The Sense of Place in Southern Fiction.

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THE SENSE OF PLACE IN SOUTHERN FICTION.
The Louisiana State University and Agricultural and Mechanical College, Ph.D., 1973
Language and Literature, modern

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The Sense of Place in Southern Fiction

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the Louisiana State University and Agricultural and Mechanical College in partial fulfillment of the Doctor of Philosophy in

The Department of English

by

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May, 1973
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I have incurred many debts in the process of completing this dissertation and in the general course of my graduate study. It is a pleasure to express my particular appreciation to the members of my dissertation committee: Dr. Lewis P. Simpson, the chairman, Dr. John H. Wildman, Dr. Darwin H. Shrell, Dr. William J. Olive, and Dr. Lawrence A. Sasek. I also wish to express my appreciation to Dr. Thomas A. Kirby, Head of the English Department at Louisiana State University, and to Mrs. Faye Rifkind, secretary to the English Department.

My greatest debt is to my parents, Mr. and Mrs. Talmage Williams, who have supported me unconditionally. I am grateful to my brother, Jim Williams, who has read the manuscript and commented on it, and to my cousin, Dr. May Campbell, who has been my counselor and teacher since I was an undergraduate. I am indebted to friends: Mrs. Juanita Carter, Ms. Jo Sisson, Mrs. Patsy Waters, Dr. Shirley Fraser, and Mrs. Marilyn Rindfuss have been constant sources of encouragement throughout my graduate study.
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This dissertation is a study of the evolving sense of place in Southern fiction, with special attention to the Southern novel. It begins with a brief introductory explanation of the distinction between the novel of local color and the novel of place. This distinction is a vital one. The local colorist romanticizes time and place; he does not intend to criticize his homeland; he employs setting as background for his stories, as a means of transmitting the "flavor" of his region. "Place," in any complex sense, is absent from such novels. On the other hand, the novelist of place is primarily concerned with time and location as they affect the people of a region. By use of details of geography, climate, traditions, rituals, religion, humor, and memory, to name several aspects of place, the novelist of place strives to evoke the reader's feeling for the transcendent uniqueness of a specific locale. Both the novelist of local color and the novelist of place are, in one sense, regionalists; however, the novelist of place is neither provincial nor romantically
subjective: he moves from the particulars of the micro-
cosm to observations of the human condition, sometimes in
universal or cosmic contexts. Unlike the local colorist,
the novelist of place must be detached enough in his
point of view to criticize his homeland and to present
it realistically. This study demonstrates the fact that
Southern fiction from pre-Civil War days to the present
has undergone an evolvement from the fiction of local
color to the fiction of place.

Chapter I is concerned with Southern writers of fic-
tion from William Gilmore Simms to Mark Twain. It reveals
the emphasis on local color among early Southern writers:
they were primarily apologists for the traditional
Southern community, which they portrayed as typified by
idyllic plantation life. After the Civil War, however,
Southern writers such as George Washington Cable, Kate
Chopin, and Mark Twain began to write about their region
more objectively: they criticized the South for racism,
bigotry, and self-idealization. Beginning in the late
1800's, Southern novelists became concerned with the
effect of urbanization and industrialization on the tradi-
tional Southern community, and with the growing sense of
displacement in the South as the region became part of the modern world.

Chapter II is devoted to Southern novelists in the early part of the twentieth century, who enjoyed two advantages over previous writers in the region: they gained the perspective of time in regard to the Civil War, and access to the perceptions of writers outside the South who were troubled by the problems of displacement. The Southern novelist in the twentieth century moved away from local color toward complex studies of place. Beginning about 1920, writers of the Southern Renaissance—among them William Faulkner and Thomas Wolfe—studied the complexities of their region for cosmic implications. Modern Southern novelists such as Robert Penn Warren (who was also part of the Southern Renaissance) and Walker Percy write of the South as a place uniquely affected by the sense of displacement.

Chapter III is a consideration of the art of Eudora Welty, the outstanding modern Southern novelist of place. Her works are classic examples of the search for the sense of place by recourse to the past—to the living memory.
In a "progressive" society, the Southern novelist looks backward to his roots in an effort to overcome the debilitating sense of displacement which is the hallmark of modern life. This search for the sense of place has become the major theme of Southern fiction.
Introduction

For the ordinary, essentially non-literary, individual who lives in the American South, whose heritage is Southern, who is an "insider," the sense of the South as a place may well be simply an unconscious response to the Southern environment: to the South's climate, history, and tradition. Made self-conscious about his sense of the South—or of that part in which he lives—as a place by a demand that he articulate his feelings about it, he will find it difficult to do so. It is simply his place, that is, his home. Although his sense of place derives from myriad sources, tangible and intangible, he has no motive to identify or explain these sources. His response to his environment in the South is intuitive. But it is a different matter with a writer. If the Southern storyteller's sense of place is intuitive, it is as well articulate. It is through its storytellers that the Southern sense of place—one that has been recognized as distinctive
since the days of the Old South—has received its chief expression. The purpose of the present work is to explore historically the evolvement of this expression. More specifically, it is to see how the intense and complex consciousness of place in the modern Southern fiction has evolved. My study will be primarily concerned with the Southern "novel of place."

In his study of Southern fiction Frederick Hoffman comments: "The importance of place in Southern literature begins with the image, the particular of the Southern scene, a quality of atmosphere or a simple human detail. Its specific Southern quality may be simply an eccentricity of genre; it may be and frequently is a detail of idiom or manner which used to be labeled 'local color.' Place builds out from it; it is made up of a cluster, or a mosaic, or an integrated succession, of images. The significance of place argues some accepted history or co-ordinated memory which is attacked, defended, or maligned (it is never ignored, or merely set aside. . . . History within an established set of spatial circumstances moves easily into local culture, or tradition. Relationships of class or race or peoples have their own ways
of modifying memory or adjusting to historical change."¹ But, he continues, while novels of place begin with images of setting, they do not stop there. When the artist's purpose is satisfied by simply locating his story and giving his reader a sense of its time and geographical location, place (in any complex terms) is subordinate or non-existent in the work. A novel limited in this way may employ historical events, traditions, myths, climate, and geography in order to create an atmosphere without adding to its dimension in any significant emotional or ideological way. The images may evoke sensory responses, but do not lead the reader to a sense of the transcendent uniqueness of a community so that its significance for him is extended beyond regionalism or provincialism. Novels of place enrich physical location by specific and highly connotative images of time, space, atmosphere, history, tradition, and myth.

But to what purpose? The purposes of novelists of place vary probably as much as do their creators' concepts. Hoffman, however, suggests three convenient categories into which most Southern place writers divide themselves: those who define, describe, and preserve the Southern tradition, without abstracting it (Elizabeth Madox Roberts, Caroline Gordon, Ellen Glasgow); those who reveal authentic particulars of the Southern scene, while communicating their existence in time and commenting on it (Eudora Welty, Shirley Ann Grau, Carson McCullers, Flannery O'Conner); those who explore complex inward meanings of place in the South (William Faulkner, Thomas Wolfe, Robert Penn Warren). If these divisions seem arbitrary, they at the same time are useful in distinguishing between the approaches of novelists to their art. In each class, setting and scene are extended in order to achieve a larger perspective than simply locating the story. The key words in defining the novel of place are "particulars" and "feelings." When the writer—whatever his purpose may be—goes beyond the generalized image of the one-dimensional local-color or regional

2 Hoffman, pp. 74-75.
novel to explore the psychological implications of his region and the nuances which attach to his concept of it, then one may say that he is attempting to write a novel of place. A psychological as well as physical "location" will be created in the mind of the reader if the artist succeeds through his metaphors and analogies in giving the reader insights into the factors determining the sense of place which is unique to his community: its myths, fables, traditions; its physical and psychic climates; its geography, history, religion, humor. He may treat his subject realistically, surreallyistically, expressionistically, or naturalistically, but he always must treat it subjectively. And herein lies the mystery and the charm of the novel of place: it is spun out of each artist's conscious and probing inspection of his own very personal, yet perhaps cosmic, feeling for his place in time and space.

When we look closely at Southern fiction from the standpoint of its historical development, we cannot fail to see that the sense of the South as a place in the novels and short stories by Southerners is an evolving sense. The sense of place, or the awareness of place,
becomes more self-conscious and more complicated as we move from pre-Civil War to post-Civil War fiction, and intensifies dramatically after 1920. This intensification reaches its greatest single expression in the works of Eudora Welty. In her stories the sense of place is central; it is, it may be said, transformed into a coherent and powerful literary art. Thus the following study moves toward a treatment of the sense of place in Eudora Welty. This constitutes the last chapter. The study begins with an investigation of the awareness of place in several writers from Simms through Mark Twain. The middle portion of the study consists of an exploration of the awareness of place in the works of several major twentieth-century Southern writers exclusive of Eudora Welty. This part of the study includes a section surveying the background of the modern Southern sensibility of place in the writings of Hardy, Yeats, Joyce, and Eliot.
Pre-Civil War writers in the South—notable examples being Augusta Evans Wilson, Nathaniel Beverley Tucker, William Caruthers, and William Gilmore Simms—though different in their approaches to art, may generally be classified as regionalists and apologists for the Southern way of life. That is not to say that no wider concerns may be found in their works. It is to say that their primary purpose in writing about their region was to portray it from the point of view of the "insider." While Irving, Bryant, Cooper, Emerson, Thoreau, Hawthorne, and Melville wrote from varied, and in some cases cosmic perspectives, contemporary Southern writers wrote of the South's role in the American Revolution, the Southerner as seen in "border" romances, or life on the plantation. At times their idealization of their section results in naive and mediocre works.
In *The Faraway Country*, Louis D. Rubin says: "The South did not produce many great writers before 1920 because it did not detach its artists sufficiently from community life, as New England did detach them, making them go in search of greater order than that afforded through community. The nature and hold of the Southern community provided, however innocently, a sufficiently complex emotional, intellectual, and aesthetic order to accommodate all its members. That such an order was not sufficiently viable and durable is not the question; to its participants it seemed so at the time. When it ceased to be adequate, major writers came into existence in the South, leaving the community, returning to it, but seeking in their art the moral order no longer present for them in the community itself." In *The Writer in the South*, Rubin elaborates upon the foregoing remarks. The Southerner prior to the Civil War—and indeed for years thereafter—was so content within his own community or so bent on defending it that he felt no compulsion and perhaps

no right to leave it; paradoxically, without the sense of
objectivity derived from alienation, few writers gain real
insight into their relation to place. As long as an
artist's community supplies all his needs and consumes all
his creative energies, he can seldom detach himself from it
sufficiently to write books of universal significance.

William Gilmore Simms is a classic example of the unde­
tached Southern writer. A man of great talent, considerable
travel, and cosmopolitan interests, he chose to live his en­
tire life in or around Charleston where he was born. Em­
broiled, as indeed were most Southerners at this time, in
the political and economic concerns of his region, Simms's
life and art attest to his fragmentation. He wrote
furiously, producing a truly formidable body of writing:
thirty-four works of fiction, nineteen volumes of poetry,
three of drama, three anthologies, three volumes of history,
two of geography, six biographies, twelve collections of
reviews, sketches, and addresses, not to mention hundreds
of letters which are scattered throughout periodicals
or lost forever. 2 Yet, in all his productivity--

2 See J.V. Ridgely, William Gilmore Simms (New York:
much of it devoted to supporting the South—Simms never wrote a novel that can truly be called a novel of place. The circumstances of his personal life may in part account for Simms's failure to explore his place on complex levels, for he was beset with problems involving his family and his financial security; however, the chief reason Simms did not write novels of place lies in his fragmentation, which resulted primarily from the socio-economic conditions of the Old South: he devoted his energies mainly toward defending his section against the criticism levied upon it from the North.

What are the characteristics which distinguish such novels as those written by Simms (and, for that matter, by his contemporaries) from those which truly may be classified as novels of place? Bearing in mind that the distinctions are often subtle, I suggest that Simms is closer to the local colorists than to the novelists of place. While he is obviously concerned with the historical events, traditions, myths, climate, and geography of the South, we do not find in his works convincing evidence that his primary purpose in employing these aspects of place involved the more profound motive of using
setting or scene to convey a sense of the inner uniqueness of his community. There is to be found in his most famous novels (Yemassee, The Partisan, and Katharine Walton) no truly complex search for meaning; there is no evidence of willingness to consider his settings through the eyes of the objective observer. If his novels are interesting, they are so as examples of good stories told by a born storyteller whose chief aim in writing them was to enhance the Southern ethos. (A harsh view would hold that they may be read as slanted history or propaganda.)

If this assessment seems predominantly negative, there are positive things to be said of Simms's art as it bears on the role of place. As Robert E. Spiller says, Simms was "an ardent admirer of the chivalric ideal, and did more than anyone else of his day to crystallize it as the Southern myth."³ His interest in the chivalric idealism (which was inspired by feudalism) came not only from his love of the heroic ideal but from

his need for grounds on which to defend chattel slavery as one aspect of the proper order of the universe.⁴

Among his novels, Woodcraft probably comes closest to being a novel of place. The depiction of Captain Porgy's return home from the Revolutionary War, while not defeatist in tone, is clearly ubi sunt: his plantation lies in ruins, his slaves have been stolen by the British, his voyage away from home appears to have been singularly unproductive for him personally. But, as J. V. Ridgely describes it, "this is a story of post-war courage and not of disillusionment."⁵ An answer to Harriet Beecher Stowe's Uncle Tom's Cabin, Simms's Woodcraft takes for its hero a Falstaff-like soldier patriot; in so doing, Simms achieves a rare balance between grim reality and humor while he avoids dealing in heavy didacticism. William R. Taylor suggests Porgy is a "scrubbed up" Falstaff; he is not lower class, but rather a country gentleman; he is a slaveowner, to be

⁴Ridgely, p. 22.

⁵Ridgely, p. 99.

sure, but one who is loved by his slaves and who feels responsible for them. One particularly revealing passage occurs in the novel (earlier called The Sword and the Distaff); Porgy, fearing that his beloved slave Tom may fall into bad hands, says:

I love Tom. Tom is virtually a free man. It's true, being a debtor, I can not confer freedom upon him. But if there is a danger of losing him--then, I shall kill Tom, Lance; I'll shoot him--him, Tom--in order to save him. The poor fellow has faithfully served a gentleman. He shall never fall into the hands of a scamp. . . . Tom, I'm thinking, would rather die my slave, than live a thousand years under another owner. 7

As though anticipating criticism for such an attitude, Simms reinforces his case by having Tom tell Porgy: "Ef I doesn't b'long to you, you b'longs to me! You hab for keep dis nigger long as he lib; and him for keep you." 8 Whether or not a real slave would have said anything like this is doubtful. But that, after all, is not the point. What matters in Woodcraft is that Porgy is Simms's representative of the Cavalier. In this novel

8Simms, p. 509.
Simms makes use of tradition, the historical past, black-white relationships, geography, and a sentimental kind of humor of the sort illustrated above. For these reasons *Woodcraft* deserves consideration as a novel of place.

If Simms may be considered the most prolific and representative of the Southern writers in the South before the Civil War, then one may look to his milieu for clues to his failure to achieve that degree of excellence which would have made him a less regional and, therefore, a more lasting reputation in American letters. Poe, though Southern in his devotion to the chivalric code, left the South, gained detachment, and wrote stories with universal appeal. Estranged he certainly was, for he deliberately detached himself from the insularity of the Old South and therefore gained—at great personal expense—the perspective which a degree of objectivity alone allows.

What, then, was the peculiar nature of the Old South which stunted its creative artists? Or, put another way, what obsessive concerns preoccupied the best creative minds in the South prior to the Civil
War? What ties bound the Southern writer so inextricably to his home that they made his criticizing it heretical? These questions are at the heart of any valid assessment of the role of place in antebellum Southern fiction. As we shall see, the attitude of the Southern writer toward his home, his heritage, his reader, his duty has undergone a remarkable change from pre-Civil War days to the present.

II

The Virginian Thomas Nelson Page, himself a local colorist of note in the postbellum South, assesses the forces which worked against the artist in the Old South in his essay "Authorship in the South Before the War."

In his words:

The causes of the absence of a Southern literature are to be looked for elsewhere than in intellectual indigence. The intellectual conditions were such as might well have created a noble literature, but the physical conditions were adverse to its production and were too potent to be overcome.

The principal causes were the following:—
1. The people of the South were an agricultural people, widely diffused, and lacking the stimulus of immediate mental contact.
2. The absence of cities, which in the
history of literary life have proved literary foci essential for its production, and the want of publishing-houses at the South.
3. The exactions of the institution of slavery, and the absorption of the intellectual forces of the people of the South in the solution of the vital problems it engendered.
4. The general ambition of the Southern people for political distinction, and the application of their literary powers to polemical controversy.
5. The absence of a reading public at the South for American authors, due in part to the conservatism of the Southern people.\(^9\)

If these criteria may be accepted as reliable, then probably the fourth is the most important to this study. Slavery, the South's "peculiar institution," and with it the whole manorial style of life, had to be defended before the world. Polemics, therefore, were the first concern of every devoted Southern man of letters: as a true son of the South, his first duty was to defend his home and its code in the face of all comers. Again, Simms is a perfect case in point. His letters testify to his absolute commitment to the Southern way. His correspondence with Nathaniel Beverley Tucker proves beyond doubt that he supported chattel slavery as a part of God's divine plan of order—the Chain of Being.

was not to be tampered with by Yankees who little understood the "weightier matters." In his second letter to Tucker, Simms writes: "We singularly agree on the subject of the Yankees. Their great deficiency is in the imaginative faculty. . . . Did you ever see such a race of rhymers, men and women, without a thought or fancy of their own to go all fours upon?" The implication, of course, is that the North was simply not capable of grasping the complexity of the Southern social theory: the real problems involved in the slavery issue were beyond their reach or comprehension. And again, a little later, Simms writes: "You will see how much of a Southron I am & how little of a Yankee." The primary argument for slavery Simms found in the necessity for order in the universe. This position he clearly states in *Southern Literary Messenger* in 1837 in response to criticism leveled at the South by an Englishwoman, Harriet Martineau.  

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12 Ridgely, p. 22.
Wilbur J. Cash summarizes the Southern position in regard to slavery and its related problems as they affected the region's literature: "This Old South, in short, was a society beset by the specters of defeat, of shame, of guilt—a society driven by the need to bolster its morale, to nerve its arm against waxing odds, to justify itself in its own eyes and in those of the world. Hence a large part—in a way, the very largest part—of its history from the day that Garrison began to thunder in Boston is the history of its efforts to achieve that end, and characteristically by means of romantic fictions." He continues, "Of all these fictions, the most inevitable and obviously indicated was just that one which we know today as the legend of the Old South—the legend of which the backbone is, of course, precisely the assumption that every planter was in the most rigid sense of the word a gentleman."  

In their defense of the South, Southern writers in the first half of the nineteenth century and in the

14 Cash, p. 73.
period of Reconstruction sought to immortalize the sentimental aspects of the plantation myth. The discrepancy between reality and this myth is discussed at great length by Cash, who informs us that far from being true Virginia-born aristocrats, most of the plantation owners came out of hardier stock: they were necessarily frontiersmen first, gentlemen second. Donald Davidson disparages Cash's assessment of the real settlers of the South, suggesting that rather than frontiersmen, the true establishers of the Southern way of life were yeomen farmers. However that may be, one central truth is owned by both critics: there were great differences between the South of myth and the South of reality. Many of the problems which afflicted the plantation system—cruelty, miscegenation, chattel slavery—however, are conspicuously absent from the fiction of the early writers. Ironically, it is probable that no single force contributed as much to the development of the plantation myth as we know it today as did "Yankeedom."

15Cash, pp. 17-41.

The defensive mechanisms employed by Southern apologists are everywhere in evidence in the fiction of the time. Examples of more realistic treatments of the South will be cited shortly in discussions of such writers as Thomas Nelson Page, Joel Chandler Harris, Kate Chopin, and George Washington Cable. At this point, and at the risk of oversimplification, we may conclude that the numerous problems which were involved in the Southern way of life were hopelessly exacerbated by the indictments of the North. The threat to the agrarian life style drove devoted exponents of slavery into a deeper and more reactionary commitment to it than ever before and paradoxically drew the less committed Southerners into a defensive alliance with the ultra-reactionary factions. The result—in the fiction produced in the South before and for many years after the Civil War—was often a glossing over of the real issues and a projection of the South in the image of the plantation myth, even to this day.

Those writers who chose to make literature an exclusive career had a hard time of it in antebellum days. Cash describes the position of the creative artist before
the Civil War as follows:

And if this \[a world of horses, dogs, and guns\] was not enough? If his \[the Southerner's\] energies and his ambition demanded a wider field of action? he went, in this world at battle, inescapably into politics. To be a captain in the struggle against the Yankee, to be a Calhoun or a Brooks in Congress, or better still, to be a Yancey or a Rhett ramping through the land with a demand for the sword—this was to be at the very heart of one's time and place, was, for the plantation youth, full of hot blood, the only desirable career. Beside it the pursuit of knowledge, the writing of books, the painting of pictures, the life of the mind, seemed an anemic and despicable business, fit only for eunuchs.\(^{17}\)

Even allowing for what appears in Cash to be exaggeration, one must conclude that life in the Old South permitted one little time for or right to detachment or objectivity. As Cash would have it, "In Southern unity before the foe lay the final bulwark of every established commonplace."\(^{18}\)

Reconstruction was intended to obliterate any vestiges of the Old South. Instead, it served to strengthen and unify the Southern stance; rather than weaken the previously unstructured Southern concept of itself, it solidified and crystallized those very characteristics which it sought utterly to destroy.

\(^{17}\) Cash, p. 107.

\(^{18}\) Cash, p. 108.
C. Van Woodward assesses the postbellum Southern characteristics which ironically set the South apart as a truly unique section in America. Suggesting that collective experience is the factor which makes the South distinctive, he believes this explains why the region's past varies markedly from the typical American experience. He postulates four basic differences between the past of America and the past of the South: 1) America looks with pride to itself as a rich nation, while the South, on the other hand, remembers the extreme poverty of the war and of Reconstruction; 2) America boasts its reputation for success, while the South lives with the unhealing psychological wounds of defeat and failure; 3) America values its role as the "innocent," the virgin country, while the South struggles with an image of guilt as a result of its defense of chattel slavery; 4) America promotes mobility and discontinuity--abstraction--"superiority to place," while the South recoils from such rootlessness and seeks its identity in the insulation of community. All of these factors, of course, are vital

when we attempt to chart the changing role of place in Southern fiction.

As we shall see, the real Southern community became fused with the myth of the Southern community in the works of such writers as Page, J. C. Harris, Chopin, and Cable even though these four writers present the reader with the first Southerners writing in the South who dared to comment from at least partially detached points of view on different aspects of life in their region. Their various approaches and degrees of objectivity were not always productive of popularity, a fact which is not surprising, but their willingness to deal candidly—even to criticize—their native section signals the important transition from those Southern writers whose insularity and chauvinism were complete to those who followed Cable and wrote from increasingly detached viewpoints. It is safe to say that this shift in perspective in large part accounts for what is today called the Southern Renaissance, a movement which gained momentum about 1920 and gave rise to such writers as William Faulkner, Thomas Wolfe, Robert Penn Warren, Allen Tate, Donald Davidson, John Crowe Ransom,
Caroline Gordon, Erskine Caldwell, Eudora Welty; and later, William Styron, Carson McCullers, Flannery O'Connor, Reynolds Price, and Walker Percy. Some of these writers we will consider in subsequent chapters.

It seems clear that the shifting role of place in Southern literature is directly related to the changing perspective of writers who, like so many of those listed above, left the Southern community temporarily or permanently in an effort to emancipate themselves from the stultifying atmosphere of their home environment. Some, like Poe and Mark Twain, never returned to live in the South. Others, on the other hand, returned to their communities. Their reestablishment of physical attachments with community in the South, however, was not tantamount to psychic reimmersion. (William Faulkner lived not so much in Mississippi as he did in the world created by his mind and art.) Hence, while they were Southerners born and bred, they were a different cut from Simms and even from post-Civil War writers like Joel Chandler Harris, Thomas Nelson Page, or Kate Chopin. They were able to study their native sections with the objectivity great art demands.
The first indications of the possibility of this kind of objectivity emerge in the history of Southern writing in the later nineteenth century. With some distance, however slight, from the intense patriotism induced by the Civil War, Southern writers began to explore their section, even to criticize it from partially detached points of view. What resulted from this new perspective was a tendency among these writers to move away from the gloss of romanticism and toward more realistic depictions of the South and its problems. This transition is the subject of the following section.

III

Let us consider four of these writers: Thomas Nelson Page, Joel Chandler Harris, Kate Chopin, and George Washington Cable. Their works show clearly a transition from the romanticism which characterized Simms and other antebellum sectionalists toward a greater degree of realism and objectivity. Page, though he is undeniably romantic in his approach to his subject matter, employs dialect and writes often from the point of view of the black man; Harris deals seriously with
the folklore of the Negro for the first time; Chopin moves away from romantic idealization and toward realism, particularly in her treatment of the role of women in the New South as opposed to the stereotyped Southern belle image of the literature of the Old South; Cable dares to indict the South for bigotry and racism in terms which forced upon him self-imposed exile comparable to that of James Joyce.

Thomas Nelson Page, probably the best known among postbellum local colorists, claimed never intentionally to have written a line which might not contribute to better inter-sectional understanding. But, as one critic points out, "sincere as Page was, his fiction demonstrates that the absolute commitment to the myth of Southern heroism, to a certain rigid attitude toward the Negro and to all Southern problems, made political if not literary reconciliation quite impossible. For today's reader, Page's significance is two-fold: first, as the creator of a collection of compelling stories that evoke the Old South, that re-create in idealistic and sentimental though poignant terms plantation life as it might have been before the Civil War; and, second, as the most
lucid and impressive chronicler of a myth of heroism that reveals one dominant Southern attitude toward the Negro."20

The tendency to sentimentalize the South and the Southerner is apparent throughout Page's works, and his uses of dialect and point of view add to the mythologized version of the South which he created in short stories as well as novels. Two short stories, "Marse Chan" and "Ole 'Stracted," are particularly good examples of these techniques. The first, narrated by an old Negro man named Sam to an impersonal listener, is the story of a young Southern boy who goes away to war, leaving a petulant sweetheart at home. Sam, his servant, goes with him, and remains utterly devoted through all the changes of Marse Chan's fortunes. Predictably, the sweetheart writes a letter of reconciliation; but duty must come before love. In a highly melodramatic ending, Marse Chan is killed, is brought home by Sam, and is mourned by the girl, who soon thereafter dies of a broken heart.

Evidence of Page's consciousness that he was conditioning his readers' minds in favor of the South is clear in the story, for instance, in the following evocation of the plantation South: "Their the former occupants of the now ruined plantation houses once splendid mansions, now fast falling to decay, appeared to view from time to time, set back far from the road, in proud seclusion, among groves of oak and hickory, now scarlet and gold with the early frost. Distance was nothing to this people; time was of no consequence to them. They desired but a level path in life, and that they had, though the way was longer and the outer world strode by them as they dreamed."21 The most pervasive effect of Page's story is nostalgic: "Marse Chan" seems to be saying, there was a day—now threatened and perhaps doomed—when time meant more than something measured by precision mechanism; it had to do with the quality of life of the region. Page, Theodore Gross says, adheres in his best fiction to the heroic code that his stories take on the qualities

of the epic. His characters are given such ideal dimensions that they seem clearly to be examples of the best qualities of a great race.\footnote{Gross, pp. 21-22.}

In "Marse Chan" we find not only the use of dialect, the point of view of the Negro, and the heroic ideal; in addition to these are Sam's \textit{ubi sunt} longing for the lost days of his youth about which he reminisces, the voyage motif, as Chan and Sam go away to war, the \textit{de casibus} theme, as the beautiful young hero dies a noble death, and ritual, as Chan's life and his death are marked—especially in the mind of his servant—by commitment. As resolutely as any knight of old, the young man marches off in defense of the principles which he espouses; as faithfully as any squire, Sam follows his master unreservedly. Chan's duel with his sweetheart's father (the central episode of the story and catalyst to her rejection of the hero) takes on "religious" connotations. Page was perhaps one of the first to perceive that the way of life in the Old South was doomed. Yet, he also knew that a people in defeat and in the degradation of Reconstruction needed to
remember its heroes as Cavaliers, not as unromantic tobacco farmers.

"Ole 'Stracted" is a touching tale of longing unfulfilled. Entirely concerned with Negroes, the story revolves around an old slave who finds adjustment to Reconstruction impossible. His past life—his very identity—has been destroyed with his emancipation. As he comes to the end of his tormented life, he believes that his master is coming to reclaim him and set all in order. That, of course, we know would be quite impossible; years have passed away and change has brought about irrevocable alterations in the old way of life to which he belonged. On the other hand, the young Negro couple who befriend the old man represent a new generation. They will probably survive, though their way will certainly not be easy. When we read it closely, we can see that the story does not advocate the idea of Negro infantilism; what Page does seem to be saying is that the abrupt emancipation of dependent slaves is traumatic for them. At the same time he

indicates that it is an irresponsible act on the part of the liberators. At the end of the story the old man rejects the title "Ole 'Stracted" though he admits that he does not know what his name really is. In a particularly melodramatic exchange, the young Negress asks, "How is you, Ole 'Stracted?" And he responds, "Dat ain't my name. . . . /but/ Marster. He know it. . . . He know it--got it set down in de book."  

The stories of In Ole Virginia involve many aspects of place. If Page is remembered first as a local colorist, a school which has fallen out of vogue in our day of sophisticated realism, that does not preclude his also being remembered for his expression of the loneliness and nostalgia and loss which Reconstruction imposed upon owner and slave alike. If he embellished the relationships and romanticized the old way of life, it is nevertheless true that he depicts the best aspects of a social system which had its beauty even while it was doomed to fail. His stories were in a sense therapeutic. Recriminations there had been, and quite enough of them; the evils of chattel slavery had been publicized

24 Page, "Ole 'Stracted," in In Ole Virginia, p. 190.
extensively. What had not been treated with equal digni-
ity were the more subtle and defensible aspects of the
plantation system. These nuances Page attempted to
articulate in his works, although as we have seen, he
did not flinch from evaluating realistically the adverse
effects of the plantation culture on Southern litera-
ture. Page marks a change in the approach to the treat-
ment of the South as a place. He saw with few illusions
the evils of slavery, but he saw too the depth of the
black-white dilemma. In a mixed effort to counter the
extreme indictments of the North and to project an image
of the misunderstood South, he wrote romantic stories
that yet have in them the forecast of a more complex
development of the sense of the South as a place.

This development is more convincingly evidenced in
Joel Chandler Harris. Harris is usually considered to
be the first serious Southern folklorist. Recognizing
the potential both for humor and realism which Negro
legends held, he set about to capture in Uncle Remus the
essential Southern flavor which is so much a part of the
region's sense of place. Paul M. Cousins comments: "He
knew the Southern plantation from end to end,
and he dealt with both its pleasant and its harsh features. He portrayed the fortunes of the planters and their former slaves after the Civil War and also the problems of economic and racial readjustments which confronted the South during the years of Reconstruction. In doing so, however, he kept clear of sentimental propaganda in defense of a lost cause."25 It is interesting to note that in 1876 Harris went to work for the Atlanta Constitution, one of whose editors was another Georgian, Henry W. Grady. Rubin has observed the strange irony which brought together the chief exponent of industrialization—the "New South"—and the author of the Uncle Remus stories which figured largely in romanticizing the old agrarian way of life.

In one especially significant essay for the Constitution, "Literature in the South," published on November 30, 1879, Harris renounced his former conviction that all literature written in the South was worth consideration—a position which ironically he seemed to endorse at least tacitly even after 1900 by his involvement

with The Library of Southern Literature—and took the position that only that literature which is American is worthy of praise. In so doing, he took a radical stand, and one which but a few years before would have branded him as a traitor to the South. His point was this: the South had too long been oriented toward "sectionalism," which was tantamount to blind chauvinism; what was to be desired was a healthy "localism," which gave flavor and "essence" to literary art without the negative aspects of sectionalism. In his words: "Fellowship is not necessary to the literary artist, but an enlarged vision, broad sympathies and national views are absolute essentials to perfect literary work. . . . the work of a literary man, to be enduring, must be utterly and absolutely removed from all sectionalism or the prejudices to which sectionalism gives rise."26 And he concludes: "The truth might as well be told: we have no Southern literature worthy of the name because an attempt has been made to give it the peculiarities of

26Joel Chandler Harris, "Literature in the South," Constitution, November 30, 1879, as quoted in Cousins, Joel Chandler Harris, pp. 108-109.
sectionalism rather than to impart to it the flavor of localism." 27

As a result of these opinions, and because of the charm of his Uncle Remus: His Songs and Sayings, published in 1881, and Nights with Uncle Remus, published in 1883, shy Joe Harris of the Constitution became Joel Chandler Harris, author and folklorist of national reputation.

When Harris first began collecting the Negro legends which later became Uncle Remus, he stated his purpose as two-fold: "to preserve in permanent shape those curious mementos of a period that will no doubt be sadly misrepresented by historians of the future," and to preserve the dialect of the Southern Negro. 28 His intentions were completely serious, as he tells us in the Introduction to Uncle Remus: His Songs and Sayings, 29 and the humor and pith of the legends are

27 Harris, "Literature in the South," p. 110.

28 Harris, editorial, Constitution, April 9, 1880, as quoted in Cousins, Joel Chandler Harris, p. 111.

invaluable resources to the student of Southern literature. Here for the first time dignity is given to an old Negro's quaint cottage; and here for the first time a white Southern writer casts a black man in the role of "teacher" to a white child. The cottage replaces the great plantation house and a simple meal of roasted yams becomes feast enough for the white master's son.

Three years before his death, Harris published a series of Uncle Remus stories called *Told by Uncle Remus: New Stories of the Old Plantation*. In the "Reason Why," he told his readers that Uncle Remus had never felt at home in Atlanta, and that shortly before the marriage of the young man who had been the little boy of the earlier stories, the old Negro had informed Miss Sally that he was going "home" to the plantation. Much to his satisfaction, she had informed him that they would all be going home with him. The child, then, of the new stories was to be the son of the boy who heard the first ones. This somber little boy worries Uncle Remus because he never laughs and seems to be totally without imagination. Once the child loosens up and becomes free
with the old man, he begins to laugh and ask questions.

What follows is an assessment by Uncle Remus—really by Harris, of course—of the difference between the lost Old South and the New South symbolized by the city:

'La, honey! You sho' dunno nothin'; you oughter hear me tell tales when I could tell um. I boun' you'd a' busted de button off'n yo' whatchamacollums. Yo' pa uster set right wha you er settin' an laugh twel he can't laugh no mo'.' His reference to the old times put Uncle Remus in a nostalgic mood, and he sadly mused: 'But dem wuz laughin' times, an' it looks like dey ain't never comin' back. Dat 'uz 'fo' eve'body wuz rushin' 'roun' trying ter git money what don't b'long ter um by good right.'

This summary of the differences between the two ways of life is marked by the wistful quality of so much Southern literature of the Reconstruction era. Industrialization and urbanization had sounded the death knell to the plantation way—the agrarian life—which in literary depictions had been regarded as quite satisfactory to white and black alike. Harris, like many another Southerner, here laments the passing of the security and the

tranquility associated with the literary sense of the Old South place.

And yet in Joel Chandler Harris the treatment of the Old South as a place is closely, perhaps inextricably, related to his sense of the New South as a place. It is important that we understand one primary distinction between the old and new concepts of the South as a place: the Old South of literature was depicted as a place of stability and happiness stereotyped and frozen in the mould of the plantation myth. Fictional treatment of individuals and their unique problems was subordinated to conform to the myth: the Southern white man was a cavalier, the Southern white woman was a belle or a mother, the Southern Negro was a happy "darkie" who, like Tom in Woodcraft, would rather die than be separated from his "master." On the other hand, the New South of fiction was more realistically depicted as a place where complex problems centered more and more on the individual and his search for identity as a member of the Southern community. Once writers began exploring Southerners as individuals—or even as representatives of specific sub-divisions of the general classification "Southerner"—stories based
on complex tensions began to appear: in these stories the Southern white man is often unheroic, the Southern white woman is frequently frustrated and unable to conform to her role as mother-woman, the Southern Negro is abused and conscious of his plight. The old romanticism was replaced by realism, and stories concerning such problems as racial disharmony, individual alienation, and sexual inequality emerged in Southern writing. The literature of the New South in the late nineteenth century pointed the way toward that of the twentieth century; it began to deal with the dilemma of displacement and with the tensions which, if always present to some extent in reality, were glossed over in the Old South literary depiction of place. This complexity of attitude is in a way strikingly revealed in the works of Kate Chopin.

First gaining national recognition in the early 1890's through her Louisiana tales which were published in various magazines (and adding to her fame later with her collection *Bayou Folks*), Mrs. Chopin had written almost a hundred stories and published another collection called *A Night in Acadie* and had acquired a secure reputation as a local colorist before her major work,
The Awakening, appeared in 1899. She shocked her public and critics alike with this book in which she dares to treat the problem of Southern woman's sexual frustration. Kate Chopin, moreover, had the time while she waited for The Awakening to be published to write a short story, "The Storm," another story of sexual desire in which the life of a Southern woman is better characterized by the term "displacement" than it is by "placement." Mrs. Chopin's shift from predominately local-color stories to penetrating psychological explorations is an excellent illustration of the transition among Southern writers from romanticism to realism. For this reason, I shall consider briefly one earlier short story--"A Night in Acadie"--in contrast to "The Storm" and The Awakening.

"A Night in Acadie" is the story of a young Southern cavalier named Telephore, "a robust young fellow with good strong features and a somewhat determined expression--despite his vacillations in the choice of a wife."  


He meets a coquettish Southern belle named Zalda who "carried herself boldly and stepped out freely and easily, like a negress. There was an absence of reserve in her manner, yet there was no lack of womanliness. She had the air of a young person accustomed to decide for herself and for those about her."³³ (We may see this description of Zalda as an indication of Mrs. Chopin's later preoccupation with some woman's place in Southern society and her attitude toward woman's rights, but her contemporaries had no reason to suspect what was to follow in "The Storm" and The Awakening.)

The setting of "A Night in Acadie" is bayou country, a place abounding in good humor, gumbo, and intrigue. The intrigue, we discover, is the result of Zalda's abortive tryst with a scoundrel from whom Telephore gallantly rescues her in the woods in the deep of night only to discover that he has fallen in love with the girl. We learn that the young man has finally met his match in Zalda: "'W'at time it is? whispered Zalda.' Alas! he [Telephore] could not

tell her; his watch was broken in the fight which secured her rescue. But almost for the first time in his life, Telephore did not care what time it was. 34 Here we find all the trappings of an entertaining but superficial local-color tale: the use of French accent to locate the story in Louisiana; the predictable reference to belles, Cajun food, and Negro servants; the rescue of a damsel in distress. But place, in any complex sense, is absent from the story.

"The Storm," on the other hand, is a brief story of illicit love, a study of a correspondence between place external and place internal. Put another way, the story is a study in the relationship between a storm in nature and ones raging within the emotions of human beings. These connectives are especially important in this story, a vital point to bear in mind when we assess Chopin's use of references to place as it grows in complexity. Here we find a Southern woman writer dealing with a love story as sensual in all points as those of Flaubert or Zola. Indeed, perhaps

34Chopin, p. 36.
she is more explicit than they. The setting is in the home of a Spanish woman named Calixta who is married to a dull but faithful husband. A storm has arisen, forcing her husband and son to take shelter away from home. Meanwhile, Calixta's former love—a planter named Alcée—is driven into her house seeking refuge. It is there that the storms of passion overcome the two while nature rages outside:

They did not heed the crashing torrents, and the roar of the elements made her laugh as she lay in his arms.

. . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .

He stayed cushioned upon her, breathless, dazed, enervated, with his heart beating like a hammer upon her. With one hand she clasped his head, her lips lightly touching his forehead. The other hand stroked with a soothing rhythm his muscular shoulders.

The growl of the thunder was distant and passing away. The rain beat softly upon the shingles, inviting them to drowsiness and sleep. But they dared not yield.

The rain was over; and the sun was turning the glistening world into a palace of gems. Calixta, on the gallery watched Alcée ride away. He turned and smiled at her with a beaming face, and she lifted her pretty chin in the air and laughed aloud. 35

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The significance of this story in terms of place lies not only in the sensuousness of the description, but also in the detachment of the author and her treatment of woman's role from the perspective of the New South. Not only did Mrs. Chopin succeed in emancipating herself from the stereotypes of local color; she succeeded in presenting life realistically and woman with understanding for the first time in Southern literature. In doing so, she broke with the romanticism of the Old South literary myth of the Southern woman as earth-mother. Women had always been elevated in the stories about plantation and frontier life: they had, in fact, been so elevated as to be isolated from reality; the stereotype of the Southern belle who is always shy, always virtuous, always maddeningly attractive yet always faithful and austere was a fiction which writers of the Old South and even Reconstruction novels had created out of whole cloth. We have but to remove our rose-colored glasses to realize that women who were sturdy enough to accompany men into a wilderness, survive the loneliness of isolation from contact with other women of their kind, assist in all sorts of
domestic crises from doctoring the sick to helping de­
 deliver babies (who might in some cases be their own hus­
 bands' offspring by some Negress) had to be a far cry
 from the demure, fictitious Southern belle.

Calixta does not leave her husband and run away
 with Alcée, but neither does she suffer remorse as a
 result of her indiscretion; she becomes, according to
 the story, more compassionate after giving vent to her
 passion than she was before doing so. Such is not the
 case with Edna Pontellier, the protagonist of The
 Awakening, a novel which concerns the growing sense of
 displacement experienced by a Kentucky-born woman who
 marries a New Orleanian—a Creole—and finds herself
 an "outsider" in his world.

The Awakening opens at the pension of Mme. Lebrun
 on Grand Isle. Edna, vacationing there with her two
 children while her materialistic, practical husband com­
 mutes from New Orleans to see them on weekends, is con­
 sumed with indescribable, unidentifiable longing. The
 Pontelliers do not have an ideal marriage; rather it is
 a convenient partnership, neither partner knowing of a
 more satisfying style of life, yet neither entirely
happy in the present one. Edna, we are told, "was not a mother-woman." As the story progresses, we discover Edna's attraction to the sea. She tells her friend, Madame Ratignolle, that it reminds her of the tall grass of a Kentucky meadow which she walked across as a child: "I felt as if I must walk on forever, without coming to the end of it. I don't remember whether I was frightened or pleased. I must have been entertained." She does not realize, of course, that in a real sense the sea and the grass correspond to the endless ocean of her own frustration, and that the sea will finally offer her the only means of escape from her distress.

In the course of the story Edna falls in love with Robert Lebrun, the handsome son of Mme. Lebrun at whose pension the story opens. Her awakened passions open for her new vistas, but at the same time they seal her doom. She searches for her internal "place" only to discover


that satisfying those needs of the spirit is not compatible with her role as faithful wife and devoted mother-woman. She is displaced by her new-found self-knowledge, and becomes alienated and finally undone. She abandons decorum only to conclude that for her, life lived for an unloved husband or solely for children is not sufficient. She seizes upon what she conceives to be her only alternative: suicide. As she swims out into the open sea from which she will not return, "She looked into the distance, and the old terror flamed up for an instant, then sank again. Edna heard her father's voice and her sister Margaret's. She heard the barking of an old dog that was chained to the sycamore tree. The spurs of the cavalry officer clanged as he walked across the porch. There was a hum of bees, and the musky odor of pinks filled the air."38 Her final moments are spent in recalling and reliving the details and the feelings connected with her life in Kentucky as a child where she knew her place and before the destructive forces of society and her own nature alienated her forever from a satisfactory sense of place as an adult.

Mrs. Chopin's realism did not suit the palate of her readers; she involved them in an uncomfortable reality far removed from her local-color tales to which they had become accustomed; she explored a new consciousness of the sense of place—of displacement—and as a result her works brought down on her severe disapproval. Even her biographer, Father Daniel S. Rankin, "concentrated on the regional aspects of her writing, brushing aside The Awakening, for example, as 'morbid.' In the Literary History of the United States, where Kate Chopin is highly praised as a local colorist, the novel is not even mentioned." 39 Until rediscovered in recent years, the novel almost slipped out of literary history. As Seyersted puts it: "Mrs. Chopin had a daring and a vision all her own, a unique pessimistic realism applied to woman's unchangeable condition. When the storm over The Awakening hit her, it showed that she was truly a solitary soul, and indeed, in 1900 she was, with Dreiser, the most isolated, the least recognized of the important American realists of that era." 40 What is important to

39 Seyersted, p. i.

40 Seyersted, pp. 199-200.
note in this study is the fact that Chopin's "daring" is a hallmark: for all American writers, but most of all for the South, it signalled the beginning of the end for the local-color myth-makers and the dawn of a type of candor which would follow in the works of the writers of the Southern Renaissance.

The movement toward realism which negatively affected Kate Chopin's literary reputation among her peers had an even more drastic effect on George Washington Cable. If Kate Chopin experienced rejection which drove her into herself, Cable fell victim as a result of his realistic treatment of social problems in the South to disapproval which impelled him literally to leave Louisiana. Here, for the first time since Poe and Mark Twain (who left, of course, for reasons other than the critics' disapproba­tion), we find a Southerner daring to defy tradition and to expose sectional prejudice. There can be no doubt that the romantic and "bloodless" literature of the years following the Civil War was directly attributable to the South's concept of itself as a community: there simply was no place in a society so badly wounded for writers whose works were critical. Rubin recommends that we look
to Cable's life and especially to his novel *John March*, *Southerner* for evidence of the fate of the writer who turned reformer and levelled his art at the imperfections of his own community.  

Cable's reputation rests more on his early local-color stories in *Old Creole Days* than on his socially penetrating novels and essays. Both Jay B. Hubbell and Edmund Wilson lament his writing *John March*, calling it an example of "didacticism." They echo Cable's editor, Richard Watson Gilder, who is reported to have written Cable after reading the manuscript in 1890: "I could weep for disappointment. Instead of a return to literature *John March is* an attempt to fetch everything into literature save & except literature itself. . . . Beware the Fate of Tolstoi."  

Like many later Southerners, Cable left the South in 1885 to make his home in the North. His fortunes in his native New Orleans had been capricious: *Old Creole Days* had brought him great admiration; on the other hand, *The* 

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Grandissimes, a novel attacking Southern racism, Madame Delphine, a story about the quadroons, The Creoles of Louisiana, sketches of life in and around New Orleans, and Dr. Sevier, a second novel, this time about prison conditions in New Orleans, were met with less enthusiastic response. Then, in 1885, The Silent South, a book advocating an end to segregation and a general reevaluation of the South's attitude toward the Negro, brought down on him the wrath of his fellow Southerners.

Let us consider two of these controversial novels—The Grandissimes and John March, Southerner—for evidence of the evolving sense of place in the works of George Washington Cable: for proof of his shift away from romanticism and toward realism.

The Grandissimes, published in 1880, thought by many to be Cable's greatest novel, is not a frontal attack on traditional Southern attitudes. In fact, it often is considered today (when sentimentality is out of vogue) to be characterized by that "peculiarly sweetish
and effeminate sentimentality that throws one off in so much of the fiction of the period. But in spite of the romantic aura which invests the novel, its plot and its treatment of racism mark yet another departure from the literary sense of place which was typical of the Old South. Newton Arvin believes that Cable's "primary aim in the novel was to paint a full, truthful, critical picture of a social and regional scene," and Cable himself said in his diary: "The Grandissimes contained as plain a protest against the times in which it was written as against the earlier times in which its scenes were set."

The Grandissimes, set in the early 1880's, centers around a family feud, the result of a duel in which a De Grapion had been killed by a Grandissime. We learn of the problem as it is told to a Yankee "outsider" named Joseph Frowenfeld who has come South to make his


45Arvin, p. viii.

46George Washington Cable, Diary, quoted by Newton Arvin in Introduction to The Grandissimes, p. viii.
home in New Orleans. We perceive the conflicts as they appear to this "outsider" with whom we identify, for whether or not we are Southerners by birth, we are ourselves "outsiders" in the context of the novel which concerns Creole society in New Orleans in the first decade of the nineteenth century. The conflicts primarily are familial and racial, both types exemplified in the feud between two half-brothers: one is the "white" Honore Grandissime, the other the quadroon Honore Grandissime, f.m.c. (free man of color) ends happily with a reconciliation between the two families involved in the conflict, but even so, many violent events precede the happy conclusion.

Cable's description of Louisiana as the Frowenfelds first see it sets the tone for the whole novel:

It was an October dawn, when, long wearied of the ocean, and with bright anticipations of verdure, and fragrance, and tropical gorgeousness, this simple-hearted family awoke to find the bark that had borne them from their far northern home already entering upon the ascent of the Mississippi. We may easily imagine the grave group, as they came up one by one from below, that morning of first disappointment, and stood . . . looking out across the waste, and seeing the sky and the marsh meet in the east, the north, and the west, and receiving with patient silence the
father's suggestion that the hills would, no doubt, rise into view after a while... But no hills rose. However, by and by, they found solace in the appearance of distant forest, and in the afternoon they entered a land—but such a land! A land hung in mourning, darkened by gigantic cypresses, submerged; a land of reptiles, silence, shadow, decay.47

The description of the land corresponds to the circumstances which shortly befall the Frowenfeld family, for not long after they arrive in New Orleans, all but Joseph die of the fever. And in a larger sense, the description corresponds to the story which Joseph is later to learn of the shadow and decay which characterize the Grandissime-De Grapion feud.

The doctor who attended the Frowenfelds during their final illness becomes the narrator of the story of the conflict between the two half-brothers. He is a native New Orleanean, hence privy to the intrigues which he recounts to Frowenfeld in the course of the novel. At one point he says to the young "outsider": "By the by, Frowenfeld, you haven't made the acquaintance of your pretty neighbors next door." And

he continues, "Their name is De Grapion—oh, De Grapion, says I! their name is Nancanou. They are, without exception, the finest women . . . that I know in New Orleans. . . . Best blood of the Province; good as the Grandissimes. Blood is a great thing here, in certain odd ways. . . . Very curious sometimes. . . . At a grand mask ball about two months ago . . . the proudest old turkey in the theater was an old fellow whose Indian blood shows in his very behavior, and yet—ha, ha! I saw that same old man, at a quadroon ball a few years ago, walk up to the handsomest, best dressed man in the house, a man with a skin whiter than his own,—a perfect gentleman as to looks and manners,—and without a word slap him in the face." Frowenfeld is understandably dismayed by the account of apparently undeserved abuse, but the doctor explains: "The fellow had no business there. Those balls are not given to quadroon males, my friend. He was lucky to get out alive, and that was about all he did. . . . They are right! . . . The people here have got to be particular."48 In this

account we see something of the racism and the pride which characterize the Creole; it is these characteristics, among others, which Cable attacks in *The Grandissime*.

Frowenfeld is bewildered—as are many modern readers—by the seemingly irrational code which leads brother into conflict with brother, white into violent conflict with black. But he learns a good deal about the pride and prejudice which characterize the sense of place in New Orleans in 1803. By inference we learn, too, about Cable's concern for injustice in the New South as well as the old.

In *John March*, the "haze of local color," as Rubin calls it, goes entirely by the board. "He set out to produce a novel which would allow him to describe what was going on in the South. He wanted to comment on the region's problems." He knew that the Southern dilemma was not simple, and he was aware of the tremendous burden of habit, prejudice, custom, and lethargy that Southerners must bear in their attempt to do what was right. So instead of ignoring all this, he would

face it squarely. He chose Georgia, not Louisiana, as his setting for the novel in order to gain as much detachment as possible. The theme centers around the struggle of the title character to overcome the limitations bequeathed him by his family and the society of which he is a part. In spite of the many problems which are heaped upon him as a result of the villainy of Brother Garnet, a religious quack, and Leggett, a conniving Negro politician, to name but two characters who put blocks in the way of March's self-fulfillment, he decides to stay in the South and do his best to improve his community. To his friend Fair we hear him say: "I know that even without your offer to join in a promising business venture in the North there's a better chance for me North than here. But--O! it's no use, Fair, I just can't go! ... My place is here." It is possible, Arlin Turner speculates, that Cable might


have wished he, too, had chosen to stay at home and fight the battles on the scene. However that might be, he did not do so; he became a man isolated from his homeland, and as such he pointed the way to later Southern writers whose emancipation from the home-tie allowed them to write—whether in or out of the South—from detached points of view.

Cable's fate was not enviable, though his courage to speak out for what he felt was just is so. Phillip Butcher comments:

The plantation tradition established by Page and his followers was appealing to the North, which was anxious to be done with the controversy that had wracked the country. The issue Cable raised, the civil status of the ex-slave, was one the nation was now willing to leave to the South. Even those readers who respected Cable's dedication to the lost cause of the freeman called on him for picturesque stories of olden times. The public failed to recognize and neglected to encourage the strength of his social vision and his talent for realistic portrayal of regional experience.52

If Cable was not recognized in his own time for humanitarianism, he did perform an invaluable service for Southern writers who followed him: he demonstrated the

fact that it is sometimes necessary to leave home in order to evaluate one's sense of place. If his art is a curious mixture of sentimentality and realism, his insights are keen and his articulation of them painfully clear.

IV

There remain two writers whose works should be accorded some note in any survey of Southern writers before 1920. I have intentionally left them until now because they are in a sense anomalous. One is the Tennessee humorist, George Washington Harris, the other is Mark Twain. Neither man can be located in the mainstream of traditional Southern literature, but both were Southerners by birth, and both drew heavily on the Southern heritage. As humorists, Harris and Mark Twain share a basic sense of place. They portray people at home, making use of their traditions, mythologies, dialects, and religions in order to explore human inconsistencies and prejudices. This alone, of course, does not make the humor of Harris or Mark Twain uniquely Southern, for any writer's richest source of
humor, whether in the North or South, is invariably 
human beings with all their peculiarities, their taboos, 
their "sacred cows." What makes the products of these 
two writers "Southern" is simply the fact that the South 
was the section of the country they knew best and about 
which they wrote. The humorist must be a keen observer 
and a student of human nature; since this is true, it 
follows that both Harris and Mark Twain were primarily 
observers of Southerners and the aspects of Southern 
life in their time and place which were vulnerable to 
their fun-poking.

The period in Southern history spanned by Harris 
(who was born in 1814 in Allegheny City, Pennsylvania, 
but moved early in life to Tennessee, and died in 1869) 
and Mark Twain (who was born Samuel L. Clemens in 
Florida, Missouri, in 1835 and died in 1910) was re­ 
markable. Comprising almost a century, the time 
between the birth of Harris and the death of Mark Twain 
encompasses all those events which occurred in the 
South from the days of William Gilmore Simms to within 
a decade of the Southern Renaissance. No more eventful 
a period of time and no more turbulent a place can be
imagined than the nineteenth century in the South. The milieu of both writers was fertile ground for the humorist.

Sut Lovingood's Yarns, first published in 1867, was written gradually over a period of years during which Harris wrote numerous sketches for newspapers and journals in Tennessee and New York. His single claim to fame, the book was to gain him the esteem of Mark Twain, and later of William Faulkner, F. O. Matthiessen, Edmund Wilson, and Robert Penn Warren. Sut, the central character of Harris's racy tales of the backwoods, has been described by Constance Rourke as "among the rootless drift of the backwoods, those who 'pursued uncharted ways, breaking from traditions, bent on triumph.'" Milton Rickels believes he belongs among the characters "who expressed the mood of dissonance in the American experience, the revolt against fixed traditional heritage," and he quotes Mark Twain as having written that

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the *Yarns* rebound in humor which would please the West but be taboo in the East.\(^55\) Mark Twain's prophecy was accurate.

Harris's contribution to American literature lies not only in his own special genius for characterization and dialect—for capturing the essence of place through humorous, often bawdy tales—but in his influence on writers who followed him in dealing with the backwoods Southerners in all his coarseness. Three writers who were greatly influenced by Harris come immediately to mind: Mark Twain, William Faulkner, and Flannery O'Connor. The connection between Harris and Mark Twain and William Faulkner is discussed by M. Thomas Inge, who believes that this "vigorous literature" *Harris's works*, which has only become widely known in the last three decades and which comes to us largely out of oral frontier tradition, has been "an important influence on modern southern literature in general and, in particular, on the work of no less a writer than William Faulkner."\(^56\) These connections

\(^55\)Rickels, pp. 121-24.

will become clearer in the discussion of the Yarns which follows, as will the specific indebtedness of Flannery O'Connor to Harris. Let us look first at Sut Lovingood himself as he is depicted in various tales; then we may better consider Harris's treatment of several aspects of the sense of place as it is revealed through Sut's eyes and actions.

Harris's readers first met Sut Lovengood (the original spelling of the name) in 1854 in a national journal, the New York Spirit of the Times. The tale which was printed in that journal was "Sut Lovengood's Daddy 'Acting Horse,'" which later was entered as the first tale in the Yarns. It was a hint of things to come, for it concerns an event in the life of a young backwoodsman of what some critics have called the "Southern Highlands" which involves him and his father in a highly comical situation. Their horse having died of starvation, Sut's father suggests a "plausible" solution to the crisis: he will harness himself to the plow while Sut assumes the role of farmer and directs the "horse." As matters develop, Sut's father runs headlong into a hornets' nest and is forced to flee naked to the river for relief.
Sut's enjoyment of the turn of events does not endear him to his father, who vows to "ruinate" Sut once he is liberated from the tormenters. Sut, "knowin' [his] dad's unmolified natur'," decides to depart for the copper mines while he can. As he retells the story to his cronies, Sut also tells us a good deal about himself and his outlook on life: "Now boys, I haint seed dad since, an' I dusent hev much appetite tu see im fur sum time to cum. Less all drink! Yere's luck tu the durned old fool, an' the ho'nets too" (38).

The "hero" (more accurately, anti-hero) is described in this first tale by a gentleman who appears periodically throughout the Yarns in order to supply the book some degree of continuity and the reader an occasional touch with the real world. "George," as this gentleman is appropriately named, describes Sut as "a queer looking, long legged, short bodied, small headed, white haired, hog eyed, funny sort of a genius, fresh from some bench-legged Jew's clothing store" (33). This description, when coupled with Sut's characteristics which we infer from his summation of the whole plowing affair cited above, introduces us to one of the
finest examples of a "grotesque" in Southern literature. (Flannery O'Connor calls Sut an American grotesque.  We shall see in Chapter II similarities between the art of Harris and O'Connor in regard to characterization and also sardonic humor.)

Not only is Sut's physical appearance bizarre; his sense of humor borders on sadism. This characteristic is more fully developed in subsequent tales though it is implied in the account cited above of Sut's inordinate pleasure in his father's confrontation with the hornets. In "Contempt of Court--Almost" Sut contemplates the sadistic aspects of human nature:

I hates ole Onsightly Peter, jus' caze he didn't seem tu like tu hear me narrate las' night; that's human nater the yeath over, an' yere's more univerusal unregenerit human nater: ef ever yu dus enything tu enybody wifout cause, yu hates em allers afterwards, an' sorter wants tu hurt em agin. An' yere's anuther human nater: ef enything happens tu sum feller, I don't keer ef he's yure bes' frien, an' I don't keer how sorry yu is fur him, thar's a streak ove satisfack-shun 'bout like a sowin thread a-runnin all thru yer sorrer. . . . An' yere's a littil more; no odds how good yu is tu yung things, ur how kine yu is in treatin em, when yu sees a littil long laiged lamb a-shakin

57Rickels, p. 131.
hits tail, an' a-dancin staggerinly onder hits ham a-huntin fur the tit, ontu hits knees, yer fingers will itch tu seize that ar tail, an' fling the littil ankshus son ove a mutton over the fence amung the blackberry briars. (186)

What is more, Sut is an unregenerate libertine. His understanding of human beings is quite clear: "---an' yere's my sentimints ontu folks: Men wer made a-purpus jis' tu eat, drink, an' fur stayin awake in the yearly part ove the nites; an' wimen wer made tu cook the vittils, mix the sperits, an' help the man du the stayin awake. That's all, an' nuthin more, onless hits fur the wimen tu raise the devil atwix meals, an' knit socks atwix drams, an' the men tu play short kerds, swap hosses wif fools, an' fite fur exersise, at odd spells" (77).

Sut's self-appraisal, which occurs at the end of "Old Burns's Bull-Ride," explains further his feelings about life and casts light on his attitude toward the parent-child relationship:

I 'se a goner I 'speck, an' I jis don't keer a durn. I'm no count, no how. Jis' look at me! Did yu ever see sich a sampil ove a human afore? I feels like I'd be glad tu be dead, only I 'se feard ove the dyin. I don't keer fur herearter, fur hits onpossibil fur me tu hev ara soul. Wo ever seed a soul
in jis' sich a rack heap ove bones an' rags es this? I's nuffin but sum newfangled sort ove beas', a sorter cross atween a crazy ole monkey an' a durn'd woreout hominy-mill. I is one ove dad's explites at makin cussed fool invenshuns, an' cum afore my time. I blames him fur all ove hit, allers a-tryin tu be king fool. He hes a heap tu count fur, George--a heap. (89)

Not only is this assessment revealing of Sut's self-concept; it also tells us something about his attitude toward his father. Very far removed from romantic depictions of fatherhood in traditional literature of the Old South, Sut's father is the forerunner of Pap in Huckleberry Finn, and later of Abner Snopes in "Barn Burning." But we need not rely entirely on the passage above for revelations of Sut's attitude toward home and family. His description of his father in the first tale of the Yarns is explicit: "he's so dod-dratted mean, an' lazy, an' ugly, an' savidge, an' durn fool tu kill" (35). And Sut's account of the night before the famous plowing mentioned above presents us with a grotesque domestic scene: "Well, one nite he [Sut's father] lay awake till cock-crowin a-snortin, an' rollin, an' blowin, an' shufflin, an' scratchin hissef, an' a whisperin at mam a heap, an' at breckfus' I foun'
out what hit ment. Says he, 'Sut, I'll tell yu what we'll du: I'll be hoss mysef, an' pull the plow whilst yu drives me, an' then the 'Ole Quilt' (he ment that fur mam) an' the brats kin plant, an' tend, ur jis let hit alone, es they darn pleze; I aint a carein'" (35).

So much for Sut the man. Undoubtedly the Yarns were originally read as rare good humor, quaint stories about lower-class Southerners who "talk funny." But they cannot be read on any sophisticated level as simply amusing or entertaining tales told by an eccentric scoundrel. Like all successful satire, the Yarns were written for a serious purpose by a man who saw a great deal wrong with the society in which he lived. They are vehicles by which Harris explores numerous aspects of life which he felt were in need of criticism. Keenly aware of the problems of his region--before, during, and after the Civil War--he created the microcosm of Sut's world in order to comment on themes of national and even cosmic significance. By employing a "fool" as narrator, he escaped censure for his insights and criticism of society, religion, and politics. No perceptive modern reader can fail, however, to recognize that Sut is more often than not Harris himself.
The **Yarns** are Harris's plea for freedom for the individual from forces in society which are inimical to his happiness: in a world which he saw as essentially orderless (he has Sut tell George: "this worl am all 'rong enyhow"), he sought to divest himself of the impinging authority, conformity, and utilitarianism which society forced upon him. In the South which Harris knew, all three of these inhibiting forces were at work, he felt, destroying the individual, forcing the primitive, natural instincts of man to conform to systems which Harris viewed as destructive.

We have seen earlier the movement in Southern literature away from the romantic depiction of the sense of place toward a realistic assessment of it. In a sense, Harris was ahead of his time in perceiving the dangers inherent in suppression of the individual in favor of society. As a strong corrective to the stereotype—the myth—of the South as Utopia and the white man as a cavalier, Harris chose as his spokesman a grotesque anti-hero in the person of Sut Lovingood. For this reason, Sut's articulations are at the heart of any evaluation of Harris's role in the evolving
sense of place in Southern literature. Chief among the
writer's targets for criticism are governmental author-
ity, religious formalism, and utilitarianism. For all
his good humor and endless talk, Sut is presented to
the reader as an isolated man; one who would like to
die, but who is afraid of dying; one who believes
himself soulless, bestial; one for whom the world is
all wrong anyhow. Rickels comments: "While Sut seeks
joy, he also sees the harsh, bitter competition for
existence. Harris' emphasis on the poverty and cruelty
of the American backwoods implies a profound disappoint-
ment with life in the New World that was envisioned in
his early Mr. Free essays."58 Taken as whole, the Yarns,
for all their zest and humor, speak more of Sut's dis-
placement that they do of his comfortable sense of
place: he is more an "outsider" than an "insider" in
the Southern community in which he lives.

In "Rare Ripe Garden-Seed" governmental authority--
elected officials, to be more exact--and religious for-
malism are dealt a hard blow. Sut asks the respectable

58 Rickels, p. 99.
George a penetrating question: "Say, George, wudn't yu like tu see me intu one 'bout haf fadid, slit, he speaks of a petticoat-type dress he wore as a child an' a-walkin jis' so, up the middil street ove yure city chuch, a-aimin fur yure pew pen, an' hit chock full ove yure fine city gal friends, jis' arter the people hed sot down from the fust prayer, an' the orgin beginin tu groan; what wud yu du in sich a margincy? (174). George responds that he would probably shoot Sut. Sut replies: "Well, I speck yu wud; but yu'd take a rale ole maid faint fus. . . . Wudn't yu be shamed ove me! Yit why not ten chuch in sich a suit, when yu hesn't got no store clothes?" (174). The pretentiousness of church-goers was an offense to Harris, as was the self-righteousness which characterized so many of them.

In this same tale, interwoven with the religious satire, is the following pronouncement regarding law officials: "Sherifs am orful 'spectabil peopil; everybody looks up tu em. I never adzacly seed the 'spectabil part mysef. I'se too fear'd ove em, I reckon, tu 'zamin fur hit much. One thing I knows, no country
atwix yere an' Tophit kin ever 'lect me tu sell out widders' plunder, ur poor men's co'n, an' the tho'ts ove hit gins me a good feelin'; hit sorter flashes thru my heart when I thinks ove hit" (175). Returning to the satire on religion Sut continues: "I axed a passun onst, what hit cud be [that "good feeling" spoken of above], an' he pernounced hit tu be onregenerit pride. . . . I were in hopes hit mout be 'ligion, ur sence, a-soakin intu me; hit feels good, enyhow, an' I don't keer of every suckit rider outen jail knows hit" (175). This passage strongly resembles one in Huckleberry Finn describing the dilemma faced by Huck concerning Negro Jim. In that case, as in Sut's, the protagonist decides to do the "sinful" thing instead of the sanctioned one.

Utilitarianism became connected in Harris's mind with Northern exploitation of the South, a problem which became increasingly severe during Reconstruction. Though Harris died in 1869, and though two of his tales which speak most harshly of the Yankee— "Sut Lovengood Blown Up" and "Sut Lovingood, on the Puritan Yankee"— were published in 1857, he had keen insights into the
exploitation of the Southerner which would follow in the wake of the Civil War. In the first of these two tales, it is a Yankee peddler who sells Sicily Burns the soda powder which she in turn serves Sut. He blames his failure to seduce her on the Yankee. In the second tale Sut summarizes the Yankee character in these words: "Well! Everything the yankee does am a cheat in sum way. The word cheat kivers his hole character as pufectly as the ball ove dirt kivers the young tumil bug, an' like the bug, he lives on hit, wallers in hit, rolls hit, an' at las' is buried in hit" (274). Crude the description certainly is, but it typifies Harris's animosity toward Northerners, who represented the infiltrators, the missioners of industrialization and materialization.

It is clear from this discussion of the art of George Washington Harris that Mark Twain owed him a debt. The ribald, sardonic quality of humor, the keen and intense declaration of war on hypocrisy and sham, the use of dialect, the earthiness—all these characterize Harris's sense of place. And all of them are in some measure also typical of Mark Twain's works.
The influence of Harris on Mark Twain is obvious. But there is the problem of whether or not Mark Twain truly belongs among Southern writers. Scholarly opinion is not unanimous on that point, for while no one denies Mark Twain's Southern heritage or the fact that his most famous works were written about the South, many contend that he was so detached from the region—both physically and philosophically—that he cannot really be classified as a Southerner. We are indebted to Louis Rubin for his interesting and convincing research into the connections between Mark Twain and his childhood home. Rubin believes that *Huckleberry Finn* "could not have been written by a man living in the South during his lifetime, and equally it could not have been written by a man who had not once lived there."  

With the exception of Rubin's study, however, not much scholarly attention has been given to the bearing of those early years of Mark Twain's life in the South on his sense of place and the manner in which they affected his art.

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Rubin thinks that Mark Twain, alone among Southern writers in the period after the Civil War, escaped sufficiently the neurosis of "The Lost Cause" to be able "to look within himself. By accident of birth and heritage, Samuel Langhorne Clemens was able to compose, out of the division and confusion of his engagement in his time and place, a few works of literature that offer the moral ordering and spiritual affirmation of great art. From Hartford, Connecticut, and Elmira, New York, Mark Twain could look at the South and at himself with the vision of discovery." But he did not escape ambivalence about the South. There were times when he preferred to refer to Southerners as "them," Rubin continues, and seemed to hate all things Southern.

All of Mark Twain's works, in one way or another, are related to the sense of place. If they are not all concerned with the South as a place, his most famous novels are. His masterpiece, Huckleberry Finn, deals with many aspects of place which we have seen in the Yarns of G. W. Harris. One of literature's greatest satires, the novel is delightfully humorous even while treating subjects of

great seriousness. Like Harris, Mark Twain employed
dialect: both Negro and white characters speak a patois
which is unmistakably and authentically Southern. The
central character of the novel, a boy named Huckleberry
Finn, shares some characteristics with Sut Lovingood,
though this analogy cannot be carried too far. The
connections between Huck and Sut lie in the facts that
both are atypical heroes, both searchers for identity
and freedom, and both essentially isolated human beings.
Huck is a "problem" for his community; he is a non­
conformist who deplores school, dislikes going to
Sunday School, refuses to wear "proper" clothes, speaks
hopelessly poor English, and fears most in the world
being "sivilized." If he does not really know who he
is (for he is trapped between the worlds of Pap, his
drunkard father, and the Widow Douglas, who tries in
vain to reform him), he clearly is a searcher; his
quest involves not only finding his own identity, but
also finding freedom.

The quest for identity and freedom in Huckleberry
Finn is portrayed as a voyage, a motif which is familiar
in literature as symbolic of search. Huck becomes a
runaway early in the novel, for he cannot conform to the life style imposed upon him by the Widow Douglas and Miss Watson. But his voyage down the Mississippi River in the company of another runaway, an escaped slave named Jim, becomes both a flight from an unsatisfactory environment and a search for a satisfactory one. Huck flees the oppression of the Southern community, but at the same time, perhaps unconsciously, he looks for his place. He does not find it. The last episode of Huckleberry Finn finds Huck and Jim at the Phelps farm. Here Huck discovers that he "has a new name," for by a peculiar turn of circumstances he is mistaken for his friend Tom Sawyer, whose aunt and uncle he has accidentally stumbled upon. For a time Huck is not certain who he is supposed to be, but upon discovering that the family thinks he is Tom, Huck says: "it was like being born again, I was so glad to find out who I was."\(^6^1\) But we know, of course, that Huck is still essentially a boy without a name—a displaced person.

\(^6^1\)Mark Twain, The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn (New York: Washington Square Press, Inc., 1960), p. 285. Subsequent references to Huckleberry Finn are from this edition and will be incorporated into the text.
If he learns a good deal about people and human foibles as he travels down the river, and if he also discovers important things about himself, he is nevertheless still searching as the novel ends. His final words inform us that the search must continue, that civilization and conformity will not do for Huck Finn: "But I reckon I got to light out for the territory ahead of the rest, because Aunt Sally she's going to adopt me and sivilize me, and I can't stand it. I been there before" (374). Where Huck has been before is an insulated little Southern town in which people are expected to conform to specified codes: to speak proper English, wear proper clothing, go to school, attend formal church services; it is also a town characterized by racial prejudice, narrow-mindedness, and bigotry. Huck has no reason to believe that the Phelps farm would be different from the place from which he came. As Huck "lights out for the territory," he is free; it is important to note, however, that the price of that freedom is separation from his home town, his friends, and his roots.

There are interesting similarities between the
life of Huck Finn and that of his creator. Of course I do not mean to imply that Mark Twain was literally like Huck Finn. But in his life, as in Huck's, there was constant searching, and a need to establish his identity. That identity, according to Rubin, had its source in the South, in Hannibal, Missouri. Mark Twain was the son of a Southern family which, if it had fallen upon evil days, was nevertheless a part of the minor aristocracy: his was a family "seeking to hold to status and noblesse oblige in a more crass and democratic society where aristocratic pose comes close to being quixotic gesture, and high-minded scruples of honor the vulnerability whereby the vernacular land speculator with no such scruples could bring the man of honor down to poverty and ruin. And here is the youth Sam Clemens, admiring and wanting to believe in the heroic gesture, the aristocratic pose, and yet observing its practical ineffectiveness and its weakness, and experiencing the deprivation and embarrassment that it brought to those dependent upon it. In Mark Twain's work the public pose, the claim of the gentleman's privilege to special treatment and respect, is always being contrasted with the levelling
processes of a disrespectful vernacular society."  

If Mark Twain is closer to Tom Sawyer in wanting to "be somebody," he is more like Huck Finn in perceiving the hypocrisy which often was a part of his society. Huck finds it difficult, as Rubin points out, to humble himself to a black man. Mark Twain perceived the injustice dealt the Negro, the dehumanization of the black, and wrote about it through use of sardonic humor which reminds us of Harris once again. When Huck arrives at the Phelps farm, for instance, Aunt Sally asks him if anybody was hurt in the accident on board the boat. (Huck has fabricated an accident to explain "Tom's" delay in arriving at the farm.) He responds: "No'm. Killed a nigger" (282). Aunt Sally, relieved, replies: "Well, it's lucky; because sometimes people do get hurt" (282).  

Closely allied to Huck's consciousness of the black-white dilemma is his confusion regarding the proper course for him to take in Jim's case. Jim, after all, is a slave: he is "property." Faced with the choice

between doing the "right" thing—turning Jim in to the authorities—and the "wrong" thing which he was sure would send him to hell—lying about Jim's whereabouts in order to protect him from being apprehended—Huck at first writes to Miss Watson:

Miss Watson, your runaway nigger Jim is down here two miles below Pikesville, and Mr. Phelps has got him and he will give him up for the reward if you send. (272)

Thinking better of his decision, he concludes: "It was a close place. I took it up, and held it in my hand. I was a-trembling, because I'd got to decide, forever, betwixt two things, and I knowed it. I studied a minute, sort of holding my breath, and then says to myself: 'All right, then, I'll go to hell'—and tore it up" (273). The decision turns out better than Huck could have hoped, for later we learn that Miss Watson, who had died two months before the Phelps farm incident, had set Jim free in her will.

We have seen that Mark Twain dealt realistically in Huckleberry Finn with several aspects of Southern society of which he was critical: enslavement of white and black alike by rigid community codes; religious
bigotry; racial prejudice; hypocrisy. And we have observed that he was keenly aware of the individual's need for freedom to seek his identity apart from the inhibiting conventional stereotype found in the literature of the Old South. Mark Twain clearly did not think of people in terms compatible with the literary myth of his region. He did, however, recognize that many Southerners did not wish to relinquish the romantic idealizations so characteristic of earlier Southern novels. The "aristocracy" in the South, as it had been depicted in sentimental local-color novels, was one aspect of the plantation myth which came under his attack. If he personally admired the genteel and the heroic characteristics of aristocracy, he also saw the bizarre turns such a code could take in actual practice in the real world. In Huckleberry Finn Mark Twain satirizes the upper class in Southern society, stripping it bare of its romantic aura to reveal such unattractive features as false pride, arrogance, and self-idealization. The quasi-chivalric code to which aristocratic white families in the South clung tenaciously during the nineteenth century was a perfect target for the writer's penetrating satire.
Two episodes in *Huckleberry Finn* illustrate Mark Twain's treatment of the upper class in Southern society; they are the Grangerford-Shepherdson feud and the incident in which Colonel Sherburn talks down a mob which is outraged because he has killed a man. In the first case, we find two aristocratic families involved in mortal combat over a cause which both sides have long ago forgotten. "Col. Grangerford," Huck tells us, "was a gentleman. . . . He was a gentleman all over; and so was his family. He was well born, as the saying is, and that's worth as much in a man as it is in a horse, so the Widow Douglas said, and nobody ever denied that she was of the first aristocracy in our town; and pap he always said it, too, though he warn't no more quality than a mudcat himself" (135). Each member of this family had a Negro to wait on him, we are informed (137). But there was another family of the aristocracy around: "They was as high-toned and well born and rich and grand as the tribe of Grangerfords" (137). These were the Shepherdsons. Huck asks Buck Grangerford what the feuding is all about, to which Buck responds that his father and some of the older members of the family
probably know, "but they don't know now what the row was about in the first place" (140). The whole ridiculous affair is a matter of "honor," as it turns out.

In addition to the feud, the Grangerford-Shepherdson episode is also significant for its satire on sentimentality. Emmeline Grangerford, long dead, is kept "alive" by her family. Her memory is hallowed: the Grangerfords keep a picture which the morbid girl had been painting when she died "over the head of the bed in her room, and every time her birthday come they hung flowers on it. Other times it was hid with a little curtain" (132). So it is with the aristocracy in Huckleberry Finn: they freely allow the living to die for a cause long forgotten, yet they enshrine the memory of a dead child who, Huck reckons, "was having a better time in the graveyard" (131) than she did while she was alive.

In the second case involving aristocracy in the South, Colonel Sherburn shoots down a drunk named Boggs who has called the Colonel "everything he could lay his tongue to" (182). Having issued an ultimatum, Colonel Sherburn methodically draws his pistol and kills Boggs
even as the drunken man pleads for his life. The crowd of citizens who witness the murder declare that the Colonel should be lynched (precisely what would have happened to a white man of less estate or a Negro, in all probability). What follows is a classic satire on the cowardice of the average man. Staring down at the crowd, Colonel Sherburn forces them to divert their eyes as he says: "The idea of you lynching anybody! It's amusing. The idea of you thinking you had pluck enough to lynch a man! Because you're brave enough to tar and feather poor friendless cast-out women that come along here, did that make you think you had grit enough to lay your hands on a man? Why, a man's safe in the hands of ten thousand of your kind—as long as it's daytime and you're not behind him. Do I know you? I know you clear through. I was born and raised in the South, and I've lived in the North; so I know the average all around. The average man's a coward. In the North he lets anybody walk over him that wants to, and goes home and prays for the humble spirit to bear it. In the South one man, all by himself, has stopped a stage full of men in the daytime, and robbed the lot"
(187). And he concludes, "If any real lynching's going to be done it will be done in the dark, Southern fashion; and when they come they'll bring their masks" (188). This episode is certainly as scathing a criticism of the average man as of the aristocratic. It demonstrates Mark Twain's understanding of the South into which he was born and which he knew so well.

*Huckleberry Finn,* underneath its humorous exterior, is a deadly serious comment on Southern life. It illustrates the realism which places Mark Twain squarely in the mainstream of those Southern writers who abandoned the old romantic, mythic sense of place in Southern literature in favor of realistic criticism of those elements of their society which so badly needed reforming.

V

The preceding commentary on writers in the South prior to 1920 points to certain cultural changes which contributed to literary changes and ultimately to the development of what has come to be called the Southern Renaissance. More than other sections of the United
States, the South is the product of its past, its memory, its damaged self-concept. We have seen some of the reasons for this self-consciousness: defense of chattel slavery, loss of the Civil War, defeat of agrarianism, to name but three. We have also seen that for these and other reasons the Southern writer before 1900 found detaching himself from his community difficult if not impossible. If in the days after the Civil War a growing trend developed among Southern writers such as Page and Joel Chandler Harris to leave the secessionist cause to the past, they tended to concentrate on the romantic myths of the Old South and publicize its cultural charm through legend and local color. Attachment to the South took another direction nonetheless in the stories of keen social observers such as Chopin and Cable. They became detached enough to expose some of the weaknesses of the Southern society, even at terrible personal expense. Insisting on candor and objectivity, they became the vanguard of the modern Southern writers, anticipating their sophisticated treatment of place.
Chapter II. Place and Displacement: Twentieth-Century Southern Novelists

I

The shift in the national economy from agrarianism to industrialism and urbanization gave rise to one of the major value conflicts experienced by Southern writers in the 1920's. Robert E. Spiller has summarized the South's economic structure succinctly:

The plantation economy of the South collapsed because of an inner flaw. It embodied most fully the agrarian ideals of Jefferson because it could not exist without them; it was wholly agrarian. As long as slavery could provide the cheap labor necessary for its continuance, the Southern pattern of chivalric living could persist and spread. It had penetrated the Mississippi Valley and had reached North as far as Missouri before it was put on the defensive and began its recession; but this did not take place until it had given full expression to its ideals and code. The myth that resulted could not be eliminated by any war; it has persisted as one of the most valuable strains in American literary tradition.¹

If this assessment seems to over-simplify an extremely

¹Spiller, p. 117.
complex problem, it nevertheless points up a catalytic irony essential to the Southern Renaissance: the medieval flavor of culture in the South did not belong in the twentieth-century urban world of automation. In the twentieth century the Southern mentality still sought security in rootedness, in the soil, in attachment to places; the national mentality, on the other hand, tended toward mobility and impermanence—and toward "abstraction," to recall Woodward's term.

The economic condition of the South in the 1920's, partly as a result of the industrial domination of the North and East, was sad indeed. The people were poor, the Southern economy—even the industrial economy of the South such as it was—was dependent on the North. Only in literature was this, figuratively speaking, a time of prosperity, and ironically, even that kind of affluence was unrecognized by Southerners. John L. Stewart admirably assesses those aspects of life in the South which made recognition of writers slow or non-existent. Few

people in the region read widely—something which Page lamented earlier—and what they did read was likely to be non-literary. Stewart concludes:

For many writers the Renaissance began with a repudiation of the regional ways and values and particularly of the past in which they were rooted. At first this might seem little different from the repudiation of one's place and heritage that has figured in so much twentieth-century art and writing. But far more was involved. The Fugitives themselves, in flight from the 'Brahmins of the Old South,' show how the South and its history were more significant for the young Southern writer than the other regions of the United States could ever be for their native sons. If he tried to repudiate them, the violence of his rebellion demonstrated that the South and its history were inexorably a part of his being; his sensibility could no more exist without them than his body could get along without nerves and blood. If he lived the life of the imagination fully, he had, in the end, to come to terms with his place and the past. Indeed, this might become his only subject because, since the South and its patrimony so permeated his being, it took in all the other subjects and furnished the images through which they might be represented and interpreted.  

I have quoted this long passage because it points up a situation critical to an understanding of the Southern Renaissance. By the 1920's there were, more

3Stewart, pp. 95-96.
than ever before, two distinct Souths: mythic and real. But the mythic South had become divided into two myths. Recognition of this division created for the sensitive and perceptive Southern writer a conflict which had to be solved. It could not be avoided. Coming out of a culture which taught commitment to the South as a primary aspect of self-knowledge, he had to search for some realistic assessment of his relationship to a South of the past to which—like it or not—he was inextricably bound. At the same time, the dream of the New South sought his allegiance.

The writers in the South in the 1920's—William Faulkner, Thomas Wolfe, John Crowe Ransom, Donald Davidson, Allen Tate, and Robert Penn Warren, to name but a few—were caught on the horns of a dilemma: they were at once unable to treat their homeland with a simple patriotism as had Simms and Page, and yet they questioned the doctrine of progress as well. They thought that Henry Grady's doctrine of progress, with his ill-conceived plans for industrializing the South, had resulted in making the region almost totally dependent on the North and that it had served to undermine
the quality of life in the South. Neither the old nor
the new order seemed to afford them an acceptable point
of view. Their problem, then, was somehow to write about
the South realistically while at the same time to main­
tain an uneasy balance between destructive and construc­
tive criticism. Their quest for objectivity coming up
against their devotion to their heritage created a de­
cided tension. This results in the complex treatment
of place that is characteristic of modern literature and
that is the essential substance of the great modern works
of literary art. But, it is important to recognize, this
tension was not generated in minds isolated in the pro­
vincial American South. By the 1920's the literary edu­
cation of Southerners—of those who had sufficient abil­
ities and wide enough opportunities—had become that of
the modern literary mind. The Southern sense of place
became informed by this sense as it had developed in the
consciousness and art of the literary modernity which the
South had been largely isolated from until the First
World War. Let us establish some aspects of the sense
of place as this was transmitted to twentieth-century
Southern writers by Thomas Hardy, William Butler Yeats,
James Joyce, and T. S. Eliot.
In the eighteenth century, the period in which the novel had its beginning, we find an increasingly conscious interest in the relationship between men and environment. Sir Walter Scott, as David Daiches observes, "is often thought of today as an historical novelist whose romantic love of the past enabled him to produce picturesque accounts of the adventures of knights and ladies in olden times." But "Scott's real interest as a novelist was not in the glittering surface of the Age of Chivalry, nor in the mere picturesqueness of history, but in the ways in which the past impinged on the present and in the effect of that impact on human character. His fascination with the history of his own country—with which all his best novels deal—was part of his deep concern with the relations between tradition and progress." This concern with the past as it bears on the present is especially visible in The Heart of Midlothian, which along with his other major novels, deals with "some

aspects of the problem of heroic action in an unheroic civilization."^5

Scott's generalized anxiety about modern man's problems in an unheroic world is clearly defined by Charles Dickens within the context of the novel of social reform. Dickens perceived what makes the modern world unheroic: in an increasingly materialistic society the spirit of man finds expression increasingly difficult. What seems to be "the good life" is really not so good after all. False values lead to emphasis on things instead of people, on acquisition and position at the expense of a genuine sense of community. Pip, in Great Expectations, is a perfect study in the changes which the "modern world" may bring about in a man: at first he is an innocent child, unconscious of prestige and wealth, therefore able to love Joe Gargery unashamedly. Once, however, he becomes aware that he has "great expectations," the past becomes an embarrassment to him; his associates in his youth are reminders of his own unpretentious beginnings. What he does not

^5Scott, p. vii.
realize, Edward Wagenknecht says, is that while Joe is "a figure of fun . . . he is also a saint, and he tests those who come near him for gold and for alloy, much as Jim does in *Huckleberry Finn.*" Decay of real values in a utilitarian world is nowhere better symbolized than in Chapter XI of this same novel wherein one finds the dreadful description of Miss Havisham's decayed wedding cake. If it ties her to her past, the connection is both morbid and destructive.

In Scott and Dickens we discover the modern concern: preoccupation with the effect of materialism on the human spirit. In a world of progress, of machines, of utilitarianism, where, these writers ask, does the spiritual aspect of man fit: how, in such a society, can man define his place and discover his true identity and rise to his greatest potentialities? How can he make himself spiritually as well as physically productive?

These questions are at the heart of nineteenth- and twentieth-century searches for place. In the increasing

complexity of modern life, the sense of place was threatened as it had never been before. The new "enemies" to community were more subtle than the old ones: man's greatest threats no longer were his visible foes, such as nature, ambitious pillagers, and monsters of Grendel's sort; the new enemy was more dangerous, for it was not entirely external to man and therefore not clearly inimical. The materialism of the new age insinuated itself into the fiber of the soul: instead of attacking with a sword, materialism seduced people in the modern world with the Siren's song of material ambition. The new enemy was not so much without as within man. It did not attack aggressively, so it was not visibly hostile. It wore an appealing mask; it was like Circe. It promised happiness, encouraged acquisitiveness, dangled the lotus of success before its prey, and therefore confused all the heretofore established values—not with a weapon, but with an hallucenogen. The "darkling plain" of which Matthew Arnold writes became indeed the setting for nineteenth- and twentieth-century combat between man's spirit and his body.

As the problem of defining the cause of man's
increasing sense of alienation and isolation became more complex, so too did the attempts to write of this problem become increasingly difficult. The insidiousness of the foe—suggested by Marlowe in Faustus many years before—blurred the distinctions between reality and mirage, and threatened to block all avenues to a genuine sense of belonging in the modern world. The old reliables—traditional religion, trust in the State, acceptance of a stratified society—no longer were believable once the sophistication of nineteenth-century scientific, sociological, and political "enlightenment" became widespread. For the first time in Western history, the writer faced the problems of redefining values, reestablishing respect for tradition, reevaluating history, and disenchanting the mass with the myth of progress. These were formidable problems, for man is always vulnerable to the Utopian myth; the promise of "the good life" is appealing, and in comparison with it, questions concerning the erosive effect of materialism on man's soul fade into oblivion and become matters of interest only to the antiquarian and the traditionalist with leisure enough to
intellectualize about them. Man's achievement of the sense of place seemed perfectly attainable and directly correlated with progress in the eyes of the mass; yesterday's values appeared unimportant, old-fashioned, and unrelated to modern happiness—to man's sense of himself in relation to his environment. "Getting ahead" became the goal of all striving. It is not difficult to see why the sensitive artist became the prophetic man of letters, assuming a mission which was somehow to prove to the new age that the god of progress was a devil bent on creating confusion of values, destroying man's sense of identity, causing him to feel alienated from community. In short, the curse of materialism was that it gave rise to forces which threatened man's sense of place, his feeling of belonging, his community spirit.

Among the leading missioners to the modern world are Thomas Hardy, W. B. Yeats, James Joyce, and T. S. Eliot. The influence of these four on the modern writers of the American South, according to evidence both internal and external, was fundamental. In their criticism of modernity they develop the tension between
realistic appraisal of the present and desire for a spiritual homeland that characterizes the novelists of the Southern Renaissance.

Consider Thomas Hardy's sense of place and his reactions to utilitarianism in The Return of the Native (1878) and Jude the Obscure (1896). In the first of these appears the famous description of Egdon Heath. Few descriptions in literature are as powerful as Hardy's portrayal of the effects of geography and climate on the people who live on the heath, and we could not hope to find a better statement of the writer's attitude toward his time than this:

It Egdon was a spot which returned upon the memory of those who loved it with an aspect of peculiar and kindly congruity. . . . Fair prospects wed happily with fair times; but alas, if times be not fair! Men have oftener suffered from the mockery of a place too smiling for their reason than from the oppression of surroundings oversadly tinged. Haggard Egdon appealed to a subtler and scarcer instinct, to a more recently learned emotion, than that which responds to the sort of beauty called charming and fair. . . . The time seems near, if it has not actually arrived, when the chastened sublimity of a moor, a sea, or a mountain will be all of nature that is absolutely in keeping with the moods of the more thinking among mankind. . . . As with some persons who have long lived apart, solitude seemed to look
out of its [Egdon's] countenance. It had a lonely face, suggesting tragical possibilities. 7

The Return of the Native is a study in conflicting values. According to A. J. Guerard, "The theme of the novel . . . is the struggle of the individual against convention; or, perhaps, the human longing for a freer and more glamorous existence played against the human longing for security." 8 The antithetical forces present in nineteenth-century England were largely responsible for the characters' conflicts: Clem Yeobright has been away from home, only to discover that he needs the security which community identification gives him more than he needs to be materialistically successful; Eustacia Vye, on the other hand, has not been away. For her the myth of the city, the bright lights, the romantic mirage of utilitarianism are magnetic forces.

Jude the Obscure, certainly one of Hardy's greatest novels, traces the deterioration of a man's ideals and


8 Thomas Hardy, Return of the Native, Afterword by A. J. Guerard, p. 465.
hopes beginning when he is a child and ending when he is a broken, consumptive, desolated man. Only a child when he determines to devote himself to the ministry and to scholarship, Fate dictates instead a course toward disillusionment and ultimate compromise if not total loss of the ideal which he sought to fulfill. A. Alvarez has suggested in the Afterword to Jude the Obscure[^9] that most if not all the significant characters other than Jude himself are actually projections of his multifaceted personality. If this is true, then Hardy uses Sue to epitomize the non-conformist intellectual isolationism in Jude's personality; Arabella to reflect the mundane earthiness which is in some degree a part of all human life; Phillotson to suggest the predictable "older" Jude; Time (melodramatic as Alvarez says he is) to represent the distortion of a personality which is formed in a society whose product is children who "seem to see all the terrors before they are old enough to

[^9]Thomas Hardy, Jude the Obscure (New York: The New American Library, 1961), Afterword by A. Alvarez, pp. 404-14. Subsequent references to this novel are from this edition and will be incorporated into the text.
have the staying power to resist them" (330), and who
are beginning to have the "universal wish not to live"
(330).

But Jude alone is the central personality, and
Hardy presents him as a sacrificial offering in a deter-
ministic world wherein religion is invariably perverted
into agnosticism, fanaticism, or stoicism. Late in the
novel, after the loss of all four children, Sue—who
for so long has preached of Mill's liberty and social
and intellectual freedom—is found paradoxically saying,
"We must conform! . . . All the ancient wrath of the
Power above us has been vented upon us. His poor
creatures, and we must submit. There is no choice. We
must. It is no use fighting against God!" (337). And
Jude responds significantly, "It is only against man
and senseless circumstance" (337). It is too late for
him to turn around; the reversal of their positions is
complete. Sue, the ex-disciple of Mill, races toward
a neurotic Christian fanaticism for some final anchor--
a retreat impossible for Jude to follow. Jude's early
acquiescence to Sue's non-conformity, while it does not
support him ultimately, has made faith in the old
religion impossible; at the same time, modern society, so bent on getting ahead, supplies him no substitute to fill the vacuum created by his loss of faith. Here we cannot fail to note the voyage motif at work: Jude's travels are largely philosophical, but as such, they are typical of the modern mind: cast adrift from the moorings of tradition and community, Jude reaches out for support and finds none. Two particularly revealing comments by the central character make this point clear: "I am in a chaos of principles--groping in the dark--acting by instinct and not after example. Eight or nine years ago when I came here first, I had a stock of fixed opinions, but they dropped away one by one; and the further I get the less sure I am" (321). The second comment is Jude's dying affirmation of cynicism: "Let the day perish wherein I was born, and the night in which it was said, There is a man-child conceived" (398). Hardy's novels are all lonely odysseys--voyages made by dislocated people--and they are at the core quests for the elusive sense of community so essential to man's happiness.

The same quest is fundamental to the world created
in the works of William Butler Yeats. It is a world peopled by Irish peasantry and aristocracy: Oisin, his blind peasant bard; the Countess Cathleen, his self-sacrificing noblewoman; Cuchulain, his wild national hero; and over all these, by the Great Memory, which is the memory of nature herself. It is Ireland in late Victorian times, but also the world created in *A Vision*, Yeats's personal system of cosmography; and it is the never-never land of Druids and Gaelic mythology. The poet's world is a labyrinth of contradictions and correspondences which complement the interior struggles and ambivalences of the man himself. "I am like the Tibetan monk who dreams at his initiation that he is eaten by a wild beast and learns on waking that he himself is eater and eaten." So says Yeats in "A General Introduction For My Works," and one is well-advised to heed his words. They suggest a set of mind which led the poet to conclude, "A poet writes always

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of his personal life, in his finest work out of its tragedy, whatever it be, remorse, lost love, or mere loneliness."\textsuperscript{12}

Yeats's personal life—the substance of his writing—was completely related to his vision of the spiritual dominion of Ireland. In his own words:

If Irish literature goes on as my generation planned it, it may do something to keep the 'Irishy' living. . . . It may be indeed that certain characteristics of the 'Irishy' must grow in importance. When Lady Gregory asked me to annotate her \textit{Visions and Beliefs} I began . . . an investigation of contemporary spiritualism. . . . I think I now know why the gamekeeper at Coole heard the footsteps of a deer on the edge of the lake where no deer had passed for a hundred years, and why a certain cracked old priest said that nobody had been to hell or heaven in his time, meaning thereby that the Rath had got them all; that the dead stayed where they had lived, or near it, sought no abstract region of blessing or punishment but retreated, as it were, into the hidden character of their neighborhood. I am convinced that in two or three generations it will become generally known that the mechanical theory has no reality, that the natural and supernatural are knit together, that to escape a dangerous fanaticism we must study a new science; at that moment Europeans may find something attractive in a Christ posed against a background not of Judaism but of

\textsuperscript{12}Jeffares, p. 255.
Druidism, not shut off in a dead history, but flowing, concrete, phenomenal.\textsuperscript{13}

He continues, "I was born into this faith, have lived in it, and shall die in it. . . . Subconscious pre-occupation with this theme brought me \textit{A Vision}. . . . The 'Irishy' have preserved their ancient 'deposit' through wars which, during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries became wars of extermination. . . . No people hate as we do in whom that past is always alive. . . . My hatred \underline{of the English} tortures me with love \underline{of the English}, my love with hate."\textsuperscript{14} These quotations, lengthy though they are, are the best description available of the ambivalence which characterized Yeats and irritated him into greatness. In his own words, he revered the traditions and ancient mythology of his native Ireland, longed for a renewal of the old, quaint spiritualism which had been characteristic of his country's past, and looked forward to a day when those elements of life so exclusively the province of Ireland would be revitalized: in a world of change, he

\textsuperscript{13}Quoted in Jeffares, pp. 262-63.

\textsuperscript{14}Jeffares, p. 263.
sought security in the spirit of a community preserved only in memory and in the literature of his land.

Yeats, like James Joyce, was a spiritual alien. The reasons for his psychic isolation the poet explains in "Poetry and Tradition"; born into a world where middle-class utilitarianism held the masses bound to the Utopian dream, he concluded that three types of men are responsible for all beautiful things; these are aristocrats, peasants, and artists. They create beauty because they are not timorous, they are not afraid. They are willing—indeed compelled—to look backward to find companions who share their recklessness and love of life—backward "to all those who understood that life is not lived, if not lived for contemplation or excitement."\(^{15}\) Here again we discover a vestige of the heroic outlook, and something of the martial spirit—this time on a psychological level—which typified the ancient Romans.

Setting aside the more complex study of place which pervades A Vision, we find in Yeats's shorter poems much

\(^{15}\)Jeffares, pp. 160-61.
of the spirit which he reflects in his analyses cited above; if in "The Wanderings of Oisin" and the Cuchulain Cycle Yeats reaches backward into mythology, and in A Vision reaches forward toward prophecy and mysticism, in the shorter poems may be found examples of the poet's less cosmic, more personal concerns. Among these are his obsessive preoccupation with the aging process found in "Among School Children"—a reminiscence of his own childhood (and Maude Gonne's) precipitated by his visit as an old man to a school—and "The Wild Swans of Coole"—a contemplation of man's degeneration juxtaposed against the constant regeneration of the swans; his longing for permanence and stability found in "Sailing to Byzantium" and "Lapis Lazula"; his disenchantment with his time as seen in "1919" and "The Second Coming"; his conviction that in the religion of art lies man's hope as demonstrated by "Leda and the Swan" and "Adam's Curse"; his admiration of heroic self-sacrifice described in "Easter 1916"; and his almost morbid awareness of life's mutability as depicted in "To The Rose Upon the Rood of Time," "Under Ben Bulben," and "Circus Animals' Desertion."
themes of aging and mutability are, of course, really inseparable: their ubi sunt quality recalls the melancholy of "The Wanderer," but in Yeats's context the voyage takes place primarily within the soul.

Yeats's longing for the old values led him, as he said in the quotation cited above, to deeper and deeper involvement in the occult. He became aware with the perspective of age that his early attempts to find answers to the problems which plagued him in romantic escape poetry were unsatisfactory. In his own words: "I had set out in life with the thought of putting my very self into poetry, and had understood this as a representation of my own visions and an attempt to cut away the non-essential, but as I imagined the visions outside myself my imagination became full of decorative landscape and of still life." In search of true values in a world bent on accepting what he considered false ones, he later came to adopt less colorful imagery "characterized by interplay of light and shade and by the suggestion of an animated universe in which the

elements . . . were informed by a hierarchy of mysterious powers." With age and growing discontentment, Yeats became increasingly abstract in his art. As Eddins puts it, "Yeats' own dramatis personae in the later poems of The Wind Among the Reeds exhibits a corresponding tendency toward disembodiment, and the image of the world as a habitat dissolving into a vague and fiery flux becomes increasingly frequent."  

The external aspects of Yeats's life in a strangely ironic way mask the internal perturbations of his soul: he was comfortably "at home" in Dublin; he was famous in his time; he was revered among his peers. On the strength of these facts, we should be apt to conclude that such a man felt a very strong attachment for his community and a very supportive personal sense of place. His epitaph, however, suggests the lonely isolation so typical of the modern, alienated artist:

Cast a cold eye  
On life, on death.  
Horseman, pass by!  

As William York Tindall observes, "What matter that no

17Eddins, p. 11.  
18Eddins, p. 150.
nonchalant horsemen—only middle-class tourists in taxis—pass that churchyard by nowadays? There, cut in stone, is what Yeats stood for, put in a way to make the chills run down your spine: all that distance and nobility, all that craft." ¹⁹

In the life and art of James Joyce we find a singular example of the modern conflict between the spirit and the flesh. He was the ultimate manifestation of the artist as alien, and his life and works demonstrate clearly both the external and internal voyage motif. Among the ironies of literary history, few are as interesting or as poignant as those which surround the career of James Joyce. Born in Dublin, he spent most of his life as an expatriate, living in Italy, Austria, Switzerland, and France;²⁰ dying in 1941, he was buried in Zurich in a cemetery adjoining a zoological garden from which one could hear the lions' roar, a sound he greatly loved.²¹ Solicited to join the Irish Literary


Movement by no lesser peer than W. B. Yeats, he remained aloof from the movement though his name and his art are inextricably joined to it. Recognized as a genius, he was unable to gain consistent support or recognition from Irish literary greats, among them Synge, Russell, Yeats, and Lady Gregory.

Further ironies exist. Born into a Roman Catholic family, he planned for a time to become a priest; as he matured, however, he renounced his church and adopted art as his true religion. A gypsy in life, claimed by seven different cities in the course of his career, his roots were to remain in Dublin. Erratic and provisional as the surface of his turbulent life appeared, "his two profound interests--his family and his writings--kept their place. These passions never dwindled. The


24Levin, p. 15.


26Levin, p. 15.
intensity of the first gave his work its sympathy and humanity; the intensity of the second raised his life to dignity and high dedication."\(^{27}\) Always surrounded by admirers, he was to lose the friend who most affected him, J. F. Byrne. "The friendship was of such importance to Joyce," Ellmann comments, "that when it dwindled, as it did later, he felt less at home in Ireland."\(^{28}\) Joyce was heralded throughout the world, but his native country, alone among nations, continued to ban *Ulysses* at the writing of Ellmann's biography in 1959.\(^{29}\)

In the light of these facts, studying the art of James Joyce in search of the sense of place is a fascinating assignment. If Thomas Hardy wrote ominous accounts of man's relationship to his universe, at least he remained at home in Dorchester to do so; if W. B. Yeats wrote of the end of an era and spoke of the melancholy demise of the aristocratic class, he did so from a fixed geographical point: he was accepted in Ireland and beloved in Dublin, famous in his time and

\(^{27}\) Ellmann, *James Joyce*, p. 756.

\(^{28}\) Ellmann, *James Joyce*, p. 66.

in his place. Such cannot be said of Joyce, whose obsessive desire—like Yeats's—was to "affirm human life"; he was the object of ridicule in his own country, was plagued with charges of obscenity, became a "citizen" of Europe rather than specifically of Ireland, yet never was able to divorce himself from his native land. He was indeed the classic example of the spiritual wanderer.

If, however, Joyce's physical residence cannot be confined to Ireland, that fact in no way diminishes the existence of his Irish sentiment. According to Levin, "Joyce, an authentic Dubliner and a competent hater, might have qualified as a member in good standing of the Irish literary movement, but he chose to remain on the periphery. In birth and background he differed from the Anglo-Irish intellectuals; for him their amateurish zeal took the bloom off the culture they were attempting to revive. They were older, and less curious about the widening horizons of European letters. They had lived in England, and conceived the Irish

30Ellmann, Yeats and Joyce, p. 475.
31Ellmann, James Joyce, pp. 514-19.
character as an interesting exhibit for the Abbey Theatre. They had never responded to the Catholic catechism, and were vulnerable to private metaphysics and theosophic visions. They were poets who looked to politics for a renascence in which Pre-Raphaelitism would go hand in hand with Home Rule. Levin continues:

For Joyce, Ireland was too much of a reality to be viewed through the haze of Celtic twilight. . . .

It is not easy to identify Joyce with any movement. His work is conceived less in the spirit of Irish renascence than of European decadence. . . . Joyce remained a wildgoose, an Irishman abroad. Expatriation was a gesture of rebellion, but of typically Irish rebellion, against the British garrison and the Roman church. . . . Though painfully déraciné, his roots had gone so deep that he continued to draw upon reserves of vitality from the soil of Ireland.

Joyce once wrote on the fly-leaf of his geography:

Stephan Dedalus
Class of Elements
Clongowes Wood College
Sallins
County Kildare
Ireland

32 Levin, p. 13.

Levin comments, "If it is breath-taking to be suddenly projected from the suburbs of Dublin to the outer circle of the seven spheres, it is heart-warming to hear the seraphim and cherubim speak with an Irish accent. The Class of Elements and the Universe belong to the same frame of reference, and they function together in a kind of cosmic regionalism."  

A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man, Dubliners, Ulysses, and even Finnegans Wake may all be classified as odysseys: they are all studies in displacement and the search for a sense of community. One critic has described their creator well: "No more completely sundered and warring personality ever put pen to paper."  

And again he comments, "I do not pretend to know why Mr. Joyce took for his modern Ulysses a Jew--Rudolph Bloom (alias Virag). . . . But there is one characteristic of this commonplace victim of auto-erotomania and lost manhood which, without

34 Levin, p. 15.

35 Levin, p. 16.

a doubt, interested his maker—conscience troubled by home-sickness. Bloom had forsaken the god of his fathers. In this one thing, he finds kinship with Stephen." 37

"Conscience troubled by home-sickness" is a poignant description of any man's mental condition. When applied to James Joyce, it becomes particularly so. The pull of the past—the desire to belong—was very strong in Joyce, but so too was his desire to break through the unrealities and injustices he saw all around him. The latter compulsion—essentially an intellectual one—overcame the former essentially emotional one, and the result was a man estranged. The price Joyce paid for speaking his truth was loss of membership in his community.

T. S. Eliot was one of the first persons to respond to Joyce with genuine critical understanding. He understood Joyce's sense of displacement. Eliot, like Joyce, was acutely aware of the impact of science and technology on modern society. F. O. Matthiessen believes that "in the case of both the novelist and the poet their unwillingness to be confined long to any given method of

37Smith, p. 23.
presentation is obviously owing in part to their extraordinary historical consciousness. . . . Probing beneath considerations of technique to the reasons for such a period of widespread experimentation in all the arts, one can undoubtedly link it with our contemporary sense of chaotic change and upheaval, of disequilibrium and insecurity."\(^{38}\)

Two words must be considered vital to any understanding of Eliot's sense of man's role in his world: "tradition" is one, and "individual" is the other. In distinguishing tradition from orthodoxy, Eliot has this to say:

I hold—in summing up—that a tradition is rather a way of feeling and acting which characterizes a group throughout generations; and that it must largely be, or that many of the elements in it must be, unconscious; whereas the maintenance of orthodoxy is a matter which calls for the exercise of all our conscious intelligence. The two will therefore considerably complement each other.\(^{39}\)


This distinction is a critical one, and "Eliot is careful to make clear that he is not using orthodoxy in the strict theological sense of the term.... What he stresses in his account of the importance of orthodoxy is 'the inherited wisdom of the race,' the carefully sifted central values of human experience that are always at war with extreme individualism in any form. Exactly what he means is disclosed in his remark that in examining contemporary literature he is 'not concerned with the authors' beliefs, but with orthodoxy of sensibility and with the sense of tradition'; and that in such light D. H. Lawrence is 'an almost perfect example of the heretic. And the most ethically orthodox of the more eminent writers of his time is Mr. Joyce.'"  

F. O. Matthiessen quotes what he describes as one of Eliot's most searching comments: "the Catholic paradox: society is for the salvation of the individual and the individual must be sacrificed to society." This same critic concludes: "The very heart of Eliot's artistic belief

40 Matthiessen, p. 147.

41 Matthiessen, quoting Eliot in the Commentary of The Criterion, April, 1933.
is the necessary union of intellect and emotion." 42
Liberal humanism, which resulted from philosophical and scientific thought in the nineteenth century, was the enemy which Eliot sought to defeat by recourse to an alternative philosophy of life which he found in tradition and orthodoxy. In this connection, A. G. George lists as the two most important premises of this liberalism against which the poet fought: 1) the idea that man is essentially good, capable of perfection and rational; 2) the idea of progress. These tenets Eliot believed could be proven false through a study of history. If man is essentially good, then whence comes evil? Progress in the physical conditions of man's environment, he did not deny; however, he saw no evidence of progress in the realm of morality. 43 Eliot suggests (ironically) in his essay on Baudelaire:

Baudelaire perceived that what matters is sin and redemption . . . [and] that the recognition of the reality of sin is a New Life; and the possibility of damnation is so immense a relief in a world of electoral reform, plebiscites, sex reform, and dress reform that

42 Matthiessen, p. 149.

damnation itself is an immediate form of salvation—of salvation from the ennui of modern life, because it at least gives some significance to living.\textsuperscript{44}

The "medievalism" of T. S. Eliot is explainable, then, in the light of the foregoing facts. But this "cult of the Middle Ages" which T. E. Hulme and T. S. Eliot "are said to advocate does not consist in a nostal-gic longing for bygone days of glory . . . it implies the rediscovery of certain significant aspects of life and thought which have been ignored since the Renaissance."\textsuperscript{45} The Church supplied for the Middle Ages a framework and an order, and it is these which Eliot sought to reidentify for twentieth-century man.

Where, out of all this complexity, can we find T. S. Eliot's concept of the sense of place? Above all, surely it must be located in the mainstream of the Christian Tradition. He once commented: "One cannot get beyond despair simply by going from one place to another . . . the protagonist of modern tragedy has nowhere to betake

\textsuperscript{44}George, p. 30. For an interesting comparison with this idea see Walker Percy, "The Man on a Train: Three Existential Modes."

\textsuperscript{45}George, p. 49.
himself, and no Areopagus to absolve him." And Professor George believes that this analysis is a key to understanding Eliot's true mission: "awakening men to a realization of the tragic structure of reality." To let Eliot speak for himself, we have only to turn to his famous essay "Tradition and the Individual Talent." Here the poet explains the creative writer's relationship to his own time and to history:

Yet if the only form of tradition, of handing down, consisted in following the ways of the immediate generation before us in a blind or timid adherence to its successes, 'tradition' should positively be discouraged. We have seen many such simple currents soon lost in the sand; and novelty is better than repetition. Tradition is a matter of much wider significance. It cannot be inherited, and if you want it you must obtain it by great labour. It involves, in the first place, the historical sense, which we may call nearly indispensable to any one who would continue to be a poet beyond his twenty-fifth year; and the historical sense involves a perception; not only of the pastness of the past, but of its presence. . . . This historical sense, which is a sense of the timeless as well as of the temporal together, is what makes a writer traditional. And it is at the same time what


47 George, p. 243.
makes a writer most acutely conscious of his place in time, of his own contemporaneity.48

And again, he suggests that the poet "in a peculiar sense . . . will be aware also that he must inevitably be judged by the standards of the past" (45). In reference to development and change, he says: "The poet must be very conscious of the main current, which does not at all flow invariably through the most distinguished reputations. . . . He must be aware that the mind of Europe--the mind of his own country--a mind which he learns in time to be much more important than his own private mind--is a mind which changes, and that this change is a development which abandons nothing en route, which does not superannuate either Shakespeare, or Homer, or the rock drawing of the Magdalenian draughtsmen" (46). Eliot continues, "What is to be insisted upon is that the poet must develop or procure the consciousness of the past and that he should continue to develop this consciousness throughout his career" (47).

48T. S. Eliot, " Tradition and the Individual Talent," in The Sacred Wood (London: Methuen & Co., Ltd., 1920), pp. 43-44. Subsequent references to this essay are from this edition of The Sacred Wood and will be incorporated into the text.
The result of such awareness, he concludes, "is a continual surrender of himself to something which is more valuable. The progress of an artist is a continual self-sacrifice, a continual extinction of personality" (47). But, Eliot warns, "the poet cannot reach this impersonality without surrendering himself wholly to the work to be done. And he is not likely to know what is to be done unless he lives in what is not merely the present, but the present moment of the past, unless he is conscious, not of what is dead, but of what is already living" (53). In a conversation with Allessandro Pelligrini, Eliot said that "our present day ruin is the external sign of a world religious crisis, and ... modern history can also be understood as a metaphysical tragedy. What can the task of art be if not to make this tragedy known?" 49

I have intentionally chosen to emphasize Eliot's philosophical opinions at the expense of citing references to his poetry because the former seem to me more immediately helpful toward an understanding of the modern artist's problems in his search for place in the

49George, p. 243, quoting Pelligrini, p. 291.
twentieth century. These opinions concern chiefly the loss of respect for tradition and order. If tradition and order are denigrated, then man is anchorless; his sense of place becomes invariably a sense of alienation. Isolation from community, as Eliot saw it, was the inevitable result of such a loss in our times.

In the works of writers like Hardy, Yeats, Joyce, and Eliot, we discover that in modern times the sense of place is more and more defined in terms of a sense of displacement. There develops a kind of dialectic of place and displacement. Out of this emerges a more acute sense of place than has before appeared in literature, and this becomes integral to the modern literary sensibility. Modern Southern writers inherited a cultural situation resembling the inheritance of Hardy, Yeats, and Joyce (if not very exactly that of Eliot). They were involved in a conflict in which the life of a small world with a powerful sense of place was being displaced by the forces of a larger, more dynamic, opposing world. They knew about their involvement in this struggle because they were a part of both the small world and of the larger world. They had, that is to say,
an intuitive understanding of the conflict. But they learned their situation in a literary way—how to grasp its subtleties and how to articulate it—because they read modern literature.


III

William Faulkner, according to Robert Penn Warren, chose a more difficult way than did James Joyce when he stayed at home in Mississippi to "forge the conscience of his race." Making Oxford his center, Faulkner was yet a citizen of the world. He wrote what he knew best: he explored the inner life of man by casting him in the Southern mould; he examined the psyches of his characters in what might be called a cosmic search for truth. While his characters live in the South, and while they are in many ways peculiarly Southern in their love of the past,

the heroic, the myth, and in their devotion to family and geographical location, they nevertheless are in most cases Everyman in their epic struggles against themselves, their fates, and their environments. In C. Hugh Holman's words:

Faulkner also shares with Wolfe the quality of intensity. Everything in Wolfe's world is vast, every emotion is cosmic, every action gigantic. A similar intensity exists in Faulkner's world. The figures who act out the steps in their damnation on the streets and roads of Yoknapatawpha County are the creation of a nonrealistic imagination; they loom larger than life, immense in feeling and movement. Upon them sweep howling winds from the past. Their actions—even simple, homely actions—assume cosmic significant. . . .

That these figures and their actions are often redeemed by earthy humor, comic speech, and simple verisimilitude should not blind us to their essentially unearthly nature. They exist as phantasma in a cosmic dream of history, a dream that pictures the glory and the tragedy of man. 51

While Faulkner lived in Mississippi, and seldom left his home town, and while he was accepted as a member of his community, his acceptance there was largely in spite of his art. When he received the Nobel Prize

for Literature, the local paper carried an editorial de-
ploring the award. If Oxford, then, supplied Faulkner's
need for community identification, it did so on a much
more limited basis than did Gilmore Simms's Charleston.
The remarkable change which has clearly occurred in the
South is that today a writer may stay at home--or go
away and return--and yet criticize his home without being
disowned or ostracized. Whereas the local colorists for
the most part sought to glamorize their region, Faulkner
sought to universalize the problems he saw there, to see
them for what they are without embellishment. Rubin sum-
marizes the twentieth-century Southern writer's greatest
accomplishment by suggesting that what he has offered "is
work that at its best, though grounded in the life pat-
terns of his community, has viewed that community sub
specie aeterinitatis, as it were. Instead of taking care
to display the home folks to the world as attractively as
possible, he has sought to present them with the utmost
moral and critical intensity of which he is capable. . . .
His art has been crafted out of a deep sense of familiarity
with the texture of community life, but also of a momentous
distancing of himself from that community. This has
enabled him to peer into the depths and undercurrents of human life within the community not ordinarily visible or recognizable from the surface alone. "52

This liberation from chauvinism and polemics undoubtedly accounts for the greatness of Southern literature today. The Southern heritage is rich in the materials from which great art arises: those aspects of the life of that region which Woodward enumerates (see p. 22 above) make it unique and productive of tensions and contradictions, of deep loyalties and strong ambivalences. That Faulkner could write of these and yet remain a citizen in good standing in Oxford, Mississippi, is truly remarkable. That, of course, does not explain the complex nature of Faulkner's personal sense of place as it is portrayed through his works. Indeed, it may be impossible to do so. Some reference to his novels may illustrate his use of place, however.

According to one critic, The Sound and the Fury (1929) is as "full of terror as a Greek tragedy," and as universal as the stories of the Old Testament or

52 Rubin, Writer in the South, pp. 32-33.
Shakespeare. Yet, for all that, the novel is set in Faulkner's mythical Yoknapatawpha County, and the superficial action is provincially Southern. Faulkner—like Wolfe, whom he admired—is almost obsessively concerned in this novel with time: the past's influence on the present becomes a major theme. No one would argue that this preoccupation is the sole concern of Southerners (one may recall Eliot's similar preoccupation). However, few would deny either that the peculiar heritage of the South intensifies one's awareness of time and place. Memory and tradition play major roles in The Sound and the Fury. And the three Compson brothers' memories are a perfect case in point. Michael Cowan describes the brothers—Benjy, an idiot; Quentin, a suicidal romantic; and Jason, the bitter materialist, as "trapped by varying patterns of isolation." Quentin presents the reader with a Southern cavalier, addicted to the code of


54 Michael Cowan, p. 5.
chivalry but unable to make his romantic dreams fit in a twentieth-century world. And Jason, on the other hand, is a nightmare of cynicism and degradation: materialism has had its way in his life and left him monstrous.

*Light in August* (1932) presents a highly symbolical study of isolation and rejection by community. Cleanth Brooks comments on this point: "The community . . . is a powerful though invisible force that quietly exerts itself in so much of Faulkner's fiction. But for many readers, the community is indeed invisible and quite imperceptible: it exerts no pressure on him at all—and lacking any awareness of this force, he may miss the meaning of the work. Such readers find *Light in August* quite baffling simply because they are unaware of the force of community that pervades it and thus miss the clue of its central structure." 55 The fact that all the characters in the novel are outcasts from that community about which Brooks speaks is a critical one. Joe Christmas, the major character, defies that community and eventually is

destroyed by it; Joanna Burden has never been accepted and never is; Reverend Mr. Hightower finally resigns his post at the church, which makes the town glad. The theme of man isolated from his place is, of course, not peculiarly Southern. But, as Brooks suggests, the fact that Faulkner writes in a rural setting in a section of the country where strong community feeling still exists and from which few are ostracized, makes his study unique.

The humor of the novel is typically Faulknerian, which is to say that it is sardonic and even at times savage. Its flavor is, however, in the tradition of George W. Harris and Mark Twain, whom we have discussed above. It is thoroughly Southern in its use of taciturnity and understatement; it is "grotesque," anticipating the art of Flannery O'Connor, and as such it is not in the tradition of Simms, Page, or J. C. Harris. But Faulkner is more revealing and more honest than they in his depiction of those aspects of place which spawn the sardonic humor one finds in Light in August and in his remarkable short stories "Barn Burning" and "Spotted Horses." In one

56 Brooks, p. 56.
particularly grim scene at the end of the novel, the man who comes upon Joanna Burden's mutilated body faces a difficult decision: should he remove her corpse at the peril of having her almost-severed head fall off, or should he leave her in the burning house? The latter is unthinkable according to his code, but he comments unemotionally that her head may indeed end up facing in one direction, her body in the other. This, he concludes, would have been an accomplishment to make her famous had she been able to perform it while she lived. If such commentary is revolting, it is at the same time comic in that way that true comedy has of being almost indiscernible from tragedy.

First published in 1936, *Absalom, Absalom!* is a classic example of the Southern novel of place. Here once again the reader meets Quentin Compson. Quentin must try to find himself in spite of the problems which afflict him. He is confronted with the really ominous problem of trying to reconcile his understanding of the history of his homeland with the stories he has learned of it from his childhood to his twentieth year. Thomas

57 Brooks cites this example, pp. 67-68.
Sutpen's "epic" is a legend that he knows well. When, however, he begins to receive conflicting information in regard to that legend from his father and from Rosa Coldfield, to name but two "reporters," he realizes that he must play the detective and make sense out of the puzzle for himself. One critic has put it this way: "Because Quentin, if he is to define himself, must confront these persisting disruptions, it is little wonder that Faulkner is so obviously fond of him. The preoccupations and difficulties of the two Thomas Sutpen, whose history Quentin seeks to discover, and Quentin, himself are not dissimilar. Within the chaotic nature of Sutpen's history and Rosa's 'demonizing,' Quentin tries to find some human value adhering to what is apparently a representative anecdote of his homeland."\(^{58}\)

In order to find out who he is, Quentin must find out who Thomas Sutpen was. His romantic imagination cannot disengage itself from its connection to the past.

One particularly revealing passage describing Quentin's relationship to his community, his past, his identity crisis, occurs early in the novel. The young man, we are told, knows the legends of his fellow towns­men in every detail. In fact, he is so full of them that his "very body was an empty hall echoing with sonorous defeated names; he was not a being, an entity, he was a commonwealth. He was a barracks filled with stubborn back-looking ghosts." In light of this burden, it is no wonder that his friend asks him in the final conversa­tion of the book, "Why do you hate the South?" And it is less wonder that Quentin replies, "I dont. I dont! I dont hate it!" What we know, of course, is that the ambivalence which the young man feels toward his home­land and his heritage, together with his inability to adjust his life—which is really lived in the past—to the modern world, will lead him to suicide. This paradox, while epic in scope, is characteristic of Faulkner's complex treatment of the sense of place. It is a sophis­ticated treatment and one not meant to flatter Mississippi. It is meant to speak truth, and through

his genius, Faulkner does just that.

Thomas Wolfe also aimed to speak the truth about the South. C. Hugh Holman reminds us that Wolfe described George Webber as a Southerner, as one who "knew that there was something wounded in the South. He knew that there was something twisted, dark, and full of pain which Southerners have known all their lives—something rooted in their souls beyond all contradiction." Holman believes that both Faulkner and Wolfe "sought not the portrayal of the world, but the discovery and enunciation of a cosmic truth." This search for answers to profound questions—particularly those which involved the South so deeply—is a bond between Faulkner and Wolfe, and may be one reason why William Faulkner admired Thomas Wolfe and thought he was a major novelist.

More obviously than most American writers before or after him, Thomas Wolfe was a spiritual wanderer. Born in Asheville, North Carolina, in 1900, he was to deal with

60 Holman, "The Dark, Ruined Helen of his Blood," in The Roots of Southern Writing, p. 119.

61 Holman, "The Novel in the South," in The Roots of Southern Writing, p. 94.
the problems of the alienated artist in an industrialized, materialistic society: he sought to discover where, in the maze created by the Industrial Revolution and the Great Depression, the poetic soul could live. The loneliness of modern life captured his imagination and haunted him throughout the hectic thirty-eight years of his life.

The effect of time and movement obsessed Wolfe. Autobiographical in every case, his four novels are studies of the voyage motif. W. O. Gant, Eugene's father, for example, is constantly on the move in *Look Homeward, Angel*. His movement is invariably away from home, and it constitutes what Walker Percy later calls "rotation."

Unable to bear reality, he seeks refuge in his dreams and seeks to make those dreams materialize through various physical and mental "escapes." At fifty-six, he makes what he senses is his last long journey—this time to California—and comes home with a strange awareness of the transience of his own life and the world around him. His return is graphically described:

How looked the home-earth then to Grant the Far-Wanderer? Light crept grayly, melting on the rocky river, the engine smoke streaked out on dawn like a cold breath, the hills were big, but nearer, nearer than he thought. And Altamont lay gray and withered
in the hills, a bleak mean wintry dot. He stepped carefully down in squalid Toytown, noting that everything was low, near, and shrunken as he made his Gulliverian entry. He had a roof-and-gulley high conviction; with careful tucked-in elbows he weighted down the heated Toytown street-car, staring painfully at the dirty pasteboard pebbledash of the Pisgah Hotel, the brick and board cheap warehouses of Depot Street, the rusty clapboard flimsiness of the Florence (Railway Men's) Hotel, quaking with beef-fed harlotry. So small, so small, so small, he thought. I never believed it. Even the hills here. I'll soon be sixty.62

In this single passage we find a veritable storehouse of place images and motifs: climate and geography are described subjectively as they correspond to the sense of "wintry, shrunken" displacement which pervades Gant's soul; the smallness of the environment complements the man's awareness of his own vulnerability and flimsiness; and he becomes unbearably conscious of the disparity between the life of his dreams and reality. The voyage, the nostalgia, the transience themes are obvious, and the de casibus motif is poignantly in evidence as Gant muses on the discrepancy: suddenly home again, cut off from his adventures, he sees his own little monument shop

62 Thomas Wolfe, *Look Homeward, Angel* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1957), p. 58. Subsequent references to this novel are from this edition and will be incorporated into the text.
in stark relief against the barren landscape and to him
"The Square had the horrible concreteness of a dream. At
the far southeastern edge he saw his shop. . . . It was
a dream of hell, when a man finds his own name staring at
him from the Devil's ledger; like a dream of death, when
he who comes as mourner finds himself in the coffin, or
as witness to a hanging, the condemned upon the scaffold"
(62).

When Eliza Gant's prattle overwhelms her husband, he
slips into a perfect rotation; as she recounts the tedious
happenings which occurred in his absence, he daydreams:

Yes, musty cotton, baled and piled under long
sheds of railway sidings; and odorous pine wood-
lands of the level South, saturated with brown faery
light, and broken by the tall straight leafless
poles of trees; a woman's leg below an elegantly
lifted skirt mounting to a carriage in Canal Street
. . . the Georgia doctor's wife who slept above him
going out, the unquenchable fish-filled abundance
of the unfenced, blue, slow cat-slapping lazy
Pacific . . . and the river. . . . His life was
like that river, rich with its own deposited and
onward-borne agglutinations, fecund with its sedi-
mental accretions, filled exhaustlessly by life in
order to be more richly itself, and this life, with
the great purpose of a river, he emptied now into
the harbor of his house, the sufficient haven of
himself, for whom the gnarled vines wove round him
thrice, the earth burgeoned with abundant fruit
and blossom, the fire burnt madly. (65)

So romantic and unreal is his reverie that we could almost
imagine it typical of a medieval knight who has come home to regroup before going forth to slay more dragons.

If W. O. Gant is a romanticist, his wife Eliza is his opposite. She "saw Altamont not as so many hills, buildings, people: she saw it in the pattern of a gigantic blueprint" (104). Many years later we find Eliza sitting before the fire at Dixieland (her home) weaving a tapestry of fables, "reliving a past of tenderness and love that never had been" (482), as the wind howls in response. Eugene, meanwhile, is caught between loyalty to his mother and an obsession to escape: "Then, as the bright thing twisted about in him, Eugene heard the whine of the bleak wind about the house that he must leave, and the voice of Eliza calling up from the past the beautiful lost things that never happened" (482). His brother Ben has died and Eugene has been home for the funeral, circumstances which give rise to the passages above. Back at the university, we find the young man experiencing some of his father's old unspeakable longing, a condition which affects him very much like Percy's "malaise" which will be discussed later in the chapter. The young romantic searches for his place internal by dreaming of places
external: "He wanted no land of Make-believe: his fantasies found extension in reality, and he saw no reason to doubt that there really were 1,200 gods in Egypt, and that the centaur, the hippogriph, and the winged bull might all be found in their proper places. . . . The conviction had grown on him that men do not escape from life because life is dull, but that life escapes from men because men are little" (491).

C. Hugh Holman feels that Wolfe's background and his parents played a critical role in conditioning him to feel as he did about the South. In his words, "That his vision of his native region was both obsessive and ambiguous was not surprising. Wolfe was born to a northern father and a southern mother, and the division of life into male and female, North and South, wanderer and homebound, was a simple extension of what he saw daily as a boy."63

Place images abound in You Can't Go Home Again, as indeed they do in all four novels. In his last book, set in the Depression years between 1929 and 1933, Wolfe

expresses through George Webber (Eugene Gant-Thomas Wolfe) some of his most penetrating conclusions about the importance of time and place in man's life. Writing to his friend Fox, he says:

Just as you are the rock of life, I am the web; just as you are Time's granite, so, I think am I time's plant. My life, more than that of anyone I know, has taken on the form of growth. No man that I have known was ever more deeply rooted in the soil of Time and Memory, the weather of his individual universe, than was I.

That /I could never get through telling what I knew, what I felt and thought and had to say about it/ was a giant web in which I was caught, the product of my huge inheritance--the torrential recollectiveness, derived out of my mother's stock, which became a living, million-fibered integument that bound me to the past, not only of my own life, but of the very earth from which I came, so that nothing in the end escaped from its inrooted and all-feeling explorativeness.64

This touchingly autobiographical statement of belief Wolfe thinly veiled as George Webber's "Credo" with which the novel ends. The truth, of course, is that it is Thomas Wolfe with his mask down, making his final confessional before the world. He continues:

The forgotten moments and unnumbered hours came back to me with all the enormous cargo of my memory

64Thomas Wolfe, You Can't Go Home Again (New York: Dell Publishing Co., Inc., 1963), p. 667. Subsequent references to this novel are from this edition and will be incorporated into the text.
together with lost voices in the mountains long ago, the voices of the kinsmen dead and never seen, and the houses they had built and died in, and the rutted road they trod upon, and every unrecorded moment that Aunt Maw had told me of the lost and obscure lives they led long, long ago. So did it all revive in the ceaseless pulsings of the giant ventricle, so did the plant go back, stem by stem, root by root, and filament by filament, until it was complete and whole, compacted of the very earth that had produced it, and of which it was itself the last and living part. (668)

Surely no finer passage could be found to illustrate the Southern consciousness of the past, of memory, of myth; and surely there could be no more graphic description of the impulse which drove Thomas Wolfe—much of the time against his will—to explain himself, to unburden his mind by writing down all that he knew, as he put it. What he "knew" came to him in a particularly and peculiarly Southern way and with a flavor all its own. Whether it was fable or fact, it imprinted his great mind and cursed him with the simultaneous desires to run from the monster which threatened to obsess him and yet to embrace it as a plant embraces the ground in which its roots are planted. In his final comment in You Can't Go Home Again, Wolfe concludes, "I believe that we are lost here in America, but I believe we shall be found" (669). It is interesting to note the writer's use of the word "America" in reference to his home; he does not say, "We are lost here in the
South." This change alone, though a very tenuous one, may be significant in that it nationalizes his sentiments. We can imagine that Joel Chandler Harris would have been proud of him.

In the cases of the four most famous Fugitives (Ransom, Davidson, Tate, and Warren), leaving home was the experience which objectified and yet intensified their consciousness of the South as a unique region and of the Southern life style as worth defending. I shall consider only Warren in this study. Of the four Fugitives he alone has made a great reputation as a novelist. (Ransom and Davidson attempted no fiction. Tate wrote one novel, a notable one entitled The Fathers.)

Youngest of the Nashville group, Robert Penn Warren was a Kentuckian by birth. He studied at Berkeley and at Oxford as a Rhodes Scholar. Eventually he developed a body of work which as Charles Bohner believes, "forms a history from the early nineteenth century to the present of the South he has known best. While it has neither the geographical nor the genealogical coherence of Faulkner's Yoknapatawpha or of Ellen Glasgow's Queensborough—and there is no indication that Warren ever intended to create an American Wessex—his work nevertheless forms a panorama of
a usable past covering more than one hundred and fifty years of Southern history."65 As Warren himself puts it: "It never crossed my mind when I began writing fiction that I could write about anything except life in the South. It never crossed my mind that I knew about anything else; knew, that is, well enough to write about. Nothing else ever nagged you enough to stir the imagination."66

The 1920's, as I have noted earlier, were critical years for the South. Even though its economy had been terribly affected by the Civil War and Reconstruction, it had remained an agrarian society. With the added strains created by World War I and the Depression, however, it was threatened as never before. "Judged against the Yankee Cult of Success the kind of success T. S. Eliot feared most, one is well-advised to remember, Southern society seemed slow and backward, it nevertheless cherished the values of family traditions and grace of manner and nurtured the esthetic and spiritual impulse. The so-called 'New South,' in its haste to share in the material fruits


66Warren, quoted by Bohner, p. 21.
of industrial progress, was selling its birthright. The capitulation to Northern industrialism was particularly stultifying to the artist."67

I'll Take My Stand, a collection of essays by twelve Southern writers including the four mentioned above, was published in 1930 in defense of the Southern agrarian way of life. In it Warren defended slavery largely on the grounds that neither whites nor blacks could support a sudden desegregation. This attitude, implicit in Page's "Ole 'Stracted," was widely held by Southerners long before Warren, of course. By 1956, however, he had changed his mind and published in defense of desegregation—and on the grounds of morality—Segregation: the Inner Conflict in the South. The sense of community which is so pervasive in the South is well illustrated by a conversation between Warren and a scholar of the region:

Pridefulness, money, level of intelligence, race, God's will, filth and disease, power, hate, contempt, legality—perhaps these are not all the words that get mentioned. There is another thing, whatever the word for it. An eminent Negro scholar is, I suppose, saying something about the other thing. 'One thing,' he says, 'is that a lot of people down here just don't like change. It's not merely desegregation they're against so much, it's just the fact of any

67Bohner, pp. 33-34.
change. They feel some emotional tie to the way things are. A change is disorienting, especially if you're pretty disoriented already.' 68 Warren calls the attitude expressed by the man above piety, though he hastens to say that he does not mean to use the word ironically. It is just that resistance to change which the conversation describes which gives character to the South while at the same time automatically making it seem anachronistic in a modern world.

Perhaps because of his travels inside and outside the South, or perhaps because of his less obvious internal conditioning, Warren is among the "emancipated" Southern writers: tied to his community by heritage, loyalty and devotion, he nevertheless has been able to achieve that degree of detachment which allows him to see the region objectively and comment from that perspective. His novels make this point very clear.

All the King's Men is set in Louisiana in the 1920's and 1930's. While Warren denies that it is Huey Long's biography, 69 it is certainly rich in references to Long's time and place. In the early part of the book, Willie Stark

68Warren, quoted in Bohner, p. 36.

and Jack Burden pay visits to their home. For Stark, home is a poultry farm; for Burden, it is an estate on the Gulf Coast. In each case, however, the men discover that it is impossible to return to their pasts. Burden comments on this reality, and on the phenomenon of memory, of the "presentness of the past":

At night you pass through a little town where you once lived, and you expect to see yourself wearing knee pants, standing all alone on the street corner under the hanging bulbs, where the bugs bang on the tin reflectors and splatter to the pavement to lie stunned. You feel like telling him /the child you see through memory/ he ought to go on home to bed or there will be hell to pay. But maybe you are home in bed and sound asleep and not dreaming and nothing has ever happened that seems to have happened. But, then, who the hell is this in the back seat of the big black Cadillac that comes ghosting through the town? Why this is Jack Burden. Don't you remember little Jack Burden? 70

Almost a stream-of-consciousness passage, this account of Jack's thoughts as he drives with the governor through Burden's Landing late at night illustrates graphically Warren's keen sense of the past as it operates on the present. Here again, we are reminded of a similar concept in Eliot, whom the Fugitives greatly admired.

70 Robert Penn Warren, All the King's Men (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1946), p. 45. Subsequent references to this novel are from this edition and will be incorporated into the text.
There is also in this novel a contrast between the Capital, which symbolizes urban isolation, and the smaller towns of Mason City and Burden's Landing, which stand for agrarian rootedness. It is ultimately in the city that Willie Stark comes to his end. It is interesting to note in passing, however, that Jack's mother and his stepfather—a young Southern cavalier type—live in plantation luxury at their estate in Burden's Landing (41). The case for the "simple life" is not made more convincing by the wistful clinging to the past and to youth by Burden's aging though beautiful mother.

The heroic ideal, epitomized by Judge Irwin, who "will not scare easy" (42), is shattered when Jack learns through his research that Irwin not only has the skeleton of accepting a bribe in his closet, but also that he has committed adultery with his friend's wife. Here, as in Thomas Wolfe's Web and Rock, we find depicted involvements which border on Jamesian sophistication, and which, brought to light, result in despair, suicide, or dishonor. The de casibus motif is clearly apparent in Judge Irwin's story, as well as in Willie Stark's.

The search for identity—the internal voyage of Jack Burden as he traces the histories of various people—leads
him to the conviction that man's true condition is not as a member of a stable and unshakable community, but rather as an isolate. Jack's immersion in history "has shown him that 'meaning is never in the event but in the motion through the event.' The present moment is the point in time in which the past is made manifest and the future determined." 71

The search for identity is treated extensively in Band of Angels. Though this novel has been criticized by some as melodramatic, the sense of place—or placelessness—is very much a part of the story. The work begins, in fact, with the heroine asking dramatically, "Oh, who am I?" 72 It is a more profound question than she knows: her curiosity to know the answer leads her ultimately to some very unhappy discoveries about herself. In the beginning Amantha reminisces (or dreams) about days gone by. Even she, however, recognizes that memory distorts reality and that the romantic haze which attaches to her reverie is not accurate. Reality is the cold fact that Aunt Suki, her Negro mammy,

71 Bohner, p. 56.

72 Robert Penn Warren, Band of Angels (New York: Random House, 1955), p. 3. Subsequent references to this novel are from this edition and will be incorporated into the text.
could find her identity only through loving and tending a white child (4), for example. Amantha voyages through life to Oberlin College, there to be accepted as legitimate and white; then home to her father's funeral only to discover that she is really black, a product of miscegenation and victim of her father's "kindness" in deluding her all through her childhood; then to the auction black (her father had failed to free her) to be bought by a Southern planter; then to freedom and marriage to abolitionist Tobias Sears; finally to psychological emancipation and entry into "the awfulness of joy" (313) which comes of dependence on self alone.

Perhaps it is the novelist's consciousness of the South and its role in American history which best accounts for his use of what he knows of his region and for his sense of place. T. Harry Williams has summarized Warren's contribution to letters and his position as a historian in his comments on the novelist's *Legacy of the Civil War*, published in 1961: "It *Legacy* is a most valuable book, because these are the meditations or conclusions not only of a man who knows American history but of a sensitive literary artist who knows life. Mr. Warren has said more meaningful things
about the central event in our national record than many an author has managed in thrice that spread." Perhaps it is this combination of historian-novelist which accounts for Warren's greatness, as well as for the perception and sensitivity which characterize other prominent contributors to the Southern Renaissance.

The art of Flannery O'Connor is, in a sense, a composite of several elements of Southern literature. C. Hugh Holman observes: "She was a part of the 'southern literary tradition.' For if she seemed in immediate subject matter to belong to the 'school of the Southern Gothic,' she seemed also to find in the southern experience a lesson for the present, as did the Agrarians, or a cosmic truth, as did the apocalyptic mythologizers like Faulkner." Yet, for all the similarities which may be cited between Flannery O'Connor and other Southern novelists, she remains unique.

No one can read Flannery O'Connor's works without


74 Holman, "Her Rue with a Difference," in The Roots of Southern Writing, p. 177.
becoming immersed in her world, in her special brand of humor, in her vision of her vocation as primarily a religious one. Though she was thoroughly Southern, her South is not the one about which Page wrote; neither is it the Virginia Tidewater or the Carolina Low Country. Her "country" could never be described as "Deep South," for piedmont Georgia and eastern Tennessee are rolling and sparsely wooded lands. The people who settled this part of the South were generally poor and held few illusions about their forebears. Their religion was almost primitive, highly emotional, and intensely Calvinistic. O'Connor's home is in the country in which Simms set Guy Rivers, and from which ruthless Thomas Sutpen had come in Faulkner's Absalom, Absalom! In every case, authors who have written about piedmont Georgia have noted the character of its people: if they are ambitious, determined, or religious, they are so in ways that could only seem grotesque when judged against a more highly refined, more highly sophisticated culture. It is this grotesqueness, this depiction of the eccentricities of the people whom she knew and loved, which sets O'Connor's art apart.

In a brief statement in the beginning of Wise Blood,
Miss O'Connor defines what she believes comedy to be and explains the connection (found in so many of her stories) between religious aberration and conduct which by any standard can only be described as grotesque:

*Wise Blood* [the novel] has reached the age of ten and is still alive. My critical powers are just sufficient to determine this, and I am gratified to be able to say it. The book was written with zest and, if possible, it should be read that way. It is a comic novel about a Christian malgre lui, and as such, very serious, for all comic novels that are any good must be about matters of life and death. *Wise Blood* was written by an author congenitally innocent of theory, but one with certain preoccupations. That belief in Christ is to some a matter of life and death has been a stumbling block for readers who would prefer to think it a matter of no great consequence. For them Hazel Motes' integrity lies in his trying with such vigor to get rid of the ragged figure who moves from tree to tree in the back of his mind. For the author Hazel's integrity lies in his not being able to. Does one's integrity ever lie in what he is not able to do? I think that usually it does, for free will does not mean one will, but many wills conflicting in one man. Freedom cannot be conceived simply. It is a mystery and one which a novel, even a comic novel, can only be asked to deepen.75

This long passage not only defines O'Connor's concept of comedy; it goes further to give the reader insight into the author's mind, into what she values: she tells us here—as

she does repeatedly in other places—that what she is first and last is Christian. A Catholic writer in a Protestant South, she is in a unique position to analyze from a detached point of view the mentality of her people.

Those characteristics of O'Connor's humor which set it apart, and yet which connect it with such writers as Mark Twain and Faulkner, are also the marks of the Southern sensibility in a broader sense. We have seen some of these earlier: 1) an incredible taciturnity and recalcitrance; 2) the conflict between city and country values; 3) a fanatical religious fervor which is at once neurotic and destructive; 4) an absolute commitment to community, to blood; 5) a relentless and often destructive pride; 6) a single-minded, obsessive devotion to a code of life which, when exaggerated, becomes humorous and incredible distortion; 7) a tendency toward understatement. Most of these characteristics, if not exaggerated, are components of strong character, discipline and the heroic ideal; exaggerated, however, they become the hallmarks of bizarre and warped—if humorous—personality derangements from which comes the term "grotesque."

76 Holman, "Her Rue with a Difference," in The Roots of Southern Writing, p. 183.
Wise Blood, for example, involves a taciturn young man (Hazel Motes), who spends most of his time running frantically away from a belief in Christ. So eager is he to escape the "bondage" of his religious convictions that he establishes "The Church Without Christ," establishes a relationship with a whore, and concludes, "Nothing matters but that Jesus don't exist." In the end, however, we find him, Oedipus-like, destroying his own eyes, giving away all his money, wearing rocks in his shoes, and ultimately being knocked in the head by two utterly moronic and ruthless policemen who have been sent out to "rescue" him.

The Violent Bear It Away, no less macabre than Wise Blood, is the story of a possessed little boy named Tarwater, who simultaneously flees the dilapidated farm on which he has been reared by his fanatical great uncle (whose preoccupations in life are to get everyone baptized and to assure his own burial) and the city to which he goes. It is in the city, of course, that he finds his Uncle Rayber, who while he is the old man's son, is also a scholar, hence a non-believer. In a chilling conclusion, Tarwater does indeed

succeed in baptizing Rayber's moronic son, but he simultaneously drowns the child, thus assuring his entrance into heaven.

The nuances—even the obvious events—of the stories must go unexplored here. These few examples serve only to illustrate very superficially the characteristics of O'Connor's humor which I have enumerated above. In her works, she examines the dark and dreadful inner places of the soul, the warps, the perversions. While she treats her characters with compassion, O'Connor does not flinch from the reality that she deals with eccentricities uniquely spawned by an environment like her native land; while she does not condone her people's actions, she subtly reveals the reasons for them. Much to the reader's horror, he discovers that he reads of their derangements with a grin on his face until he suddenly realizes that the Hazel Moteses and Tarwaters are just people like himself who have become obviously twisted; then it is that an uncomfortable thought may occur to him. How, he may wonder, are they very different from "normal" people except, perhaps, in degree and sophistication?

Probably no less concerned with loss of identity than
Warren, O'Connor treats the subject of displacement and the search for placement perceptively in *Everything That Rises Must Converge*. In the title story, Julian and his mother experience a moment of truth which results in her death and his coming of age. A Southerner of the old school, she longs for lost days, revels in her bloodline, is fiercely proud of her connections with the old plantation way of life, pities the victims of miscegenation, thinks of culture as externally visible, patronizes Negroes. As a result of her attitudes, her son has become a snob toward snobs and a hypocrite as well; that is, he patronizes his patronizing mother. He withdraws from her world because he feels it is wrong-headed, but he "never spoke of it /the decayed mansion which symbolizes his forebears' holdings/ without contempt or thought of it without longing." His confusion is complete: he hates his mother's pride and chauvinism, but at the same time longs for her security. The result is his withdrawal into "the inner compartment of his mind where he spent most of his time." He has fallen victim to fantasy, has created a world of his own as a defense against the real, unbearable one. His sense of detachment from and superiority to his mother seem absolute until in the end of the sequence they
experience a trauma: the Negro woman whom Julian's mother has been patronizing knocks the white woman down in a moment of rage. Julian's initial reaction is delight until he realizes that the experience has been much more complex than it at first appears: something in her mind snaps, and the result is stroke and death. "The old world is gone," Julian chides her, not realizing that for her the "new" world is also gone. His obtuseness is remarkable. When he realizes too late what has really occurred, it is indeed too late:

"The tide of darkness seemed to sweep him back. . . ."

Flannery O'Conn or has been at once accused of morbidity and praised for accuracy. She is her own best apologist:

The problem for a southern novelist will be to know how far he can distort without destroying, and in order not to destroy, he will have to descend far enough into himself to reach those underground springs that give life to his work. This descent into himself will at the same time, be a descent into his region. It will be a descent through the darkness of the familiar into a world where like the blind man cured in the gospels, he sees men as if they were trees, but walking. This is the beginning of vision, and I feel it is a vision which we in the South must at least try to understand if we want to participate in the continuance of a vital Southern literature. I hate to think that in twenty years Southern writers too may be writing about men in grey flannel suits and may have lost their ability to see that these gentlemen are even greater freaks than what we are writing about now. I hate to think of the day when
the Southern writer will satisfy the tired reader.78

As the matter now stands, there seems little likelihood that she had anything to fear. At least her works are unlikely to become good bedtime reading.

If Flannery O'Connor wrote of piedmont Georgia, and of people who are obviously grotesque when judged by the "norm," Walker Percy writes of the Deep South—of Mississippi and Louisiana—and of people who are perhaps no less grotesque than O'Connor's characters though more sophisticated and adroit at concealing their peculiarities. Both novelists write from the Catholic point of view; both conclude that modern man's sense of alienation is due largely to his estrangement from God.

Walker Percy is something of an anomaly among Southern writers. Born in Birmingham, Alabama, he spent his boyhood in Greenville, Mississippi, under the tutelage of his uncle, William Alexander Percy, author of Lanterns on the Levee. Though he studied medicine and became a physician, tuberculosis made it impractical for him to pursue that career. Fortunately, he was independently wealthy, which

made possible his moving to Covington, Louisiana, where he has lived quietly since 1946 and pursued the vocation of philosopher-novelist. Unlike many Southern writers, and despite the fact that he grew up not far from Oxford, Percy never fell under the influence of William Faulkner. That in itself is a wonder, since Faulkner was a friend of Uncle Will's and often played tennis with him.⁷⁹

Percy's "time" is the present and the future, and though he frequently casts an eye backward to that other world of the Old South and its influences on the modern Southerner's sensibilities, his interest has never been directly related to antebellum melancholy which pervades so much of the literature of the region. His primary concerns are philosophical and psychological: he explores the problem of alienation through the vision of one who has studied deeply the thoughts of Sartre, Kierkegaard, Heidegger, Jaspers, Marcel, Dostoevski, and Camus. As Percy once explained, "Modern European thought focuses on 'concrete life-situations rather than abstractions,' and is mainly interested in 'the predicament of modern man,

afflicted as he is with feelings of uprootedness, estrangement, anxiety, and the like.'"80

When we turn to Percy's fiction, what we discover is a writer preoccupied with the present, with what it means to live in a world which by its very nature poses new enemies: conformity, boredom, and alienation; and with the future, which promises to threaten the old order, the old values, as never before. That is not to say, of course, that Percy's novels are not "southern," for indeed they are peculiarly so in certain ways. His settings are in the South, and his central characters are products of that region who struggle against the impinging past, the uncomfortable present, and the ominous future. The Moviegoer, The Last Gentleman, and Love in the Ruins are all concerned with the voyage motif. Grandly comical in the best sense of the word, all three novels present the reader with odysseys, but the "movement" takes place, in each case, primarily in the soul of the protagonist.

On the most superficial and obvious level, each book considers a young Southern man who finds life in the present world of movies, computers, highly advanced telescopes—or

80Luschei, p. 8.
the future world of "lapsometers"—engaging, frustrating, alienating, and at times ridiculous. In each case the young man must work out his life, fight for his heroic ideals, search for his solutions against formidable forces which oppose him and challenge at every turn his sensibilities. And in each case, reconciliation of the incompatibility of his ideal and real worlds requires of the protagonist intensive introspection, and in the end compromise, as he searches for his sense of place.

The Moviegoer concerns Binx Bolling, a young man who is deeply involved physically and psychologically with his native New Orleans. He is externally well-established: he comes from an aristocratic white family, he has a promising career, he drives a nice car, and has access to an endless supply of movies to divert him. Internally, however, Binx is afflicted with that dread modern "disease" of the spirit which Percy calls "the malaise," a condition which results from "everydayness" and is characterized by abstraction, innervation, inability to communicate, loss of meaning, and utter boredom. Seek as he may to divert himself with women, movies, or other "rotations," he is ultimately overcome by

\[81\] For a comprehensive analysis of the malaise, see Martin Luschei's study cited above.
his illness. The term "rotation," it should be noted, is Percy's name for diverting change in routine. As he has said in his remarkable essay "The Man on the Train": "... it is often said that it is no wonder people are anxious nowadays, what with the possibility that the Bomb might fall any minute. The Bomb would seem sufficient reason for anxiety, yet as it happens the reverse is the truth. The contingency 'what if the Bomb should fall?' is not only not a cause of anxiety in the alienated man but is one of his few remaining refuges from it. ... The real anxiety question, the question no one asks because no one wants to, is the reverse: What if the Bomb should not fall? What then?"  

Percy defines rotation specifically as "the quest for the new as the new, the reposing of all hope in what may lie around the bend."  

In his need to escape into the future, Binx strikes a new note among Southern protagonists, most of whom seek their escapes in the past.

The old order in The Moviegoer is represented by Binx's Aunt Emily, who laments the passing of honor and recommends

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Marcus Aurelius and the Stoic Code as a corrective to the young man's lack of resolution, his sense of placelessness. Unable to respond, incapable of communicating with that other world in which his aunt lives, Binx must come to terms in his own way with his alienation: "Is it possible," he wonders, "that—for a long time I have secretly hoped for the end of the world and believed with Kate and my aunt and Sam Yerger and many other people that only after the end could the few who survive creep out of their holes and discover themselves to be themselves and live as merrily as children among the viny ruins. Is it possible that—it is not too late?" Then, in what Luschei describes as his "leap of faith"—a phrase borrowed from Kierkegaard—Binx sets his course and sinks his roots once and for all; he marries his cousin Kate—a neurotic, suicidal girl—and undertakes the rearing of his smaller siblings. As Luschei puts it: "For the house he has chosen to live in, we know that Binx has found a place suitable for the wayfarer who knows that he must hand people along and be handed along in
turn. The half-brothers have become brothers. Binx has found his vocation. He inhabits the full house now and it is his.\textsuperscript{86}

The \textit{Last Gentleman} not only locates Will Barrett in an externally alien world (in the North), but it explores the greater isolation of his internal displacement. The scion of a Southern family, he has left home to find himself. An intellectual by turn of mind and background, he has become a humidification engineer at Macy's. When he meets the Vaught family—rich Southerners on their way back South because Jamie Vaught is dying—Will is a wanderer, a displaced person who remembers his father as a romantic idealist who listened to Brahms, longed for other days, and finally committed suicide in the attic of their home.

Will is visited by a strange variation of the malaise which takes the form of periodic amnesia attacks—his version, perhaps, of rotation and his escape from reality in a modern world which offers him the blessings of its technology (in his case, the highly refined telescope which he spends the remainder of his fortune to acquire), but which

\textsuperscript{86}Luschei, p. 110.
separates him from his psychic roots and dislocates him internally. His involvement with the materialistic Vaughts—a family of "strangers" to their own perceptive son Jamie, to whom Will becomes a companion—leads him back South to his physical roots, and beyond, to the Southwest, and finally back home to establish himself in the South where he began his pilgrimage. In a sense, then, we see Will journey from the past (South) to the present (North) to the future (Southwest), and back again to the past which he must reconcile with the present. His resolution is not unlike Binx's, for in the end, Will must come to terms with life on his home ground and locate his place where he began.

The odyssey of Will Barrett is clearly revealed by selected passages from the novel. Before setting out on his first journey, Will is described as "suffering not only from hay fever but having fallen also into a long fit of melancholy and vacancy amounting to amnesia."  

87 Walker Percy, The Last Gentleman (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1966), p. 17. Subsequent references to this novel are from this edition and will be incorporated into the text.
humidification engineer, which is no great shakes of a profession. But I am also an engineer in a deeper sense: I shall engineer the future of my life according to the scientific principles and self-knowledge I have so arduously gained from five years of analysis" (41). Ironically, of course, we soon discover that his scientific principles carry little weight in the face of emotional imperatives. Traveling with the Vaughts, Will finds that the South he goes home to is alien to him, that he felt more at home in the North because everyone around him felt bad, which made him feel good (the old enigma of the man on the train), and he concludes, "I have recently returned to the South from New York, where I felt quite dislocated as a consequence of a nervous condition. . . . Only to find upon my return that I was no less dislocated here" (320). His journey leads him beyond the South to New Mexico in search of Jamie (whose doctor-brother has taken him there); Dr. Sutter Vaught, Will finds, expresses the same sense of displacement that he feels; Sutter has written in a notebook which Will happens upon: "I had left the old ruined South for the transcending Southwest. But there transcendence failed me. . . . Genius loci of Western desert did not materialize" (349). The
transcendence for which Sutter searches he discovers is unavailable to him unless he is able to find it by reimmersion into the South. The novel's ending, which suggests such a possibility, is not hopeful for Sutter.

On the other hand, for Will the outlook may be brighter. As his search nears its end, we see him decide to take the leap of faith and marry Kitty Vaught, who in a sense is as ill-equipped to face the real world alone as is Kate in The Moviegoer. It is through commitment that Will hopes to gain a sense of place, an equilibrium which he has never known. He abandons the dream of "pure" possibility and concludes: "It is better to do something than do nothing. . . . It is good to have a family. . . . Better to love and be loved. . . . To make a contribution, however small. . . . Well, isn't it better?" (383-85). But the question is haunting and the evidence ambiguous. In any case, Will sets a course, and in doing so, like Binx, he "marked the beginning . . . of what is called a normal life" (389). He falls back upon himself, and we must hope with him that the place to which he returns to put down roots will result in spiritual attachment and establishment of a genuine sense of place.
Finally, **Love in the Ruins** is a projection, a satire set in the future, which has as its protagonist Dr. Thomas More, distant relative of the redoubtable Sir Thomas More. The novel is subtitled "The Adventures of a Bad Catholic at a Time Near the End of the World." I have said nothing in this discussion of Percy's religious concerns, but they are important to note, however briefly. Not unlike Flannery O'Connor (and yet very unlike her, too), Walker Percy, as a Catholic, explores the meaning of traditional religion in the modern and future world. It is only through "jumping into the destructive element" (to borrow Joseph Conrad's memorable phrase) that one may hope to escape the malaise; and this "jump," for Percy, involves a highly symbolical, yet actual commitment to order which is reminiscent of T. S. Eliot's conclusions discussed earlier in this chapter.

Thomas More is at the first—and perhaps at the last—a "bad" Catholic; he cannot adjust his life in all points to conform to the demands of total and blind faith. Yet, the conclusion of **Love in the Ruins** is explicit, if the prognosis guarded: Dr. More has tried to find meaning in all the "places" made available to him by scientific technology, and he has failed. In the end we see him reestablished in
his religion, going to confession and receiving communion; if he must take a few shots of Early Times to get him by, still his leap has been affirmative as are his commitments to his new wife, his children, his now-humble home. In that we can surely rejoice. His sense of place becomes established only after he recognizes his condition as wayfarer, "wandering in the malaise, assailed by its deadly forms of inauthenticity and abstraction, its numbing everydayness."\textsuperscript{88}

So it would seem that Walker Percy points the way to future orientation for dislocated modern man. If one can recognize his "condition as wayfarer, a man on the road to somewhere, and undertake the search by which \textit{he} may become a sovereign wayfarer, not a lone traveler seeking the lost road to being, but a co-celebrant sharing the joys of \textit{his} pilgrimage,"\textsuperscript{89} then there is hope that he may find in this disoriented world a sense of community, a sense of place.

\textbf{IV}

The concern for place and displacement, it becomes

\textsuperscript{88}\textit{Luschei}, p. 63.

\textsuperscript{89}\textit{Luschei}, p. 63.
clear upon reading twentieth-century Southern writers, is central to modern Southern fiction. In only one of them, however, does the sense of place seem to be clearly— we may say, absolutely— the central preoccupation of the writer's vision of life. This is in the case of Eudora Welty. In her writings the sense of place reaches the most complete and most subtle expression it has attained in Southern literature. It is appropriate to devote the final chapter to the writer in whose works the evolution of the sense of place reaches a culmination.
Chapter III. The Sense of Place in the Art of Eudora Welty

I

What Thoreau said of himself—"I have travelled a good deal in Concord"--is appropriate as a comment on Eudora Welty: she has traveled a good deal in Mississippi. (Born in Jackson, Mississippi, in 1909, Eudora Welty has lived there continuously, with the exception of her years as a graduate student and as, briefly, a resident of New York City.) Her "voyages," as indeed the voyages of most of her characters, have been largely internal: she has not searched for meaning so much in the outside world as in the environments of the spirit. Because she knows much of that latter realm, she also is wise in the ways of the former. She has been a compassionate student of the individual as he functions in what might be called the "microcosm" of the South. Believing that "life is lived in a private place," she refuses to pontificate about her observations on it. As she says in the Introduction to One Time, One Place: "We come to terms as well as we can with our lifelong exposure to the world, and we use whatever devices we may need to survive.
But eventually, of course, our knowledge depends upon the living relationship between what we see going on and ourselves. . . . Insight doesn't happen often on the click of the moment, like a lucky snapshot, but comes in its own time and more slowly and from nowhere but within. The sharpest recognition is surely that which is charged with sympathy as well as with shock—it is a form of human vision. And that is of course a gift. We struggle through any pain or darkness in nothing but the hope that we may receive it, and through any term of work in the prayer to keep it." And she continues, "In my own case, a fuller awareness of what I needed to find out about people and their lives had to be sought for through another way other than in taking pictures, through writing stories. But away off one day in Tishomingo County, I knew this, anyway: that my wish, indeed my continuing passion, would be not to point the finger of judgment but to part a curtain, that invisible shadow that falls between people, the veil of indifference to each other's presence, each other's wonder, each other's human plight."¹

She leaves pontification about art to those who have

not yet reached the conviction that she expresses above. She is one of the least presumptuous of writers, therefore one of the most attractive and incisive; she refuses to lapse into moralizing, and steadfastly resists apologetics or polemics. Indeed, I believe she feels no compulsion to defend what she observes of life: she is deeply conscious of her region's past and its problems, but far too intelligent and far too fine a scholar to lecture to her readers. As she has said, "Someday the things that have been happening in the South might be dealt with more directly, but I think things have to more or less jell or settle into something that gives you an idea in form. I don't believe it can be an artificial thing--an artificial plot that's designed with one good person, one bad person, one preacher, one victim, one white, one black. That isn't the way I write . . . and it isn't honest." Fortunately, in spite of her reluctance to expound on her private convictions, she perceives a great deal, and her genius allows her to share those perceptions with others through her stories. If she is a sympathetic observer, not a pedagogue, "there

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is nothing simple about her vision of life,"³ however.

It is the fact that Miss Welty possesses uniquely authentic intuitions that makes her essay, *Place in Fiction*—a rare excursion for her into exposition—fundamental to the study of the sense of place and its role in fiction. She knows "in her bones" things about place which elude other investigators of the subject, an all but indefinable element not only of fiction, but of life.

*Place in Fiction*, written in her inimitable style, is as lyrical, as poetic, as elusive as her fiction. With some trepidation, I shall sample, paraphrase, and interpolate parts of her essay as a base from which to explore the sense of place in three of her novels: *Delta Wedding*, *Losing Battles*, and *The Optimist's Daughter*.

"Place," Miss Welty begins, "is one of the lesser angels that watch over the racing hand of fiction, perhaps the one that gazes benignly enough from off to one side, while others, like character, plot, symbolic meaning, and so on, are doing a good deal of wing-beating about her chair, and feeling, who in my eyes carries the crown, soars

³Joyce Carol Oates, Review of *Losing Battles* in The *Atlantic Monthly*, 225 (April, 1970), 120.
highest of them all and rightly relegates place into the shade. Nevertheless, it is this lowlier angel that concerns us here. There have been signs that she has been rather neglected of late; maybe she could do with a little petitioning.\textsuperscript{4} While place has to do with location, it must not, she continues, be thought synonymous with that highly generalized, therefore careless term "regionalism." Place, she tells us, is where the writer stands; it gives him a base of reference, a point of view (2). Art, and especially the novel, is "the voice of the individual, doing its best to speak, not comfort of any sort, indeed, but truth"; as such it is "bound up in the local, the 'real,' the present, the ordinary day-to-day of human experience." And "Fiction," she explains, "is properly at work on the here and now, or the past made here and now; for in novels we have to be there. Fiction provides the ideal texture through which feeling and meaning that permeate our own personal, present lives will best show through. For in his theme—the novelist has the blessing

\textsuperscript{4}Eudora Welty, \textit{Place in Fiction} (New York: House of Books, Ltd., 1957), p. 1. Subsequent references to this essay are from this edition and will be incorporated into the text. I have taken the liberty of numbering the pages, though they are not numbered in the text.
of the inexhaustible subject: you and me. You and me, here" (3-4).

If it is the nature of fiction to be "bound up in the local," then what a writer says to the world depends on his perceptions, his feelings, about those particulars which he observes when and where he lives. He must choose his details carefully, recognizing that his credibility is always in the balance. As Miss Welty suggests, it is "the responsibility of the writer, to disentangle the significant—in character, incident, setting, mood, everything, from the random and meaningless and irrelevant that in real life surround and beset it" (8). When he has successfully developed his plot and his characters so that the reader comes to believe in them, then he has accomplished half of this duty: he has given his novel an "outer surface" which is visible and coherent. If he succeeds completely, his work will have an "inner surface" as well, which is its meaning, its symbolical significance. "Seeing that these inner and outer surfaces do lie so close together and so implicit in each other, the wonder," Miss Welty concludes, "is that human life so often separates them, or appears to, and it takes a good novel to put them back together" (7).
Just as no one can explain why two people can approach a canvas with the same paints and one produce a masterpiece, the other a disaster, so no one can really explain why one writer chooses a magic combination of detail and produces a great book while another chooses differently and is incomprehensible or inane. But the question is, what does the master writer do that makes him a master? Miss Welty's answer is deceptively simple: "What tells the author his way? Nothing at all but what he knows inside himself: the same thing that hints to him afterward how far he has missed it, how near he may have come to the heart of it" (9).

The successful novelist of place, then, must give himself up to those forces which exert themselves upon him from within; he must allow his work to have a way with him, to direct him. When he does so, his product will be authentic, and the reader—on some inexplicable level—will sense his authenticity. He chooses the details in order to develop his plot and characters, of course, and to that extent he is at the controls. He does not manipulate, obscure, or distort those details toward some preconceived or vulgar end. Put another way, his method is largely inductive: the particulars of his novel ultimately result in showing the
reader its meaning. He cannot know—as Herman Melville could not know—what levels of meaning he may convey to his reader. What he can know—indeed must know—is that he is not intentionally falsifying, embellishing, or slanting the details to fit his purposes. As we can see immediately, it is the latter operation which often results in superficial local-color novels. They may be entertaining, but they are not usually convincing: they are almost immediately recognizable as the vehicle of propaganda, or worse, they are written for the sake of creating an illusion, not of fictionalizing actuality. As Miss Welty puts it: "Novels that are written about place for its own sake are a little the fashion now. They are not very good, and are mentioned here because they represent the opposite use of place from that I have tried to describe. . . . If these novels are showy and vulgar underneath, it is because they have been vulgarly felt. Drifters write them, and while some drifters may be talented with words, drifting is not an emotion, and can scarcely provide a theme not statable in two words ('I'm drifting'). Restlessness is a different matter, a serious one. . . . Being on the move is no substitute for feeling. Nothing is. And no love or insight can be at work in a shifting and never-defined position, where eye, mind, and heart have
never willingly focused on a steadying point" (22-23).

In fairness to Miss Welty, the use of the term "local color" is mine, not hers. And I do not mean to imply that all novels that use place deductively—which manipulate the details—are objects of her criticism above. Such writers as Page and Cable, for example, were not drifters. But they were primarily apologists and as such, wrote polemics, not novels of place. The key, then, to determining a novel's qualifications as a novel of place, lies in what sort of person is writing it and what his purpose is in doing so. In Miss Welty's words: "It may be going too far to say that the exactness and concreteness and solidity of the real world achieved in a story correspond to the intensity of feeling in the author's mind and to the very turn of his heart; but there lies the secret of our confidence in him" (20). That is not to say, of course, that a novelist must write a documentary; it is to say that the elements of his plot and the actions of his characters must ring true. This essentially self-conscious process by which a novelist commits himself to his intuitions allows him to write a "lie" (7), but tell the truth. "For the spirit of things is what is sought" (15).
If the author must "commit himself to his subject, ... absorb it, embrace it in his mind, take it to his heart, speak it in plain words" (24), then he must do so from some location in which he has his roots. "Location, however, is not simply to be used by the writer—it is to be discovered. ... Discovery does not imply that the place is new, only that we are. ... Discovery ... is a matter of vision" (25).

It is undoubtedly the sense of alienation, the "drifting" about which Miss Welty speaks, which accounts for so much emphasis today on isolation, placelessness, rootlessness, homelessness. Many modern novelists, indeed, seem homesick for homes they never knew. Miss Welty does not argue that one should stay forever in one place. On the contrary, she believes that staying home because it is safe is the worst mistake one may make in his life. Yet, "The open mind and the receptive heart—which are at last and with fortune's smile the informed mind and the experienced heart—art to be gained anywhere, any time, without necessarily moving an inch from any present address. There must surely be as many ways of seeing a place as there are pairs of eyes to see it. The impact happens in so many different ways" (26). Whether one stays at home or leaves his point of origin forever is
not, in the final analysis, what counts: "There may come to be new places in our lives that are second spiritual homes—closer to us in some ways, perhaps, than our original homes. But the home tie is the blood tie. And had it meant nothing to us, any other place thereafter would have meant less, and we would carry no compass inside ourselves to find home ever, anywhere at all. We would not even guess what we had missed" (27-28).

That "compass" of which Miss Welty speaks is synonymous with the sense of place. In a stable society which emphasizes home, family, community, heritage, and a consciousness of the past, one develops a sense of continuity. Once he is established in such an environment—once he feels he belongs—then he can leave that specific locale without leaving his sense of place behind. If his community (and here I mean all those elements mentioned above, including family, friends, religion) is a positive force in his life, if it identifies for him "his own tree" (26), and does not tyrannize him as it does Quentin Compson, then he can "go out on a limb" (26). He has his built-in point of view which serves him as a rudder no matter where he may go once he has gained this knowledge.
He may, of course, find that he cannot go home again, in the literal sense of the word, because the elements of that home as his memory has recorded it may have changed radically in his absence: people he knew as a child may have died or grown old; his own perceptions and experiences may have altered his concept of those people. But what remains consistent and reinforcing is his memory of that place to which he belonged actually and to which he still belongs emotionally and psychologically, and therefore ever after serves him as a point of reference, a compass. If he is jarred by the discrepancies which he discovers upon going home after years away, he nevertheless retains the imprint of that earlier sense of place, and his life, therefore, retains its continuity: he knows where he has been (and where his community has been in the past), and can, as a result of that knowledge, determine where he is, who he is, and to some extent, where he is going. One critic has summarized the matter well: "To her Welty a sense of place is also a sense of the past, a sense of belonging to a community and being related to the world of nature. She seizes the paradox of human fulfilment instinctively: only by recognizing the claims of the past, of belonging to an established network of relationships can the individual
fulfil his individualism. While the world is rushing forward into the future looking for purpose and meaning, those who stay still have meaning and purpose conferred on them, an inheritance from a living past. 5

II

Delta Wedding (1945), Losing Battles (1970), and The Optimist's Daughter (1972) are all studies in the relationships of various people to their communities. Those relationships and those communities differ, of course, but the constant in all three novels is the fact that the characters feel very strongly the blood-tie: they work out their lives in relationship to their communities, whether of present actuality, as in the first two books, or of past actuality, as in The Optimist's Daughter. Miss Welty does not oversimplify this complex relationship; her works are not "regional," though they all revolve around clearly identifiable Southern locales; she does not write romantic glorification of the South, nor glamorize the effects of these

communities from or in which her characters function. But she does explore them with compassion, and we sense in her works a deep strain of melancholy which is inevitable when we consider that the elements of the communities with which she deals, with all their eccentricities, are anachronistic in the modern world of rockets, test-tubes, and computers. There are certainly examples in each novel of alienated people who do not belong in the communities where they live. These "outsiders" are set off in stark relief against the "insiders," as we shall see. And to further complicate the picture, we discover that there are insiders who find readjustment (except in memory) to the old community difficult and sometimes impossible.

The three novels which I have chosen, when seen together, compose a fascinating study of the Southerner and his relationship to place: Delta Wedding presents us with a picture of the vestige of the Mississippi Delta's "aristocratic," affluent, insular plantation society, ironically functioning in 1923 much as it did a hundred years before; Losing Battles takes us to the rugged hill country of Northeastern Mississippi sometime during the Depression years of the early 1930's where life is hard and the people not only
simple and uneducated, but desperately poor; The Optimist's Daughter thrusts us into modern Southern Mississippi, into an educated middle-class environment revisited by a woman whose roots are there, but who experiences a collision between memory and reality upon her return after years in the North. Not only, therefore, do the characters of these novels represent the entire spectrum of Mississippi society, but the stories differ according to the times in which they occur. By considering certain aspects of place as they are revealed in these works, then, we should be able to gain insight into Miss Welty's treatment of the concept of place in her art.

To attain a degree of order, I shall look at these novels in regard to the following: 1) the types of families/communities represented: their people, values, rituals, and humor; 2) the role of memory/time in the characters' lives; 3) the conflict between insiders and outsiders. Such evidence, I believe, will reveal that certain themes are present in all three books: 1) the significance of family/community as a vehicle for continuity; 2) the importance of memory as a link with the past; 3) the timelessness of the old world South in
conflict with the modern world of "clock time" and deadlines; 4) the alienation of the outsider (and sometimes of the insider who returns home); 5) nostalgia for a way of life which is no longer relevant. All of these are involved in the search which has become modern man's obsession: the search for identity in a world bent on making every one of us anonymous.

III

*Delta Wedding* is a novel about a wedding which is, in a sense, a funeral as well. The Fairchilds, a large Southern family left over from the days of Gilmore Simms, gather to celebrate—with guarded enthusiasm—the marriage of their daughter Dabney, to their overseer, Troy Flavin. Very early in the story, we become aware that the pastoral existence at the old plantation home leaves something to be desired by those who will be the next "parent" generation: Dabney and her sister Shelley, each in her own way, are in the process of escaping when we meet them. And they, we will soon discover, are not the only ones who seek in some way liberation from the insularity of their present "idyllic" environment: the older generation
live almost entirely in the other world of the nineteenth century; the "parent" generation, some of whom have moved to the city, live as much in memory and myth as in their real world; the future generation on whom continuity depends, have already begun to plot other kinds of lives, and trips to far away places. Still, what dominates the novel is the reader's constant awareness of that old Southern theme: the presentness of the living past.

Before looking at these points in more detail, let us meet the people with whose lives we are concerned. As they gather for the ritual of marriage, we learn a great deal about them. And as we see them from our omniscient point of view, we know immediately that their way of life is a comical anachronism: in 1923, while the modern world recovers from World War I, while industrialization and urbanization have the day, they live in reality or in memory in an ante-bellum world which cherishes the values and the myths of Thomas Nelson Page. We also know—as do some of them—that we are witnessing the last gasps of a community which cannot survive unaltered in the real world. Even so, there is something at once charming,
poignant, and terrible in their struggle to reconcile the old order with the new.

The story begins with a "voyage." Laura McRaven, "little motherless girl," the daughter of a Fairchild woman who married young and transplanted herself to Jackson—to the "city"—and died there, travels from her father's modern world of offices, busses, and daily newspapers, back in time to her mother's childhood home. We learn through her a surprising fact: the microcosm of Delta Wedding is not the South; it is not even one part of that South; it is, unbelievably, one specific Delta family. What the little city girl witnesses as she enters the Mississippi Delta sets the tone for the whole novel:

Thoughts went out of her Laura's head and the landscape filled it. In the Delta, most of the world seemed sky. The clouds were large—larger than horses or houses, larger than boats or churches or gins, larger than anything except the fields the Fairchilds planted... The land was perfectly flat and level but it shimmered like the wing of a lighted dragonfly. It seemed strummed, as though it were an instrument and something had touched it.

In the Delta the sunsets were reddest light. The sun went down lopsided and wide as a rose on a stem in the west, and the west was a milk-white

6Eudora Welty, Delta Wedding (New York: The New American Library, 1946), p. 11. Subsequent references to this novel are from this edition and will be incorporated into the text.
edge, like the foam of the sea. The sky, the field, the little track, and the bayou, over and over—all that had been bright or dark was now one color. From the warm window sill the endless fields glowed like a hearth in firelight, and Laura, looking out, leaning on her elbows with her head between her hands, felt what an arriver in a land feels—that slow hard pounding in the breast.

The timelessness—the unchangeableness—of the scene is unmistakable. The economy at Shellmound, the Fairchild plantation, is agrarian, the tempo of life medieval, the values at once complex and incredibly simple, if heroic and romantic at the same time. As Laura arrives at her destination, she discovers her mother's kin, and she also meets, significantly, several people who are "kin" not by blood, but rather by marriage or necessity. It is from this latter group that she learns something of what it means to be an "outsider."

In this unusual community many types are represented. Among the members of the older generation there are Great-Aunt Shannon, for whom the past is more real than the present; Aunt Primrose and Aunt Jim Allen, who live in another plantation house nearby, who spend their days much as they did when they were girls, and for whom tangible objects from the past are unspeakable comforts.
The "parent" generation is composed of Battle Fairchild, the childlike, blustering, indulgent father; Ellen, his Virginia-born wife and the mother of his many children; George Fairchild, the brother from Memphis who is in all points a cavalier; Robbie, his wife, who comes "from the wrong side of the track," yet who perceives a great deal. The future generation is represented by Battle and Ellen's daughters Dabney, a Southern belle who has chosen a man from the hill country for her husband, and Shelley, who thinks and writes and dreams of trips to far off lands; Troy Flavin, who is of dubious stock, and who does not pander to the "aristocracy" who inhabit Shellmound; numerous younger children, among them Maureen, the orphaned child of a third Fairchild brother, long dead and much lamented, and a demented woman who never "fit" at the plantation. And then there are the Negroes, who, if they are no longer slaves, act and are treated as though they still are.

A wedding, like a funeral, is a reason for families to gather. However disparate the elements of personalities, the hopes, fears, values which separate or unite people, they are all present in exaggerated and
concentrated form when the fragments of a family assemble to celebrate as a unit. Such is the case at Shellmound: the uniting forces of shared memory and shared blood at once intensify the feelings of belonging and those of alienation. The demands of celebration are sometimes heavy, and ambivalences which escape unnoticed otherwise, on such occasions display themselves in shameless panorama. Values and rituals assume new dimension and the secrets of the heart are exposed for public scrutiny.

We learn something of the "Fairchild dilemma" gradually as we look into the lives of those who assemble to certify the change which is more than a change in one girl's life; her union with an "outsider" is not the first, of course: Battle had married Ellen, George had married Robbie Reid, Aunt Tempe had married Uncle Pinckney Summers. On each former occasion, however, the Fairchild member had retained the authority and the old values. Something is different about Dabney's marriage to Troy: she, we learn, is likely to relinquish that ascendancy—and by her own choice: "Sometimes," we are told, "Dabney was not so sure she was a Fairchild—sometimes she did not care, that was it. There were moments
of life when it did not matter who she was--even where. Something, happiness--with Troy, but not necessarily, even the happiness of a fine day--seemed to leap away from identity as if it were an old skin, and that she was one of the Fairchilds was of no more need to her than the locust shells now hanging to the trees everywhere were to the singing locusts. What she felt, nobody knew!" (44).

And later we see even more clearly how far Dabney has come from the values of her older kinsmen. In a sort of spontaneous ceremony--a ritual of a kind--Aunt Primrose and Aunt Jim Allen give Dabney their most priceless treasure, a night light which had comforted generations of Fairchilds. She accepts it graciously, even gratefully; however, once back at Shellmound where it is accidentally shattered, "they heard that the shattering but no cry at all--only the opening and closing of the screen door as she went inside" (67). The significance of the insignificant is nowhere better illustrated, for the little porcelain night light symbolizes the old order, the old values, and Dabney has no time to lament its passing. It was to Aunt Primrose and Aunt Jim Allen
a link with the living past, a tangible evidence of what Great-Aunt Shannon takes for granted as she "talks" to her brother Gordon who was killed in the Battle of Shiloh: Great-Aunt Shannon seems to enjoy intimidating her sister, Great-Aunt Mac "with her access to their soldier brothers Battle, George, and Gordon, as well as to James killed only thirty-three years ago in a duel, to her husband Lucian Miles and even to Aunt Mac's husband Duncan Laws" (142).

Not only is there a timelessness apparent in the life at Shellmound where Aunt Shannon talks to the long-dead, where Laura had been taught long ago "they 'never seemed to change at all'" (25); there is a jarring collision between practicality and idealism. Aunt Shannon, who will never eat unless cajoled, "never wept over Laura, as if she could not do it over one motherless child. . . . In her the Fairchild oblivion to the member of the family standing alone was most developed; just as in years past its opposite, the Fairchild sense of emergency, a dramatic instinct, was in its ascendancy, and she had torn herself to pieces over Denis's father's drinking and Denis's getting killed. Insistently
a little messenger or reminder of death, Laura self-
consciously struck her pose again and again, but she was
a child too familiar, too like all her cousins, too much
one of them (as they all were to one another a part of
their very own continuousness at times) ever to get the
attention she begged for" (79).

And George, we learn, had toyed with death to rescue
Maureen from the train called The Yellow Dog. For honor
and family's sake, he had taken a grave chance even while
he could not be sure Robbie did not carry their own child
who would have been left fatherless had his attempt
failed (172). If his bravery was laudable, his explana-
tion was incredible: the engineer would not have hit him
because "It was somebody I knew! Mr. Doolittle wasn't
going to hit me!" But as Robbie secretly knew, "George
was sure Mr. Doolittle was" (174). The point, of course,
is not that George should have done less than try to save
the child; what is remarkable is his cavalier attitude
in the face of almost certain death; this, practical-
minded Robbie finds inexplicable and all but unforgivable.
She feels he had a choice, and he chose in favor of a
moronic Fairchild instead of her.
It is, perhaps, Shelley who best assesses her family as she writes in her diary:

We never wanted to be smart, one by one, but all together we have a wall, we are self-sufficient against people that come up knocking, we are solid to the outside. Does the world suspect that we are all very private people? I think one by one we're all more lonely than private and more lonely than self-sufficient. . . .

The whole Delta is in and out of this house. Life may be stronger than Papa is. He let Troy in, and look, Troy took Dabney. Life is stronger than George, but George is not surprised, only he wants Robbie Reid. Life surprises Papa and it is Papa that surprise hurts. I think George expects things to amount to more than you bargain for—and so do I. . . . Uncle George scares me a little for knowing my fright. Papa is ashamed of it but George does not reproach me. . . . He expects things to be more than you think, and to mean something—something—He cherishes our weaknesses because they are just other ways that things are going to come to us. I think when you are strong you can squeeze them back and hold them from you a little while but where you are weak you run to meet them. (103-105)

If her thoughts are dramatic, they are also penetrating and perceptive. She has written it all down: the weaknesses, the strengths, the eccentricities which are parts of the compass by which Fairchilds take their reckonings, by which they define their sense of place.

But there are also aliens among them. Ellen, even though fully accepted, is Virginia-born and often returns
to Virginia in the private world of her living memory (250). Robbie, whom Aunt Tempe from Inverness has declared worse for the family than Troy Flavin (240), shrewdly sizes up the Fairchild women as asking "a great deal of their men—competitively"; as "knowing what to ask because in their kind of people, the Fairchild kind, the women always rule the roost"; and "the men lived here on a kind of sufferance!" (170-71). Laura, who though half Fairchild, feels mostly McRaven and wishes most in the world to be accepted (95). So immersed is she in the womb-like security which seems to characterize Shellmound, that "she suffered from the homesickness of having almost forgotten home" (158). After all, why shouldn't she "belong"? She was her mother's child, "and it was as if they had considered her mother all the time as belonging, in her life and in her death (for they took Laura and let her see the grave), as belonging here; they considered Shellmound the important part of life and death too" (159). Troy Flavin, red-headed and from the hills, answers Robbie's "I didn't marry into them! I married George!" with "Well, it's a close family. Too close, could be" (166).
The humor in Delta Wedding is predictably sardonic, at times even cruel. It ranges from Battle's practical joking to the aunts' statement to Ellen's children: "Your mother is killing herself. ... But you can't do a thing ... with her. ... We're going to have to whip her or kill her before she'll lie down in the afternoons, even" (30). Perhaps, however, the most comical scenes are also the most poignant. This is especially apparent in the visit of Laura and Roy to Marmion, the plantation house which is being renovated for Dabney and Troy. As they enter the great door and find themselves in the middle of the vacant living room, they find that they are not alone: old demented black Aunt Studney is there, standing in the middle of the room "protecting" her bag of "treasures." As Roy teases her, she suddenly lets open the bag and fills the house with bees. Her only response to Roy's incredulous "why?" is her favorite phrase, "Ain't studyin' you." And at that moment it occurs to Laura that "Aunt Studney was not on the lookout for things to put in, but was watching to keep things from getting out" (207).

Laura's assessment of Aunt Studney's preoccupation---
"not on the lookout for things to put in, but . . . watching to keep things from getting out"--seems a perfect summary of the Fairchild's themselves. Perhaps each of them is so private a person, as Shelley has declared, that they have no time for "studyin'" anyone else. In any case, Delta Wedding is filled with people threatened: their sense of place is deep-rooted, to be sure. But the insularity of their pastoral world is in peril from within as well as without. Life has left them behind in what might best be described as a cul de sac, but even before our eyes George talks of "modernizing" the Grove's agricultural methods, Shelley dreams of Europe, and Dabney sets out on a life as the wife of Troy Flavin, overseer. Those facts are more than hints that Shellmound is destined to become for future generations of Fairchild's an anachronistic curiosity, a source of pride, a part of their living past.

IV

The family we meet in Losing Battles could well be Troy Flavin's neighbors "back home." They are hill
people: poor, ignorant, fiercely proud, and possessed of a unique attachment to one another and to their place. Here again a family is gathered to celebrate a momentous occasion. This time it is Granny Vaughn's ninetieth birthday, though according to her, "I'm expecting to see all my living grandchildren, all my great-grandchildren, and all the great-great-grandchildren they care to show me, and see 'em early... I'm a hundred today." No one would have dared to disappoint her, not even her grandson, Jack Renfro, who is inconveniently away in prison and not due to be released for another day. Gradually all the kinfolks assemble, and there are many, many of them. As Aunt Birdie puts it (though she speaks of chickens): "I've about decided that nothing's going to kill some bearers... regardless of treatment" (193). The Vaughns and the Renfros are, indeed, prolific and they are hardy. In the middle of the Depression their indomitable spirits are capable of joviality: their "compass," by which their priorities are determined, has led

7Eudora Welty, Losing Battles (New York: Random House, 1970), p. 5. Subsequent references to this novel are from this edition and will be incorporated into the text.
them all back to the headwaters of their lives to celebrate with Granny her unconquerable love of life.

*Losing Battles,* however, for all its earthiness and humor, and for all its endless talk of past and present, is not simply or mainly the story of a reunion. It is a study of two opposing approaches to life—of two aged women: Granny Vaughn, the matriarch of the assembled celebrants, and Miss Julia Mortimer, the teacher whom they all have loved, hated, or dreaded, but never understood. Appropriately, the book begins and ends with ceremonies in honor of them—with Granny's birthday celebration, and Miss Julia's funeral. Above all the chatter and the incessant activity, something tells the reader that this is their story: the revelation of what their influences mean and have meant in the lives of those whom they have taught.

If the sense of place is finally to be defined as an intangible attachment to one's roots, then it follows that those roots begin from seeds: from these "seeds" (or lessons) come the roots which undergird the tree in whose limbs the "fruit" is to be found. In the novel, the "outer surface"—which is what we see as the fruit—is
clearly visible as the activities, the conversations, the attitudes, the reminiscences, which are not only highly particular, but which are amazingly detailed. If the underground source of all these aspects of the "outer surface" are not immediately visible, they are nevertheless there: the Vaughns and Renfros act as they do chiefly as a result of the approach to life which Granny taught them; the grayheaded disciples of Miss Julia react as they do largely because of lessons they learned from her when they were young. The "seeds" have borne very different fruits.

In Losing Battles Miss Welty explores the most basic fact of human life: to be born is to be sentenced; to be mortal is to be engaged--like it or not--in losing battles against age, time, and the fact of one's own temporariness and vulnerability. The question which this novel raises is not "Will the characters lose the battles?" That much has already been determined. The question is "How and with what weapons will they choose to fight until they lose?" There are two opposing answers to that last question. One is the answer of nature: love family, revere the past, be loyal to your
own kind, work hard, give to those you love, learn to laugh, do not worry about what you do not understand. This, of course, is Granny's code of life and what she has taught her children. The other is not so simple and not nearly so popular: try to love those who are different from yourself, learn from the past, be loyal to principles as well as to people, study hard, give all you have to whoever needs, learn to cry, worry about and seek answers to what you do not understand. This clearly is Miss Julia's code of life.

It is at once fascinating and revealing to observe the people who result from these opposing ideologies. Granny's family is enormous and well-tutored in the lessons which she has taught them: they are strong-minded salt-of-the-earth people, but they are as innocent (or ignorant) of the nuances of life as newborn babies; they are immersed in the past, but it has taught them acceptance of the harsh realities of poverty, and it has made them callous toward the pains of the spirit even among themselves; they are generous, but chiefly with their own; they laugh a great deal, but often at each other; they worry, but mainly about mundane problems of
survival and never about metaphysical questions.

Miss Julia's "progeny" is very small. Since she, unlike Granny, never married and had children of her own, those who love her—who are her "family"—are "the ones who got up and left home" (424). They are aliens in this land, but they, too, are fiercely loyal to their matriarch. Among them is a Catholic priest who delivers Miss Julia's funeral oration in Latin. He is mocked by a protestant observer: "Worshipped himself, didn't he? Just loved hearing the sound of his own voice" (430). And he is summarily dismissed by Jack: "I expect she might be the only one could have understood a word out of that man burying her. If he was a man... She was away up over our heads, you and me" (432). There is also a doctor, who cuts Mrs. Moody (the Judge's wife) off very short when she offers the platitude "She's past minding now, Dr. Carruthers," by responding, "And now I mind!" (430). And there is Judge Moody, whose pain at Miss Julia's passing is revealed in his sense of utter futility: Mrs. Moody imperceptively remarks, "And she'd already completed her task on earth. But I do think she could have given in enough to allow down-to-earth
Presbyterians to take charge of her funeral. All that jabber we got here in order to be served with. Just because she once taught that fellow algebra" (430). Her husband laughs, not about the funeral, but to keep from crying over the incredible depth of his wife's insensitivity.

Miss Julia's "children" are strong-minded, to be sure, but they are strangers in this land of their births: they are conscious of the nuances of life; they, too, are immersed in the past, but it has taught them bitter resignation, and tenderness toward the pains of the spirit; they give not only to their own, but to all whom they may serve; they laugh, but their laughter is very close to tears; they worry, and mainly about the imponderables to which they have become sensitized. They are not like the "happy" people at the reunion, but we wonder if they are not perhaps the wiser ones. On this point, as usual, Miss Welty is perfectly ambiguous and non-judgmental. In that fact, I believe, lies her mastery of the "inner surface" about which she speaks in Place in Fiction: we never lose sight for a moment of the "outer surface"--the plot, the characters, and the
action. But we must assess for ourselves, by our own best lights, the significance of that more subtle level of meaning.

Three generations of Vaughns and Renfros are represented at the reunion. In addition to Granny Vaughn are her numerous grandchildren, among them Beulah Beecham Renfro, Jack's mother, who symbolizes the "parent" generation. Jack Renfro and his many brothers and sisters account for the future generation. Lady May, Jack's child, represents the generation which is to come. The continuity is obvious, and the promise of its continuation no one can deny. The novel, on one level, may be read as their history and as a prophecy of their future. But it is much more than that.

As the story unfolds, we discover several important facts. Granny had once been more than casually acquainted with Miss Julia. The teacher had lived for a time with the Vaughns, a time during which Granny's grandson Sam Dale might have sired a child by an orphan girl named Rachael Sojourner. Through torturous mazes of family history, we learn that the child may be Gloria Short, and this accounts, of course, for Miss Julia's great concern
about the marriage of Jack and Gloria: they may be first cousins (314). We also learn how Granny regards Miss Julia: "There was a time, some years back, when I didn't deplore her presence here. Mr. Vaughn is so much given to going out of sight to do his praying before we blow out the lamp. And she and I could set and catch our breath when the day's over, and confab a little about the state the world was in. She picked up a good deal from me... Too bad she wasn't able to put two and two together... Like I did" (346). In addition to Granny's self-agrandizement, this passage tells the reader something about the presentness of the past: Granny here, as in many other places, freely mixes the present tense with the past, for Mr. Vaughn has been dead for a year.

The "two and two" of which Granny speaks concerns the secret of Gloria's parentage, as we learn upon discovery that she has hidden a postcard which she found among Sam Dale's effects when he died. The card was addressed to Rachael, though it was never sent, and in it he refers to her as his wife and to their baby (267). Though this, we find, is not the whole story, it is a piece to the puzzle which Miss Julia was not allowed to share: it is Vaughn-
Renfro business, and therefore not the province of "outsiders." The opposing points of view—Granny's and Miss Julia's—are perfectly illustrated here: Granny tells no one (not even her own grandchildren) about the relationship revealed in the postcard because she is fiercely protective of her son. What we learn later (323-24) is that the information is far from the most shocking secret the family conceals: Beulah is responsible for revealing the fact that Sam Dale was terribly injured in a childhood accident, and as a result was impotent. He, she says, could not have been Gloria's father. But the matter is hopelessly ambiguous, for the truth is distorted past finding out. The web of circumstances is too complex to be disentangled, and as Judge Moody finally concludes: "I think we'll have to leave it that what's done is done" (325). It is, however, Gloria who settles the whole debate with these simple words: "Jack, I'll be your wife with all my heart, and that's enough for anybody, even you. I'm here to be nobody but myself, Mrs. Gloria Renfro, and have nothing to do with the old dead past. And don't ever try to change me" (361). Her lack of concern for the implications of blood-marriage is complete,
and is precisely the sort of "innocence" which finally
defeats Miss Julia Mortimer, who had warned the girl not
to marry in haste, because there was a "dark thread, a
dark thread running through my story somewhere" (251).

Gloria was Miss Julia's last protégé (325) and one
she hoped would let knowledge guide her. Instead, we
hear Gloria's opinion in the matter: "No, people don't
want to be read like books" (432). Her need for identity
is greater than her desire for knowledge, and this is
Miss Julia's ultimate dilemma. Her years of labor to
bring everything "out in the open" (432) fail in the
face of that greater imperative, the sense of place. In
her final letter to Judge Moody she admits as much:

Oscar, it's only now, when I've come to lie flat
on my back, that I've had it driven in on me--
the reason I never could win for good is that
both sides were using the same tactics. Very
likely true of all wars. A teacher teaches and
a pupil learns or fights against learning with
the same force behind him. It's the survival
instinct. It's a mighty power, it's an iron
weapon while it lasts. It's the desperation of
staying alive against all odds that keeps both
sides encouraged. But the side that gets licked
gets to the truth first.

Oscar Moody, I'm going to admit something to you.
What I live by is inspiration. I always did--I
started out on nothing else but naked inspira-
tion... Now that the effort it took has
been put a stop to, and I can survey the years, I can see it all needs doing over, starting from the beginning.

They prattle around me of the nearness of Heaven. Is this Heaven, where you lie wide-open to the mercies of others who think they know better than you do what's best—a what's true and what isn't? . . . I think I'm in ignorance, not Heaven. (298-99)

Only the very few can accept what Judge Moody knows: there is majesty in this statement of "defeat," and there are kinds of kinship which are not of blood. In response to the foolish questions of the Vaughn-Beecham-Renfro delegation, he simply says: "I am not kin to Miss Julia—there are other ties" (301). For them, however, his message is unintelligible nonsense: the blood-tie is the one that counts.

One final point is worth noting. Despite her sense of rightness in concealing knowledge to protect her son, Granny is not entirely comfortable with the "fruits" her philosophy has borne. As she listens to Miss Lexie (Ralph Renfro's old-maid sister, and Miss Julia's last nurse) describe her relationship to her former "inspiration," and as she sees the reaction of her own children to Miss Julia's death, Granny experiences a fear she has
not previously known: she is frightened by their callousness, and her response is, "I'm ready to go home now" (287). Beulah, thinking her grandmother's reaction is attributable to senility or fatigue, responds: "Granny, you are home," and Aunt Birdie asks a significant question: "What's she getting scared of?" The response is simple—perhaps simple-minded: "Granny's not scared of anything" (287). We know, of course, that she is indeed afraid of something—afraid of the natural "callousness" of her own: "Granny dropped her hands, and she and Miss Beulah looked at each other, each face as grief-stricken as the other" (288).

The two worlds—Granny's and Miss Julia's—can never be reconciled to one another; they are too far apart. In the end neither has really "won." Their lives are past or quickly passing, but their lessons, for better or worse, have been well-learned by those whom they influenced. The cycle begins again—the continuity is secure. The priest, the doctor, the judge will perpetuate their kind, however small their number. Jack and Gloria will bring forth a new generation of Renfros who will be taught and then teach the lessons we have witnessed in Losing Battles,
and the living past will never die. And who can say which point of view is "right"? As Miss Welty has said, "We come to terms as well as we can with our lifelong exposure to the world, and we use whatever devices we may need to survive." The "inner surface" of this novel shines brightly through the outer one, but the reader must assess for himself what that light reveals.

The Optimist's Daughter is a novel about collisions. Set in New Orleans and Mt. Salus, Mississippi, in the present day, the real location of the story is in the mind of Laurel McKelva Hand. Long away from the South, she is called home to support her aging father through an operation from which he does not recover. What she experiences from the moment she arrives in New Orleans until she leaves for Chicago after taking her father home and attending to his funeral is the heart of the book; the reader is permitted to act as voyeur during those short days, and what he sees in Laurel makes him timid before his own mirror.

Laurel Hand, a widow in her forties, has a successful career in Chicago where she has lived since her marriage to
Philip Hand many years ago. Except for occasional "ceremonial" visits to Mt. Salus, she has been long emancipated from that community. She has struck down other roots—has found a "second spiritual home." But the "home tie is the blood tie," and her reentry into the world of her youth, imposed upon her by necessity, not choice, forces her to evaluate and reevaluate her sense of place. The result of this confrontation with past and present is a number of external and internal collisions which compel her to look with new eyes at herself, at those she loves, and at those whom she does not love.

From her position of detachment, Laurel has continued through the years to accept as authentic the assessments of her youth: her parents, her friends, and her home town have become fixed in her memory as she perceived them as a girl. Now that she is a woman, she must face up to the collision between myth and reality, between naive and mature insights. Much as one might stop a movie—"freeze" the characters and the action into a still-life scene—she suspended time in Mt. Salus the day she left for her other world. Now, faced with reality, she must come to terms with the fact that only in her mind have those people and
that place been frozen in the mould of her youthful percep-
tions. She learns, much to her surprise, that she really does not "know her own tree." The distance which she has maintained through the years has robbed her of gradual reevaluation, and now in a few short days, she must reidentify—or perhaps identify for the first time—the sources of her existence. The inevitable result is an epiphany.

The focal points of Laurel's memory world are her parents, Judge and Mrs. Clinton McKelva. They are substantial, educated middle-class Southerners: they are the respected establishment and leaders in their community. Her father, as she "knows" him in memory—in her frozen movie—is revealed gradually through Laurel's reactions to what she considers misappraisals of him by those who come to pay their respects at his home in Mt. Salus as she stands by the coffin "waiting it out with him."8 One woman says, "He had a great sense of humor. Underneath it all"; Laurel responds, "Underneath it all,

8Eudora Welty, The Optimist's Daughter (New York: Random House, 1972), p. 73. Subsequent references to this novel are from this edition and will be incorporated into the text.
Father knew it wasn't funny" (72). The doctor recounts a boyhood experience in which he saved her father's life, to which she replies, "Father was delicate" (74). An old friend remembers the judge as fearless and careless of his own well-being in a kind of Colonel Sherburn way; Laurel comments, under her breath, "I don't think that was Father" (79). And then to the daughter of the old friend she says, "He hadn't any use for theatrics... He's trying to make Father into something he wanted to be himself." The old man retorts, "Oh, under that cloak of modesty he wore---" before Laurel interrupts him with, "Father really was modest" (80). Finally, outraged, she turns to Miss Adele, her neighbor, and concludes: "What's happening isn't real," to which her friend responds: "The ending of a man's life is very real indeed... They're trying to say for a man that his life is over. Do you know a good way?" (82). Somewhat later in the exchange between the two women some striking words appear. "The least anybody can do for him is remember right," Laurel says. Miss Adele's response is profound: "I believe to my soul it's the most, too" (83).
I have intentionally labored the details of this series of conversations because I believe it tacitly exposes the thesis of the novel: while the guests romanticize and eulogize Clinton McKelva and distort reality, Laurel seems unconscious that her fixed perceptions of him are equally distorted and unreal. If they are in part accurate, they are also products of the imagination and memory of a naive girl, not of a detached, observant, perceptive woman. In a very real sense, what Laurel feels about the Chisoms (the family of Judge McKelva's second wife) is true as well of her: "They might have come out of that night in the hospital waiting room--out of all times of trouble, past or future--the great, interrelated family of those who never know the meaning of what has happened to them" (84). Laurel, too, is part of "that great, interrelated family."

The difference between Laurel and the Chisoms--or between Laurel and the people of Mt. Salus, for that matter--is that she is not able or willing to accept the jarring collision of myth and reality without somehow trying to reconcile the two. She knows now, through
the knowledge of experience, that certain aspects of her father's life—and especially of her memory of his relationship with her mother—do not conform to her cherished illusion. Chief among those discrepancies is her memory of her mother's last reactions to the Judge, and then the Judge's marriage to ignorant, selfish, frivolous, uncultured Wanda Fay Chisom, a woman thirty years his junior who resembles no one so much as Bonnie Dee Peacock in The Ponder Heart. If Laurel is ever to confront her "ghosts," to separate fantasy from reality—if she is ever to learn where and whom she comes from—she must first come to grips with these two troublesome incongruities. She has until now been able to push them back, to refuse them entry into her consciousness; now, alone in the house in which she was born, she must face them not as abstractions, but as realities. What Mrs. Chisom has said of Laurel—"So you ain't got father, mother, brother, sister, husband, chick nor child. Not a soul to call on, that's you" (69)—is truer than even Laurel knows. In the final analysis she is faced with the existential problem of all thinking people: alone she must solve the riddle of her own identity.
The "voyage" which Laurel takes is more of time than geography. What she discovers on the way is other collisions which have strewn reality's path, some of them completely unknown to her from the distance of her girlhood and the insulation of her second home. The first of these is a conflict between her mother and father which she has vaguely known existed but only now can look at objectively. In her living memory her parents are still two compatible, healthy people whose "beloved reading voices came rising in turn up the stairs every night to reach her. She could hardly fall asleep, she tried to keep awake, for pleasure. She cared for her own books, but she cared more for theirs, which meant their voices. In the lateness of the night, their two voices reading to each other where she could hear them, never letting a silence divide or interrupt them, combined into one unceasing voice and wrapped her around as she listened, as still as if she were asleep. She was sent to sleep under a velvety cloak of words, richly patterned and stitched with gold, straight out of a fairy tale, while they went reading on into her dreams" (57-58).
Slamming against this well-preserved image from her childhood, however, comes another from the repressed secret places of her memory: in her long and terrible five-year illness, her mother had wanted most in the world a husband who would face up to the finality of her disease. She needed a kind of strength which she could have called up out of her own deeps—which, indeed, she was reduced to doing—but which the Judge, for all his gallantry, did not possess. "What burdens we lay on the dying, Laurel thought, as she listened now to the accelerated rain on the roof: seeking to prove some little thing that we can keep to comfort us when they can no longer feel—something as incapable of being kept as of being proved: the lastingness of memory, vigilance against harm, self-reliance, good hope, trust in one another" (146). As she thinks of her father realistically, she faces what she has "known" for a long time: he "had a horror of any sort of private clash, of divergence from the affectionate and the real and the explainable and the recognizable. He was a man of great delicacy; what he had not been born with he had learned in reaching toward his wife. He grimaced with delicacy.
What he could not control was his belief that all his wife's troubles would turn out all right because there was nothing he would not have given her. When he reached a loss he simply put on his hat and went speechless out of the house to his office and worked for an hour or so getting up a brief for somebody" (146).

The "delicacy" in her father Laurel remembers her mother called by a different name: "... when he'd come home, her father would stand helpless in bewilderment by his wife's bed. Spent, she had whispered, 'Why did I marry a coward?'--then had taken his hand to help him bear it" (148). And Laurel also remembers her father's promises: "I'll carry you there up home' to West Virginia, Becky." And she recalls her mother's response: "Lucifer! ... Liar!" She realizes what it all meant so long ago:

That was when he started, of course, being what he scowlingly called an optimist; he might have dredged the word up out of his childhood. He loved his wife. Whatever she did that she couldn't help doing was all right. Whatever she was driven to say was all right. But it was not all right! Her trouble was that very desperation. And no one had the power to cause that except the one she desperately loved, who refused to consider that she was desperate. It was betrayal on betrayal. (150)
Worst of all, Laurel remembers her mother's last words to her: "You could have saved your mother's life. But you stood by and wouldn't intervene. I despair for you" (151). Was it the speech of delirium? Was her mother mixing her own mother's death with hers, as she so often mixed the past with the present in those last fitful days? Or was it that awful truth spoken only by the dying? Laurel knows, of course, that she could not literally have saved her mother's life. But she also knows through her terrible new perception that she could have kept her mother from coming "to believe . . . that she had been taken somewhere that was neither home nor 'up home,' that she was left among strangers, for whom even anger meant nothing, on whom it would only be wasted. She had died without speaking a word, keeping everything to herself, in exile and humiliation" (151). By admitting the truth with her mother—by sharing it, not running away from it or feigning that "optimism" which is the ultimate cynicism—she might have supplied the "spiritual guidance" which her mother was desperate to find, found neither in husband, daughter, nor clergyman, and died without.
The second incongruity in Laurel's father's life was his marriage to Fay Chisom. "Both times he chose, he had suffered; she had seen him contain it. He died worn out with both wives—almost as if up to the last he had still had both of them" (151). Another blinding collision becomes apparent to Laurel as she thinks of the difference between the Judge's two wives: "Fay had once at least called Becky 'my rival.' Laurel thought: But the rivalry doesn't lie where Fay thinks. It's not between the living and the dead, between the old wife and the new; it's between too much love and too little. There is no rivalry as bitter; Laurel had seen its work" (152). The operation had been a success. It did not kill the Judge. What killed him, Laurel realizes, was something more subtle: "As he lay without moving in the hospital he had concentrated utterly on time passing, indeed he had. But which way had it been going for him? When he could no longer get up and encourage it, push it forward, had it turned on him, started moving back the other way?" (151-52). In those hours while he lay motionless, waiting for his physical eyes to heal, he was forced to confront "the beast in his jungle." His
enforced leisure had compelled him to face up to the
heart-stopping nostalgia for that other world and that
other wife on whom he so completely depended, but whom he
failed in the ultimate crunch of her dying hour. Without
Becky—whom his "delicacy" had made it impossible for him
ever to really understand—he had been unable to bear life
alone. He had chosen her antithesis, a weak, symbiotic
child of a woman who was incapable of understanding him.
The "falling off," and what it said to him about himself,
had broken his heart.

With painful care, Laurel spends the night after her
father's funeral putting the puzzle pieces of her past
together. Always afraid of birds since she had visited
her grandmother "up home" as a child and seen the natural
voraciousness of her pigeons, Laurel comes across an
ancient letter from that grandmother in West Virginia to
her mother at Mt. Salus: "I will try to send Laurel a
cup of sugar for her birthday. Though if I can find a
way to do it, I would like to send her one of my pigeons.
It would eat from her hand, if she would let it" (154).
Like her father's, Laurel's greatest threat has always been
that very treasure of life which the bird symbolizes: she
has been afraid to let hungry, flying things (or hungry, high-spirited people) too close to her. Phil Hand, her husband, had been such a spirit. He and her mother—like the pigeons—had been gluttonous for life and she had felt timorous before such passion. She imagines her young husband, killed by a kamikaze long ago, looking "at her out of eyes wild with the craving for his unlived life, with mouth open like a funnel's" (154). She has her father's tenderness but her mother's perception. Armed with this new awareness, she thinks of Phil: "Left bodiless and graveless of a death made of water and fire in a year long gone, Phil could still tell her of her life. For her life, any life, she had to believe, was nothing but the continuity of its love" (160).

Like her father, Laurel has been shy "in the kind of shyness that takes its refuge in giving refuge. Until she knew Phil, she thought of love as shelter; her arms went out as a naive offer of safety. He had showed her that this need not be so. Protection, like self-protection, fell away from her like all one garment, some anachronism foolishly saved from childhood" (161). Phil, she remembers, was a perfectionist, but not an optimist (162).
They had only been married a year when he was killed. Phil had once answered the Judge, "the kamikaze have been about close enough to shake hands with" (162). The image is striking: he had been close enough to the destructive element to extend the hand of brotherhood. And so, Laurel realizes, it is in life: the closer one is to another, the greater his potential as destroyer or preserver. Laurel is thankful that her memories of closeness to Phil are constructive ones, and she concludes: "the guilt of outliving those you love is justly to be borne. Outliving is something we do to them. The fantasies of dying could be no stranger than the fantasies of living. Surviving is perhaps the strangest fantasy of them all" (162-63).

Equipped with mature self-knowledge, Laurel faces the final confrontation with Fay. At first intending to take the scarred old breadboard which Phil had so lovingly made for her mother, Laurel decides she can do without it. It is no one but Fay who brings her to this decision, ironically. Discovering that Laurel values the object, Fay mocks it, and in a moment of rare passion, Laurel is tempted to strike "the enemy" down with the
very symbol of continuity. The temptation passes, however, as she concludes that Fay is past helping or hurting "for Fay was without any powers of passion or imagination in herself and had no way to see it or reach it in the other person. Other people, inside their lives, might as well be invisible to her. To find them, she could only strike out those little fists at random, or spit from her little mouth. She could no more fight a feeling person than she could love him" (178). Fay asks, "What do you see in that thing?" And Laurel replies, "The whole story, Fay. The whole solid past" (178).

Laurel has experienced her epiphany: she has found a freedom she has not previously known. She knows that while she has assessed herself and her loved ones candidly. "The past is no more open to help or hurt than was Father in his coffin. The past is like him, impervious, and can never be awakened. It is memory that is the somnambulist. It will come back in its wounds from across the world, like Phil, calling us by our names and demanding its rightful tears. It will never be impervious. The memory can be hurt, and again—but in that may lie its final mercy. As long as it's vulnerable to the
living moment, it lives for us, and while it lives, and while we are able, we can give it up its due" (179).
When Fay "offers" Laurel the breadboard, Laurel can now bring herself to say, "Never mind. . . . I think I can get along without that too," for she knows that "Memory lives not in initial possession but in the freed hands, pardoned and freed, and in the heart that can empty but fill again, in the patterns restored by dreams" (179).

If Fay is the future, as she describes herself (179), then the future is in the hands of the nihilists and the last words are even now being written for people who learn from and revere the past and who cherish their living link with that past, their memories. But that sort of speculation concerns the "inner surfaces" of Miss Welty's novels, and I do not intend here to judge where she does not. However we may assess those deeper meanings, her novels are all explorations of the sense of place, and they are all happily flavored by her remarkable ability to laugh at and with serious and heartbreaking life. In a recent interview she spoke of her garden in Jackson. "You wouldn't know it, but this garden was once beautiful.
My mother really kept after it." But she said the year the nematodes came to attack the roses, Mrs. Welty was sick—"past those battles"—so Miss Welty planted a crab-apple in between the rosebed and her mother's window to conceal the disaster as well as possible. At the same time that all of this was happening, "Miss Welty was writing Losing Battles at home with her mother's two nurses and laughing a great deal . . . and the nurses did not approve of anything."\(^9\) Many of the roses died (as did her mother shortly thereafter), but some of them lived to bloom again and that is the glory of continuity.

In a world where senselessness and insensitivity appear to have full sway, we can only hope that there will always be some roses to escape the nematodes, some Laurels to search for and locate their places in past and present. For the world's sake, let us hope that writers with Miss Welty's wit and perception are not a dying breed— that they will continue to record their visions and their


\(^{10}\)Mitchell, p. 5B.
living memories—for they are the preservers of that tenuous connection with the past from which we learn in this fragile, rootless modern world the meaning of the sense of place.

I would like to think Miss Welty's vision is optimis­tic, but I am not so sure it is; Miss Julia and Laurel Hand leave no heirs, and the nematode-like people in the novels are prolific. However that may be, if all the roses die, there will still be inextinguishable memory which is not vulnerable to nematodes.
CONCLUSION

The focus of this study has been on the sense of place in the Southern novel. The fiction of the South is unique in the twentieth century: in an ever-changing, always-moving, highly technical society which values tomorrow more than today and yesterday hardly at all, writers in the South have sought, and continue to seek, their answers to the questions of identity and meaning in the lessons of the past. Some of the reasons for their preoccupation with the past are obvious and can be assigned to their section's unique role in American history. Some, however, have more to do with the psychological and emotional responses to change which characterize the sensibility of the South and which—though highly sophisticated in their treatment by Southern writers—seem anachronistic in the space-age world. In a time when getting to the stars is the order of the day, Southern novelists are busily employed in the exploration of "inner space," which they travel to not in spaceships, but in the vehicle which I have called the "living memory."
If the twentieth and twenty-first centuries show promise of discovery of worlds yet unknown, there is a danger inherent in that promise: we may get so busy moving ahead that we forget what is behind, and lose in the process our compass by which to find home and security and the answer to the compelling human questions "Who am I?" and "Where did I come from?" Southern novelists have said—and continue to say—that such an eventuality would be a catastrophic misappropriation of our resources and more disastrous to us as earth-bound, memory-linked beings than an atomic war; if we forget the past in our assault on the future, we will discover that we have struck a very bad bargain indeed. Like it or not, the sense of place is the "compass" by which human beings take their reckonings; until that changes, Southern writers will undoubtedly continue to act the part of prophets crying in the wilderness, and they will probably continue to pray that the day never dawns when their message to the world will be, "The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the son of man hath not where to lay his head."¹

¹Matthew 8:20.
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VITA

Mina Gwen Williams was born on February 24, 1935, in Robstown, Texas. She is the second child of Mary Lester and Wendell Talmage Williams. After attending public schools in Robstown, she studied at Abilene Christian College and Del Mar College before enrolling at Texas A&I University, where she received BA and MA degrees in English in 1957 and 1958, respectively. She studied at Louisiana State University and The University of Texas periodically from 1963 to 1966, returning to Louisiana State University in 1970 to complete her work toward a PhD degree in English in 1973.

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Candidate: Mina Gwen Williams

Major Field: English

Title of Thesis: The Sense of Place in Southern Fiction

Approved:

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EXAMINING COMMITTEE:

[Signatures of committee members]

Date of Examination:

April 27, 1973