Trout is real (which is to say, that we have shifted to the fictional Vonnegut who exists in *Timequake One* alongside the fictional Trout). Part II, though, is a curious liminal space between them—the fictionality or reality of Trout and Vonnegut cannot be determined. The various Vonneguts, ranging from the decidedly real to the decidedly fictional, blend together, crossing narrative layers—but so too does Kilgore Trout, presumably wholly fictional, refuse to be so neatly contained in *Timequake Two*.

That Vonnegut should use the past tense (common to the discussion of historical events) to sketch the life details of Trout instead of the present tense (common to the discussion of literary constructs) suggests that in Part II we have already transitioned to the fictional space made more clear in Part III—but this is not conclusive. Vonnegut could just as easily be idiomatically ignoring the history/literature conventions for verbal conjugation. Consequently, the fictionality or reality of Part II is nebulous. Much of the novel exists in this liminal narrative space.

The anachronism of interest to this chapter is an effect of the timequake event (referenced above, though articulating its inherent paradox more fully will be the subject of the next section). Thus, this chapter is in a way an analysis of the never-seen *Timequake*

*One*, since it is that novel wherein the paradox occurs. If, however, *Timequake One* were entirely subordinated to *Timequake Two*—as Vonnegut’s narration suggests it is—then the diegetic effect of the anachronism could not affect our reading of *Timequake* in the way it needs for the process this dissertation is invested in describing. Since a novel about a science-fiction novel needn’t itself be science fiction, proving SF sensibilities in *Timequake One* (if we accept the novel’s description of itself) would be more-or-less inconsequential to *Timequake Two* (which, once again, is the alternate title of the novel we in the external know more simply as *Timequake*).

However, because the demarcation between *One* and *Two* is not as stable as our narrator would like us to believe it is, we may entertain the possibility that the anachronism can have effects beyond the diegesis of *Timequake One*. The absence of stable boundaries between the two novels—evidenced by the Vonnegut character’s persistent identity across narrative levels and the novel’s temporal positioning within itself—suggests we may not necessarily be working with two autonomous diegeses, after all. Thus, if the temporal paradox of the rerun brings *Timequake One* closer to the recognizable traditions of time-travel literature, it’s going to drag *Timequake Two* right along with it.

### **The Troubled Dualism of *Timequake***

That past events cannot be changed is central to the premise of the novel. Also central is the notion that humanity is aware of the rerun *as* a period of repetition. However, these two premises are irreconcilable within the same cosmology. There is, as this section shall make more explicit, a fundamental paradox observable in the conflicting temporal rules that govern A) human awareness and B) everything else. Whereas the universe at

large adheres to a relativistic (and deterministic) model of physics, consciousness alone seems to operate within a more supernatural framework, even while it is still bound by physical limitations. Thus, supernatural human awareness is our artifact, in a setting of material determinism.

*The Inherent Material Determinism of General Relativity*

It is Trout himself who gives the most complete description of the timequake in the entire novel:

“The timequake of 2001 was a cosmic charley horse in the sinews of Destiny. At what was in New York City 2:27 p.m. on February 13<sup>th</sup> of that year, the Universe suffered a crisis in self-confidence. Should it go on expanding indefinitely? What was the point?

“It fibrillated with indecision. Maybe it should have a family reunion back where it all began, and then make a great big BANG again.

“It suddenly shrunk ten years. It zapped me and everybody else back to February 17<sup>th</sup>, 1991, what was for me 7:51 a.m., and a line outside a blood bank in San Diego, California.

“For reasons best known to itself, though, the Universe canceled the family reunion, for the nonce at least. It resumed expansion.” (55)

It is later repeated by Vonnegut with only slight variation: “[The] Universe had shrunk a little bit, but had then resumed expansion, making everybody and everything a robot of their own past, and demonstrating, incidentally, that the past was unmalleable and

indestructible...” (97) These are the only descriptions we get in the entire novel, and even though they are incomplete (the timequake is expressed as the result of a whim of the Universe and not given any distinctly physical rationale), they communicate a very specific cosmological framework.

Time in this novel is presented as tied to the expansion of the universe: it progresses when the universe expands and regresses when it contracts. This already gives us a cosmology distinct from Newtonian physics, in which space is static, time is constant, and the two concepts are distinct. Instead, we see a relativistic model of space-time in force. In the relativistic model of physics (physics as conceived in terms of the General and Special Theories of Relativity, associated with Albert Einstein, Stephen Hawking, and Richard Feynman, among others), what we perceive as time is an effect of the motion of physical particles. Specifically, the direction of time is determined by the universe’s progress from an ordered state to a disordered state, what Hawking calls the “thermodynamic arrow of time” (Hawking 149). This progress may occur at different rates in different points of the universe: In areas with denser gravity (say, in proximity to a black hole), it takes more energy for particles to move—thus, the progress from order to disorder is a slower one. As a result, all particular motion is slower, and what we perceive as time is slower as well.

In the core of a black hole, motion may stop completely, as the energy needed to move particles approaches or reaches infinity. Thus, time stops (not that anybody would be in a survivable position to notice it). However, a less extreme version of this effect is observable on a human scale. As Hawking explains:

To someone high up, it would appear that everything down below was taking longer to happen. This prediction was tested in 1962, using a pair of very accurate clocks

mounted at the top and bottom of a water tower. The clock at the bottom, which was nearer the earth, was found to run slower, in exact agreement with general relativity. (33)

With a greater gravitational differential, the effect becomes even more pronounced. The constituent satellites of the Global Positioning Satellite System, which inform Google Maps or any other dashboard navigational system, must be programmed to take this time differential in consideration in their computations, because (operating at a lower gravity) time moves faster for them than it is observed on Earth (Hawking 34). The only reason Google Maps can get a driver across town is because this difference in time can be observed, quantified, and corrected for.

In an entirely material universe—which is to say, a universe in which there is no supernatural existence—you cannot get away from scientific determinism. Scientific determinism, as first theorized in 1814 by Pierre-Simon Laplace, states that if you can know the position and velocity of every particle in the universe, then you could (theoretically) calculate all future configurations and extrapolate all previous ones. And here, we see at work the assumptions of Laplace's age, for determinism, on its surface, suggests the Enlightenment idea of a rational and knowable existence, which can be wholly understood given a sufficiency of information. Admittedly, modern physics complicates this view, especially Heisenberg's Uncertainty Principle, the 1927 discovery which states you can never know the position and velocity for the same particle simultaneously. This makes it impossible to have all of the information Laplace's theory assumes. However,

Heisenberg doesn't obviate the notion of determinism itself—only our ability to calculate and know what has *been* determined.<sup>5</sup>

Although the variables are too miniscule and numerous (and the data too close to infinite) for us to have a working model of usable predictions, all physical reactions are subject to distinct laws. Thus, if something like *Timequake*'s titular event were to occur, it is entirely consistent with contemporary physics that it would result in an unalterable rerun: Every particle in the universe simultaneously reassuming its position from ten years prior is an instance of all matter and energy regressing from a disordered state to an ordered one—thus the reversal is indicative of Hawking's "arrow of time." That all events, no matter how trivial, should unfold exactly as they did the first time through once this prior position is assumed is the definition of determinism, made manifest.

However, what is inconsistent with this model is that humans (or any entity) should have awareness of the rerun *as* a rerun. Again, according to Hawking, life as we know it consumes energy that has been stored in food (an ordered state) and then biochemically converts this food to heat (a disordered state). Consequently, life is bound to the same "arrow of time" which determines the direction of causation in the universe: from order to disorder (Hawking 149). Human life, let alone consciousness, is too bound up in time's arrow to be freed from it by physical processes.

Furthermore, what we are aware of as thoughts and memories are, scientifically speaking, the results of electrochemical reactions occurring in our brains. The energy pulses and chemicals of these reactions, being material, would be subject to the rerun just

<sup>5</sup> Humorously enough, in this progression of theoretical models we see science mirroring the trajectory of literature and art, with Heisenberg's Uncertainty Principle playing the role of Postmodernism by rejecting the Enlightenment assumption of a rational and knowable universe.

the same as all other physical matter. If all particles of the universe (regardless of size or kind) were reset to the positions they held ten years before, then the particles that compose the chemicals in our brains would shift as well. Thus, the precise chemical makeup of our brains would revert just the same as everything else, and we would have no knowledge of the following decade, because the chemical process of writing that knowledge on our brains would have been undone.

*The Apparent Miracle of the “Soul”*

As indicated above, the materialism on which the novel’s determinism depends is complicated by the temporal transcendence of human awareness. That this awareness should contravene the scientific determinism of the universe in *Timequake* suggests that it is somehow independent of those same laws—that it is *supernatural*. This implication is a live concern in *Timequake*, apparent toward the end of the final chapter:

“Your awareness,” [Trout] said. “That is a new quality in the Universe, which exists only because there are human beings. Physicists must from now on, when pondering the secrets of the Cosmos, factor in not only energy and matter and time, but something very new and beautiful, which is *human awareness*.”

[...] This was his finale: “I have thought of a better word than *awareness*,” he said. “Let us call it *soul*.” (213-14)

Of course, Trout’s use of the word *soul* doesn’t necessitate the sincere acknowledgment of a supernatural element to existence, any more than the novel’s use of *free will* in any way lessens its obsession with determinism. Nonetheless, it does strengthen the supernatural

import of human awareness in the novel, and conspicuously brings supernatural into the conversation, if it had not already occurred to the reader to bring it in herself. And while it is tempting to read this odd exception in temporality as supernatural—as Trout (perhaps sardonically) invites us to—resorting to supernatural will not resolve the novel’s central paradox—it merely changes its form.

We can find a relevant supernatural in Christian theology. This is not an arbitrary selection of faith structures; *Timequake* is persistently in conversation with explicitly Christian ideas of morality and eternity. Whether it is Vonnegut’s accidental invocation of Heaven in his eulogy for fellow atheist Isaac Asimov (73), his lament of the loss of faith of his real-life friend Bernard V. O’Hare (72) or of the fictional Dudley Prince (56), or his insistence on the value of a Christian church as a community for those in need of one (74), Christianity is present in *Timequake* as a social and philosophical force, even if *Timequake* doesn’t adopt its cosmology as its own.

A useful articulation of Christian supernatural can be found in C.S. Lewis’s *Miracles: A Preliminary Study*. For Lewis, a belief in the existence of the supernatural is a belief “that one Thing exists on its own and has produced the framework of space and time and the procession of systematically connected events which fill them. This framework, and this filling, HE calls Nature. It may, or may not, be the only reality which the one Primary Thing has produced” (20). Nature and supernatural are distinct, but not wholly separate. Nature is dependent on and subordinate to supernatural. Nature cannot affect the supernatural, but supernatural can, from time to time, incur into nature to effect change. This is the process that Lewis refers to as *miracle*: “an interference with Nature by supernatural power” (15). This is not inconsistent with an earlier definition of miracle,



advanced by Cardinal Newman: “A miracle may be considered as an event inconsistent with the constitution of nature, that is, with the established course of things in which it is found” (4).

As suggested in Lewis and stated more explicitly in Newman, we can expect the incursion of the supernatural to be inconsistent with the defining rules of the natural system in which it occurs. In this way, what Trout identifies as a soul does appear to be supernatural, even miraculous, in that it is able to transcend the material temporality demanded by the scientific determinism of *Timequake*'s cosmology. However, while this awareness flouts the natural order of things in one way, it is still bound by physical limitation of the universe in another, more troubling way: the supernatural “soul” is incapable of affecting the material reality (or nature) in which it appears.

After the rerun, when Trout discovers free will has returned, he performs a simple test which, Vonnegut claims, had been common when the timequake had first struck:

He said nonsensical things on purpose, and out loud, like, “Boop-boop-a-doop, dingle-dangle, artsy-fartsy, wah, wah,” and so on. We all tried to say things on that order back in the second 1991, hoping to prove we could still say or do whatever we liked, if we tried hard enough. We couldn't of course. (99)

During the rerun decade, characters cannot act differently. Thus, even if there is some supernatural force at work in human awareness—whether we call it *soul* or something else—that supernatural force is still bound by the laws of nature. Consequently, it can no longer be supernatural, for nature is to be subordinate to supernature. By making the miracle subject to all the same laws as nature, and by obviating its ability to effect change in the cosmos, the miracle ceases to be miraculous.

As a result, we have two competing cosmologies in the novel: materialism and supernatural. Both are present and mutually exclusive, and neither fully and satisfactorily explains the novel; we have a human consciousness that is independent of time, and thus of all physical law. Therefore, we may conclude the novel is in a *supernatural* cosmology. However, the supernatural element is bound by physical laws, thus it ceases to be supernatural. Were this a simple matter of a separation of the mind and body, we would have a fairly recognizable spiritual dualism at work. But the mind not only contravenes physical law, it contravenes its own. Here, we may be reminded of Old Seth in Rian Johnson's *Looper*—surprised by his gradual dismemberment, yet simultaneously practiced in how his body has to move. In both, the cosmological rules that govern time and consciousness in this diegesis remain in a constant, irresolvable state of paradox. Our materialistic setting contains a supernatural artifact—yet remains materialistic. This should not be; the supernatural element *should* subordinate the material universe. It does not, though, and this reveals the paradoxical tension (temporal in nature) between the artifact and the setting that should not contain it.

Anachronism.

### **Vonnegut the Science-Fiction Writer**

Vonnegut's various, nested paradoxes may at first appear to make *Timequake* resist generic assignment—or at the very least, make the novel exemplary of that Postmodern anti-rationality which has historically kept the Postmodern divided from science-fiction. However, the paradox at the center of the novel goes a bridge too far and results in making *Timequake* align even more closely with norms of the science-fiction time-travel story.

This is not an insignificant development in terms of Vonnegut's canon, for, as was stated at the outset of this chapter, throughout his career he consistently insisted that he was *not* a science-fiction writer.

Oddly enough, however, in the academic discourse surrounding Vonnegut's work, many critics are perfectly willing to advance Vonnegut's estimation of himself. *Slaughterhouse-Five* in particular has been sanitized of its fantastic impurities by essay after essay that casually assumes that the appearance of time travel is just a manifestation of the protagonist's burgeoning dementia and lingering post-war trauma (Mustazza 102-115, Tanner, Edelstein). Oliver W. Ferguson proposed a similar reading of *Galápagos*, in which narrator Leon Trout is not a ghost narrating one million years of observed human evolution, but is in fact in a dissociative state after his harrowing experiences in Vietnam, hallucinating the surface narrative. Readings such as these are interesting, and sometimes quite enlightening—in fact, over the years I have come to be wholly persuaded by Ferguson's vision of *Galápagos*—but they nonetheless risk advancing that reductive notion that elements of the fantastic must be “explained away” in a novel in order for that novel to be worthy of serious critical engagement—a notion that is both consistent with Vonnegut's attitudes toward the genre, and dismissive of the variety and artistry of literature of the fantastic.

However, by reading *Timequake* in terms of its anachronism—a paradox of narrative temporality—and observing how this paradox aligns the novel more firmly with a common science-fiction subgenre even while it resists that same assignment, the demarcation between genre fiction and literary fiction becomes less final. The distinction between Salman Rushdie's magic realist *Midnight's Children* and Theodore Sturgeon's

*More than Human*, between Susan Sontag's Postmodern "The Dummy" and Philip K. Dick's "Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep," or between Margaret Atwood's speculative *The Handmaid's Tale* and Octavia Butler's *Parable of the Sower* begins to appear more arbitrary.

Consequently, the case against the serious study and reading of the fantastic is weakened, for the fantastic has not only begun to join a more respected canon, but is shown to have always been already present in that canon. At the outset of this chapter, the Postmodernity of *Timequake* may have appeared to complicate the applicability of anachro-diegetic reading to it, in fact it has done something quite different: *Timequake*, in making works of literature appear more fantastic, enjoys a similar effect of the anachronistic reading. For by considering each anachronism-invested diegesis as a universe distinct unto itself, with its own history and cosmology, we are in effect making every novel of this kind a tale of parallel Earths, of time-travel alterations unfolding exponentially.

### CHAPTER THREE: ANACHRONISM AND CONTENTIOUS HISTORY IN HARRY TURTLEDOVE'S *THE GUNS OF THE SOUTH*

In the previous chapter, *Timequake* allowed us to explore the challenges of analyzing an anachronism that does not depend on history. The challenge of the anachronism in this chapter is similar. How is the discussion of anachronism affected by a lack of consensus on the *content* of the historic real? The anachronism of interest in *Absalom, Absalom!* was a rather glaring omission of a historic event, and acknowledging that novel's deviation from history involved a simple binary question: was there a Haitian Revolution or wasn't there? The historic deviation at the center of the present chapter's text, Harry Turtledove's *The Guns of the South*, is a bit more fraught. Here, the historical deviation doesn't hinge on a single, easily recognized difference, but in a qualitative difference in an era's *zeitgeist*.

As indicated in the Introduction, the study and discussion of literary anachronism as a concept can never be wholly separate from historicism (despite the rare individual exception, as in *Timequake*). Instead, historical grounding is necessary to even identify an anachronism. But the previous chapters have dealt with observations that are either incontrovertible or at least demonstrable. If history were no more than a series of universally agreed-upon facts, then the identification and subsequent discussion of anachronisms would be a direct affair. But the details of history are disputable, and when the questions of motivation or underlying philosophy are brought to bear, it is difficult to maintain those agreed-upon premises on which sustained discourse depends. And presently, there is no period in American history less likely to be broadly agreed on than the American Civil War. Certainly, while a few basic premises are recognized—there was

an American Civil War, it was fought from 1861 to 1865, the United States of America won the war—more qualitative questions persist as philosophical battlegrounds: *Why* was the Civil War fought, and what was the overall national character of the two entities engaged in it? Should a novel set in the Civil War deviate from history in one of the large, binary questions, the anachronism is clear because the deviation from the historic real is obvious. But should that deviation involve the more *qualitative* question of *zeitgeist*, then whether-or-not an anachronism has occurred becomes a subject of debate—potentially forestalling any discussion of the meaning of that anachronism.

Such is the problem with Harry Turtledove's 1992 time-travel/alternate-history novel, *The Guns of the South*. In this novel, the intercession of time travelers alters the outcome of the American Civil War. Though the novel is concerned with time travel, the artifact of interest is not a result of that fantastic element. Rather, this chapter is interested in an indifference to race and an interest in social justice that was unusual in the Confederacy of the historic real, and impossible on the scale at which it is demonstrated to be in force in the Confederate society of the novel. (Unless specifically stated otherwise, "Confederate," "Confederacy," and other related terms will for the remainder of the chapter refer to the diegetic Confederacy, not the historic one.

According to Turtledove, the novel was born from a happenstance exchange with a friend of his, as he states in the Acknowledgements of the novel, and has reiterated in interviews:

*The Guns of the South* would never have been written had Judith Tarr not complained in a letter to me that the cover art for an upcoming book of hers was as anachronistic as Robert E. Lee holding an UZI. That set me wondering how and

why he might get his hands on such a weapon. *The Guns of the South* is the result. Thanks, Judy.... (557)

By this account, the novel was conceived entirely as a curious historical speculation: a science-fiction writer's imagination coupled with a historian's interest in the details of bygone eras. In fact, Turtledove is a science-fiction writer whose first career was as a historian and a professor of history. However, his PhD is in Byzantine history, and his pedagogy was in the ancient and medieval eras—much more removed from the present of the modern American reader than the Civil War era is. As this chapter shall explore, despite the professed innocence of the novel's originary speculative act, *The Guns of the South* reifies narratives of history which have been used to mask and celebrate the South's legacy of racial subjugation. With the recent emboldening of American white-nationalist organizations, Turtledove has perhaps come to realize the effect that this novel and his others like it have had. With each passing month, it seems, he takes to Twitter to voice some fresh outrage at the unintended relevance of his fiction—most apoplectically in his recent pronouncement, “As I screamed earlier this morning, none of that shit was meant to be topical. None, none, none! Not any. Not even a little fucking bit!” (@HNTurtledove). However, the novel has its effects—regardless of Turtledove's intentions, expressed or otherwise. Despite Turtledove's recent protestations and the naivete of his premise, the genie is out of the bottle. Let us now examine it.

The narrative of *The Guns of the South* is as follows: In January of 1864, a mysterious group approaches the government and military of the Confederate States of America (CSA). The members of this group have a unique manner of dress, unrecognizable accents, and claim membership in an organization they call only AWB (which, they

explain, stands for “America Will Break” [15]). In exchange for near-worthless amounts of Confederate paper currency, AWB supplies the CSA military with the unique firearm they have brought with them: the AK-47. Over the course of the novel, key Confederates learn AWB are time-travelers from 150 years in the future (the year 2014). They are South African white supremacists, members of *Afrikaner Weerstandsbeweging* (the Afrikaner Resistance Movement of the historic real, which, it is learned late in the novel, is the true name the AWB initials refer to, instead of “America Will Break”). Using a stolen time machine, AWB has traveled back to the Civil War to change its course, using a combination of future technology, foreknowledge, and gold specie to make the political climate of their present more consistent with their racist views. While the outcome of the war does change and the CSA wins its independence from the Union, a new war breaks out between the CSA and AWB, as the Confederates have come to resent the South Africans’ interference in their governance and political development. By the end of the novel, the Confederates have repelled the time-travelers, destroyed their time machine, and—under the presidency of Robert E. Lee—introduced a system of gradual manumission and eventual abolition.

That the protagonists work to dismantle the slave system in the South after the war may on one level indicate that the novel is working to condemn or reject those racist institutions and policies with which the historic Confederacy is associated. However, since these protagonists are Confederates, and this act of dismantling begins before they learn any substantive details about the future, the novel also suggests that the historic Confederacy would have dismantled these systems of its own volition had it won. This in turn implicitly claims that the Confederacy was not invested in maintaining slavery, and thus that the war had not been about slavery. Meanwhile, those racist attitudes associated



with the historic Confederacy are instead shown to be the unique qualities of the non-American time travelers. Consequently, *The Guns of the South* presents a Confederacy in which senseless racial animus is a foreign import rather than a domestic product. Thus, even though the novel ostensibly rejects the designs of the historic Confederacy, it nonetheless supports those post-war revisionary images that have allowed for the continued lionization of historic proponents of slavery.

Insofar as the novel's Confederacy is approached as a vision of history, it engages with the revisionist historical imaginary of the Lost Cause narrative—an account, according to which, the Civil War was not about slavery, and the Confederacy was a noble but doomed society that only desired self-governance. As it relates to Turtledove's novel, this revision is achieved through a variety of simultaneous tactics, which, after a brief recognition of how the novel's genre complicates its moral framework, shall be discussed presently, as follows.

First of all, the novel obscures its own revisionism by carefully reproducing technical or trivial minutiae from the period. These minutiae then serve as a figleaf, forestalling claims of revisionism by supplying a demonstrable accuracy. Second, the novel establishes a set of obvious antagonists to typify the systemic devotion to white supremacy from the historic Confederacy, thus deflecting criticism away from the *diegetic* Confederacy. Though this is the second aspect discussed, it is actually the primary strategy of the novel; by giving us a temporal and geopolitical *other* as a source of racial animus, the novel seeks partially to exonerate the Confederacy of those attitudes and policies, demonstrable historically. These, of course, are the same attitudes and policies that indicate

the historic Confederacy went to war to preserve slavery, and that its structures and leading figures were invested in the continuation of white supremacy.

Third, the novel carefully negotiates what behaviors and philosophies are to be read as normal (as opposed to present-but-fringe) in its Confederacy by selectively foregrounding admirable characters and keeping repugnant ones distant and diminished. Fourth, the role of slavery as a cause for the Civil War is reduced, both by decentralizing the importance of slavery in Confederate politics, and by keeping slavery out of sight and abstract for the reader. Many of these tactics are themselves constituted of smaller, interlocking pieces—but each of these moving pieces will be enumerated more fully in the section that deals with that tactic.

In addition to enumerating these tactics, this chapter will test how anachro-diegetic reading is affected by the absence of consensus on its basic premises (an agreed-upon historic real). The diegetic effect of the prochronistic racial attitudes in *The Guns of the South* begins with the creation of an alternate history, separate from the alternate history the novel conspicuously creates through its time-travel act. Let us refer to those differences that result from the time-travel act as the *diegetic alteration*, and those differences that exist irrespective of that act as the *diegetic imaginary*. As will be seen, by presenting the reader with a version of the Confederacy in which the systemic preservation of white supremacy is a foreign imposition, this diegetic imaginary aligns closely with the Lost Cause narrative. However, although this novel does not effectively interrogate the assumptions of the Lost Cause narrative—in fact, it reinforces them in a few troubling ways—reading the novel anachro-diegetically has an interesting effect. By divorcing the diegesis from the historic real, we not only obviate the real's ability to impose terms on the diegesis, we also diminish

the ability of the diegesis to make claims about the content of the historic real. Thus, reading the novel in terms of its anachronism can potentially quarantine its historical claims. The historical revision is re-fictionalized, and the myth potentially deprived of some of its power.

Unfortunately, it can only have this effect when the basic premises of the historic real are agreed upon. This chapter finds that, when the qualities of the setting are as hotly disputed as the qualities of the historic South up to and during the American Civil War, the grounding work necessary to argue for the anachronicity of that setting expands so far as to outweigh many of the potential insights made available by anachro-diegetic reading. To use a folksy expression, “the juice is not worth the squeeze.” However, for an audience already in agreement about the relevant conceptions of history, this act of anatomizing the anachronism needn’t be a cost of entry to that discussion, nor a distraction from it. The act of arguing the presence of an anachronism is already an act of juxtaposing the diegetic norms against the historic real.

### **The Demands of Genre**

Harry Turtledove is perhaps the best-known author of alternate history—a genre, often positioned as a subgenre within science-fiction, concerned with stories set in somewhat-recognizable presents or pasts in which historic events, for whatever reason, have unfolded differently, resulting in a diverging timeline. In science-fiction studies, the critical term for the single event which, by its alteration, creates a new timeline is the

*Jonbar hinge*.<sup>1</sup> In some alternate-history novels, no rationale is ever given for why the Jonbar hinge deviates from the same event in the historic real. Such is the case with *The Two Georges*, the 1995 novel Turtledove co-authored with Richard Dreyfuss. *The Two Georges* is set in a 1996 in which the American Revolution had failed and America is still under the governance of the British Crown. Here we know exactly what the Jonbar hinge is—that George Washington surrendered to George III instead of continuing the Revolutionary War—but there is no attempt to explain *why* the difference occurred; accepting the difference is just the cost of entry to the novel.

In other alternate-history novels, the Jonbar hinge is the result of some fantastic element conspicuously added to the historic setting: Turtledove's *Worldwar* series is set in a world in which the Axis and Allied Powers put World War II on hold to join forces against an alien invasion. Events in both types of narratives unfold differently, but in this second kind of alternate-history narrative, the introduction of and reaction to the transmogrifying element is just as much a narrative concern as the altered events that element enables. *The Guns of the South* is in this latter vein, and some of its problematics may be explained (though not excused) as a result of the needs its genres impose on its narrative.

Although *The Guns of the South* is positioned firmly within the respective traditions of the alternate-history and time-travel genres, there are key deviations that render the novel, if not unique, then at least a rarity. As far as alternate history goes, "What if the

<sup>1</sup> This term comes to us from Jack Williamson's 1938 serialized novel *Legions of Time*, in which protagonist John Barr, at what proves to be a turning point in history, picks up one of two objects: a magnet or a pebble. This apparently insignificant decision determines whether history leads to a Utopian society (Jonbar) or a tyrannous state (Gyronchi)—and has since become a shorthand for all similar constructions in fantastic plots. However, perhaps because not all alternate-history novels bear the trappings of the fantastic, let alone time-travel, this same concept is sometimes referred to as the "Point of Departure."

South had won” is a popular question—perhaps second only to “What if the Axis had won WWII”: Ward Moore’s 1953 *Come the Jubilee*, MacKinlay Kantor’s 1960 *If the South Had Won the Civil War*, and the 2004 Kevin Willmott mockumentary film *CSA: Confederate States of America* all explore the different political landscape of a present-day America in which the Confederates had won. But in these examples, the historical deviation is entirely speculative; there is no attempt to explain the alterity as the product of a fantastic element, such as time-travelers or space aliens. Thus, *The Guns of the South* distinguishes itself from much of this tradition by exploring Southern victory as a result of time travel.<sup>2</sup>

Meanwhile, as a time-travel novel, *The Guns of the South* still deviates from expectations in an interesting way. The time-travel act on which this novel is predicated is what we will term a Missionary action, wherein a *Missionary*, in time-travel terms, is a traveler who seeks to re-author the temporal landscape into a form more consistent with his particular needs or ideological framework. When the Missionary intentionally acts on a national or global scale,<sup>3</sup> it is usually in response to some large-scale catastrophe: the world-ending plague in the 1996 Terry Gilliam film, *12 Monkeys*, or the near extinction-level events caused by a passing comet in the 2016-18 Netflix series *Travelers*. Catastrophes on this scale can quickly be established as universally-accepted undesirable outcomes, thus allowing the Missionary or Missionaries to act toward their prevention with

<sup>2</sup> While there is time-travel in *Come the Jubilee*, it comes late in the novel and does not cause Southern victory. In fact, the time-traveler accidentally changes the course of the Battle of Gettysburg. Thus, in the world of *Come the Jubilee*, the victorious North of our own historic real is itself the alteration, instead of the original.

<sup>3</sup> *Acting intentionally*, as opposed to the 1985 film *Back to the Future*, in which Marty McFly’s alterations are initially accidental. *Acting on a global scale*, as opposed to the 2006 anime *The Girl Who Leapt Through Time*, in which Makoto Konno uses time travel for such petty ends as scoring better on a surprise math test or getting the last cup of pudding in the fridge.

little-to-no discussion of the politics of their actions—consequently presenting no barrier to the identification of the Missionary as a protagonist and hero.

However, when the Missionary works with catastrophes an order of magnitude lower than extinction-level events, the personal and cultural values of the time-traveler matter more. For instance, when Gabriel Prince travels back in time in Peter Delacorte's 1998 novel *Time on My Hands*, it is to prevent Ronald Reagan's presidential policies by derailing his political career, or at least preventing his shift to conservatism. Here, Delacorte (or, at least, Prince) is working with the presupposition of the undesirability of Reaganomics, Iran-Contra, etc. But as the present political climate attests—with the glorification of Reagan an article of faith for the current Republican party—this is not a Missionary action everyone can get behind, and Prince's motivations are distancing for unsympathetic readers. Consequently, the political assumptions behind the desire for change matter in a way they do not in the avoidance of human extinction.

Usually, Missionary narratives are concerned with *benevolent* Missionaries.<sup>4</sup> However, AWB in *The Guns of the South* are decidedly *malevolent*: they are persistently shown to be violent, cruel, dishonest, manipulative, and bent on the subjugation of entire races and nations. Yet as they are the only figures who have traveled back in time to effect change, they are without a doubt the Missionaries of the novel. However, this malevolence is not enough to make the novel distinct, for there is also a well-established counter-trope in the malevolent Missionary. In these cases, the Missionary is usually not the only time traveler. Instead, there is a *Second Actor* (also a time traveler) who travels back in

<sup>4</sup> At the risk of bringing the author-figure into a dissertation largely unconcerned with authorial intent, *benevolent* may, at least for the ease of discussion, be defined as “compelled by motivations with which the author is sympathetic.”

opposition to the Missionary, and who works to prevent the alteration the Missionary seeks. For example, in James Cameron's 1984 film *The Terminator*, the Missionary is the titular character—a robotic assassin who has traveled to the past in order to prevent the birth of the resistance leader who will eventually succeed in overthrowing the reign of machines in the future. Here, the Missionary is working to effect, not prevent, an extinction-level event—thus we may easily consider him malevolent. But the Terminator is not our protagonist. Instead, the film's protagonists are Sarah Connor, the mother of the unborn revolutionary leader, and the time-travelling Kyle Reese, the Second Actor hotly pursuing the Terminator, working to frustrate his aims. Harry Harrison's 1983 novel *A Rebel in Time* works with a premise very similar to that which Turtledove would eventually use. In Harrison's novel, a racist military officer named Wesley McCulloch travels back in time to turn the tide of the Civil War by supplying the Confederates with implements of modern warfare. However, in *A Rebel in Time*, there is a Second Actor in Troy Harmon, who follows McCulloch back in time to prevent the alteration he seeks.

While the malevolence of the Missionaries in *The Guns of the South* is a recognizable, even common inversion of a standard time-travel trope, what makes the novel a rarity is the absence of a Second Actor. AWB members are the only time-travelers; there is no FBI or Interpol agent working against them, positioned to give the modern reader an easy, sympathetic vantage or protagonistic identification in the novel. Perhaps Turtledove was leery of accidentally replicating the earlier Harrison novel. Regardless, in the absence of a Second Actor, if the novel is to give the reader any sympathetic protagonists to work against the malevolent Missionaries (as the Second Actor would), they must be indigenous to the Civil War era. Furthermore, if the time-travel alteration is

being effected within the Confederate political sphere, the protagonists would need to be situated within that sphere to immediately see the change, be affected by it, and be in a position to work against it. Thus, the novel's distinct positioning within its various genre traditions almost requires that the protagonists be drawn from the Confederacy—a group who not only lost their conflict in the historic real, but who have ever been identified with a devotion to the continuation of racial slavery, which is to say, a devotion to a repugnant philosophical and political position. Of course, the effect of this demand could have been reduced had any of the novel's protagonists been enslaved or free blacks. Without this distinct vantage point, the novel arbitrarily limits itself to characters who are invested in the Confederacy's claims about itself—whereas a black protagonist could have given us an “indigenous outsider,” a character of the period and space, but positioned to question or deconstruct the expressed motivations of the CSA as a whole. As it is, since the only protagonists are drawn from that section of the population that the Confederacy was designed to further and serve, it leads the novel to insufficiently question the benevolence of that government.

### **The Accuracy of Small Things**

One of the most crucial tactics by which *The Guns of the South* attempts its revision—the tactic which eases the way for all the following—is the concealment of that act of revision. This is achieved through an exacting attention to minute historical details. By meticulously recreating picayune details from the Civil War era, the novel creates the impression that it has recreated the era itself. Unfortunately, the truth is that though historical minutiae are accurately presented here, this care does not extend up to higher-



order questions of the causes of the Civil War or the social and philosophical makeup of the Confederacy. However, because the minutiae have been so carefully addressed, the novel falsely implies that all other aspects of life in the era have been seen to with the same level of fidelity.

Many of these details describe common technical processes from the historic real: the system by which soldiers, in rotation, cooked and filled canteens for the men in their squads (40); the management of a classroom with multiple grade-levels in one room (277-80); or the maintenance of railroad cars between journeys (234). This attention to technical detail goes beyond the Civil War era itself—the mechanics, use, and maintenance of the AK-47 is reproduced (nearly verbatim) three times in the opening of the novel (6-8, 27-34, 46-48), and its mechanics are revisited later when the Confederates begin to reverse-engineer their own version (361).

Exemplifying how these technical explanations are incorporated into the text is an early passage in the novel, in which AWB prove the efficacy of their new weapons by holding a shooting match between one of their own and one of the CSA's fastest marksmen:

Hines did everything perfectly, smoothly, just as the manual said he should. To load, he held the rifle upright between his feet, with the muzzle in his left hand and with his right already going to the cartridge box he wore at his belt.

Caudell imagined the invisible drillmaster barking, "Handle cartridge!" Hines brought the paper cartridge from the box to his mouth, bit off the end, poured the powder down the muzzle of his piece, and put the Minié ball in the muzzle. The bluntly pointed bullet was about the size of the last joint of a man's finger, with

three grooves around its hollow base which expanded to fill the grooves on the inside of the rifle barrel. (27)

The description goes on, but this is enough. Narratively, the main need of this passage is to illustrate the disparity in performance between the AK-47 and the weaponry already available to the Confederates. The details of Hines's loading and firing routine speak to this disparity by demonstrating what a slow and involved process firing a rifle was in the Civil War period. But this passage has a second function as well: it makes its own historical accuracy conspicuous. Not only does it describe this routine with the precision of a training manual—it specifically references the training manual, so the reader can be sure this process is not an invention.

This tactic is not pursued with technical details alone, but also with biographical information and other easily verifiable events from the historic real: When Robert E. Lee is reunited with his family on a visit to Richmond, the narration is careful to mention the specific address of the house they are renting (61). A meeting at the War Department brings forth General Patrick Cleburne's historic plan to arm and train enslaved blacks for combat in exchange for their freedom (58).<sup>5</sup> The 1862 secession of the western counties of Virginia from the commonwealth as a whole (resulting in what we now know as West Virginia) is referenced as a complication to the post-war process of negotiating the terms of peace between the Union and Confederacy (190). With the inclusion of each detail, the novel further cements its claim to meticulous historical accuracy.

<sup>5</sup> This plan was historically proposed in July of 1863, but not enacted until the desperate last month of the war. Few volunteered for this unit, and they never saw combat—having not even finished their training by the time of Lee's surrender at Appomattox.

Turtledove himself is very open with the reader as regards his sources. In the Historical Notes at the end of the novel, he informs his audience that none of the characters associated with the 47<sup>th</sup> North Carolina Infantry was entirely invented, but that their names and ranks were all drawn from a specific volume: *North Carolina Troops, 1861-1865: A Roster* (559). Also, AWB's futurological library, of which the Confederates come into possession late in the novel, lists by title several real books about the Civil War—such as *Lee's Colonels* by Robert Krick (496), or *The American Heritage Picture History of the Civil War* (420). In addition to naming the sources from which the protagonists learn about their avoided future, each title is also implicitly a claim: the reader is invited to assume that these works and others have been carefully consulted in the construction of the novel, and thus that the novel is responsible in its reportage of history.

But as the following sections shall make clear, though *The Guns of the South* is faithful in the little things, it fails to question the basic philosophical assumptions of the Lost Cause—the narrative the South tells about itself. The novel's "real" history of the Civil War, that which is unaltered by AWB and is here called the *diegetic imaginary*, is as much a fiction as its *diegetic alteration*. It changes nothing that Turtledove is not the originator of this fiction.

Consequently, this novel is riddled with anachronistic philosophies and attitudes that have traditionally been mobilized to revise the South's inconvenient history. These anachronisms are the sort that Barnes and Barnes refer to as "insidious," in that the anachronism is concealed and a reader may assume it to be fact. Since the novel is clothed in the language of ostensible accuracy, its revision is likewise concealed.

This aspect of the revision is, curiously enough, aided by the fantastic in the novel. The overt fictionality of the time-travel element potentially distracts the reader further from the cryptic fictionality of the diegetic Confederacy. The reader sees the obvious invention and is satisfied she has discovered the entirety of the diegetic deviation from the real—and potentially looks for no further deviations. The effect is not unlike that achieved by a stage magician who misdirects by making an interesting gesture with his left hand, momentarily suggesting to his audience that since his left hand is doing something interesting, his right hand can't be. But that's the hand that's stacking the deck.

### **Virtue by Contrast**

The central conflict in this novel is not that between North and South, for the war is concluded a third of the way through the book. Rather, the real conflict, to which the Civil War is only a prelude, is the divide between the CSA and AWB (or “the Rivington men,” as the time travelers are most commonly called—in recognition of the North Carolina hamlet they have adopted as their center of operations). In its futurological antagonists, *The Guns of the South* has an obvious set of villains. These villains embody many of those criticisms of the historic Confederacy, and by thus embodying these problems, they allow the Confederate protagonists to appear more virtuous and real in juxtaposition—thus allowing them to avoid much of the criticism earned by their historical counterparts. Although the anachronistic racial attitudes in the novel precede the time-travel act and do not result from it, it is by contrast with the time travelers that the negative qualities of the historic Confederacy are disowned (or at least diminished), allowing the

diegetic Confederacy, though by no means ideal, to serve as the idealized vision of the South at the center of the Lost Cause narrative.

Various qualities position the antagonists as both villainous and inferior to the Confederates. They are outsiders. They are enthusiastic in the oppression of enslaved blacks. They are manipulative. They are foolishly shortsighted in their devotion to white supremacy. Each of these traits will be discussed more fully below, but one result of the antagonists being invested with all these traits at once is an obviousness (even cartoonishness) of villainy, which serves to make the Confederates (and Confederacy) appear more nuanced and real, thus furthering the earlier work of concealing the revision.

#### *Outsiders from Another Time*

The tensions between these two groups build slowly and start early. Indeed, the seeds of the future conflict are already evident in a brief exchange between General Robert E. Lee and AWB leader Andries Rhodie, on their second meeting, when Lee invites the stranger to dine with him in camp:

“Would you care to share supper with me, sir? Perry has not much to work with here, but one would never know it by the meals he turns out.”

Rhodie’s eyes flicked toward Perry. “Your slave?”

“He’s free,” Lee answered.

Rhodie shrugged. Lee could see he did not approve. The stranger started to say something, then evidently thought better of it, which was just as well. (12)

The apparent disapproval which here almost leads Rhodie to make a comment to Lee will return with greater and greater effect, culminating in an assassination attempt at his Presidential inauguration after the war. But Rhodie's disapproval is more than simple disagreement—it is also disillusionment. For each time Lee acts contrary to Rhodie's expectation—such as by issuing a general order that black prisoners of war should be treated the same as their white counterparts (159), or running for CSA President on the promise of pursuing a plan of gradual abolition (377)—he not only frustrates the time traveler's plans to use the Confederacy to re-author his own present, he also reveals the inaccuracy of Rhodie's pre-existing image of Lee and the CSA.

This inaccuracy is a persistent reminder that Rhodie is not from the time that he moves about in, and he doesn't fully understand it. Thus, it underscores that his actions do not reflect on the Confederacy as a whole, even as he purports to act in their interest. Throughout the novel, Rhodie and AWB work to make the CSA in their own image, having learned that this Confederacy, unlike their own organization, is not principally motivated by and organized around the idea of a white ethno-state. Concerningly, while the novel disillusion Rhodie, it simultaneously suggests that any notions the reader may have of the CSA as a government formed to preserve slavery and white supremacy are also illusions to be put aside—which further aids the act of Lost Cause revision.

It is worth noting, though, that the novel should have as its antagonists AWB, out of all white-supremacist groups the twentieth century had to offer. There are, in the historic real, no shortage of American white-supremacist groups which could have performed the same function as AWB in this novel. Aryan Nation, National Alliance, and the National Socialist Movement were all violent white-supremacist groups operating in America at the

time of the publication of *The Guns of the South*. Even eschewing groups that favor Nazi imagery and rhetoric (and thus *appear* foreign, even when they are American), and focusing on those groups that specifically venerate the Confederacy, this still remain the Ku Klux Klan, the Church of the Creator, and countless American militia groups. Any of these could have served the same function. Instead, the novel presents *Afrikaner Weerstandsbeweging*—a foreign group that can work towards white supremacy without immediately reflecting on American values or institutions.

Although the 1991 dismantling of South African apartheid was a current event when this novel was written, the selection of AWB as the instigating group may be an accident of timeliness. Whatever the reason, it is a *foreign* entity that seeks to steer the CSA into a future of Confederate victory and global apartheid. Consequently, the novel forestalls any attempt of the reader to view their machinations in the past as an expression of patriotism; instead, their otherness paints them as a colonizing force, cynically exploiting the Confederates. This aids both in the reader's rejection of the time travelers and in the novel's careful reassignment of American white-supremacist attitudes to them.

This national otherness is not a minor feature of AWB; it is actively maintained throughout the novel as AWB reject several Confederate cultural norms. Yet as this is primarily manifest in their dealings with enslaved blacks, their otherness can continue to be discussed as part of the analysis of their particularly cruel form of mastery.

### *The Cruel Masters*

The time travelers are consistently shown to be cruel, dehumanizing masters. But they are also shown to be exceptional in this cruelty. Although slavery predates their

arrival, they make the slave system something new and more horrible by their participation in it. In this way, the novel divorces the South from the more overtly cruel aspects of its slave economy—attributing all those cruelties to a few bad actors (who aren’t even local)—and consequently implying that those cruelties were never inherent in the original historic culture.

Glimmerings of AWB’s different approach to slavery occur early in the novel, when two Confederate characters (Nathan Caudell and Rufus Daniel) are in Rivington to be supplied with their AK-47s (or “repeaters”):

[AWB’s Benny Lang] stamped over to one of the slaves, threw him to the ground with a flip [...] “Ow!” the man cried. “What’d I do, boss?”

“Not bloody much,” Lang snarled, punctuating his words with a kick.

[...]

The black men moved. Boxes came down from wagons at an astonishing rate. “Will you look at that?” Rufus Daniel said. “If I had me enough niggers to hire an overseer, that there Lang’d be first man I’d pick for the job.”

“Maybe so,” Caudell said. But he watched the sidelong glances that were the only safe way the slaves could use to show their resentment. “If he treats ‘em like that all the time, though, he’d better grow eyes in the back of his head, or else he’ll have an accident one fine day—or a lot of runaways, anyhow.”

“Might could be you’re right,” Daniel allowed. (44)

Lang’s rough handling of the unnamed enslaved laborer is unusual enough that it draws a comment from Daniel. Thus, the reader is led to see it as out of place. As suggested by Caudell’s comment, Confederate masters and overseers would not be likely (in this version



of the Confederacy) to behave in the way Lang has; it would not be in their own interest. That Daniel readily accepts Caudell's wisdom here implies that, in this diegetic imaginary, the treatment of enslaved blacks is modulated by reason and restraint—and this reason and restraint are instantly recognized. By reveling in his mastery, Lang both harshens the role of master and rejects a norm of the diegetic imaginary.

This may be contrasted with another enslaved work detail Caudell chances to see on his walk home from the train station immediately after the completion of the war:

He passed a gang of blacks weeding in a tobacco field. They did not notice him. Their heads were down, intent on the work. Hoes rose and fell, rose and fell, not quickly, but at a steady pace that would finish the job soon enough to keep the overseer contented—the eternal pace of the slave.

He'd grown used to faster rhythms. He also remembered, from his dealings with the Rivington men and from what he'd seen in Rivington itself, that slaves could be made to work to those rhythms. But why bother? Things got done, either way. Slowing down was part of coming home, too. (242)

This, the novel purports, is a more indicative picture of how slavery is practiced in the absence of AWB: The work is done at a leisurely, sustainable pace and there isn't a master or an overseer in sight. The men enslaved at Rivington, whom Caudell had seen previously, were conspicuously more industrious. The reason for this is made clear for the reader: the Rivington men are hard masters; the Confederates, more lackadaisical. Of course, as this chapter continues, a historical comparison will reveal to what extent that slackness is the effect of a revision, but for the moment it is enough to observe that the time travelers are not the sort to abide the laxity Caudell observes in the above passage—the same laxity that

is stated to be accepted as a normal and reasonable pace of work in the South at large. If the pace and diligence of enslaved labor at Rivington are unusual, and if they can be brought about by the cruelty of the master, then the disparity between the performance of the Rivington team and that which is more usual in the South is inherently a self-demonstrating claim that cruel masters are unusual in this Confederacy.

It is not this episode alone that advances this claim. Shortly after returning to civilian life, Caudell observes a slave auction. At this auction, we are told “*Some* [of the enslaved] did have scarred backs” (318, emphasis added). Whip scars on an enslaved person’s back are deserving of comment, which is to say *unusual*. What’s more, the absence of those scars is taken as a selling point, indicating that this person is “tractable as well as willing” (317). The assumption undergirding both of these observations is that corporal punishment is only ever meted out to “difficult slaves” for deserving offenses, as opposed to a violent means of asserting dominance, or of pushing the enslaved to produce even more, or even as a purposeless effect of dehumanization. We are not told concretely what these punishable offenses are—running off appears to be one of them, but any other offenses are obscured by the general idea of “being difficult”—but if the acceptable laxity of the work team Caudell watches is any indication, slow or unproductive labor is not an offense.

This suggests that this is not the South known by Frederick Douglass, who was beaten for his “awkwardness” with tasks he had not performed before (*Narrative* 81), and who saw a young woman beaten because, in childhood, her hands had been accidentally burned to the point that she couldn’t do much work as an adult (78). Nor is it the South in which James Thompson was beaten for asking to be married (Blassingame 243), or in

which John Homrn saw enslaved laborers beaten for momentarily submitting to the exhaustion of their toil (257).

The auction that Caudell attends exhibits other signs that AWB's unflinching dehumanization of the enslaved black laborer is an unfamiliar addition to the diegetic South. On two of the occasions in which an AWB member is the top bidder, there is an informative exchange between the laborer and his purchaser: First is Dock, who bears a bullet wound that marks him as an insurrectionist, freed by Union troops and returned to servitude by Nathan Bedford Forrest. He is purchased by an unnamed Rivington man, who warns him against any future rebellion:

“You do your work and we'll get on fine, boy. Just don't put on airs because you used to carry a rifle. I can lick you any way you name: bare hands, axes, whips, guns, any way at all. Any time you want to try, you tell me, but you have your grave picked out beforehand. Do you understand me?”

“You don't need to lick me none, masser—you gots de law wid you,” Dock said. But before he answered, he measured his new owner with his eyes, saw that the Rivington man meant exactly what he said and could back it up without the law. He nodded, more man to man than slave to master, but respectfully nonetheless. (317-18)

Dock's initial impulse is to concede that the AWB man has access to a system of laws to police his behavior. Having been made recently subject to that law—in the form of arrest by Forrest's troops—we can understand him to be acutely aware of it. However, what appears to be a new element in this master/slave exchange is the master's ability to enforce his will without the need to appeal to those laws. The threat of physical, mortal violence

accompanied by the skills and determination to carry out that threat is something that merits Dock's special appraisal and consideration, for they are not apparently an accustomed feature in this society.

Second, there is Westly, a tanner and bricklayer. Having a trade, Westly is accustomed to being hired out for his skills. This was a common practice by which slaveowners could make extra money off of the skills of the enslaved, and a key reason why skilled tradesmen were able to fetch a high price. When he is purchased by an AWB member, Westly promises his new master that he'll work "extra hard" for him, so long as he is allowed to keep a little of the pay he receives. To this, the Rivington man laughs and says he has no intention of hiring Westly out. Westly is visibly disappointed, "but he had no choice save for going with the man who had bought him" (319).

Here, we are perhaps meant to observe the hardness of the Rivington man as he shuts down Westly's reasonable request. This is also a further instance of the time-travelers rejecting the social norms of the slave society they have ostensibly joined. However, there is also something else going on here: Westly has attempted to negotiate the terms of his servitude. The Rivington man's apparently unreasonable rejection of these terms may conceal this act, but concealed or no, Westly is accustomed to operating in a system of slavery in which, despite being property, he can expect some say in how he is employed. He is accustomed to an assumed approachability of the master by the slave. That his new master rejects the norms he had become accustomed to is a dispiriting surprise. Thus because slavery in this diegetic imaginary is governed by a social contract in which even the enslaved have some form of bargaining power.

This is not to say that *The Guns of the South* depicts a pleasant slavery, but it does present an endurable one—a slavery which all parties realize could be worse. This is made clear when the Rivington men actively participate in the slavery system and *make* it worse. This presumed durability is demonstrated when the sexualized Josephine is put forward for sale. What she endures, even in this scene, is already dehumanizing—stripped down naked in front of countless men,<sup>6</sup> who are invited to fantasize about her, and are about to bid on her as property—and it is only suggestive of what she has endured before the auction and expects to endure after it. Even in the less problematic Confederacy of the novel, her lot is an onerous one. But she *does* endure it. She stands stoically as she is “appraised” by the spectators. When AWB’s Piet Hardie wins the auction, she descends the auction block “with a grace that matched her beauty” (321). Yet there is something about Hardie, some new element that had been absent in her previous servitude, that finally pushes her to run away. For it is shortly after the auction—later that same day—that she does so. It is not clear what precisely has transpired between her and Hardie, but whatever it was was beyond the pale of even her low expectations. This point is reinforced when we learn that Josephine, recaptured, has hanged herself in Rivington. In whatever manner the Rivington men behave behind closed doors, the implication is that it takes this behavior to make slavery unendurable.

The time travelers’ society is a closed one, and its inner workings are often off limits to the reader. However, there is a slight indication of AWB treats the enslaved when the CSA has breached their compound in Rivington near the end of the novel. The 47<sup>th</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Also note, if the absence of scars on her person is any indication, corporal punishment does not appear to be an instrument of sexual coercion.

North Carolina has made it to the slave quarters. Here they meet Shadrach—the only enslaved black in the Rivington compound whose name is given—dressed in rags and “fed no better than he was clothed” (515). The men of the 47<sup>th</sup> are surprised at the condition of Shadrach and the others they find there. But would the sight really have been such a new one, historically? In the historic real, systems of pseudo-science, such as that of German polygenist Christoph Meiners, were in place to justify the treatment of slaves with claims that black men and women needed less food than whites. Thus masters could increase profits by giving their slaves the minimum sustenance necessary to yield maximal work. This is wholly consistent with slavery as experienced and described by Frederick Douglass, who recounts fighting the household pets for “crumbs” to supplement his meager rations (*Bondage* 75). For the emaciation of Shadrach to be notable, the novel’s Confederates must be practicing a more gentle slavery, in which the enslaved are—in the aggregate—fed and treated well.

If this difference in treatment is only implied by the reactions of the soldiers, it is cemented by the words of Shadrach himself, who effusively greets and sings the praises of his Confederate liberators. This man has most likely been in bondage his entire life. Prior to the appearance of AWB in 1864, every master he had would have been native to this time. Yet the deprivation he has experienced in Rivington is beyond what he is accustomed to. What’s more, Lee’s legislation to begin the four-year process of gradual abolition has not yet been passed—and it is not a given that the Rivington men would have passed the knowledge of potential freedom on to their enslaved laborers. Thus it is likely that Shadrach has no expectation of manumission—he is only being removed from one servitude to be

later placed in another. Yet he greets the army—the same army that fought to keep him in bondage—as saviors.<sup>7</sup>

However, it is not just in their treatment of the enslaved that AWB aid the historical revisionism of *The Guns of the South*. The time-travelers are also manipulative and short-sighted, allowing further contrast with the Confederates, who are made to appear honorable and reasonable as a result of the juxtaposition—thus continuing the novel’s ennoblement of the historic Confederacy and its cause.

### *Manipulation and Machinations*

The manipulation starts early. When Rhodie first reveals his time-travel to Lee, he presents him with a nightmare scenario of what “will” happen should the South lose: Abraham Lincoln (never assassinated) will eventually be succeeded by Thaddeus Stevens—known as a radical abolitionist. The South will be placed under the governance of those it had formerly enslaved (83). From there, more and more national governments will be “co-opted” by black men, who place “the white man” under cruel subjugation.

However, late in the novel, when the CSA seizes AWB’s offices in Richmond, it acquires a cache of twentieth and twenty-first century history books—which are unanimously condemnatory of the Confederacy. At this time, Lee learns that Rhodie had been lying (432). Later still, when President Lee shares this futurological library with his political rivals, we learn that he is not the only one who had been thus deceived: all the

<sup>7</sup> Later in the novel, Shadrach will fatally stab AWB leader Andries Rhodie, thus giving proof to Caudell’s early comment that cruelty to slaves is against the interests of the slave driver. He does this in full view of the 47<sup>th</sup> North Carolina—which lets him leave immediately afterwards, completely unmolested. Thus we see the diegetic Confederacy drastically departing from the historic by allowing circumstances in which a black man may be permitted to kill a white man with no consequence.

members of the government and military that had been read in on the Rivington men's origins had been given the same fabricated scenario as Lee. Thus we are shown that, even before tensions begin to divide AWB and the CSA, the time travelers are consistently lying to the Confederate power structure; the revelation of the "true history" here is also a revelation that the Rivington men had never really joined the Confederates in the Southern cause, but that they had been cynically using them to further their own. Consequently, the Southerners appear by contrast as earnest truth-seekers who, though perhaps misguided, have always been sincere in working towards the preservation of their nation.

However, the manipulateness of the time travelers extends beyond their dealings with a few well-placed politicians. After the Confederacy wins the war, AWB engages in an organized and far-reaching campaign to exacerbate racial tensions and effect the systemic enshrinement of white supremacy in the new nation's society and laws. Their actions in this campaign show their deviousness as antagonists. However, that AWB feels the need to enact this campaign further suggests that this Confederacy, if left on its own, would not have worked towards a similar systemic enshrinement.

Immediately after the war, Lee is in Richmond as part of ongoing peace negotiations with Federal commissioners when he encounters a mob in pursuit of a free black man (265-68). The black man, unnamed, is a blacksmith who charges less for his services than the local white blacksmiths. Lee, with his commanding presence, manages to halt the crowd before it turns violent. He then disperses them—first by shaming them once they admit that the black man had committed no crime, and second by reminding them that the poor among them would be those most vulnerable were the rule of law to be superseded by mobs.



At first, the formation of the mob may seem like a recognizable instance of direct and active white supremacy—a timestream-crossing prefiguration of the Jim Crow future of the historic real. However, in the course of dealing with this mob, Lee finds a single Rivington man among their number. This man works against Lee in this exchange, continually trying to whip the mob back into a frenzy even as Lee’s reasonable dialogue quells their passions. It is implied that this same Rivington man was the one who first incited the mob to violence and that, left to their own devices, the Confederate citizens may have grumbled about the freed-slave-turned-blacksmith—but likely would not have progressed beyond that.

Whenever Confederate characters work towards the active defense of white supremacy as a cultural end, there is *always* a significant AWB presence. When, during Lee’s Presidential campaign, newspapers start publishing character-assassinating pieces on him, it isn’t because the entrenched powerful are concerned that the former general threatens to alter the status quo. Rather, it is because Rivington men have paid for the journalism (269-71). Those politicians who oppose Lee’s abolitionist rhetoric are either funded by AWB or are being blackmailed by them (270). Most of the opposition to Lee’s abolition plan disappears upon the Rivington men’s assault on Lee’s inauguration—the same event by which the time-travelers abandon all of their political and cultural influence in the South. Even during the Presidential campaign of Nathan Bedford Forrest—who runs with no policy promises other than the continuation of slavery—Rivington men are front-and-center as the organizers of his campaign rallies.

By consistently presenting the reader with this campaign of futurological manipulation, the novel is not necessarily attempting to claim that racism was wholly

absent in the Confederacy—after all, the Rivington men’s campaign can only work if there are pre-existing racist tensions to manipulate—but it does suggest that those racist attitudes would not have had the power to shape governmental policy without the interposition of an outside force deliberately shaping them to those ends.

### *The Short-sighted Ideologues*

Despite being shown engaged in a lengthy, organized campaign of political manipulation, AWB are also shown to be impulsive and short-sighted. Early on, in the same Rhodie/Lee conversation that gives us the first indications of the tension between Confederates and time travelers, we can see this shortsightedness manifest in an obvious oversight of AWB’s plans: During the course of their camp dinner, Rhodie supplements Lee’s humble offerings with some food of his own—army rations brought with him from the future, far superior to any domestic foodstuffs in terms of packaging and preservation. An astounded Lee, who does not yet know Rhodie’s origins, suggests that these provisions could be just as beneficial as weaponry (if not more so) for his starving armies. Rhodie informs him that “his firm” had only been prepared to ship weapons, and that he is uncertain as to how long it would take to add food stock to those shipments (13-14).

Here we have the leader of a group that was able to steal a time machine, research key engagements and personnel of the Civil War, and lay up untold (but expansive) quantities of munitions and gold—yet it has completely escaped his notice that the Confederate armies were notoriously ill-supplied. That he should get this far in his plans yet have failed to take into account such a basic reality of the war suggests not only

shortsightedness, but a simplistic view of history (and once again, the reader is nudged towards dismissing her own pre-existing views of the Confederacy as similarly simplistic).

The shortsightedness recurs later in the war, when Lee issues a general order about the humane treatment of the black Union soldiers captured at Bealeton. Rhodie's response is immediate and severe: Lee will rescind the general order, or AWB will cease supplying the Army of Northern Virginia with ammunition (159-60). General Lee points out that "the Federals have promised to mistreat the prisoners they hold to the same degree to which we maliciously harm their men," and in so doing makes a reasonable case that it is in the best interests of the CSA to let the general order stand. But Rhodie is too invested in notions of white supremacy and black inferiority to be swayed by such reasonable, big-picture arguments. He threatens to cut off all ammunition supplies to the army. Of course, this tactic does not work, for Lee points out that, with no ammunition, there will be no Confederate victory, and neither he nor Rhodie will get what they want. Rhodie acquiesces, but their argument shows how close he came to throwing over the entire time-travel plan for the immediate, transitory benefit of mistreating black prisoners of war.

The shortsightedness of AWB culminates in their attempt to assassinate Robert E. Lee at his inauguration. The attempt is not subtle, nor does it afford them any measure of plausible deniability: It is a massacre in the streets of Richmond performed by uniform-wearing Rivington men with Uzis. Several people are killed, including such dignitaries as Vice President Albert Gallatin Brown, General Jubal Early, and the new First Lady, Mary Custis Lee. This outrageous act is the opening salvo in the war between AWB and the CSA, and it removes any domestic support the time-travelers had. Even Nathan Bedford Forrest, who had been their champion among the Confederates, turns against them, saying "If I'd

known then what I know now, I wouldn't have voted for myself" (494). Had they been more discreet or patient, perhaps they could have eliminated their political opposition in a way that would have allowed them to maintain their political connections. But their animosity toward "race traitor" Robert Lee is an unreasoning bloodlust.

This, the novel seems to argue, is what racism looks like: unthinking, violent rage. Anything less—such as subtle racist attitudes that occur among the Confederates, but which do not impel violent action—is made to appear lamentable but correctible. The time travelers are moral strawmen, placed in the novel to contrast with the Confederates and prove inferior in the process, embodying and absorbing all the criticisms of the age. Contrasted with the violence and pettiness of AWB's manipulative campaign, the Confederates are made to seem more reasonable and virtuous; as contrasted with AWB's obvious cartoonishness as villains, the Confederates are made to seem more nuanced and real.

### **The Negotiation of Moral Norms**

The act of historical revision in *The Guns of the South* is not effected entirely through the antagonists. The selection of the protagonists—specifically, the two characters from whose vantage points the entire novel's plot is reported—is done in such a way as to continue this act of revision by carefully articulating what should and should not be seen as morally normal in this Confederacy. That which we are meant to see as acceptable and usual is made immediate to the reader; those behaviors and attitudes that the novel disowns are kept distant and abstract.

The novel's two point-of-view characters are Nathan Caudell, First Sergeant in the 47<sup>th</sup> North Carolina Infantry's G Company, and Robert E. Lee, commander-in-chief of the Army of Northern Virginia and later the President of the Confederate States of America. These two characters present distinct views into the changing Confederate society of the novel. Caudell's scenes tend to focus on the differences in daily life, as experienced by the common man. On the other hand, Lee's scenes give us a view into those command tents and legislative halls where the shape of the CSA is being decided. Although both characters have basis in documentary historic fact, Lee is the subject of numerous biographies and the object of a personality cult, whereas Caudell is little more than a name on a register. Let us begin with Caudell who, being more of an invented character than Lee, is more easily moldable into the novel's vision of the average Confederate.

*Nathan Caudell: The Common Man*

Nathan Caudell is not an important man. Though a non-commissioned officer during the war, in civilian life he is a school teacher. His everyday concerns are mundane ones: the behavior of his students, letters to his sweetheart, and how to stay financially afloat during his unemployed summer months. Living in Nashville, North Carolina, he is in the same county (Nash County) as Rivington, and thus in a position to see how the Rivington men comport themselves in peacetime. He is otherwise unexceptional. Thus, he is the yardstick by which the reader is invited to measure the norms of Confederate society.

This is not to say that Caudell is perfect. Having been raised in a slave society, he has internalized certain casual, racist assumptions. But he is nonetheless presented as an ideal, in that he consistently questions these assumptions, continually revising his view to

reflect an increasing awareness of the world. This usually takes the form of small acts of condescension almost immediately contradicted by more just action. For instance, when he and his friend Raeford Liles are speculating about what life would have been like under Union victory, Caudell laughs at the idea of being required to teach the black population (284). But later, he does just that—teaching math to the former slave Israel so he can keep his employer’s books (393).

Earlier in the novel, he and fellow soldier Mollie Bean (enlisted in the 47<sup>th</sup> North Carolina under the name “Melvin Bean”) console each other after the death of the enslaved Georgie Ballentine. Bean is more affected by his death than she had expected to be, and tries to explain this by saying that he “seemed like people” to her, prompting Caudell to observe that perhaps many of the enslaved “seem like people to somebody who knows them” (99), a proposition Bean agrees with. This exchange reveals not only the assumed subhumanity of non-whites, but also the antithesis of that assumption. While Bean and Caudell have both been raised with the belief that black people are not, properly speaking, people, this belief is largely dispelled by no action other than actually knowing a black person. The condescension is pervasive, but cannot survive contact with the other.

Caudell is by no means unique in this willingness to question and alter his basic assumptions regarding race and how enslaved blacks are to be treated based on sound reasoning or personal experience. When Rufus Daniel changes his mind about hiring AWB’s Benny Lang as his hypothetical overseer, persuaded by Caudell’s warning about the long-term consequences of Lang’s behavior, he too is adjusting his presuppositions. Even Major Charles Marshall, General Lee’s aide-de-camp, exhibits this reasonable behavior: When Lee dictates his general order about the treatment of black prisoners of

war, Marshall is hesitant at first, yet is wholly and enthusiastically persuaded by Lee's reminder that their own prisoners up North will be treated in kind (154) The same argument will later fail to have any effect on Andries Rhodie. Thus, Caudell, in his rational correctability, is not exceptional, but is exemplary of the norm—a norm which is markedly different from the unreasoning devotion to white supremacy seen in the Rivington men.

However, Caudell is not without his moral failures. However, his failings are shown to be distinct from those that typify the time-travelers. After watching the slave auction described above, Caudell is fishing for his dinner under a bridge when Josephine, the sexualized woman he had just seen sold to AWB's Piet Hardie, comes to him for help (326). She has run away from Hardie, who is portrayed as particularly cruel—even compared to other AWB members. With a heard-but-unseen slave patrol on her heels, she begs Caudell to hide her, suggestively offering to do “anything” he wants. After a brief internal conflict, Caudell packs up his tackle and leaves the scene, aiding neither Josephine nor her pursuers.

That he does not actively assist her pursuers is not insignificant, since, this being summer, Caudell has no income, and could have signed on with the posse Piet Hardie hires to track her. However, despite not aiding Hardie directly, his refusal to help Josephine in any way leads to her recapture and thus effectively amounts to assistance. Barring notable outliers (which will be discussed shortly), this is how racism is practiced by the average Confederate—not as an active engagement or an overt act of oppression, but as passive indifference. Though the reader is invited to see this passivity as a failing, she is likely meant to acknowledge that it is of a different order of magnitude from the behavior observed in AWB. Therefore, this extends the assertion that the Confederates are “not as

bad” as the temporal interlopers. Ultimately, the difference is only a superficial balm to Caudell’s conscience, as Josephine ends up dead regardless.

This tragic scene is more than the typical pattern of Confederate white supremacy in the novel—it replicates the novel itself. *The Guns of the South*, like Nathan Caudell, may make some gesture towards racial justice. But just as Caudell fails to frustrate Hardie’s hunt for Josephine, so does the novel fail to adequately interrogate the racist structures it presumes to condemn. Consequently, it allows the continuation of what it ostensibly resists, a celebration of a culture which was historically marked by full-throated devotion to systemic white supremacy.

*Robert E. Lee: Folk Hero of the Lost Cause*

Whereas Caudell was practically invented for the novel, Robert E. Lee is an icon of the Civil War, and the traditional folk hero of the Lost Cause. The novel’s treatment of Lee—who has left a significantly greater documentary footprint—is understandably more complicated. Ultimately, the Robert E. Lee of the diegesis is more-or-less the same figure as Robert E. Lee from the Lost Cause mythology: a stoic, principled man who fails at significant points to match his counterpart from the historic real.

According to historian Robert Glaze, the historic Lee has been favored as an emblem of reconciliation between North and South whereas other figures (such as Forrest) are more representative of lingering resentment or rising tensions. The historic Lee’s placid, post-war retirement and his presidency at Washington College (now Washington and Lee University) paint the picture of a man who had put war behind him.



Then there are his views on slavery. A fragment from a December 27, 1856, letter to his wife is frequently quoted to support the view that Lee did not approve of slavery. In this letter, he says, “there are few I believe, but what will acknowledge, that slavery as an institution, is a moral & political evil in any Country” (Nolan 11-12).<sup>8</sup> This view is in force in the novel, which, though it does not directly reference the 1856 letter, gives us a Lee consistent with it. After the Battle of Washington, when Lincoln surrenders, Lee tells the Union President, “I hold no brief with slavery” (187). This is, admittedly, a noncommittal self-assessment. As with Caudell, it expresses some small sense of racial justice, but in itself offers no resistance to slavery as a system. But after the war, in the rapidity with which Lee progresses from considering freeing his wife’s serving woman, freeing her, and then working toward abolition across the Confederacy, we nonetheless can see the shadow of that Lee who authored the 1856 letter—the Lee willing to call slavery evil.

Many enthusiasts of the historic Lee will supplement the point of “a moral & political evil” by insisting that Lee himself owned no slaves. This, combined with his choosing to join the secession instead of accepting the command of the Army of the Potomac (offered him by Lincoln in April, 1861) present the image of a principled man choosing to defend his home over the allure of a Federal career—despite being conflicted over the Confederacy’s continuation of slavery. This, in turn, serves the perception that slavery could not have been the motivation of the Civil War—for if it were, would a man who owned no slaves, and who had called slavery evil, have fought so hard to preserve it?

<sup>8</sup> Civil War historian Alfred T. Nolan begins his chapter on Lee’s attitudes about slavery by describing how popular sources insist Lee was an advocate for the liberation of black men and women—a claim often supported “only by citing Lee’s 1856 letter to his wife” (9). Furthermore, this single sentence from the 1856 letter often appears on quote-aggregation and meme-aggregation sites like Wikiquote.com or Brainyquote.com without specific source attribution, let alone documentary context.

Of course, as is usually the case, the history is more complicated than the image. As Lee biographer Elizabeth Brown Pryor points out, Lee is too “multifaceted” for a single, decontextualized quote to accurately metonymize him: “Lee the flirt, the man handicapped by passivity and indecision, the racial supremacist, the humorless sermonizer, and the merry companion must be conformed with Lee the natural leader, the sentimental lover of children and animals, the indifferent engineer, the aggressive warrior” (xii-xiii). Thus, any image can be built of Lee, given the right selection of decontextualized snippets. And as Pryor also states, “[as of 2007] Lee’s papers have never been collected and published, which seems astonishing given his historical prominence. Only casual collections and an imperfect and strongly edited set of his wartime documents are available in printed form” (xii). This means the cultural image of Lee has previously been based on discussions of selections rather than on a corpus, and those selections have often been framed by groups interested in maintaining a stance of Southern apologetics.

While the above, oft-touted quotation about “moral & political evil” is genuine, it is often presented in isolation. In the context of the letter itself, Lee’s remark is only a segue into a discussion of his belief in the inferiority of “the black man,” for whom slavery is a “painful discipline they are undergoing,” which was “necessary for their instruction as a race” (Freeman 372). Furthermore, while Lee was president of Washington College, students formed a chapter of the Ku Klux Klan and often terrorized nearby black schools and communities:

The number of accusations against Washington College boys indicates that he either punished the racial harassment more laxly than other misdemeanors, or turned a blind eye to it. [...] Certainly, he did not exercise the near imperial control

he had at the school, as he did for more trivial matters, such as when the boys threatened to take unofficial Christmas holidays. (Pryor 455)

Whether or not Lee owned slaves in his own right, instead of “temporarily managing them” as part of the execution of his father-in-law’s estate, the historic Lee was not a man concerned with the quality or sanctity of black life.

But the Robert E. Lee of *The Guns of the South* is not the historic Lee. He is much closer to the Lee of the popular imaginary—the taciturn, conflicted statesman. The diegetic Lee is a man who frees the slaves of his father-in-law, George Washington Parke Custis, immediately upon inheriting them.<sup>9</sup> We are not told until the second time this manumission is mentioned (Turtledove 260) that it was one of the terms of Custis’s will and not Lee’s decision—but either way, it was an immediate action. Meanwhile the historic Lee did not free those slaves until 1862, five years after Custis’s death—the maximum term allowed under the will. The novel’s protagonist is not *that* Lee. Nor is he the Lee who seized three laborers who had run away (under the impression that they were already free) then supervised their subsequent flogging (Blassingame 467-68). Instead, we have a kind gentleman doing his best to lead the South into a complex political future—one who frees not only his father-in-law’s slaves, but his own as well, and then works to end Confederate slavery.

Furthermore, that pivotal general order on the treatment of black prisoners—the edict which shows Lee’s compassion, allows Major Marshall to reasonably alter his

<sup>9</sup> “He had manumitted all the estate’s nearly two-hundred bondsmen on his father-in-law’s death” (Turtledove 205). Note both the implication that the action is immediate, and the substitution of the word *bondsmen* for *slaves*.

opinions, and proves Rhodie to be a frothing ideologue—is wholly inconsistent with the historic Lee, who in 1864 refused to exchange prisoners with General Grant specifically because Grant had requested “that blacks be exchanged ‘the same as white soldiers’” (McPherson 800). Of course, by this point, a third of the way into the novel, small documentary details have been so carefully reproduced that a casual reader could reasonably assume that this order, like General Cleburne’s plan to offer manumission in exchange for military service, is another detail confirmable in the historic real.

Like Caudell, the protagonist Lee is a fact-based invention. However, Unlike Caudell, Lee is not Turtledove’s invention: he is the image of post-Civil War reconciliation made manifest in narrative form. The single exception is that the novel’s Lee owns slaves, even if we almost never see them, whereas the mythic figure of the Lost Cause never did.

In addition to the problems posed by the diegetic Lee’s attitude toward slavery in the novel, there is also his attitude toward free black labor, which, like the general order, is decidedly ahistoric. When Lee the protagonist mentions to his wife his plan to free her serving woman, Julia, he counters Mary’s fears of what she will do without her servant by suggesting Julia could stay on for wages, adding “Perry has served me so for years” (259). Here, Lee’s cook from the beginning of the novel is once again invoked—this time as evidence of the feasibility and suitability of black waged employees. However, this casual attitude towards the practical effects of the change in Julia’s status is contrary to the historic Lee who, after the war, advised his friend and former Chief of Artillery, Colonel Thomas H. Carter, to fire all of his black farmhands and replace them with whites, saying “I have always observed that wherever you find the negro, everything is going down around him”

(Lee 168). Admittedly, this is after the South lost the Civil War,<sup>10</sup> and so this is a version of Robert E. Lee that we will never see in a narrative of Southern victory. Regardless, it is difficult to recognize the novel's Lee in the man who historically voiced this sentiment.

Lee's opinions on arming black men and enlisting them in the Confederate Army also point to an interesting deviation from history—but instead of diverging from the historic Lee, the deviation is from the South as a whole. When President Lee addresses the Congress as they begin deliberations on his plan for abolition, he hints at one potential benefit of the policy: the ability to enlist black troops into the Army, thus shoring up national defense. This is a timely hint as the CSA is in the middle of its new war against the time travelers: “The war itself and its aftermath taught us new lessons about the Negro, lessons, I admit, a fair number of us would sooner not have learned. Yet they remain before us, and we ignore them at our peril. We learned from the United States that colored men might make fair soldiers, a possibility we had previously denied” (501-02).

From a combination of encountering the capable fighting of black Union troops at Bealeton and the small but frequent post-war insurrections by the formerly enslaved, freed by Union troops during the war, Lee has realized that “colored men” are not “the docile servants they appeared to be in the past.” But this is raised not only as a benefit of abolition, but also as a threat that will be persistently in place should the motion be defeated. As Lee himself says in his speech, “To do so but exacerbates the risk of servile rebellion and gives our enemies a dagger pointed straight at our hearts” (502).

<sup>10</sup> The anecdotal style of Captain Lee's memoir makes it difficult sometimes to pin down the dates conclusively, but it would seem this exchange occurs at some point in 1865—when the war is by no means a distant memory.

Here, the reader is meant to see Lee questioning his previous position on the propriety of arming black men in light of his experiences during and since the war. But more significant is the precise nature of the perception he is beginning to question. His reluctance (and, based on his decision to use this point to persuade the other Confederate politicians, *their* reluctance as well) had not been rooted in fear of an uprising. That threat had only occurred to him since the war. (“Once having tasted freedom,” Lee says, “they can no longer safely be returned to servitude”). Instead, the reluctance Lee argues against had been rooted in the conviction that black men were inferior soldiers—that they lacked the tenacity, conviction, or fighting edge to make an effective military unit. This is evident in Lee’s amazement that enslaved men and women are not “the docile servants they appeared to be” and his assertion that they have grown violent only after they “tasted freedom.” If this is a common perception in this Confederacy, the reader has occasion to wonder if this Confederacy has the same history of violence and uprising as that in the historic real. That it is a surprise that the black man should be able to fight suggests the diegetic imaginary may differ from the historic real more drastically than has previously been apparent.

*“Presentism” and the Absent Black Perspective*

Of course, it is not only telling but troubling that a novel that has committed to following multiple protagonists should nonetheless neglect the perspective of an enslaved black, or any other person of color. The closest the novel offers is in a brief exchange between Caudell and Georgie Ballentine. When Caudell asks Ballentine why he hasn’t ever attempted to run off, the narration observes, “all at once [Ballentine’s face] became a

fortress to guard the thoughts behind it.... ‘Don’ wanna be no runaway,’ Ballentine said. Caudell thought that would end the conversation; the black man had said what a black man had to say to get by in a white man’s world” (92). This is a gesture towards the interiority of a nonwhite character, but only enough to explicitly deny the further consideration of that perspective.

By neglecting this vantage, *The Guns of the South* replicates modern assumptions that continue to limit the discussion of the Confederacy. Specifically, it mirrors charges of “presentism” frequently leveled against those who would denounce Confederate historical figures for their involvement with slavery. The charge of presentism necessarily overlooks the contemporary abolitionist pressures that historically made it so difficult for the Confederacy to gain any foreign support. But more germane to the present point, the accusation of presentism also depends on the assumption that the only relevant opinions on the matter of slavery were those held by people in power. Charges of presentism assume it is irrelevant how the enslaved felt about their servitude.

By giving the reader a black vantage-point character, the novel could have more effectively interrogated both the alternate history and the alternate imaginary it creates. There is already an established tradition for such a strategy within the canon of alternate-history science-fiction: Philip K. Dick’s *The Man in the High Castle*, a seminal work in the genre, is set in an America occupied by Axis forces after losing World War II. Although some chapters are written from the perspective of Nazi characters and other chapters are written from the perspective of Imperial Japanese characters, there are also chapters that focus on the American Resistance movement. These Resistance chapters maintain a

consistent moral framework for the novel, and keep it from celebrating the dark alternative it imagines.

Historically, the slaveholding South was fraught with resistance by the enslaved. In 1943, Herbert Aptheker found that, even limiting one's scope to insurrections involving no fewer than ten enslaved persons acting with the specific aim of obtaining their freedom,<sup>11</sup> there were approximately 250 such revolts and conspiracies in the history of American slavery (162). For Aptheker, the South during the Civil War years was "one huge *mobilized* military camp" (360). For example, April 1861—the very outset of the war—saw rebellions in numerous Kentucky counties (364). In December of 1862, an uprising in Charleston, South Carolina, resulted in a fire that destroyed six hundred buildings (365). Also in 1862, free and enslaved blacks who had plotted rebellion in Culpeper County, Virginia, were discovered to have copies of the Emancipation Proclamation on them, prompting speculation that their actions had been directed by clandestine Union operatives (95).

These are but a few examples from the historic real, but enough to highlight the oddity that there should be no such culture of resistance in the diegetic imaginary.<sup>12</sup> Resistance at any appreciable scale seems to be limited to those who had been liberated by Union forces during the war and a few scattered references to John Brown at Harper's Ferry. There are no references to Nat Turner, though—nor reference to any other rebellion or large-scale self-liberation conceived or led by enslaved blacks on American soil.

<sup>11</sup> By Aptheker's own admission, this definition is far more limiting than many of the legal definitions of "insurrection of slaves" in force in the period (Aptheker 366).

<sup>12</sup> Given that *The Guns of the South* has Robert E. Lee as a protagonist and has Southern munitions and manufacture as such a central concern, it is particularly egregious that the novel should elide over an uprising by enslaved laborers at the Tredegar Iron Works in Richmond, Virginia—where Lee's family lives—in May, 1863—just a few months before the January, 1864 beginning of the novel.



Without a resisting vantage in *The Guns of the South*—a vantage which could have been supplied by the addition of a Southern, black protagonist—the novel is forced to focus on the CSA/AWB tensions that frame the novel, and enslaved characters (such as there are) aren't able to drive their own narratives. Like Shadrach, their only lot is to thank their enslavers for rescuing them from their other enslavers.

### *The Marginalization of the Repugnant*

That Caudell and Lee are semi-ideal protagonists, positioned to give the reader a neatly curated vision of the Confederacy, is not to say that the novel insinuates that the Confederacy was in itself ideal. *The Guns of the South* recognizes the presence of racist attitudes and practices in the Confederacy, yet it keeps these at arm's length from the reader, suggesting through the application of names and of narrative framing that such behaviors are non-indicative of Confederate values as a whole. By showing these attitudes and practices as present, *The Guns of the South* forestalls charges of inaccuracy—much the same as with the replication of minor details, discussed above. Yet by continuously implying that these behaviors only come from those Confederates who are not fair examples of Confederate beliefs, the novel can continue the work of disowning the South's negative legacies, already achieved so effectively through the selection of its antagonists.

This is often achieved through a joint system of naming characters and giving them presence. For the most part, only exemplary characters are referenced by name *and* made present—which is to say, have direct interaction with Lee or Caudell in one of those protagonists' respective episodes. By leaving practitioners of racism either unnamed or unseen, the novel effectively keeps them abstract. Thus they are less real than the main

protagonists, and their actions appear less weighty. When Lee visits Richmond, his black driver, Luke, is shouted at and called a racist epithet by an unnamed Confederate officer for pulling the carriage up right outside the office of the War Department at Mechanic's Hall. But when the officer sees whom Luke is driving, he is immediately embarrassed: "The words stuck in his throat when Lee got out of the carriage. He pulled himself to attention and snapped off a salute that would have done credit to a cadet from the Virginia Military Institute" (73). The officer's embarrassment and subsequent performative rectitude communicate his awareness of having been caught in unbecoming behavior, and here it is implied that though the racist attitude suggested by his language is present in the Confederacy, it is not decorous for those attitudes to impose into the public sphere. Furthermore, that this character is unnamed reduces him in contrast to Luke. Lee has a name and a personal history, as well as his own desires and fears. Luke, who only appears in this Richmond chapter, is little more than a name but is nonetheless invested with a measure of personality and individuality—bantering with Lee on the drive to the Confederate White House and smiling secretly at the officer's embarrassment. The officer, meanwhile, is only a function; he exists only to be embarrassed by his behavior. Consequently, the reader has a harder time identifying with him, or accepting the normalcy of his behavior in contrast to the counter-example of better-known characters.

We see this same tactic at work with the posse hired by Piet Hardie to track Josephine, a posse whose members are not only unnamed but unseen. Without any names or faces, we do not know if any among them are people Caudell knows or that readers have grown attached to over the course of the book. They are, like the above officer, only functions. They contribute to the diegetic *zeitgeist* of the novel, but do so in a way that does

not reflect on our protagonists or the image of the noble, genteel South on which the Lost Cause narrative depends.

Similar to the presence of unnamed characters, the novel also uses the opposite phenomenon—the secondhand report of the actions of named-but-absent historical figures—to communicate the moral framework of its Confederacy. This is done most persistently with Nathan Bedford Forrest. We do not see Forrest until relatively late in the novel, when he confronts Lee, who has just announced his candidacy for President of the CSA (346). But by the time he has been made narratively present for the readers, the readers are already familiar with his reputation as a skilled but chillingly merciless cavalry commander.

He is first mentioned in connection with the massacre at Fort Pillow (160)—in which he commanded the Confederate troops that massacred black Union troops as they were trying to surrender. This is an event from the historic real (April 12, 1864) that has managed to occur again in the diegetic alteration, only this time effected more efficiently with improved weaponry. The event is revealed to the reader through Lee and Rhodie's argument over the treatment of black prisoners of war. By this point in the novel, AWB's antagonism is becoming more readily apparent, even to Lee, and so Rhodie's endorsement of Forrest's actions at Fort Pillow amount to a castigation from the point of view of the novel. Indeed, the narration (from Lee's perspective) states explicitly "most of what he'd heard of Nathan Bedford Forrest was unsavory" (161). Later, "that rascal Forrest" is reported to have disregarded the armistice after the Battle of Washington and destroyed the supply lines for General Sherman's starving troops (198). Forrest is presented as an exception to Confederate values, rather than an example, and thus his actions are pre-

established to be no indication of the real moral or ideological framework of the South. Furthermore, since the reader has no direct encounter with Forrest until significantly later in the novel, she has no opportunity to form an opinion of the character independent from the estimation of him rendered by the novel's protagonists, who have been presented as Confederate exemplars. Nathan Bedford Forrest is named, but he is only a name. By keeping him out of the reader's sight, the novel can work to disown and discredit him.

This is not to say that *The Guns of the South* marginalizes racist behavior entirely through unnamed or unseen characters. There is a recurring, minor figure named Billie Beddingfield—a low-ranking soldier in the 47<sup>th</sup> North Carolina. Many of the more hostile racial attitudes associated with the historic Confederacy have been invested in him. At the Battle of Bealeton, when the Army of Northern Virginia encounters a regiment of black Union soldiers, Beddingfield takes great delight in slaughtering its members, stabbing one soldier repeatedly “long after he was dead” and dismissing the thanks of a Confederate he has rescued, saying “I [killed him] for my own self” (149). Immediately prior to Lincoln's surrender in the fallen Washington, DC, Beddingfield taunts the President, and moves to shoot him on the spot. This attack is stopped only by his First Sergeant (Nathan Caudell) and the sudden, awe-inspiring appearance of Robert E. Lee.

Beddingfield is racist, small-minded, and violent—much of a kind with the novel's AWB antagonists. However, his first appearance in the novel (when Confederate non-commissioned officers are first being trained in the use of the AK-47) conclusively contextualizes him. Here, Beddingfield challenges aforementioned AWB member Benny Lang—a man decidedly smaller than himself—to a hand-to-hand fight, to prove Lang isn't a threat without his “fancy-pants rifle.” When he is immediately bested by Lang's superior

futuristic fighting style, he is made to look foolish in the eyes of his fellows (and the reader). But even before the fight occurs, he is marked as aberrant by the reaction of two officers and a First Sergeant (Caudell again) who have had to deal with his antics before. Another sergeant questions why Beddingfield had ever been made a corporal in the first place (35). After the fight, his colonel lowers him back down to private rank, not because he lost, but because “a raw brawler like that doesn’t deserve to wear [corporal’s stripes]” (37). From the outset, Beddingfield is shown to be unrepresentative of Confederate society or values. Consequently, when the novel has him gleefully slaughter black soldiers or attempt to assassinate Lincoln, it doesn’t reflect on the Confederacy, because Beddingfield is no true ~~Scotsman~~ Confederate.

### **The Diminution of the Impact of Slavery**

After the Battle of Washington, when Lincoln surrenders, Lee identifies “the main question of the war” to be “whether the South should be free and independent.” Lincoln immediately concedes this to *be* the main question, and determines that it has been answered “the wrong way,” not through negotiation, but violence (191). Here we have an admission by Lincoln himself that the States’ Rights question had been the motivating cause of the war—not slavery.

This is the most urgent work of the Lost Cause narrative: denying or at least reducing slavery as a motivator for the war or the central cause of the war. According to the narrative, the proper cause of the Civil War was the rights of states to govern themselves without intrusion of the central, Federal authority. Slavery, under this view, was nothing more than the issue that happened to bring this dispute to a head. Many articulations of the

Lost Cause narrative concede that the war *became* about slavery toward the end—but this concession, of course, only sets up the consequent insistence that the States’ Rights question was never conclusively settled.

That this is view is not only voiced by Lee but is acceded to by Lincoln is indicative of the extent to which the diegetic imaginary of *The Guns of the South* unquestioningly reproduces the South’s revisionist narrative about itself. This concerted diminution of the impact of slavery is at work throughout the novel, and is largely achieved by diminishing the centrality of slavery in Confederate society. First, the novel claims that the Southern governments had never been invested in maintaining racial slavery, but had only appeared to for political gamesmanship. Then, the day-to-day practice of slavery is kept abstract by foregrounding free black characters over enslaved characters, making unclear which characters are enslaved or free, and keeping Confederate masters out of the visible narrative frame. This result is the decentralization of slavery (and white supremacy in general) as a cultural force in the Confederacy, with the consequent implication that slavery was never important enough to the South to go to war over. To use a dichotomy found in Ira Berlin’s 1998 *Many Thousands Gone: The First Two Centuries of Slavery in North America*, the diegetic imaginary Confederacy is not shown as a “slave society” (which the historic Confederacy had been); it has instead been downgraded in severity to a “society with slaves.”

### *Slavery as a Political Game*

In his 2001 book *Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory*, historian David W. Blight states that the Lost Cause narrative is underpinned largely by a notion of

white supremacy “as both a means *and an end*” (259, emphasis added). However, it would seem that in the Confederacy of *The Guns of the South*, white supremacy is never an end unto itself, which is to say it is not a foundational cultural value that must be defended. Rather, it is only a means by which other values are protected or achieved—national sovereignty or economic stability, for example.

When Lee first meets with his running mate, Albert Gallatin Brown, the two sound each other out to discover the compatibility of their beliefs. As to his willingness to support Lee’s abolition plans, Brown says:

“When we were part of the United States, we had to seek to extend slavery wherever we might to balance the corresponding expansion of the Northern States and our consequent loss of power within the U.S. But now we are no longer within the U.S. and may act as we deem best, without fear it will weaken us before our political foes.” (387)

Here, white supremacy—in the form of the legislative machinery that sustained racial slavery—has only ever been a means of defending Southern representation. Now that Confederate independence has been achieved, Brown argues, the South does not need slavery; the new Confederate government represents the permanent protection of those same representative interests. Thus we are told that one of the most concrete manifestations of institutionalized white supremacy was only an instrument, which can be laid aside once the job is done.

This function of the ideology is admitted by none other than Nathan Bedford Forrest. After Lee has been elected the second President of the CSA (but before he is inaugurated), Forrest reaches out to him to concede the victory and congratulate his

opponent.<sup>13</sup> The Forrest campaign had been a nasty one in which Lee's character had been thoroughly smeared, and Forrest's only campaign line had been that Lee was going to set all of the enslaved free. However, at the time of Forrest's concession, Lee comments on the unpleasant campaign, prompting his rival to dismiss it all: "[Forrest] waved his hand. 'All that was just business, just trying to put a scare'—he pronounced it *skeer*—'on you and the people out there who did the voting, same as I would have on a Yankee general, to get him runnin'" (416). Although Forrest continues in his opposition to manumission, he admits that much of his anti-black rhetoric and fear-mongering was nothing more than theatrics. He was performing the part for a political end and, now that the race is over, he will put that part aside.

However, one of the most curious instances of Confederate reasoning suggesting a different set of values than what is borne out historically occurs during Lee's campaign for the Presidency. This is in 1866, and by this point, Abraham Lincoln has lost his bid for re-election, having been defeated by Horatio Seymour. The dominant party in the Union is now a branch of the Republican party that blames abolitionism and the black population for their defeat in a costly war. President Seymour's retaliatory policies have made life in the North more inhospitable to black men and women than had been the case before the war, and as a result, those liberated by Union troops during the war are less likely to "run up North," instead standing their ground and resisting military attempts to re-enslave them. In light of this, when George Lewis (North Carolina State Assemblyman, and Caudell's former Captain) campaigns for Lee, he defends the proposal for gradual abolition by

<sup>13</sup> This is as far as the character gets from "that rascal Forrest," who had performed so much cruelty offstage. Likely, this is a gesture towards making him a more sympathetic figure, in preparation for the coming war against AWB, in which he takes a commanding role.



claiming that the ability of the self-liberated to head north served as a “a kind of safety valve.” But in light of the North having recently closed its borders to runaways, they will instead stay in the South and disrupt the peace and business of the Confederacy. Lewis says, “Now we’re stuck with all of ‘em, and the valve’s tied down. Do you want it to blow? Do you want to see Santo Domingos all through the South?” (391).<sup>14</sup>

If we take Lewis at his word, then Southern concern about enslaved blacks escaping to the North has never been anything more than talk. In fact, Lewis suggests that the ability of the enslaved to run elsewhere is something the Confederates should be grateful for, as it left them with a more pliant population. And this raises the question of whether this Confederacy has the Dred Scott decision in its history. For that historical landmark of a Supreme Court case and others like it gave the Southern states the right to repossess formerly enslaved men and women who had run to freedom in the North. The only way for Lewis’s comment to be recognizable as truth to those whom he is trying to persuade is if the diegetic Confederacy had *not* made concerted efforts to seize runaway slaves from North of the Mason-Dixon line, and consequently had not pressured the Supreme Court to allow the ties of slavery to supersede local laws.<sup>15</sup> Therefore, if we take Lewis at his word, the novel’s Confederacy has a degree of permissiveness regarding self-liberation that is not recognizable in the historic real.

<sup>14</sup> As mentioned in the chapter on *Absalom, Absalom!*, the Haitian Revolution had disruptive repercussions for the slaveholding South. These repercussions are also at work here: Haiti is referenced because of its violence and political import. But it is *also* distant—which again leads the reader to wonder if Lewis isn’t referencing any uprisings in the American South because there haven’t *been* any in this South.

<sup>15</sup> Furthermore, if the Confederacy of *The Guns of the South* does not have the Dred Scott decision, then it becomes *easier* to advance the Lost Cause notion that the war was primarily about states’ rights—since the Dred Scott decision directly contradicts the notion that the states should be able to govern themselves and determine their own laws and policies regarding slavery.

This Confederacy may mobilize white supremacy to achieve its goals, but once those goals are met—when independence has been achieved or economic anxiety has been alleviated—the need for white supremacy is re-evaluated, and white-supremacist practices can be set aside. This is especially true when more sustainable means present themselves for achieving the same ends—such as being able to rely on a newly manumitted black population to aid in the national defense. As a result, this Confederacy—striving to be reasonable in its treatment of its black population—reveals itself to be less and less recognizable as the Confederacy from the historic real.

### *The Abstraction of Slavery*

Whereas the above tactic furthers the act of Lost Cause revision by altering the realities of history, the following tactic is less about direct alteration and more about the implication of difference through narrative framing. Just as the novel uses a system of abstractions to make careful claims about what is morally normal in the diegetic imaginary, an additional system of abstractions is used elsewhere to make slavery less real and immediate for the reader.

The novel almost completely avoids scenes of Confederates exerting mastery over the enslaved. In some cases, this means the black characters interacted with are free (resulting in a higher number of free black figures than is supported by the historic real). However, in other cases the enslaved or free status of characters cannot be determined, based on a peculiar effect of how the novel introduces them. Finally, in the event that an enslaved person is conclusively known to be enslaved, the master/slave relationship is otherwise avoided by keeping the master absent. All of these tactics continue the same act

rendered by the reduction of white supremacy to a political game; it decentralizes the South's dependence on slavery, which in turn aids the reproduction of the Lost Cause claim that slavery could not have been a cause for the war. Additionally, keeping slavery abstract reduces the reader's difficulty in emotionally engaging with the Confederate protagonists, since there are fewer persistent reminders that they are actively engaged in a war to maintain slavery.

It is significant that the first character of color is Perry, the conspicuously free man who serves as Lee's camp cook. He is mentioned incidentally above for the effect the revelation of his freedom has on Rhodie, but there is an additional effect of this revelation: Turtledove is able to avoid putting Lee in a position of mastery over an enslaved man. This is not a one-time effect; many of the black characters Lee has his most significant interactions with over the course of the novel are free, such as John Dabney the caterer at his inauguration (436) or the unnamed blacksmith whose harassment he stops (265). Having Lee interact primarily with free black characters not only keeps consistent with his counterpart in the Lost Cause imaginary—the Lee who never owned other human beings—but also reduces the ways in which he directly benefits from the Confederate slave system. This makes it easier for the reader to entertain that it is in keeping with his character to take up the cause of abolitionism later in the novel.

Julia, his wife's serving woman, is an outlier: Though she is mentioned early in the novel—and is even described as “a slave woman” (64)—she largely disappears after this debut. It isn't until after Lee frees her that the two of them ever speak to one another, or that she begins to manifest any semblance of individuality or agency. Without dialogue or other insistently visible action, there isn't much to bring her into the reader's attention

during the period when her existence would be a reminder of the prevalence of slavery in the South.

However, just how many of the black characters Lee or others interact with are enslaved and how many are free is a difficult point to discuss, because the novel's framing is so effective in casting even basic assumptions about the racial makeup of the South in doubt. In this light, Perry has yet another function: he sets the reader's assumptions regarding the status of all future black characters.

In the historic South of the 1860s, wherein only about 6.2% of the black population was recognized as free (Berlin 137), Rhodie's assumption that Perry is enslaved would not have been an uninformed one. In truth, given the statutes throughout the South requiring free blacks to maintain and present proof of their freedom, the assumption of slavery had the weight of law. But by introducing the free Perry before any other black character—and by conspicuously correcting the “erroneous” assumption of his status—the reader is discouraged from making the same assumption as Rhodie in the future. This frustration of assumptions is reinforced every time a new free black character is introduced, be it John Dabney, the unnamed blacksmith, or Israel—the shopkeeper's assistant whom Caudell teaches math late in the novel. By the time the reader encounters Luke, Lee's driver in Richmond, her ability to assume the status of characters of color has been largely obviated.

This, of course, does not conclusively require that these characters are free, but whether they are or not, the doubt aids the revision. If the characters are free, it implies a higher free population in the diegetic imaginary than in the historic real, thus furthering the

idea that slavery was not prevalent. If they are not, then the uncertainty obscures this fact and still engenders the impression of a larger free population.

However, there are still enslaved characters whom the novel acknowledges are enslaved, and who figure prominently in its scenes. In these cases, however, the novel tends to avoid depictions of Confederate mastery by keeping the masters out of the narrative frame. I have already discussed this about the work detail Caudell observes after the war: They toil at an easy pace, and no master or overseer is observed in the field with them. But this is also apparent in Caudell's exchange with Georgie Ballentine, the cook for the 47<sup>th</sup> North Carolina's H Company, whose death he and Mollie Bean will later mourn. Ballentine came to the Company as a bodyguard to his master, Addison Holland, who had deserted six months before the novel begins. We never see Holland, and as a result, though Ballentine is attached to Company H of the 47<sup>th</sup>, no individual owns him anymore, and no Confederate attempts to exert the unilateral influence of mastery over him. He appears to us as only *de facto* enslaved, but in praxis is given freedom of movement, expression, and arms. By erasing Holland, and thus erasing the reminder of Ballentine's legal status as property, the novel makes his servitude invisible. So it is that even when one of the two point-of-view characters has a meaningful exchange with an enslaved character, the realities of slavery are still kept at bay through layers of abstraction.

The disproportionate inclusion of free black characters and the persistent exclusion of masters are tactics by which this novel makes slavery abstract, and thus reduces its centrality in Southern society. But as this chapter has shown, *The Guns of the South* employs multiple tactics to aid in the construction of a revisionist diegetic imaginary consistent with the popular imaginary of the Lost Cause narrative. Although the presence

of time travelers make the alteration of the diegesis conspicuous, AWB come to a past that is already different from the South of the historic real, a past wherein slavery is not inherently cruel, where white supremacy is only an expendable tactic of political gamesmanship, and in which racism is never potent enough to engender political or physical action.

### **The Refictionalizing of Myth**

Though not given to us as an ideal, Turtledove's Confederacy is nonetheless an improved version of the historic real—a gentler, semi-Utopic vision in which the South had never been invested in white supremacy as a cultural end and, if left to its own devices, would have swiftly manumitted all of its enslaved population in its own time. In this way, it is nothing more than a lengthy, concrete manifestation of Lost Cause myths, advancing (whether naively or maliciously) destructive myths which continue to dominate modern discourse about the Civil War and civil rights.

However, anachro-diegetic reading has an interesting effect here. It is, of course, the central idea of this system of reading that the presence of an anachronism results in the creation of a new reality. Generally, the key distinction here is that the historic real is not allowed primacy over the diegesis, but the diegesis is allowed to have its own persistent identity. This aids an act of deconstructive comparison. However, as the diegesis in *The Guns of the South* is largely a recreation of the Lost Cause myth, this act of comparison is not in itself anything new. This is an urgent and ongoing conversation.

Fortunately, there is an unintended but welcome corollary effect to the distinctness of the diegesis: Not only is the historic real not able to make claims about the diegesis, the

diegesis cannot make claims of the historic real. We have already seen how the first tactic of the novel, the one that aids all others most persistently, is the concealment of the revisionary act. Insofar as the presence of the obviously fantastic—and thus, the conspicuously fictional—aids in this obscurity, anachro-diegetic reading reverses the process. The anachronism, once engaged with as an anachronism, reinforces the fictionality of the text, and readers whose perception of history incorporates this diegesis or others with the same myth are consequently reminded that the diegetic imaginary is not the historic real. *The Guns of the South* does not need time travelers to remove it from recognizable history; that removal was already complete at the insertion of its Lost-Cause-appropriate racial laxity.

Understandably, discussion of the implications—diegetic or otherwise—of an anachronism cannot occur if there is no mutual recognition of that anachronism in the first place. The more disputed the history, the more clearly and exhaustively the critic must communicate the understanding of history under which the anachronism becomes apparent. In this chapter, this took the form of a close, historicist reading to yield persuasive evidence of the presence of anachronism. Yet when we consider how much attention this chapter had to devote to proving the anachronicity of the novel versus the heft of the discussion of that anachronicity, we begin to wonder if there is, in this instance, a disproportionate amount of work required for what may be an insignificant yield.

For discussions aiming to persuade those who initially disagree about the presence of a contentious anachronism—probably not. But for discussions with those who are already aware of the historical context on which an anachronism depends, this may not be wasted effort. This is because, for the resistant, the act of anatomizing the anachronism is

a process of argumentation. But for the initiated, the articulation of the finer parts of the anachronism is not performed in order to prove anything, but to demonstrate the subtlety of its presence—calling attention to those real-world conditions which render the anachronism nearly invisible. Calling attention to these conditions is in itself a means of inviting that real/diegetic comparison which is the aim of this dissertation.

In fine, with the contentious anachronism, anachro-diegetic reading is not a good means of beginning a conversation about mythic historical narratives. But it can be a valuable means of continuing such a conversation that has already been begun.



## CHAPTER FOUR: THE INTERNALLY-CONSTRUCTED ANACHRONISM IN MARGARET MITCHELL'S *GONE WITH THE WIND*

The next novel employed in my argument complicates the notion of anachronism in another interesting way. In previous chapters, the anachronisms of interest have been complete and always already parts of the text: the colonial slave system is in effect in *Absalom, Absalom!*'s Haiti; human consciousness does have a paradoxical relationship to the physical universe in *Timequake*; and in *The Guns of the South*, the Confederacy is invested with ahistorically progressive attitudes about race. But the anachronism of interest in Margaret Mitchell's 1936 *Gone with the Wind* is incomplete. By "incomplete" I don't mean that the anachronism isn't very anachronistic; even an anachronism of the second kind (that which is merely unlikely) is still an anachronism. Instead, in *Gone with the Wind*, the anachronism is incomplete because it is something that the characters themselves attempt to construct. Thus Mitchell's novel complicates the reader's understanding of anachronism and tests the application of anachro-diegetic reading. It presents the reader with an anachronism that is being *internally* constructed, which is to say, attempted within the diegesis by characters who are part of that diegesis.

The artifact is a genteel, Antebellum existence made anachronistic by its appearance in a Reconstruction setting. Under many definitions of *anachronism*, this narrative strategy may be overlooked completely. After all, it lacks the immediate preposterousness of a mechanical clock in Ancient Rome, and thus falls short of the "thing out of time" construction that usually dominates definitions of anachronism. Yet under the definition of anachronism advanced in this dissertation, we may see its anachronistic import more fully, for in this definition the anachronism isn't the artifact, nor is it the

setting, but is the paradoxical link between the two—the *temporal* problematic of the one containing the other. And insofar as the bygone aristocratic system this novel memorializes was annihilated by the outcome of the Civil War, the Civil War consequently has the same history-splitting effect as the Haitian Revolution in Chapter One of this dissertation. So it is that when the reader observe characters attempting to rebuild the old system in the new reality, she sees that they are attempting to build an anachronism.

The attempt to build this artifact anew is a fragmentary one—not a process coherently managed by an organized group, but a series of disjointed processes whereby a variety of characters use a variety of methods to recreate differing fragments of Antebellum gentility, as they remember it. Of course, even in the novel, the parts cannot cohere, and the reader is left with the inescapable *pastness* of this existence—hence the anachronistic nature of its attempted recreation. However, as this chapter shall demonstrate, the behavior of the former Confederates, when viewed as attempts to construct anachronisms, reveals not only the hollowness of the incomplete act of construction, but also the hollowness of the supposed “originary” that the characters are so invested in rebuilding. The image of the genteel Old South is always already an insubstantial one, and Tara has always been a simulation of itself.

It is not only curious that the anachronism of interest in this chapter is one constructed diegetically, but it is also apt. It is, after all, the core assertion of anachro-diegetic reading that an anachronism alters the diegesis in which it appears. *Gone with the Wind* simply presents us with a narrative in which characters are attempting to do just that—construct a bygone way of life and, in so doing, alter their reality to something more amenable to themselves.

It may seem odd to think of an anachronism as something effected within a diegesis. However, this sort of parachronistic anxiety is the same we find in Dickens's Miss Havisham in *Great Expectations*, clinging to the date of her intended wedding. It is the same we see in Cervantes's famous La Mancha knight-errant, who seeks to recreate the age of chivalry by living in accordance with a fantasy version of that age that he keeps in his head. Even Kurt Vonnegut has written in this tradition; his short work "Where I Live" is concerned with how the inhabitants of Barnstable, Massachusetts, resist any form of progress or development in their berg, and ultimately reveals that nobody who lives there was born there; everybody is desperately preserving an imagined antiquity that has nothing to do with the fact of the place. In short, there is a tradition of literary figures trying desperately to recreate a bygone era through their own action. This, I contend, is an act of anachronism, and this tradition is writ large in *Gone with the Wind*.

Of course, since the anachronism of interest is an internally-constructed anachronism, this alters the resulting act of comparison. This is because we do not need to go beyond the bounds of the novel, into the historic real, to compare the anachronism to the "reality" it deviates from.<sup>1</sup> The reader can see this deviation easily enough, as well as the tension between the two "realities," in the immensity of the effort required to construct the various Antebellum simulacra, and in how these simulations fail to satisfy.

Not only does *Gone with the Wind* allow us to read a curious formation of anachronism, it also extends the work of the previous chapter. One of the central challenges

<sup>1</sup> Of course, we still *can*. As with *Absalom, Absalom!* and *The Guns of the South*, we can mine the novel for its historic inaccuracies and revisions and demonstrate how these inaccuracies place the novel within a different history. We *can* do this. But as previous chapters have already done this, this chapter is free to focus instead on the curious anomaly of the internally-constructed anachronism.

to the anachronism in *The Guns of the South* is a cultural reluctance to abandon certain romanticized myths about the Old South, the Confederacy, and the Civil War. This mythic complication remains, in a form, with Mitchell's novel. Indeed, *Gone with the Wind* is not just another example of a text influenced by a historic imaginary; *Gone with the Wind* is central to that imaginary. Thus, by depriving it of some of its mythic power by means of reading it as a novel about an (incomplete) anachronism, the reader destabilize a cultural pillar of the romanticization of the Confederate cause.

### **Mitchell's "True Account"**

It may not be strictly necessary to summarize Margaret Mitchell's 1936 novel *Gone with the Wind*, so completely has it passed into the American consciousness (thanks, in large part, to its 1939 film adaptation). It tells the story of Scarlett O'Hara, an entitled and manipulative belle from a wealthy Georgia family, who loses her privileged way of life in the wake of the Civil War—not only as a result of the deprivation from the war itself, but also as an effect of Reconstruction after the war, which is here presented as particularly cruel and vindictive.

Scarlett does everything in her power to resume the old careless life she had enjoyed in the Antebellum: she pawns stolen goods, marries her sister's beau for his nest egg, and runs a series of lumber mills to exploit people rebuilding Atlanta after Sherman's March to the Sea. Every action puts her at odds with her fellow former Confederates, who resent not only her success, but her complete unwillingness to play the part of the good Confederate wife, widow, or mother. By the end of the novel, Scarlett has built up a sizable fortune, but comes to realize that her careless girlhood is irretrievably lost to her, and that

she should have more closely treasured the company of her fallen socialite neighbors whom she had disparaged and been shunned by.

The novel was released to mixed reviews, with many of its more respected critics (such as John Crowe Ransom) not only having to explain its literary inferiority, but also its incredible popularity. And this popularity has endured (again, largely thanks to the Best Picture-winning movie adapted from it). In *Confederates in the Attic*, a thorough examination of how the Civil War (and particularly the Lost Cause of the Confederacy) persists in popular American culture, Tony Horwitz devotes an entire chapter to Mitchell's novel, in which he says "*Gone With the Wind* [sic] had done more to keep the Civil War alive, and to mold its memory, than any history book or event since Appomattox" (296). Here, perhaps unintentionally, he writes in the same vein as literary critic L.D. Reddick who, as early as 1937, speculated that, "To many persons, who seldom read a history book, *Gone with the Wind* will represent the true account in fictionalized form of what actually happened" (365).

However, with its wistful look back to the days of plantation slavery, its sinister depiction of Union occupation after the war, its unrepentant lionization of Southern aristocracy, and its unapologetic depiction of black people as either simple-minded children or shiftless roustabouts, *Gone with the Wind* is a problematic novel. From 2009-15, conceptual poet Vanessa Place engaged in a project of systematically retweeting the novel, a line at a time. In her 2015 artist's statement written in the aftermath of this controversial project, it is clear she has no love for *Gone with the Wind*, which she describes as "the thingness of racism," saying that Margaret Mitchell "plays the blackface minstrel, ventriloquizing blackness."

Place's experience with *Gone with the Wind* is revealing of the novel's cultural problems. Place's stated intention for her Twitter reproduction was to invite a lawsuit by the "notoriously litigious" Estate of Margaret Mitchell—to make the Estate take public ownership of Mitchell's racist language and caricatures. But the Estate took no action against her. Instead, her work caused a backlash against her within the Association of Writers and Writing Programs (AWP), which consequently ousted her from the planning committee for its 2016 convention (Jaschik). According to AWP's statement after the ouster, a key problem with Place's work was that Mitchell's original racist text was "unmediated"—that is, devoid of any commentary or re-contextualization (Association). Without this, the Twitter project was only replicating and further amplifying Mitchell's racist imagery.

Place, her critics, and the rest of AWP are not the only voices taking issue with Mitchell's novel and its treatment of race. A 2011 retrospective review in *Time* magazine describes it as "a retrograde book—unforgivably racist" (Cloud). A 2016 review by Rafia Zakaria views Mitchell's treatment of race as her willing continuation of the race-regulating politics of her day: "If, in Mitchell's reality, blacks were free but unequal, in her book they are flat and one-dimensional, enduring the cruellest [sic] sentence a novelist can impose." In the wake of the 2017 white-supremacist rally in Charlottesville, Virginia, an editorial on *Slate.com* revisited the 1939 film of *Gone with the Wind* as a "cinematic monument" to the Confederacy, but points out that its potential for damage is more insidious than that of D. W. Griffith's Ku Klux Klan-glorifying *Birth of a Nation*: "Where *Birth of a Nation* inspires violence and the perpetuation of virulent racism, *Gone With the Wind* inspires complacency—its mythology echoes today in a more casual form of bigotry

that ignores the humanity of black people, while scrubbing white people clean of any wrongdoing” (Bastién).<sup>2</sup>

However, at least in the popular sphere, such denunciations of Scarlett’s story are often rejected as troubling instances of “presentism”—transparent attempts to revise a narrative to be more palatable to modern-day sensitivities, to the erasure of its historical import—much like any effort to judge Confederate figures by any standards others than those they created for themselves. When a Tennessee theatre decided to break with its thirty-four-year tradition of showing *Gone with the Wind* annually, this action was declaimed as part of the continuing saga of political correctness run amok, and a portent of continued liberal censorship. Said one fan, “Stop trying to rewrite history. The next thing you know they will ban *To Kill a Mockingbird*, *Driving Miss Daisy*, and other iconic movies” (Andrews). Fox News contributor Todd Starnes used even more apoplectic (perhaps apocalyptic) language in his blog when he wrote of the event, lamenting, “Sadly, I predicted several weeks ago that it would be only a matter of time before the culture jihadists targeted Tara.” By labeling the reduced public display of *Gone with the Wind* as “revision” or “erasure,” these speakers suggest they do not see Mitchell’s novel as engaged in its own acts of revision and erasure. But so enticing has Mitchell made her revision that, as Reddick predicted, her version of events is accepted as truth. Consequently, any attempts to re-historicize Scarlett’s odyssey will always be read as an Orwellian rewrite of history.

<sup>2</sup> Admittedly, Bastién’s comments refer to the film instead of the novel, as do the defenses of *Gone with the Wind* cited below. However, as novelist Rodger Lyle Brown points out in his dissertation, the two are indistinguishable in terms of their popular impact: “When people refer to this thing called ‘Gone With the Wind,’ they tend to merge the novel with the movie, ultimately referring to neither, but rather to a set of characters, place names, and vague and various assumptions of southern history and culture” (quoted in Dickey 13).

Since the novel is accepted as truth, then, perhaps a helpful course of action would be to make the novel testify against itself. To use the document, accepted as true, to complicate and deprivilege the same romantic vision it espouses and enshrines. Anachro-diegetic reading may help with this.

Scarlett and her Atlanta neighbors are desperately clinging to an old way of life—specifically, the Southern aristocratic existence. This would suggest an existing element of anachronism to that old way of life. In fact, it is the position of this chapter that it is more accurate to say that, since the old way of life is completely gone (with the wind), the characters who are invested in maintaining it after the war aren't in actuality *maintaining* anything. They are, instead, constructing something new: an anachronistic recreation of the aristocratic system they remember.

This is an important distinction, because *Gone with the Wind* is popularly read as a narrative about attempting to continue an old way of life. Reading the novel as a narrative of the construction of something new potentially displaces this, and abdicates many of the “heritage” claims raised in support of neo-Confederacy, for heritage and inheritance are matters of unbroken lines of continuation. Even though that new thing has the appearance of that which came before it, the appearance does not change the fact. The anachronistic reading, which emphasizes this act of construction, undercuts the traditional reading of a passively enduring South. And when the reader sees that the Southern characters of *Gone with the Wind* have not been meekly waiting through the Northern “occupation,” but have instead been actively engaged in a reconstruction of their own, the exposure of this activity highlights the failure of that act of construction, and prompts us to ask why that failure should occur.



### **In Search of (a) Lost Time**

The key difficulty in constructing Antebellum aristocracy in the Reconstruction is that that aristocracy has two key parts, which (the novel suggests) are impossible to acquire simultaneously after the war; the first part is material wealth. The second part is a genteel system of correct behavior. Without the wealth, the aristocratic system would be reduced in power and would not enjoy that wide-scale influence it enjoyed before the war. Without the system of decorum, there would be none of that gallantry and pageantry by which the age is recognized. The decorum gives the aristocracy its *form*, but material wealth provides the *substance* on which that form is based. Although most of the Southern characters in the post-war portions of the book are all working to recreate the aristocracy in their new conditions, they prioritize different parts of it: Scarlett seeks to reproduce the substance by pursuing material wealth to the detriment of all her social connections to the Old South; her neighbors neighbors in Atlanta, however, are desperately mimicking the forms of their old lives without the wealth that had given those forms weight. This results in an apparently irreconcilable tension between Scarlett and her neighbors, as she and they are divided by a common goal.

Ultimately, constructing the old aristocracy anew proves to be too much for the characters; the anachronism is not fully achieved. This is precisely because neither form nor substance alone is enough to rebuild the old system, and pursuing them both is presented as mutually exclusive. This raises the question of why their pairing (and the completion of the anachronism) should prove unachievable. Indeed, several different explanations emerge, depending on the way the reader questions the text: In the surface narrative of the novel, the aristocratic system of the genteel South cannot be recaptured

because of the cruel intercession of the victorious Northern government. Under this reading, the gentility and grace of the old system is something that has been *taken* from the Southerners. This, of course, depends on a careful revision of history in which the Southerners had no hand in bringing about the Civil War. A second reading appears when Mitchell's Civil War is historicized. In this light, the reason for the anachronism's futility is revealed to be the abolition of slavery. Without enslaved labor, the Southerners cannot maintain the profitable plantations that provided the substance of their wealth, nor do they have the leisure to perfect the forms of their decorum. Unfortunately, the novel anticipates this reading and establishes its diegesis as one in which enslaved persons do not desire freedom. This, consequently, is what makes any historicism of Mitchell's revision appear to be a revision itself to those readers invested in the surface narrative. Thus there is an apparent need for a means of reading the novel that pushes back against Mitchell's Southern-victimhood narrative, yet does not need to set its critical lens outside the diegesis.

Our third reading, the one this chapter is focused on, is such a reading. This chapter looks within the diegesis and finds signs that the Southern aristocratic system—the artifact on which this anachronism is centered—already contains the seeds of its imminent collapse. Though the war hastens this process, the aristocracy that many characters in the novel are invested in recreating was already collapsing; thus attempts to build it anew as a permanent (even eternal) structure are inherently doomed.

The reason for this collapse is simple: Confederate society in the novel is based on a central fiction that victory or success is the inherent right of the Southerner. Dogmatic devotion to his idea (or, at the very least, the conscientious performance of that devotion) is not only central to the Confederate identity, but also a leading factor in its collapse. This

is because the performative belief in the assured success of the Confederate often involves avoiding any of those practical actions necessary to aid that success. I shall now examine this myth more closely, not only because it helps the reader better understand the artifact of this anachronism, but also because the performance of this myth is central to the means by which most of Mitchell's characters work to recreate that artifact in the new setting.

*The Grand Myth: The Performance of Southern Entitlement*

By the time the novel begins, the genteel Old South is a husk maintained only by an illusion that neighbors are kind enough to support each other in. So tenuous is that originary aristocracy that the removal of any of its various props would prove catastrophic. And while slavery, as suggested in the above gloss, is decidedly a load-bearing prop in this arrangement, the novel suggests that even a much less serious resistance can be sufficient to bring it all down. In this case, that slight resistance is nothing more than the encroaching presence of those who do not choose to "play along" in furthering the South's grandiose narrative about itself—a narrative in which the Southern way of life is superior to all others—and that the Southerner's success in his endeavors is assured *because* he ascribes to that way of life. Let us call this the Grand Myth of the Confederacy.

At Rhett Butler's first appearance—at an engagement party at Twelve Oaks—he quickly establishes himself as an outsider. Not only have we been told that "he isn't received" in polite company (101)—a revelation that shocks even the unflappable Scarlett—but he also openly resists the Grand Myth by questioning the partygoers' repeated assertion that a war with the North would be prosecuted quickly and result in Southern victory:

“Has any one of you gentlemen ever thought that there’s not a cannon factory south of the Mason-Dixon Line? Or how few iron foundries there are in the South? Or woolen mills or cotton factories or tanneries? Have you thought that we would not have a single warship and that the Yankee fleet could bottle up our harbors in a week, so that we could not sell our cotton abroad? But—of course—you gentlemen have thought of these things.”

[...]

“The trouble with most of us Southerners,” continued Rhett Butler, “is that we either don’t travel enough or we don’t profit enough by our travels. [...] I have seen many things that you all have not seen. The thousands of immigrants who’d be glad to fight for the Yankees for food and a few dollars, the factories, the foundries, the shipyards, the iron and coal mines—all the things we haven’t got. Why, all we have is cotton and slaves and arrogance. They’d lick us in a month.”

(113)

His wording here is particularly charged, because when he assures the Georgians that “they’d lick us in a month,” he is explicitly parroting an earlier assertion of Southern victory from among a barrage of such assertions: “‘Of course we’ll fight—‘ ‘Yankee thieves—‘ ‘We could lick them in a month—‘ ‘Why, one Southerner can lick twenty Yankees—’” (108)—to list only a few.

These utterances offer no evidence except their own repetition. Behaving as if they are true is an article of faith among good Confederates. The Grand Myth dictates that the Confederate fighting man is more than the equal of any Union rival. Bringing up such negligible details as the Northern superiority in numbers, munitions, and manufacture is

nothing more than contrarian negativity; each of these impediments can be overcome by the Southerner's inexhaustible cussedness.

When Charles Hamilton, newly affianced to Scarlett, assures her that the war will be over in a month (128), he is articulating another form of this same myth. Clayton County's regiment, "the Troop," is "wild with excitement" when they go off to join the war, and this is supposedly enough to cover for the fact that they are only a "half-drilled, half-armed" military outfit (131). When Melanie Wilkes insists that a home guard is an unnecessary waste of men, because "Nobody's invading us and nobody's going to" (177), she too is espousing the same myth. We also see it at work in the continuation of balls and parties even after the war has begun—there is no sense of homefront austerity, no notion that this war they have been so hawkish about promoting will require any alteration in their luxurious lifestyles. Acknowledging that even a victorious outcome will still take time and resources is tantamount to Rhett's indiscretion at the Twelve Oaks party—an impolitic questioning of the superiority of the Southern man.

Rhett's comments do more than question the assumption of easy martial victory; they also call attention to the precarious economics of the South. Not only is there a notable lack in the diversity of the South's production—thanks to the divine right of cotton as king—but also later comments suggest that even those limited products the South is able to export are not being sold to fullest economic advantage. This is a point of pride, mentioned explicitly in the context of the Southerners' confidence that England would soon come out as their ally, because "naturally the British aristocracy sympathized with the Confederacy, as one aristocrat with another, against a race of dollar lovers like the Yankees" (171). Here we see aristocracy specifically opposed to commerce—to trade

aggressively is to be “dollar-loving.” Much better to remain an aristocrat, even if it doesn’t yield the same profits in the long run.

Here, the idea of charging the prices that your product can demand on the market is presented not just as a novelty, but a sinister one. Furthermore, here is an exchange from when the war is in full swing and Rhett Butler is building his fortune as a blockade runner and speculator:

“Right after Fort Sumter fell and before the blockade was established, I bought up several thousand bales of cotton at dirt-cheap prices and ran them to England. They are still there in warehouses in Liverpool. I’ve never sold them. I’m holding them until the English mills have to have cotton and will give me any price I ask. I wouldn’t be surprised if I got a dollar a pound.”

[Scarlett:] “You’ll get a dollar a pound when elephants roost in trees!”

“I’ll believe I’ll get it. Cotton is at seventy-two cents a pound already.”

(239)

Again, we see that the idea of a Southerner demanding his own price is a new development, and this will prove thematic with regard to the novel’s Southern merchants, such as Frank Kennedy and Ashely Wilkes: They are by no means aggressive in trade, almost embarrassed to participate in low, mercantile activities. From the above comments, we can presume that this commercial squeamishness is not localized to these two men—it is a cultural value. The Southerner’s reluctance to engage earnestly in commerce is another sign of his superiority to the Northerner. But, as a result, this means that the Southern economy has been deliberately hamstrung. The reluctance to pursue trade in concert with the avoidance of manufacture and the narrow focus on a small selection of cash crops all

point to this economic stunting—or at least stagnation. And while a carefully maintained stasis does not in itself forebode collapse, it does if your neighbors are not as invested in maintaining that stasis as you are. And indeed, given the snide remarks about the greed of Northern merchants, the reader can assume they are not.

In both war and business, the Grand Myth has the same destructive effect: the visible performance of superiority precludes preparation—for preparation would belie the image of being beyond concern. It is this state of conspicuous nonchalance that Scarlett is specifically working to effect in the later parts of the novel, the parts that center on the construction of anachronism. The difference is that her nonchalance is not performative, but factual; she has worked to actually place herself beyond material concern, even though this leads her to actions which her neighbors find distasteful. But whereas Scarlett acts without performing, her neighbors perform without acting, depending on those around them to support the myth by playing along. In this way, the insufficiency of the two attempted anachronisms in the latter parts of the novel shows the final divorce between the substance and forms of the Old South.

### *Scarlett's Pursuit of Wealth*

Shortly after relocating to Atlanta after the war, Scarlett attends the wedding of Fanny Elsing, a former neighbor of hers from Clayton County. It is a gay affair, and Scarlett is reunited with many people she had not seen since before the war. She is momentarily distracted by the extravagance of the reception: “She wondered where the money for the satin dress had been obtained and for the refreshments and decorations and musicians too.

It must have cost a pretty penny” (593). However, Scarlett can also see the signs of deprivation once she knows to look for them:

In spite of her pleasure at the welcome, Scarlett felt a slight uneasiness which she tried to conceal, an uneasiness about the appearance of her velvet dress. It was still damp to the knees and still spotted about the hem, despite the frantic efforts of Mammy and Cookie with a steaming kettle, a clean hair brush and frantic wavings in front of an open fire. Scarlett was afraid someone would notice her bedraggled state and realize that this was her only nice dress. She was a little cheered by the fact that many of the dresses of the other guests looked far worse than hers. They were so old and had such carefully mended and pressed looks. At least, her dress was whole and new, damp though it was—in fact, the only new dress at the gathering with the exception of Fanny’s white-satin wedding gown (592).

And later:

She looked from the alcove into the huge drawing room and watched the dancers, remembering how beautiful this room had been when first she came to Atlanta during the war. Then the hardwood floors had shone like glass, and overhead the chandelier with its hundreds of tiny prisms had caught and reflected every ray of the dozens of candles it bore, flinging them, like gleams from diamonds, flame and sapphire about the room. The old portraits on the walls had been dignified and gracious and had looked down upon guests with an air of mellowed hospitality. The rosewood sofas had been soft and inviting and one of



them, the largest, had stood in the place of honor in this same alcove where she now sat. It had been Scarlett's favorite seat at parties. [...]

Now the chandelier hung dark. It was twisted askew and most of the prisms were broken, as if the Yankee occupants had made their beauty a target for their boots. Now an oil lamp and a few candles lighted the room and the roaring fire in the wide hearth gave most of the illumination. Its flickering light showed how irreparably scarred and splintered the dull old floor was. Squares of the faded paper on the wall gave evidence that once the portraits had hung there.... (596)

The guests manifest high spirits, but their clothes are cheap, the furnishings are in poor repair, and over all of it hangs the awareness that this bright moment is the exception to the workaday dreariness that has come to typify their lives in the Reconstruction. All of this is made more evident by the out-of-place luxuriousness of Fanny's satin wedding dress, which sharply contrasts with its surroundings and makes them all seem more threadbare.

Compare this to the parties that Scarlett herself hosts (and the general lifestyle she enjoys) once she is financially stable. By this point, she is married to Rhett Butler, but is *persona non grata* among the former-Confederate Atlantans because of how willingly she does business with Yankees:

On the crest of this wave of vulgarity, Scarlett rode triumphantly, newly a bride, dashing pretty in her fine clothes, with Rhett's money solidly behind her. It was an era that suited her, crude, garish, showy, full of overdressed women, overfurnished houses, too many jewels, too many horses, too much food, too much whisky. When Scarlett infrequently stopped to think about the matter she knew that

none of her new associates could be called ladies by [her mother] Ellen's strict standards. But she had broken with Ellen's standards too many times....

Perhaps these new friends were not, strictly speaking, ladies and gentlemen but like Rhett's New Orleans friends, they were so much fun! [...] And, except for her brief honeymoon interlude, she had not had fun in so long. Nor had she had any sense of security. Now secure, she wanted to dance, to play, to riot, to gorge on foods and fine wine, to deck herself in silks and satins, to wallow on soft feather beds and fine upholstery. And she did all these things....

The men, though they had made money, learned new ways less easily or were, perhaps, less patient with the demands of the new gentility. They drank heavily at Scarlett's parties, far too heavily, and usually after a reception there were one or more unexpected guests who stayed the night. They did not drink like the men of Scarlett's girlhood. They became sodden, stupid, ugly or obscene. Moreover, no matter how many spittoons she might put out in view, the rugs always showed signs of tobacco juice on the mornings after. (867-69)

Here, material opulence is evident—Scarlett can afford to be careless, registering the ruination of her niceties with little more than a vague, fleeting annoyance. Food and drink are in abundance, and again, spirits are high. However, notably absent are any of the people from the wedding. Instead, her guests are crass, *nouveau riche* sorts who don't know how to behave in polite society.

The genteel party is impoverished, and the opulent party is vulgar. Neither achieves the grandeur of the first party of the novel—that held at Twelve Oaks to celebrate the announcement of Ashley Wilkes's engagement to Melanie Hamilton. That one is both

lavish *and* polite, and all of the “best” people are in attendance.<sup>3</sup> Both of the two post-war parties referenced above are, in their own way, trying to recapture that moment.

Scarlett’s parties echo the lavishness, but forsake the company. Here we can see how she has reproduced the substances of her old life—balls, fine clothes, material possessions—but done so at the expense of the social practices that gave that old life form. For her neighbors, those fellow Atlantans who eventually stop receiving her in polite company, she has nothing but contempt—seeing them as fools who let a series of arbitrary social codes get in the way of securing both the stability and power that come with accruing material wealth. Her desire to recreate a carefree environment is made plain in her frequent declaration that when she is rich she will tell everyone she doesn’t like to go to “Halifax” (her euphemism for Hell). For her, this freedom to be flippant is the crucial part of her old life, the artifact she wants to seize again—and the surest way to seize it again is to be wealthy again.

Scarlett’s focused pursuit of material gain doesn’t necessarily mean that she is abandoning the social forms. In fact, the novel suggests that she operates under the assumption that once the material substance is in place, the forms will necessarily follow. We can see this most clearly toward the end of the novel, just before Rhett leaves her, when she comes to regret her social castigation: “though she had won material safety [...] in her dreams she was still a frightened child, searching for the lost security of that lost world” (1008). Similarly, in the description of her party, quoted further above, she has brief misgivings about the quality of her guests. That she dismisses these misgivings indicates

<sup>3</sup> The engagement party is also the only glimpse the readers get into the social lives of the Southern characters before the war sets in. Granted, it is a carefully curated one in terms of who gets to be counted as part of the old society.

she still believes the path of material gain to be the right one to achieve her ends, but it also indicates some dawning comprehension that form and substance are separate dimensions to her old, careless, Antebellum life.

*The Atlantans' Devotion to Decorum*

Meanwhile, in maintaining old friendships, jealously guarding against the incursion of new social influence (in the person of the Yankees and other “jumped up” poor folk who have only come into a little money since the war), and strictly adhering to the old, performative standards of politeness and decorum, Scarlett’s Atlantan neighbors are in fact prioritizing those forms which Scarlett has abandoned. However, unlike Scarlett, they have necessarily foregone acquiring the material trappings or financial security that would give those forms substance. Having prioritized the other half of the old aristocratic model, the Atlantans have just as much contempt for Scarlett as she has for them (perhaps more, since her wealth allows her to not think about them).

In their own eyes, they do not lack the gumption to continue in the new, post-war world. After all, Hugh Elsing cuts and sells firewood, his mother runs a boarding house, and Mrs. Merriwether sells pies. All of these occupations already represent willing departures from the aristocratic disdain for labor which had been an undercurrent of their old lives (though admittedly pursued in a halfhearted fashion). Tellingly, though, the Atlantans have the “decency” not to call undue attention to their neighbors’ commercial endeavors, thus supporting those neighbors in a mutual fiction of a continued life of gentility. Furthermore, attaining the level of wealth that Scarlett achieves would require

two actions that are anathema to the Southerners: trading gladly with Yankees and engaging sincerely in commerce.

As for dealing with Northerners, many of the Atlantans do. After all, in Mitchell's *Reconstructed Georgia*, it is only carpetbaggers and Federal officers who have money. But decent Southerners have the decorum to trade grudgingly: "Mrs. Merriwether and many other Southerners were also doing business with the newcomers from the North, but the difference was that they did not like it and plainly showed they did not like it" (660). This disdain for the occupying armies needn't be sincere, it need only be visible. And though this behavior does not seem to help the Atlantans' finances any, it does allow them to maintain their place in the ersatz aristocracy.

The second thing Scarlett does that is anathema to her neighbors is engage in commerce without reservation. Frank's finances in his general store are poorly managed; the lines he extends amount to little more than loans to his friends in the old families of Georgia. Before they are married, when Frank and Scarlett happen to meet on her arrival in Atlanta after the war, Frank is proud to have scrimped together five-hundred dollars (683). However, after they are married and Scarlett is able to access his ledgers, she finds that the loans he has extended to their former Confederate neighbors come to another five hundred dollars (610). This astounds Scarlett for, in her mind, Frank could have amassed twice the sum he once thought princely if he had been more eager to demand his rights. But Frank is a neighbor first and a merchant second.

Ashley Wilkes is not too different in his management of Scarlett's lumber mill:

At first Scarlett was shocked and disappointed that Ashley did not immediately take hold and make the mill pay double what it had paid under her

management. [...] But he was no more successful than Hugh [the previous manager]. His inexperience, his errors, his utter lack of business judgment *and his scruples about close dealing* were the same as Hugh's. (735-36, emphasis added)

Neither Ashley nor Frank is too eager to exact the best price from his customers. Neither man is quick to call on a debt, or to deny future credit. But as with the other Atlantans refraining from discussing the trades their neighbors are engaged in, Frank and Ashley's behaviors are charitable not only regarding the finances of the members of their in-group, but also to their sensibilities. By holding off on collecting what is owed to them by their neighbors, Frank and Ashley needn't gauchely remind their neighbors of their new impoverishment. The former aristocrats can continue as they had before the war, breezily stepping in and out of shops, purchasing whatever they need, their unimpeachable good reputation as sufficient currency. Granted, if Fanny Elsing's wedding is any indication, the Atlantans aren't indulging in luxury as they may have done before the war. Nonetheless, the illusion gets to continue that they can be as carefree as they once had been. Similarly, by not haggling for the best price, not only do Ashley and Frank get to avoid the miserly reputation that will eventually hover around Scarlett, and they also get to indulge in their own illusion—that they are well off enough that they needn't chase every penny. Here again is the Grand Myth at work—now employed in the service of anachronistic construction.

Were decorum enough to reestablish these characters in their old lifestyles, then there would be no need to perform. But the Atlantans turning a blind eye to each other's altered circumstances is a *de facto* recognition of that alteration. Thus, the need to perform indicates at least a vague awareness on the part of the Atlantans that their old life is

unattainable without material wealth, though, of course, the attainment of that substance would be unseemly. In preserving their dignities, Ashley, Frank, and presumably other sympathetic storekeepers are protecting them from facing the reality that devotion to the old, decorous forms will not cause a sympathetic reaction in their universe, restoring them to wealth and security.

Recall the general disdain the Southerners of Atlanta feel for Scarlett; not only does she engage in trade with Northerners and take an active interest in commerce, but she succeeds while doing so. This is commented on by Rhett Butler, by then Scarlett's third husband, who says "It's always annoying to the godly when the ungodly flourish like the green bay tree" (837). What makes her success so egregious is that it exposes the illusions on which their new aristocratic order depends. The Atlantans do more than mingle and keep a lax economy. They also carefully police social lines: Who is high quality versus low quality, who "is received" by polite company, and who can never be called on. There are a host of ladies groups—"sewing circles, cotillion clubs, and musical societies" (726)—that afford their members some degree of importance by allowing them to determine who is fit and proper to be a member. By means such as these, the former Confederates are able to simulate the strict, formal social norms that they had clothed themselves in before the war. But Scarlett, rich enough to tell everybody to "go to Halifax," doesn't play by their rules—and thrives nonetheless. Her success exposes that the ersatz aristocracy of the Reconstructed South does not have the cultural cachet it pretends to, and that its members do not have the power they once had to determine their environment. It reveals that their community is a sad simulation of a thing that cannot exist in its new setting, due to the changing times.

### **The Call for Reading Mitchell Anachro-Diegetically**

Toward the end of the novel, there is some indication of the Southern characters eventually coming to a state of affairs that is more agreeable to them: The Republican government is disgraced and on its way out, a rising Democratic government promises to undo much of the damage and indignity brought on by Reconstruction, and carpetbaggers are leaving the South for more hospitable climates up North. But despite the indication of this as a potentiality, by the end of the novel, the anachronistic aristocracy cannot be achieved; its parts cannot cohere. Consequently, the title *Gone with the Wind* is fully justified, and the reader is left with the image of the South as a tragic figure, suffering nobly like Oedipus at the end of the Sophoclean play

So far as it regards the surface narrative, perhaps the supposed tragedy of that loss is meant to linger in our perception. By keeping the fallen Confederates in a tragic state at the end of the novel, Mitchell may intend for her readers to be the Southern restoration that her characters cannot achieve. But even without subordinating the novel to a historicizing lens—even momentarily accepting Mitchell's revisionary version of the Civil War and its adjoining eras as a version of history accurate within the diegetic bounds of the novel (more on that in a moment)—the reader still has the means of resisting her apparent estimation of the import of those events. As the rest of the chapter shall demonstrate, reading the novel as the narrative of an anachronism provides a way to challenge the surface narrative's answer to this question in a way that does not force the reader to appeal to outside historical sources, thus making the novel show the lie of its own methods.



*The Surface Reading: A Victimized South*

The facile answer, the one to which the novel itself seems to lead us, is “those damned Yankees.” In a surface reading of the novel, the entire reason that the Wilkeses cannot remain at their ancestral estate of Twelve Oaks, that Fanny Elsing’s satin wedding dress is an oddity among its surroundings, or that genteel community and financial stability have been rendered mutually exclusive is the cruel interposition of an overreaching Federal government. It is the Yankees’ needless, excessive taxes that threaten to deprive Scarlett of her girlhood home; it is the vengeful strictures against former Confederates voting that force the people of Georgia to endure a corrupt post-war government; it is the meddling Freedmen’s Bureau that makes financial success so difficult with its “conflicting regulations” about what the former Confederates “must pay their servants” (644). This is put into the forefront of the reader’s mind when poor white laborer Will Benteen, having joined the Tara homestead, spells out the Northern government’s political efforts to disenfranchise the South:

“Those Carpetbaggers and Scallawags can vote and most of us Democrats can’t. Can’t no Democrat in this state vote if he was on the tax books for more than two thousand dollars in ‘sixty-five. That lets out folks like your pa and Mr. Tarleton and the McRaes and the Fontaine boys. Can’t nobody vote who was a colonel and over in the war and, Miss Scarlett, I bet this state’s got more colonels than any state in the Confederacy. And can’t nobody vote who held office under the Confederate government and that lets out everybody from the notaries to the judges, and the woods are full of folks like that.” (513)

Foregrounding Reconstructive policies such as these advances is the narrative of Southern grandeur as a thing that has been unfairly taken. For Horwitz, it is *this* narrative that inspires and captivates one of Margaret Mitchell's Arkansan fans:

A small white-haired woman with a name tag that said "Peggy Root, Magnolia, Ark." stared intently at Bridge's movie posters. "You can't imagine what *Gone With the Wind* meant to my generation," she said in a gentle drawl.

When I asked why this was so, her eyes misted over. "Poverty," she said. "Ours, I mean. When I was coming up in Arkansas, we didn't have chairs in both the kitchen and setting rooms. So the adults dragged chairs from one room to the other while the kids sat on the floor. Life was that bare. Then this book comes out about a rich South we never knew. It was escapism, I guess."

[...] "I was in the eighth grade when I first read *Gone With the Wind*. [...]" It was like visiting another planet," Peggy said. "And to think our ancestors lived like that. The only one of ours we'd heard about was a grandfather who went broke and lost his mind over the Civil War. He papered his living room with Confederate dollars."

She went quiet for a moment. "I was a good student, the first woman in my family to finish high school. Sometimes I wonder if there hadn't been a Civil War, maybe I could have been a Margaret Mitchell." (306-07).

Peggy Root has fixated on the idea of aristocracy as something that could have been hers without that unfortunate Civil War. Of course, placing Mitchell's simplified history into a larger context reveals the preposterousness of this reading.

*The Historicist Reading: A Revisionary Narrative*

When placed in a larger historical context—one where the terms have not been carefully dictated by Margaret Mitchell—*Gone with the Wind* reveals that the aristocratic existence fetishized in the novel is not one to which all Southerners had access. Thus, it is not something that has been taken from them. The pastness of the Antebellum aristocratic system does more than provide the characters with a parachronistic fixation or lend a tragic air to the general reduction of Southern communities. This pastness also makes that system abstract, and since the modern reader does not have to contend with the exclusivity of that system on a daily basis, every modern, disaffected Southerner who reads the novel is free to believe she would have been a beneficiary of the system had it only been allowed to continue. More simply, the reader is free to cast herself as an O'Hara or a Wilkes and needn't entertain the possibility that she may have been one of the un-propertied poor—one of the despised, "white-trash" Slatterys, or a pretender to class like former overseer Jonas Wilkerson. This is an effect of Mitchell's narrative framing—her reverent focus on the propertied classes of the Old South and her near erasure of other experiences.

But the most important framing choice in the novel is Mitchell's elision over the institution of slavery. To the question, "Why can't the anachronistic recreation of the Old South aristocracy be completed," the historical answer is going to be, "Because the Southerners must attempt to rebuild their society without slavery." Without the easily exploitable, large-scale manual labor provided by slavery, plantations such as Tara and its neighbors cannot produce a yield sufficient to their pecuniary needs. Without those resulting profits on the scale of an entire plantation's production, the former owners of those plantations cannot operate the costly system of fêtes and balls which the Atlantans

weakly impersonate after the war. And without those profits being generated in such a way that does not require the direct, manual interposition of the landowners, there can be none of the dignified idleness of a class that needn't bother itself with the grotesqueries of commerce. Slavery is the missing ingredient without which the whole ruddy concoction cannot cohere.

But were the novel to acknowledge this, then every Southerner's lament at his changed circumstances would become, in part, a wish to again be the master of slaves. This would potentially alienate those readers who, like Peggy Root, may want to see themselves in a white hoopskirt but balk at the idea of holding a whip. And so the novel does what it can to conceal the aristocracy's repugnance. It does not do this by erasing slavery completely from the picture, but by reframing the institution as something benign. The novel's image of a victimized South depends on a carefully revised history in which the South's own actions have had no bearing on its changed circumstances. It depends on a version of history in which Lincoln is never assassinated,<sup>4</sup> in which the inhumanity of slavery is only ever an invention of Harriet Beecher Stowe, and in which the formerly enslaved blacks resent being freed by the Northern government.

This last point is particularly egregious, but it is one that the novel establishes very deliberately. Once Scarlett owns multiple sawmills in Atlanta, she shifts to exploiting convict labor to maximize her profits. This move is roundly condemned by Scarlett's friends and neighbors because of the inhumane way convicts are treated. Here's a brief

<sup>4</sup> Although the assassination of Abraham Lincoln by a Confederate sympathizer is often given as one of the factors that led to the harsh, retaliatory nature of Reconstruction, *Gone with the Wind* makes no mention of Lincoln even being dead.

account of how leased convicts are usually treated, related by Scarlett's white driver Archie, who had been a convict himself before the war:

"I knows about convict leasin'. I calls it convict murderin'. Buyin' men like they was mules. Treatin' them worse than mules ever was treated. Beatin' them, starvin' them, killin' them. And who cares? The State don't care. It's got the lease money. The folks that gits the convicts, they don't care. All they want is to feed them cheap and git all the work they can out of them." (746)

Lest the reader connect this description to nineteenth-century slavery narratives, the novel is careful to establish that what Scarlett has put in place at her mill is decidedly worse than anything entailed in plantation slavery. In an argument with Frank, her husband at the time, she counters his protestations about working convicts by saying "You didn't have any objections to working slaves," to which the narrative voice of the novel responds, "Ah, but that was different. Slaves were neither miserable nor unfortunate. The negroes were far better off under slavery than they were now under freedom, and if she didn't believe it, just look about her!" (752) This conversation is more or less repeated later in the novel, when Scarlett sells her sawmills to Ashley Wilkes, who swears he is going to stop using leased convicts:

[Ashley:] "I can't make money from the enforced labor and misery of others."

[Scarlett:] "But you owned slaves!"

"They weren't miserable" (967)

It would be easy to read this dismissal of the question as the wishful thinking of a former slave owner, shying away from a difficult moral question to avoid examining his former life. And so it would be, if it weren't for the corroboration of the formerly enslaved characters, whom Mitchell makes complicit in their own servitude. So it is that we have Big Sam, formerly a fieldhand at Twelve Oaks, who, reunited with Scarlett after the war, is relieved to return to her service, because finally he has "someone to tell him what to do" (775). We have an unnamed carriage driver, who bristles when called "free," resenting the implication that he would abandon his former owners the Talbots instead of working to provide for them even after the war (543). We have Mammy, who only brings attention to her post-war freedom in the context of refusing Scarlett's orders to leave her side (591), and who calls "trash" any black person who would act on their liberation. By making freedom of the enslaved appear unwanted, the novel further advances its surface narrative of an equally unwanted, interloping Federal government. This is likely the process Vanessa Place is responding to in her comments about Mitchell's "blackface." Historicism is thus a ready means of not allowing Mitchell to get away with her revision.

*The Anachro-Diegetic Reading: Resistance without Presentism*

However, as discussed above, there is a curious problem in historicizing *Gone with the Wind*, and that is the cultural power it has as a central text for the Lost Cause myth. In certain circles, Mitchell's revisionary history is taken as fact, and so any attempts to recontextualize it gets rejected as revisionary—a "presentist" reading of the novel that attempts to view the characters through a biased, unflattering lens.

But engaging with the novel as the novel of the creation of an anachronism—specifically, and reading that anachronism diegetically, provides a means of resisting Mitchell’s historical revisions without appealing to an outside source. Even if we accept *Gone with the Wind* as a wholly accurate depiction of the events within its own diegetic reality—and thus, we have to accept that Big Sam, Mammy, and the other reluctantly freed characters are the indicative samples they are presented as—we can still find subtle indications that expose some forms of the Lost Cause revision as a continuing act of revision—one which, intertwined with the anachronistic construction in the novel, is also performed by the characters themselves.

Even within *Gone with the Wind*, the aristocratic South never existed. It was always an illusion maintained by the willful participation of neighbors. Reading *Gone with the Wind* as the story of anachronistic creation forces us to see the Southern aristocracy, not as something that is maintained (a heritage) but as something new that must be built. And focusing on this anachronism entirely within the diegesis leads us to see the pre-existing fragility of the illusion—a reading that may not have been pursued so long as historicism was on the table. But as this chapter suggests, and the previous chapter was concerned with more centrally, historicism is a difficult critical tool to employ when there is resistance to the shared concept of history. Thus, the literary anachronism—specifically the internally-constructed anachronism—gives us a means of making a central text of the Lost Cause imaginary expose the weaknesses of its own account. The novel testifies against itself, and a major foundation of the ongoing romanticization of the Confederate cause is consequently destabilized.

## CONCLUSION: THE FUTURE OF ANACHRONISM

Despite anachronism being an ancient literary device, there has been scant theorization of this interesting temporal paradox. The *utility* of the anachronism, as a tool for critical inquiry and analysis, has traditionally been limited by a long history of discourse that assumes the anachronism is always an error of historical fidelity and insists the only anachronisms worth study or analysis are those which can be persuasively argued to be the deliberate inclusions of an author figure. Thus, the anachronism has been largely excluded from centuries of development in the methods, assumptions, and values of literary criticism.

Consequently, this dissertation's contributions to the state of discourse on anachronism are not insignificant. The definition I advance for *anachronism* goes beyond the simplistic "thing out of time" definition that has been accepted for so long, and acknowledges that there is more to any anachronism than the visible object that makes it apparent. The central insistence that anachronisms be read as pledges of what is normal within a given diegesis avoids any question of error and intent, and thus frees anachronism to be approached with a broader range of critical means. With the provided taxonomies of direction and kind, discourse on anachronism can be made more precise, and thus avoid the easy but limiting binary of asking whether something is or is not anachronistic. Although the terminology for direction is ancient, the terminology for kind—original to this dissertation—is one I expect to use persistently in my ongoing work on anachronism. In fact, this system has already started gaining some interest as portions of this research have been shared at the International Conference for the Fantastic in the Arts, where



numerous colleagues commented that the impossible/unlikely/misread gradations are both interesting and useful.

Furthermore, each of the chapters not only continued this dissertation's project of demonstrating what it means to read an anachronism in terms of its diegetic effect, but also tested the limits of the central definition of anachronism and assumptions about how anachronism works. The first chapter was a straightforward demonstration of what the diegetic reading of an anachronism could look like using a text that has been read and analyzed for decades—both with and without regard to its central anachronism. The second chapter explored the admittedly rare configuration of the anachronism that does not depend on a historic real. The third chapter solidified to what extent the discussion of anachronism depends on historical consensus. Finally, the fourth chapter explored the possibility of the anachronism constructed internally to diegesis—an incomplete attempt on the part of the characters to alter their reality and thus, an effect to render in practical terms that which in this dissertation has been largely theoretical.

There is, of course, much work yet to be done. Two of my texts (*Timequake* and *The Guns of the South*) are novels of the fantastic that are fixated on the notion of the alterability of the past—in *Timequake* this is impossible, but in *The Guns of the South*, this is readily achieved. The ability of literature of the fantastic to make the past alterable suggests a whole new dimension of temporality: time ceases to be a single line, becoming a system of parallel or even branching temporalities. This in turn suggests the possibility for a completely new kind of anachronism, outside the scope of the dissertation. Whereas I have used *prochronism* for the anachronism that comes from the future and *parachronism* for that which comes from the past, there is presently no succinct terminology for the

anachronism that comes from a parallel or diverging timeline. I am currently working on an examination of this special anachronism, which I call *ectochronism* (from *ektos khronos* [ἐκτός χρόνος], “outside of time”). This new project, which I am preparing for *Science Fiction Studies*, will define the ectochronism, show its pre-existing use in science-fiction literature, and then suggest the ectochronism’s non-literal applicability to non-fantastic texts.

Furthermore, the Lost Cause narrative has been an undeniable presence in this dissertation—for three of its four chapters, at least. Although I have valued the sustained theoretical meditation on anachronism and its utility that this dissertation has allowed, I believe that, moving forward, I would like to focus on the persistence of anachronism in Lost Cause culture. As I begin revising *Normative Disruptions* with an eye to a first book, this will be my emphasis—instead of using Lost Cause texts to demonstrate articulations of anachronism, I will use my understanding of anachronism to shine a light on a genre and cultural movement that presupposes we can choose our own history and place ourselves within that chosen narrative.

As I said at the outset of this project, anachronism is a long-misunderstood device. However, this need not be the case. Despite a needed clarification about “the thing out of time,” anachronism itself is not a difficult or obscure topic. The main limitations to its understanding are thus not its inherent complexity, but in the willingness of the scholarly community to take the anachronism seriously.

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