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ISSUES OF WHERE:  
THE ACTIVITY OF PLACE IN CONTEMPORARY SOUTHERN WRITING  
BY WOMEN

By

Tonita S. Branan

A DISSERTATION

Submitted to  
Michigan State University  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Department of English

2000

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# ABSTRACT

## ISSUES OF WHERE: THE ACTIVITY OF PLACE IN CONTEMPORARY SOUTHERN WRITING BY WOMEN

By

Tonita S. Branan

The idea that place is a constitutive feature of southern writing has dominated southern literary criticism for over six decades. Scholars in the field have tended to depict place as a common-sense, transparent phenomenon: that it evokes real sites in the South in ways native southerners will immediately recognize, that readers all know what place means (it represents Nature, or the various levels of a community's social hierarchies, or female caprice and fertility), or that place in the South, like the Civil War's Lost Cause, is ever on the verge of extinction. But if critics would consider aspects of multiculturalism gaining ground in contemporary southern texts -- e.g., that a site may be experienced differently by different people, or that place gives rise to misunderstanding, fissures, and loss as well as reciprocity and shared perspectives -- place could not be construed as obvious or depend on collective agreement. The premise of this study is that southern

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literary criticism needs to *problematize* its understanding of the dynamics of place to address the complexities of regional diversity.

This study's basis for stretching conventional notions of place is the spatial predicaments in contemporary southern women's writing. The texts it treats, Gloria Naylor's Mama Day, Minnie Bruce Pratt's "Identity: Skin Blood Heart," and Elizabeth Spencer's The Salt Line, all question the South's transition from white hegemony to something else and cast place as an issue that needs settling. These works wrestle with uncertainties along the edge of place's meaning: how position affects "legitimate" occupancy, the ways dominance figures a city's grid, whether long-standing possession translates to southern essence. Analyzing these texts' place-determined complications, this study theorizes how place is discrepant, selective, irregular; its unorthodox definitions also jolt the non-confrontational, stabilizing approaches to place in southern literary criticism. Ultimately Issues of Where accounts for the enigma of the South's continuing in a multicultural context, amid forces that seem likely to render the region insignificant but have not (yet).

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## Acknowledgments

Marcia Aldrich has read draft after draft of this manuscript and always responded with unflinching candor. For this, as well as her organized, argument-oriented approach, I am deeply grateful. In no small measure the shape of this project is guided by her recommendations.

Stephen Rachman insists on things making sense and explains my ideas back in ways that are clearer than what I started with. How will I find another such reader?

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I could finish.

List of Figures

Introduction

Chapter One

Measuring So

Chapter Two

Viva Day and

Chapter Three

List Causes

Tracking the

"Identity":

Chapter Four

Board an Air

Conclusion

Replacement

Appendix

Notes

Works Cited

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

List of Figures.....	ix
Introduction.....	1
Chapter One	
Measuring Southern Measures.....	30
Chapter Two	
<u>Mama Day</u> and the Trouble with Maps.....	86
Chapter Three	
Lost Causes, Lost Space:	
Tracking the Void in Minnie Bruce Pratt's	
"Identity: Skin Blood Heart".....	143
Chapter Four	
Toward an Almost Shareable South.....	197
Conclusion	
Re-placement Due South.....	261
Appendix.....	281
Notes.....	294
Works Cited.....	318

Figure 1  
The Map at  
Random Ho

## LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1

The Map at the Opening of Mama Day

(Random House, 1993).....97

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## Introduction

Defining the American South in today's multicultural age is something of an enigmatic task. It is perplexing because a multicultural South seems inherently contradictory: can a region created on the basis of white supremacy continue to exist in the wake of Civil Rights, waves of ethnic migration, mass media and mass society? Certainly it is implausible to sustain older versions of the South. Even if the region's geographic parameters were fixed over time (which they have not been), it would be hard to find distinguishing features about the South that have remained unchanged. Characteristics which once set the region apart -- slavery, the Mason-Dixon line, Jim Crow, or a small-farm economic base -- are now extinct, out of vogue, or largely misrepresentative. Southern demographics are no longer predominantly Black and white; growing numbers of Latinos, Mexicans, and people of Asian derivation occupy the South, often encouraging their families and friends to join them.<sup>1</sup> White bigotry appears to be less exclusively southern, as well as less of a stronghold in the region: race riots erupt in Detroit or Los Angeles as easily as in Atlanta, and notably, since the early nineteen seventies



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African-Americans who once fled southern homes to secure freedom and opportunity are building powerful networks in major southern cities and electing Black mayors and State Supreme Court justices.<sup>2</sup> With the advent of air-conditioning, the southern climate has turned from impediment to attraction, and the Sunbelt brims with northeastern transplants and Frostbelt-weary retirees.<sup>3</sup> Considering the influx of Yankees, MTV, and newspeak, not even the southern drawl seems safe or indelible, and with the rise of Ted Turner's cable empire, the Atlanta Braves are broadcast nationally as "America's Team." The lines between the South and the rest of the United States have slackened considerably.

Yet we still talk about the South as an entity unto itself, as if it points to tangible difference. Soul food and Vidalia onions. The blues. The legacy of Martin Luther King, Jr. and his Southern Christian Leadership Conference. New Orleans' celebrated mystique and magnetic pull at Mardi Gras. The rise of the New South Right under Jerry Falwell, Pat Robertson, and Ronald Reagan. The phenomenal success of Algonquin Books of Chapel Hill in the late eighties and early nineties, a small press feeding the flame of the

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southern literary tradition, promoting (formerly) unknown writers like Kaye Gibbons or Larry Brown as obvious heirs of Twain and Faulkner. The national obsession with Savannah after Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil. The influence of Athens' alternative sound (R.E.M. or the B52s), or of classic southern rock groups such as the Black Crowes, who model themselves after the Allman Brothers Band. The wide readership of Southern Living.

It strikes me as misdirected to qualify the South by a predetermined set of criteria, to try to prove whether the region continues and to what degree -- whether, for example, the resurgence of the blues weighs enough to cancel the "foreign" element of Mexican migrant farming (I put foreign in quotes because migrant farming is commonly called that but is not really so -- it has become a staple of southern agriculture).<sup>4</sup> Holding an ideal of the South, a prototypical image frozen in time, and measuring other Souths in other circumstances by that particular brand of authenticity is a familiar trap of this kind of thinking. In contrast, I believe the South exists as long as people need it to, as long as we refer to it meaningfully and perceive effects we consensually label as regional. When the South and southern cease to signify, people will stop

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mentioning, acting on, or judging by them; when there is no energy within or put toward these terms, the land known as the South will amount to latitude and longitude only, and in a social sense, have lost its borders. But we are not there yet. No matter how far the region has drifted from its moorings, no matter how strange it appears to its fifth-or-sixth generation white privileged, the South still elicits dialogue and contention. It is represented and continues to matter as area and issue; therefore it exists. The task, then, of those of us in southern studies should not be some frenzied South-stumping: looking for clues of a quintessential region and preaching its thin line of longevity (barely discernible, except to the trained eye). Instead we need to account for whatever versions of the South are gaining currency.

The marvel is that the South circulates at all in an age where its traditional priorities are wavering or devalued. Protestant groups such as Baptist, Methodist, or Presbyterian, which have dominated southern communities for over two centuries and defined the Bible Belt's modern religious conservatism, are losing numbers to non-denominational "mega-churches"; moreover, across southern cityscapes, Buddhist temples, Muslim mosques, and Jewish

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synagogues are thriving. Following Federal mandates, public schools cannot systematically under-educate minorities, and for the last thirty years students in the South have been bused across district lines to ensure balanced ethnic proportions (a practice which neutralizes white flight and racial separatism).<sup>5</sup> The individualist ethic which has characterized southern politics and was affiliated with agrarianism (Jefferson's yeoman farmer, the South's emphasis on state, versus federal, control) has diminished in the last fifty years, in the wake of southern support for FDR's New Deal and the encroachment of urban sprawl; also, where farming persists in the region, corporate management has heavily infiltrated.<sup>6</sup> There are other large-scale changes in southern society pertaining to an influx of new people and/or clash of neighborhood interests: the South must now respond to its widespread Spanish-speaking population, tensions between inner-city Blacks (who are showing larger voter turn-outs and tend to elect Black officials) and suburban whites, or the regeneration of historic city districts, which are often dilapidated and occupied by minorities, but prized as would-be gems by developers, who pump money in only as ethnic influences recede.<sup>7</sup>



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Considering the magnitude of such shifts, I am interested in the South's encounter with multicultural forces that seem likely to render it insignificant but have not (yet). In the midst of strengthening minority representation, a decreased sense of the North/South divide, and white people's awareness that they no longer carry the majority, it is astounding that the region continues to bear. How does the South endure when its lived reality defies the region's stereotypical identity markers? Why, for instance, would self-sufficient ethnic communities want to avail themselves of the designation "southern"? How shall the face of the white South change -- that which has been marketed as "the South" by television, literature, radio commercials and the film industry and accepted as such by outsiders -- if whites cannot legally sustain their sense of privilege? Even if some white southerners are willing to admit the region's past and present racial depravities, which stem largely from their and their ancestors' doing, can they take steps to *amend* social injustice without the shape of the South (which has been founded on such injustice) collapsing? If the South is to gear itself more toward inclusion (by following the mandates of affirmative

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action, for example, in its corporate business and educational policies), what happens to resistant pockets of the Old South? Do they clash constantly with these newer regional constructs, fade quietly into the background, or sit side by side in glaring incongruity? In light of its failed original principles, the Civil War, and its long, lost fight with Civil Rights, the fact that the South is *not* obsolete leaves me bewildered. What alchemy fuels its transmutations and staying power?

The angle I have chosen for examining contemporary accounts of the South is place. I first seized on this approach out of necessity, when living for several years outside the southeast, in Michigan. There, it seemed that whenever I identified southern literature as my field of specialization, peers in my English department or friends in East Lansing and Ann Arbor would question my area of concentration. They asked, why *southern* literature? How did I define a southern canon apart from the rest of American letters? Did I qualify the "southern" in literature as writing style, choice of content, or an author's background? Initially I balked, put off that my acquaintances would casually test the obvious to try my patience (or so I thought). Having grown up in Stone

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Mountain, Georgia and earned my BA and MA at Wake Forest and UNC-Chapel Hill, no one before had insisted I legitimize southern. But eventually I had to concede that the inquiries amounted to a trend, that people seemed genuinely interested in what I would say -- and after all, why couldn't I answer them readily? So I determined to resolve the issue of the southern in southern literature and even became slightly obsessed: I felt I must forward a satisfactory explanation.

Defining literary regionalism was more involved than I anticipated, and my lines of reasoning felt circular and hesitant. I decided against writing style as my criterion; I did not want to claim some essence about the manner of southern expression that would put a strait jacket around the canon, allowing only for three or four writers who share technical strategies (and I suspected many people would swear by Faulkner as their standard). Similarly, I opted against an author's background, especially the notion that a writer must be born in the South to produce work that counts as regional. Though formative, an author's experience cannot be trusted to explain every nuance about a text (how would one know which biographical act to match with which literary issue?), or what various audiences do with texts.

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Also, whenever I applied the author-background formula to specific examples, it did not make sense: Harriet Beecher Stowe may have spent most of her life in Connecticut and Ohio, but I was not about to exclude Uncle Tom's Cabin, a book that forcibly shaped the South's self-presentation and political pitch in the 1850s, from my literary oeuvre. I settled, then, on the flexibility of content and effect: that any type of writing which engages the South, and by extension, influences readers' ideas about the South, is southern. I liked how clean and simply my definition came across: southern writing, on some level, conjures the South. But unwittingly I had dug another hole. Maintaining that the basis of southern writing is textual encounter with the South, I felt compelled to describe that looming point of reference. I needed to indicate, even if generally, what constitutes the South, and found myself ill-prepared for summarizing what I had always considered apparent.

Searching for inroads, I maintained that southern literature concerns the South, and that the South, in turn, encompasses the eleven states of the Confederacy. But political-physical descriptions from one slice in time proved unreliable: I was excluding Kentucky and Maryland, with their bluegrass, horse derbies, and tidewater, and



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putting a wide arm around Texas and Florida. Plus, did I want to use a state-by-state guide, when obviously within any one state there might be resistance to a southern designation (what about present-day Miami, which is widely known as the other New York City, or during the Civil War, the mountain factions of Federal sympathizers in North Carolina and Tennessee)? I began to realize that outlining the components of place, which you must do to describe a place, is not straightforward. Defining a region involves more than drawing lines around similar typography, and even that activity is compromising: there are subjective decisions according to who does the clustering, and a dot on a map obscures the interplay between landscape and culture, between a rock or a stream and its designation within particular lived contexts. My idea of the South as specifiable, an area you can survey with containing and stable parameters, was naive. Its physical markers are social and political as well as geographic, and they can change -- due, for instance, to sweeping cultural shifts, like Black Migration, or natural disaster, such as draught or flooding, or urban development. Once I realized that place itself is subject to time's disruptions (and not a

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stalwart holding out against time), that it involves flux and mediation and drawing and redrawing boundaries, I saw I could never delineate a steady reference for southern. And I became convinced that, rather than abandon my definition of southern literature, I should embrace its reference as open: that the South is up for grabs, and literature is one of many cultural expressions which attempts to shape and secure the region. Thus I did not need to outline a master South, an impact recurring among texts; I needed to analyze how, and to what purpose, different texts build different "South" versions.

My interest in exploring the South as a figure of place -- as both a figure and philosophy of place, a field across which various notions of place intervene -- segues with my curiosity about the region's perseverance. Place has everything to do with the premise of a multicultural South: if such a region is succeeding, as some writers contend, we need to understand why people accept today's South as viable (how place is legitimized) and in what ways southerners designate space around them to ensure the South's continuity. Moreover, regarding place as medium of social expression, or rather, a conceptualization measuring social expression, I believe our frames of thought are outmoded.

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Specifically, the definitions of place now offered by southern literary criticism fail to address the complexities of regional diversity. To this point scholars have depicted place in southern literature as a common-sense, transparent phenomenon: that it evokes real sites in the South in ways native southerners will immediately recognize, that we all know what place means (it represents Nature, or the various levels of a community's social hierarchies, or female caprice and fertility), or that place in the South, like the Civil War's Lost Cause, is ever on the verge of extinction (which is what makes it so nostalgically lovely and piercing). But if critics would consider the throngs of non-natives in the South and focus more scrupulously on minorities' viewpoints, place could not be construed as obvious or depend on collective agreement. A newcomer's eye on southern communities is not *bound* to prioritize areas as locals have been taught to do; from her perspective, the "town center" might sit askew, obscuring actual seats of power or active political and creative coalitions. Or, a Hispanic migrant worker, who has come to support his family back home and save for a decent retirement in Mexico, will not be inclined to see the South as waning, and his

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transient status should shift his relation to southern places -- he will not own and is not looking to root or establish. Or to the Black southerner, the aspect of Dixie could not be further from a South she would mourn or want to return to, even as she personally claims the region as grounds for African-American ethnology, solidarity, and essence. To include multiculturalism in ongoing constructions of the South, as I am suggesting, scholars must revise accepted notions of place. We have to *complicate* the category, allowing, for instance, that a site may be experienced differently by different people, or that spatial symbols issue from certain groups, rather than diffuse ubiquitously. We need to recognize that place gives rise to misunderstanding, fissures, and loss as well as reciprocity and shared perspectives. In a word, our understanding of the dynamics of place must be *problematized*.

In line with my particular interests concerning place -- that the figure of the South is brimming with social change, stemming from an influx of many different groups of people, and that common tenets of place must be revamped if we are to grasp the foreign-familiar of today's dispersing South -- I have relied on two rules of thumb for selecting



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literary texts. First, that works be contemporary and address multicultural issues: I am concerned with how the South endures today (or as close to it as I can get) amid various competitive, contiguous factions. Second, that texts treat place as either a question or complicating factor. I have tended toward writers who take place for more than the equivalent of setting: rather than (just) satisfy readers with descriptions of provocative scenes, they cast place as an issue that needs settling -- a milieu where rules of etiquette are undetermined, for example, or where wrong and insult hang in the air, impending one's way, even as benign shapes and faces surround. These authors wrestle with uncertainties along the edge of place's meaning: how position affects an acknowledged right to occupy, the ways dominance figures a city's grid, whether long-standing possession translates to southern essence. They struggle, not entirely successfully, to resolve these complications of place, and in their struggling I find traces of the activity and effort through which communities of difference try to ground themselves. I have fixed my sights on complications with place because they were the very issues I originally stumbled over in reading these

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texts (and could not explain), and because even as they left me disconcerted, I realized they stemmed from many competing cultures within a single context. I felt that if I could begin to understand these place-determined complications, the positive and negative of their results, I might theorize how place is discrepant, selective, irregular. I further hoped my unorthodox definitions would jolt the picturesque, non-confrontational, neutral approaches to place I was discovering in southern literary criticism. Accordingly, I devised my methodology: examining different depictions of conflicted multicultural Souths, I identify certain practices and procedures of place (the practices laid more bare than usual by the fact that these Souths are cycling through transition), ultimately to come to grips with the phenomenon of the region's continuing relevance.

The texts I focus on are Gloria Naylor's Sea Island novel, Mama Day (1988), Minnie Bruce Pratt's consciousness-raising essay "Identity: Skin Blood Heart" (1984), and Elizabeth Spencer's novel about resurrection after a hurricane, The Salt Line (1984). Addressing these works I single out disputes or quandaries involving place, to understand what today's Souths are challenged by, but also, to weigh the consequences involved in the region's

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regeneration. Among contemporary southern literature each of these pieces is notable for pushing place to the forefront, making place subject as much as prop or foundation and stressing its *difficulty*. With Naylor, Spencer, or Pratt we cannot casually appreciate place as a familiar or endearing scene, because the dynamics related to location in their work are often confusing or problematic. Naylor's Mama Day, for instance, puts readers in an awkward position by first engaging them with an exotic map and then alluding to ill omens mapmaking historically portends for her fictional island. The text also encourages characters' excursions to sacred places for answers to ancestral questions, but inevitably the answers revealed by these sites amount to "nothing," loss, or erasure. Naylor's Black characters may own Willow Springs island outright, with no threat of losing it to development-hungry whites, but *occupying* their home is another issue altogether: a steady, easy abiding there does not settle out, because characters lack information they need about their family's past on the island. In the end Naylor's sacred places yield only partial clues. For African-American characters returning to the South to find security in a Black core or southern Black

marrow (associated with the island's ties to the Motherland, Africa), Naylor offers ambiguous and ambivalent rewards. Despite the certainty of ownership, place in Mama Day is, in its most positive rendering, a hopeful state of dislocation, and Naylor withholds any evidence of an *essential* Black South.

In "Identity: Skin Blood Heart," white lesbian activist Minnie Bruce Pratt construes the South as a series of voids, a region where, in her experience, cultural difference is traditionally erased. Because of this black-hole dynamic, place is difficult in her work for a variety of reasons: having been repeatedly thrown out of conventional homes, Pratt is motivated to re-think what home means, especially as she works to live differently than her parents or former husband; Pratt also admits personal shortsightedness as she negotiates her Washington, D.C. neighborhood, realizing that *what she misses* circumscribes her paths negatively; lastly, walking through one scene Pratt may be reminded of others (sometimes jarringly, as if she is at another site), and this layering of places highlights features of past inhabitances which before Pratt failed to acknowledge. Much of Pratt's struggling with place in the South, then, is self-reflexive. She tries to

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see more clearly than she was raised, for instance, to grasp all the elements of a neighborhood, or, denounces her own complicity in dis-placing oppressed people. Furthermore, Pratt writes as a modern-day Jeremiah, calling on the white South to repent. She believes that if the region is to flourish in mass society, white southerners must quit covering the holes we make, the ways we disenfranchise those unlike us. If the South is ever to approach Reconstruction honestly, its voids must be apprehended, admitted, and then, either atoned for or avoided.

With The Salt Line Elizabeth Spencer probes two concepts of the South, a nostalgic version of Arcady and a newer community based on difference and welcoming, but ultimately both are found wanting. Her fictional town, Notchaki, is devastated after Hurricane Camille; the dilemma characters face is how to manage rebuilding. A popular contingent advocates for resurrecting the Golden Coast, with its Old South stereotypes and trappings, but Spencer exposes this picture as morally dubious. The transition from Arcady toward a more inclusive South, however, is also besieged by problems, and disturbingly, in some cases, by the same problems as Arcady's. Spencer warns that the gesture of white southerners welcoming others is not enough for a

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multicultural South: the South will never genuinely practice inclusion until we forego a predominantly white center. Hence place is difficult in this novel because, even when well-intentioned people want to shift their boundaries, and see how boundaries need shifting, all too inevitably previous lines are redrawn. Spencer's South does get a makeover by the end of The Salt Line, with various ethnic groups convening on points of commonality, but Spencer makes clear that Notchaki's new base is precarious, and far more threatening, that the costs of its changes are largely minorities'.

Each of these women writers theorizes place in her own right. Each is willing to experiment with place and tests common southern beliefs -- e.g., that the South, which still bears traces of African languages and medico-religious faiths, is the heartland for American Blacks, holding secrets of an arcane, natural Black identity; that the birth home promises one's surest asylum; that what you see tangibly constitutes your surroundings; and, that places are the way they are because they have always been that way (a version of the "sense of place" idiom, which disavows that local politics are spatially expressed). Although occasionally I draw on outside sources to explain Naylor's,

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or Pratt's, or Spencer's spatial predicaments, these other voices help me build the writers' arguments about place in the South, and are not inserted to establish that Pratt, for instance, merely illustrates Michel de Certeau's city-walker. I consider the writers themselves to be conceptual guides; the ways they quicken and dramatize place, making us feel the improbability of safe, or reliable, or settled bearings, or alternately, the questionable after-effects when such bearings are achieved, offer fresh angles on the South's proposition. For despite its mythical stereotypes, the South has always labored for a unified front, and riding into a new millennium with white supremacy losing its force, the region may fly apart altogether. Naylor, Pratt, and Spencer indicate why the South has held (and perhaps more important, how tenuous its foundations have been), and how southerners must change their social geography for the region to hang on in the future. Mama Day, "Identity," and The Salt Line lean toward the South continuing, which is partly why I have chosen them -- I am not as taken with apocalyptic accounts, because they fail to explain the region's tenacity or challenges with cultural diversity.

Attention to place as a literary category is nothing new for southern studies, and in my first chapter I review

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the meaning of place within the critical tradition. I identify and assess five tendencies toward place espoused by southern literary scholars, to provide a history and context for my work, but also, to show why the category needs revamping. Yet I do not write to dismiss previous lines of thought; the spirit of my study is to extend a critical conversation. Place can be hard to slice in the South and seems especially so today, but with a region which has long qualified itself as absence -- "the Lost Cause" -- how could critics ever explain the traditional *fullness* of the South's rendering? To some extent my first chapter is a tribute to those before me who, like me, have tried.

In the course of describing my work to others, people have asked about my selection of authors and texts. My earliest decisions regarding the shape of the project were to define a multicultural South and revive the importance of place for southern literary criticism, and I searched for contemporary works that would show the relation between these two points of interest and direct my line of argument. Initially I worried no texts would stand out: certainly any incorporates place on some level, and there could be dozens which experiment with it. But my qualification that a piece treat place as an *issue*, something that is thematized and

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grappled with across the length of a work, eventually distinguished the texts I have chosen. While there are other contemporary authors who draw unconventional pictures of the South, framing bizarre worlds we may never have admitted, they do not problematize those worlds' composition. Scenes may appear odd or surreal but are not hard to process, either for readers or characters. Cormac McCarthy, Harry Crews, or Larry Brown might stretch the region's look, but the ways place operates as a dynamic is not as much their interest. In McCarthy's epic, Blood Meridian, for example, the country between Texas and Mexico spreads wide, desolate and savage, so ragged that there is nothing to feed characters but brutality, and the sheer boundlessness of this wasteland wears exhaustingly across the novel. Yet what mesmerizes readers and propels McCarthy's narrative are the thousand acts of "mindless violence." His parched territory is not, by itself, cause for hesitation or dilemma: it is something to be gotten across, a stage for the Kid's quest for knife wounds, scalplings, and blows, and not puzzling in its own construction. Similarly, Harry Crews captures Souths that are extravagantly grotesque, a small Georgia town hosting a

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Rattlesnake Roundup, or an offbeat Miami hotel besieged by a bodybuilding competition, but Crews' emphasis is characters' psychological despair -- how clearly they perceive life's absurdity, and their one recourse, self-destruction. Crews circles forward and back through freakish settings until readers feel as dizzy as his liquored-up, Vietnam-crazed protagonists, but his unusual surroundings generate moods rather than controversy; place is not an interpretive obstacle. In the same vein, Larry Brown's tour de force, Joe, evokes a landscape that leaves readers brooding, with its trash-laden Mississippi backroads and square, identical houses, where pit bulldogs lurk underneath, furious and uncontrollable; but if Brown's spatial impressions arouse strong emotional response, still, they are not difficult to construe. You might be disgusted with the grime and wonder how vagrants eat out of a dumpster, but it is repulsion, not disorientation, you wrestle with.

I decided to treat writers who feature place as a particular regional strait, and for reasons described, Naylor, Pratt, and Spencer each uniquely meet that requirement. However I never expected to focus exclusively on women and have wondered at the seeming coincidence. Obviously anyone can theorize place, and in Europe those

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best known for revising the history of western social environments have all been white males: Henri Lefebvre, Michel Foucault, Michel de Certeau. But because place relates to location, which in turn depends on individual position, it seems reasonable to assume that in any given society, those least secure may be most likely to question the assembly and hierarchy of their surroundings. It is no secret that the American South has been traditionally patriarchal and racist: in large part white men have appropriated and surveyed the land, run the farms, designed town squares, and sat on the boards which control community planning. Southern Blacks, on the other hand, have been physically bound, denied the opportunity to own property, forced to occupy run-down areas, and pressed to watch their children attend impoverished, segregated schools. White women have fared much better (on the arms of white men), but their rank and privilege in local communities has not tended to be their own, and by dint of gender, their opportunities in the public sphere have been severely limited. Homosexual men and women are usually ostracized within America's Bible Belt, on any side of any color line, unless they hide their choice of lifestyle; and except in larger cities, you do not

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commonly see non-whites of any type attending the elite churches or black-tie charity benefits, or stroking golf balls with the country club crowd. Tellingly (I now think) the writers I could discern who sharply qualify place in the South are all women, and among them, an African-American whose family migrated from Mississippi to New York, and a politically active lesbian whose parents and husband literally shut her out. The hardest writer to explain, in terms of background, is Elizabeth Spencer: she enjoyed a middle-class white upbringing in Carrollton, Mississippi. But significantly, Spencer came of age painfully aware that her increasingly wealthy father would not support an unmarried, working daughter as he had supported his adult sons, and similar to Pratt, felt compelled to leave home out of disillusionment with its collusive (albeit silent) racism.<sup>8</sup>

Finally, a note about my use of the term "place." My intent is not to overturn general conceptions of the category -- as a particular locale, as the space between certifiable points, or in a literary sense, as setting or scene. Instead I want to add to these notions. With this introduction I have invoked place as area or extent and will continue to do so, but as a springboard for other ideas: to

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track how place is *produced* in the South, something that is made and restricted and bartered; to measure aspects of place that direct our paths but are not readily perceptible (such as social mores or etiquette); to acknowledge *what* we do to seal a natural, or immovable, aura around particular structures; to convey the vertigo of haunting at certain southern sites, places where the effects of oppression are still palpably felt; to suggest how we may share the expense of the South's broadening, in terms of its racial and cultural diversity. Rather than establish a unified theory of place among Naylor, Pratt, or Spencer, I draw on them to question and enlarge the category's meaning. Also, I view place as a subset of space, and with regard to space, am persuaded by arguments in the field of the new cultural geography. Theorists such as Helen Liggett, David Perry, Derek Gregory, and Edward Soja share the conviction that space is a social phenomenon. Assumptions that space exists out there apart from human exchange, a hollow which takes shape only as we occupy it, are deemed outdated; to designate space is to situate ourselves within the culture around us. Space requires at least two objects -- not that space is the divide between them, but rather, is the series

of relations we design/negotiate between them (or between ourselves). As David Harvey puts it, space is "contained in objects insofar as it contains and represents within itself relationships to other objects" (13); note how space for Harvey depends on doing (to contain, to represent) in a social context. I cannot stress enough the extent to which the new cultural geography perceives space as an activity. Following the monumental work of Henri Lefebvre, space is felt to be something we make; according to Helen Liggett and David Perry, "to consider the spatializations of life is to fill out the context(s) of social formation -- our daily and institutional practices, in all their 'situatedness'" (3).

Space, it seems to me, is the starting point, the all-inclusive category of which place is a fraction (as Lefebvre has written, "The form of social space is encounter, assembly, simultaneity. But what assembles, or what is assembled? The answer is; everything that there is in space, everything that is produced either by nature or by society, either through their cooperation or through their conflicts" [101]). Place is space discussed in a particular way -- a particular segment of space discussed particularly. Patricia Yaeger points out that space is often described as an anonymous, pervasive quality of the physical environment,

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whereas place suggests specificity, preserved boundaries, and emotional attachments (4-5). For my project I want to retain the impression that place differs from space in its locality, its familiarity, but differs only in the sense that we *represent* place as the local or familiar. Place, I believe is technically a slice of bustling or "deep space," Neil Smith's evocative term which designates "the relativity of terrestrial space, the space of everyday life in all its scales from the global to the local and the architectural" (161). "Deep space," he continues, "is quintessentially social space; it is physical extent fused through with social intent" (161). As with its larger source, place implies activity and social practice. Place *is* space, with the added twist of a circumscribed or territorial designation. And significantly, because my study revolves on place, I want to emphasize that there is no easy translation between the familiar and knowledge. Place is not easier than space. If boundaries with the former seem more distinct and real than with the larger entity, more comforting, this is an illusion: John Berger's oft-quoted notion that space "hides consequences" applies to both

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terms. In a way, you could describe my project as tracking what has been hidden by place in the contemporary South.

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## Chapter One

### Measuring Southern Measures

This project centers on the conviction that theories of place need revitalizing in southern literary studies. I choose the term *revitalize*, rather than *revise* or *improve*, because I in no way disparage and then overturn traditional notions of place in southern literary criticism, debunking them outright in favor of new (read: correct) place definitions. Instead I review how place has been construed by the southern critic, distinguish helpful ideas from any ill-advised trends, and keep both the useful and the potentially misleading in view as I chart additional, other courses for place's meaning. I conceive of my project, therefore, as more an extension of than a departure from the southern critical tradition.

*Revitalize* also captures my desire to resurrect the aura, the hype even, that critics once afforded place as a constitutive feature of the southern in southern writing. In recent years the long-esteemed "sense of place" has been denounced in southern literary studies, and understandably so, by critics frustrated with its hazy, rarely-defined connotations; the widespread currency of "a sense of place"



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has achieved a myth-like status often trading in self-referential ambiguity.<sup>1</sup> But rather than abandon place as exhausted cliché, a notion "too much with us" in Noel Polk's judgment, I propose we sharpen and reorient the category, expecting a profound return on our readings of southern identity (33). For if critics like Patricia Yaeger and Una Chaudhuri are right, *where* goes a long way toward explaining *who* (or *what*, in the case of regional texts and canons), especially as, in Chaudhuri's words, "national and ethnic identities are often derived from or directed toward a *geography*; there is a *location* of identity based on race, nation, ethnicity, language.... the construction of cultural otherness is also a *mapping of the world*" (3). As a badge of regional American identity, southern continues to be a characteristic people claim fervently: according to sociologist John Shelton Reed, who has long studied southerners as "a 'quasi-ethnic group that cuts across conventional ethnic distinctions," data collected in the last thirty years indicates, "the group identification of Southerners surpassed that of Roman Catholics with others of their religion and that of union members with other unionists, and approached the levels of identification

displayed by Jews and blacks" (41, 31). Thinking along Chaudhuri's lines, I believe anyone's sense of and relation to southern depends heavily on perceptions of where the South starts and stops, on intellectual and imagined geographies of the South. My project maps the South's boundaries, expansions, special sites, and erasures -- as they are portrayed in contemporary southern women's writing -- to grasp what counts as southern, who gets to say, and what lies at stake in the notion of any essential southern place. I map a literary South, in other words, to distinguish features of regional identity, and more importantly, to understand why southern functions as a point of fascination, why it is a quality with any real staying power.

Mapping a literary South requires the clearest understanding of place as a critical category, the first step toward which is tracing its history and use in southern literary studies. Place has figured conspicuously in showcasing regional writers' appeal and special talent since the late 1940s and 1950s, when the possibility of a modern southern literary canon initially evolved. At that time academics stopped adhering to H. L. Mencken's picture of the

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South as "the Sahara of the Bozarts" and began to add the accomplishments of the Agrarians, Faulkner, Wolfe, and Warren, bracketing them as authors *from* a region writing for or about that region, bound by "the mind of the South" and particular "themes of Southern literature" (Rubin and Jacobs xi). In one of the earliest and most influential collections of a new (and unabashedly proud) southern literary criticism, Louis D. Rubin, Jr. and Robert D. Jacobs's 1952 Southern Renaissance, an entire essay is devoted to "Time and Place in Southern Fiction." Here H. Blair Rouse designates three options for place as a literary tool: it may equal setting ("as little more than a backdrop" [135]), may operate as spiritual as well as physical "room" for characters, or, at the height of writerly accomplishments, may function as an imaginative country so concrete as to seem real, so value-laden as to convey the essence of the human spirit (138, 142-43). Other chapters in the volume bear names like "How Many Miles to Babylon," "No Faulkner in Metropolis," "Thomas Wolfe in Time and Place," and "The World of Eudora Welty," with versions of place surfacing as the Babylon metaphor applied to America's modern industrial society, as property (with man's God-given

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right to possession), as the stable utopia of family/community/state, and as the extreme American divide between enervating Megalopolis and nurturing rural province (31-34, 101-11, 290-305, 306-15). Along with W. J. Cash's notion of "The Mind of the South" (the subtitle of the first section of essays) and Robert Heilman's of "The Southern Temper" (the lead-off chapter), place weaves its way across the collection, giving Rubin and Jacobs a perceptible, bold backing, a recurrent leitmotif, for "the whys and wherefores of modern Southern literature" (ix).

The compulsion to explain place's role in writing designated and sold as southern recurs throughout the next decades. Critics pay homage again and again to Eudora Welty's groundbreaking "Place in Fiction" (first published in 1954),<sup>2</sup> and essays and books highlighting some aspect of the category appear at every turn. There is Louis D. Rubin, Jr. and James Jackson Kilpatrick's The Lasting South (1957), wherein Robert Hazel argues that the material South, a hungry, homogenous region marked by defeat, poverty, and cultural decay, drives and chooses its writers rather than is chosen by them ("The Southern Writer and His Region," 171-80). There is Frederick J. Hoffman's "The Sense of

Place" (1961), which urges that place at its most meaningful is a *distilled* abstraction, the "transmutation" of emotion into "images large and small" (73-74). In the same year G. T. Buckley, writing for PMLA, derides one-to-one correspondences between Faulkner's Jefferson, Mississippi and the real-life town of Oxford; instead, Buckley contends, Jefferson is modeled on other Northern Mississippi county seats, such as Ripley and Batesville (448). One of the first pieces to unravel symbolic constructions of the South, Annette Kolodny's "'Stript, shorne, and made deformed': Images on the Southern Landscape" (1976), reads environmental doom in the region's maternal stereotypes of land and calls for better politics with southern metaphors; reasoning that "language provides clues to the underlying motivations behind action," Kolodny welcomes place images free of people's greed toward a too-bounteous natural landscape (73, 68). More recently, William T. Ruzicka (1987) specifies five orders of imaginative architecture in Faulkner's work (the room, the townscape, etc.), maintaining that each corresponds with and "concretizes" an individual, a particular society, or humanity in general (114-15). And transitioning to a feminist enterprise, Elizabeth Jane



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Harrison (1991) believes southern women writers have created a pastoral tradition which contrasts that of their male counterparts', that the women celebrate "new worlds, different kinds of communities" rather than mourn lost romantic rural scenes (x).

So it is that when critics try to explain the intricacies of southern literature, when they cast about for topics that make a particular work of scholarly interest or its surrounding culture of any importance, place is constantly invoked and grappled with. Michael Kreyling has estimated that "a common sense of place" functions as "the foundations of the literary history of the South," and while I disagree that scholars have ever endorsed a collective view of what place means, it is true that some form of the category marks nearly every piece of southern academic writing (234). In all its multiform guises, from the idea of the South as a brooding, living thing compelling loyalty and lore, to debates over the authenticity of southern literary settings, place strongly determines what critics say southern literature is, their understanding of the canon's symptomatic concerns. It is time we assess the category's literary history -- its diverse applications and,

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frankly, its instability -- rethinking the assumption that place involves any generally accepted meaning. Our own readings of place, South, and southern could be that much more rich and consciously precise.

The catalogue I have just cited of random scholarship barely hints at the volume of academic work shaping place as a category. To manage the sheer breadth of this scholarship, I have identified several approaches to place shared by groups of southern literary critics. Yet I forward a caveat: by categorizing I do not mean to suggest that every critic's reading of place neatly fits my scheme or matches just one of my designations. A single reader often endorses multiple facets of place, allowing for scene as a starting point, for example, but then moving to "higher" considerations, such as a location's effects on character development and community values. Still, in the analysis that follows I choose usually to feature one critic per approach, in the interest of time and space, but also to explore particular qualities of that approach through the cohesion of an extended example. I try always to note other approaches to place informing a critic's work, as well as the range of criticism to which one approach pertains.

In my view southern literary studies is dominated by five tendencies regarding place: the blanket approach, which assumes that place's meaning is self-evident and which applies the category, without explanation, to a mixed array of literary situations; the inclination to read place as a vehicle for realism, which holds that an author's best chance for gaining an audience's trust and infusing work with the actual, the *believable*, occurs through reliable place depictions; referring to place as a stabilizing force, a literary rock that subdues (and in many ways bypasses) the upheavals of real life in the twentieth-century South; the inclination to see in depictions of the South the weighty messages of symbol and theme, so that southern pictures either organize, or are organized according to, prescribed conventions; and finally, lamenting "true" southern places as perpetually past or passing, their certain extinction always regrettably on the horizon. In the remainder of this chapter I am interested to define these five approaches and reckon what motivates critics' investment in them.

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*And I could say oo oo oo*

*As if everybody knows*

*What I'm talking about*

*As if everybody here would know*

*Exactly what I was talking about*

*Talking about diamonds on the soles*

*of her shoes*

-- Paul Simon

In the song "Diamonds on the Soles of Her Shoes" off his Graceland album, Paul Simon captures perfectly the shortcuts toward which we are prone in communicating -- the hope that when we reach topics hard to put words to, those with whom we converse will bridge gaps and understand what we mean. This is the impulse with which more than a few literary critics refer to place, the hope that as readers we all think alike when it comes to issues of where. It is a problem with the category that academic writing will count on place's obviousness. Not uncommonly, for example, southern literary critics market and encode their work with place-oriented titles, while failing to nail down what place means or how exactly it applies to the overall project.

Consider Cleanth Brooks's seminal book, William Faulkner: The Yoknapatawpha Country (1963). In one sweep with the title Brooks enlarges and abstracts Yoknapatawpha: Faulkner's county is suddenly "country," an expansive, profound territory, made to embody (with the colon) the essence of its author. Yet in the body of the text Brooks's place categories are confusing. In the Preface he identifies his subject as "William Faulkner's characteristic world, the world of Yoknapatawpha County," but outlines his methodology somewhat hazily:

How does one go about describing a world? Is there an inevitable way or even one best way? I think not... I have preferred to feel my way into the world of Yoknapatawpha and to let my book grow accordingly.  
(vii)

Further along as Brooks defends closing his study with The Reivers, we catch, almost offhandedly, an idea of that world's reference points:

Here, more than in any other Faulkner novel... the inhabitants of country, town, and city... are presented in all their various gradations. The richness and variety of Faulkner's world has received no more complete expression. (ix)

That Yoknapatawpha equals social layers is an opinion implicitly reinscribed by Brooks's second chapter, "The Poor

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Plain People," and general statements throughout urging, "The community.... is the circumambient atmosphere, the essential ether of Faulkner's fiction" (52). Less often Brooks links place to nature, which initially seems to mean unspoiled wilderness (see "Faulkner as Nature Poet"), and then to "the female principle" and personal instincts (67). Considering the scope of his book, it seems appropriate that Brooks would entertain more than one prospect for place, but he circles among them without explaining their connections or preparing us for shifts, and fails to delineate straightforwardly what the components are of Yoknapatawpha Country. Readers have to search too hard and infer too much from social "gradations," nature, and woman, aspects Brooks deems obviously transparent.

In no small measure William Faulkner: The Yoknapatawpha Country indicates just how difficult place is to define, how widely applicable and unmanageable the category can prove. But I am not sure that systematic approaches to place escape Brooks. I do not think, after all, that when Brooks sets out to explore "the amazingly rich and intricate world" of the Yoknapatawpha novels he is much interested in the construction of Yoknapatawpha, or in the methods Faulkner

uses to make place appear settled on the surface. The critic's intrigue with Faulkner's "world" is more descriptive than questioning: Brooks believes in the physical and spiritual coherence of Yoknapatawpha county, that the area "embodies its own principles of order," and that his duty is to identify and expound on these controlling features (368). From Sartoris to The Mansion, Faulkner's country, for Brooks, is seamlessly woven and uniform, evenly regulated; the land and climate dictate natives' predispositions, society is provincial, inhabitants share "unspoken assumptions," universal lessons are to be learned there, and every action, even violence, "exhibit[s] purpose and value" (368). Nothing deters Brooks's vision of symmetrical integrity:

Even lack of purpose and value take on special meaning when brought into Faulkner's world, for its very disorders are eloquent possibilities of order: Joe Christmas' alienation points to the necessity for a true community, and the author's dramatically sympathetic delineation of Joe's plight may be said to point to the possibility of that true community. (368)

The Yoknapatawpha Country draws a large and full image of a place -- its codes of behavior, the tendencies of its aristocracy, "plain people," and select minority figures, its family genealogies, its "collective memory" -- the

structural contours of which, in the critic's view, approach imaginative perfection. For Brooks the *description* of this dense, prodigious locale is the thing; place is a given, the foundation piece for his picture, and not some premise in and of itself to be tinkered with. Certainly he fulfills his goal with regard to detailed portraiture. But Brooks's reliance on place-related terms such as "country" and "world" is as vaguely directed as the terms are wistful and shadowy, and his massive scholarship does no help us figure what the components are of his version of place or how the category *works* in the Yoknapatawpha cycle.

By far the most dominant trend among southern literary critics is treating place as a medium for realism.<sup>3</sup> As a school of thought realism promotes everyday, common subject matter, a mimetic theory of art, attention to complicated ethical issues, and tightly focused characterization (Holman and Harmon 412-14). At least two factors encourage realistic leanings in southern literary criticism: the reflex assumption that southern writing, by definition, engages the materiality of the geographical American South, and the influence of Eudora Welty's landmark essay, "Place in Fiction" (first prepared for a 1954 Cambridge lecture and

later reprinted in her collected tracts and reviews, The Eye of the Story). Including Welty's piece in the ranks of southern literary criticism may seem problematic, for toward the essay's end Welty insists that regional literature holds no monopoly on place, even that "'regional' is an outsider's term; it has no meaning for the insider who is doing the writing, because as far as he knows he is simply writing about life" (132). However critics who talk about place in southern literary studies practically eulogize Welty's criteria -- Louis Rubin, Frederick Hoffman, and Noel Polk are among the more prominent disciples of "Place in Fiction" -- so that even if willy-nilly, Welty's essay has proven a touchstone in the field (see footnote #2).

"Place in Fiction" never advances a simple definition of its subject. Although at one point Welty attempts a concise description where she affiliates place with detail, her requisite that detail be "credible" opens a string of complications difficult to sort through:

Place in fiction is the named, identified, concrete, exact and exacting, and therefore credible, gathering spot of all that has been felt, is about to be experienced, in the novel's progress. Location pertains to feeling; feeling profoundly pertains to place; place in history partakes of feeling, as feeling about history partakes of place. Every story would be another story, and unrecognizable as art, if it took up

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(122)

I begin to feel less sure-footed with this definition when I arrive at "therefore credible"; it is hard for me to understand how believability naturally issues from precision. Also, Welty does not specify to whom or what "exacting" applies -- the gathering spot, the characters, reader, or author? In the same vein, who feels and experiences as the novel moves forward? Welty could be hinting toward a symbiosis of author and reader, where their impressions somehow connect at place's meeting ground, or toward a process where readers learn to feel on characters' cues -- the possibilities, in my mind, are so general as to be overwhelming. I am at a further loss to distinguish location from place, and with Welty's circling from location to feeling to place, to history to feeling and back to place, I am unable to trace her main point. Do the semi-colons indicate a progression in logic, that one subject inevitably leads to the next (location plus feeling amounts to place)? If so, how does history affect the equation, except to say that place, feeling, and history are indispensable to one another?

Recounting what place does, Welty is less ambiguous, treating the literary category as a set of three-tiered functions (Gretlund 2). The first two are "objective" and easy to pinpoint, applying to the author's choice of subject and particulars, "the goodness -- validity -- in the raw material of writing," and secondly, to fiction's "achieved world of appearance" (124, 117). So place has to do with the substance an author draws from real life, and on a slightly higher level, with the author's skill in creating seemingly actual environs. Place's third function is "subjective," the one most determining of good fiction and the trickiest to follow: it relates to the author's point of view, "where he has his roots" and "where he stands" (124, 117). "Place, to the writer at work, is seen in a frame. Not an empty frame, a brimming one. Point of view is a sort of burning-glass, a product of personal experience and time.... It is an instrument -- one of intensification..." (124). The author who is concerned to craft "a chink-proof world of appearance" must constantly negotiate "two pictures at once in his frame, his and the world's," with the aim of making his personal vision seem real (124-25). For Welty, attaining such a "pleasing illusion" is to reach the "ideal"

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-- not actuality, but "the spirit of things is what is sought" (125).

"Place in Fiction" features a brand of realism hinging on suspension of disbelief. In Welty's view a novel must convey "truth" from author to reader and establish "mutual understanding," and place, most fundamentally, seals readers' faith by offering an authentic outer world, one "continuous and unbroken, never too thin to trust, always in touch with the senses" (117, 120). Without a plausible "finished surface" a story will lose its audience and fail: "Forty hounds of confusion are after it, the black waters of disbelief open up between its steps.... even if it has a little baby moral in its arms, it is more than likely a goner" (120). Fortunately the novel, as a mark of its genre, tends toward "the local, the 'real,' the present" -- which assures that "fiction is properly at work on the here and now" and that "we" are "there" with the story -- yet Welty cautions against loaded doses of actuality (117). Good fiction, she insists, sifts through life's common details, "disentangl[ing] the significant"; rather than present reality in full, its "world of appearance... has got

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to *seem* actuality" (120, 121). How best to feign and convince?

Place being brought to life in the round before the reader's eye is the readiest and gentlest and most honest and natural way this can be brought about.... The moment the place in which the novel happens is accepted as true, through it will begin to glow, in a kind of recognizable glory, the feeling and thought that inhabited the novel in the author's head and animated the whole of his work. (121)

Note again how place fits in Welty's scheme: its fidelity to the apparently real hooks a reader's confidence ("place... is accepted as true"), opening the way for an emotional exchange, or even epiphany, between author and reader (once the reader trusts place, the author's most intimate motivations will palpably "glow"). Not surprisingly, in Welty's view it is feeling which "carries the crown" over "character, plot, symbolic meaning" and "rightly relegates place into the shade" (116). Place must adhere to realism because the familiar secures, above all, an audience receptive to its author's emotive intensity.

Welty also builds a case for what I term the hyper-real, that good writing anticipates and in a moral sense, improves on, everyday experience (125). If fiction must cull out and augment special effects of the mundane to achieve believable places, for Welty the "carefulest and

purest representation" is "twice as true as life" (*italics added*, 127). Faulkner's comedy stands as her model: his story "Spotted Horses" may not have genuinely occurred, but as any Mississippian will attest, its strength lies in its legitimacy. Because Faulkner attends closely to everyday plain dealing, "social fact," and an "unerring aim of observation," the story "could happen today or tomorrow at any little crossroads hamlet" (*italics added*, 126-27). In Welty's view, then, place's faithfulness to real sources ensures a kind of prophesying power: "Life is strange. Stories hardly make it more so; with all they are able to tell and surmise, they make it more believably, more inevitably so" (128). Seeing the ordinary recognizably sketched, we discern a "heightened" sense of the real and gain truths more than actually exist (127). Crucially, the physicality, the tangibility place lends fiction transforms the "unconvincing" of what we customarily experience to loftier places of understanding, "the very heart's familiar" (128). Fiction's real is realer than we know.

Welty's assertion that place controls and refines character indicates another realist strain.<sup>4</sup> In their summary of the literary school Hugh Holman and William

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Harmon stress realism's preoccupation with the individual, its "great concern for the effect of action on character and... tendency to explore the psychology of the actors"; predictably, they commend Henry James as a model practitioner (413). For Welty, who quotes James on the first page of her essay, believable characters are those checked by clear margins: "... the likeliest character has first to be enclosed inside the bounds of even greater likelihood, or he will fly to pieces" (122). It follows that the most reliable margins, the best checks on an individual, have to do with place, which shapes character outright by hemming it in. "To know [an individual's] size," Welty writes, "we must see him set to scale in his proper world.... by confining character, [place] defines it" (122). Akin to this focus on the (narrated) individual is realism's doctrine that good writing communicates authorial intention. As Catherine Belsey observes of the school, ideally the great brain looming over a text's "represent[ation]" should be patently felt and measurable (8). Welty evidently agrees, identifying the author's sensibility as any story's bona fide nucleus. She maintains, for instance, that art is our best world

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ambassador, but with an important stipulation: "never the voice of a country," art "is an even more precious thing, the voice of the individual, doing its best to speak, not comfort of any sort, indeed, but truth" (117). And as I have already quoted, Welty has place point ultimately to "the feeling and thought that inhabited the novel in the author's head and animated the whole of his work," and then again she urges:

It may be going too far to say that the exactness and concreteness and solidarity of the real world achieved in a story correspond to the intensity of feeling in the author's mind and the very turn of his heart; but there lies the secret of our confidence in him. (127-28)

There is little doubting the author's eminence for Welty. She cannot emphasize enough how the figure of the writer overshadows his text -- how, through the auspices of place, he impresses reality's significance, how he captures "ideal" representations of the everyday world and wins readerly trust, how he conveys his own range of emotion, and indeed, *reproduces* it, feeling by feeling, in the audience. The objective of place, then, is authority. Place is a writer's best tool for selecting, controlling, infusing, convincing. It works as the author's direct line of communication, the place along which (if he manages a decent



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illusion) the author secures his audience and marshals their response. Moreover, Welty surrounds place with an air of deification, making the writer's mastery of it all the more impressive. Introducing place as one of the "angels" guiding fiction's "racing hand," elsewhere she speaks of its "mystery," "lasting identity," and "magic" (116, 119).

"From the dawn of man's imagination," Welty muses, "place has enshrined the spirit; as soon as man stopped wandering and stood still and looked about him, he found a god in that place" (123). The writer's business must be to steady himself and evoke in his portrayals these very gods. Hulk-like and awe-inspiring, the author resembles a great explorer in his "translation and ordering of life" into literary terrain, his struggle to broach "the spirit of things" with place depictions (128, 125):

... the responsibility of the writer... [is] to disentangle the significant... from the random and meaningless and irrelevant that in real life surround and beset [his work].... With each word [the author] writes, he acts -- as literally and methodically as if he hacked his way through a forest and blazed it for the word that follows.... though the woods may look the same from the outside, it is a new and different labyrinth every time. What tells the author his way? Nothing at all but what he knows inside himself.... (120-21)

The real god for Welty is not place but the writer's control and vision; the author can trust an intuitive wisdom to seal "the novel and its place [as] one... the same thing, like the explorer's tentative map of the known world" (121). In the same vein she lauds Flaubert's silhouettes of French experience as "no less conscious than... gigantic" and estimates of Faulkner:

He was born knowing [every aspect of his home state], or rather learning, or rather prophesying, all that and more.... If there is any more in Mississippi than is engaged and dilated upon... in the one story "Spotted Horses," then we would almost rather not know it."  
(124, 127)

Welty prefers that the buck stop with Faulkner's mind: place begins and ends with the genius of any work's awesome master.

At the heart of "Place in Fiction" lie two convictions, that place grows out of the author's omniscience (what he can read, evoke, and craft from his perception of ordinary experience), and that the author's ultimate challenge with place is capturing realistic pictures. A truly gifted writer uses personal viewpoint to hone in on his surroundings and glean their important aspects; these selections, coupled with his ability to describe them

convincingly, make for fictional places which readers credit as true. Hence realism works as a kind of contract between writers and audiences (if readers see the familiar in fiction, they will come again and again) and depends on authorial *focus*. To honor his end of the deal, a writer must see feelingly and clearly -- "focus then means awareness, discernment, order, clarity, insight" -- and place must be translucent and balanced, firm:

... at the moment of the writer's highest awareness of, and responsiveness to, the "real" world, his imagination's choice (and miles away it may be from actuality) comes closest to being infallible for his purpose.... No blur of inexactness, no cloud of vagueness, is allowable in good writing; from the first seeing to the last putting down, there must be steady lucidity and uncompromise of purpose. I speak, of course, of the ideal. (125)

Place, or the author's purest version of real, is a steadying, reliable force. It gives "equilibrium" and "a sense of direction," and Welty assures that if ever we are "carried off" when "reading or writing something good," place will repair our impetuosity (128-29). "It is the sense of place going with us [in the reading] that is the ball of golden thread to carry us there and back and in every sense of the word bring us home" (129). Place in fiction is safe, it is trustworthy, it is sound. It keeps

us close to what we know, in terms of the familiar and our own "point of origin" (119). And in the finest examples of writing, an author's version of place will always be sure.

One of Eudora Welty's most outspoken admirers, Louis D. Rubin, Jr., follows her formula for place closely in The Faraway Country (1963), a long critical work which argues that modern southern literature reflects the social upheaval enveloping twentieth-century southern culture. Vestiges of "Place in Fiction" appear throughout: against the standard of realism, "romantic" situations are dismissed as conventional and second-class (though unlike Welty, Rubin does not explain realism's natural superiority), an author's real-life experience determines how he fashions literary worlds (the equivalent of Welty's "seeing double"), and any chaos lurking in texts is largely stabilized by southern writers' renditions of place. Yet Rubin combines and magnifies the latter two criteria in ways that depart from Welty. Real life does serve as impetus for drawing literary places, but only negatively; the twentieth-century South troubles and even antagonizes the authors Rubin studies, and in efforts to correct their homeland's discrepancies the writers forge "private countr[ies]" of the mind, which turn

out to be the places dominating their literature (7). Thus literary place is an abstraction of magnificently balanced proportions, a psychological defense mechanism whereby authors "discover through... art the order and meaning that 'real life' no longer afford[s] them" (8). Rubin's insistence that writers' "faraway countries" impart security, and ultimately, lessons in moral virtue makes him an obvious prototype for treating place as a steadying influence.

The central thesis of The Faraway Country -- it crops up, in fact, across Rubin's distinguished career -- is that only when the South began to fall apart could it produce noteworthy literature. For Rubin, the region's disintegration and massive cultural shifts arose not from the Civil War but early twentieth-century industrialization; around the turn of the century, "sleepy, "contained" agrarian communities were jolted from sixty- to seventy-year repose by capitalism's gaining momentum (4). Writers such as Faulkner, Robert Penn Warren, and Thomas Wolfe, whose work came to fruition in the nineteen thirties, forties, and fifties and contributed to the literary flowering known as the Southern Renaissance, grew up witnessing the South's

disruption, though they failed to understand the impact of its social changes until leaving the region as young adults. Returning later as sensitive artists, the Renaissance writers discovered two hard truths: they perceived how an older, better way of southern life was dying (which many of their families and neighbors did not), and because of their ability to view the South from without, they never again fit comfortably in their home communities. Some lingered on in an alien South; others left in exasperation, fated, even so, to contemplate the region of their birth endlessly through their writing.

In response to their peripheral southern status, many of these artists turned inward, churning out of their estrangement the South's first literature "of great moral and spiritual intensity, of tremendous intellectual depth" (6-7). They consulted idyllic images of a South which they believed existed in their childhoods (but had actually passed before that time), and these images of "an imaginary country where 'tasseling corn,/ Fat beans, grapes sweeter than muscadine/ Rot on the vine'" permeate the Southern Renaissance canon (14-15). In short, the Faulkners, Warrens, and Wolfes create cohesive literary worlds to

compensate for the fact that "the Southern community as it used to be [had] broken down" (7):

... what the Southern writer has done with the South, is to give to his experience a logic and order greater and more accessible than that of "real life." He fashions his own country because... of his desire to effect an order greater than the one everyday life can provide for his experience.... The life of Faulkner's Yoknapatawpha has a moral logic greater than the life of Mississippi.... It is not the logic of everyday life, but it is life clarified and interpreted in the universal light of human experience. (18)

This is Welty's hyper-real one hundred fold, that the rationale ordering literary worlds settles confusion sweeping actual places -- settles it, at least, in the artist's consciousness and in the lasting integrity of his work as a whole. And Rubin's appreciating the *moral* logic of place in fiction cannot be understated; in his assessment place is a steadfast medium for the expression of humanist ethics. Yoknapatawpha, for example, serves as a permanent, invariable stage for the "moral drama of the soul's own bitter travail," the scene for "Faulkner's great human drama, the story of the attempt by human beings to translate ['love and honor and pity and pride and compassion and sacrifice'] into concrete behavior" (65, 50). By the end of his Faulkner chapter Rubin goes so far as to declare, "the



Faulknerian world is based on human love, with the dignity and justice that makes possible in society, and the tragedy that arises out of its violation. The necessity for love is the one constant in all the novels and stories" (64).

Circling back, the other "constant" Rubin initially recognizes in Faulkner's cycle is the county itself, "with its fields, rivers, farmland and homes remaining anchored in time, while the lives of the men and women inhabiting the land come and go" (47). Place is a *fixture* which Rubin eventually links to values or abstract principles. Thus Yoknapatawpha equals love, Altamont "time" and "the process of loss," and Burden's Landing the betrayal of "honor, responsibility, leadership" (88, 130).<sup>5</sup>

Effectively Rubin accomplishes for the category of place what (in his reading) Southern Renaissance writers do for a misguided South: he makes it ordered and ordering, a unifying force, the thread which salvages timeless patterns from texts' wandering views and various ethical implications. His version of place ensures main themes and messages, precepts for the high road to humanity. An admirable task for criticism, this moral instruction, and certainly Rubin rightly assumes that judgments and values

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overlay textual production. But in my view a sticking point impairs his analysis: for the author of The Faraway Country, literary production works one-dimensionally, issuing from the author's mind and the author's mind alone. The hard-won principles Rubin so appreciates in As I Lay Dying or All the King's Men originate with the writer's genius and -- because literature faithfully registers the designs of the mind behind it -- abide lastingly in the texts, invulnerable to change or blemish. Readers in no way affect the value-making. Accordingly, a text's lessons endure from audience to audience, culture, to culture; they lie suspended and crystal clear, at the height of literary cause and effect, for readers to swallow or reject. This rock-like stability is difficult to accept, particularly in light of the inroads made in the last thirty years by reader-response, psychoanalytic, feminist, and deconstructive critical practices. Today it seems unthinkable that proper values inhere timelessly in any one text, or that place in fiction can freeze time, transition, or interpretation, even if an author does conceive of place as his abstract, paradigmatic response to real life's troubling changes. For Rubin's bedrock theories of place to be convincing, he must

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establish how texts purely express writerly intent, how texts are transparent mediums. And he needs to explain how all wise readers read the same.

More encouragingly, an extended version of Rubin's reality/place relation could reconstitute the work of place in literature. In The Faraway Country, the place an author invents and images in his text amends the disruptions of an everyday South, yet only within an imaginary frame. That frame includes the author's mind and the esoteric realm of art, both of which stand removed (loftily, in a protected, transcendent sort of way) from the concrete. This is to say that Rubin's frame never touches the real-life South: any repairs made are idealistic and psychological. However if we relax Rubin's boundary between real and imaginary and allow that artifacts influence the cultures experiencing them, then place in fiction could impact place in actuality. We might consider, for instance, that literary place affects our impressions of geographical parameters, reinforces spatial stereotypes along the lines of which real communities orient themselves, or undermines so-called sacred spots which help perpetuate, day in and day out, social injustice. With his emphasis on authors re-ordering

reality through/in the countries of their minds, Rubin edges closely toward -- yet remains *essentially* far from -- such possibilities.

Like his colleague Louis Rubin, Lewis Simpson tries hard to explain how the South, long derided as America's economic and cultural wasteland, could produce the twentieth-century phenomenon known as the Southern Literary Renaissance. And like Rubin, in his conjecturing Simpson dwells on southern writers' alienation, though not from the South itself so much as modernity in general and industry's machinistic sway. Simpson's version of alienation differs from Rubin's on one other point: far from unique to Renaissance artists, a conscience resistant to new-fashioned trends marks some of the earliest southern writing. In The Dispossessed Garden: Pastoral and History in Southern Literature (1975), Simpson traces southern intellectual estrangement (from gathering industrial/technological forces, or from prevalent philosophical suasions of their day) in William Byrd, Thomas Jefferson, William Gilmore Simms, Robert Penn Warren, and William Styron, among others. All share a disaffection with the modern, but according to Simpson the Renaissance writers descry a huge flaw in their

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forebears' discontent: a Jefferson or Simms resented the changing world's reproaches of chattel slavery and wrote to defend the institution, struggling to reconcile it with New Eden images of the South. These efforts, in the Renaissance authors' judgment, promoted conceits of idyllic southern living that were hopelessly out of touch with real misery and wrongdoing; southern literature had abandoned memory, history, and the classical Christian ethic. Renaissance writers, mindful of such apostasy, attempt to resurrect "the meaning of the past by the literary mind... to arrest the disintegration of memory and history... [in order to] reconstruct the Western literary tradition" (70). For Simpson, their success in this weighty mission (undertaken out of responsibility to ages and ages of a particular, superior culture) appropriately measures the achievement of the South's stunning Renaissance flowering.

What drives Simpson's argument is a timeworn symbol, an image of place, which affects all southern writers differently but orders each of their objectives: southern soil as a redemptive Garden of Eden, a fresh Arcady, realized most typically in the stereotype of the Old South



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plantation. As Simpson describes it (studying Robert Beverley's The History and Present State of Virginia):

The glimpse of a planter like a Beverley or a [William] Byrd seated pleasantly amid the honeysuckle and the hummingbirds in that faraway summer, foreshadows the evocation in literary imagining of a pastoral plantation situated in a timeless "Old South," a secure world redeemed from the ravages of history, a place of pastoral independence and pastoral permanence. To the incomplete scene we have only to add the plantation mansion and the planter, who has in his hand a well-worn copy of Virgil, and within a supervisory distance a group of Negro slaves amiably at work in a tobacco field. (17)

Simpson locates this image's origins in the religious quest of early colonial settlers, which was to fulfill God's covenant in the New World, since the Old had abandoned it for modern versions of politics, commerce, and national expansion. Yet where New Englanders interpreted their pastoral as a sacred "pleasure garden" carved from foreboding wilderness, Virginians saw no threat in their natural terrain; its abundance could potentially earn vast riches (12). So Virginians revised the northeastern mission of clearing holy ground from the badlands. Instead they conceived of their errand as one "into an open, prelapsarian, self-yielding paradise, where they would be

made regenerate by entering into a redemptive relationship with a new and abounding earth" (15).

There was a hitch, however: the southern symbol of paradise included a glaring deviation from Arcady in the classical-Christian tradition, the chattel slave, and Virginians were pressed to justify their peculiarity in poetic terms. Hence the slave appears in eighteenth-century southern literature as devoted gardener, and later, beginning with Jefferson, the devoted slave and meticulously-ordered plantation bear evidence of "the condition of the independent [white, land-owning, upper-class] mind" (33). Southerners' quarrel with modernity, focused on notions of social equality which were gaining ground in the Age of Reason and which southerners felt were perverse, became crystallized in their Arcadian image of an idyllic and civilized South. This golden world is the "dispossessed" of Simpson's title, initially undone by authors' incorporating slavery in the picture, and later because modern writers felt alienated from their forebears' (slavery-defensive) alienation.

The value of Simpson's criticism is that he allows his South-as-paradise symbol a wide range of flexibility. The

Dispossessed Garden does not read like a coded checklist, where writers are assessed by how many qualities they satisfy of an exemplary, normative image. In fact, Simpson's picture of the South as plantation utopia never stagnates, is never presented as a literary frieze passed from author to author; he documents, rather, the transformation of that picture over time. Thus Robert Beverley (1705) draws a South where teeming natural resources are productively harnessed by Greek-reading, refined country gentlemen, where, amazingly, no slaves toil the land (a conspicuous omission on Beverley's part); whereas in Woodcraft (1854) William Gilmore Simms features the happy slave who, fiercely protective of his master, helps establish the pastoral of "'a well-managed household, in which the parties were all at peace with themselves and one another,' and 'a sort of center for the parish civilization,' which draws 'the gentry all round, within the sphere of its genial, yet provocative influences'" (60); while with Faulkner and his Renaissance peers, Arcady is abandoned as an empty, perfectionist metaphor. The Renaissance writers, Simpson maintains, exhibit their alienation differently, not through escapist plantations but

by reinvoking history and memory, the "fusion" of which is "a moral order -- a dimension of being" (75). But if these authors prefer other channels for their cultural estrangement, it is their reaction against Arcady, against slavery's worm in Arcady, that drives them to search for new expressions of their separatism. The garden "dispossessed" works just as potently on artistic imaginations -- if not more powerfully, considering the Renaissance feats -- as the southern idyll in full bloom.

Simpson himself quits the study of southern pastoral images as he treats memory and history in Faulkner and Warren, and existentialism in post-Renaissance writers, and frankly, his last section's withdrawal from the book's central stereotype reads a little jarringly. There would be much to consider with Arcady in modern southern literature. Plenty of Simpson's twentieth-century authors stress the demise of the Old South or of a particular plantation in their work (think of Sutpen's Hundred in Absalom, Absalom!, or Burden's Landing in All the King's Men); it seems a hole in Simpson's argument to overlook Arcady's ongoing circulation, even its lines appear so exhausted as soon to pass. Probably the critic would answer that alienation is

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his main thread and that the plantation symbol fails as antidote for southern writers' social angst, but reading The Dispossessed Garden, one would never know this symbol continues in Renaissance literature and beyond. It does, usually with violent or apocalyptic ends, and considering the implications of Arcady's attrition would round out Simpson's case and help us all better appraise a long-standing, far-reaching picture of the South.

As The Dispossessed Garden convincingly attests, in southern literature place is often designated as a symbolic construction, as a site which imitates other, previous sites, as a stereotype laden with historical connotations. There is little doubt that images of the South resonate with coded layers of meaning. Thanks to critical work by Simpson, Lucinda MacKethan, Kathryn Lee Seidel, Elizabeth Jane Harrison, Louise Westling, and William Ruzicka, we know that representations of southern places betoken the plantation utopia, white southern womanhood (particularly the fallen belle), ancient myth and ritual, or architectural embodiments of a regional mind, individual or collective.<sup>6</sup> What this scholarship helps us understand is that physical sites in literature exist for reasons additional to visual

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effect; they are more than round, full pictures meant to please our inner eye, and we need to be aware of their hidden dimensions, their culturally-embedded implications. In The Dispossessed Garden, for example, Simpson unravels how John Pendleton Kennedy enters antebellum arguments over slavery by tinkering with the stock plantation image. In Swallow Barn: Or Life in the Old Dominion (1831) Kennedy portrays the southern plantation as a type of "pastoral squirearchy" where the slaveholder acts as "lord over a less glamorous but a more kindly and far more pleasant ancestral estate than ever existed in England" (44). On the surface this place issues directly from William Byrd's or Jefferson's Arcadia, with its big house, immaculately-ordered grounds, and contented slaves, but as Simpson looks closer he discerns how Kennedy's "'flattering image of 'feudal' Virginia'" registers an ambivalence toward the southern garden (45). Through a narrator from New York City who detects "phony feudalism" on plantation tours, through slaves who parody their owners' misguided sense of dominion, through pictures of tidy slave quarters that evidence the thrift and civility of partially-emancipated slaves, Kennedy promotes views which most of his southern contemporaries

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would have abhorred (44): "that at [the] heart [of the garden] is a pathos of order," that for the pastoral to ring true slaves must be granted a meaningful relation to land they toil, that slavery is an unacceptable condition in a country based on freedom, that "slavery resists embodiment in the hierarchical pattern of society that is in the minds of the masters" (47, 48, 50, 45). Such profound anti-slavery wranglings -- and in a novel that at first glance seems enamored of Arcady.<sup>7</sup> With his image-intensive criticism Simpson is able to show how the outer trappings of a heavily-circulated, bucolic picture of the South gives way in Kennedy to more tarnished pastoral elements. Simpson does not merely expose the cracks in Kennedy's squirearchy; he suggests how the cracks speak to an ideological debate. What we see with the literary symbol is that even when southern authors divvy up literary space along lines verified by tradition, the designations are intentional, political, and far from easily natural. Those designations -- a symbol's discernible features -- can and do change. Obviously a knowledge of popular symbols of southern scenes and the codes they evoke/revise proves indispensable to any place-centered thinking.

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The final tendency regarding place which colors much of southern literary criticism is, in some cases, a scholarly indulgence, and in others, as much an observation on critics' part (about authorial frames of mind) as their own wringing of hands: mourning the authentic southern place as near extinction or irrevocably lost.<sup>8</sup> This ominous mood has not been confined to literary scholarship; for decades cultural gatekeepers have sung a southern swan song. In historian Edward Ayers's assessment:

For as long as people have believed there was a South they have also believed it was disappearing. Virginians and Carolinians thought the South was dying as early as the 1830s, when too much easy money in the Cotton Kingdom pulled people to raw places such as Alabama and Mississippi, which knew nothing of true southern gentility. Then people felt certain that the South would be erased by the end of slavery or Reconstruction. They did not expect the South to survive the effects of automobiles or radios, of World War II and the postwar bulldozer revolution. There was reason to believe that the events of Brown v. Board of Education, Montgomery, Greensboro, Selma, and Birmingham might do the trick, surely the inexorable spread of strip malls, fast-food places, cable, and satellite dishes marked the end of the South. (68-69)

Bleak predictions also toll among writers who brood openly over their homeland. Contemporary author Harry Crews posits that for four generations since the Civil War, "the entire Deep South and all its people were one enormous

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neighborhood" in terms of "idiom and accent of speech, the food, the music, even the manner of worship" (Harper's 39). With the onslaught of chain restaurants and television preachers, however, the South "has been corrupted all the way to quaint," and for Crews, the eradication of that monolithic neighborhood translates into thin southern caricature, no South at all (40). Josephine Humphreys regrets what she terms "the dirty family secret of the South," labyrinth and tacky urban development (297). In her view the encroaching "condo-golf resort scene" initially displaces a purer region of Eden-like wilderness, and now too, threatens the South's last bastion, its distinctive small towns. With the loss of the Town, Humphreys maintains, the death of the South impends (297-98). Since southern writers who turn cultural critics often assume cynical views of the fate of their region, it is little wonder that southern literary criticism adopts similar positions. At the very least, scholars have tended to take writers at their word and read southern literature as full of perpetually dying Souths.

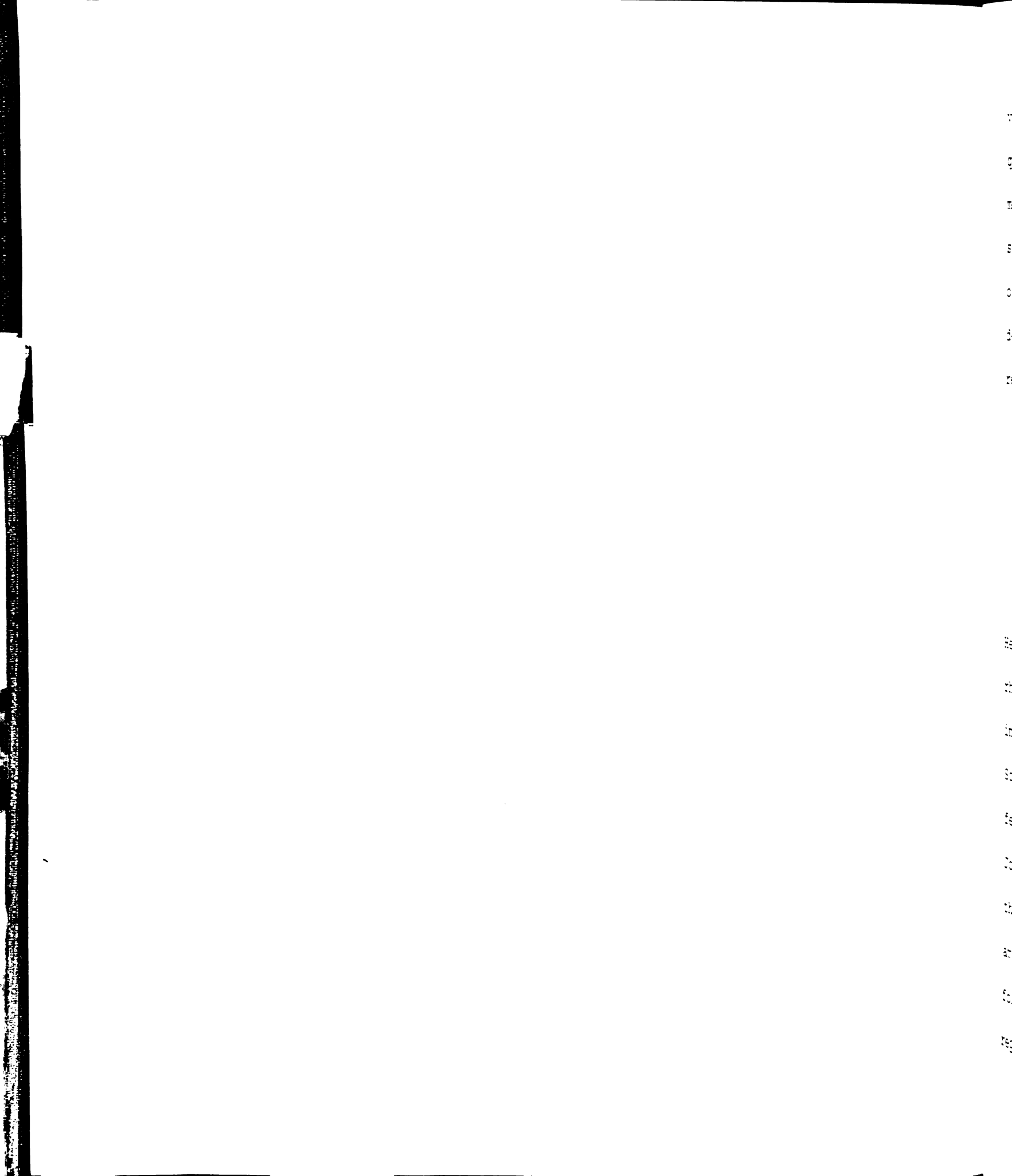
The loudest keening for a fading South to affect southern literary criticism burst on the scene in 1930, when

twelve academics associated with the Nashville Fugitives published I'll Take My Stand. Because so many in this group went on to become leading poets, fiction writers, and critics (John Crowe Ransom, Donald Davidson, Allen Tate, Robert Penn Warren), and because Louis Rubin has over the years championed the volume and vigorously supported two reprints (in 1962 and 1977), I'll Take My Stand has exerted an influence on southern literary criticism which remains unparalleled. The golden vision of its collaborative authors, the Twelve Southerners, and what they strive to preserve is "the agrarian life of the older South," perceived as under siege by forces of the New South's "industrial gospel" (xxxviii, xliv). John Donald Wade's story, "The Life and Death of Cousin Lucius," offers an exemplary picture of the demise of the treasured farming community, before the Civil War a place where settlers could carve "almost a little nations of one's own," and after it a vast specter, due to poor crop management, an ebbing labor force, and the uneven economics of industrial capitalism (266). No matter how noble Lucius, no matter the energy he extends to convince his neighbors to invest soundly, alter crop production, and read the classics, his farm-based town



slowly disintegrates. The landscape is razed for timber and fast cash, harvests fail, and generation upon generation move away. The sense of doom engulfing Wade's fictional community never lets up; war-ravaged and labor-short in Lucius's childhood, in ensuing decades the town suffers natural blights, loss of peace to the automobile, a countrified inferiority complex, and the exodus of most of its inhabitants. By the end of "The Life and Death of Cousin Lucius," the motif, "Hard Times" is all that will certainly recur; when Lucius "saw inaugurated the old process... of people leaving their farms and putting out for the cities," he observes remorsefully "that those who went prospered, while those who stayed languished" (296-97). Nothing can stop the slow wasting of his town.

Likewise, though the Twelve Southerners intend their manifesto as a warning of what the South might dwindle to and believe they can inspire a revolt against the "increasing disadjustment and instability" of modern influences below the Mason-Dixon line, I'll Take My Stand is characterized most by a gloomy defensiveness (xlv). When the authors initially ask, "how far shall the South surrender its moral, social, and economic autonomy to the



victorious principle of Union?" and offer hopefully, "that question remains open," at the same time they admit "the melancholy fact" that momentum for so-called progress has swept their home region (xxxviii). Tellingly, at the close of the Introduction they cast their rallying cry in terms decidedly negative, seeming already to disparage any genuine response:

If a community, or a section, or a race, or an age, is groaning under industrialism, and well aware that it is an evil dispensation, it must find the way to throw it off. To think that this cannot be done is pusillanimous. And if the whole community, section, race, or age thinks it cannot be done, then it has simply lost its political genius and doomed itself to impotence. (xlviii)

Here, as accusations of loss and impotence bear the brunt of rhetorical weight, the restoration clamored for feels impossible to imagine. This volume's urge to revive an old South rises from the suspicion that there are not enough fellow warriors to reclaim that myth-like kingdom. To twist John Crowe Ransom's famous words and use them ironically, the Twelve Southerners' urge for antebellum-like communities amounts to getting stuck "look[ing] backward rather than forward" (1). Their agrarian image of a purer, better region is fixed regrettably in the past with little or no

chance of realization, most of all because, as Rubin himself has admitted, "perhaps [it] never existed" (Introduction to the Torchbook Edition xxxi).

The stand assumed by the Twelve Southerners opposes changes they witness everywhere in their hometowns, the South's none-too-slow Americanization. As their region blends in with the rest of the country, the Twelve judge, as farmland is deserted and cities grow and mass production enlists a daunting number of workers and national marketing brainwashes the consumer's mind, the South quickens its own doom. Their message: close the door on industrial invasion and re-draw time-honored lines distinguishing the South, lines cherished and advocated for over a century by white, land-owning males. For agrarian dreams of the southern place resemble Jefferson's yeoman farm, where the individual white male tills his own soil, feeds and provides for his family, and makes his own crafts and music. The yeoman's chief rewards, like the planter's at Monticello, are an independent mind and control of the realm of his homestead.

Unfortunately agrarian boundaries allow too little space for women and African-Americans, not to mention that ethnic groups other than Anglo-Irish, Anglo-Scot, and Black

are unheard of in I'll Take My Stand. Andrew Nelson Lytle's "The Hind Tit," for example, pictures the farmwife's domain as the kitchen, where "her victories are partial, but very satisfying, for she knows her limitations [with regard to the caprice of nature's resources]" (220). Wife and daughters "wait" first on the men before eating, "can be of great help in the garden," and contribute to the family economy by "mending clothes, darning, knitting, canning, preserving, washing or ironing or sewing," but they in no way act as proprietors or are trained to make wide-scale decisions (224-229). Although Wade's Cousin Lucius believes that his wife, "who was at best but a frail creature, was the strongest hope he knew for the perpetuation of that bright tradition against the ceaseless, clamorous, insensate piracies of Hard Times" and that she demands "a sort of worship," this "strongest hope" moves discreetly about the home and church and never ventures into spheres of business or trade (279). Not surprisingly, issues of women's rights are "a puzzle" to Lucius, who muses that the other sex should worry over "woes incomparably more galling than the renunciation of ['suffrage']" (289). But if the Twelve Southerners' small farm ideal depends on women for an

(unseen) foundation, its lines cast Blacks off to the side entirely. The place of African-Americans in the South is taken up by Robert Penn Warren's essay, "The Briar Patch" -- a title aptly modeled on a popular southern cliché, a spatial symbol of thorny predicaments with little room for maneuver (247). Warren in fact consigns Blacks to precarious grounds: he advises them to remain in the South, to resist joining a cheap industrial labor force, and to work the land in hopes that white owners will repay Blacks' efforts fairly (or if the Black man owns his own farm, that the southern market will pay commiserate with the quality of his produce). Starker still, Warren envisions separate white and Black communities. "The Southern white man," Warren holds, "wishes the negro well; he wishes to see crime, genial irresponsibility, ignorance, and oppression replaced by an informed and productive negro community" -- a community apart, a community that, as it self-improves, should keep its social ills from spilling over (264). In the conclusion Warren counsels, "Let the negro sit beneath his own vine and fig tree" (264).

The Twelve Southerners' conviction that the South is fatally tainted and that its recovery depends on the

comeback of nineteenth-century small farming communities disqualifies too many people from the power base of its ideal. Even more short-sighted, theorizing place in the present as exhausted and in the past as an utopian option (and our only legitimate one) fails to explain the South's thriving longevity. Today, seventy years after I'll Take My Stand, the region flourishes, as does a literature concerned with its parameters, the extent of the South's influence on contemporary living. It seems to me that rather than romanticize versions of place which no longer affect us significantly, we need to account for the South's constant regeneration. While the plantation or the small farming community no longer dominates our southern scene, we still talk about the South -- how do we now imagine its constitution and extent? When we turn loose the archetype of an homogenous, smoothly-hierarchical region, where do we go?

The implicit question posed at the end of The Dream of Arcady, Lucinda MacKethan's 1980 study of southern literature's nostalgia for lost place ideals, maps the start of my critical thinking, the point at which I want to enter southern scholarship's conversation on the meaning of place:

Walker Percy has noted that the South is now "almost as broken a world as the North, and we must learn to live in it." Like writers outside of the South, the southern writer today finds perhaps his greatest challenge in involving his characters in quests for a way to live actively and responsibly within a broken world. The pastoral mode requires a viable myth in the dream of Arcady. The pastorally grounded image of a South of old as an Arcadian community represents for most writers today perhaps a garden left too far behind, to use John Crowe Ransom's image. Yet for roughly one hundred years that garden and the southerner's response to the loss of it have provided an astonishingly fertile field for artistic response. (217)

While I do not accept that the South today is "broken" -- which implies it once was agreeably unified and whole -- MacKethan forces us to consider an important issue. Between the lines she asks, how do we picture a South bereft of its dearest place icons? If "the dream of Arcady" no longer resonates in the South or speaks to its range and nature, what does? Although MacKethan's question turns on the concept of symbols, I think we can widen its scope, taking Eudora Welty's cue and allowing for multiple possibilities of what place in literature pertains to -- visual images of physical sites, yes, but also the dynamics of boundary making and changing, how trespass is determined (trespass by characters, by readers), how past geographies undergird, scramble, or perhaps infringe on contemporary spatial



arrangements, what constitutes sacred space, and how spatial voids or erasures are dealt with and accommodated in southern experience. In fact, a large component of my project is exactly this, identifying aspects of place that may strike us as unusual, immediately new, or simply different. Even as my queries begin with wondering about the nine lives of the South and how literature perpetually reconceives this region, they shift quickly to gauging what our region-making indicates about the meaning and activity of place. I move constantly back and forth between a place and place as a theoretical category.

Southern scholarship imparts several lessons about place which we would do well to keep with us. Welty, we might remember, insists on the multiplicity of place; in her scheme the category varies between the "raw materials" from which an author chooses, to the "chinkproof" sphere he creates, to his own position and background. Although Louis Rubin never commits to such himself, he anticipates that lines drawn between the South and representations of the South are far from clearly discernible; if we extend Rubin's thesis, that authors repair the ills of real-life places through/in their fictional worlds, we come close theorizing

literature's effect on, literature's interaction with, day-in, day-out conceptualizing of "South." And Lewis Simpson's tracing the genesis and development of a seminal southern symbol drives home how aware we should be of standard images of the South and particular messages they have transmitted historically.

The insights these critics afford us are worthwhile and useful -- already we have had to grapple with the place-site equivalence, metaphorical applications of place, and the degree to which place and identity coalesce. Yet even as I appreciate the headstart southern scholarship offers, evaluating the tradition's drawbacks can help us locate problems in place thinking which may be avoided, or if further discussions seem warranted, may be referred to more recent socio-geographical theorists. In my view the weightiest critical flaw in southern literary criticism is assuming the self-referentiality of place; having learned from Cleanth Brooks and a dozen like him, who believe we all mean the same (obvious) thing when we talk about place, I will try to define the specific contexts and elements that I analyze of the category. This is of crucial importance, because those contexts and aspects will change frequently in

my study of Naylor, Spencer, and Pratt. Moreover, the tendency to read place as a vehicle for literary realism poses several obstacles for our reading: How do we assess which sites and situations are authentically real, since southern culture changes over time, and since we cannot be familiar, firsthand, with every community every book evokes? Is it not true that the theoretical underpinnings for realism toppled as early as the advent of structuralism? And when a work deliberately upsets modern perceptions of real-life places, as does Gloria Naylor's Mama Day, how can we explain its place practices? Obviously we must reconceive the relation between place in literature and literary realism, pinpointing alternatives to the bent of "this is the South and it is genuine -- and therefore a good rendering."

I also look skeptically on the critical faith that place functions as a stabilizing force, most often as one which channels transcendent, universal values. My project does not take for granted that authors and readers automatically share values, that a text can purely express its author's values, or that values are safely encapsulated and hover about a work, complete and unspoiled, ready for

the reader to ingest. And because the texts I analyze tend to use place in unsettling, disconcerting ways, it would be valuable to formulate space as "a fragmentary field of action, a jurisdiction scattered and deranged, which appears to be negotiable or continuous but is actually peppered with chasms of economic and cultural disjunctions" (Yaeger 4). Regarding the rich convention in southern scholarship of tracking classic symbols of southern places, I intend to read with an eye toward those symbols and authors' manipulation of their standard features, but I do not want my study to be image-obsessed. It seems to me that critics' focus on single archetypes of place (such as Simpson's on the southern garden) might confine their place definitions, might lead them to ignore aspects of place which do not neatly fit their symbol hypotheses (as Simpson ignores Arcady's disintegration in modern southern writing). Finally, my study of place in contemporary southern women's literature does not expect that the South is about to peter out, does not seek solace in defunct pictures of southern communities. Too often those past pictures contradict Naylor, Spencer, and Pratt's *multicultural* place dynamics,

and so I am interested to imagine how southern sites are territorialized, contested, evolving.

## Chapter Two

### Mama Day and the Trouble with Maps

On the surface Gloria Naylor's main setting in her 1984 novel, Mama Day, appears to be a southern Black utopia. Willow Springs, a fictitious Sea Island off the coast of Georgia and South Carolina, is Black-owned, Black-operated, and virtually sealed from white influence, from 1823 to the period when most of Naylor's story occurs, the late 1970s and early '80s. Not only is the island stunningly beautiful, a "primeval Paradise" in critic Helene Christol's words, and inhabited exclusively by descendants of freed slaves, it also preserves cultural ties to the original Black motherland, Africa (350). Late into the twentieth century islanders observe rituals passed down from their earliest ancestor, the revered conjure woman, Sapphira Wade, who was enslaved along the west African coast around 1819 and purchased by rice planter Bascombe Wade in the New World.<sup>1</sup> The Afro-centric customs bequeathed by this "great, grand mother" are widesweeping and habitually practiced, and strongly define Willow Springs' communal identity (48). Although Sapphira's name and the details of her experience have been lost over time, islanders rely on her herbal

medicines to guard their health, her conjure to read signs of Nature and maintain peaceful relations, her spiritualism to honor and bury their dead, and legends of her reciprocal giving for their Candlewalk celebrations in December.

Inhabitants' confidence and dominion on Willow Springs is also bolstered by their sense of impregnable possession. As a result of Sapphira's machinations, residents own every inch of the island outright: somehow she convinced Bascombe Wade to transfer his holdings to her progeny, the Days, and a clause in the deed forbids living Day descendants from selling. So legally binding are islanders' property rights that challenges in state and federal courts have failed to divest this extended Black family -- through antebellum times, Jim Crow, and luxury development of the Sea Islands in the 1960s and 70s. Amazingly, at the edge of a Deep South systematically white-controlled, ownership and administration of Willow Springs rests with a network of independent African Americans for over a hundred and seventy years.

Yet Naylor admits a shadow across the rise of her southern Black Mecca. Despite their proprietorship and political and cultural self-possession, residents of Willow

Springs feel anxious about their surroundings: they cannot penetrate family secrets literally *embedded* within their long, narrow swath of land. Certain areas around the island bear evidence of calamities and indiscretions which destroyed some former Days' relations; Naylor's present-day characters, vaguely aware of such turmoil, either avoid these sites, or, seeking historical information, are unsure of how to approach them.<sup>2</sup> Therefore the Days and their kin might own and manage Willow Springs; they might know the best grounds for storm-protected building, the best waters around the island for fishing; they may have mastered the economics of bridge construction and chemistry of soil composition; they might successfully screen Willow Springs' borders for unwelcome mainland deputies -- but regardless of the Days' local authority, they remain hesitant and unsettled in their domain due to gaps in family knowledge. Islanders miss particulars about the Days' genesis and preservation that might explain their substantive collective identity and how they come to be prepossessed: the conditions of Sapphira's arrival, her name, the nature of her relation to Bascombe Wade, how she wrested the island from him, why her issue, like herself, tend to tear loved





ones' hearts "wide open" (151). Naylor augments these gaps in knowledge by representing them as *site-specific* mysteries: she concretizes and enlarges the Days' ignorance of historical fact by concealing answers to the family's troubled past at various locations around the island. Naylor distinguishes these areas as unique, allegorical, and subject to divination: they are sacred, oracular, places where family-altering events occurred (and where evidence of such may be discovered), or where strange tokens of conjure lie waiting to be construed. Accordingly, at the novel's climax, when the family scrambles for clues of their forebears to combat the last childbearing Day's impending death, they head toward Naylor's emblematic destinations. Out of intuition and/or compulsion, they flounder around these sites, confused, unaware of what to look for to solve the family's crisis. The culmination of this furious, place-bound agitation is that in the end, Naylor's specified haunts are not wholly revelatory; they yield only partial information in masked, obscure terms, at times too inexplicably for characters to know how to proceed.

In what follows I explore the ways Naylor qualifies her minority stronghold in the South, by examining the novel's

spatial metaphors for lost, or forgotten, or unrecoverable family histories. It is significant that a Black author creates a Black utopia in a region traditionally race-discriminatory, and then features her community's internally corrosive elements -- i.e., that Naylor's sacred sites fail to deliver historical links intact. I label these failures corrosive because they cause one character's death and threaten to extinguish the Day family line, but more importantly, because they indicate the reverberating ill-effects of the original white master, Bascombe Wade. As I will establish, the lack of evidence at designated sites bespeaks a conflicted, wrongful influence among Naylor's people that can never be wholly eradicated, the will to control someone else, which has marked generations of Days through their unacknowledged relation to Wade. If place is difficult in Mama Day because, symbolically, it is expected to clarify the past and does not, I am interested in what its difficulties point to: an unwanted tie to a white progenitor, which complicates the meaning of ownership in a minority-strengthened South, and on another level, the frustrations of trying to ascertain a southern African-American essence (a vital goal for Naylor's characters). I

will consider whether Mama Day manifests and legitimizes a southern Black essence, to determine its indispensability (as far as Naylor is concerned) for minority grounding in a region overwhelmingly hostile. Ultimately I intend to figure whether some groups in the South are due a collective essence more than others.

Uncertainty around Willow Springs is not confined to sacred sites or the Days' historical record: the island itself, physically speaking, borders the edge of believability, and for this reason more than others, southern literary studies is ill-prepared to treat the dynamics of place in Naylor's novel. Critics as highly esteemed as Eudora Welty have predisposed the field toward literary realism: with regard to place and southern writing, scholars expect credible settings which approximate scenes they recognize from personal experience; "ordinary" versions of the South, which invite readers' trust and familiarity (due to the author's choice of detail from the world around him); and locations that are safe and reliable, that check the erratic tendencies of spontaneous, wayward characters. Willow Springs, however, could not be more at odds with such standards. Not only is the island a regional anomaly for

its long-standing minority ownership, but the African spiritualism there emphasizes ghosts and conjure (voices murmuring through surf, fatal graveyard dust, talking cemeteries, or babies conceived from chicken eggs) to the extent that the supernatural, or uncanny, glosses everyday tasks and circumstances. Naylor infuses Willow Springs with the fantastic, the eerie, daring readers to suspend our disbelief, withholding fictional confines we might easily grasp or identify. Even the island's geography defies straightforward explanation: in terms of latitude and longitude Willow Springs sits squarely on the line dividing Georgia and South Carolina, preventing either from laying claim to the island, and also, prohibiting its representation on area maps. Because of its lucky, unlikely situatedness, technically Willow Springs enjoys a legal statelessness. It can sequester itself from the rules and extractions of state sovereignty, in a region of American where, traditionally, allegiance to the state supersedes even federal obligations.

If Mama Day opposes southern studies' preference for realistic scenes -- as defined by the criticism -- it does not discard plausibility altogether or its own

interpretations of real. Islanders regard most idiosyncrasies around them as natural and commonplace; their impression of what is incarnate and irrefutable is as vital to them as the phenomena are bizarre or unreconcilable for outsiders. Hence in its otherworldliness and exceptionalism, Willow Springs does not overturn the possibility of realism so much as encourage southern literary studies to accommodate different versions of the "actual" South. While Naylor's voodoo-inclined, stateless, intensely Afro-centric setting may not match some critics' tastes for the familiar, and further, may undermine stereotypical pictures of the South that have long been the field's obsession, regional studies should not pick and choose among circulating images of the South: scholars need to assess *all* of the region, incongruities included, however it is being represented.

Another lesson for southern critics is Naylor's flexibility with the function of place. In her depictions of Willow Springs, place does not amount (merely) to a particular site, a marked-out, passive space which characters traverse or fill. More than physical extent, place in Mama Day is a conundrum: sites are difficult to

negotiate, in terms walking/working through them and moving forward (the moon's shadows may play tricks with characters' eyes, seeming to block paths, or a bridge may be out, or a well that one needs access to may be bolted shut), but more importantly, they raise questions which the novel leaves unresolved. One example from among many is the other place. Here, at the Day family homestead that islanders believe to be possessed, a local woman suffering from infertility is mysteriously impregnated. The ritual performed on her requires the first new moon of the spring and a chicken on the verge of delivering its eggs, and it *absolutely* must be completed at the other place. Naylor's description of this island sacrament is heavily symbolic and arcane: we are never sure exactly what transpires between the presiding griot, the woman, and the "pulsing" chicken egg, but the woman does bear a child later that same year; moreover, it is never clear what the other place contains that would ensure the operation's success (140). What happened out there, and *why* out there? Naylor's settings can be hard to fathom because confounding developments take place on their grounds; not only are the sites' physical characteristics disorienting, but the issues or doubts that issue from these

settings hang in the air, unconfirmed and unsettled. Rather than offer recognizable scenes to establish mutual grounds with readers -- which would satisfy southern literary criticism's preference for settings that reassure and encourage our trust -- Naylor uses unwieldy locations to test our faith in her story. Her challenge for southern studies is to discern the puzzles and predicaments of southern sites, to figure what their loose threads indicate about the region's makeup. Since such open-ended elements dismantle a secure sense of place, we need to theorize the effects of "the South" without requiring a smoothly-assembled picture of the region, wherein all its parts fit together agreeably and supplement a well-rounded, decipherable whole.

As an example of the vertigo often associated with Naylor's island, I want to examine a map at the novel's opening which, sequentially, readers have to get past to reach Naylor's narrative. Interpreting the map is an exercise in spatial maladjustment: it is gorgeously complex and hard to cipher. Readers' difficulty with the drawing foreshadows the problems of place Naylor's characters encounter as they search for family truths at sacred sites;



also, the map illustrates why we need critical approaches other than (or in addition to) literary realism to address enigmas of place within the bounds of southern culture.

\* \* \* \*

Just after Naylor's title page and dedication, the first text readers encounter in Mama Day is a rich, black-and-white, flower-laden map of Willow Springs. The sketch positions the island off the Georgia/South Carolina coast, with a bridge running from the point of these states' dividing line to the even middle of Willow Springs; notably, since the island lies as squarely in one state as another, it falls under neither's jurisdiction. The map's most looming features are Willow Springs itself, drawn large and complete compared to the fragmented chip of mainland, and a collection of teeming Queen Anne's lace, morning glories, and marsh grass, which appear to consume the mainside, spill over an enlarged image of the rickety, wooden bridge, and lean out toward Willow Springs and the Atlantic. A sense of exoticism and fecundity prevails with this map, from the lush flowers to the sign designating geographic direction,

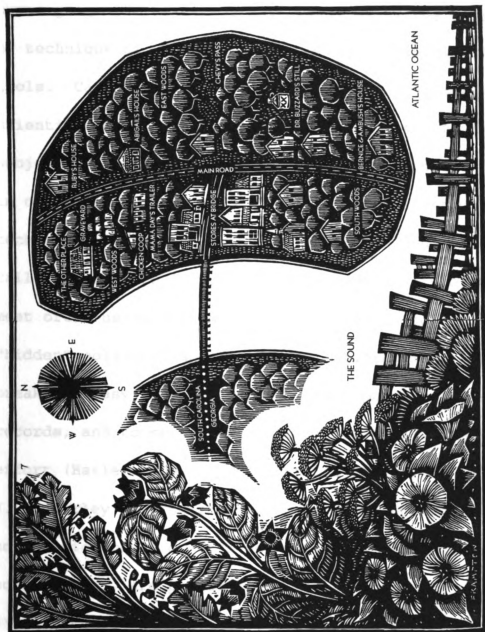


Figure 1  
The Map at the Opening of Mama Day (Random House, 1993)

with North, South, East and West etched on the four tips of a sand dollar shell.

In terms of deciphering Mama Day's opening document, human geographers' recent assessment of cartography, the art or technique of mapmaking, provides some useful evaluative tools. Cartography has long operated in the West as a scientific discourse; it is a field convinced of its subject's direct access to and representation of reality, or in other words, the map's status as factually true technology. Since the mid eighties human geographers have called cartography's positivist assumptions into question, most often using deconstructive strategies to expose "hidden" political agendas behind official maps of state, to break the easy trust in maps as geographical or historical records, and to stress the rhetoricity of any mapmaking effort (Harley, "Deconstructing" 232-33, 239). In this vein J. B. Harley asserts that all maps, "scientific or non-scientific, basic or derived" "state an argument about the world, and... are propositional in nature" ("Deconstructing" 241, 242). With the terms "argument" and "propositional" Harley signals a refrain common to his writings: that any map "is an art of persuasive

communication" and works hard to invoke authority ("Deconstructing" 242). Graham Huggan, who supports the idea that maps are invitations to modes of seeing rather than objective copies of landscapes, helpfully adds, "the 'reality' represented mimetically by the map not only conforms to a particular version of the world but to a version which is specifically designed to empower its makers" (118).

I am intrigued to consider what perspectives Mama Day's map advances as well as the character of its authority. We can begin by noting the power it overturns, the geography traditionally imposed by white southern government; the map curtails state and federal dominion, the standards by which, in American culture, places are measured and fixed. Georgia and South Carolina are reduced to a strip of seaboard and provide more a relational background for readers (cues of familiarity, as with the sign, "Atlantic Ocean") than a determining or overarching presence. What the map promotes instead is Willow Springs itself, just as the narrative of Naylor's written text begins with the two-word sentence, "Willow Springs." And just as the island is arguably the map's largest, most conspicuous item -- certainly the one

presented in greatest detail, partitioned off as it is -- likewise throughout the book Naylor confers on Willow Springs a special aura. Mama Day features the island as originary, as a kind of southern paradise, and as a destination for characters who wander too far and too long mainside. Thus Willow Springs, Naylor's solution to, or replacement for, shrunken images that white place-control offers, bears the qualities of permanence, divine blessing, and a fateful magnetism, all of which point to the island's particular kind of power. With the map I have already referred to a pervading sense of exoticism; correspondingly, across the novel Willow Springs is figured as other-worldly and marked by conjure-woman magic. The authority of the aging griot, Miranda (Mama) Day, for example, or of the "great, grand Mother" Sapphira Wade, lies in the African magico-religious tradition, and their contact with this power has literally enabled the Black community to exist and protected Willow Springs' longevity (48). The power behind and diffused throughout the island, then, is profoundly Black-oriented, well-tuned to natural elements, and for most outsiders, almost entirely unbelievable.

This is also the power invoked by the map at the text's beginning. The enlarged size and profusion of flowers, the use of black as a dominant background in the drawn portions, lending a rich depth to the picture, the second image of the bridge at the bottom of the map, emphasizing its wooden and homemade construction, and the fact that this bridge extends from the mainland out toward -- what? -- we cannot be sure, just as we cannot be sure of the shadowy island with its one road and scattered, leaning buildings -- all these elements summon an other-worldiness, a strange beauty, definitely, but all the same, a beauty that *is* strange and unusual.<sup>3</sup>

And it is precisely the map's peculiar unfamiliarity which determines its proposition: namely, reader, will you step over to the other side? Will you suspend your disbelief, accept the island's brand of normalization, and trust in Willow Springs' conjurin' power? The invitation the map extends is faith in an unknown place. The recognizable bearings of Georgia, South Carolina, the Sound, and the Atlantic might ease us toward committing, with the promise that Willow Springs approximates *something* we know, yet if we resemble the social scientist with his tape recorder, who runs around the island spewing questions without respecting

locals' manners and integrity, or George Andrews in the chicken coop, with a revelation before his eyes that he simply cannot see -- if we resemble these seekers and cannot affirm the island's premise, once we cross the bridge South Carolina may seem minuscule and distressingly far away (10).

I do not use the term "faith" casually. It is the only means for characters and readers to find their way around Willow Springs; it enables them to ask for directions they may never fully understand, directions which, nonetheless, they must trust and follow to discern significant island markers. Naylor makes clear this trust-and-seek dynamic by describing an unbeliever's mistake. In her introductory ten pages of the novel, the communal narrative voice recounts the tale of a local woman's son, identified only as "Reema's boy -- the one with the pear-shaped head" (7). He was raised on Willow Springs but "never picked a boll of cotton or head of lettuce in his life -- Reema spoiled him silly," and when the young man goes mainside for post-secondary education, any island-savvy he had possessed he loses completely (7). Transformed into an over-earnest graduate student, Reema's boy returns to Willow Springs for a subject for his Master's thesis. He finds one in the island saying,

"18 & 23," and determines to explain it rationally (7). The communal narrative voice insists that Reema's boy could easily learn what he needs by *knowing* "how to ask... [and] how to listen," and had he done so, that "we woulda obliged him" (emphasis added, 10, 8). If he would listen sensitively and credit islanders' suggestions, he would likely discern Willow Springs' most meaningful landmarks. Reema's boy would have been directed to Abigail's, where he would receive mint to chew ("thirsty or not") and instructions to Mama Day's trailer; where, because of the sweet mint on his breath, he would be instructed in island lore and guided close to a sacred patch of oak; there Mama Day would insist that the young man put moss in his shoes. Left alone and with his shoes untied, Reema's boy might spy an "old graveyard just down the slope," and another after that, and another after that (9). According to the communal voice, had Reema's boy followed these rituals to reach Willow Springs' pivotal destinations, he "coulda heard from [island spirits] everything there was to tell about 18 & 23" (9-10).

But he does not. School has made him a smart "raving lunatic," and his inquiries ring false to the locals, who



perform for the boy rather than direct him to proper paths (8). Ignoring "the fields [islanders] had to stop farming back in the '80s," Miss Abigail's house, and Mama Day's silver trailer, Reema's boy draws his own conclusions, "talking into his little gray machine" about topics such as "'ethnography,' 'unique speech patterns,' [and] 'cultural preservation'" (7). In the end he determines that:

... 18 & 23 wasn't 18 & 23 at all -- was really 81 & 32, which just so happened to be the lines of longitude and latitude marking off where Willow Springs sits on the map. And we [locals] were just so damned dumb that we turned the whole thing around. (8)

The communal voice faults this young man for blindness and intellectual jargon. Instructively, at the end of this section Naylor discloses that Reema's boy's failure warns us about the right attitude for reading. We can plunge ahead with our modern-day, skeptical edge (how many people do I know who have put the book down because they cannot figure what happens at the other place with Bernice Duvall's pregnancy?), or we can affirm the island's parameters by playing according to its rules, the first of which is to believe in a place that balks all explanation. On shaky ground, completely befuddled, we have to "know how to ask" and "know how to listen" (10). If we do not, we may repeat

the graduate student's error, who reduces his childhood home to a mistaken anomaly.

Perhaps as a ruse to compound our vertigo, even if we proceed with the map and "cross over [to the island] from beyond the bridge," we learn that mapping perpetually causes trouble for the island community (3). Just as we try to make sense of Naylor's lyrical first ten pages, how the very existence of Willow Springs is tied up in the legend of a woman who "don't live in a part of our memory we can use to form words," what the island-exclusive phrase, the catch-all phrase "18 & 23" points to, or how it is possible that "Willow Springs ain't in no state" -- just as we try to absorb these incongruities, Naylor warns us of potentially negative effects from our proceeding. The narrative voice explains "part of Willow Springs's problems was that it got put on some maps right after the War Between the States" and then goes on to describe the deceitful lures of commercial development and inane conjectures of Reema's boy, whose primary motivation is "to put Willow Springs on the map" (7). Caught and bewildered! Already we have opened the book, engaged a map, and are complicit in possibly setting off a negative chain of events. But just as George and

Cocoa cannot un-cross the bridge during their disastrous and baneful visit, we cannot undo our reading. Mama Day has fated our discomfort, our sense of trespass, and importantly, Naylor determines that discomfort with regard to Willow Springs applies to us all. While it is true that by sifting through the novel non-Black readers, and especially white readers, should sense that we are treading on another group's guarded territory (and for southern white readers, grounds which, historically, we have tried to appropriate and exploit); and while non-Black readers, and whites especially, must realize that at best, we are what critic Jocelyn Donlon calls Naylor's "secondary audience" (18); still, Naylor impresses that possession of Willow Springs is also difficult for African-American characters (importantly, for reasons other than it is difficult for white readers).<sup>4</sup> First of all, Mama Day qualifies the act of ownership -- it is always conferred two generations down -- so that, theoretically, Willow Springs may never be sold (219). More profoundly, the islanders straddle two home countries: this one in America, effected out of their wrongful past captivity, and the mother land, Africa, the looming signifier which amounts to forced loss, the

characteristics of that loss even unknown and un-named. Within the confines of Willow Springs there is always the shadow of that other place, which bears so strongly on the islanders' magico-religious tradition and customs like Candle Walk, but direct access to that native land is never realized, only fragments of a historical path. Place in Mama Day is, if anything, a process of sifting through these fragments -- the black ledger, nearly inscrutable from "years of dampness," the screams issuing from the well of Peace, the voices whispering, "Waste. Waste," at the bluff (279, 248). Place in Naylor's novel arouses a *hopeful* state of dislocation -- hopeful because of the anticipation of discovery -- of feeling confused and undone while doggedly working back to a story of the origins of the Days.

\*            \*            \*            \*

Characters who track genealogical information at Naylor's sacred, or designated, locations include Miranda (Mama) Day, her grandneice, Ophelia, and Ophelia's husband, George Andrews. Because Ophelia's pilgrimage scarcely begins by the novel's end, I will focus on Miranda's and

George's searches; notably, both scour Willow Springs because they are driven by the same despair, fear of Ophelia's well-being. During George and Ophelia's first visit to Willow Springs, a jealous island neighbor, Ruby, poisons Ophelia by braiding her hair, because Ruby outrageously suspects the younger woman of making advances on Ruby's husband. The hex is shockingly insidious: through the braids, the poison seeps into Ophelia's scalp, causing a heavy, dead-weight sleep and then delirium and hallucinations, until at last it transforms into putrid, clawing worms, which literally threaten to eat Ophelia alive. George is beside himself: a foreigner from New York City, he refuses to believe that voodoo, or in George's words, "mumbo-jumbo," lies behind his wife's ailment, and more critically, that a specific ritual he alone can perform might save her. George is desperate to find conventional medical help, but by a terrible stroke of coincidence, Ophelia's hex sets in during one of the worst hurricanes in Willow Springs in sixty years; the storm has obliterated the bridge to the mainland, and George feels "marooned" in a backwards, "godforsaken place" (266, 256). He panics. He runs wildly, exhaustedly, about the island, helping a small

crew of men rebuild the bridge (a maddeningly slow endeavor), trying to patch a small boat to row Ophelia across The Sound (despite the fact that George cannot swim), but primarily, George concentrates on ignoring islanders' advice about the hex. He rages at their suggestions of what really plagues his wife or how he can cure her, trusting instead what he sees before him and the tasks he can complete with his own two hands.

It is Willow Springs' wise, old griot gifted with visionary and conjurin' powers, Mama Day, who alone grasps the full implications of Ophelia's illness. Only she knows what information is required to save her grandniece, intuiting where to look, and can direct George in his role in restoring Ophelia's health and sanity. After the hurricane Miranda heads to the other place, the Day ancestral homestead, to try to salvage what she can of the great, grand Mother's garden and assess any damage on the house Bascombe Wade built. There she senses Ophelia's condition before being told, and when news does come, Miranda stares into the roaring fire under the huge family hearth: that hearth has drawn in generations of Days, back to her father's talent for carving wood and her mother's demented

and endless rocking, back even several families prior, to ancient herbs drying near the blaze and "the woman who began the Days" (262). Peeling back layers of time around this centralized gathering spot, Miranda realizes that Ruby's hex feeds off of repeated misunderstandings between Day men and Day women. The poison has tapped into a cyclical family problem: women whose longing and grief pushed them away from their loved ones, with an obsessive desire to leave, and "the blood from the broken hearts of the men who [those women] cursed for not letting them go" (263). For Ophelia to live, Miranda needs to know more about what tore former couples apart, what dread error keeps repeating in Day history. Scaring her most of all, ultimately Miranda needs George to correct that error and restore the union that for centuries has been lost.

Miranda's search for information centers on the other place because Naylor endows it with the aura of a destination. A site that holds answers. Throughout Mama Day Miranda is drawn to the homestead to solve Bernice Duvall's infertility, for example, or consider legends about Day origins that the December celebration, Candle Walk, raises. The other place is full of Day artifacts, remnants

holding the touch of ancestral hands: Miranda's father's  
woodwork, her mother's rocking chair, clay jars for dried  
flowers and herbs from a time far past Miranda's experience.  
No one has lived there for years -- most islanders refuse to  
go to the other place, afraid of its ghosts and voices -- so  
that it seems locked in an earlier period. After confirming  
Ophelia's dire state, Miranda sequesters herself at the  
other place, waiting for explanations to questions she  
cannot quite form; she does not know what she is looking  
for, but nonetheless, she goes over the family grounds and  
patiently bides her time. Instinctively Miranda expects "a  
missing key" to "the door to help Baby Girl" out at the old  
Day manse (280).

Mama Day's intentional searching goes unrewarded. She  
cannot will the house to speak to her, even when she tries  
tactics that have stirred visions there before. It is only  
when Miranda stops trying and attends unthinkingly to tasks  
at hand that revelations come: Naylor makes the looking and  
finding seem divinely led and fated. There are three  
moments of epiphany. First, Miranda discovers fragments of  
the Day progenitor's name. Fixing a leaky roof at the other  
place, in a small corner of the rafters Miranda finds a



crumbling, water-logged ledger with a slip of paper in the back. She is able to decipher the paper as a bill of sale for "one negress" to "Mister Bascombe Wade of Willow Springs," but what Miranda most prizes, the name of the woman, is illegible -- all she can read are the first two letters, "Sa..." (280). Racking her brain for every "Sa-" combination she can imagine, Miranda busies herself with housework, at every turn proposing and then dismissing another possibility for her foremother's name. Only when she forgets herself and concedes to sleep is the second sign unveiled. Dreaming, Miranda "finally meets Sapphira," but as a vast light of maternal sustenance, not a name (282). Mama Day opens "door upon door upon door," entreating "Tell me your name," but what is revealed to her is a set of instructions rather than any complete answer: she must "look past the pain" and "go out and uncover the well where Peace died" (282). Her second clue, like her first, indicates more searching.

The site Miranda is directed to, the well at the other place, has been shut tight for almost a century, since Miranda was a little girl. It is the scene of family tragedy: Miranda's sister, Peace, fell in and drowned as a

toddler. Their mother, Ophelia, lost her mind with grief, and their father, John-Paul, bolted the well shut to keep his wife from jumping down. Miranda has a time trying to pry off his lid, and when she does, she waits uncertainly for something to happen. At last the oracle erupts in screams, high-pitched and excruciating. Miranda fights the urge to run. "Look past the pain," she thinks, and closing her eyes, she tries to see into the awful sound (284). What she spies is a series of vignettes:

A woman in apricot homespun: Let me go with peace. And a young body falling, falling toward the glint of silver coins in the crystal clear water. A woman in a gingham shirtwaist: Let me go with Peace. Circles and circles of screaming. Once, twice, three times peace was lost at that well. How was [Miranda] ever gonna look past this kind of pain? (284)

When she opens her eyes they rest "on her own hands," hands that remind her of her father's (285). And then she understands. Miranda begins to concentrate on the other side of Day pain: the Day men and their hands that restrained the women they loved, out of love, trying to stay their partners; she perceives the losses each of these men sustained anyway, from the trying. "Looking past the losing," Miranda "feel[s] for the man who built this house [Bascombe Wade] and the one who nailed this well shut"

(285). She feels "the hope in [the men] that the work of their hands could wipe away all that had gone before. Those men *believed* -- in the power of themselves, in what they were feeling" (285). What Miranda learns at the well is that the Day story is not exclusively about Sapphira or the scrap of a name. The link Miranda needs for Ophelia's well-being is the only thing that can bring the Baby Girl peace: Ophelia's partner George's hand, and the belief in that hand that "connects... with all the [men's] believing that had gone before" (285). Miranda needs George's trust and his inevitable tie to the Day forefathers: "by holding her hand she could guide him safely through that extra mile where the others had stumbled" (285). Like the first two revelations, Miranda's third betokens more searching, but this time the foreigner George's quest, out of her domain.

George is an unwilling seeker. Ophelia's illness, combined with the fact that the hurricane has stranded them on Willow Springs, make him half-crazed and single-minded: he must get Ophelia across The Sound to standard medical facilities. Natives plead with him to consult Mama Day, to combat Ruby's strange business the island's way, but George scoffs at "Snakeroot. Powdered ashes. Loose hair. Chicken

blood" and resolves to "work until I dropped to get you [Ophelia] out of there" (287). He finally breaks down when, after tiresome days and nights working on the bridge and no end in sight, another man convinces him to make the journey to the other place. George can hardly find his way, but as he stumbles onto the scene, Mama Day's instructions repulse him: she tells him to take her daddy's walking cane and the black ledger, go to the chicken coop outside her trailer, and bring her back whatever he finds in the old red hen's nest. Furious at "these games" in the face of Ophelia's deterioration, George "hate[s] [himself] for the weakness that had taken me into those back woods," and rushes home to check his wife (296). When he finds Ophelia screaming in the shower, and calming her, realizes she does have maggot-like worms chewing the insides of her body, George returns to Mama Day, "beaten down to believe," and takes the cane and the ledger (299). Reaching the coop, heading to the northwest corner for the old red hen's nest, George is startled by the intensity of the hen's attack; she tries pecking his eyes and rips the flesh on his hands; she flies at him in murderous onslaughts. Between her assaults and his throwing her off, George finally seizes the nest, only

to find, "Nothing. There was nothing there -- except for my gouged and bleeding hands. Bring me straight back whatever you find" (300).

The answer to George's search, nothing, or at best, his hands, is not a solution that makes sense to him or one he is prepared to test. He sinks to his knees with "tight, airless laughter" and considers of the revelation, "All of this wasted effort when these were *my* hands, and there was no way I was going to let you [Ophelia] go" (301). Somehow George manages to drag himself across the road to Ophelia, grab her shoulders -- because he would keep her -- when his heart bursts and he dies. Although Ophelia slowly recovers and is saved, Naylor stresses the tragedy of George's unnecessary sacrifice: with a measure of faith in the weird and supernatural, he could have overcome the Day curse, lifted Ophelia's hex, and walked away from the island with his wife. But as Mama Day observes, "He went and did it his own way, so he ain't coming back" -- a realization that sends her tears streaming, since the griot regrets the carnage and waste which a hand in her palm would have avoided (302).

Characters' hopes about place, about the explanations of Day history sacred sites might yield, are only partially fulfilled. Miranda and George are directed to locales which hold special significance, which preserve material ties to former Days, and are led to believe that the solution to Ophelia's peace will be revealed in those places. What they find are contingent half-answers. They each find *something* that approximates an answer, or an important clue, but that relies on other unknowns to be fully revelatory. These include fragments of the original Day mother's name; in a dream, meeting the shape and presence of that foremother but still not learning her name, and feeling pressed to carry the search elsewhere; at the well, discovering that Ophelia's malady stems from generations of misunderstanding between Day men and Day women, but realizing only an uncontrolled factor (the outsider George's skeptical search) can assuage old wrongs; at the chicken coop, George finding nothing but his hands, which means everything to Mama Day and pure absurdity to the doubtful New Yorker. It is not that sacred sites are empty or reveal the "nothing" George thinks he uncovers. Oracles in Mama Day do speak, but their messages are multiple (there is no one disclosure that

clinches the knowledge needed for Ophelia's recovery), incomplete, and dependent on other, uncharted territory. Answers denote lack: the rest of Sapphira's name and her questionable relation to the man who purchased her; the resentment and communicative roadblocks -- which can never fully be recovered -- bottled up in past tragedy, the drowning at the well; George's inability to trust what he cannot see, when Willow Springs' secrets spring from haunting and African magico-religious precepts.

Importantly, Naylor's partial answers are almost all irresolute. Even after George's sacrifice, when Mama Day admits his pursuit "opened... memor[ies]" that make her visits to the other place redundant, she still does not know Sapphira's name and passes that search to her grandniece, Ophelia. Miranda relays to George's spirit:

I can't tell you her name, 'cause it was never opened to me. That's a door for the child of Grace to walk through. And how many, if any, of them seven sons were his [Bascombe Wade's]? Well, that's also left for [Ophelia] to find. (308)

Soon after this passage Mama Day ends, with a forty-something Ophelia making regular visits to the island, her face "given the meaning of peace" and "ready to go in search of answers" (312). But Naylor does not launch Ophelia's

investigation: questions set aside for the grandniece remain open, with only a promise that they will be worked through. Ultimately, then, Willow Springs does not reveal a resounding confrontation, or a crux of the story, or a simple cause-and-effect unfolding that makes the Day family history clear. No definitive revelation awaits Miranda or George at the end of their pursuits; if a site is marked as consequential, it stirs as many questions as family memories and hinges on other missing information to be absolute or fully comprehensible. Willow Springs does not account for itself completely -- its peculiarities of custom and orientation, its spotty past that is responsible for so many of the island's rules and exclusions. Yet by the close of the novel, because of their seeking, characters know more of Willow Springs' legacy than before they probed its grounds, and their inhabitation there is less precarious. In Naylor's last sentences, as Ophelia and Mama Day commune silently at another sacred spot, the rise over The Sound where Miranda's mother committed suicide, we read: "Under a sky so blue it's stopped being sky, one is closer to the circle of oaks (the Day graveyard) than the other. But both can hear clearly



that on the east side of the island and on the west side, the waters were still" (312).

That Willow Springs never produces a comprehensive picture of Day origins, especially in light of the anticipation surrounding George and Miranda's searches, suggests an ambivalence toward southern African-American essence -- either that Naylor herself feels, or as part of the message she conveys about Black genesis in the American South. I read these searches as germane to southern Black essence for two reasons. One, because Naylor distinguishes the Days as primordial. They are the first Black community to control the island paradise, and apparently the only community on Willow Springs since it was discovered by Wade's ancestors, the Vikings (5). Not only their exclusive, age-old status (exclusive in the sense that the Days have been the only established group on the island) but also their *divinely inspired* proprietorship makes the Days seem chosen, their control of Willow Springs inevitable: Naylor associates Sapphira's mothering and progeny with the Old Testament Genesis story. Sapphira rests on "the seventh day" (her seventh son), just like God, and names her offspring after major and minor prophets.

These Biblical allusions in Naylor's opening document, the Day genealogy, impress that the Days are a primary African-American lineage, authorized by unforeseen powers.

Subsequently, George and Miranda's pursuits for missing links in the family chronicle imply quests for fundamental information -- fundamental because they could explain a crucial beginning for southern American Blacks, what about them enabled their success in a region defiantly set against them. What about the Days makes them chosen and unique? George and Miranda's searching carries the undertone of revealing the family's pain, yes, but also the secrets of their dominion and legitimacy.

A second correlation between the Days and southern Black essence is Willow Springs' evocation of Africa. Through its typographic features, Sea Island setting, and legendary conjure woman, Sapphira Wade, Willow Springs summons the yearning expressed by Black American culture for the lost African Motherland.<sup>5</sup> Because the island looks and feels like the west African coast, and more to the point, preserves idioms, beliefs and practices from the great, grand Mother who hailed from Africa and eventually returned to her homeland, there is the sense that it approximates

that other place, that it is purely derivative. Willow Springs bears a stamp of *genuine* Black American experience: it is where an African matriarch left evidence of herself and willed the freedom of an originary African-American line. Contributing to the island's archetypal status, the character George recalls the stereotype of the jaded Black northerner who comes South looking for his people's authenticity, which has been watered down through Black migration from the South to northern and midwestern cities. With his rapture over Willow Springs' beauty (George says it "smell[s] like forever," that its early morning air is "more than pure, it was primal" [175, 185]) and urge to remain on the island and "play Adam and Eve" with Ophelia, George reinforces the aura that Willow Springs is "another world," a magic Black wonderland which "call[s] up old, old memories" (222, 175, 184). His conviction that Ophelia's roots are "solid enough to be able to walk over," more real than his own foundling heritage, and that, through his wife, he would like to join in "own[ing] this land," where "I had only to listen to the pulse of my blood" to fathom Willow Springs' eccentricities, echoes the belief among some African Americans that the South retains the soul of their

race (219, 214).<sup>6</sup> Places like Willow Springs are subject to Black pilgrimages, historically and metaphorically, because, as Jean Toomer attests in Cane, the Dixie Pike "has grown from a goat path in Africa": the South nourishes a Black vitality because it is shaped by the enormity of African slaves' loss, their stolen homeland (12). African-Americans can more closely approach the point of a slave ship's landing in the South. Accordingly, Naylor plants rich seeds of African influence across her island -- Mama Day's conjure, the pattern of headstones in the Day family graveyard, the standing forth at Little Ceasar's funeral -- to impress how remnants of the motherland, even if not fully understood, are a lifeline for the community in times of struggle or crisis.<sup>7</sup> Sentiments and pieces of the African bond appear all round, usually in some disclosure regarding Sapphira that confuses more than satisfies. And if Mama Day and/or George can reach back to the start of Day history, their searches might explain more than what transpired between Sapphira and Bascombe Wade. Their searches might shed light on what distinguishes African-Americans as a people, in their wrenching from Africa and forced stock in

the New World -- what about Africa's encounter with the American South forged the mettle of a new social group.

Just because answers to Miranda and George's place-bound quests are more elusive than determining does not mean expectations for Willow Springs are misplaced. It does not mean the island is devoid of the information characters need -- about the Days, about the strange improbability of their origins -- but that details may never be clear-cut. Answers are both suggested and put off: every nuance about the past cannot be known. Naylor does not reward characters' searching with resolutions; at the same time, she in no way belittles their efforts. Encouragingly, George and Miranda each come away with more knowledge than when they began, and in the end Ophelia is saved. Miranda may never learn to name Sapphira, but what she does discover, the "Sa," prepares her for the dream and directions to the well. By the novel's close Miranda has pieced together enough information to conclude her visits to the other place (where there are "no more secrets that's left for her to find") and frame Ophelia's future quests (307). Similarly, George may fail with his interpreting in the chicken coop, but he does stumble on the answer Miranda needs him to return with, and

even though he refuses to offer his hands to the old conjure woman, George realizes they are all that can help his wife. He takes his hands and pure will to Ophelia, determined to keep her with him, *grasps* her, and then dies. George intuitively enough to reclaim Ophelia's life, and even in death he remains poised over the island, a vital spirit for Ophelia to converse with, to "retrac[e] our steps [and try] to find exactly what brought us to this slope near The Sound" (310). But what Ophelia learns in retrospect, conferring with her sacrificed husband, is that there is no single cause for their parting. She admits to George's specter:

... I still don't have a photograph of you. It's a lot better this way, because you change as I change. And each time I go back over what happened, there's some new development, some forgotten corner that puts you in a slightly different light.... [W]hen I see you again, our versions will be different still.... Because what really happened to us, George? You see, that's what I mean -- there are just too many sides to the whole story. (310-11)

Naylor's dynamic of seek-and-find-incompletely signals a complicated response to Black essence in the American South. Certainly the novel presents the Days as a select people, with a history stretching back seemingly before time began, with artifacts and oracles marking their property

which purportedly embody the family's character, unique hubris, and facts of their rightful possession. With much fanfare, Naylor sends George and Miranda to Willow Springs' sacred, supposedly revelatory sites, and both do find tokens, or signs, to help account for the beginning of the Days. But overshadowing what they find, their searches' answers rely on other, unlaunched searches and currently shrouded information -- and this is the alternate side of Naylor's position on essence, the side that is not so sure. Naylor suggests the *positing* of essence is an important process for African-Americans: the Days believe and act on a notion of propitious, shared beginnings, and because of their faith in shared origins, and their certainty those origins are sanctified, their cohesion as a group is strong. Politically, they have endured as an identifiable sector across seven generations and exerted their own force and control: whites have been unable to confiscate Day freedom or Day land, even amidst the turmoil of southern Reconstruction, and into the twenty-first century, Willow Springs remains self-governing. The Days enjoy a solidarity that applies not only to their ownership, but to a collective identity bound in common roots: an obvious

example is their communal narrative voice, a subconscious voice that dares to summon unspoken, island-wide divination, what "everybody knows but nobody talks about," "the legend of Sapphira Wade" (3). That voice discloses every inhabitant's sixth sense: a barrage of different stories about Sapphira and Bascombe Wade, the core rapacity of white southerners, what happens when island natives wander too long mainside, and the various shades of meaning behind "18 & 23" (3-8). Distinguished in their thinking and feeling by the peculiarities of Willow Springs, and by their mutual respect for a past which sets them apart but which they cannot fully discern, the Days adhere to their rare election. They try to uncover basic truths about their substance as a people because they are singularly successful -- as Black folks, the Days defy social and legal odds in the South -- and they are more formidable for their belief in their special derivation, the vein that inimitably qualifies Day character.

But Naylor is unwilling to isolate what exactly about Black ties in the American South singularizes African-American culture: she defers the recovery of any one, singled-out vein, the vein of Day essence. If the positing



of essence is necessary as a social gel for Naylor's minority group, an enabling factor, equally so, essence itself is flawed and thwarted. There is no obvious key to Willow Springs' improbability; no clear line on Sapphira's revolution, or the earliest prompt for Candle Walk; no answer to the conundrum of how the Days shall guarantee their perpetuity. Even so, the novel insinuates that there is "something there," that the island does hold clues about Black genesis and artistic expression and empowerment in hostile, thoroughly racist environs. Although no single take on Black individuality presents itself, and in the end the idea of a particular Black marrow is withheld, the promise of essence lingers throughout Mama Day, and more importantly, a unique southern Black culture most assuredly looms large, its manifestations direct offshoots of the Middle Passage and old-world, mistaken shards. In Naylor's sphere, those shards cannot be anything other than mistaken: characters cannot know everything about the past. It is a condition of human experience that time and place both invoke and maim previous occurrences.

Mama Day also probes the meaning of ownership in a minority-strengthened South. By all accounts Willow Springs

is an extraordinary regional anomaly -- bequeathed for and managed by a group of vested, self-sufficient African Americans. Yet islanders reside guardedly and will continue to do so, not only because mysteries remain, but also because *vestiges of southern racism still infiltrate Willow Springs* -- despite its seclusion and inhabitants' sure entitlement. For there can be no such thing as an untainted minority refuge in the American South, not in the sense of boundaries which erase or completely repel white influence. This does not mean the Days are misguided in their efforts to block bigotry's pernicious forces, to define their lives independently of southern white culture, nor that racism is so large and ominous it cannot be effectively resisted. Black and white can establish worlds apart in the South but not worlds irrespective, and this is true for both sides: although whites have worked hard to distinguish themselves as separate and superior, and through economic and political advantages have systematically done so on the surface, it is commonly accepted that vanguards of "southern" culture (i.e., white southern culture) are comprised from a merging of white and Black elements, or better put, from white appropriation of Black sources -- the Uncle Remus tales from

African folk traditions, Elvis from the Delta blues, forms of white Protestant worship from slaves' call-and-response expressions. On the other hand, Blacks' distancing from whites is more ethically justifiable: for self-preservation, dignity, the pursuit of happiness without "unequal" qualifications. It seems right that southern minorities should be able to mark off their property and designate who is allowed access, and if historically disenfranchised people want to exclude the traditionally privileged, then so be it; such recompense is fitting and long overdue. Yet Naylor disallows an all-Black, racially unadulterated utopia, despite that her islanders are unobliging toward whites and send unwanted intruders packing. Southern whites do figure in Willow Springs' politics and inhabitants' thinking, and what is surprising and perhaps most threatening, white influence stems from *within* the Day family line. Because the hovering unknown Bascombe Wade represents -- Willow Springs' original white master and likely Day progenitor -- stymies characters like Ophelia, who cannot accept the possibility of white blood in their veins or begin to articulate what that might mean.

Bascombe Wade presents a thorny, complicated figure for the Days' general conscience. In one sense he reminds that the family's possession is derivative: Wade had the land first, straight from his Viking ancestors, and without his claim and settlement Willow Springs never would have seen Sapphira, his slave, or evolved into the community that it did, so completely shaped by her conjure. Plus, Day ownership was bestowed. Wade willingly released his land rights to Sapphira's children, a detail that makes it hard, psychologically, for her progeny to separate from him; it is confusing to position yourself at odds with an oppressor if you feel vaguely indebted. Although some island stories allow for clean estrangement from Wade, casting Sapphira as a wily murderess who, before she smothered or knifed him, took Wade's land by working her infamous voodoo, the weight of Naylor's narrative does not bear this type of scenario (3): Miranda learns that Bascombe Wade "die[d] from a broken heart" searching up and down the main road for an African-bound Sapphira, that the light for Candle Walk [a sacred island tradition] "was for him" and his impossible wish to find and detain his mistress (118). It is unclear whether Sapphira used conjure to manipulate the man who owned her,

but regardless, Wade was enamored of her and "willing to give [Sapphira] anything in the world but [the prerogative to walk away]" (285). Another link between Wade and the Days, besides his love and material commitment to Sapphira, is the enduring stamp of his behavior. Wade's fatal decision regarding Sapphira, that "the work of his hands" could make her stay and "wipe away all that had gone before," is the same miscalculation repeated by generations of Day men -- Miranda's father, and later George (285). In fact Naylor strongly implies that the slaveowner begot Sapphira's sons, that Wade's genes and disposition are part of every Day's makeup: looking at her own hands Miranda is reminded of her father's, John-Paul's, and contemplating her father's she envisions the grip of "other hands that would not let the woman in apricot homespun go with peace" -- Bascombe Wade's hands (285).

The degree to which Day offspring owe allegiance or respect to the man who founded Willow Springs, or simply acknowledgment of some relation, is woefully problematic. Very likely Wade is in their blood. He loved their Mama. He set their ancestors' free, with property to boot. Yet it was always wrong for Wade to possess Sapphira and her babies

in the first place. Even if he attempted a fresh start with Sapphira, hoping to rectify his sin of chattel slavery by granting her children their humanity and his worldly goods, even so, the couple's slate could never be made clean -- not by "the work of [Wade's] hands [to] wipe away all that had gone before" (285). They could never approach one another equally, forgetting that Sapphira's existence on Willow Springs resulted from profound, unspeakable loss, her innumerable losses, which as master Wade instigated and benefited from. Wade can never be an easy figure for the Days because, even if he did take steps to amend his bigoted lifestyle, even if he did come to understand the outrage of human possession, he is forever responsible for Sapphira's indignities. He bought her. It was for his use, ultimately, that Sapphira was torn from her homeland and all she knew; because of him she could not choose a mate or path of happiness. Because of Wade she knew the anguish of bearing children without recognized power over their fate and destiny -- children she may not have wanted. All Naylor certainly reveals about this slave woman is that she was able to secure her family's future, and with that settled, Sapphira seized her self-possession and returned to Africa.

If she did harbor feelings for Bascombe Wade, they were not enough for her to forego what he had stolen from her.

At first glance it might seem that the complexities of islanders' relations to Willow Springs result from their racialized history but not explicitly from white oppression -- in that, since Bascombe Wade, no white has exercised control over the island or set foot on Willow Springs more than briefly. Implicitly, however, Wade's legacy to the Days entangles them in the slavemaster's offenses, because he is most probably their forefather and the source of their island proprietorship. This is not to say that Sapphira's line is responsible for Wade's damage or the grievances he committed against them; nor that they should have to identify with a man who in so many ways coerced their mother (even if not sexually -- although Naylor leaves the question of Sapphira's affections open). Yet because of Bascombe Wade the Days' inheritance can never be wholly African, and despite their right to side with the great, great African mother, because of him the Days will always wonder what aspects of the white master might surface among their kind. Tellingly, Naylor justifies their fear of "white" contamination: Wade unsettles Day ownership because his

possessive streak, regarding his property, Sapphira, recurs throughout Day experience, threatening Willow Springs' survival much more than tempests or mapping quandaries. Wade's attitude toward Sapphira, that he can make up for the pain between them, force her love, and make her stay, is the same violation John-Paul Day, and later, George Andrews commit against their spouses, the urge to control another's responses and bend destiny as they, the Day men, see fit.

John-Paul determines to stave off his wife Ophelia's descent into madness; he wants to dim the picture of their daughter's drowning that keeps playing inside her head, to encourage Ophelia to rebound for their other children, to love him enough to want to keep living. He pushes her to get over the gulf of her grief and move on, and John-Paul believes he can make her sound. Similarly, George Andrews resolves to procure for (his) Ophelia the help he thinks she needs and restore her health by means only he, among Naylor's characters, deems legitimate: patching a boat, building a bridge, holding his wife with his hands. George refuses to acknowledge that there might be other ways or sources of recovery -- because, as Ophelia offers in retrospect, he was fated to experience Willow Springs



differently than she (165). Naylor draws unmistakable links between George and Bascombe Wade, giving George the aura of the dead man's chosen heir: as Miranda perceives, the vines around Wade's grave "twine around [George's] knuckles, as if they were pulling him in closer to listen, willing to hold him there until he does" (207); and not surprisingly, it is George who hears and empathizes with Wade's voice (248). George, like Wade's direct descendant, John-Paul, is doomed to trust himself too much with Ophelia and believes his common sense and strength can save her.

Therefore the tendencies of the slavemaster, the man who owned his lover and tried to bar her self-determination, transfer tragically to men who do not own their spouses but act as if they would -- and I make this claim realizing John-Paul and George's intentions toward their wives are human and perhaps understandably familiar. But then, what Naylor outrageously makes us wonder is, perhaps so were Bascombe Wade's. By placing the sting of southern racism (in the shape of the urge to control someone else) as an inward pressure on Willow Springs, something *like which Days* themselves are susceptible to, Naylor renders White Oppression unusually complex and emotionally approachable.

She demystifies it as a hardened condition of the Other, something Black folks could never abide or admit into their realm of possibility, and allows that even an institution like slavery could support a range of motivations and emotive intensity -- not just apathy, derision, or complete disregard for a different race, but Wade's longing, jealousy, and unreconcilable devotion. Through the difficulties her Black community faces, because of their mixed lineage, Naylor suggests that racism in the South *is and is not* as simple as evil white preying on innocent Black. There is no doubting that for centuries southern whites enslaved, dehumanized, tortured, and murdered millions of Blacks abducted from Africa's southwest coast, and in this there is no confusion between who perpetuated and who suffered from the colossal wrongdoing. Yet it is also true that slavery was practiced in a wide variety of ways by/on a wide variety of people, that some crossed the lines between owner and owned and formed conflicted, improbable bonds, that as soon as any of us believe we are immune to bigotry's behavioral characteristics, because we are not white or because our ancestors were "not involved," we err. Time has shown prejudice to be primarily a white

problem and white transgression in the South, but Naylor advises that sectionalizing bad white and good Black (as in the Days, like the contemporary Ophelia, pitting themselves against Wade's image) is naive and falsely comforting. Slavery itself was more insidious, and much more far-reaching, than such a clean boundary. As George insists to himself when trying to figure what transpired between Sapphira and Bascombe Wade, "there was something more, and something deeper, than the old historical line about slave women and their white masters" (225).

For these three couples personally, Wade/Sapphira, John-Paul/Ophelia, and George/Ophelia, Naylor indicates there are some wounds which never will heal. Even with those we love the most -- especially with those we love -- there are betrayals, calamitous accidents, terrible crossing of stars from which people cannot recover or conquer hand in hand. There are things we can do to each other that cannot be undone; situations we might enter, completely unaware, that forever negatively affect our relationships. This applies on a larger scale to ownership in a minority-strengthened South and new concepts of southern geography. As far as Day ownership is concerned, there is no question

in the novel that Naylor's African-American dynasty reigns supreme on Willow Springs, that no force will strip them of the inheritance they rightfully claim. But even in this gated and thriving minority community, the effects of Bascombe Wade's slaveholding continue to plague Black characters, posing situational and ethical dilemmas that mar family bonds and threaten lives. Despite owning the island the Days cannot make its regional context disappear: slavery's aftershocks can never fully be excised from the South. Grounds untainted by the privilege of some and denial of others cannot exist; the region's foundations and social scaffolding are too inextricably tied to injustice. No staked-out, minority utopia can be pure in the South, because no matter how carefully disenfranchised groups draw lines around themselves, and define themselves *apart* from white culture, the repercussions of sub-citizen treatment do not die just because you vigorously fight them, much less if you choose to ignore them.

By taking such an overdetermined view of racism's lingering imprint, I do not mean to sound a death toll for the South or suggest minorities should never settle there.

Chief among Naylor's encouragements is that Blacks deserve and are due the fruits of their ancestors' toil. Since the region was built on the backs of slave men and slave women, recompense needs to be made and/or taken, even now, even late: African Americans can approach the South confidently, ready to establish themselves, to seize opportunities for regaining what their foreparents' warranted but were denied. African Americans can feel entitled to shares of the region because they have significantly helped shape it; writers like Zora Neale Hurston, James Baldwin, Alice Walker, and Ernest Gaines, artists such as Scott Joplin, John Lee Hooker, and Johnny Mercer, and political emissaries like Martin Luther King, Jr., Andrew Young, and Jesse Jackson instill pride and assurance among Blacks that their people's contributions are among southern living's most notable. Even if every African-American clan does not enjoy the Days' headstart of vested ownership, that advantage may be read symbolically as applying to all: Mama Day is a story of Africans' beginnings in the New World, a confirmation that their investments here will belatedly yield manifold blessings for their progeny. Naylor seems to advise her African-American southern readers: mindful of your past,

*make your claims to home; it is time to stand up, receive, and prosper. It is time "southern" apply to a rich palette of people's experiences, not just to the all-consuming aspect of white.*

In addition to a southern geography that is Black-specific and attentive to Black areas' restitution, Naylor serves a good measure of celebratory Afro-centrism. Her wide eye on a particular swath of southern territory magnifies Willow Springs' extraordinary, striking features; Naylor's Black geography, to borrow Zora Neale Hurston's phrase, "jumps at de sun." An important corollary of this atmospheric enlargement is the author's emphasis on Black selection: that the Days are a chosen people, that their prominence on the island was fated, that that fate evolved straight from the African mother's impenetrable powers. In Naylor's rendering, there is something special about the South for African Americans. Not simply because they are due their fair share here -- although certainly possession is crucial in her scheme -- but because they are close to their earliest ties of African solidarity and culture (that solidarity stronger through the humiliation of slavery than perhaps it would have been in native Africa, because here,

color and conditions bound together differences that, there, tribal affiliations would have rendered distinct). Even if the complexities of place in Mama Day prevent characters from finding "the answer" to their African singularity, if the maps they are stirred to use fail to solve the family's curse -- and alternately, the family's dominion -- Willow Springs provides its inhabitants tantalizing scraps of information. Naylor's mysteries around the island are suggestive, stirring rather than dampening Black faith in southern essences: she adds to a southern geography the spark that some minority designations are "touched" and inviolable.

### Chapter Three

Lost Causes, Lost Space:  
Tracking the Void in Minnie Bruce Pratt's  
"Identity: Skin Blood Heart"

For civil rights activist and white lesbian poet Minnie Bruce Pratt, the South poses an immediate, graphic black hole. It is a black hole because, in Pratt's experience, southern communities organized and led by white males tend to erase, or render invisible, sites and evidence of cultural difference: Native Americans' property rights, the poor sides of town where mill workers live, slave blocks and lynching trees. The region presses immediately on Pratt because she issues from it, the daughter of a small farming community near Selma, Alabama, and because even as an adult living far from her birth place, Pratt finds her point of origin bears heavily on who she is, what she sees and knows, and how she builds more inclusive homes. As a black hole the South is horribly graphic in that, as Pratt regrets, its swallowing techniques depend on fear, brutality, and bloodshed. It is a menacing place to be in or from, but Pratt's wanting to be away (or wishing she were from elsewhere) does not cancel the fact of the South or its tendencies toward exclusion and disposal. In "Identity:



Skin Blood Heart" Pratt grapples with the downside of her home region, the ways, for instance, southern communities ignore certain neighborhoods, create off-limits areas, or direct white ladies' paths around town. With any of these issues of orientation, Pratt strives to identify what is lost: what the South loses in designating acceptable, cardinal boundaries. To spin off loss (or emptiness, or disenfranchisement), is to spin a void; it is to leave groups of people with, literally, no place to stand. Pratt determines to track down the voids in the Souths she has occupied, with the hope of filling what holes she can, helping restore (by fully recognizing) oppressed southerners' homes and social networks, their dignity and their absolute right to walk about freely. Moreover, she wants to name the black hole to avoid getting sucked in herself, to stop further complicity with southern racism, paternalism, with the restrictions that make the South a sinking sand pit, superficially and politically white on top, clutching and treacherous underneath.

Because "Identity" depicts place in the South as a nullifying force, a dynamic that targets, excises, and discards, and because it advocates an ethical response to

the South's negations, Pratt's essay challenges southern literary criticism to conceive of place differently, in unflinching and unflattering new ways. Scholars in the past, most notably Louis Rubin, Jr., have stressed the literary category's stabilizing influence, that place in writing compensates for the real South's deterioration by offering nostalgic and idealized textual worlds. But Pratt rejects the notion that place in literature should provide a neat, intellectualized escape from everyday disruption and maltreatment: "Identity: Skin Blood Heart" is a consciously political essay, through which Pratt uses spatial representations to uncover and intervene in southern social discrepancies. For example, her description of former homes reveals the extent to which security, familiarity, and communal acceptance in the South depend on strict and unquestioning conformity -- in Pratt's case, on obedience to her parents, Presbyterian upbringing, husband, and North Carolina statutes regarding proper and permissible sex. Place is technically demanding in her essay because it manifests the vertigo of Pratt's actual experience, emotionally difficult because it testifies to her various, distressing evictions. And Pratt never attempts to gloss

the fissures or site-specific inhumanities in places she has known. Her determination to expose the South's voids and degrees of ostracism poses a critical confrontation: if southern studies acknowledges her work it has to begin to theorize place as a means of dispossession. Pratt herself provides the field with several conceptual starting points; her essay identifies debilitating aspects of southern socio-geography that have not been generally recognized and grapples with their causes, their objects of harm, and the extent of their domain. *Writing down the black holes*, she sets an example for ways to talk about disenfranchisement's spatial implications.

"Identity" reads like a quest, marked strongly by urgency: Pratt would like to establish guidelines for visionary homes where all types of people are welcome and mutually respectful. But a precise blueprint for Pratt's utopian living situation is never attained in "Identity," nor in Pratt's experience. If Pratt's optimism for open, nurturing homes drives the essay, in practical terms the bulk of "Identity" deals with what, realistically, Pratt knows is not open or nurturing. To have a chance of articulating her ideal, Pratt must uncover and reject the

negative, separatist underpinnings in her current and previous homes, all of which lie in southern territory. She needs to absorb as full a scope as possible of her real-life southern homes to perceive their holes and how those holes function: where parameters stop too short or camouflage is used to disguise undesirable areas, or how main streets might bypass the critical landmarks of disadvantaged people. Pratt wants to see *everything* where she lives and work toward full integration: she wants to change how neighborhoods are organized, what points are allowed to touch. But Pratt is necessarily limited to what she knows. She can move only so far as her own environs, past and present, and her context is and has been the South: her Alabama hometown, Chapel Hill and Fayetteville, North Carolina, and Washington, D. C.<sup>1</sup> In terms of the personal reach of Pratt's analyzing and restructuring (the exact places she scrutinizes), "Identity: Skin Blood Heart" focuses exclusively on the region of her birth.

A crucial aspect of "Identity" is that, structurally, the essay wanders across Pratt's personal history, committed to no particular sequence. Pratt disavows a time-line approach as she refigures the significance of prior

experiences; her stories about former homes skip around. But whether her home-subjects are immediately present or in her mind's eye, with each Pratt struggles over the requirements for fitting in, for familiarity with others sharing the same environs. In her Washington neighborhood in particular, she has trouble mastering local etiquette, hesitating over whom to speak to, what she can assume of her neighbors, which time of day is safest to be out. "I just want to feel at home," Pratt writes, "where people know me" (12). Her efforts to *be known* in this place -- and importantly, being known amounts to Pratt's optimal definition of home<sup>2</sup> -- set the tone for the essay's major concerns: whether Pratt can comprehend the intent behind spatial organizations in areas she has lived, whether she has thrown up (or acquiesced to) barriers between herself and those around her, whether she can understand the situation of oppressed people, even if she tries, to the degree that she may interact meaningfully with them. By these standards home is a hard state to attain. What Pratt laments throughout much of "Identity" is the failure of the South, and her own failures in southern communities, to "get a little closer to the longed-for but un-realized world,

where we are each able to live, but not by trying to make someone less than us, not by someone else's blood or pain" (13).

One of the voids Pratt faces constantly in her wide, discriminatory South is being shut out of centers once thought of as home. From the birth home, the marriage home, even a Fayetteville apartment occupied alone, Pratt has been wrenched away by family conflict and/or cultural norms and forces. She remembers unwilling severance from her parents, in particular, and the Alabama town in which she was raised: the force of her differences from her family sets Pratt apart. With her father the fact of her gender precludes any intimacy between them. As a child she is barred from the leisure activities available to him (no women or girls in the pool hall or around the drugstore's loitering circles), but in an unusual instance where he invites her to join a special adventure, climbing to the top of their town courthouse, Pratt falters out of fear: "[My father] let me crawl down: he was disgusted with me, I thought.... I had not learned to take that height... a white girl, not a boy" (16). Looking back Pratt registers her father's loathing of a reaction which, as a young female, Pratt was conditioned

to act out; she is estranged from him because of prescribed cultural roles which enfeeble her (and which throughout the essay her father's figure reinforces). When Pratt mentions him elsewhere in "Identity," it is only briefly, but always to the effect that she could not abide the values he espoused (36-37, 52-53). Her father, she explains, constructed safe and familiar margins from paranoia and prejudice; she saw him "caught in the grip of racial, sexual, cultural fears" which Pratt the activist strives to combat by "understanding them in myself" (53). As an adult, Pratt could not wish to perceive the world his way or remain in his domain.

More often regarding her birth home, and explicitly concerning her expulsion, Pratt examines her relationship with her mother. When Pratt, as a married woman with two small boys, declares she no longer loves her husband and acknowledges openly her homosexuality, her mother locks the doors to the homeplace shut. Not only does Mrs. Pratt deny her daughter refuge when Pratt is ousted from the marriage home, but when Pratt's husband "threaten[s] ugly court proceedings," Mrs. Pratt volunteers as a character witness for him, that he may gain custody of Pratt's two boys (26-

27). Her mother disapproves of Pratt's choices, but more damaging, works actively to strip Pratt's right to maintain a home and influence with the children. Pratt's homosexuality defiles her mother's small-town, Presbyterian religion and its rules for the right family make-up, and if Pratt cannot replicate the nuclear family she was born into, its support is promptly withdrawn. From the mother's perspective Pratt embraces alien, suspect elements Mrs. Pratt's home and community had sought to exclude: "no niggers, no kikes, no wops, no dagos, no spics, no A-rabs, no gooks, no queers" (39). Mrs. Pratt believes her daughter "had walked away, and seemed to have turned my back on home" (48). The mother accepts no responsibility for their parting: the decision to leave had been her child's, when Pratt spurned basic codes of decency.

In addition to her parents' rejection, another aspect of Pratt's Alabama homeplace induces "a kind of vertigo" and leaves her ashamed and repelled (35). Determined to research her ancestral history rather than accept her mother's accounts uncritically, Pratt is devastated to find that "my foundation, my birth culture, was mortared with blood" (35). Searching family records, letters, and texts



by Black writers on local nineteenth-century politics, Pratt learns: that as a matter of public record, her grandfather-judge did nothing when Black men were lynched for allegedly raping white women; that both sides of her family owned slaves, increasing their holdings and wealth "from the work and lives of others,"; that Pratt's earliest Alabama forefathers received land "as a bonus for 'good work'" in the Creek Wars, had helped drive Seminole Native Americans from their South Georgia dwellings (34). The land Pratt grew up calling her own, ate off of, and roamed with her friends (under the eye of a Black nanny) was initially "stolen" from whoever lived there previously, as a reward for Pratt's great-grandfather's role in systematic, military dispossession (34). Not just with acquisition, but through maintenance of their properties, Pratt's family's brutalities mounts: they presumed to buy and control human beings, to reap as much as possible and avoid sharing the profits fairly. Akin to Poe's Usher, her birthplace represents a gilded house of horrors. It remains solvent only insofar as the family glosses their relations with each other: the wife covering her husband's drinking and dependency on her income, the husband acting as if he

descends from town royalty, the daughter demurring to her father's judgments about where she can go in Civil-Rights Alabama and who she can side with, as Mr. Pratt frightens her with tales of Martin Luther King, Jr.'s sexual abuses. Pratt's birthplace depends on artifice; for members to recognize each other truthfully would send the home crashing down. Worst of all, like Usher the birthplace hides its bloody corpses, but not for the ages, as had been planned: the voices of people whose backs broke for her home "come" to Pratt like blows from a hammer, making her realize her own blame for the conditions of their lives (35).

In "Identity" Pratt resolves to hear the voices out and refrain from responding defensively, to go ahead and swoon from their charges, as she believes she well should, sensing that "the earth [had] opened, [and] I was falling through space" (35). She knows she *must* fall away from the place she was raised by amending its history, listening to its muffled cries, tearing down southernscapes pieced together by white men for "good country people."<sup>3</sup> If the pit she is pushed into seems bottomless, if it wrecks Pratt's sense of self and the fine intentions she thought she had toward the oppressed, if it forces her to "struggle with myself,

against myself," she cannot fault the voices which started her fall but the grounds which inflicted their suffering. Those grounds, not the voices, have set Pratt's black hole in motion. Those grounds are Pratt's birth home, unmasked and rightly characterized, and she feels eaten alive by her proximity to the place. The birth home is inside Pratt, part of her, and as a white woman she has benefited from its ill-gotten plenty, but at the same time, once Pratt assesses that first place as compromised and base, like a parasite it threatens to consume her. The emptiness the birth home makes of minorities' lives turns on Pratt and is well nigh her own:

As I try to strip away the layers of deceit that I have been taught, it is hard not to be afraid that these are like wrappings of a shroud and that what I will ultimately come to in myself is a disintegrating, rotting *nothing*: that the values that I have at my core, from my culture, will only be those of negativity, exclusion, fear, death. And my feeling is based in the reality that the group identity of my culture has been defined, often, not by positive qualities, but by negative characteristics: by the *absence of* [those unlike us].... (39)

Pratt's origins define her by elimination: from within and without, the birth home guts elements other than white, capitalist, Christian Protestant, male-centered, and heterosexual. Its deletions leave Pratt with no good to

self-confirm. The voids created by a small-town South whose collective dynamic is *no*, these voids eventually snag the privileged inhabitants who beget them. Pratt testifies that the begetters can fall in, too, and when they do, the voids are reflective, like mirrors: the effort to make someone else nothing makes you what you would impose. Voids created through annulment show the South's core as withering, show the core to be Pratt's own as well as her kith and kin's. Yet for Pratt to perceive the voids' mirroring means she is already standing apart from her people, willing to look down.

There are other homes where Pratt loses her footing. She chooses to leave her husband in Fayetteville, North Carolina, because she wants to pursue an affair with another woman, but Pratt does not anticipate the severity of his response. After announcing her intentions Pratt is thrown out of the marriage home: her white, southern liberal husband, a great admirer of the Agrarian poets, "threatened and did violence, threatened ugly court proceedings... restricted my time and presence with the children, took them finally and moved hundreds of miles away" (26-27). He has the weight of North Carolina behind him, which he employs:

by dent of legal statute Pratt is declared unfit as a mother because of her homosexuality. For women in North Carolina, once a marriage contract is entered, "the use of [the female] body" is set: you must tend to your husband's sexual urges for the "right" of a home and civil protection (27). When she acts on her love for a woman Pratt steps outside what rule-makers deem acceptable and is deprived of keeping her boys with her. A Cumberland County judge labels her "dirty, polluted, unholy" and decrees that "I was not to have a home with my children again" (27). Pratt is once again condemned for her difference, and the impact of the judge's arbitration sends her reeling:

I had held [my boys] before they were born and almost every day of their lives, and now I could not touch them.... The inner surface of my arms, my breasts, the muscles of my stomach were raw with my need to touch my children.... [From my marriage I] carried away the conviction that I had been thrust out into a place of terrible loss by laws laid down by men. In my grief, and in my ignorance of the past of others, I felt that no one had sustained such a loss before. And I did not yet understand that to come to a place of greater liberation, I had to risk old safeties. Instead I felt that I had no place, that, as I moved through my days, I was falling through space. (27)

Pratt has been expelled to another dark hole, a place where she cannot seem to catch herself or gather resources to stake her own territory. The marriage home seeks to

nullify her, to un-mother Pratt and erase options for how she may live in Fayetteville. In this case it is Pratt who is designated as what needs to be stamped out: her lesbian identity puts her "in the wilderness with those feared by white Southern men" (26). She is now the disadvantaged. Unlike the vertigo Pratt experiences when she researches the birth home, where she falls through self-indictment, here Pratt is victim to emotional and tangible spiraling because of inflicted physical loss. Pratt feels empty for reasons different than before: with the corrected birth-home history Pratt is nearly paralyzed by her own guilt, but with the marriage home, her hands grasp at straws because what she has bound to herself, her children, are forcibly taken. The magnitude of Pratt's immediate, fleshly loss is matched by another palpable reality: there are no grounds, legally, for Pratt to keep her boys with her in Fayetteville. This means she has *no where* to go, not as she actually wants to be.

Eventually Pratt is shaken from another North Carolina home she counts on, and in the same town, but this time due to rules drawn entirely by herself. After her husband moves north with the children, Pratt takes what is left -- "my clothes, my books, some kitchen utensils, two cats" -- and

rents an apartment in Fayetteville. She supports herself by teaching at the local Black college and becomes heavily involved in grassroots, white feminist politics, organizing rape-awareness programs, establishing a women's shelter, scheduling talks on religion. But after a couple of years her political fervor wanes: Pratt cannot understand why Black and other minority women never join her white peers' efforts and is disillusioned when issues such as ERA become lost in the quagmire of "electoral politics and social services" (33). Except for fulfilling her teaching obligations, Pratt draws inward and makes herself scarce. She feels comfortably isolated staying home:

...it was so peaceful in my three-room apartment; at night I would burn candles on the mantelpiece, no sounds but the blapping of my typewriter.... I did not have my children, but I had these rooms, a job, a lover, work I was making. I thought I had the beginnings of a place for myself. (33)

Pratt surrounds herself with poetry and the effects of a private, simple aesthetics; her home is a break from external contacts and the nagging of social dis-ease.

But suddenly Pratt's walls start to give as her ideas about safety are assaulted. Within an hour of her home, at an anti-Klan demonstration in Greensboro, white supremacists

blast through a crowd, guns firing, and kill five people. The news is shocking to Pratt, because it is hideous and disturbingly close -- close in the sense that, for Pratt, it is psychologically searing, because she cannot figure whose side of the drama she fits on. She empathizes wholly with the victims and abhors the men who would shoot, but then the Klansmen claim *people like Pratt* as an excuse for the murders: the gunmen maintain they were "rushing" to the aid of white women under attack (34). Pratt can hardly take this in: her own protection is draped over massacre, transforming butchery into valor. To make white women safe, according to southern white gentlemen, minorities and others need be targeted -- among those killed are "Jews, communists, a Black woman" (34).

Although Pratt disagrees with the Klansmen's rationale, opinion alone scarcely affects the violence laid at her feet. Therefore she decides to resist actively those who would protect her. Pratt sets out to learn "what white men have been doing outside home, outside the circle of my limited white experience," "what had been or was being done in my name" (34). Her resolve after the Greensboro shootings leads to the research I have mentioned on her



hometown and family, as well as on areas immediately surrounding Fayetteville. She uncovers the implications of white women's protection: on the subject of the Klan she discovers, "[their] 'chivalric' behavior has meant historically ... the systematic rape of Black women; the torture, mutilation, and killing of Black men... the death of Leo Frank, a Jew" (37). She concludes that white women's safety is nothing more than confinement: in the South white women have been harassed into supporting their fathers, brothers, and husbands, and when white women might reject their culture's brand of protection, they have been banished, threatened, and in some cases, killed. Pratt responds to these revelations by questioning her own sense of safety openly. She quits her apartment's seclusion, moves among those unlike her, "find[s] new ways to be in the world" (42). She educates herself on the histories of southern Jewish women and women of color and interacts with these people, "listening to [their] criticisms, not talking back but listening" (43). She looks to "do something" to overcome passivity and ambivalence, risking severance with loved ones by speaking out against injustice, risking

severance with groups of lesbians, even, by pointing out lack of diversity in their wary and guarded circles (46).

The shift in Pratt's relations to her Fayetteville apartment represents a void in the sense of rupture: her comfortable retreat ceases to exist because Pratt disavows retreating. She no longer tolerates screens from social tensions or activism. Importantly, this shift marks an abiding change for Pratt. Her choice to set out continually from the apartment is instructive rather than debilitating; never again does she sequester herself or refer to home as an edifice. Her choice to quit this particular cloister -- to acknowledge its protection as a void causing others' pain and her own, related moral waste -- is instructive because Pratt now recognizes its pitfalls and can avoid them in the future. After the Greensboro murders, Pratt eventually settles in Washington, D. C. and searches for other, regenerative concepts of home. There, for the first time in a manner that is comprehensive and unremittingly self-conscious, she acts *against* anxieties about protection instilled by her birth and marriage cultures. For example, Pratt speaks to Black men she passes on the street, "damn[ing]" "the old racial-sexual fear" [13]), or takes the

trouble to ponder her ignorance about strangers who are minorities (she considers the background of a Black man from the Yemassee in South Carolina, a man with whom she has difficulty communicating [12])). In Washington, Pratt allows herself to be guided by the *deficiencies* of her Fayetteville apartment experience; she learns where to step because of the voids, instead of being engulfed by them.<sup>4</sup> Perhaps it is too much to say that Pratt makes peace with the South's voids, but traversing her D. C. neighborhood she certainly treats those voids as constructively as she can. Wise from the past and from dissecting the past, Pratt *sidesteps* the ignorance and presumption of white-woman protection, *acknowledges* her own prejudices based on race, class, or religion, and *admits* that her links with white southern culture necessarily restrict others' responses. Whether she avoids reproducing voids which have snagged her previously or opens herself to their humiliation and pain, Pratt does not hold back. The last thing she will do is ignore southern holes of oppression or pretend she does not help create them.

The rifle-shot in Greensboro forces Pratt to question the price of her safety: it makes her concerned for others'

injustice, not merely her own, and this outward turn marks the fundamental difference in Pratt's approach to home -- the difference that is the trademark of "Identity."

Accordingly, when Pratt moves to Washington she works to define home by circling outside. In these environs Pratt will not lead readers over a threshold; to describe her new locale she hits the streets, walking, casing the wide physical network around where she lives. During the essay's first several pages, Pratt takes us up H St. NE, where she banks and gets her shoes repaired, then along Maryland Avenue to her lover's house, then back toward her own building, and later out to Maryland Avenue at night. Her walking in Washington lacks what Michel de Certeau terms "a proper locus," a center she journeys from and returns to (37). Pratt walks to show us where she lives, which encompasses myriad streets and shops and alleys and back yards, as well as the exchanges that tie her to them -- but not a house. She rejects the common notion that "a place... can be delimited as [her] own," that through position and power she can buy (or rent) a base to defend herself from external, encroaching pressures (de Certeau 36). Such a base would imply sealing herself off, just as her father sat

in his chair with John Birch newspapers, railing against Civil Rights sit-ins and marches, what he perceived as menaces endangering his home (36-37). Conversely, Pratt will not possess a site for self-encasement, and unlike her husband, does not want a post through which to extend her long arm. Besides that she disagrees ethically with such arrangements, experience has proven that Pratt is only wrenched away from such places, her former southern homes.

In Washington, however, Pratt makes peace with being endlessly torn from proper locations. She makes peace with home-wrenching by incorporating it into her changed conception of what home signifies. Pratt's revised version of home is being known in a larger community (home is no longer place-as-an-institution); it follows that the only way to achieve outside familiarity is by leaving her rented bit of space. So Pratt gets out and walks, moving physically apart from home as an authorized site. She circulates among others to take them in as clearly as she can and fix mutual ground through shared exchanges; she hopes that they, too, might extend themselves enough to see and acknowledge her meaningfully. If reciprocal contact is made, even briefly, this for Pratt is home. To be known,

then, she must *decamp* and interact: she walks away from and/or around the site where she lives. Marcia Aldrich and Leigh Gilmore, who also interpret walking as the chief method by which Pratt stretches her home-concept, judge the practice as "both spatial and epistemological" (33).

Pratt's walking is as much about mindset and stop-and-start learning as traceable movement. Akin to the idea that Pratt rejects home as a power-based retreat (in a pragmatic, workaday sense), Aldrich and Gilmore suggest that, theoretically, Pratt "abandons home as an original site of knowledge" (34). Pratt uses walking to scope her neighborhood, but also analytically, as "a strategy of consciousness" to check her nostalgia for former homes or quixotic expectations for future lesbian embraces (34). Pratt repeatedly "change[s] [her] mind and heart" about home-approaches (33). As she gropes toward situations of being known, "the work never stops, nor the love, with coming out, with falling in love, with a fragile and shared domesticity" (32).

Along the H. Street, NE routes, Pratt does not rely on panoramic sight -- the kind of rooftop gazing encouraged by her father -- to make her way through the neighborhood. In

fact, not only does Pratt avoid a place proper with its removed, elevated view (of such a place de Certeau maintains, "[It allows] the eye... [to] transform foreign forces into objects that can be observed and measured, and thus [to] control and 'include' them within its scope" [36]) -- her on-the-ground wandering compounds blindness upon blindness, and in line with her resolution "to strip away the layers of deceit that I have been taught," Pratt wants to establish that she cannot see or that she perceives certain situations only partially (39). Not that Pratt is averse to sight: she scopes the neighborhood to make herself see/acknowledge the young Black man, for example, whom she was taught as a white girl to disdain (based on southern stereotypes of the Black-beast rapist); she wants to see/recognize the Latino and Jewish cultures around her, and for herself and her Jewish lover to be perceived/received as the lesbian couple they are (13). Yet for all Pratt's work to discern others' individuality, in her walking she stumbles constantly over something missed, some characteristic or need she failed to register. She misrecognizes people, sometimes because she does not pay close attention, other times because she cannot help the

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mis-taking. Specifically, Pratt cloaks others' images with received stereotypes, blocking her view of these people, or follows culturally-prescribed roles, prompting others to don masks which she, in turn, cannot see through. Either way, because of what she conceals or cannot penetrate, Pratt *circumscribes* the freedoms others take with her: what they might say, how close they come, how long (or how willingly) they share contact in passing.

With Mr. Boone, for instance, a Black janitor who works at her apartment, Pratt hopes to see the man whose proud Yemassee legacy points to "Indian resistance and armed communities of fugitive slaves" (12). She would like to see his self-respect and pay homage to his remarkable background. She would like Mr. Boone to address her in "his own voice," the way she has just heard him carry on with another man (12). But her exchange with him comes undone because Boone follows racist etiquette, that the Black man is a *boy* to white ladies, that he must not "raise his eyes... or his head" when talking to Pratt (12). Taking his cue, Pratt answers Boone's sing-song in the "horrid cheerful accents" mentioned earlier. This man performs for Pratt, refusing to let her see who he is -- he will not take the

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chance, or perhaps, afford her the privilege. He presents a blind spot she cannot overcome, partly because of his choosing, mostly because of "my white womanhood that drags between us the long bitter history of our region" (12). Pratt's visible marks of race and gender restrain Mr. Boone for good reason. They both know that in the South, when a Black man greets a strange white woman frankly, the woman will probably assume he threatens her sexually (and she might alert white men), or, ignore him with disdain. By playing boy to Pratt, Mr. Boone signals his sexual insignificance and keeps his distance from a figure who, historically, has spelled nothing but trouble for his kind. Also, by playing boy Mr. Boone wiggles out of a tricky position with white women: he does not risk Pratt's ire by refusing to speak at all, and yet, while technically his "sing-song" acknowledges her, it is trivial, a no-brainer, nothing in which he must invest himself. At least he has dealt with the serpent, and the white folks' parade can move on. Moreover, he has salvaged his privacy; the last thing Boone wants is for this white woman to act familiarly or discern his actual thoughts. For her part, Pratt is keenly aware that with Mr. Boone there are lines she cannot cross

(because he will not abide intimacy), that his disguise is opaque and solidly set. As she leaves him she perceives the extraordinary breadth of their gap. To reach each other they would have to address, and on some level reconcile between themselves, "the long bitter history of our region" (12). A daunting fissure to take on individually -- and nearly impossible to bridge from Pratt's side alone, though she concedes that her white, policing, middle-class South is responsible for the crack in the first place. For Mr. Boone to meet her halfway he would have to relent and -- grown vulnerable -- reveal himself to Pratt forthrightly. Unfortunately there is no indication that as of yet, Mr. Boone has reason to change.

With the young Black man, though, or a white man dressed in a three-piece-suit, Pratt's hesitations over speaking derive solely from her own visual problems. Her sight overburdens their profiles with phantom characteristics; Pratt's assumptions about these fellows never pan out. Since she "*makes*" herself speak to the young Black man to stifle "the old racial-sexual fear," presumably Pratt feels uncomfortable (emphasis added, 13): their exchange starts off on shaky ground, as Pratt *pushes* her

greeting forward, rounding it off with a slightly "what the hell" attitude ("Damn the past anyway" [13]). But Pratt did not take him in fairly: "When I speak directly, I usually get a respectful answer" (13). The same with the well-dressed white man, whom Pratt meets late at night on Maryland Avenue. After intense self-questioning about the meaning of his suit, his race, his reasons for being out late in a predominantly Black neighborhood, her supposition that he will suppose her greeting is "about sex" -- after all these misgivings comes the denouement, "I speak and he speaks" (12-13). Pratt squeezes in a greeting at the last possible moment, cutting the white man's chance for -- as she expects -- an offensive or questionable gesture. Also, because of Pratt's mental ambivalence and the pervert she thinks she sees, she and the suit-man miss contact any more than split-second hellos: even if he brushes by closely, because of her mis-assessment Pratt does not invite him to linger. Reflecting later on their benign greeting, Pratt thinks "how my small store of manners, how I was taught to be 'respectful' of others, my middle-class, white-woman, rural Southern Christian manners" do not aid her in reading people in this strangely regional, broadly multicultural

enclave (13). She simply cannot see straight, trained as she is to look for particular signs. The signs she has filed from southern cultures do not deliver their promised one-to-one correspondences (e.g., that a white man with enough money to dress well only strolls through a Black neighborhood for opportunities to exploit), and Pratt is unsure how to proceed. She knows she will never "get to the new place where we can all live and speak-to each other for more than a fragile moment" unless she drops her guard and apprehends others more trustfully (14).

A last, painful example of Pratt's shortsightedness is especially jarring: when she smiles and says hello to the "white-headed white woman coming with difficulty down the walk," the woman's response unnerves her (14). "She spat at me, shout-singing, 'How much is that doggy in the window?'" and Pratt grasps "the uselessness and childishness of my manners in a world where [the woman] labored down the sidewalk" (14). Pratt could kick herself that her greeting lacked the empathy, perhaps the genuine offer of help, which would have acknowledged the woman's hardship. She noticed the woman but missed the gravity of her steps; Pratt did not really see her. Mulling over their exchange Pratt admits

the woman's lashing was hard to take: "The stark truth spoken in public, the terror of what is said about my place on the other side of the chasm between me and another, makes me want to pretend I didn't hear" (14). It would have been much less embarrassing had the woman suppressed her insult, but in that case, Pratt reasons, there also would be no gains. Pratt wants to be known in this neighborhood, which means she holds herself responsible for knowing others: seeing indifferently impedes the very connections she would make. Pratt transposes the issue of sight/recognition to hearing/understanding and vows "to listen for the beauty in the stark truth that someone tells me, that which seems brutal and may terrify me" (14). Seeing straight is not a matter of simply opening her eyes, because her eyes are "constricted" and "only let in what I have been taught to see" (17). Seeing straight means being slapped, sometimes, and learning to learn from the sting. For Pratt it is a matter of conceding when others expose her personal blinders, as when a Jewish woman corrects Pratt's impression that crosses alone top gravestones at Arlington Cemetery (the woman shows Pratt a photograph with stars-of-David in relief, scattered across the landscape [17]). Pratt needs

to identify and discard the etiquette that directs her to overlook or make wrong assumptions; she has a responsibility to work to see what her culture ignores or what people may not reveal. While her walking disclaims any perspective from on high, more importantly, Pratt's groundview tactics show there is still much she neglects from close-up. To avoid chasms of her own making between herself and others, where her bright "illusion of acceptance vanishes," Pratt must find where her sight runs short (14).

What I have noted as the circular structure of "Identity," whereby Pratt rejects chronological sequencing to highlight aspects of many different home stories, is in line with her activity of walking. Pratt darts between the present (her home-building efforts in Washington) and memories of former inhabitances which hit her broadside as she roams. One home is layered over another. As she circles the H. St. environs, as she interacts and broods, Pratt is especially reminded of her birth home. Even though D. C. lies "far from where I was born," when she passes some Black men putting on tales, Pratt recalls her father swapping jokes at the local drugstore; or, measuring this area of Washington Pratt rethinks her childhood town, that



it was not welcoming to all people but "a place of forced subservience" (11-12). Or, when she meets the elderly white woman who shuns her greeting, Pratt's impulse to "cover up the truth" "*comes from home*," where family tried to silence her crazy great-great-aunt Rannie (emphasis added 14).

As Pratt's D. C. neighborhood evokes other of her southern experiences beyond what she physically sees, there is a sense in which the new territory *quivers*. It oscillates, as Avery Gordon would put it, between what is there and not there. An aura of place undulating -- much like t.v. clips of a desert, its horizon seeming to curl and shiver through thin films of gasoline, evaporating in the heat. A suspicion that a place is more than it is, or more than we can take in, thick with elements unaccounted for. Feeling that a place is overlain -- that another place (yet strangely the same place) lies sandwiched on top or underneath, if only we could better discern. For Pratt, not only the Washington walk, but reminiscences of her other southern homes suggest this phenomenon of the "wavering present" (Gordon 178). Recalling those places in the essay's now, with the "changed mind and heart" Aldrich and Gilmore have commented on, Pratt remembers what they were

like *then* differently than before (33). Her pictures of southern places change. Pratt feels overwhelmed by features she did not see in the past: remembering her childhood town, or her network of women/feminist friends in Fayetteville, she senses something else there, an irritation that her recollections of a place or community have not been complete enough (Gordon 164).

In "Identity: Skin Blood Heart" Pratt wants to alter the score with her memory. She wants to locate the parts of the South she let go or never saw, to restore them and make what peace with them she can. These fissures, these losses in Pratt's South induce a disorientation. They jostle her and leave a bad taste, making her feel weighty and vaguely guilty. I want to emphasize again that, for Pratt, the South as a fluctuation is at once structural, a component of her out-of-sequence narrating, and *sensate*. As Pratt explains, making her way around one place she experiences another: her immediate surroundings conjure other homes she has known, and Pratt yields to her memory, allowing herself to be transported back. These spatial warps, where the present gives way to another place, are the hardest type of void to pin down in "Identity." Places waver, their

wavering gestures toward loss, and the loss changes Pratt's pictures of a South she thought had crystallized with time. These voids carry Pratt to spheres which are not there, tangibly (but once were), and which continue to influence her self-formation. They make her acknowledge oppression she had not seen before, in scenes from her life already played out. These voids are valuable to Pratt because late acknowledgment is better than none, because, even late, acknowledgment is instructive: Pratt will act differently in the future if she understands how she should have behaved in the past.

Pratt's memory of a rare invitation from her father, to climb to the courthouse roof in their small Alabama community, comes on the heels of a section where she probes the benefits of speaking-to, both with her neighbors in Washington and (through the immediacy of writing) with us readers, the audience. She yearns to speak to others without the barriers of "gender, color, culture, [or] sexuality" thwarting honest connections, and she wants her attachments to be kind and impartial (there is a "right-and-wrong" of reaching out to other people, and for

Pratt, the right way hinges ethically on respect [14]).

When she mentions her father Pratt has just admitted how difficult speaking-to can prove in "the world-as-it-is" and wonders aloud how we ever feel the "need to change what we were born into" (14, 16). Pratt next remembers the world she was born into, and the lopsided fashion in which it was presented to her as a child. Envisioning the courthouse climb with her father, as an adult Pratt imagines what she would have seen had she reached the top as an eight-year-old:

... on the streets around the courthouse square, the Methodist church, the limestone building with the county Health Department, Board of Education, Welfare Department (my mother worked there), the yellow brick Baptist church, the Gulf station, the pool hall (no women allowed), Cleveland's grocery, Ward's shoestore: then all in a line, connected, the bank, the post office, Dr. Nicholson's office, one door for whites, one for Blacks': then separate, the Presbyterian church, the newspaper office, the yellow brick jail, same brick as the Baptist church, and as the courthouse. (16)

Looking back years later, Pratt feels compelled to search for more. She further recounts "what I could not have seen from the top: the sawmill, or Four Points where the white mill folks lived, or the houses of Blacks in Veneer Mill quarters" (16). Pratt decides as an adult to fill in the

holes of her courthouse vista -- to fill them in, not invent them, because their content was already there, *back then*, waiting to be perceived. The sections of town Pratt missed for so long have pressed on her in ways she cannot grasp, not until she concedes them. The vital point here is not that Pratt, like a god, *wills* the areas into existence through procrastinated acknowledgment, but that she finally realizes how this other side always existed, influencing the paths she took, influencing her hierarchy of social entitlement and where she thought she fit on the scale -- it was so close, determinative, but only *now* is she seized by the foreign-familiar. Pratt describes in the first, sanitized picture what she was routinely permitted or encouraged to see: rows of buildings authenticating government authority, white religion, and the pleasure of shopping if you had money. In the second Pratt admits where the lower classes lived and worked. Her sparse detail of these areas (a couple of lines compared to the other's full paragraph) hints that she was not nearly so apprised their features. Presumably Pratt avoided the mill and its quarters out of obedience or privileged indifference -- she does not say. She does disclose:

... I was shaped by my relation to those buildings and to the people in the buildings, by ideas of who should be working in the Board of Education, of who should be in the bank handling money, of who should have the guns and the keys to the jail, of who should be in the jail; and I was shaped by what I didn't see, or didn't notice, on those streets. (17)

*I was shaped by what I didn't see, or didn't notice, on those streets.* In sociologist Avery Gordon's terms, looking back Pratt experiences a haunting. What was not there to Pratt's perception was (and in many ways is) patently there, making a difference in her character-building. The ghosts of the other sides of her childhood town rouse her, challenging Pratt to focus the "back-drop of [her] past" more scrupulously, since against that back-drop she "act[s] out the present" ("Identity" 17). I say ghosts because something we cannot put our finger on -- rationally, at least -- pricks the woman's conscience, gets her to sketch a fuller picture of the courthouse view than she has needed before. What moves her toward this second sight? Pratt herself calls it "the inner push to walk into change" but is hard-pressed to say "where [it]... comes from" (16). Subtly switching gears, she does list for readers the gains to be had by "chang[ing] what we were born into"; these include "a way of looking at the world that is more accurate, complex,

multi-layered, multi-dimensional, more truthful," being "a break" in cycles of misunderstanding, and reaching "a new place" with other women "where with understanding and change, the loneliness [of culturally-imposed separation] won't be necessary" (17-19). None of these gains, however, were obvious to Pratt as she worked toward them; she had to stumble onto their rewards, piece them together from various life lessons, to be able to define them as encouraging for others. While I do not want to draw too fine a line between such gains and Pratt' "originary" impulse for change, it is worth pointing out that her reasons for pushing forward were not always clear to her. Either way, in commencing to act/remember differently, or in reflecting on how she has acted and remembered differently, either way the motivation(s) for change seem tied to a sense of responsibility, whether Pratt could spell them out at the time or not. Throughout "Identity" she attests to feeling bound to "do *something*" (as Lillian Smith exhorts) where she suspects some hardship or wrong (46). As Gordon would put it, Pratt is willing to let ghosts in. She accepts that "the highly visible can actually be a type of invisibility" and that "that which appears absent can indeed be a seething

presence" (Gordon 17). Moreover, Pratt consciously confronts these flip sides of haunting when she meets them. Gordon explains of such an exchange:

The ghost is not simply a dead or a missing person, but a social figure, and investigating it can lead to that dense site where history and subjectivity make social life. The ghost or the apparition is one form by which something lost, or barely visible, or seemingly not there to our supposedly well-trained eyes, makes itself known or apparent to us, in its own way, of course. The way of the ghost is haunting, and haunting is a particular way of knowing what has happened or is happening. Being haunted draws us affectively, sometimes against our will and always a bit magically, into the structure of feeling of a reality we come to experience, not as cold knowledge, but as a transformative recognition. (8)

By Gordon's reckoning we can never account for a haunting matter-of-factly. Language cannot make transparent that which leaves us half-doubting and relies much on suspicion and intuition. Thus we talk around hauntings. We tell stories about our ghosts over and over with countless variation; we utter a single, profound insight that seared us one evening; or perhaps we say nothing at all, ourselves disbelieving. The one certainty is that we are struck, pestered, by a something related to the social scaffolding that holds our particular culture in place -- an object connected to or affected by (often negatively) institutions,



"historically embedded social formations," History with a capitol H (19). That object incites us to change the embeddedness: it works at our conscience and asks us to act. It makes us feel accountable. It stirs "a potent imagination of what has been done and what is to be done otherwise" (18). Gordon cannot stress enough the importance of responsibility in haunting, that to rid ourselves of ghosts we must assume the toil, the guilt even, those ghosts pass along:

Following ghosts is about making a contact that changes you and refashions the social relations in which you are located. It is about putting life back in where only a vague memory or bare trace was visible to those who bothered to look. It is sometimes about writing ghosts stories, stories that not only repair representational mistakes, but also strive to understand the conditions under which a memory was produced in the first place, toward a countermemory, for the future. (22)

Further concerning accountability, Gordon holds that the pestering object "mediates" between big dates, big decisions, big events, and our ordinary routines (19). Because haunting "links an institution and an individual, a social structure and a subject, and history and a biography," it warns that the seemingly mundane is not at all isolated or inconsequential (19). Meeting ghosts

impresses that what we do every day affects situations which seem larger and more important, situations which make headline news and may even be relegated to the history books (such as the Columbine High School shootings or legislation on tobacco health hazards). We are not neatly disengaged from "organized forces and systemic structures that appear removed from us," and the ghost often comes as an unsettling reminder that we must reckon with authority we thought we could not touch (19). Still, Gordon's point is not so much that subjectivity wins the battle with positivism, but that gaps between them might be "fill[ed] in... differently" (19). We need to be less satisfied with domination and resistance as final explanations for modernity's dehumanizing, vicious cruelties -- not that these flip sides of power are not "basic and intertwined facts," but that "our predominant modes of expressing and communicating the enormity and intricacies of [these] fact[s] are wanting" (193). The real battle ghosts pose for us is one of comprehension, how we understand the operations of social networks and forces: if we acknowledge the ghost and see "what is usually invisible or neglected or thought by most to be dead and gone," then we can better grasp "the living

effects, seething and lingering, of what seems over and done with, the endings that are not over" (194-95). We can write more comprehensive "histories of the present" that are uncanny, provisional, enchanted with shadows, rather than fixed conclusions of the past (195). Likewise in our material practice we will see "the fundamentally animistic mode by which worldly power is making itself felt in our lives" (202). We will perceive, in Gordon's words, a something else to be done about broad social scaffolding that applies to us personally.

Another instance of Pratt's haunting reveals her entanglement in a chain of events historically profound. The haunting occurs as the Washington-wise Pratt re-examines early feminist ties in Fayetteville: she vaguely recalls aspects of the town she missed when working there as an ERA activist, such as particular landmarks or ethnic clusters, or ways her prejudice prevented connections with minorities and other women of color. Pratt's memories of her grassroots politics are overtaken by what went wrong. Looking back she pinpoints methodical gaps which never struck her at the time, but which, unfortunately, severely limited the impact of her local NOW chapter. The chapter

was comprised of Pratt and five or six other women. To their credit they addressed aggressively what needs they could discern: establishing self-defense classes for women, education programs, a rape crisis line and battered women's shelter; making phone calls to rally support for the passage of ERA; fighting for Black women's studies courses and the appointment of a Black woman to a county advisory group (29). Heavily outnumbered in civic battles, the members of NOW concentrated on filling their ranks, converting other women to their causes, and in this endeavor, according to Pratt, they fumbled miserably:

We wanted to change the world; we thought we knew how it needed changing.... We tried everything we could think of to "reach more women."

We were doing "outreach," that disastrous method of organizing; we had gone forward to a new place, women together, and now were throwing back safety lines to other women, to pull them in as if they were drowning, to save them. (30-31)

Because Pratt and her peers were intent on their own agendas and wanted to convince large numbers of women to join their pre-shaped platform (instead of inviting those others to help mold a platform), they neglected the concerns of women whose background and interests differed. They forged ahead, planning community forums with a token panel on "minority

women," without approaching Black women's groups for input on planning or sponsorship, without thinking that "'minority women' in Fayetteville included substantial numbers of Thai, Vietnamese, Cambodian, Laotian, Korean, and Japanese women, as well as Lumbee women and Latinas" (30). Similarly, when Pratt's NOW chapter organized a talk on religion, "no representation was requested from women of the local Jewish congregation, since 'religion' meant denominations of Christianity" (31). Speaking for herself, Pratt admits how she never thought of Jewish people as actually living in Fayetteville, never conceived of them as southern, like herself and her friends: "I had no place for Jews in the map of my thoughts, except that they had lived before Christ in an almost mythical Israel.... they were always foreign, their place was always somewhere else" (31). Although Pratt habitually drives past Fayetteville's only synagogue, she automatically assumes a Saturday will be most convenient for NOW's "community" talk on religion. And when she feels anxious in a Black section of town, putting up posters on a rape awareness program because she wants "Black women [to] know and come," Pratt does not question the root of her anxiety ("a fear of Black men"), or pause to think about the



messages her white skin sends, paired with the word "rape" on her posters. At the time Pratt does not consider how, in that place, she may strike a threatening figure (certainly a painfully ironic one), but the Pratt who looks back reads the situation's real edginess, which had little to do (but perhaps everything to do) with her white-woman fear: that for over a century, Pratt's people sexually abused Black women but then circulated stories of white women's rape to kill Black men, and yet here is this nail-biting white women, running up and down Murchison Road, assuming she has something to impart or warn about the violation of women's bodies.

Through hindsight Pratt evaluates previous mistakes with feminism that once were invisible but now make her feel ashamed and callous. Compelled to explain how her politics were limited and limiting, Pratt's image of Fayetteville circles larger than what her perceptions of the town were then: she includes groups of women she did not recognize (the Thai, the Lumbee); the priorities of a place of worship well within her scope but ignored; the political fervor of Black and Jewish Civil Rights activists whose struggles were organized long before NOW (but whom NOW did not deign to

contact); and the deep layers of resentment by Blacks, toward whites, for forcing rape as both a weapon and an excuse, the resentment choking Black streets and impeding a white woman's way. Undoubtedly a racialized minefield, Fayetteville was brimming with women with axes to grind over Pratt's race, class, and educational status, but the white feminist had sauntered about, thinking "I was the first to struggle" (29). Alternately, the minefield was a potential source of power: Pratt's town offered vast numbers of oppressed women of various ethnicities and lifestyles, who could have been gathered for a collective coalition, but Pratt, obsessed with white women's problems, did not seize the advantage of those others' presence or experience. Reflecting later, she is disturbed by the possibility of bonds which never flourished, which she personally obstructed by adhering to bigoted definitions of women's liberation. She also broods over lessons she missed: since she failed to recognize Black and Jewish women's afflictions, she lost the benefit of their examples of resistance. Cruelties Pratt suffered as a lesbian in Fayetteville may have been related to organized terror in the South toward Jews and Blacks (each with lengthier, more



dramatic histories than her own), and she have could gained strength from these other women's insights. In retrospect, what nags Pratt is the fact that she compromised ties with potential allies: where there could have been mutual empathy with minority women, she and her peers added to misunderstanding and separation. Her present, memory-induced haunting is a self-sick, guilty wound, but back in the late seventies, the effects of Pratt's behavior (which would later cause the haunting) were tangible and direct: Pratt drew social lines that restricted minority feminists' options.

As Pratt reconstructs her entry into grassroots feminist politics, she notices a historical pattern. The oversights she made with groups of Blacks in Fayetteville repeat the prejudiced arrogance of nineteenth-century women's suffragists: that feminism applies only to white women, that the movement should not be fettered by racial concerns, which could shift attention away from gender, and that whites need not be aware of the motivations of other groups of people. Specifically, Susan B. Anthony discouraged southern Black women from organizing for suffrage, that she might attract their white counterparts;

also, after the Civil War Elizabeth Cady Stanton refused to be sidetracked by supporting Black men's right to vote, and by extension, a liberal Reconstruction government -- a government which may have been more favorably disposed toward women's turn at voting booths. By insisting on the priority of gendered oppression these women missed its links with racialized suffering: to achieve their goal of white women's suffrage, both Anthony and Stanton turned their backs on women of color and Black emancipation in general, losing an ideological advantage and numbers of potential supporters. Their racism stymied their aspirations; had Anthony and Stanton been interested in universal equality, women's suffragism may have made sharper gains much earlier. Pratt reads the same writing on the wall for herself and her contemporaries: had southern white women been more supportive of Civil Rights in the 60s and 70s, had they helped elect more Black people to political office, the outcome of ERA might not have been so bleak. Pratt is a small cog in white feminism's wheel, but she is a cog; she realizes that the ways she pursued her feminist agenda prevented it from making substantial gains. With her NOW group in Fayetteville Pratt repeated the mistakes of

higher-profile, nationally-influential feminist pioneers. Her lesson is that her actions do matter -- they matter *corrosively* -- when she fails to learn from the past and reproduces its abortive outcomes. Looking back, Pratt is haunted by the negative impact she had on what could have been a decisive social movement in a small, conservative town. In an effort to make amends and clarify future feminist goals, she writes herself into Fayetteville's history of women's politics as honestly as she can.

I have characterized the various deficiencies of Pratt's southern homes as voids, or black holes, using the concept of place-bound loss loosely. By void I mean a gap where something was or should be, usually forcefully rendered. Voids in "Identity" are dangerous cracks, or points of separation, that trip Pratt up, or confuse her, or make her feel responsible for some ill done. By nature they are physical, psychological, or perceptual (or perhaps mixtures of these): there are forced departures from homes (in some cases self-induced); there is Pratt's perception of her own soul as a rotting carcass, eaten alive by the negativity and exclusions of her birth culture; there are Pratt's personal blind spots where she fails to notice

entire sections of towns, or where she half-apprehends the people she passes and thereby misses connections with them; and there are spaces made empty by minorities' dispossession, which are riddled with evidence of brutality, pain, and betrayal, and which haunt Pratt into admitting her hand in their emptying. Pratt associates all these types of fissures with specific locales: that is, the voids exist because of where they originate. They are products -- or better put, waste stations -- created by particular communities' interests. The defining feature of each of Pratt's voids is loss: they are defined as loss and generate loss, seeming to feed on oppression, appropriation, and denial. It is almost impossible to fill them in or restore what they have taken.

I do think, however, that Pratt finds ways to redeem southern voids' losses -- not by ignoring them, and certainly not by pretending she can recoup what is gone, but by facing the loss head on and saying "no." Pratt's overriding declaration in "Identity" is, "no more; I will do what I can to stop the erasure that has characterized my home region." She exposes the fraud of the Lost Cause of the Old South. In effect, Pratt shows that the cause of

racism in the South was never lost, never even went underground: since the Civil War it has flourished, robbing Blacks (and more than Blacks: non-Christians, homosexuals, and women) of their rights as free citizens. The Lost Cause of the Confederacy. For its sake southern communities erected signposts at Civil War battlefields and statues for dead soldiers (present today in so many town centers); they formed the Daughters of the Confederacy as loyal, living shrines to the Cause, and the Ku Klux Klan for organized terror; slowly they took land back after Reconstruction, made a farce of the Federal Government's promise of forty miles and a mule to Black families; they implemented sharecropping for Blacks and poor whites, a debt-ridden, dependence farming which was virtually impossible to work one's way out of; they established a legal system resembling the separatist, antebellum one, renaming it Jim Crow. By just about every social standard in America -- the right to vote, to a fair trial, the opportunity to own land, get a basic education, build a business, protect one's family -- by all these standards the Lost Cause won out by denying disadvantaged people in the South, and as Pratt maintains, despite the progress of Civil Rights in the '60s and '70s,

continues to win. As the major impetus for Pratt's southern black holes, the Lost Cause mandates lynching and disavows welfare, mandates pilfering and tight-lipped silence. It buries the causes of those who have actually been maltreated. Alive and thriving, the Lost Cause is a vacuum sucking up the non-white and underprivileged. The only ways to combat it are by divesting *its* myth of sacrifice -- the Old South is not lost at all, but a looming social movement digging the holes that Pratt finally espies -- and by acknowledging where the real suffering exists and against whom it is committed. These counter-actions are Pratt's mission throughout "Identity: Skin Blood Heart."

Pratt's repudiating the Lost Cause South carries several rippling effects for a new southern geography. To create better places to live she does not deny the Old South's holes, many of which implicate her personally: she might try to avert the kinds of voids which have plagued her and others previously, but Pratt acknowledges them to step around them, and in the event that they are unavoidable, she confronts the gaps head on. In Washington, for example, although she desists reproducing white women's assumptions about how to act or where to go when Black men are around,

still, there is her fear, which restricts her interaction with these others; to her credit, though, Pratt recognizes the limits she has imposed, how needless they are (when the Black men speak respectfully), and vows to curb her apprehension in the future. Pratt implies that if the South is to flourish as an identifiable region through the era of multiculturalism -- which only promises to increase -- then (white) southerners must quit covering its holes, pretending a smooth surface. The South must allow that its foundations are physically and psychologically jagged -- physically, in the sense that its parameters have been open to some and closed to others, and psychologically, that all who live in the South are affected in their thinking and feeling by what has transpired on the grounds they occupy. Second, and related, in Pratt's scheme a new geography of the South must account for the region's layered-ness, the sense that one place may be draped over another. To outline the region's borders and properly characterize its features, we have to be aware, place by place, of who has lived there and in what capacity, how towns have earned their money, how the definition of zones has been arbitrary -- and combining all these types of features, *how places have developed out of*

*their development in the past.* Finally, Pratt's new southern geography requires an eye as fully open as possible, committed to ferreting out its own prejudices. A new geography of the South should restore a fuller picture of the region than has tended to circulate. It needs to see the sections of places which have existed all along but gone unheeded. Acknowledging these sections, which, not coincidentally, usually correlate with poverty and groups of minorities, could be a first step toward creating more equitable conditions. And for Pratt, piecemeal acknowledgment -- person by person, slow dawning by slow dawning -- might make all the difference in the South's overdue reconstruction. Starting with herself, Pratt writes to pick her own southern biases apart, because change is worth a try.



## Chapter Four

### Toward an Almost Shareable South

In a definitive scene that is actually a flashback, a third of the way into The Salt Line (1984), Elizabeth Spencer establishes the novel's twin themes and a reference for its ambiguous title. Her protagonist, a late-middle-aged professor named Arnie Carrington, and his wife Evelyn drive toward the Mississippi Gulf Coast, fleeing a humiliating episode at Arnie's northern Mississippi liberal arts college. Arnie has just been forced to resign his English department position -- secretly, because of a former affair and personal jealousies, but more overtly, due to his renegade tactics for Black students' rights and veterans' housing on a campus resistant to the fifties and sixties' turbulent changes. As the couple heads south, Evelyn gamely rouses Arnie from his silence and dark thoughts: "There's a place along the road where you can smell the Gulf," she offers (110). "You could draw the line of that salt smell on the map, I bet. Have you ever noticed it? (110)" Gruffly, Arnie retorts, "Speaking of salt... don't look back or you'll turn to it," but glancing at Evelyn, he knows she will not: "Turning back was never her way" (110). Arnie

muses appreciatively on his wife's "shining courage and strong good sense," and when he forgetfully asks aloud a question that has been consuming him, "What do you do when something's over?" Evelyn immediately levels, "You finish your book.... Everyone should be so lucky. You have a book to finish" (111). Unfortunately, her answer's wise practicality is not what clinches this scene. Arnie, who has been remembering the conversation several years later, observes, "But even then, [Evelyn] was riding toward her doom. The something over, for her, would be the everything over, for Evelyn Carrington," and broods on consecutive events that upended his world (111): Hurricane Camille, an unprecedented, murderous, 1969 fury that ravaged the south Gulf coast from Alabama to Texas, including Arnie and Evelyn's newly beloved hometown, Notchaki, and worse still from Arnie's view, Evelyn's death from cancer.

Evelyn's allusion to the salt line is intriguing. She defines it certainly, as a particular point delineating coastal territory, the boundary of "the salt smell" so distinct it could be reliably etched on a map (110). For Evelyn the line of transition from negative to positive sphere is fixed and certifiable: she knows she has crossed a

border, she believes it is natural and sure, and she is confident others will experience the same sensation along the same coordinates (at least that is what mapping implies). Her explanation of the salt line mirrors a theme dominant in Spencer's novel: the desire to nail a place down, particularly according to its historic, romanticized links. Characters in The Salt Line trust that if they can salvage the Old Gulf Coast as it has been known traditionally (i.e., prior to Hurricane Camille), they will save its innocent charm and gentility; they will resurrect its true identity. But Spencer includes a second, competing theme that threatens to overturn the first. Arnie's troubling question, "What do you do when something's over?" is symptomatic of a consequence which recurs throughout The Salt Line: the reality that communities are continually in flux, subject to catastrophe and balances of power which alter their looks, their demographics, their parameters. Thus Spencer juxtaposes the compulsion to uphold accustomed place stereotypes against an inevitable undoing of revered sites or communal meeting points. In many ways The Salt Line is driven by the friction of these two main themes and the possibility of any resolution between them.

To grant the implications of each theme full range of expression, Spencer offers two different approaches to coastal rebuilding -- an Arcadian picture of her fictional setting, Notchaki, and a looser, more inclusive town model based on gathering disparate elements -- and subjects both to, on one hand, an impulse to stifle change, and on the other, an eventual, life-threatening diminishing. In other words, each picture of Notchaki is initially characterized by an idyllic, sentimental ambiance which characters strive to preserve, but after a time, which collapses, or appears on the verge of collapse. What makes The Salt Line an interesting treatise on place is not whether institutionalism or iconoclasm wins out -- not whether the novel comes to rest on an invulnerable place image or winds up lost in some perpetual southern wasteland. Instead what is significant is Spencer's emphasis on the politics of reconstruction. Notchaki's unusual situation of having been literally swept away allows Spencer to focus on the work and fractious haggling and bartering of interests involved in creating and managing a facade of place stability. She shows how hard it is for a community to settle on the self-images it wants to convey, and how the generation of place

images is in fact ongoing -- Hurricane Camille represents changes any community must face, relentless changes in the bearing and meaning of a shared "sense of place." Equally important, Spencer advocates an ethics of rebuilding, a right and wrong way for southern communities to regroup in the midst of contemporary cultural divergence and diversity. She makes her college English professor, Arnie Carrington, a man who considers himself a free-thinking, radical visionary, the champion of each of her phoenixing projects -- first, of the Arcadian restoration, and second, of the transition to a less straight-laced, less prejudiced Notchaki that stresses welcoming and generosity. Notably, each picture fails, but Spencer makes clear that their failures are related (as contrary as the two approaches seem to be), and that they stem from white southern liberalism's questionable ambitions, embodied in the tactics of Arnie Carrington. I want to consider why the recovery schemes of this self-styled progressive flounder. Carrington makes similar mistakes with both Arcady and his more open, inclusive version of Notchaki, and I want to establish what is flawed about his well-intentioned, but ultimately misdirected, assumptions regarding preservation and renewal.

Through Carrington's example Spencer affords southern geography a valuable lesson: what can go wrong with white liberal attempts toward southern multiculturalism, and why their/our kind of South may not yet be shareable enough.

Spencer's commitment to a post-Arcadian South is notable. The Salt Line does not feature the demise of the Old World Gulf (merely) as an occasion for weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth; rather, Spencer evenly assesses the once-venerable image, finds numerous contempts and disorders, and portrays an alternative as obviously preferable. Her detached approach to an Arcadian South differs measurably from southern literary criticism's: unlike the Twelve Southerners, who in the famous manifesto I'll Take My Stand (1930) despair of the South's continuing without a small-farm, individually reliant, racially segregated base, Spencer's characters are willing to experiment with the foreign as well as the familiar. Instead of insisting on old forms as their only rebuilding option, and stopping dead in their tracks with a depressed, backward glance when they realize the golden coast has long elapsed, Spencer's community is able to imagine a next step. The fact that their ensuing town model might also dissolve

by the novel's end, having been weakened by some of the same mistakes as the Old World Gulf, does not imply that their efforts toward inclusion are ill-conceived. It does suggest that dynamics of place continually evolve, that providing an alternative to Arcady which is crystallized and ready to be enshrined (as the next southern archetype) is far from Elizabeth Spencer's intention. She levels just as square an eye on Carrington's newer version of Notchaki, and despite its improvements, finds it regressive and discriminatory. Spencer provides southern literary criticism a serious wake-up call, the chance to rethink our ingrained tendency to idealize the South, especially through the lens of nostalgia. She warns that the region may be flagging most when our fondest place stereotypes are widespread and entrenched, that our obligation as cultural critics is to ward off image-mongering -- which may work well for book jackets and theme parks, but should not be southern studies' analytical project.

The Salt Line opens a couple of years after Hurricane Camille, onto a landscape and coastal community still reeling from the natural disaster. Widower Arnie Carrington, a retired college professor inclined toward

local social-change movements, responds to the surrounding devastation with a vision of what he can do: help restore the order and appearance of the Gold Coast, an old-South version of the Gulf comprised of white, columned houses, a few, gracious, privately-run hotels, and long wooden piers standing far out in the water -- an image of the coast bolstered by memory and longing for the past. Throughout the first half of the novel Arnie campaigns to make Notchaki what it was, and in large part he relies on fleeting impressions from a single childhood experience to fashion the shape and feel of his old-world picture. Arnie's recollections of the coast fix repeatedly on a day he ran away from his northern Mississippi home and turned up with some relatives near Gulfport, whose stately oceanside house "with a generous high portico" lay "at the end of a long front walk," a series of steps, and two gateposts (97). For Arnie the place and day are forever linked to hospitality, warm welcome and awe. There he got his "first look at the big water" and sensed a "great tranquillity, a kind of inner breathing [that] came on" when "the wind made the old trees whisper and stirred the long moss hanging to the ground" (37). From the trip he also remembers "'Po' Boys and Gumbo'



for twenty-five cents," piers stretching out toward the horizon, and all along them summer-dressed women "under big umbrellas, talking through the twilight" (37-38). These are the forms, then, that Arnie would claim from the hurricane: grand manners, gracious living, stately white homes with moss-laden trees, and at every small, quaint stopping place, classic cuisine ready to serve. Arnie even finds proof of his "earlier paradise" (97). Along the wall of his friend Yates's business hangs a collection of pre-hurricane photos, scavenged randomly after the storm, and Arnie is convinced one of them was taken from his day at the cousins' homestead. He sits before the picture as at a "shrine," gazing longingly at:

... shrimp boats and ancients oaks, camellias in bloom, flags flying from the old white Notchaki lighthouse, moonlight on the Sound, softly blowing curtains of Spanish moss, and the one rectangle Arnie especially loved, which showed a small boy sitting on some concrete steps between two gateposts.... The boy was sitting with his cap in his hands; he was smiling in the sunlight. Arnie knew that that boy was himself. (97-98)

Carrington's blueprint for Notchaki invokes one of the South's dearest, and most popular, place icons. Arcady, as Lucinda MacKethan describes it in The Dream of Arcady (1980), figures prominently in southern writing and culture

from Reconstruction through the Southern Renaissance of the mid-twentieth century. Depictions of the South as a golden land, "a world committed... to the preservation of the simple, good life, to a working respect for nature, and to the practices of neighborliness," follow the classic pastoral tradition, which in its earliest stages derives from Virgil and Theocritus (MacKethan 3-4). Rules of the pastoral include nostalgia for and idealization of an agrarian state, usually linked to childhood; a sense that this state is, or soon will be, forever lost; identifying former worlds as simple, pure, as tied to a "natural order"; and the persuasion that a receding golden age exposes modernity's lack, expressly, its rushed, alienated, and overly complex lifestyles (4). MacKethan argues that the devastations of the Civil War led white southerners to the pastoral as a way of justifying antebellum culture; they felt anxious to venerate a society that had been condemned by federal standards. White southerners wanted to convince their Northern neighbors that southerners were not (and had not been) corrupt, that their former occupations, relations to slaves, patterns of spending, and homesteads had been fine in every sense of the word. In particular white

southern writers cast the Old South as respectably as they could, borrowing heavily from Western pastoral forms. Popular, late-nineteenth-century southern authors, like Thomas Nelson Page and Joel Chandler Harris, present the more sincere, textbook cases of southern Arcadies compared to others in MacKethan's study. Of Page the critic observes:

The three aspects of the antebellum world which Page turned into staples of his Arcadia were the plantation locale itself with the great house at the center; the image of the southern gentleman; and most important, the "old time" Negro... through whose voice the Old South achieves mythic status. (42)

Joel Chandler Harris, often mentioned alongside Page as champion of an idyllic South, is tagged by MacKethan as cultivating "love of peace and simplicity," a distaste for city life" and firm "belief in plantation ideals" -- traits which patently characterize the world of Harris's Uncle Remus (67, 82).

What makes Carrington's version of Arcady particularly poignant is that it no longer exists. His dreams of the Old Coast loom larger than life because they are past time, past experience; they embody standards which appear increasingly bright as Arnie scowls on the rebuilding that is taking

place. With the hurricane he despairs that every decent thing about the coast is gone. Aged trees uprooted, hundred-year-old homes swept away, treasured landmarks sawed in half, the older, native generation packed up and left, too tired to try their hands at resurrection. Worse yet, Arnie believes that with the coast's vast clearing comes degeneracy: the genteel look of the old is forgotten as newcomers and opportunists erect as much as cheaply as they can. Arnie writes to a friend of the whole sordid process:

The Coast now is nothing but the bones of itself, stripped bare. Of course, people are building back. There are new houses, subdivisions out from old towns, a lot of new motels and restaurants going up along the beach, nightclubs, shopping centers, everything except what your heart desires. Some of the old remains, looking surprised at itself, and seedy, like people after major surgery. (10)

Self-described guardian of what little of the past may be salvaged, Arnie determines to "keep faith" with previous forms through accumulation (38). He buys up out of the "tumbled pathetic wreckage" as much property as he can afford to try to monitor who invests in the Coast, to fend off the Mafia and neon food chains (7). Therefore Arcady in The Salt Line is no longer physically manifest; it is nothing more, nothing less than Carrington's frantic,

one-man crusade, an expression of values, the gauge of which is Spencer's passionate, impulsive protagonist. As expressly subjective criteria (although Carrington would like to believe that the Gold Coast exists completely apart from him and has long been carved in stone), Arcady depends on Carrington's convictions and preferences, chief of which is his antithetical approach to what counts as Old Coast and what does not. Arnie assumes *his* interests protect a good coast, and pitted against this he perceives anyone with alternate intentions, especially those ignorant or apathetic about old forms and lifestyles. He creates a good coast/bad coast binary, working hard to convince others and himself of the sanctity of his plans. He refers constantly to his vision's perfect integrity and symmetry, and to compliment his ideal, he must believe in the existence of other people "with feelings like mine" (22). Arnie has to quicken his sense of a collective effort (mine/ours) for the just and true cause, and this is what his magnolia-and-moonlight agenda depends on. In the long run, however, Spencer exposes Carrington's binary as false, breaking down his lines between us/them, and Arcady loses its attraction and magnetic force to compel.

People with "feelings like [Arnie's]" designates a hazy category, which at best means those with pre-Camille experience and what Carrington would consider proper knowledge. Really, the only character who comes close to sharing Arnie's vision is his friend Joe Yates, an architect who designs the white houses and meandering landscapes in Arnie's mind's eye and helps him with financing (34). There is also, fleetingly, someone else, an unknown "somebody" who preserves a vignette from "the olden days," which catches Arnie by surprise one morning and stops him dead in his tracks (215):

... [Arnie] passed the property line of a huge motel, its name known to more of the world than any Caesar's had ever been.... Yet passing through the back, not a hundred feet from this monster, he caught his breath, stopping.

A live oak with a seat circling it -- as in the olden days; somebody had remembered -- stood central to a play area for children, with tiny swings hanging from the limbs, and nearby a little seesaw, painted yellow. A Negro boy was alone there, raking leaves. He was wearing overalls and a dark-checked shirt. The oak leaves rattled against the wire rake, and just now, moving on to a magnolia tree in the far corner of the plot, the response of the fallen leaves was all according to their nature, some being stiff and dried and brown, and others of the same brown, thick and leathery. The air, still and fresh, was like green silk, and the boy's movement was in tune with all they both -- worker and watcher -- knew. And not only they but oak and magnolia (both evergreen, shedding leaves in early summer as new growth came), the seat around the oak (how it cut the bark in places), the silent swings and seesaw, and whatever there was of bird or

vine or lizard, all in one breath's tremendous knowing, held.

He held on to the fence to extend the moment. Who knows any place like it knows itself? Why would I -- why would anyone -- be needed here? (215-16)

This excerpt neatly captures the twin elements of Carrington's Arcady: perfect pitch and custom of all that lies within its boundary, and certainty of others ascribing to Arnie's vantage point. When he first stumbles on the scene Arnie reflects, "somebody had remembered," meaning presumably that someone caught a style and sensibility similar to his own (215). It is notable how the myriad elements of the picture fit in place and are *just right* in Carrington's appraisal: the magnolia leaves respond and fall "according to their nature," the worker's raking is "in tune with all they both... knew," as are the trees, the tree seat, swings, and "whatever there was of bird or vine or lizard." Fragile but pure, as opposed to the tacky, concrete aspect of the motel across the way, the vignette exemplifies those qualities Arnie associates with the three properties he owns and other remnants of the Old Coast: meet, respectable, suited to a natural order of goodness and gentility, pleasingly inviting. Furthermore, in terms of an inner circle of supporters drawn toward Arnie's better view,

there is the "somebody" who preserves the scene and the African-American worker. In a broadly egotistical sweep Arnie assumes complete agreement between his comprehension and the worker's, and really, that of any immediate vital object. It seems a stretch, however, to imagine that the laborer, raking and raking, is as entranced by his surroundings as the aging white spectator. Spencer gives no indication that the young man pays Arnie any attention: the fellow never looks up from his work, and all that suggests a shared respect between them is Arnie's assumption that "the boy's movement was in tune with all they both -- worker and watcher -- knew." We have no idea what the laborer knows, only that he chooses to ignore the white onlooker; Arnie infers their camaraderie. But the muted presence of this young African American profoundly checks what Arnie thinks he sees.

Regrettably for Carrington, few along the coast seem to share his rebuilding criteria, and from his perspective distinctions spread wide between his inner band and those who inhabit the Gulf with other designs. Indeed, the developments springing up, products of outside influences, signal to Carrington an invading depravity; he makes much of



their dubious financial backing and shoddy frontages to distinguish the elegant, custom-savvy forms he would recreate. Early on in his refusal to sell his island to local Mafia go-between, Frank Matteo, Arnie emphatically separates his land and proprietary interests from the Mafia's. He tells his friend Yates, "trying to rebuild the Coast makes no sense if you just let the crooks in," and later, looking remorsefully at the photos in Yates's office, Arnie sets the pictures of "softly stirring Spanish moss," a "smiling shrimp fleet," and "white-pillared houses" against "the ever-growing legal enterprises, the coliseums, the Holiday Inns and Howard Johnsons, the waffle houses, and shopping malls," which represent so many "sleeping dragons" in his view (34, 188-89). In the same conversation, which occurs midway through the novel at a point when Arnie begins to realize the impossibility of his good-coast battle, he despairs, "My dreams of the Coast... why they're chicken feed, gobbled up, blown away in a breeze" (188). Arnie's vision of the old-world Gulf seems less and less a reality he can mold Notchaki into; forces he views as contra-Arcadian, such as the coliseums and shopping malls, appear inevitable and fast encroaching. Any version of Notchaki

contrary to Arnie's own counts as *them*, and they are winning: from his perspective the sleeping dragons will surely wake to define the town's rebuilding. Voicing equally heavy cynicism, Yates replies, "The whole coastline is like a sieve... from Miami to Key West to Galveston" (188).

The edge dividing Carrington's Arcady from a gaudy, crime-infested Notchaki does go to pieces in The Salt Line, but not because the evil takes over. Rather, the line itself between good place and bad, us and them, breaks down as any meaningful, organizing structure. Primarily this is because Carrington detects an underside to old-coast images and changes his mind about supposed enemies: he realizes *his* position along the binary is morally dubious and immersed in the stakes of conquest. Carrington's Arcady is exposed as contaminated and power-mongering, much like the newer developments he opposes. Spencer suggests that the long-residing, land-controlling group Arnie would protect, the white southern gentry, have had to labor, to enter into conflict even, to bring off the gentility of the Gold Coast; their influence and will to dominate underlie the area's settled, uniform, and seemingly natural identity (by natural

I mean a sense that this is the way things are and have always been). In terms of places covering the rivalries and contention that define them, as I am stipulating, cultural theorists Alison Blunt and Gillian Rose would target Arcady in The Salt Line as a prototype of transparent space. Their use of the term transparent pertains to socially shared conceptions of a place rather than any distinguishing physical characteristics. Blunt and Rose believe that most people -- especially those interested in occupying and regulating an area -- tend to regard space as if it were transparent, as if the eye could absorb and classify every feature of significance. Analyzing subjugation in colonial and postcolonial geographies, Blunt and Rose attribute transparent space to the white male colonizer. He explores, names, and believes he has realized the full extent of a colonized area; subsequently he maps his knowledge, sure of his record's mimetic capacity. His reading and writing of space depend on smooth views. Those who subscribe to transparency create pictures of homogeneity and contented hierarchies and carefully straighten any jagged edges of difference or conflict. But Blunt and Rose think this largely Western way of seeing, a matter of perspective that

actively *usurps*, needs countering. As a more honest alternative and the only politically viable response, Blunt and Rose suggest the idea of territory, a way of seeing land as "claimed and conquered" (15). Territory exposes the dirty laundry of transparent space. It looks at grids designated as transparent and finds that "there is always a space [within them] of some kind for resistance" (15). It acknowledges the importance of factions and neighborhoods and admits that various forces compete for spatial rights. Territory reveals transparent space to be "constituted," a site of imposition (15). In its quest for placid surfaces and rigid corners, transparent space takes pains to erase incompatible areas and voices, but with territory, Blunt and Rose encourage scrutiny of those margins as the starting point for sharper critical awareness.

In its post-Camille upheaval Notchaki compares to the colonial and postcolonial areas of interest to Blunt and Rose, in that Spencer portrays the hurricane-damaged coast as site of contest between, on one side, the established families, small businessmen, and "old-line political bosses," and on the other, the descending speculators and "national crooks" (61). Arnie Carrington is involved in the

fray as an old-guard defender, and his vision of an aesthetically monitored, rank-conscious Notchaki dangerously approaches the transparent space Blunt and Rose caution against. Accordingly, applying the concept of territory to Mississippi's Gulf uncovers several blindspots in Carrington's Arcady. For one, Arnie's conviction that the New Coast should *instinctively* rise out of its hurricane debris *in the shape of the old* rests too much on a monolithic, conflict-free utopia that Notchaki's everyday life does not sustain: casting the Gulf as territorialized highlights diverse groups other than Carrington's small band, each with its own ideas about what constitutes acceptable areas. One of the more unsettling, and silent, presences in The Salt Line is that of Native Americans and their ancestral burying ground. That ground lies auspiciously on Carrington's property, just behind his house, an ever-present reminder that the old, genteel Coast extorted land and suppressed an indigenous population. Hence Arnie's revered, pre-hurricane Gulf was never intrinsically primal, never "simply there" or unsullied. Also, because the Native tribe has a contract with the local government to visit the burial ground at any time, their

occasional brushes with Arnie raise questions of who counts as trespasser and the legitimacy of ownership: despite that Arnie feels kindly toward these people and would enjoy some friendly exchanges, they "just come and stand there, look for awhile, and go away," never acknowledging Carrington, taking for granted (as they should) their right to come and go as they wish (230).

Other sectors of Notchaki make their influence patently felt. More conspicuous and immediately pressing than the Native Americans, the shopping complexes, cheap hotels, and chain restaurants have no place in Arnie's resurrection plans, but for better or worse implant themselves next to cherished, old-world sites, like the seedy motel in front of the oak-tree playground (215-16). Too, groups of vandals such as the Weasels disfigure a staunch pine on Arnie's Hotel Miramar lot, torch a community treasure, a nineteenth-century lighthouse, and engage publicly in licentious behavior, which affronts their elders' tastes in decorum (125, 217). Finally, of course, there is the Mafia, represented by Frank Matteo's restaurant, covert gambling operations, and efforts to buy Arnie's island for suspected drug-running.

Along with the reality that Notchaki has never been shaped exclusively by well-established white folks, either in the past or present, Arnie must come to accept that parts of Arcady he thinks he salvaged from the storm are not as pure as he imagined: his second blindspot lies in perceiving the Gold Coast and its residue as immaculate and uncorrupt. Spencer disabuses her protagonist of this notion with a series of personal, painful confrontations, each regarding the properties (or "shrines") Arnie purchased after the storm, with the intent of saving them from hoodlums, plunderers, and the ills of commercialization (119). One is the old Miramar Hotel, which Arnie especially favors because he and Evelyn liked to vacation there. Although all that is left is a dilapidated building and scattered shrubs and blacktop, Arnie values the skeletal holding and posts "KEEP OUT, DANGER, NO TRESPASSING" signs to secure its seclusion (121). On an afternoon stroll through the ruins he reflects thankfully:

The old place was keeping its goodness. [Arnie] remembered the croquet court, right about where they were walking. No traces, anyway, of anyone having come there to picnic, smoke pot, get drunk, find shelter, make love. (121)

But several paces later Arnie finds what he loathes. Having wandered off behind the hotel he discovers "the charred picnic fire, the used safes," and an abomination: a message scrawled on a pine, the bark "peeled back," the words painted on indelibly (125). "BEN AND EDNA FUCKED HERE, then, I FUCKED EDNA TOO. HA! HA!" (125). Arnie is struck to the core: "It was the tree his heart went out to, surviving a hurricane for such as this" (125).

Untouched preservation is too much to hope for; Carrington cannot keep the aura of the Old Coast locked in frieze. This recognition dawns on him also about an island he and Evelyn bought, once a sanctuary for nuns, where the couple had retreated "middle-aged, doomed, happy, full of empty plans" before Evelyn's cancerous death (79). For Arnie the island represents a "vital spot"; enchantingly, "The Holy Ghost is a swarm of butterflies" there (81). It holds the "mystery" that is Evelyn (she is illegally buried on this property): "She's out here. In spirit. Nothing sinister. Friendly as hell" (81). Yet the point where Arnie loses his old-world vision, in the mid-novel talk with Yates, is the point where he admits his island has been debased. One night when Arnie imagines he camps there

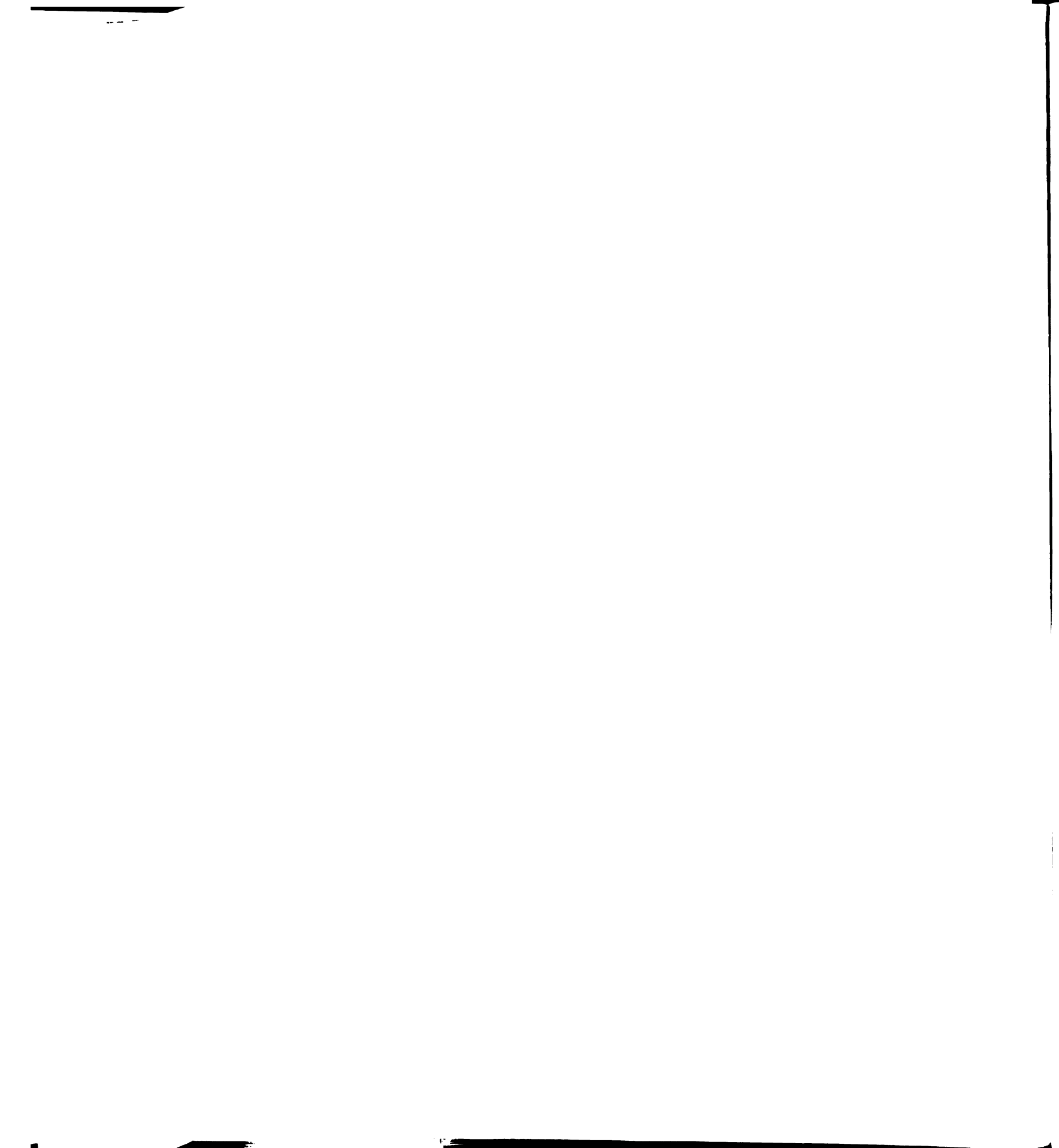


alone, he hears boat motors and rushes to a far, desolate end, just in time to watch Mafia-man Frank Matteo receive packages from a vessel with a foreign-speaking crew. The scene breaks abruptly and next we see Arnie with Yates, where Carrington rails:

So they were there [on the island] all the time....  
Have been, are, will be. Whether [Matteo] owns it or not, he looks on it as available, he uses it as if it were his. Rights of passage, strange cargoes, scorpions from Oaxaca or Borneo, who knows what gets in there? (187)

Several lines later Arnie gives up on Arcady completely: "My dreams of the Coast... why, they're chicken feed....

Nothing belongs to us here: power's loose" (188). Groping for a response, Yates compares their flailing efforts to save Notchaki to the living nightmare of a local Yugoslav, who had escaped drowning in the hurricane by climbing a tree, and woke the next morning to find snakes looped all around him (188-89). What is dawning on Arnie is that the snakes are nothing new; they "have been, are, [and] will be" in Notchaki, ongoing tides of adverse influence he cannot hope to keep at bay. The image he liked to foster of his three properties -- "the holdings of some small seafaring principality, cropping out in orange here and there" against



his larger mental map of the region (216) -- is losing its distinction. Arnie cannot will his land assets to stand out against their background, at least not as sanctified, wholly innocent grounds.

Carrington's fear of various powers running wild -- at its height in the above talk with Yates, where Arnie tries to grasp the "enlarg[ing]" "structure" backing Matteo -- shifts his final blindspot into relief: that he himself and his vision of Arcady are enmeshed in games of control (188). For if we frame Notchaki as territory, teasing out its social layers and multiple boundaries, no group enjoys the distinction of being removed or irreproachable. No group is inherently privileged. This does not mean that all groups and areas are equal (or that all are equally worthy), but that every site must be negotiated, must be actively arranged, even when a place appears traditionally fixed and stable. And while Arnie prefers to see himself as disempowered, nobly set apart (and following the island spirits) in his pursuit of coastal restoration, The Salt Line suggests otherwise. Often to protect his sacred spots Arnie compromises himself to get what he wants: he is implicated in negligible, even lawless, activities to ensure

that his properties are well-maintained or to seal them from outsiders' queries. With the Hotel Miramar, for instance, Arnie cannot afford to clear its grounds for selling lots or his various rebuilding projects. He needs the city's free demolition, which is granted only when a site proves a health hazard, and "the hotel was remarkably free of [disease-carrying pests], pure in its bashed-in state" (177). So Arnie and Yates capture rats, and plant and poison them in the Miramar, calling in city officials to witness the effects of their "exhibit" (177). The spectacle is so disgusting that "one of the inspectors threw up" and "[Arnie] was sick himself by now -- heartsick" with guilt (177). Spencer writes loftily (catching her protagonist's tendency toward martyrdom and self-dramatization): "The golden robes of [Carrington's] manhood for the first time faded to an ordinary cloth, and he longed for the island, its distance and winds, its warming sands" (177).

Yet Arnie's island cannot cleanse him either: it hides evidence of further violations and remorse. The evidence is Evelyn's body, smuggled there and buried just after, at Evelyn's insistence, Arnie and a doctor named Swiggart ended her life. Evelyn had tired of fighting terminal cancer and

implored her husband, "You know you have to.... Anything else would be a cop-out" (167). A needle, Evelyn's vein, Arnie's "thumb had pressed the plunger" -- all arranged by the "trusted young doctor who had so 'understood' them both, had helped when they wanted to hurry death" (167, 182). But Arnie's compulsion to meet Evelyn's demands leaves him vulnerable to shady dealings. Dr. Swiggart "had faked records, stolen lethal drugs, sneaked in dark of night over dark waters" to help Arnie dig Evelyn's grave, only to blackmail Arnie, in the end, for all the professor's life savings. Carrington surrenders his money but has trouble rationalizing the whole confused plot. Once, when Yates alludes to Evelyn's death and suggests foul play, Arnie squirms inwardly, "Oh hell. He bent his head. Crime was what you called it when other people did it" (190).

There is more to the island implicating Arnie in high-stakes politics and campaigning. In a series of deftly-executed arrangements, he and Yates sell the island to Frank Matteo -- the man Arnie self-righteously loathes but whose freshly laundered cash Arnie needs -- at the same time that Yates presses Congress to annex the island as National Seashore. The annexation comes through. Frank pays Arnie

in good faith and loses his entire investment, a botched deal that nearly costs Frank his life with his Mafia superiors. Although periodically Arnie hesitates over the plan, worried over Frank's fate, he tries to quell his conscience by disavowing any real involvement. He stipulates to Yates, "Whatever you wanted with all those addresses [which Yates uses for letter-writing and lobbying], I wouldn't like to know about it," and he "secretly" believes himself "so out of things, out of the world he had once known and influenced, that he could not imagine the addresses doing anyone any good at all"; nonetheless Yates succeeds using Arnie's information (193-94). In light of Arnie's considerable fringe benefits -- cash, avoiding bankruptcy, continued access to the island as a National Reserve -- Spencer's description of Arnie and Yates planning their contacts assault packs a stiff dose of irony:

... they had taken on, it seemed, a common cause. It had to do with how life in this place ought to be lived. It was better than working hell-for-leather for money, or power, wasn't it? There seemed something extra good about it, *because they had so little to gain.* (Emphasis added, 195)



Contrary to Carrington's self-assessment of "being out things," there is no question that he holds and exercises power. Arnie must admit the shades of gray, or even black, in his own affairs -- "rats in Eden," the duplicity of his transactions with Dr. Swiggart, or his mistaken assumption that "Crime was what you called it when other people did it" -- and as a result, the line slackens considerably between Arnie and the "dragons" he spies around him (181, 182, 190). As the novel progresses and "the golden robes of his manhood... fad[e] to an ordinary cloth," Arnie's attitudes ease toward groups which initially he set himself against. Having recognized aspects of the other side within himself, he is able to affirm people whose agendas oppose his own. These changes in Arnie's perceptions toward himself and once-dreaded, nefarious others indicate how thoroughly distinctions blur in The Salt Line between good coast and bad. With Frank Matteo, for instance, Arnie actually begins to warm toward the man and finds points of shared interests. When Frank openly agitates over family problems, Arnie detects in the Italian-American from Philadelphia certain southern sensibilities, telling Yates, "Frank's sounding more like Mississippi every day" (257). And when one of



Arnie's closest friends, the local art teacher named Mavis Henley, becomes pregnant with Matteo's child, Arnie not only pushes for the couple's reconciliation, he decides he needs Frank to claim the baby and accept the friendship of Arnie's close-knit group -- Carrington needs Frank's participation for the group's solidarity. By the close of the novel Arnie hopes Frank will harbor no offense over the island deal and join him in collaborating over new restoration plans; he selects Matteo as an *inheritor*, one "to pass my notion on to" (276). Not only with Frank, but also with a teenage gang long the object of Arnie's disdain, the Weasels, does Arnie "surpris[e]" himself by mellowing (229). Although they sneak about his property and, as he believes, massacre Arnie's precious ducks, as he cleans the scene of slaughter Arnie ponders the kids' situation empathetically:

His mind turned to [the Weasels] now, and also, surprising him, his heart, in all its sudden generosity. He had seen their faces when the whip fell [during one of Arnie's earlier confrontations with them]. What fire did they sit by, defiant maybe, but also lonely, and afraid? (229)

Spencer justifies Arnie's softening toward the gang as, eventually, they are cleared from any real wrongdoing. By the novel's end it is the doped-up teenagers who seem to be

victims of injustice: two kids dead because of bumming around and a penchant for shifty appearances.

The downsides of Arcady that Carrington initially fails to perceive grow focused and dominant in Spencer's rendering. Clearly there are plans for Notchaki other than Arnie's, invested groups besides his own, so that Carrington's vision for reconstruction comes to seem not so much paramount as one faction competing among many. More threatening, in terms of Arcady's marketing and reproduction, the protagonist himself eventually questions the whiteness of his white-columned houses; there are cracks and inevitable contaminations within Arnie's good-coast boundary. That boundary relies too much on an impossible virtue, the uncompromising ideal of purity, and not only is the contemporary Notchaki shown to tolerate questionable forces, but its predecessor, too, is revealed as ethically flawed (through the uncomfortable presence of a few Black characters and the aforementioned Native Americans). Worse still for Arcady, its smug guardian, Arnie Carrington, himself commits indiscretions, in the name of his nostalgic ideal, which erases the distinction defining the Gold Coast in the first place.

Obsessed with recreating a feel of the Gulf he had known for a day in his youth, Arnie grows jealous of the forms he would recall and maintain. He draws his lines around Notchaki and lets few others in, assuming too much too hastily about people like the Weasels and Frank Matteo. He builds his dreams for the town on the basis of probity, unable to see that both he and the dreams are embroiled in controversy and are even hurtful to others. Instructively, The Salt Line judges Arcady differently than Carrington and eventually rouses him (even him) to new viewpoints. Spencer is able to evoke the brutalities Arcady stems from, just by introducing Native American or Black characters, just by letting them *be there* along the Gulf, the subjects of awkward, vague exchanges with white southerners. Every time Arnie glimpses Native Americans in his backyard, he wonders if it would be appropriate to greet them, his uncertainty speaking volumes. And with Black characters during the earlier parts of the novel (when Arcady is Arnie's objective), Arnie either has nothing to say or assumes too much: with Frank Matteo's assistant, Dancey, Arnie stands back and -- watching Dancey with others -- judges the boy as uppity and disrespectful (14-15, 192); with the laborer who

rakes behind the monster hotel, Arnie believes the young man exists *by necessity* for the good of Arnie's Arcadian picture; and with Arnie's lover, Barbra K., Arnie makes a second home in her small quarters but only once invites her to his house, when it needs cleaning (90-91). Across the novel Arnie's position toward Blacks resembles that of nineteenth-century plantation authorities he at one point critiques (192): Carrington, the champion of old-school southern customs and homesteads, measures the Black laborer, for instance, from an unobserved vista. Arnie is the privileged white voyeur, who is able to assess the Other's work from a leisured position, more like Robert Beverley's philosophical (and labor-alienated) planter than he would ever admit. Or with Barbra K., he is like the white gentleman who hides his path to the slave cabin (for much of the novel Arnie visits her secretively) but disallows his mistress crossing the same lines, to enter his home. Through such well-placed hints and shrewd characterizations, Spencer repeatedly links southern architecture and landscape (the plantation house, Arnie's private property) with white supremacy, and consequently, human indignity. The columned homes Arnie would love to reproduce around Notchaki are

historically tied to greed and cruelty: Arcady's price in the South has been human lives. Spencer also overturns Arnie's old-coast vision by entangling its objectives with local political battles, i.e., arguments over the allotment of public funds and options for land use and development. Without question Carrington can give as well as take; his duping of city assessors or Frank Matteo is strategically carried off. Past or present, white houses with wrap-around porches do not sit on the choicest sites without someone, like Carrington, entering the territorial conflict and managing a serious bit of finagling. Carrington's restoration plans rely heavily on the spotlessness of his Arcadian boundary and an impossible wish to keep his business hands clean, but Elizabeth Spencer challenges and displaces both.

\* \* \* \*

As Arcady recedes from Carrington's ambitions Spencer does not switch abruptly to an alternative conception of place. Her transition in The Salt Line to another kind of South is far more subtle. The book's other kind of southern sphere is hard to describe, hard even for characters themselves to put words to, despite that they acknowledge a

rare confidence building among themselves, a different pride and aura pertaining to their location. These changed feelings about Notchaki seem to crop up from nowhere; they register abruptly, having been disregarded by inhabitants until near the novel's end. No one much notices until locals pause from their schedules and realize how daily routines have produced something memorable in town: significant ties with one another based on an habitual crossing of paths. In other words, because their comings and goings intersect for a time, certain people begin to feel mutually bound. A special quality of their bonding is fragility: folks fear their attachments might collapse due to the erratic nature of human relationships, or, as they have experienced all too recently, because of path-altering catastrophes like Hurricane Camille. Spencer's main barometer for the progress of Notchaki's new genesis, Arnie Carrington, reflects and models the shift in approaches to place I am trying to describe. Busy with completing a book on the English poet, Byron, and healing wounds with his estranged adult son, Kelly, Arnie has no notion of an alternative to Arcady until it hits him from broadside. Occupied with various errands around town, Arnie stops

briefly to appreciate relaxed boundaries around Notchaki and is amazed where his thoughts take him:

When [Arnie] drove about the Coast from place to place, teaching at the junior college, or drinking in a bar, or having his boat mooring changed, meeting with the ecology group (once off pelicans, they had gotten hung up on shore terns), or unraveling interminably the problems of real estate (four lots had sold), he felt that distinctions were no longer possible here, that all of life, good and bad together, was simply one thing, a growth, a creature made of many creatures within the area of its original simple structure, yet complicating itself the more it let new creatures in, and he felt the generosity of its doing so. (193)

Gradually Arnie accepts that if anything is natural about communal development, it is the certainty of different groups juxtaposed with different interests. Here he changes his mind about Notchaki's distinguishing features, believing them now to be respect and collective tolerance. Following his recognition of the town as "a creature made of many creatures within the area of its original simple structure," Arnie concentrates on the gesture of welcoming. With regard to his immediate neighborhood Arnie shifts his focus from tasteful outer trappings to drawing dissimilar people together: place comes to signify a gathering rather than an edifice. With Yates's help -- and this is the novel's most profound example of Arnie's revised philosophy of place --

Carrington refurbishes one of his properties, a row of small shops in the center of town, and convinces a mismatch of entrepreneurs/friends to lease from him. There is the white, hippie-ish, pregnant art teacher, Mavis, the Black, voodoo-inclined, daycare operator, Barbra K., and the upper-crust white architect, Joe Yates. What separates this real estate venture from Arnie's previous ones is his change of focus; with the row-shops he zeroes in on something other than restoration. More than capturing a vanishing architectural style Arnie relishes the intimacy springing up among his tenants:

As a kind of musical accompaniment to [Arnie's political camaraderie with Yates] was Mavis Henley. She was often with them, or nearby, peripheral. Joe Yates was to move into one of the shops in the row Arnie had bought. His office would be moving there, and Mavis had plans for a handicraft shop in another, the one next to Barbra K. That would leave three to rent. [Mavis] had the ducks, too, over at Arnie's house, and the art classes, at the junior college. And within, as their common chemistry knew constantly, she had Frank's child.

But [the group of renters] didn't talk about it. They talked about business, about food, about architectural drawings and the talent of the art students, and whether Barbra K. could get a permit to set up a child day-care center, and what toys would be available.... Their lives lived in the spaces they could live in, stronger than if they could live freely in all. *It was what I meant all the time, Arnie thought.* He had known you couldn't order such things like a meal, or write a check for them in a store. That time he'd run away from home in grand rebellion, and the family had sent for him: "You've just come for



this nice visit with us," his Biloxi cousins said.  
"You know where we live now. Come back again."  
(Emphasis added, 195-96)

Regarding the shared interests stirring among Arnie, Mavis, Barbra K., and Yates, the shape and look of the row-shops does not much factor into the unique state the friends have stumbled onto: living together "in the spaces they could live in, stronger than if they could live freely in all." The group makes room for each other where they can. Their paths are intertwining, and these people are *accommodating* each other, despite the shortcomings, prejudice, or differences of opinion that might keep their respective doors closed (i.e., those subject they choose not to talk about). More than simply scooting over for the adjacent person they are *extending* themselves into one another's business and spaces -- each one, in turn, opening her own space to the others, enabling a reciprocity. *It was what I meant all the time, Arnie thought.* He understands that a place can be made special through conscious good will shared among the people there, people who would likely ignore one another in other settings and circumstances.

There is another feature of Spencer's second alternative to place, a complicating feature, that is both

positive and devastating, galvanizing and deleterious: the very real threat of loss. The camaraderie building among Arnie's unlikely assemblage is uncertain, ever on the verge of disappearing, in large part because this place-bound feeling cannot be attained through will or conscious decision. Even though its prerequisite is deliberate tolerance, still, people's efforts to interact amiably in no way seal an aura of commonwealth: the chemistry among dissimilar folks *just happens*. "[Arnie] had known you couldn't order such things like a meal, or write a check for them in a store." Genius of place in The Salt Line cannot be marshaled or indefinitely retained. When Arnie remembers his cousins' consolation, "You know where we live now. Come back again," we realize this late in the novel that there is no going back for Carrington; he can never recapture that afternoon's experience in Biloxi, much as it continues to shine on in his mind and spur his attempts at reconstruction. Likewise, various spots around Notchaki enjoy a special aura of welcome and gathering, but only as a transitory blessing. Particular sites come to feel charged because people want to congregate there, yet the impetus for gathering can peter out: place gods may not be fixed or

willed to reappear. Even so, the gods, or the energy, of places will randomly circulate. The Buddha in Arnie's garden, for instance, might suddenly vanish, leaving characters without their quick-stop, spiritual nexus, yet there is the connection among row-shop inhabitants. Arnie might continue to visit his and Evelyn's island, but without the urgency or quest for healing which once compelled the grieving protagonist; eventually he comes to terms with Evelyn's death, takes a new lover, and judges of the island, "no need to go there, really, with [Barbra K.] here, ashore" (301). There is a sense in this novel that thriving place dynamics simply evolve, and that as soon as a special place grows comfortable and familiar, even needed, the chemistry binding people together there evaporates. That vanishing usually leads to hard scrutiny of former Edens, to an uneasy understanding of the precariousness of their foundations. As Yates reflects on discovering the Buddha's departure, "[Its] removal was a real loss. Things encircled, sacred, set in place, how could they be moved?... If one thing could go, so could everything" (180).

Spencer's revamping the meaning of place for a small, self-consciously southern community is meticulous and

wide-sweeping. She transitions from Arcady, an idealistic view of Notchaki based on an hierarchical social system and what white people thought the area once looked like, to a willingness to open doors. Rather than comply with old-Coast stereotypes of stately houses with wispy moss-draped landscapes, The Salt Line modifies what a sense of place pertains to: sites particularly valued are those where people with diverse backgrounds feel welcome. These are sites constituted on inclusion, and they are precious to their regulars because the urge for meeting there may suddenly vanish; characters must seize good karma where and while they can. Spencer's narrative attributes this shift in the significance of place to Arnie Carrington, the man who keeps Arcady alive but owns up to its repercussions, who not only entertains but enacts new approaches to Notchaki's phoenixing, who from the beginning reaches out to cut-off, misunderstood, or disadvantaged folks and in the end binds them all together. Genuinely a positive force, Arnie tries to do what he judges as right, tries to live by his conscience and a healthy dose of humor, and he likes to believe his motives stem from altruistic intentions. In point of fact Carrington is magnanimous, he does give most

people a chance (as well as a hand), and usually he sides with the "lofty principles," such as open college enrollment and veterans' benefits and saving endangered species (195). But Spencer also marks him as human. Arnie makes mistakes and contradicts himself, and sometimes to relieve his guilt, concocts elaborate rationalizations. Notably, even after committing to enlarging Notchaki's boundaries, Arnie repeats some of the same errors he made with Arcady. With the Gold Coast stereotype Carrington had assumed his own privilege, deeming his plans for the Gulf suitable and legitimate and himself as aligned (theoretically if not practically) with the local gentry. Yet even as Arnie admits the restrictions of the Old Coast and converts to a neighborhood ethic of "let[ing] new creatures in," even then he harbors former notions of superiority and takes too strong a hand remolding those in opposite circles (193). He risks his second option for Notchaki's rebuilding by supposing he may judge who belongs and under what conditions; he monitors his associates' public bearing too tightly. With the minority characters in particular, Frank Matteo and Barbra K., Arnie's requirements for their joining his collective are preposterous and unfair -- which exposes

his gathering instincts as more appropriative than impartial. Too restrictive and homogenous to extend meaningfully, in the end Arnie's multiculturalism shows serious signs of flagging.

After baiting and betraying Matteo over the island deal, incredibly, Carrington expects the restaurateur to forgive and forget, ally with the row-shop group, and "claim us all" (298). Arnie wants to have it both ways with Matteo: he wants to exclude Frank on the basis of negligible business ethics (i.e., Frank's Mafia ties), but alternately, when Arnie realizes that a sense of place depends on communal rapport, he hopes to draw Frank in to avoid severing "the knot" that is Mavis's love (194). Arnie reserves the right to humiliate Matteo but trusts their friendship will be strengthened; problematically, Carrington supposes his politics might not be taken personally. Spencer, however, refuses to let Arnie have his cake and eat it, too: Frank responds ambivalently at best to the protagonist's pleas and invitations. Ironically, Arnie's dreams of fastening people together and The Salt Line's resolution hinge on Matteo's reaction to a community he perceives as set against him, so that Arnie's ill treatment

of Frank hangs thickly in the air as Spencer ends with the question of what Frank will do.

Since the shake-up over the island deal Frank has laid low, avoiding everyone except Mavis, and even with his pregnant pseudo-girlfriend he is cool. But Mavis's shock-induced, early delivery has all Arnie's group keeping vigil at the hospital, and Frank himself cannot stay away, even though he steers well clear of the others. In the waiting room:

Frank Matteo looked at no one. He walked outside, but remained in shadow form visible through the beveled glass of the door. He came back in, restless. The things that had happened, who knew them all? Proud, he watched over [Arnie, Barbra K., and Yates] in his own way, alone. (300)

When news filters through that Mavis and son have survived, Arnie expects Matteo to rouse to participation and a sense of belonging. "Frank," he pleads, "go to her. For God's sake" (302). Matteo lashes back defensively: "You think I don't want to? Seeing my son. Why, that's all there is!" (302). But Spencer does not supply Carrington a feel-good conclusion; neither she nor Matteo wipes Arnie's slate clean. There is a price for Arnie's machinations with Yates and the Federal Government, and it is uncertainty over what

Carrington has come to value most, the ties holding his unlikely group together. The mutual dependency among Arnie, Barbra K., Mavis, and Yates is unsure because they need Frank, they need Frank to acknowledge and support his relation with Mavis, but due to the island fiasco Frank holds back. In the hospital scene Spencer cuts her narrative short on a precarious note, with Matteo wavering. She does not give Arnie the satisfaction of seeing Frank commit to the group as, in the novel's last few sentences, Frank hedges over whether to cooperate. Arnie has just urged him to look in on Mavis and the baby:

Like something for the moment leashed, but about to be cast, [Matteo] turned to look at the others. Had they trapped, betrayed, deceived him? He had to defy what threatened, to fend off what was always ready to strike.

"You think that's [seeing my son] not everything there is?" he challenged. "You think for a minute that's not all?" [the novel ends] (302)

Here Frank is saying what Arnie wants to hear, that fatherhood will take high priority, yet the two men stand worlds apart. Frank feels insulted to be told to go to Mavis, as if he did not know himself to do so, and he lashes out that of course this birth is important. Carrington and Matteo make the same claims but are "challeng[ing]" one



another; Frank's survival instincts kick in with the man who tried to ruin him. How discordant that Arnie knowingly injured Matteo, whose presence Arnie deems so crucial to Notchaki's growing collective. Ultimately that collective stands in the balance, waiting to see what Frank will do about having been screwed by the people who want to include him. Spencer creates an odd, odd situation. Arnie proffers a slap with a follow-up invitation, and in light of the fact that he won against Frank on the island deal, Arnie controls the conditions of Frank's merging with the group: Frank must come clean of the Mafia and assume responsibility for the woman he coupled with and the child he conceived (210). As far as the progress of Notchaki is concerned, Carrington might extend his arms to extrinsic forces like Matteo, but in the end it is still Arnie's umbrella.

The deception of Frank Matteo undercuts Notchaki's momentum of gathering, but another source of disquiet, Arnie's attitude toward his lover, Barbra K., threatens the success of his small community more gravely still. The fact that she is Black hovers large and negatively for Arnie. Although he never refers to her social status explicitly, Arnie's bigotry surfaces in the ways he treats Barbra K. and

what he believes she owes him. Besides the fact that Barbra K. has a far-off husband, they keep their intimacy under cover because Arnie hesitates to introduce her to his larger circle. Well into the novel none of the other characters, not even Yates, has any idea of Arnie and Barbra K.'s affair, and the first time Barbra K. steps foot in Arnie's house it is as his maid, to be "told" "what needs doing" by Arnie's young white friend Mavis [the only explanation for this rank and order is that is Arnie's notion of what his lover should do, in light of, presumably, the material help he has given her] (90). Although gradually Arnie acknowledges their relationship more publicly, introducing Barbra K. among row-shop inhabitants and no longer hiding his path to her place (even admitting to Evelyn's ghost that Barbra K. is the woman he loves and would prefer to marry), his intentions to possess Barbra K. smack of ownership, rather than mutual commitment and dependency. In one instance Arnie expects her to use her underground chain-of-influence and provide him information on Matteo, and when Barbra K. turns close-mouthed and vague in response to his queries, he feels slightly indignant:

It seemed to [Arnie] that Barbra K. ought to do most anything for him. He had fixed up the front of her house so she could work mornings, taking care of

children whose mothers worked. She was earning money. It looked as if she felt no gratitude, though in many ways she was accommodating. (192-93)

Arnie believes his lover should jump to do his dirty work; she should disclose intelligence on Matteo, her former employer, and direct Arnie about reaching him. Because of their sexual liaison and his considerable financial backing, Arnie feels he has saved Barbra K. and earned her political likemindedness, that she should risk her standing with the lower-class Black network for the sake of appeasing his interests.

There are signs far more disturbing that Carrington blatantly overlooks the individuality and self-direction of his lover, that he ignores her existence apart from his determinations. In the last scene in the hospital waiting room, for instance, Arnie has an epiphany which, in his mind, clarifies his lover's significance: Barbra K. is now his center-point instead of the island. What prompts this recognition is Arnie's noticing that Barbra K. "looked like Evelyn. The same amplitude," which reinforces Arnie's earlier presentiments that Evelyn and Barbra K. are somehow friends (their spirits "g[e]t along together," he believes [236]) and that Evelyn approves of Barbra K. (301, 166).

When Arnie thinks he sees Evelyn in his lover and decides the island is no longer necessary, his commitment to Barbra K. appears as a resurrection project, a way of bringing Evelyn around again. Where is *Barbra K.* in Arnie's attraction to her? His capacity for casual transfer -- shifting Evelyn onto his lover to assuage his guilt over a new partner, perhaps, or to smooth the racial, cultural, and social differences between him and Barbra K. -- slights the actual woman Arnie wants to claim. Just as insulting, in another instance Arnie dismisses the weight of his whiteness in relation to Barbra K. as he fantasizes *turning dark* through the alchemy of their love. He exoticizes Barbra K. and imagines that her foreign qualities are his for the taking:

While putting up the straight razor he always used, clearing the basin, it slowly came to [Arnie]: an island here [with Barbra K.] was where he'd spent his time, and he saw the vine once more spread live and green as a great benign lizard against the screen of Barbra K.'s room where the dark smell of her flesh was spread as evenly as butter. New Orleans music murmured from the record player. Another one, a white singer, crooned that "Love is Blue." But it wasn't, he was here to testify: its color was milky brown. He should have gone through a chameleon change. *He wondered at the whiteness of his arm.* (emphasis added, 236)

Perhaps the key to Arnie's eagerness for passing is the word *chameleon*: he never converts from his skin for a second, except in the security of a daydream. He is slumming, enjoying the thrill of a quick fantasy. Arnie acts as if the price of being black is easy, merely the *wanting* to be black, the admiration of a raspy style of music. He deems another race *en vogue* and reads the issue of color frivolously, as if it pertains to a box of crayons, something one can pick up and then put back down. Arnie's attempts to mitigate Barbra K's blackness/his whiteness are unabashedly appropriative: he will make her his new Evelyn, or in an alternate mood, become a good old soul brother himself.

Just as with Frank Matteo, the warning signal for Arnie's attitudes toward Barbra K. is Barbra K. herself. While Spencer refrains from divulging Barbra K.'s interior observations, the woman's behavior toward Carrington suggests that she does not fully trust this presupposing white liberal and has plans of her own. Barbra K. likes having Arnie over and is portrayed as enjoying their intimacy, but she will not dispense with her husband for Arnie, will not rat on Matteo, and unlike Arnie, never hints

she will become more serious with him. Barbra K. may appreciate her sugar daddy on the side, but she does not allow him to control her and is firm about his peripheral position. I wager that this good-looking, wise woman, inclined toward New Orleans-style voodoo and adept at forecasting other characters' problems and secret motives (41, 97), sees right through her aging lover and his requisites for their romance. Barbra K. would not mop Arnie's floor oblivious to the fact that he has never before invited her over, oblivious to his calling a younger white woman to manage her work, and if she is smart enough to intuit "something sittin' there" over Arnie's impotence "[that's] gonna take wing and fly," chances are likely that Evelyn's larger-than-life dominance [over Arnie] is no mystery to Barbra K. (41).

Carrington's treatment of Matteo and Barbra K. mars his predilection for gathering. Arnie may have learned that "let[ting] new creatures in" should be the basis for Notchaki's rejuvenation, yet under his system of invitations, all creatures are not admitted equally (193). He has professed that "distinctions were no longer possible here," but in his efforts to "gather everything up...

everything we know... everyone we know," Arnie stresses unity and consensus-building, and notably, asks his minority friends to conform most for the good of the group (193, 277). Matteo's example is blatant. Arnie wants to wash the Mafia out of this Italian-American and make him a family man, to straighten Frank's intentions toward the community and Mavis. Arnie condescends to judge Frank as potentially worthy: having dismissed Frank for half the novel based on his dark, brooding looks, European lisp, and suspiciously quick cash flow, it is Arnie who gets to decide to let Frank in. [Frank, as Frank makes clear to Mavis, had always wanted in (269).] Arnie gets to decide that Frank is okay; he rationalizes that Frank has southern family principles, or that Frank should be made welcome because someone Arnie loves (Mavis) loves Frank (257, 194). And Carrington will make Frank perform for the privilege of neighborly intimacy. Frank must brush off Arnie's island betrayal, brush off the fact that his most significant lifeline, the Mafia ties, will never recover, and embrace his role as a father. The irony of Arnie's demands of Matteo is that Carrington's pot calls the kettle black: Arnie has repeatedly proven an able swindler and has for years been negligent toward his own

son. If it is admirable that Arnie changes his mind about Frank and "see[s] him as still human in his motives," even after catching Frank at trespassing, disappointingly, to the end Arnie assumes his superiority over the outsider from Philadelphia. Arnie believes he will guide Matteo toward proper conduct, as he tries to do in the emergency room, which will assure Frank's good group standing. Arnie's treatment of Matteo reveals that the rules of the chemistry among row-shop inhabitants are largely Arnie's: the happy bonding we read so much about depends on Carrington figuring who fits in and on what terms. The others will have to do the changing. Arnie shifts the burden of who pays for the new Notchaki away from himself, onto those who are least like him, and this is the worst impediment to his multicultural southern enterprise. The costs for reshaping Notchaki will not be his own.

Likewise with Barbra K., Arnie makes a place for her with Yates and Mavis, but only under guises he would craft for his lover. The molds he tries to squeeze Barbra K. into are twofold: becoming his new Evelyn and Barbra K. appearing to his friends as less-Black, less of a social anomaly. Arnie enables Barbra K. to pass in a circle with which,



normally, she would have little contact, by virtue of binding her to his reputation. Barbra K. is Arnie's woman: his friends would not hurt him so much as to snub her. Certainly Barbra K. stands out as the gang's only Black, and in a novel/town where Blacks and whites are not reported to mix socially, she stands out a great deal. What makes her acceptable to the group is their respect for Arnie. They intuit the nature of his liaison with Barbra K., they choose to accept her, and accordingly, they prefer not to mention her race or the fact that Arnie frequents her quarters. The inclusion of Barbra K. reveals the degree to which Carrington's group feel they must suppress difference in order to survive. Specifically, when Spencer describes the "communion" building among row-shop inhabitants, she is explicit about topics off-limits for their conversation (195). Arnie and his friends may go on for hours "about business, about food, about architectural drawings and the talent of the art students, and whether Barbra K. could get a permit to set up a child day-care center," but along with the subjects of "Frank's business being crooked" and "what would happen when [Mavis's] baby came," they will not discuss "Reuben (Barbra K.'s husband), who had got his ear



half cut off in a fight in New Orleans," "or Arnie vanishing in Barbra K.'s direction from time to time," or "Barbra K. being black and the others white," "or whether Reuben would get it in for Arnie if he found out" (195-96). The group will not broach what is radical, or dangerous, or problematic about their relations, and much of this involves Barbra K. -- her racial distinctions, who she has sex with, which man will eventually claim her. They will not broach taboos against them in a larger world, what may have kept them apart in the past or threaten their future accord. Having finally made it together, having reached a point where they can talk in casual and friendly terms (where before they would not have spoken at all), they cannot risk questioning the social factors that would throw thick walls between them. Now this is true of Mavis's unwed pregnancy and even of Yates's former drug-addicted wife, but as Spencer's plot unfolds, the weight of how well the group will endure rests on Frank's and Barbra K.'s shoulders. As Mavis's pre-term labor forces one of those unspoken factors into relief, making the group deal with an issue they have preferred to ignore, Spencer writes that they charge to the hospital "riding" on "hope" -- hope, as Arnie imagines, that

Frank will "come and claim [the baby], claim [Mavis], claim himself, claim us all" (298). And again, the scene in the hospital waiting room pivots on Matteo -- whether this prowling, stand-offish figure will join the others' vigil -- and on Arnie's revelation that Barbra K. is his island incarnate. At the novel's close the status of the group depends on Matteo's and Barbra K.'s response to roles prescribed for them, and tellingly, Spencer ends without revealing what either will do. Frank is all in a quandary, not knowing whom to trust, challenging Arnie even if, theoretically, he agrees with him, and Barbra K. has no idea yet of Arnie's intent to make her his spirit place -- she has only been sitting in the waiting room, praying, holding her head in her hands. Hence the response of the minority characters is -- if not nothing -- certainly ambiguous, and Arnie's collective never gels for sure. Frank and Barbra K. pose vague contingencies to Arnie's plans for a tight-knit group, and the fact that neither fully squares with his expectations hints that maybe they have been asked to do, or sacrifice, or transform too much.

Ultimately Carrington's efforts to achieve a balanced and friendly southern multiculturalism fall noticeably

short. The white southern liberal makes good strides; with Notchaki's rebuilding he learns to relax boundaries rather than swear by them and admit "new creatures" into his circle, but in the end Arnie's example proves that welcoming alone will not secure group cohesion (193). It is not enough for Arnie to invite a minority person to share his space; as a white southerner he needs to recognize that other spaces are available in the South, that his space may not be appealing or sufficient for non-white southerners, and, considering the region's history, that folks ethnically different may be suspicious of a trap. As a white southerner Arnie supposes multiculturalism starts with himself *where he is*, that it is something he can do from his own vantage point, bringing others around. He considers himself the nexus for a new Notchaki, and urges others to conform to his expectations to approach his inner ring. But multiculturalism should not entail Arnie asking oppressed people to occupy his traditionally privileged spots; perhaps instead it would succeed if Arnie let go his side of town as opposed to another and acknowledged that the *whole grid* around him (and not just the pockets he owns) surges with meaningful activity. He does not have to allow in Black or

Native American or Italian American people for them to impact the South. Arnie must dispense with the notion that that which he has excluded -- what he has deemed the "outside" -- can become the South only as he gives it access. When he reaches toward the outside without recognizing and talking about the problems of his boundaries (former or not), then those who have been excluded feel cheated and will likely reject him (as Matteo, and in a different way, Barbra K., seem inclined to do). If Arnie continues to try to *smooth* over the South, past or present, Notchaki will pass him by in its evolution. Carrington's example shows that there can be no inside track for those who want to deal with a divergent and multicultural South. Arnie may have the wanting, but his mistake is that he cannot get over being white, cannot let go the idea that he holds the reins for his group's identity. Carrington's revised South is not fully shareable because, like Arcady yet more subtly, its basis is racial, that a white man knows best and should control the community's decorum, rapport, and concomitantly, its physical layout.

With both Arcady and Arnie's more open alternative, boundaries are tenuous because the lines drawn entitle white

folks at others' expense, and the others are tired of accommodating: boundaries cannot hold unless their various sides adhere. Arcady, for example, depends on the Black worker raking magnolia leaves: that he wear "overalls and a dark-checkered shirt" (plain work clothes, common of the agrarian South), that he work deliberately and with seeming satisfaction, and that he stay put while the white man-about-town watches (215). Arcady also depends on the containment of Native Americans (their only property left to visit, but not own, is relegated to Arnie's back yard), and a strict delineation between Arnie's interests and the darker Frank Matteo's. The problem with these parameters is their disproportion: they designate too much for one side. Inherently they are fallible because sides given less tend to want to edge over. From the start it is too much to ask that Black characters occupy restricted spaces contentedly; that Native Americans accept their dispossession and chat pleasantly with the white man who owns their sacred grounds (soothing his conscience and reinforcing his title rights); that Matteo settle for being treated as a second-class citizen, denied the opportunity to purchase land associated with the white genteel, when he pumps sizable funds into the

local economy and follows a business etiquette similar to Arnie's. The founding principle of Arcady is circumscription: a person's social value determines where he can circulate freely. But those deemed subordinate seem unwilling to comply, and when white fails to appeal as superior, Arcady loses its shape in The Salt Line, as well as its mystical attraction.

Likewise with Arnie's revised version of Notchaki, his difference-based community will not model his white, one-man lead, particularly when that lead is damaging, as with Matteo, or appropriative, as with Barbra K. Supporting difference should not require others' changing. For Arnie to ask others to be like him, or to act as he advises, in order to join forces suggests another kind of racism, perhaps less obvious than Arcady's, but prejudice all the same: not that Carrington's purity needs separating from the untouchables, but that it will dominate through adoption and compulsory similarity. Unlike Arcady, his revised version of Notchaki is not compartmentalized in its layout, with each compartment designating a particular ethnic group or class; rather, its grid stipulates a near and a far, a center and the hinterlands. With this revised picture



difference is a matter of degree, and the more of it one can shed to be like Carrington, the closer she may come to Notchaki's center. There is opportunity to advance toward the core and make connections which before were forbidden, but Arnie's lines of inclusion are still dictatorial and biased.

It would be comforting if Spencer promised the South's continuing distinction and vitality. She does not. In Carrington's mind, what links his revised version of Notchaki to the old Gold Coast is its emphasis on invitation and open reception, but the conditions he sets for others to enter his circle impede their admission. Arnie jeopardizes the essential quality he would like to see characterize his town: he problematizes welcoming by requiring uniformity. Therefore the possibility of "gathering everything up.... everyone we know" is seriously threatened, and at the novel's close, Arnie's collective hangs in the balance (277). However in Spencer's South there is always the risk of losing place, of having borders wiped clear or radically transformed: through social upheaval (Indian Removal or the Civil War), natural disaster, bigotry, or related, the small-scale battles of different parties with competitive

interests. Sometimes too, as with the Buddha's meditative reign in Arnie's back garden, sacred space ebbs because it misses the force of its allurements. What Spencer contributes to a new southern geography is this insistence on losing places as we know them: spatial loss and change are part of human experience and the natural world's cycling. There can be no fixed South, not in practical terms, and for Arnie's revised version of Notchaki to succeed, he must abandon his resolve for a founding, stabilizing center. Like Naylor and Pratt, Spencer also warns that, even if lost, former configurations of places are never *erased* -- there may be physical remnants left that influence newer geographic layouts, or rooted ideological commitments (among inhabitants or builders) that determine where and why current lines are established (between various enclaves of people, for instance, or corporate and private, or natural and industrial). In The Salt Line, there is no such thing as a blank-slate community, even when a hurricane leaves what seems like a decimated landscape: the South will always be marked by its history of white supremacy, violence, and oppression. The key to the region's ongoing existence is whether inhabitants, especially white

southerners, will perceive, and then combat, the effects of bigotry in their own spaces of living, business, and leisure, and whether they can reconcile -- with themselves, and with those mistreated -- with the weight of the past. These are difficult tasks, even when characters like Arnie Carrington are motivated to achieve them, but they are Spencer's challenge for an honest southern multiculturalism.

## Conclusion

### Re-placement Due South

The South today is unfolding -- not unravelling but unfolding. It is edging past stereotypical images of itself, such as Jefferson's yeoman farm, the large plantation house, sharecroppers' shacks, or the quaint small town, as in To Kill a Mockingbird or Walton's Mountain, to assume different looks and social standards. Urban ghettos and gay bars dot every southern metropolis. Atlanta boasts upper-class Black neighborhoods, and even more influential, Miami's Cuban-American sector dominates the city's business and political affairs. Revived interest in folk art has boosted the esteem and economy of once remote mountain communities, like Hiawassee, Georgia or Waynesville, North Carolina. From the southwest to the Carolinas the agricultural work force is primarily Mexican migrant. Perhaps most astonishing, recently a Texas town showed no mercy for the white men who drug a Black man, James Byrd, Jr., to his death in 1998. These new pictures of the South appear radically different from former characterizations because they are what I call multicultural: they center on southern groups who were once ignored or suppressed (most



obviously Blacks, but also, any person other than white, Christian, heterosexual, native southern, and preferably middle-class male), and most of them implicitly critique the region's traditional white power base. Today the South's underside is prone to coming out -- not that these groups or issues have attained wide acceptance from white southerners (although some have), but that they show themselves, they dare ask, they occupy. The wonder is that the region continues at all with such changes, since they rock its founding principles of exclusion. You would think the South might come to be known as something else: flexibility is one thing, but to absorb the *opposite* of what you have stood for suggests something other than addition or modification; it seems to require a new face completely. If the South is beginning to show signs of diversity (or evidence of honest struggle with inclusion), then in its self-conception and self-labeling you would think it might break ties with its historically repressive past. But there it is still -- "the South" -- object of parlance and news polls, a designating point and identity marker, even for thriving minority groups. It disgusts and titillates in David Lynch's Wild at Heart, flaunts rock-and-roll nostalgia and racial exoticism

in John Berendt's travelling Savannah show (which stars real-life figures from his best-seller, Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil), and showcases the glint and sophistication of southern African-American chique in the vignettes of Pearl Cleage or Tina McElroy Ansa's The Hand I Fan With. The South still works and convinces and passes as the South, and despite its overburdened and often negative associations, it is a point of origin or habitation many various people, even oppressed people, are willing to claim as their own.

In this project I have tried to account for the enigma of a multicultural South. I have tried to explain in some measure the oddities of the region's continuing, when its code of white supremacy is slipping, and the particular angle I have used is one constitutive for southern studies, the literary category of place. I focused on place for several reasons: because I could not define southern writing without describing its reference point, the South, and trying to describe the South raises questions about centers, borders, and the strength of proximity; because describing the region is a back-and-forth exercise between determining particulars of a place, and more complex, the meaning of

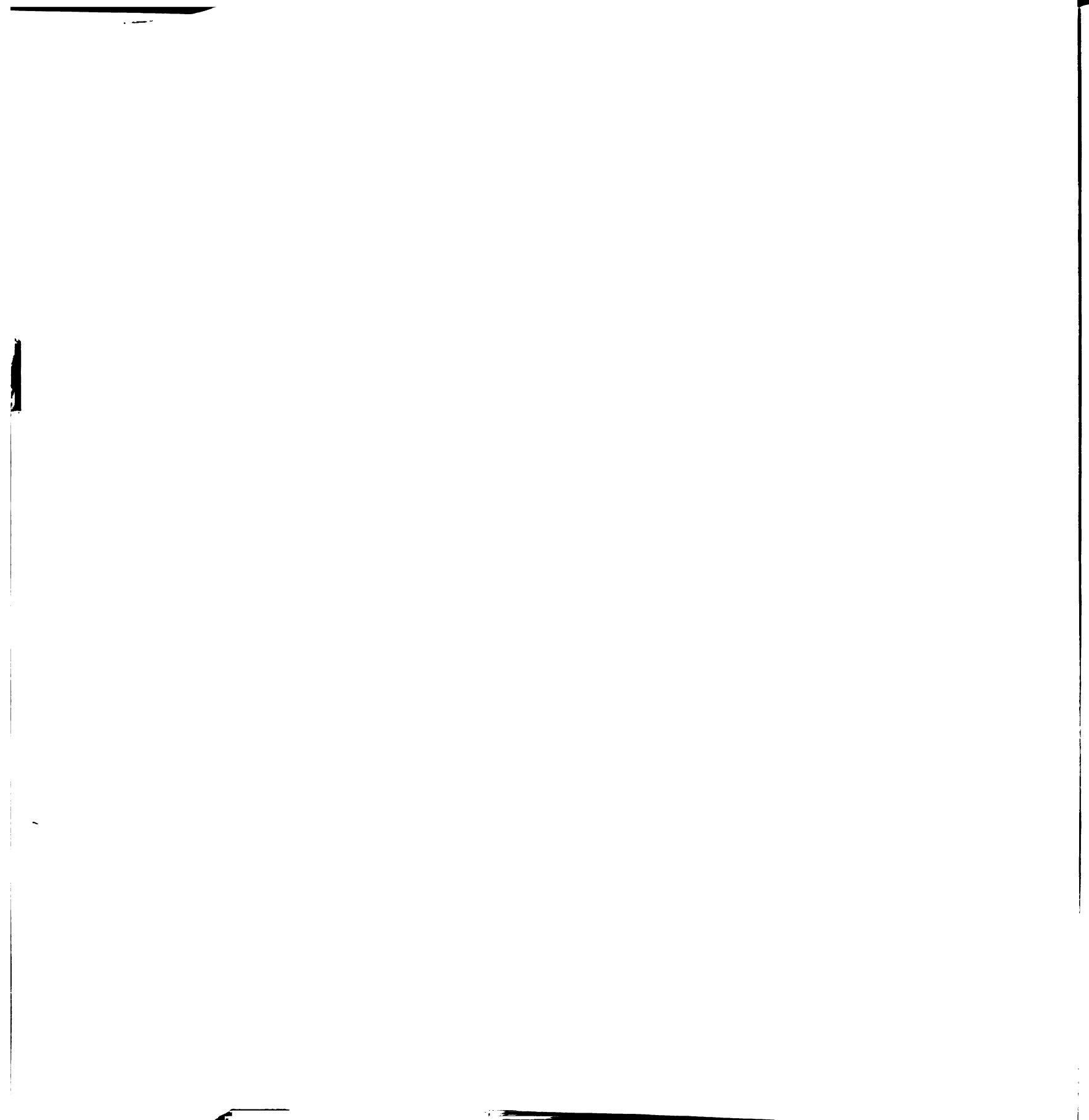
place itself; because literary critics have long distinguished southern writing for its sense of place but have never explained what that entails; and finally, because as a practice and concept multiculturalism invokes shared space, that multiple parties with conflicting interests divvy and mediate common ground. Place is an inevitable battlefield for multicultural tensions. On an everyday, tangible level, it forces choices and competition between parties interested in the same sites or networks: everyone must be somewhere, and most people prefer certain locales over others. Place and multiculturalism intersect over who has a right to be where and on what terms -- who owns, who can visit freely, who trespasses -- so that by dissecting the ways areas are laid out and used, we learn as much about social dynamics of neighboring groups as physical proportions. Place further pertains to multiculturalism because, theoretically, any site indicates a near and a far, a here and a there: establishing the bearings of a locale means figuring its relation to other areas, a situational exercise that must be enacted for various groups to claim, share, or occupy a limited range of turf.



By concentrating on subtleties of place I have recalled one of southern literary criticism's abiding interests. Since scholars began to identify and shape the movement known as the Southern Renaissance in the late 1940s and 50s -- indeed, twenty years earlier, with the Nashville Agrarians -- they have relied on place to fix the validity of regional writing and culture. Some insist that the southern in southern literature rests with a sense of place, a "moonlight and magnolia" quality critics edduce as natural, or self evident, and thereby exempt from analysis. Others stress the necessity of realism for southern scenes. Maintaining that readerly trust legitimizes regional writing, these critics praise literary places mirroring Souths they can identify. To infuse texts with credibility (the power of the familiar) there is no force more constant, or pleasingly subtle, than what by necessity must always be present: backdrop, location, site. Every incident requires a recognizable somewhere.

Southern studies' preoccupation with place extends even further. Scholars construe in literary depictions of the South the complex layers of symbol and theme, tying southern pictures to prescribed cultural conventions; they read place

in books as a panacea, an answer to the helter-skelter changes of the twentieth-century South; and poignantly, they mourn the loss of authentic southern places, convinced of the region's passing. So entwined is the formation of a southern canon with "the South" that within regional scholarship virtually every commentary espouses a philosophy of place, and the range of philosophies is wide. But despite the number and variety of approaches all tend to stabilize the category, and this has been my frustration. In combing southern studies for flexible ideas about place, to help explain the interaction, and even progression, of many discordant Souths within a multicultural South, I have found only structures of homogeneity. Although scholars in the field target different aspects of place (e.g., as intuitive knowledge, verifiable site, or charged ideological image), with regard to its function they each stress conformity: that successful literary depictions of the South share a unique aura; that native southern readers instinctively grasp such an aura; that characteristics of the real South in literature are obvious and may be validated; that the most prominent of southern writers use place in texts to repair their homeland's disintegration.



Also, the southern critic limits place's role to support or prop. He casts it as an immovable grounding point, essential but not transformative and certainly never overpowering -- a foundation for characters and time to spend themselves on. When the worst is over and other elements have given way, that foundation, he councils, will remain, and what remains is the heart of the South.

What I have suggested is a broadening of place. My basis for stretching conventional notions has been the spatial predicaments in contemporary southern women's writing, which southern scholarship, with its emphasis on reliability and cohesion, all but invalidates. For the texts I set out to treat -- all questioning the South's transition from white hegemony to something else, by an African American from New York City, a white lesbian political activist, and a privileged white lady from near the Mississippi Delta -- present place as sheer difficulty. Far from ancillary, in Gloria Naylor's Mama Day, Minnie Bruce Pratt's "Identity: Skin Blood Heart," or Elizabeth Spencer's The Salt Line, place intrudes as an issue or uncertain point of reckoning. Place in these texts upsets personal quests, strips characters of long-held beliefs, and

threatens more loss than security or comfort. These contemporary works enliven place, divulging its movements, its momentum, its propensity for change. They show how place registers and remembers, how it trips characters up. Their interest in place is as an activity rather than passive scene.

Mama Day, "Identity: Skin Blood Heart," and The Salt Line are inexplicable by southern studies' standards, because at root they contradict what the criticism says about place. Mama Day, for example, balks the scholarship's insistence on realism. Naylor spins a bizarre tale from several unlikely threads: her main setting, Willow Springs Island, splits the line between South Carolina and Georgia and thus is controlled by neither ("Willow Springs ain't in no state" [4]); since the antebellum period, the island has been legally possessed by a single African-American family (an astonishing feat at the edge of the Deep South); and eerily, disgruntled Day ghosts stalk characters around Willow Springs, confusing steps and blurring well-worn pathways. Geography itself is a source of agitation, with woods closing in around pilgrims, searches on hallow ground ending in futility, or points of direction vacillating once

African magic holds sway. Further, Mama Day opens with an exotic map of Willow Springs, luring readers across intercoastal waters from their "mainland" experience, but at so many narrative turns Naylor weaves arcs of improbability (such as Berenice's conception at the other place) which impede an audience's crossing over. Although readers do need faith to complete Mama Day with any measure of satisfaction, Naylor withholds familiarity; even for most Black characters, the propositions offered by Willow Springs are outlandish and unthinkable. Trust in the staging of the Day family drama is hard-won and inconceivable and precious. Spatial realism has little room in this bewitching tale about an African American group for whom the dominant perspective (i.e., the southern white man's) has been overthrown and successfully replaced.

Likewise, in "Identity: Skin Blood Heart" Minnie Bruce Pratt uses place to break down her former southern homes, subverting the theory that regional writers idealize the category to mitigate real-life ills. According to Louis Rubin, southern writers cast place in their work as it has ceased to be in their experience: a physical and moral promised land, hierarchically organized. Rubin stipulates

that the decline of an author's immediate surroundings makes her textualize place as quaint, reliable, and uniform. But in "Identity," a sharply politicized personal essay, place is no literary sanctuary. Pratt revisits former inhabitances to show their divisive and devouring ways, how they have caused humiliation and violence and outright murder. Not only does she depict each homesite as distressingly lacking (of human empathy, of unconditional love, of clear vantage points and racial equity), Pratt judges them as *effecting* lack. She learns, for example, her paternal home's foundation is stealing and bigotry; the land Pratt grew up on was taken from Native Americans in the nineteenth century and given to her great-grandfather for his role in the Georgia Indian Wars. Not only Native American, but African American oppression, has bolstered the Pratt family homestead, by means of slavery, and in the twentieth century, cheap labor. Her father's home also generates loss within Pratt. Its inheritance is prejudice, and although Pratt cuts the cord of that birthright, she continues to feel blighted ethically. Or, with a lesbian home Pratt herself builds for protection, there lurks an unexpected abyss: her own intolerance. Pratt's concern for

personal safety (which she learned as a child in rural Alabama) turns into apathy toward other oppressed people, less sheltered than she, a dynamic so disheartening that Pratt forsakes normative constructs of home altogether. Places she has known in the South haunt Pratt until she examines and disposes of those models: her main goal in her new Washington, D. C. neighborhood is avoiding reviving the old. Although Pratt closes "Identity" with a forward-looking glance, hoping for an utopia of peace amid difference, she refrains from structuring such a blueprint. Instead Pratt works to expose the voids of previous southern homes, and in the heat of her candor, those inhabitances figure dangerously as swallowing, groping black holes.

In line with Naylor and Pratt, Elizabeth Spencer upends yet another flagship of southern studies, the arcadian stereotype of the grand old South. In The Salt Line natural disaster wipes out the Golden Coast along the Mississippi Gulf: Hurricane Camille dashes all vestiges of hand-built wooden piers, white columned houses, centuries-old trees and genteel local inns. But staging the death of Arcady is not what sets Spencer apart; since the Agrarians, scholars have lamented the loss of a rural, white-dominated South, heavily



tinged by their nostalgia. What distinguishes Spencer is that, ultimately, she debunks Arcady as tainted. Through her small town's disenchantment with rebuilding old-coast images, Spencer reveals a compromised base for arcadian forms: the assumption that Blacks must be satisfied with their inferior status, that "right" is defined according to personal interests, that a single perspective suffices for various groups. More importantly, Spencer allows characters to move past their grief for Arcady and create a new place standard (a willingness to look for alternatives, a gesture the Agrarians never considered): the special aura of their resurrected community depends on accepting outsiders' difference. By the end of the novel a nucleus based on common pathways forms around a stalwart old-coaster, a hippie-ish art teacher transplanted from Florida, a poorer Black native, and a mob figure from Philadelphia. Tellingly, the old-coaster, who advocates vehemently for Arcady through the first half of The Salt Line, admits that the group's burgeoning chemistry was what he had sought all along. In lieu of a magically touched, aristocratic Golden Coast, which was never the tranquil scene it appeared, Spencer offers generous feeling among misfits to anchor the

growth of her phoenixing town. A "sense of place" in The Salt Line emerges as bonds of concern between disaffected southerners, which obscure their previous boundaries of social separation. Yet Spencer's lines of connection are fragile, as is the certainty her community will hold. She emphasizes how characters must safeguard their relations and resist imposing molds on the group. Place emerges, then, as sheer force of good will and utterly tenuous: a precarious exchange-by-exchange momentum.

If Naylor, Pratt, and Spencer cause older versions of place to stall -- in the sense that the criticism misses their spatial dynamics, for lack of language or adaptability -- at least these writers provide other options. Theorists of place in their own right, they highlight the category by stressing its complications; they force attention to place by making it difficult to manage (i.e., difficult for characters, readers, and Pratt's autobiographical "I"). In Mama Day, "Identity," or The Salt Line, place does not stay put as supporting or transversable background -- not in terms of situating characters or serving as relief for their dramas, not in terms of being easy to walk across, or access, or take charge of. Nor does place function as an

entity marked off and had. With Naylor, Pratt, or Spencer sites resist categorization/possession, because boundaries *fluxuate* between the natural and supernatural, good and bad neighborhoods, and acceptable family structures. Sites in these texts also change with revisiting; that is, the trouble surrounding certain spots compels characters, and Pratt's autobiographical self, to mull over those spots and return, often to find lost nuances (concrete or interpretive "keys" to the site's dilemma) or jarring transformation (the site looks different to the inquirer, or is physically altered). Sometimes scenes change in that they cease to compel, but this too is significant in works preoccupied with the exertion and magnetism of place. Though it assumes a variety of guises, place's primary role in these texts is stirring bewilderment or anxiety: it *confounds*. Each of these writers authorizes hazards or confusion around place, which is why it is so noticeable in their work, which is why I have called on them to define my study.

However spatial predicaments are not the only point for Naylor's, Pratt's, or Spencer's stories, and not for my critical account, either. It is true that these writers refuse to solve place: none offers secure place images, or

answers questions raised by her locales (at least not fully), or insures comfort with regard to orientation. But their refusal to fix place -- in the sense of amending the category -- is itself instructive. That we are left with impasse, home-lessness, or shaky foundations makes us consider, a little harder than we might otherwise, place's function and effects, what its difficulties suggest. The available criticism's explanation, that place in southern literature works toward conformity, fails to apply: Mama Day, "Identity," and The Salt Line do not lend themselves to scenes that seem widely identifiable or feel-good auras drawing "instinctive" readers in. Instead these texts are caught up with people negotiating unfamiliar or distorted Souths: unfamiliar because foreign groups have moved in, or minorities are re-claiming scenes of their former oppression; distorted because white folks realize the perversion of their local geographies, and areas held orthodox or proper begin to appear offensive.

It is precisely because of such multicultural frames that place in these texts is uncertain. In "Identity" and The Salt Line, tables are turned on white characters because their communities' supremacist lines are giving way, folding

to new and peculiar influences. Whites flounder with accustomed spaces because social rules have changed: they must share configurations they once owned, or frequented, exclusively, and it begins to dawn on them how their former possession was unfair. The implications of their ownership are portrayed as injurious, and in Pratt and Spencer's rendering, white figures actually feel guilty about this insight and desire restitution. On the other hand, in Mama Day Black characters enjoy proprietary rights to an extent hard to imagine -- their land can never be taken, even if they wish to sell -- but this reversal of fortune for southern minorities does not clinch an easy relation to place. Willow Springs *denies* the Days what they think it embodies (and what the island itself presses them to look for), the answers to Day origins and African-American essence. The multicultural frame of this novel -- what makes place problematic and what place problematizes -- is this: a dominant group of minorities tries to remain controlling and discrete in their southern domain. They try to find what, exactly, has made them discrete and privileged in their relation to the island, the mystery of the Blackness of the Day southern Black. Willow Springs appears

to be made and conceived for the Days, but ironically, it withholds the secrets of their clear title. And it is because of the Days' unusual, historical empowerment that place in Mama Day is bewildering: there is the clause against selling land, hoaxed into effect by Sapphira Wade's conjuring, or the sacred sites that do not yield full explanations, nettled by Day ghosts whose misfortunes were circumscribed, unknown to them, by a white forefather/master. Naylor's text proves the difficulty of staying front and centered as a minority group in the South, even when the opportunity to do so seems guaranteed. The multicultural ideal of equal allotment does not automatically heal past disenfranchisements: place in Mama Day shows that racism's aftershocks will torment minorities' occupancy for some undetermined time, despite their right and legitimacy to a fair share of the South.

Therefore as to function, Naylor, Pratt and Spencer make place a barometer for the growing pains of diversity. Place blocks, it disguises, it seems to come unhinged or constantly be improvised, because it charts a profound changing of the guard. White southerners unused to marginal spaces begin to make room for other people; alternately,

Black characters assume prime locations/positions, but not without struggle; and in general, an equitable distribution of limited resources is sought. As an activity to be worked through or complication raising tough issues, place in these texts measures progress toward difference -- toward forcing difference, reconciling with difference, toward realizing the fulness of difference. Even place's stalemates or moral quandaries are fundamentally constructive: in Naylor's case, they withhold the mysteries of Black essence but encourage the positing of collective identity; in Pratt's and Spencer's, they induce guilt, and then more positively, urge the correction of social wrongs based on personal responsibility. In Mama Day, "Identity: Skin Blood Heart," and The Salt Line, place indicates the work to be done in building inclusive, and minority-strengthened, Souths.

As a critic who believes literature matters in the ways we shape and interpret our lives, my hope is that texts like the ones I have analyzed, which experiment liberally with the application, "southern," while remaining committed to its viability, will begin to make more of a mark. I hope scholars and students of southern studies will take better

notice, because frankly I like these texts' politics.

Perhaps as we southerners determine benefits for Hispanic migrant workers, for example, or approaches to revitalizing urban ghettos, or the suitability of chain-gang labor and Confederate flags hoisted over state capitols, we might do well to consider the South's misdeeds and how we can make amends. I think assuming responsibility for old wrongs is the best way to feed the flame of the region's vitality.

What this study has taught me, to my surprise and pleasure, is that the South might actually hold as territory perceptibly different from the rest of the nation. But only as we open its interior demarcations graciously -- not the lines defining the South's perimeter so much as those closest to us, that we abide by every day.



## Appendix

## Appendix

In my reading of The Salt Line I pay close attention to Elizabeth Spencer's white liberal main character, Arnie Carrington, and his blind spots in helping establish a version of Notchaki based on inclusion and welcoming. To his credit, Arnie abandons an Arcadian vision for Notchaki's rebuilding, because he grasps how profoundly deception and injustice mar its contours (even as seductive as those shapes seem to him). Unfortunately, though, Arnie makes some of the same mistakes with the newer Notchaki as he did with its nostalgic counterpart: he is willing to betray and swindle if he perceives a greater good; he scrupulously protects his own interests; and, he treats his Black lover, Barbra K, condescendingly, assuming she will rally others around his interests out of debt to his favor and financial generosity. In line with these ego-centrisms, Arnie takes for granted that he defines the chemistry stirring among his unlikely community of friends, and to the end, expects others to metamorphose according to his agenda for the group.

Carrington's example shows there can be no inside track for those who want to deal with a divergent and

multicultural South. Arnie may have the wanting, but his mistake is that he cannot get over being white, cannot let go of the idea that he holds the reins for his group's identity. Arnie's South is not shareable in that he retains the right to speak fully for others, especially his Black lover, Barbra K. Crucially, the trouble with his example pertains to me personally and other white critics involved in southern studies.

It is not always wrong to speak for others. Linda Alcoff has argued persuasively that speaking for others must be a political priority when encountering oppressed groups with no viable means for communication; to the extent that we are able, we have to help them gain footing and let their causes be heard. But more often than not speaking for others assumes a position of arrogance or mastery and may insult or disempower those spoken for. It corners them as victims and mitigates the effect of what they might say. Rather than stimulating change or improvement, speaking for others can reinforce the social hierarchies that disenfranchise certain people in the first place. So while we need to retain the practice for extreme instances where subjugation leaves few alternatives, when we do decide to

Speak out for someone else, we have to pay attention to the context of our conversation; whether our intervention is appropriate depends on the situation. Above all, Alcoff warns, we must always be responsible for what we say.

As white critics of southern literature, born of a tradition that was wont to acknowledge non-white or gay writing, much less critical voices different from our own, we have to be careful of how we change our all-white, middle-class look. We have to be careful of how we teach and write about minority southern writers. We must not speak for them in the sense that we act as if we have just discovered them, act as if we are doing these writers a favor by reading them alongside Wolfe or Welty, or congratulate ourselves that our attention to them fills the holes in our canon and assuages our bigotry in the academy. We cannot claim them as southern without juxtaposing their history, traditions, and writerly contexts with the white hegemony of southern literary production. We cannot claim them as southern without revising what southern itself pertains to, and we must account for their influence on definitions of regionalism, not pretend these writers are and have been an extra, foreign element. Most especially,

we must not speak for minority writers by pretending our assessments of them are primary, ignoring the cultural heritage from which they spring or the fact that scholars of color have been talking about them for some time.

When two of southern literature's most highly esteemed critics, Fred Hobson and Lewis Simpson, both end their studies (or introductions to their studies) of exclusively white writers by forecasting the future dominance of southern Black artistry, this lets me know that as white critics we still have a long way to go.<sup>1</sup> We need to make our critical practice match the actual diversity of southern culture and literary output: instead we are continuing to build a white tradition, with the offbeat apology that we spy minority contributors in the wings ("you first heard about them here, folks"). We are speaking for minority writers in the worst possible way: showing that we are politically correct enough to acknowledge them but implying that they fail to measure up for this particular study and with these particular white writers. We take credit for being multiculturally aware, but heaven forbid we should actually treat Black writers in detail -- our reference to them is a promissory note for future scholars.

There are better examples to follow among southern literary critics, scholars who not only nod to minority writers but respect them with serious treatment. One is William Andrews, whose massive volume, To Tell a Free Story (1986), traces the evolution of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century African-American autobiography; so extensive and painstaking is Andrews' research that the work remains, thirteen years later, a touchstone in its field, referenced heavily by anyone who deals with the genre. In fact across his career Andrews has edited or written forwards for scarcely-known (at the time) Black southern texts (e.g., Charles Chesnutt's The House Behind the Cedars) and published articles on Frederick Douglass, Elizabeth Keckley, and Booker T. Washington, to name a few. Significantly, he specifies time and again the debt of his work to Black literary scholarship; throughout his criticism Andrews reviews influential studies by George M. Fredrickson or James Olney, for example, comparing his assertions to theirs, or in the process of writing, solicits aid and advice from such giants as Henry Louis Gates, Jr. and Robert Stepto. Another white literary critic who tests the traditional southern canon is Minrose Gwin, whose first

book, Black and White Women of the Old South: The Peculiar Sisterhood in American Literature (1985) treats the complex and often schizophrenic relations between Black and white women in plantation novels and neo-slave narratives. Gwin has also testified poignantly to the distractions and hazards, as a critic and university professor, of being white, of "attempting to teach black women's studies at a former military university in the land of Robert E. Lee" ("A Theory" 22). In "A Theory of Black Women's Texts and White Women's Readings, or... The Necessity of Being Other," Gwin holds her own fear and humiliation at bay as she reads *herself* in Black women's texts -- that is "not just as the person I am or would hope to be but as the more general (and thereby highly problematic) signifier of white women" (22). Without making excuses for all the reasons she is not those white female characters she so loathes in Black women's texts, Gwin tries fully to absorb the distrust Black women have historically felt for their white counterparts. She tries to listen to what Black female writers and students have to say without answering back defensively -- answering back would take the edge off their accusations, and Gwin is convinced that the accusations should rightfully make her

smart. Hers is not a social criticism that supplies answers. At the end of the article Gwin does not suggest what we all should do, we Black and white women in southern contexts, to talk freely and work together; all too often, she recognizes, white women in the South have been Breakers of Promises, exploiting Black women physically, economically, emotionally, and have been quick to abandon common causes of gender to side with the long arm of white husbands and Jim Crow law. White women have profited mightily from Black women's oppression. Gwin seems to say that rather than erase that legacy and move on, we white women need to sit down and let Black women speak their peace, as she herself does by closing with a long quote from one of her Black women students, who is fed up with "well-meaning white friends" who have disclosed, "But can't you help your black sisters understand that we want to help them?" (31).

Drawing on the examples of Andrews and Gwin, for white critics to teach and write about minority southern literature respectfully, a second thing we must do is immerse ourselves in minority critical traditions. Houston A. Baker, Jr.'s scholarship on Black authors and the blues



should inform our discussions as much as Lewis Simpson's dispossessed garden. We need to be familiar with Booker T. Washington and W. E. B. DuBois's classic debates over the position of Blacks in the South, Lillian Smith's articles and speeches condemning the southern New Critics ("No writers in literary history have failed their region as completely as they did"), and Arna Bontemps' suasion that Blacks should reclaim the South and follow through on the implications of Martin Luther King, Jr. addressing Lyndon B. Johnson as "my fellow Southerner" (Smith 199, Bontemps 332). We need to know who Blanche McCrary Boyd is, why her personal essays have been so prized by The Village Voice, why Dorothy Allison calls Boyd's The Redneck Way of Knowledge "a cultural masterpiece" (Introduction to the Vintage Edition of Redneck xii). We need to recognize how minority critics have championed Black, or gay, or Jewish writers as *indelibly* southern (there is plenty of precedent for southern applying to non-white), how these critics have been imaging Souths fundamentally different from conventional American stereotypes of the South. In 1993 the African American Review dedicated two issues to the Black South, "a region in motion," featuring such articles as

"Black South Literature," "Black South Culture," and "The Black South in Contemporary Film" (27.1, p. 6).<sup>2</sup> More recently, the guest editors of American Literature, Houston A. Baker, Jr. and Dana D. Nelson, forwarded a call for papers for a special issue on "Violence, the Body, and 'The South,'" with marked attention toward "the specificity of violence against human bodies -- especially African American bodies."<sup>3</sup>

But as Minnie Bruce Pratt or Minrose Gwin would warn, we white southern critics need to be careful. As surely as we must instruct ourselves and our students about the Black South, the gay South, the South of Oriental immigrants and migrant workers, we need to know our place relative to minority writers and scholars. We should be aware of these other traditions, we should teach them and keep up with their developments, but our attention must not, must not ever resemble appropriation. I mean this particularly for the Black literary and critical tradition, which has steadily been gaining ground in the past ten years and whose leaders and participants would rightly scoff at our slumming -- if slumming is the attitude we take, acting as if we are "coming down" from the establishment to other exciting,

forbidden levels. We must not swoop minority traditions under our wing, but we can treat the Black southern heritage as central, examine its intersections and impasses with white southern literature, and most crucial of all, carefully and honestly study the implications of our own academic racism. In the spirit of Minrose Gwin's piece on "The Necessity of Being Other," or Michael Kreyling's troubling critique of cultural amnesia in the work of Louis Rubin, Jr., I think the weightiest job for white southern academics is unraveling how *our being white* has affected regional scholarship. To be responsible for what we have said and condoned in the past, for the ways, as Kreyling charges, we turned our backs on the Civil Rights movement by worshipping literary image over concrete experience (and separating the two), we have to figure the meaning of race not just for the writers we study but for the pronouncements we have made. And rather than take offense at attempts by ourselves and others to hold our scholarship accountable, such as Louis Rubin has done in offhand remarks at conferences, we need wisely to remember Blanche McCrary Boyd's charge, "Like every white American I've ever encountered, I am a racist," and the awful certainty with

which she quotes a seasoned Black friend, "White people is all the same story" (146-47). We need to keep quiet a little and listen and take our prejudice to heart, and when we do make pronouncements it should be with a sense of the shakiness of our authority. It is absolutely essential that we acknowledge our racism, clarify the ways we have blocked others from the qualifier, southern, and disavow those practices, or otherwise I despair that minority scholars will ever join our conversations. A sensitive and contrite criticism is what I am calling for, first of all because it is the right thing to do, but equally important, because minority critics will continue to dismiss white southern scholars if we act as if everything is peachy, every problem is past, and why can't we all just get along.

Finally, a word about my use of we. I have employed it throughout this conclusion to indicate other scholars of southern literature who are white, most of whom are also southern. My experiences in graduate school at UNC-Chapel Hill and an assortment of southern literary conferences have led me to think that people who identify themselves as scholars of southern culture are nearly each of them white, and that, for perhaps three exceptions, scholars of minority

southern writing do not call themselves *southern* critics, but critics of, for example, African-American literature. Certainly at southern literary conferences the audiences are almost exclusively white, and so are the panels and panel topics. I hope that in ten or fifteen years my use of the word *southern* will seem archaic, maybe so horribly out of place as to sound prejudiced. I hope *southern* itself will still be around. But the only way *southern* will continue to be meaningful, I believe, is if it applies to so many different ethnicities and orientations -- with representatives of those groups actively involved as *southern* scholars -- that my designation here will strike people as grossly outdated. I hope that *southern* as critics now know it (and know ourselves) falls apart enough to *disperse* and thereby keep its head above water in the turf-wars of popular American culture.

Notes

## Notes

### Introduction

<sup>1</sup> See George E. Pozzetta's "Ethnic Life" (401-04), Roger Daniels's "Asian Groups" (418-21), and Carlos E. Cortes's "Mexicans" (437-38), all in Encyclopedia of Southern Culture (Eds. Charles Reagan Wilson and William Ferris). See also David R. Goldfield's "Urbanization" (34). Although since the 1970s Pozzetta notes an increase in the South of "Vietnamese exiles, Mexican migrant laborers, Cuban 'boatlifters,' Haitian refugees, and other Latin American immigrants," he also forcibly reminds that the South was never exclusively Black and white; in the colonial South, for instance, there were scores of Native American tribes (Lumbee, Seminole, Cherokee, Choctaw, etc.), and in the port cities especially, like Charleston, New Orleans, and Baltimore, communities of French Huguenots, Sephardic Jews, Germans, and Spaniards settled in ethnic enclaves (404).

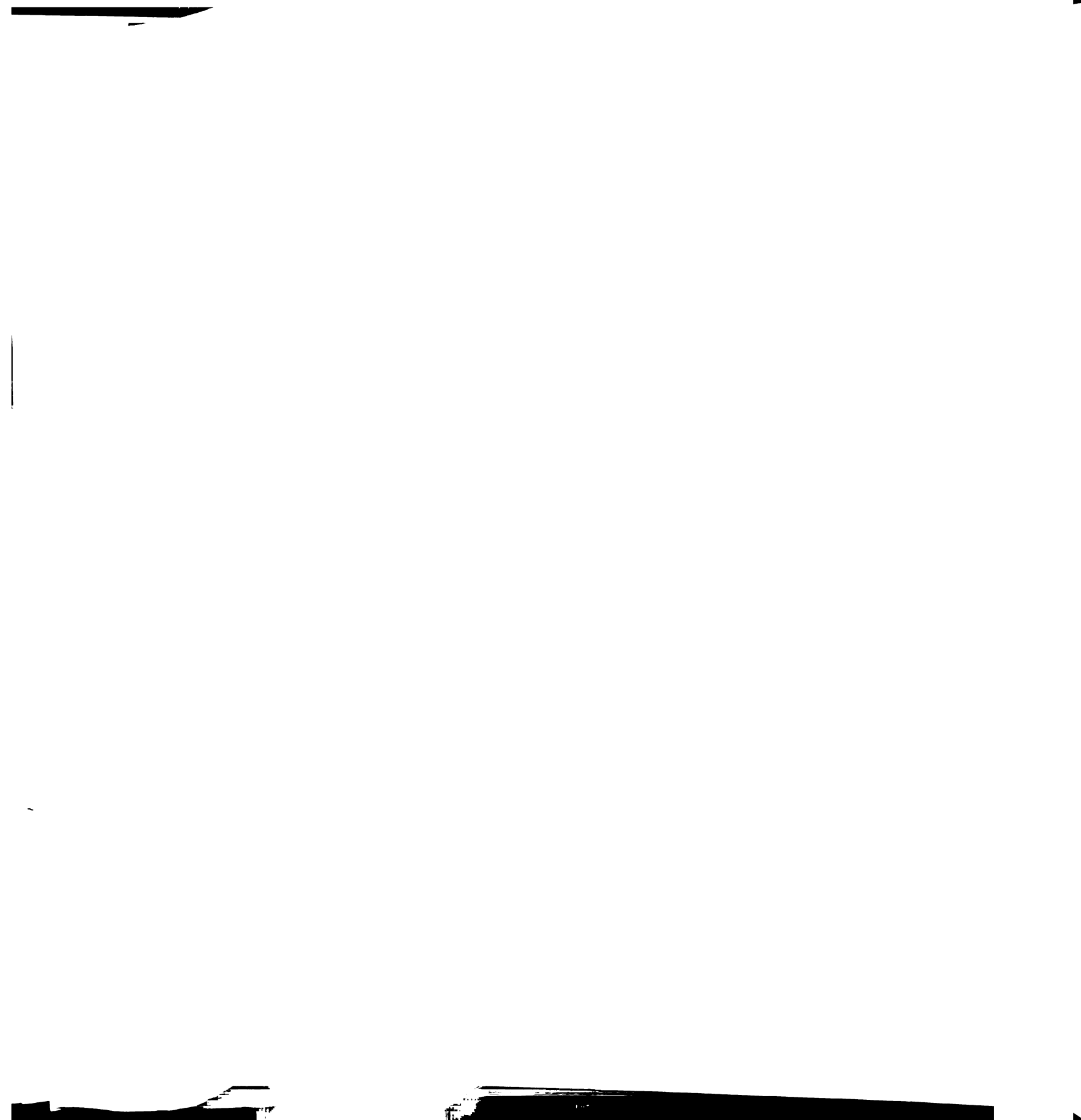
<sup>2</sup> On Black in-migration to the South, see Campbell, Johnson, and Stangler (514-28); Marcus E. Jones (97-98); Rabinowitz (110-11); Preston (189-90); and Goldfield's Promised Land: The South Since 1945 (1987). Using 1990 census figures, Philip Perlmutter argues that Blacks constitute 67.1 percent

of the population in Atlanta, 65.8 percent in Washington, D.C., 63.3 percent in Birmingham, 61.9 percent in New Orleans, and 59.2 percent in Baltimore [notably, Black mayors have served in Atlanta, Washington, Birmingham, and New Orleans] (21). On the 1965 Civil Rights Act and resulting increase of Black registered voters and elected Black officials in the South, see Scher (246-58); Clark Hine (183-84); Rabinowitz (111-112); and Preston (189-92).

<sup>3</sup> In My Tears Spoiled My Aim (1993) sociologist John Shelton Reed claims that one out of every eight people living in the South have transferred from the North -- mostly to fast-growing southern cities like Atlanta, Charlotte, Austin, and the triangle-area of North Carolina, where high-tech industries have been booming, and along the edges of the South (northern Virginia, the Ozarks, Texas, and Florida) (130-34). Northern retirees, Reed contends, come to the South just because they like it better than home (134). See also Raymond Arsenault on the air-conditioning revolution; and Dewey Grantham on the 1970s influx of elderly migrants to the South (265).

<sup>4</sup> One recent incident which highlights southern farmers' dependence on Mexican migrant workers is the furious





response of Georgia farmers and congressmen to an Immigration and Naturalization Services raid on illegal immigrants in Vidalia, Georgia, in May 1998. The raid occurred in the middle of onion-harvesting season and sent most seasonal workers' packing; but before the onion crop rotted, Georgia congressmen worked a compromise with the INS which allowed illegal immigrants to return unscathed (Bixler, "Immigration Law Enforcement Can Depend on Labor Needs" and "They Come with a Will to Work and a Hope for a Better Life," D1). On migrant farming as a staple of southern agriculture, see also Daniel Rothenberg's With These Hands: The Hidden World of Migrant Farmworkers Today (1990).

<sup>5</sup> Howard N. Rabinowitz writes decisively, "since the early 1970s, southern schools have become more integrated than northern ones, in part because of the artificially forced nature of much of the original segregation and the success of busing and other court-ordered measures" (112). See also Gary Orfield et al, School Segregation in the 1980s: Trends in the United States and Metropolitan Areas (1987).

<sup>6</sup> Dewey W. Grantham writes convincingly of the South's embrace of FDR's programs and how federal support

transformed southerners' political leanings. The New Deal "helped create a politics of class and economic interest in the South.... It both reinforced southerners' regional self-consciousness and heightened their awareness of being an integral part of the nation" (338). The South could no longer conceive of itself as an entity outside of Washington's reach. On the growth of southern agribusiness and decline of small-to-medium-sized family farms, see Charles Reagan Wilson (13-15), Grantham (26-61), and Hirsh (8.A).

<sup>7</sup> On the ever-enlarging Spanish-speaking population in the South, particularly concentrated in Texas and Florida, see Perlmutter (17, 19-20); see also Deborah Jackson (writing about Greensboro, North Carolina) (R1); and Mark Bixler (writing about southeast Georgia) (D1).

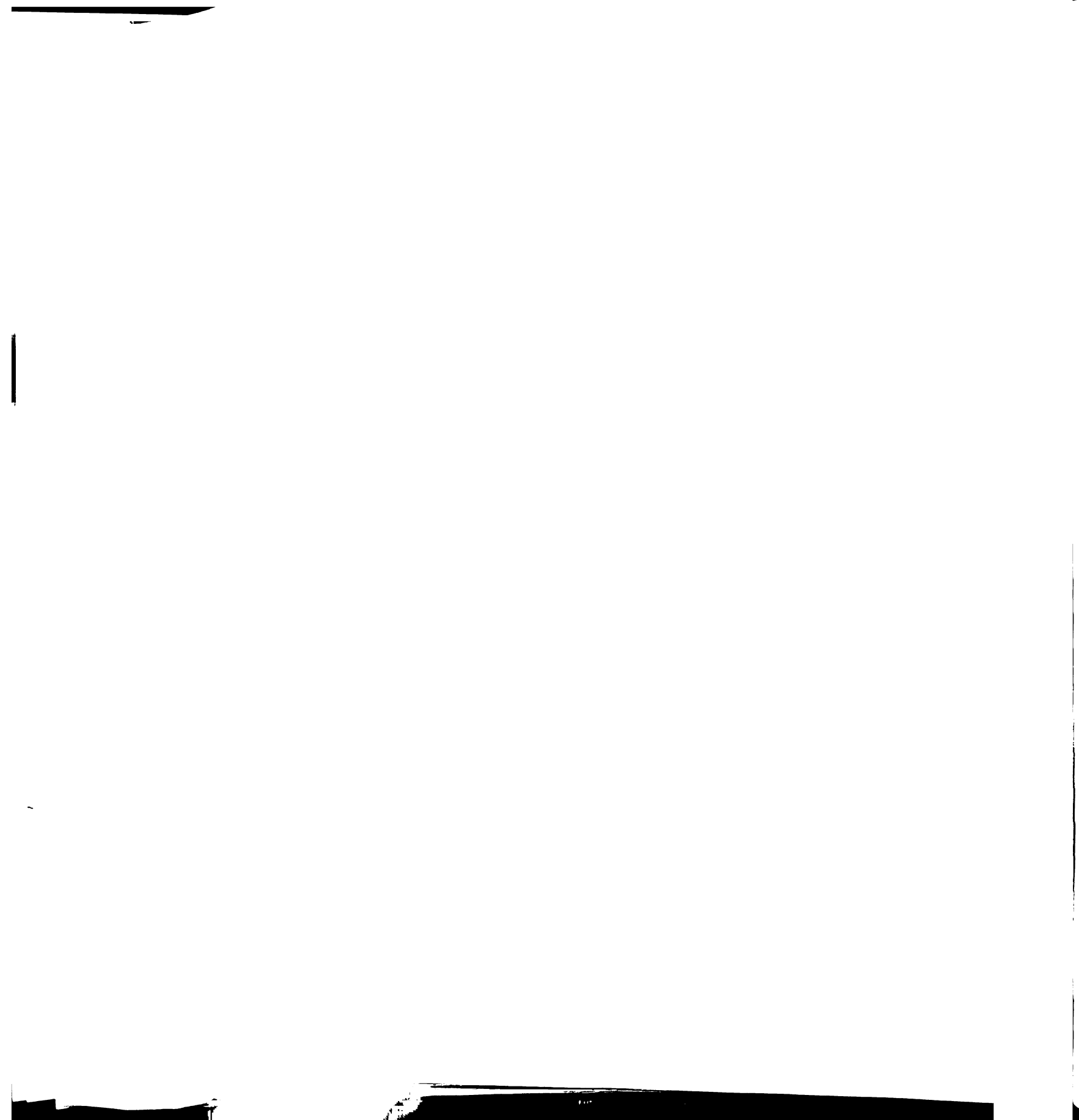
<sup>8</sup> See Elizabeth Spencer's memoir, Landscapes of the Heart (1998), particularly her chapters "Homecoming" and "Leave-taking."

## Chapter One

### Measuring Southern Measures

<sup>1</sup> Michael Kreyling posits in blanket fashion (seeming to yawn), "A common sense of place... is often invoked as the foundation of the literary history of the South; some version of Woodward's 'burden' formula is most frequently applied as history" (234). Kathryn Lee Seidel frankly sizes up, "The preeminence of place in all of southern literature is by now such a cliché that one may be tempted to look instead for other influences" (18). And best capturing the critical irritation with this over-used yet perplexing term, Noel Polk wonders if "the whole idea of the separate southern 'place' is too much with us" ("The Southern Literary Pieties," 33).

<sup>2</sup> See, for example, Robert W. Daniel's "Eudora Welty: The Sense of Place"; Noel Polk's "The Critics and Faulkner's 'Little Postage Stamp of Native Soil,'""; Elmo Howell's "Eudora Welty and the Use of Place in Southern Fiction"; Frederick J. Hoffman's "The Sense of Place"; or Jan Nordby Gretlund's Eudora Welty's Aesthetics of Place.



<sup>3</sup> Although I treat Eudora Welty at length in this section, one could also consult Jan Nordby Gretlund's Eudora Welty's Aesthetics of Place, which focuses on the "pronounced out-of-life-into-fiction tendency in Welty's writing" and questions what the artist's Mississippi scenes point to (3, 5). Comparing Welty to Anton Chekhov for her "realism" and (in the next sentence) for the fact that "whatever [she] write[s], it is always wedded to place" (13), Gretlund praises a young Welty who learned early to evoke places she knew familiarly in her settings (34-36). The Mississippi in Welty's fiction "serves as 'a gateway to reality,'" confirming the writer's importance to cultural studies of her home state and her characters' spokesmanship for "Southern life" (346-47). At the heart of this study Gretlund regards Welty's work as "representative of the collective experience of the South from the Depression, through WW II, and up through the civil rights battles of the 1960s to the present" (1). Similar to Gretlund, the critic Robert Daniel is amazed by the creditability of Welty's settings, "which are real enough to touch" (276). In Daniel's view, readers warm to Welty's place depictions because she appeals to their own reference points: "Take the

Peacocks' shack [in The Ponder Heart], where the funeral is held: we already know, from the sentence introducing them into the story, what kind of place it will be. The details of it... individualize it unforgettably. Outside, the tire with red verbena growing in it; on the porch, portulaca in pie pans and, of course, the mirror; inside, the cracks on the floor and chickens under your feet. And all of it authenticated by the broom standing behind the door! How could skepticism greet a story that happens in such undeniably real places?" (276-77)

It is one thing to claim an author's finest writing is rooted in (and indebted to) real-life locales, but two other bodies of criticism, Wolfe's and Faulkner's, probe supposed prototypes of fictional settings in nearly maddening detail. For guidebook-like studies of Asheville/Altamont (or comparing Wolfe's fiction to the mountain region of western North Carolina), see, for example, Floyd Watkins's Thomas Wolfe's Characters (1957), Anthony Channell Hilfer's "Wolfe's Altamont: The Mimesis of Being," Elmo Howell's "Thomas Wolfe and the Sense of Place," or Floyd Watkins's "Thomas Wolfe and Asheville Again and Again and Again." For one-to-one correspondences between Oxford, Mississippi and

Faulkner's Jefferson, see Ward Miner's The World of William Faulkner, Elizabeth Kerr's Yoknapatawpha: Faulkner's "Little Postage Stamp of Native Soil", G. T. Buckley and Calvin Brown's PMLA debate in the early 1960s (Buckley's "Is Oxford the Original Jefferson in William Faulkner's novels?" and Brown's "Faulkner's Geography and Topography"), and Charles Aiken's "Faulkner's Yoknapatawpha Country: A Place in the American South."

<sup>4</sup> Certainly Welty keeps good company with her emphasis on place framing character. In the place-oriented essay featured in Rubin and Jackson's Southern Renaissance, "Time and Place in Southern Fiction," H. Blair Rouse contends that setting, skillfully rendered, "involve[s] the life of the characters in such a way that the reader comes to understand these people as living in a physical world possessing specific characteristics and a true and actual location" (135). In Rouse's view setting transcends props when it evokes a particular mood, comprises a character's physical and spiritual "room," or influences characters' lives to the extent that it, too, "becomes an actor in the structure of the work" (138). Even with regard to mood, the aspect which might appear least affected by character, Rouse manages to



use fictional personages as criterion. If atmosphere overwhelms character and action, an author has gone too far: "the reader almost loses sight of narrative entirely and may realize the central characters... only as clusters of attitudes, customs, superstitions" (140). Hence place potentially threatens; it should not impress for its own sake, apart from character development. More properly, setting can speak to "the poetry of human existence" by conjuring sensory impressions directly linked to characters' experience (140-41). Rouse praises one of Paul Green's scenes, for instance, because it is "vividly present in all its sights, sounds and smells, with its varied implications for the whites and Negroes who lived there" (141). And no doubt best of all, place may achieve a sort of "spiritual stature" when it simultaneously captures "the ideal" and "utterly factual actuality," and when, as with Faulkner, readers grasp "just what was the physical world of his people and what it meant to them, how it affected them and how it was affected by them" (142-43). All these cases of potentially "good" scenes -- in terms of mood, an individual's meaning-charged space, or sacred space -- share the common denominator of character "revelation and

interpretation" (137). There is a strong sense with Rouse's essay that characters must metamorphose, must either wax or wane, and that place surpasses its humble origins by stirring the individual to act.

Other critics who follow this scene-serving-character impulse include W. R. Moses, Francois Pitavy, and James Watson, all of whom write on Faulkner. In "The Limits of Yoknapatawpha County" Moses argues, "Though Faulknerian characters may be morally very good or bad, spiritually very splendid or base, they are doomed to certain types of experience... by the fact that they are dwellers in Yoknapatawpha County" (297). Pitavy offers the following thesis in "The Landscape in Light in August": "Faulkner's scenery is indeed always inhibited, one way or another, seen by a character or related to his consciousness.... It is thus not surprising that the landscape should have a strange resemblance with the characters inhabiting it, and be endowed with both their unreality and their haunting presence" (265). And James Watson's "Faulkner: The House of Fiction" purports that in much of Faulkner's work "houses so profoundly render the reality of place because they are so closely tied to and expressive of the characters' own sense



of place -- not just as a physical but as a spiritual, psychological, and moral reality" (136).

<sup>5</sup> Other critics who conceive of place as a stabilizing influence include Eudora Welty, who, as I have already noted, believes, "Sense of place gives equilibrium; extended, it is sense of direction too.... it is the sense of place going with us still that is the ball of golden thread to carry us there and back and in every sense of the word to bring us home," and further assures, "It is through place that we put out roots, wherever birth, chance, fate or our traveling selves set us down; but where those roots reach toward... is the deep and running vein, eternal and consistent and everywhere purely itself, that feeds and is fed by the human understanding. The challenge to writers today, I think, is not to disown any part of our heritage" (128-29, 133); Frederick Clifford Dowdey and Donald Davidson, who both view the South as "the" motivating force behind any authentic southern writer ("An Inherited Obligation" and "The Talking Oaks of the South," respectively); Mina Gwen Williams, whose dissertation The Sense of Place in Southern Fiction holds that modern southern novelists glean overarching, "cosmic implications"

from "the complexities of their region," and also suggests that their manipulation of "geography, climate, traditions, rituals, religion, humor, and memory, to name several aspects of place" can evoke for the reader "the transcendent uniqueness of a specific locale" (vi, iv); and Christopher Edward Arthur, whose dissertation, *Possibilities of Place: The Fiction of William Faulkner* offers, "The places [Faulkner's characters] inhabit provide some sort of counter to the erosions of time, some sense of continuity and stability," and advances an entire chapter on the "sacred center" (in the form of the pilgrim's destination) at the heart of Faulkner's canon (4, 107-31).

<sup>6</sup> Lucinda MacKethan's *The Dream of Arcady: Place and Time in Southern Literature* is in many ways a more nearly full analysis of Simpson's Arcady thesis than that found in *The Dispossessed Garden*: MacKethan follows Old South images in nineteenth- and twentieth-century writers and devotes a chapter to "The South Beyond Arcady" (207-17). Kathryn Lee Seidel (*The Southern Belle in the American Novel*), Elizabeth Jane Harrison (*Female Pastoral: Women Writers Re-Visioning the American South*), and Louise Westling (*Sacred Groves and Ravaged Gardens: The Fiction of Eudora Welty, Carson*

McCullers, and Flannery O'Connor) each engage feminine metaphors of the South. Seidel is interested in depictions of the Reconstructed South as fallen (raped) white woman (18-25, 135-46, 146-47), and Harrison in the ways southern women writers overturn images of the land as feminine to establish "an empowering bond with nature" for female characters (9). Westling examines Flannery O'Connor's pagan-mythic locations, the "feminine sacredness" in Eudora Welty's fields, rivers, and woods (179), and Carson McCullers's "claustrophobic," female-inhibiting spaces (181). William T. Ruzicka's Faulkner's Fictive Architecture: The Meaning of Place in the Yoknapatawpha Novels proposes five levels of fictive architecture in the Yoknapatawpha cycle, each of which corresponds with and "concretiz[es]" an individual, group of people, or humanity in general: the room, the dwelling, townscapes, landscapes, and cosmic space (114-115).

<sup>7</sup> Simpson is loath to claim that Kennedy intentionally promoted anti-slavery sentiments. Instead Simpson charges that Kennedy was himself "puzzled" by "the pattern of ambivalence that comprises the inner structure" of Swallow

Barn, and that the author's "attempt at a pastoral ratification of slavery" is at best "uncertain" (49-50, 51).

<sup>8</sup> The Nashville Agrarians' famous manifesto, I'll Take My Stand, which I treat at length in this section, was written expressly to retard the South's demise in the face of twentieth-century industrialism. Louis Rubin shares the Twelve Southerners' fear in The Lasting South, as he remonstrates: "The South is in danger today of losing its most precious possession, that regional quality, and the enemy is just as much within as without [he identifies the enemy as "modernity" in the next paragraph]. So subtle is that enemy and so apparently natural and inevitable, that it is mostly not even recognized for being an enemy. Instead it is being greeted with enthusiasm by the very people who should be most suspicious of it" (2). Echoing the Agrarians Rubin believes the South's "greatest challenge" is curbing the "menaces" of industrialism (14-15); Cleanth Brooks worries over watered-down southern speech and the region's tendency toward American "standardization" ("Southern Literature: The Past, History, and the Timeless" 14-15). While other scholars trace patterns of a dying South across the southern canon, they are less want to ascribe to the

blues themselves, to further the alarm over the South's lifespan with their own political comments. See, for example, Lucinda MacKethan's The Dream of Arcady or Philip Castille's "East Toward Home: Will Percy's Old World Vision."

## Chapter Two

### Mama Day and the Trouble with Maps

<sup>1</sup> According to Lindsey Tucker ("Recovering the Conjure Woman: Texts and Contexts in Gloria Naylor's Mama Day, pp. 180-81), the customs passed from Sapphira Wade to her offspring recall the BaKongo and Yorubu groups, who inhabit sections along the west African coast. I hypothesize Sapphira's west African origins based on Tucker's analysis of the magico-religious traditions in Mama Day.

<sup>2</sup> Most islanders, for example, cut a wide swath around "the other place," the Day family homestead, because they believe the old house to be haunted and are unable (or unwilling) to pinpoint the sources there of previous generations' discontent. Or even the novel's aging griot, Miranda (Mama) Day, who from childhood has roamed the rough wildlands of Willow Springs as if they were inscribed on the back of her



hand -- even she has trouble negotiating the west woods as she strains (unsuccessfully) to catch snatches of ancestors' voices, a centuries'-old argument repeating along a late-night, shadowy path (117-118). Or more gravely still, when Miranda's grandniece Ophelia is dying, and the older woman realizes she must fathom the Days' legendary curse out at the other place to save the family line, Miranda searches frantically, lost in her own birth home, but *for what* she has no idea. In the same vein, Ophelia's New-York-bred husband, George Andrews, is directed to a specific location for information regarding the same curse, but he cannot will himself to go. Driven to near-madness by a hurricane, his wife's illness, and skepticism over Willow Springs' African magico-religious traditions, George is unable to accept that Ophelia's forebears' mistakes are affecting her condition; correspondingly, he can barely discern one end of the island from another, and his steps are labored, misdirected, as if he trudges along in a quagmire.

<sup>3</sup> I recognize that my interpretation of the second bridge at the bottom of the map is questionable: does it extend from the mainland out toward the Atlantic, or perhaps from the island back toward Savannah? I read it the first way,

because of its sense of direction: its flowers "side" with the drawing of South Carolina and Georgia, and the bridge extends from the flowers out toward the larger drawing of Willow Springs.

<sup>4</sup> I think non-white readers *should* have a sense of trespass and that Naylor wills it so. The only white character in the novel, beside Bascombe Wade, is a deputy sheriff from beyond the bridge who addresses islanders as "nigger this and nigger that" (80). Miranda concocts an awful storm and has "that boy wandering down in the cypress swamp" before he learns to speak respectfully to locals -- and also learns Willow Springs is "a place where he had no business anyway" (80-81).

I do not assume that all readers read the same, or that every reader's confusion with Mama Day is identical to another's. As a critic, I need to be honest about my experience and background, about my limits in reading. It would be naive and irresponsible for me to assume that my uncertainty regarding Willow Springs is the same as a Black reader's. I do believe that Black readers can have or desire an affinity with this place that I, a white reader, cannot and should not claim. Having said that, it would

also be naive and irresponsible for me to dismiss place confusion as "a white thing" and as my own problem, because Naylor seizes on important aspects of dislocation through the experiences of her African-American characters.

<sup>5</sup> Historically, a major component of Black nationalist theory in the United States has been an urge for African Americans to return to Africa, or at the very least, garner their values and political principles from African cultures. In 1829, with the publication of Appeal to the Colored Citizens, David Walker advanced the notion that American Blacks would never truly realize freedom until they returned to African soil. Toward the end of the century, Alexander Crummell and Bishop Henry M. Turner stirred considerable support for back-to-Africa political momentum. But the figure most famously associated with international amity among all Black people and Pan-Africanism is Marcus Garvey, whose Universal Negro Improvement Association (active throughout World War I and the early 1920s) championed urban Black capitalism in the United States as a means of challenging imperialism in Africa.

<sup>6</sup> The idea that the South has a special hold on Black expression, Black spirituality, and indeed, on the soul of

Black folks, stems from its fostering of African influences -- foreign, non-American, uniquely Black influences. As early as Frederick Douglass Black scholars recognized that slave art emulated African values, that slaves' music, folk tales, trickster tales, and toasts were direct offshoots of African expository (these kinds of claims were validated later by W. E. B. DuBois in The Souls of Black Folk, actor Paul Robeson, and most recently, by literary theorists Houston A. Baker, Jr. and Henry Louis Gates, Jr.). Probably the most eloquent testament to a quintessential southern Black vitality is Jean Toomer's Cane (1923), a hallmark of the Negro Renaissance, a record of the alienated Northern Black's odyssey back to his family's southern roots, in search of southern pastoral healing. Even the slang Black Americans have created for elements of southern lifestyle reveal a conviction that those elements are "yeasty," as Arna Bontemps conveys (330): "The Southern Negro's link with his past seems to me worth preserving. His greater pride in being himself, I would say, is all to the good, and I think I detect a growing nostalgia for these virtues in the speech of relatives in the North. They talk a great deal about 'Soulville' nowadays, when they mean 'South.'

'Soulbrothers' are simply the homefolks. 'Soulfood' includes black-eyed peas, chitterlings, grits, and gravy. Aretha Franklin, originally from Memphis, sings, 'Soulfood - it'll make you limber; it'll make you quick.'" (331).

<sup>7</sup> Again, Lindsey Tucker's article is indispensable for information on the African origins of some of the Days' practices. For instance, Mama Day's conjure and divination hearken to BaKongo spiritual customs, as does arranging family graves in the woods, in groups of seven, with planted oaks to guide to guide people's spirits (180-81). The standing forth at Little Caesar's funeral recalls the BaKongo belief that "the afterlife was a reality; death was a journey to the spirit world, which, nonetheless, did not constitute a break with life on earth" (180).

### Chapter Three

#### Lost Causes, Lost Space: Tracking the Void in Minnie Bruce Pratt's "Identity: Skin Blood Heart"

<sup>1</sup> A smart, suave, yuppie-ish city, Washington declares itself an island apart from Virginia or Maryland (the District of Columbia is state-less) and appears more like

another border city dotted with federal monuments, Philadelphia, than Richmond, the nearby capital of the Confederacy. But for Pratt D. C. counts as southern. Its landscape matches the South, it is filled with African-American immigrants from Georgia and North Carolina, and unlike its northern counterparts, Washington imposed segregation as long as legally possible (V. Hunt Interview 97).

<sup>2</sup> Marcia Aldrich and Leigh Gilmore are the first to describe home for Pratt as, "conceptually... where she is known" (33).

<sup>3</sup> Here I am trading on the heavily ironic title of Flannery O'Connor's well-known short story.

<sup>4</sup> The dynamic of learning where to step because of the voids is true throughout the essay of all Pratt's former homes, in the sense of Pratt-the-narrator's epistemological practice; that is, as she writes "Identity" looking back, each time she revisits a dwelling Pratt looks to scrutinize its example, testing how well it approaches or departs from her ideal, "a place of mutuality, companionship, creativity, sensuousness, easiness in the body, curiosity in what new things might be making in the world, hope from that

curiosity" (24). But in terms of Pratt's personal experience, Washington marks the first time she interacts with the world around her consistently aware of the damaging effects of white-woman safety.

#### Appendix

<sup>1</sup> See Hobson's The Southern Writer in the Postmodern World (92-101) and Simpson's The Fable of the Southern Writer (xvii-xviii). To be fair, Hobson concludes his study of the vanishing "southern" qualities of postmodern regional fiction with a ten-page analysis of Ernest Gaines, arguing that "it would be difficult to find in contemporary southern letters any writer who is more traditional, in the best sense of that word, than Gaines" (92). But Hobson's comments on Gaines are slight compared to his analyses of Bobbie Ann Mason, Lee Smith, Barry Hannah, Richard Ford, and Josephine Humphreys, so that the effect of turning to Gaines so briefly at the end of this white-author study is to minimize the Black writer's significance.

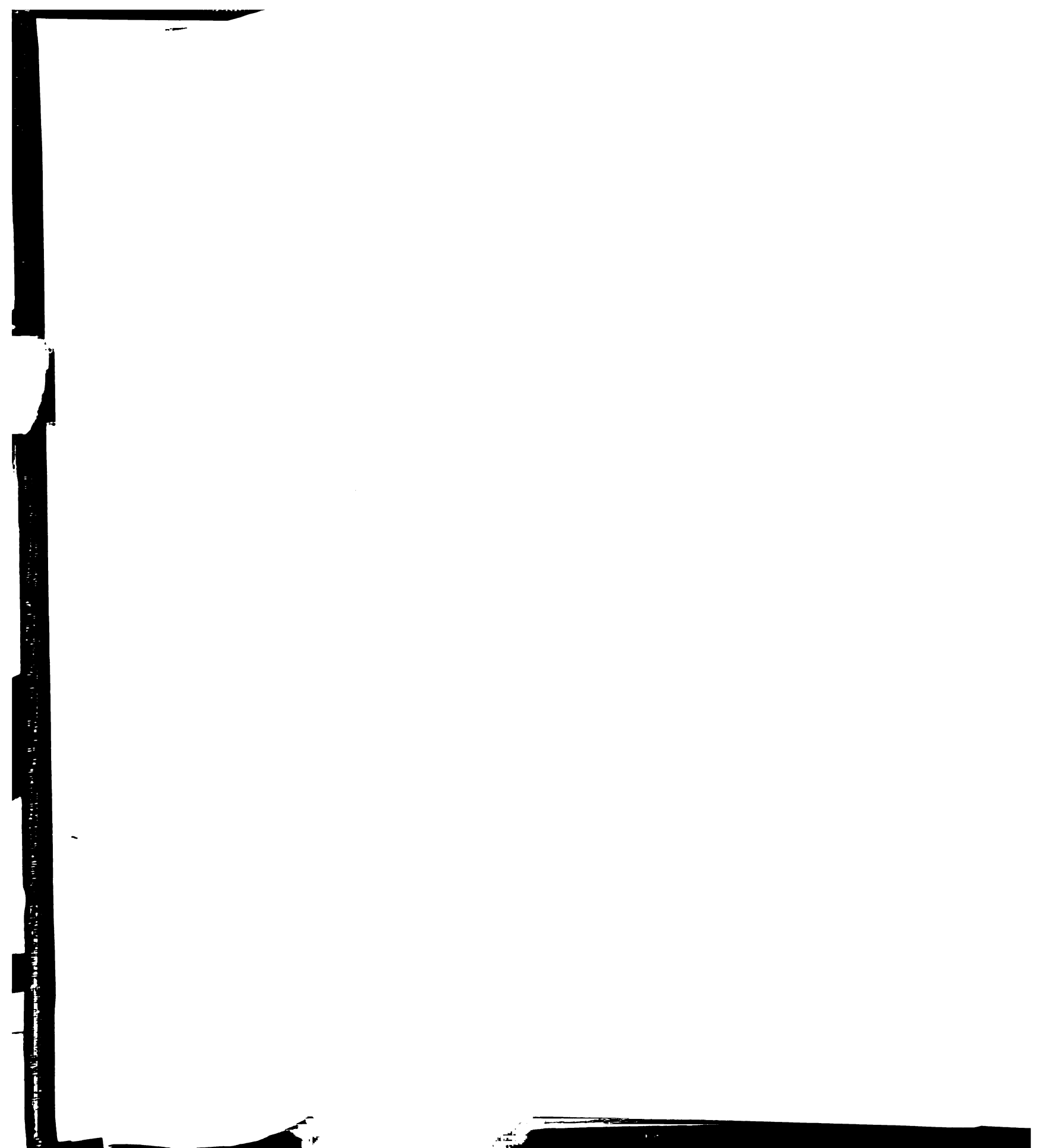
<sup>2</sup> Parts 1 & 2 of the African-American Review's special issue on the Black South were published in the spring and summer of 1993 (volume 27, numbers 1 & 2). "Black South

Literature: Before Day Annotations" is by Jerry W. Ward Jr. (27.2, 315-26); "Black South Culture" is by Jerry W. Ward, Jr. and Kalamu-ya Salaam (27:1, 7-58); and "The Black South in Contemporary Film" is by Jacquie Jones (27:1, 19-24).

<sup>3</sup> This call for papers was advertised in PMLA (May 1999) 114:3, 442.



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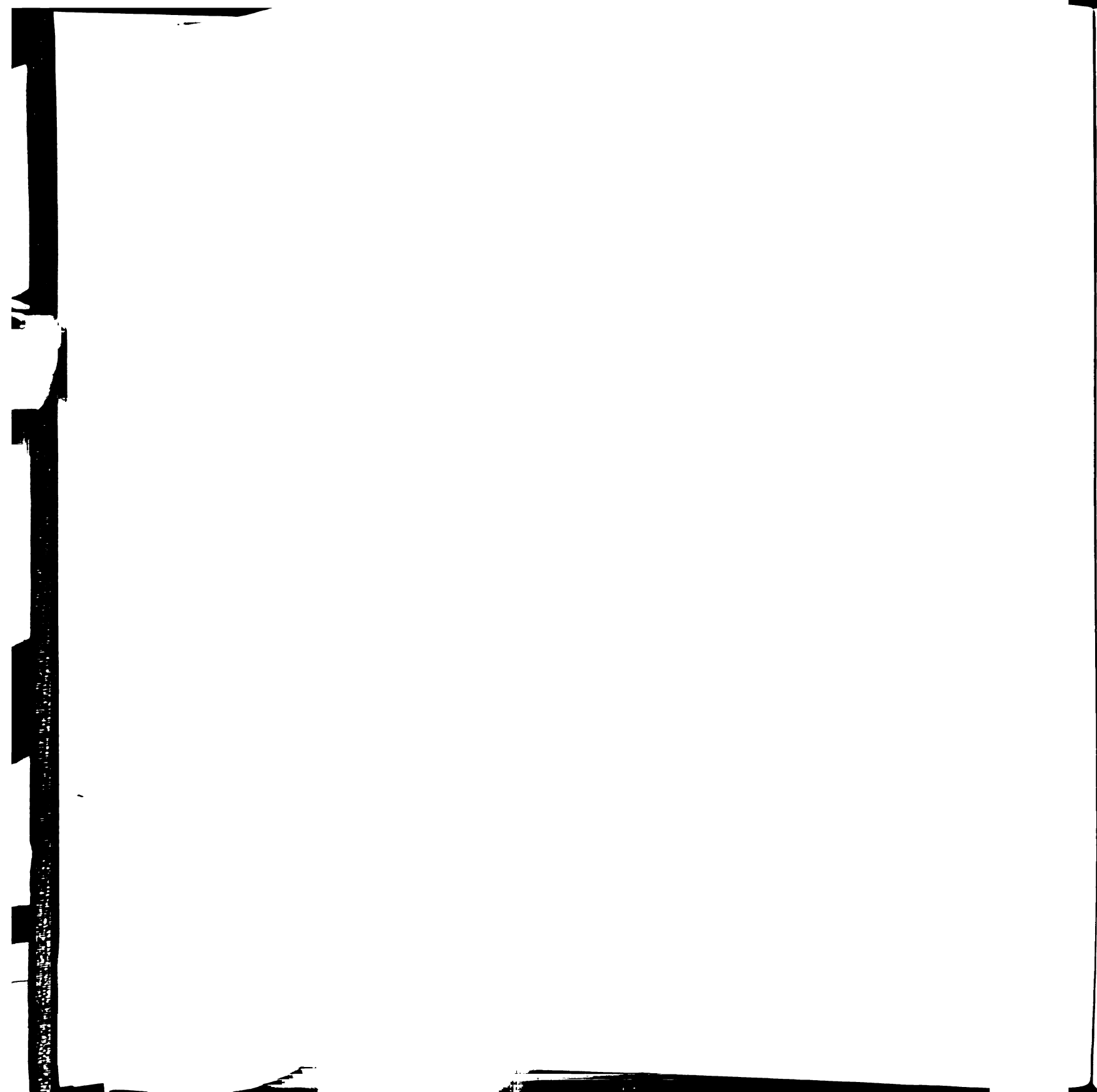


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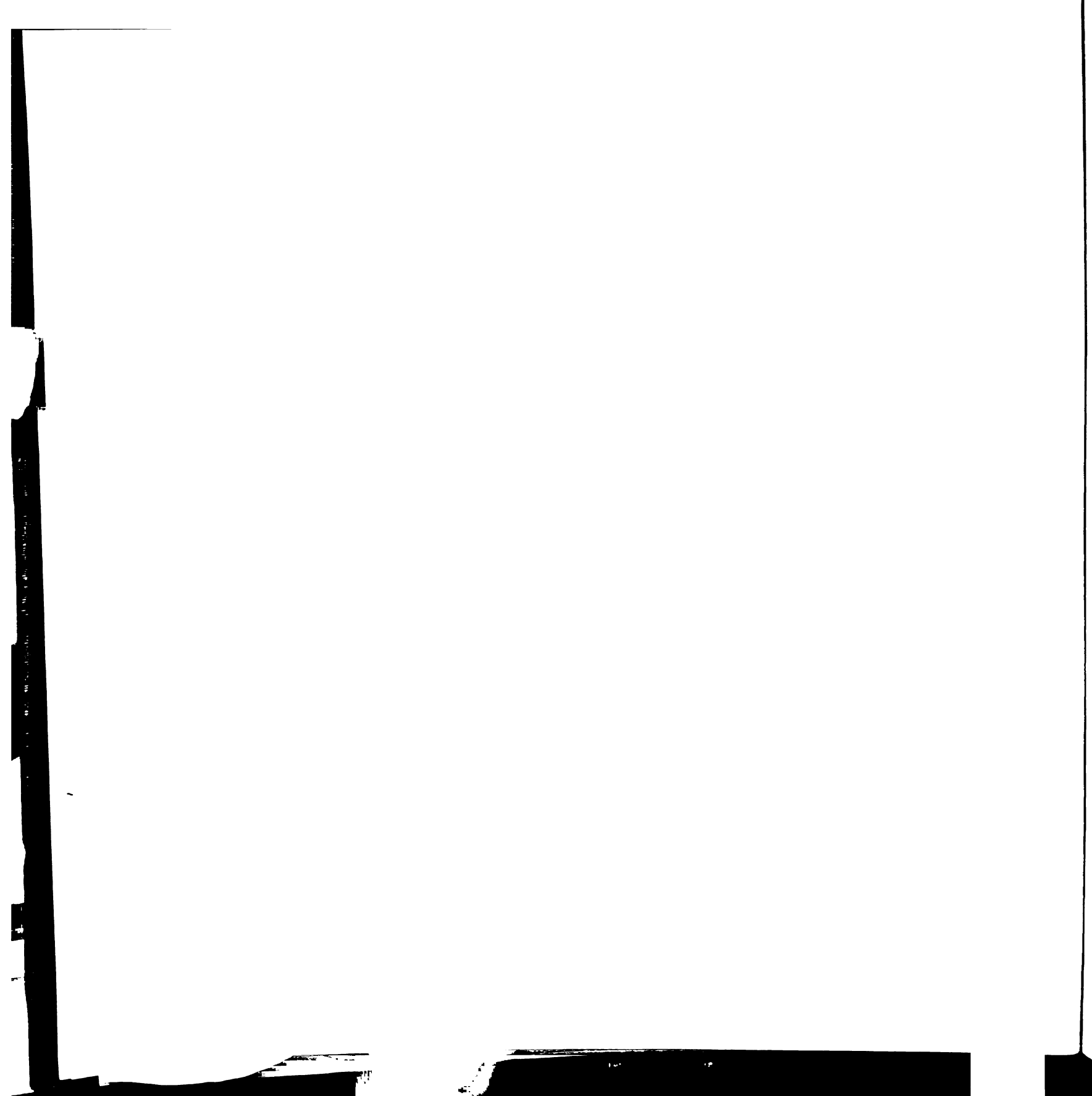
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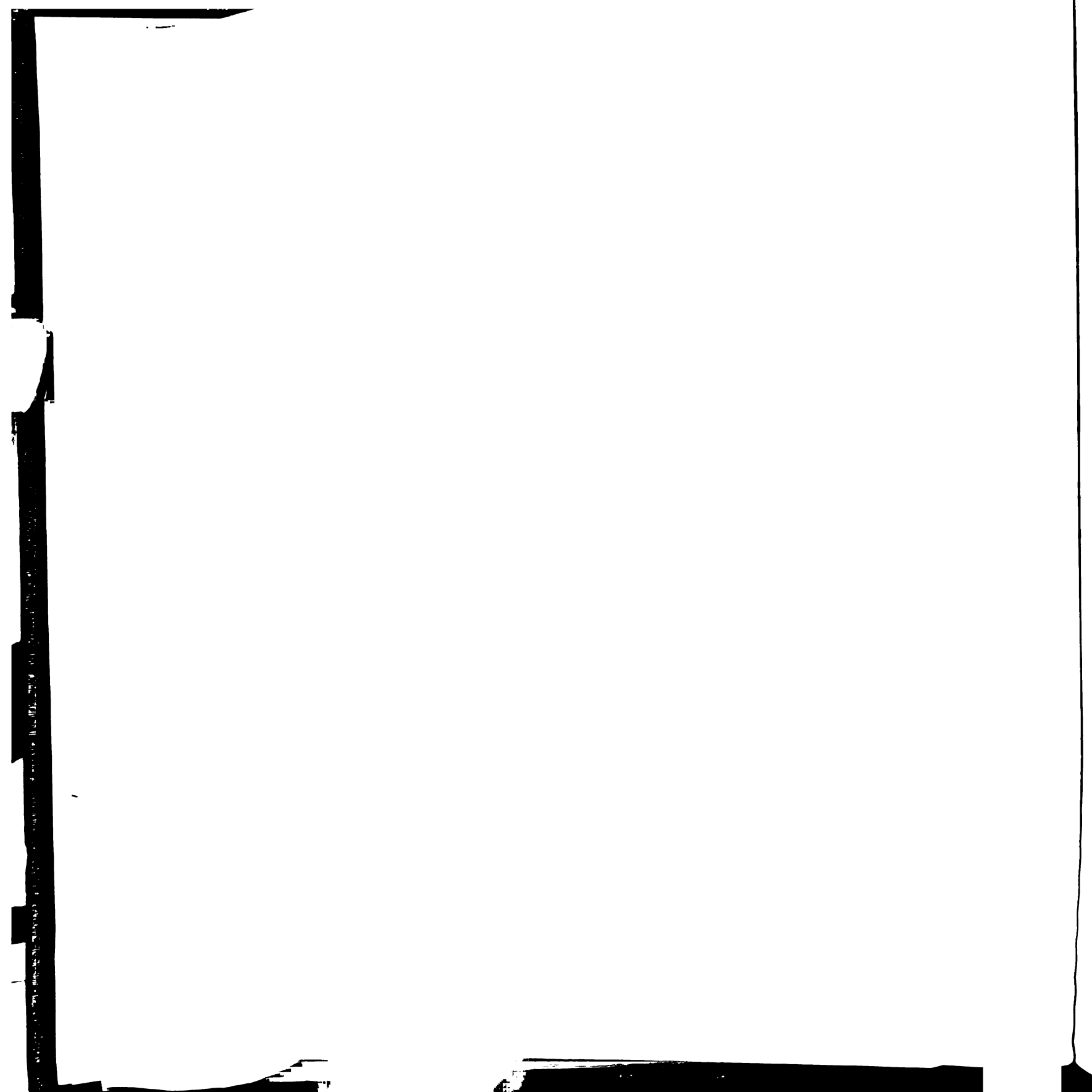
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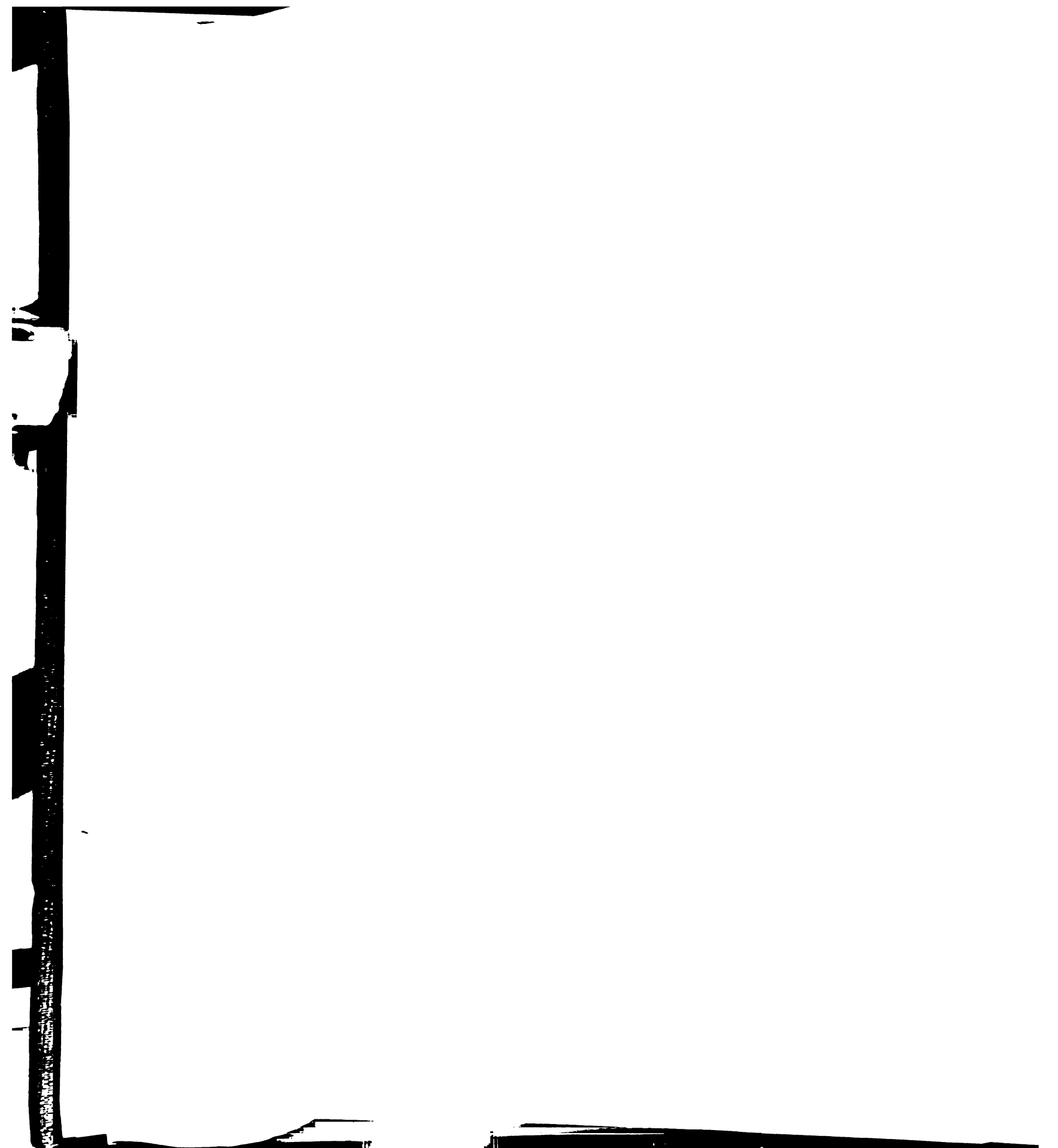




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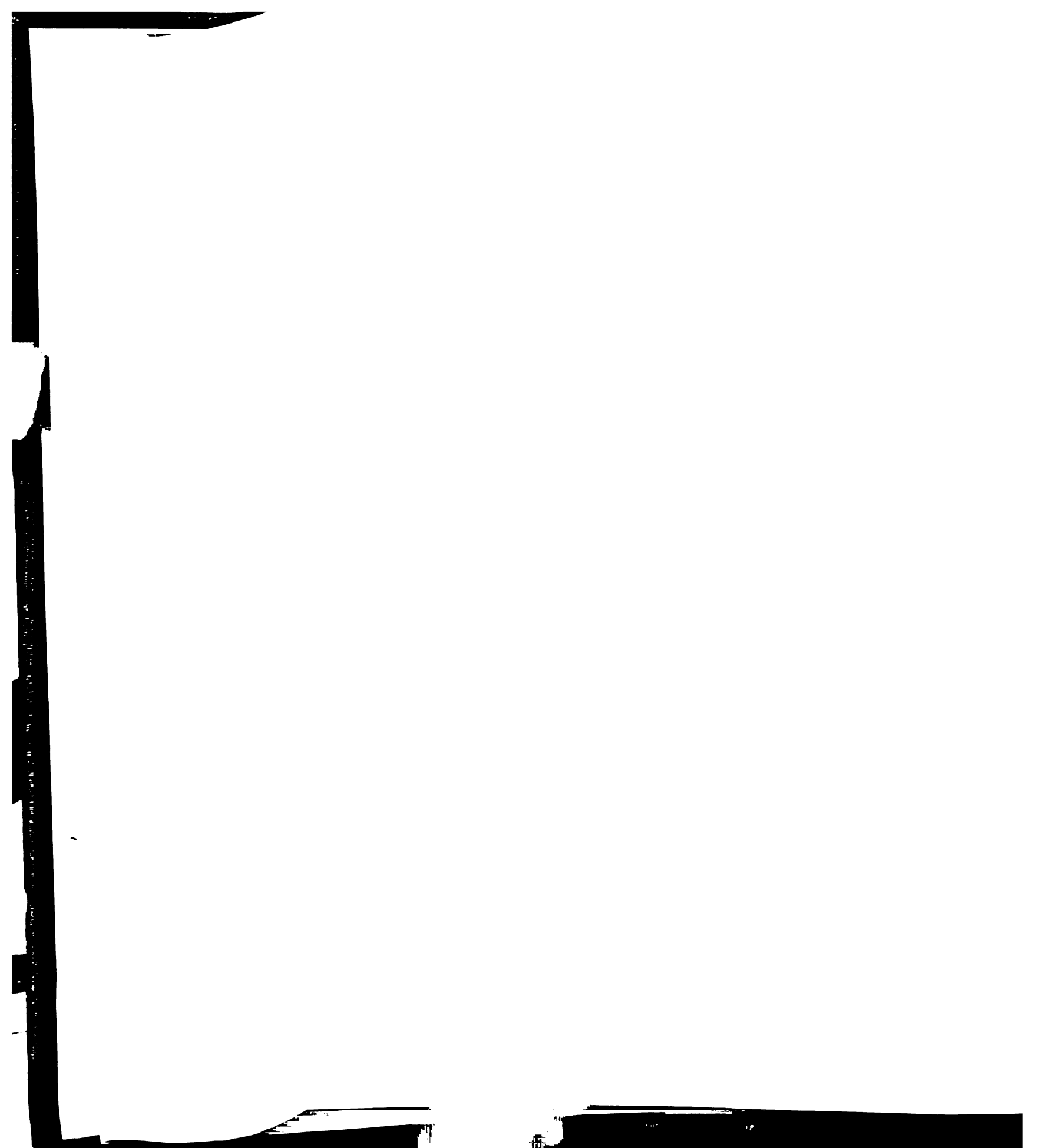
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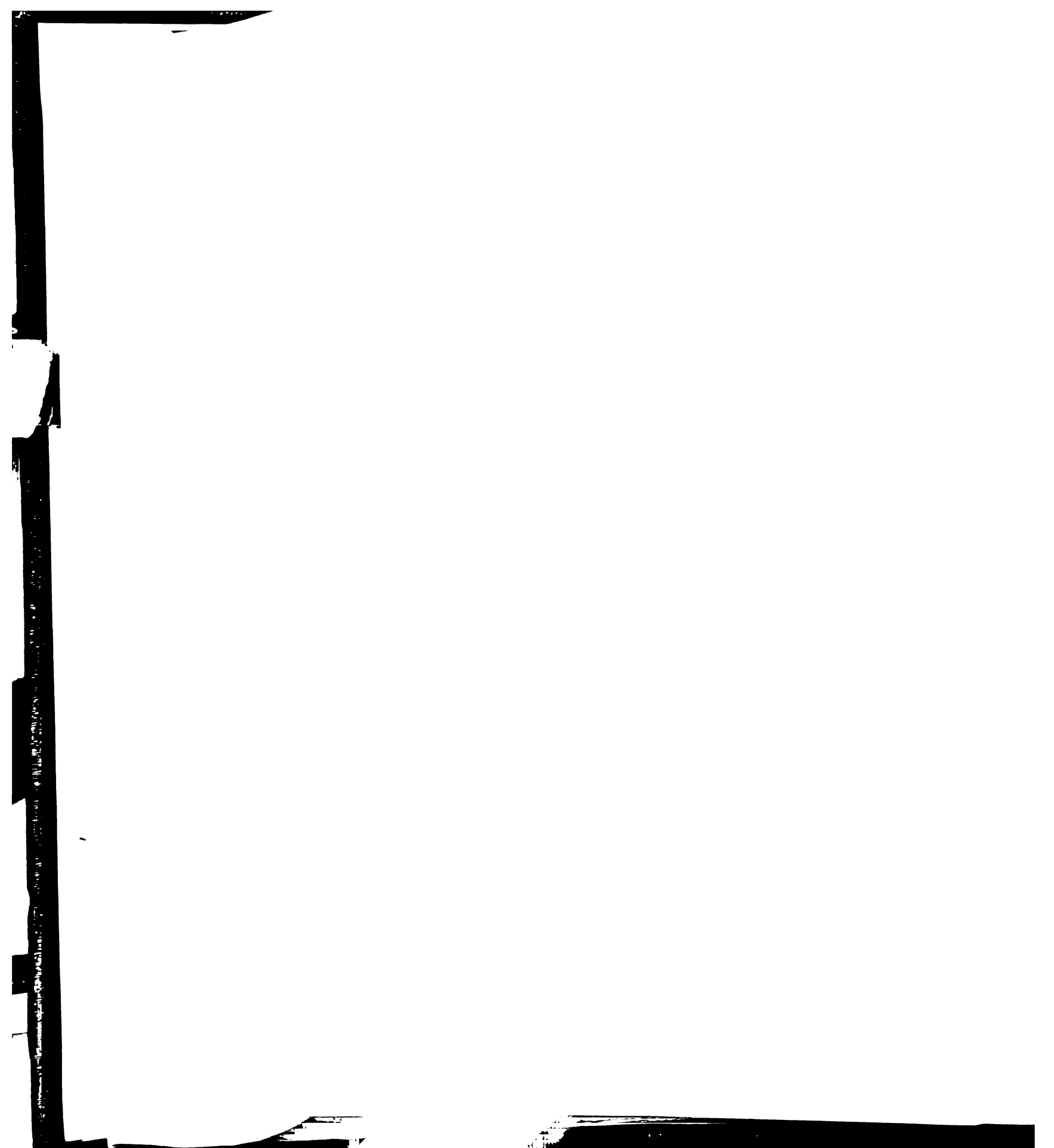
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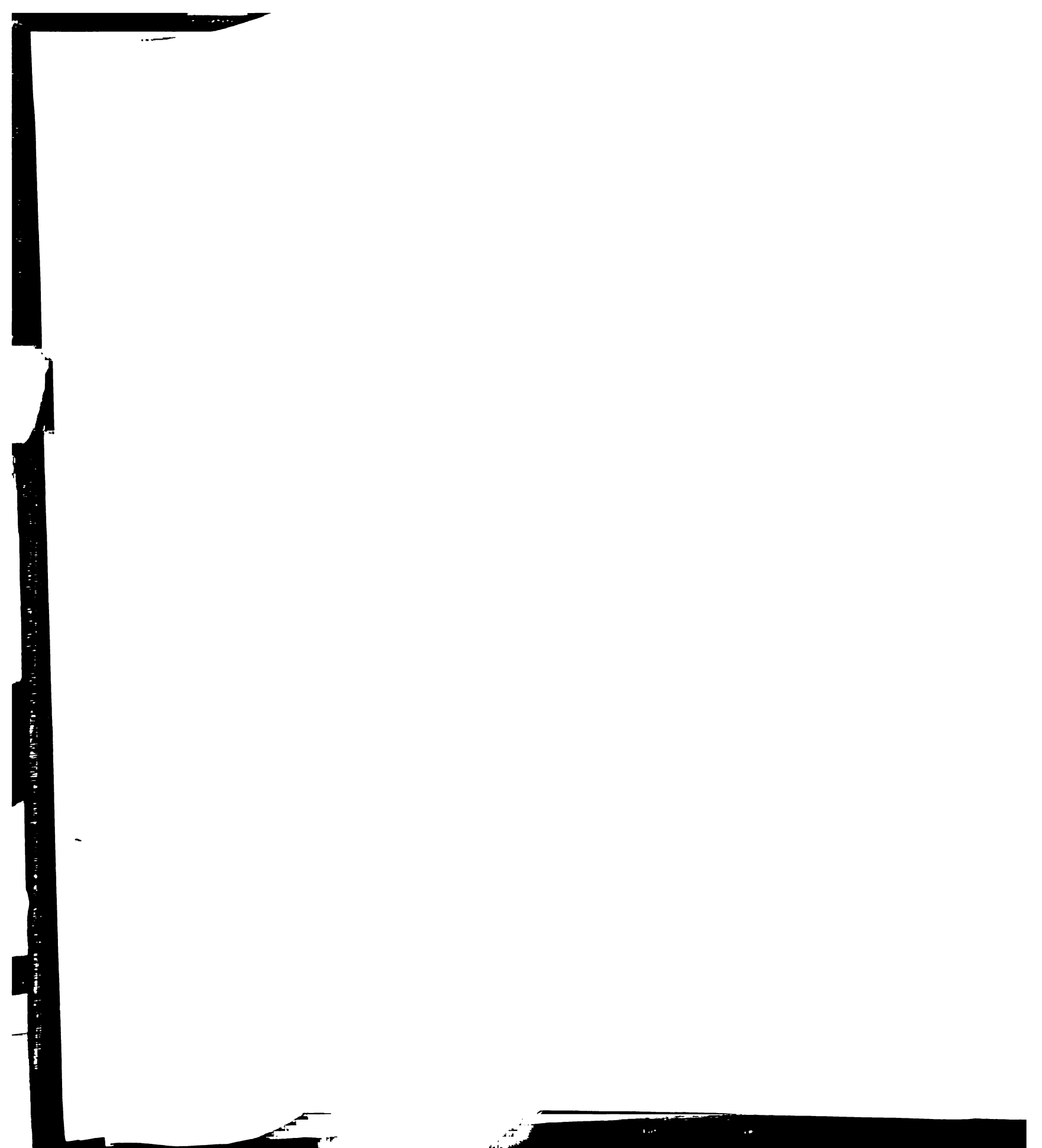
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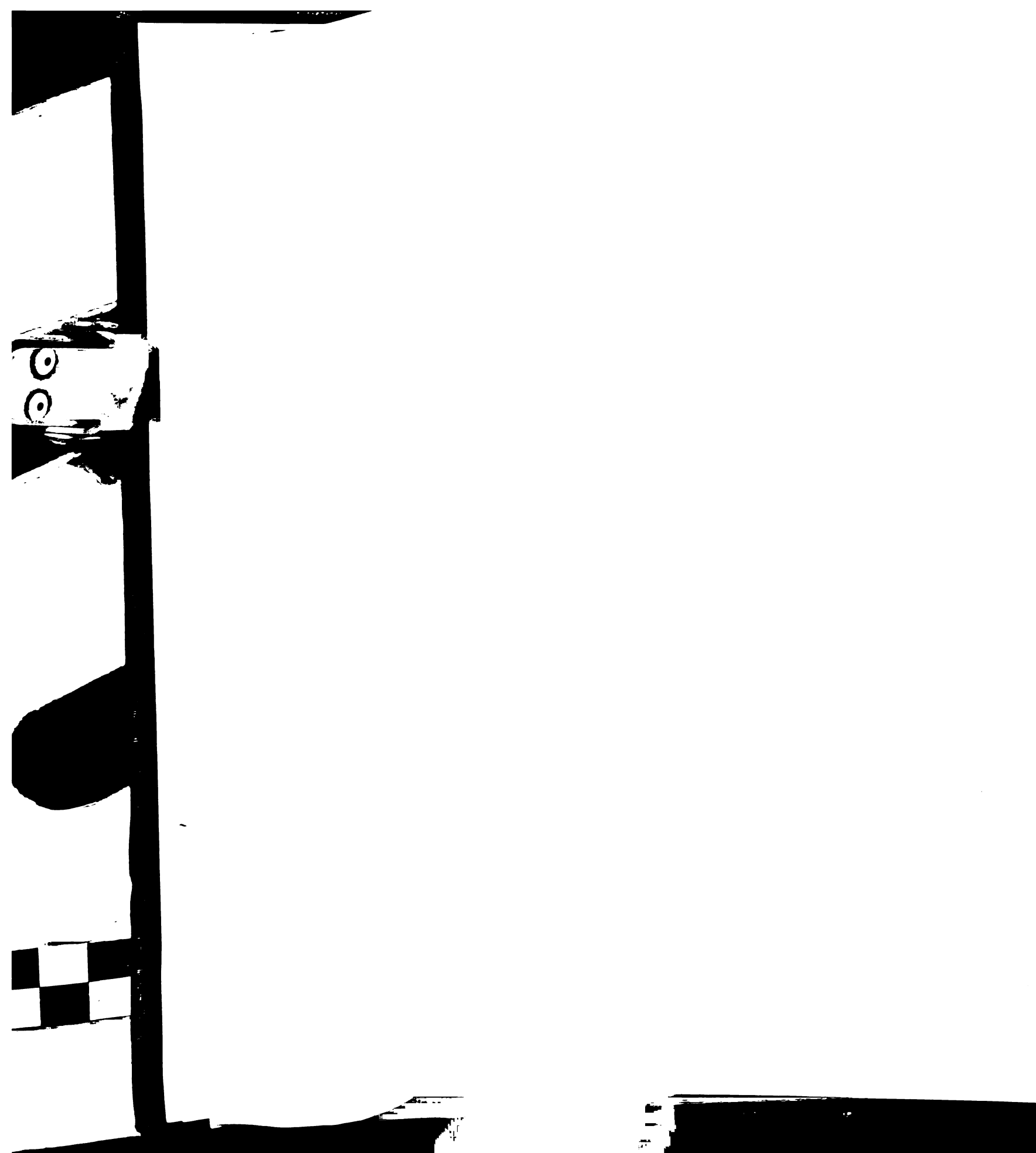


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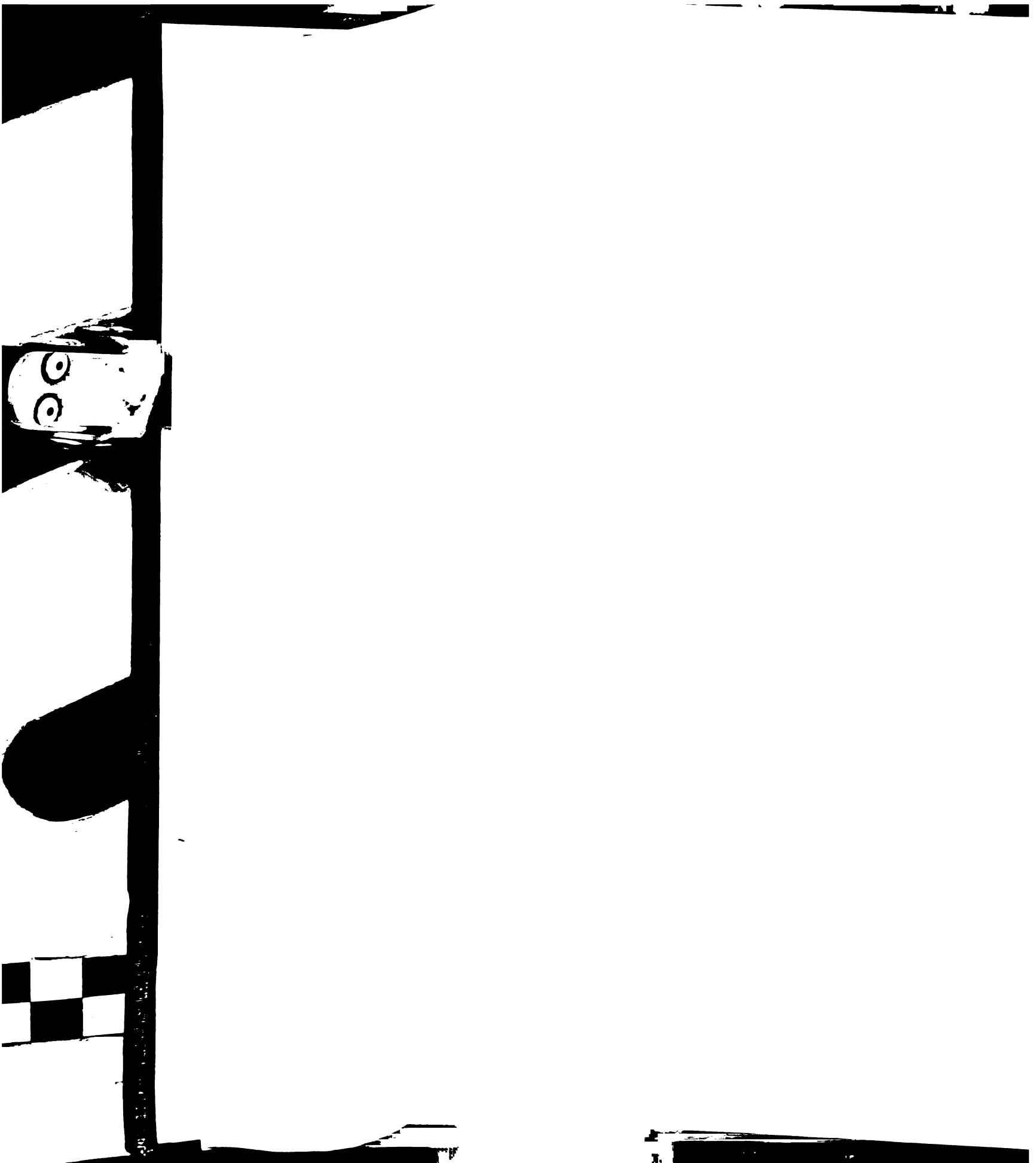
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