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# "Let me play a while": storytelling characters and voices in the works of Mark Twain, William Faulkner, and Lee Smith

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"LET ME PLAY A WHILE"  
STORYTELLING CHARACTERS AND VOICES IN THE WORKS OF  
MARK TWAIN, WILLIAM FAULKNER, AND LEE SMITH

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the  
Louisiana State University and  
Agricultural and Mechanical College  
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in

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## ABSTRACT

This dissertation focuses on the difference between narrators and characters in fiction who tell stories. It also argues that traditional orality persists in American culture and is a significant influence in the fiction of Mark Twain, William Faulkner and Lee Smith. In their work, they try to overcome what some perceive as a structural discrimination inherent in the novel and imbue their characters' speaking voices with authority that is determined by something other than their position in the structural hierarchy. All three authors attempt to give their characters speaking voices which are not necessarily inferior to the narrative or authorial voices in their works. This dissertation also suggests that the "narrator" has changed over time from a written representation of an oral storyteller to a literary function which facilitates storytelling. It is therefore methodologically useful to distinguish between narrators and storytelling characters. Susan Lanser's and Stephen Ross's concepts of voice help differentiate narrators from storytelling characters and from other voices in literature. By looking at types of storytellers, both narrators and characters, and the types of voice used by authors to represent them, we see how each type of voice acquires discursive authority. This work adapts these concepts in order to begin a discussion of voice in the works of Twain, Faulkner and Smith, and show that each of these authors attempt to give mimetic voices unusual degrees of authority—both in and outside the fictive world. This work looks specifically at storytelling events in several of Twain's short stories, including "A True Story Repeated Word for Word as I Heard It," and how experiments with these characters in his short stories led to the narrative voice in *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. This is followed by a detailed look at narrators and storytellers in Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom!* and Smith's *The Devil's Dream*.

## INTRODUCTION WHO'S TELLING THIS STORY?

I'm not much of a storyteller, but I know a good story when I see it. When I write this I'm not trying to display the kind of modesty Mark Twain showed in "How to Tell a Story" when he wrote: "I do not claim that I can tell a story as it ought to be told. I only claim to know how a story ought to be told, for I have been daily in the company of the most expert story-tellers for many years" (263). The best research available indicates that Twain was at least an above average storyteller. Unlike Twain, I have had few storytelling models; I was not daily in the company of even above average storytellers. I'm from a different time and place. The stories I hold dear and that have helped create and reinforce my value system were not transmitted to me through face-to-face interaction and could never have been affected by my active participation. I get the vast majority of my stories from books, television, and movies, and I always have.

For example, one book that was very important to me, one of the first I read on my own, was a biography of Green Bay Packers' quarterback Bart Starr. One season, Starr injured a stomach muscle so severely he couldn't even stand up straight without pain. He never complained, and he never quit. He tried his best to help the team despite his injury and despite the pain. At least that's how I remember the story. Bart Starr was my hero, and I tried to model my behavior on his. Like many young American's of my time I loved football and its heroes. I felt like I was a part of something larger than me, an ideal past that reached into the present, something I could be a part of.

In his book, *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life*, Robert Bellah argues that the feeling I had was one typical of modern Americans. Many

Americans form a sense of belonging through communities that are not necessarily organized around geography or family. Bellah writes:

Communities, in the sense that we are using the term, have a history--in an important sense they are constituted by their past--and for this reason we can speak of a real community as a 'community of memory,' one that does not forget its past. In order not to forget that past, a community is involved in re-telling its story, its constitutive narrative, and in so doing, it offers examples of the men and women who have embodied and exemplified the meaning of the community. These stories of collective history and exemplary individuals are an important part of the tradition that is so central to a community of memory. (153)

That is what makes a community, not geography, family, or economic interdependence, but memory. Memory is produced and reinforced through retelling of communal stories. Roger Schank argues that "We are the stories we tell. We not only express our vision of the world, we also shape our memory by the stories we tell" (170). Barbara Johnstone notes that "shared stories are the sources of shared notions of truth and appropriateness which bind people together" (126). As a child I got my stories from the print and electronic media and not from face-to-face interaction. I saw film of Bart Starr on television, with narration by John Facenda, but in order to really find out about him I went to the book. There was something special about books. I remember looking at my father's bookshelves, which lined the walls of a room in our basement we actually called the library, and thinking how much they held. Movies and TV were fun and interesting, but for me, both wisdom and knowledge resided in books.

This faith I had in the power of books as repositories of truth is indicative of the society I grew up in, one that privileged literacy. M.T. Clanchy writes that "modern literates, including the author and his readers, are conditioned by their own schooling to believe that literacy is the measure of progress and that those who use documents less are less civilized" (20). Clanchy

argues that this privileging of literacy is misguided; “it is language itself which forms mentalities, not literacy. Writing is one of the means by which encoded language is communicated; it can never be more than that” (9).

Though he doesn't privilege literacy, Walter Ong argues that writing does help form mentalities. In his book, *Orality and Literacy*, he argues there is an “oral mindset” that is fundamentally different than the mindset of individuals and cultures that have “interiorized literacy,” that is, have made the technology of writing intrinsic to their way of life. Even in literate cultures, however, oral modes of thought can survive, and in some subcultures they remain the fundamental way people engage reality, regardless of their use of writing. Ong alternatively calls these groups—that are aware of writing, or use the technologies of writing, and yet retain characteristics of orality—“verbomotor cultures” or ones with “oral residue” (68).

Tex Sample uses the term “traditional orality” instead and argues that a large number of Americans still engage the world in a manner that is in many significant ways “oral”: “about half of the people in the United States are people who work primarily out of a *traditional orality*, by which I mean a people who can read and write—though some cannot—but whose appropriation and engagement with life is oral” (6). Whatever the percentage, oral modes of thought persist even though literate modes have gained a dominant position. The word ‘literature’ is itself a testament to how writing is a culturally privileged medium for the artistic use of language. I will explore the idea of traditional orality in more depth in the first chapter. Now I want only to underline the importance of storytelling as a way of forming and maintaining communities, and how the authority of oral storytellers is the local communal tradition while a novelist's authority comes from a different one.

In *The Nature of Narrative*, Robert Scholes and Robert Kellogg write: “by narrative we mean all those literary works which are distinguished by two characteristics: the presence of a story and a story-teller” (4). Many scholars have defined the novel by beginning with oral storytelling, but this model may well be outmoded. Though the precursors of the novel spring from oral traditions, the novel is very much a creation of the technology of print. Mikhail Bakhtin writes that all written genres except the novel “or in any case their defining features, are considerably older than written language and the book, and to the present day they retain their ancient oral and auditory characteristics. Of all the major genres only the novel is younger than writing and the book” (*The Dialogic Imagination* 3). Originally, written stories were an unironic attempt at the transcription, replication, and representation of oral storytelling. The authority for tellers of traditional tales comes from the tradition itself and from the individual teller’s familiarity with, and mastery of, the tradition. Over time the figure of the storyteller was replaced by those of the narrator and the author, and the figure of the author has become one of an individual who is the source of authority, through knowledge and mastery of the written tradition. This idea of the author is a creation of the literate tradition, as is the novel. Ong writes that “the novel is clearly a print genre, deeply interior, de-heroicized, and tending strongly to irony” (159). Walter Benjamin writes that the novel is different from “all other forms of prose literature” in that:

it neither comes from oral tradition nor goes into it. This distinguishes it from storytelling in particular. The storyteller takes what he tells from experience of his own or that reported by others. And he in turn makes it the experience of those who are listening to his tale. The novelist has isolated himself. The birthplace of the novel is the solitary individual. (87)



Benjamin suggests here that the novelist is estranged from the community and cannot pass on the wisdom of the storyteller, in part because he himself is uncounseled. The only community the novelist is a part of is one of tenuously connected, solitary individuals. The novel is the most written of literatures. It is the type of storytelling furthest removed from storytelling. It is the type of literature that developed because of the technologies of writing and print and through separation from the oral tradition, and it is not the shared living experience that storytelling is. This sense of shared communal experience that storytelling engenders is very important in the formation of group identity, on all levels of society. What if a novelist wants to show the wisdom of the storyteller? How can someone use the most literate of genres to represent orality? Mark Twain, William Faulkner and Lee Smith all try to present storytellers in their work. Their works contain oral and auditory characteristics. They try to express the importance of storytelling, of the spoken word, in their novels.

Stephen Ross argues that when the spoken word is represented in the novel it is necessarily secondary to the written discourse which produces it. In his work, *Fiction's Inexhaustible Voice: Speech and Writing in Faulkner*, Ross writes that "transcribed speech, the product of mimicry, always occupies an inferior position in relation to the diegetic discourse of its production. The mimetic voices we hear are always secondary, indulged and condescended to by the reader who shares (as an audience shares the mimic's knowledge) the author's power over all the voices" (108). My arguments do not require that this assertion be either true or untrue. It may well be true. Certainly any author who wishes his or her mimetic voices to be authoritative has an obstacle to overcome. In their work, Twain, Faulkner and Smith try to overcome the structural discrimination inherent in the novel and imbue their storytelling character's with

authority that is determined without regard to their position in a structural hierarchy. Twain and Smith have both made attempts to present an authentic vernacular voice that is not “secondary, indulged and condescended to.” Faulkner may differ from them on this. If so, it is because he elevates his speaking characters to the same rhetorical plane as his narrators thereby not accurately representing individual dialects. I hope to show that all three authors attempt to give their characters speaking voices which are not necessarily inferior to the narrative or authorial voices in their works. Whether or not they succeed is another story.

I have a story about how this work came about. In a discussion about William Faulkner’s *Absalom, Absalom!*, I mentioned my interest in how oral traditions played a part in the novel, and how they effected the way Faulkner approached his work. We talked about how critics couldn’t agree on the number of narrators in the novel, and I mentioned how Estella Schoenberg, in her book *Old Tales and Talking: Quentin Compson in William Faulkner’s Absalom, Absalom! and Related Works*, claimed that there were “nearly a dozen of them in the novel” (73). Then the person I was talking to said: “*Absalom, Absalom!* only has one narrator.” Cleanth Brooks agrees with this assessment, writing that “in spite of the many conversations between characters and the long reveries and monologues of a single character, *Absalom, Absalom!* is finally a novel written in the third person by an omniscient narrator” (308).

If there is only one narrator, what do we call all these other voices that certainly are narrating? The point is that in a very important sense both Schoenberg and Brooks are right. If we follow Gerard Genette’s *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method*, we can label the narrators Schoenberg identifies. Rosa Coldfield, Quentin Compson, Mr Compson and Shreve McCaslin are all intradiegetic narrators; Ellen Coldfield Sutpen, Judith Sutpen, Wash Jones and “possibly

Charles Bon” are all metadiegetic narrators; Thomas Sutpen is a meta-meta-meta-metadiegetic narrator. That may be one “meta” too many, but the point remains that Genette has an exact designation; if we can agree how many narrative levels exist, we can agree on the exact term. Schoenberg argues that there is another narrative voice that is easy to overlook: “the objective or impersonal author–Faulkner himself” (73). This narrative voice is the novel’s only extradiegetic narrator and the omniscient narrator Brooks identifies.

All of these characters narrate, and in Genette’s system can be correctly identified in terms of their diegetic level. But Brooks is certainly correct–this one extradiegetic narrator is fundamentally different; he performs the functions attributed to narrators. He is not a representation of a storyteller, unlike the other characters. He is not in a concrete setting telling a listening audience a story. His is a written voice. *Absalom, Absalom!* has one narrator and a great many storytelling characters.

Storytelling characters are characters in novels who tell stories. These characters are presented to the reader by narrators. In order to understand storytelling characters we must be able to differentiate them from narrators and other types of characters. First and foremost a storytelling character takes part in a fictive storytelling event. This event may not be fully dramatized, it may only be implied. Robert Georges argues that a storytelling event is a specific social interaction where at least two people agree to “assume social identities for the purpose of the event” (“Towards” 318), specifically those of storyteller and listener. These are, of course, not necessarily the only social roles that are relevant during the event, but they are important and are adopted specifically for the event; “while narrators and audience members are first and foremost narrators and audience members, they are other things to themselves and each other as

well; and the ways in which they behave during storytellings are determined by the multiple social identities” (Communicative Role” 52). A storytelling character is a representation of a social role that is as old as human culture while a narrator is a literary role that is younger than the technology of writing. A narrator is a device that facilitates storytelling in a novel. It seemed to me that it could be methodologically useful to distinguish between these two types of voices in novels, and that is one of the main goals of this text.

A storytelling character is not represented as writing, even if his or her voice is not being presented. A storytelling character may not be aware a book is being written. When the character is, the narrator of the work is a character involved in the presentation of the teller’s spoken word. Sut Lovingood and Jane Pittman are aware that someone at least intends to write a book. In both of these works the narrator of the works claims to be an amanuensis, a transcriber of the character’s spoken word, which is also what Twain said he wished to be for Huckleberry Finn. Even if the character is aware a book is being written, he or she is not consciously complicit in the work of fiction. This is not to suggest that these characters do not relate fictions, merely that they themselves are entirely fictive and are constrained to remain on a fictive plane. A restriction narrators do not necessarily have.

Storytelling characters are also speaking to fictive story listeners. These story listeners are sometimes the narrator of the work, as in Twain’s “A True Story” and Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*. Sometimes the listener is a character as in Joel CHandler Harris’ Uncle Remus stories and as Quentin Compson is in much of *Absalom, Absalom!* One particularly interesting way to dramatize a storytelling event is to have the story listener be undramatized, but have the teller seem to be speaking directly to the listener. This technique, used by Eudora Welty in the short

story “Livvie” and by Lee Smith in several of her works, puts the reader in the position of story listener while the fiction of the event can be maintained. The difference between a fictive story listener and the implied reader is the difference between private and public voices; Lanser defines them: “private voice (narration directed toward a narratee who is a fictional character) and public voice (narration directed toward a narratee ‘outside’ the fiction who is analogous to the historical reader)” (15). I have to point out that all fictional narratees are not necessarily story listeners, but this study is concerned with the distinction between public and private voice and their relationship in the depiction of storytelling events.

I had initially assumed I would be looking almost exclusively at storytelling characters and how they establish their authority through the act of telling. I found that even though fictional storytellers do establish their authority in a manner similar to real storytellers, narrators still play a significant role. In order for a storytelling character to gain authority two things have to happen. First an author figure must endorse the character or deny his own authority either overtly or tacitly. Second, the character must positively establish authority. Storytelling characters gain authority in much the same manner as actual storytellers, either through demonstrating verbal acuity, wisdom and/or knowledge—through demonstrating mastery of the discourse and the subject of the discourse—or through actions inside the fiction which will elevate them in the reader’s estimation.

In this dissertation I suggest that we look at narrators less like representations of storytellers. Instead a narrator is a literary function that facilitates fiction’s storytelling. Of course the role of narrator was initially a represented storyteller, and often still is. However, in order to clarify what happens in fiction, we should understand that narrators do not necessarily tell stories

and that characters who tell stories are not necessarily narrators.

Some characters who tell stories in fiction certainly relate narratives, but they do not perform all the functions of narrators, and they have a different set of powers and prohibitions. These storytelling characters are more closely analogous to oral storytellers than narrators in the literary sense and therefore follow conventions of storytelling which differ from those of written fiction. Conversely, some narrators do not actually tell the story, instead they perform what Genette calls the directing function.

Genette argues that the actual telling of the story, which is mostly closely analogous to the function of oral storytellers, is the “narrative function.” He argues that “no narrator can turn away from [this function] without at the same time losing his status as narrator” (255). In the same paragraph he defines the other function of a narrator, “the directing function.” this function includes the ordering of events, chapter division and manipulations of point of view and time. Genette classifies these acts as the “‘stage directions’ of the discourse” (255). The analogy with film direction is apt. Significantly, there are times in novels where the voice performing the narrative function does not perform this function. In those cases Genette apparently attributes this function to the author<sup>1</sup>, Wayne Booth to the implied author, and David Hayman to the arranger. I hold that this function is always performed by a narrator, and would provisionally name a presence that performs the directing function but does not narrate a covert narrator.

I don’t intend to invalidate the terminology or work of these other critics by doing this. All of them acknowledge that the directing function is performed and that in some works it is not

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<sup>1</sup> I say ‘apparently’ because he doesn’t explicitly name this figure. He uses ‘author’ more than once in this context; in other instances he uses, “the context” (174-75), and “the text” (185).

performed by what is conventionally considered to be the narrator. I suggest the term covert narrator because it helps bring an important fact to the forefront: narrators are not necessarily storytellers. Equating the two may foster a misapprehension of the genre. The directing function is one of two functions performed by the narrator; therefore, a presence that performs this function should be categorized as a narrator, whether or not it literally narrates.

The narrator has changed over time from a written representation of an oral storyteller to a literary function which facilitates storytelling. At the same time, the authority for the narrator initially was derived from mastery of a communal oral tradition and discourse and now springs from mastery of a more widespread written tradition and its discourse. One result of this is that speaking voices represented in modern works at least tend to have a secondary position to the authorial voice.

In the first chapter I will be looking closely at the idea of voice as it is outlined by Susan Lanser and Stephen Ross, respectively, both of whom follow Gerard Genette to some extent. By looking at types of storytellers, both narrators and characters, and the types of voice used by authors to represent them, we will see how each type of voice acquires authority. I will adapt Lanser and Ross's concepts of voice in order to begin a discussion of voice in the works of Twain, Faulkner and Smith, and show that each of these authors attempt to give mimetic voices authority—both in and outside the fictive world.

The first chapter will also discuss the shift in authority in literature that in part defines the novel as a genre. This shift occurs so early that I will use *Beowulf* as an example of written narrative that is the transcription of traditional materials. This will help establish the difference between narrators and storytelling characters. Narrators were initially modeled on storytellers and

as such were authorized in similar ways. As early as Chaucer, however, we see narrators identified with elite, written culture and character's speaking voices, specifically represented storytellers', considered secondary. We see this again at the time Twain begins to write. Many southwestern humorists, Twain's literary predecessors, face the same challenges as Chaucer when they try to present their character's speaking voices. Like Chaucer, many of them used frame tales both as guides for their audiences and as what Kenneth Lynn calls a "cordon sanitaire"—a genteel shield protecting both the author and the reader from the "vulgar" vernacular speaker. This acceptable form for presenting speaking voices marks the starting place for Twain's literary career. Like other writers of his time Twain was interested in the realistic portrayal of nonstandard speaking voices. I will define and discuss some of the techniques of literary dialect. I also will define the genteel narrator as a type of personal voice available to white male authors in order to prepare us to see Twain's use of this narrator to present storytelling characters.

In the second chapter I will show how Mark Twain's technique was developed in part because of the influence of oral modes of thought. Twain demonstrates a commitment to as accurate a representation of dialects as possible in the written medium. We will see his attempts to realize storytellings events in print. I will discuss his use of the folktale the Golden Arm in his live work and in "How to Tell a Story." In that short story Twain demonstrates how the act of performance, at least in this case, cannot be realized in print, while also giving the reader sufficient information to imagine the effect of a proper performance. In his several versions of "The Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras County" and other of his short stories Twain uses a type of genteel narrator characteristic of southwestern humor which I will argue is a type of



authorial narrator, a writerly presence. Twain uses a variety of frames in the jumping frog stories which are based in part on a story he heard performed while working at a mining camp. We will see his use and at least partial abandonment of the genteel narrator in some of his more important works as he attempted to authorize speaking voices by removing this writerly presence. In “A True Story, Repeated Word for Word as I Heard It,” for example, Twain opens the story in a very conventional manner, with the narrator dominating the storytelling character. By the end of the story, the narrator has withdrawn and left the mimetic voice of the storyteller as the only and hence the dominant voice in the story. A more striking move in this direction is in *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, where the authorial presence withdraws almost immediately, allowing Huck’s speaking voice to take the privileged position in the novel and tell his own story. When Huck tells his own story, however, he demonstrates that he is still dominated by “civilized” culture; the novel’s authorial presence subtly helps show, as Henry Nash Smith writes, that “the dominant culture is decadent and perverted” (117).

In chapter 3 we will see the importance of oral traditions to Faulkner, and his representation of the power of one in *Absalom, Absalom!* He tries to vividly represent a living tradition in the novel, but Faulkner is less interested in accurately portraying dialect than Twain. Instead, most of his storytelling characters use the same voice and orthographic system as the omniscient narrator. Since the primary storytelling characters in the novel and the narrator speak in the same voice, their voices could be considered to be on the same dialogical plane as the narrator, and perhaps Faulkner has evaded the structurally secondary status of mimetic voice and written what Mikhail Bakhtin calls a dialogical novel as many critics have contended. One reason this theory has explanatory power is because this novel so persistently focuses on narrative

authority in novels and in oral traditions, and on how Quentin Compson uses the oral tradition of his community to try to arrive at a truth he can live with.

Besides being in this way a dialogical novel, *Absalom, Absalom!* also has a public extradiegetic narrator—an authorial voice—who seems to refuse some of the authority he possesses by literary convention. By refusing to take authority, he encourages his voice to be on an equal dialogic plane with the voices of the individual storytelling characters in the novel. The relationship between the narrator, the storytelling characters, and the story they tell also seems to change as the novel progresses. Later in the novel the storytelling seems to have greater evocative power, and the narrator seems to give up authority he has exerted earlier. It does seem this way, but I will argue that the narrator’s authority and the evocative power of the story remain almost analogous throughout the novel, and that the seemingly greater explanatory power of the latter sections is leavened by the narrator’s ostensible arrogation of authority, leaving all of the sections nearly equal in authority. During a period where authority still generally rests with the narrator, Faulkner’s narrator can only give his characters authority by denying his own.

Lee Smith’s novel, *The Devil’s Dream*, has an authorial presence that narrates a significant portion of the novel, while also performing the directing function throughout. In the final chapter we will see that Smith was also strongly influenced by storytelling events she witnessed even though she was influenced by electronic and written media as well. In *The Devil’s Dream* Smith tries to show a sense of community, and how one community constructs meaning by retelling stories, and how the identity of the protagonist Katie Cocker depends on her community and its stories. She sometimes uses storytelling events where there is a storytelling character telling part of the family’s story and the reader becomes the implied story listener. In

the novel, characters tell stories about their past and often in so doing come to a clearer definition of themselves. Smith uses other types of narration as well, including a third-person omniscient narration that I will argue is a type of authorial voice that uses nonstandard dialect. One result of this third person narration is that the voices of the individual storytellers presented are, in Bakhtin's terms, objectified, making *The Devil's Dream* a monological novel, where all the individual character's voices are subsumed by one semantically authoritative voice. I will also suggest that the categories of monological and dialogical, though useful, are too constrictive.

Mixing character's direct and indirect discourse with an authorial voice, Smith presents the history of the Bailey family leading up to Katie Cocker's telling which brings the novel to its present. In a way Katie is the novel's semantically authoritative voice, but her voice is authorized by a source outside of her. Preceding chapters prepare us for Katie's telling which the authorial presence assures us is the direct discourse of an honest, wise and balanced character who we should like, trust and respect. This voice, however, does not use the voice of authority. Instead this third-person narrative voice is similar to the storytelling characters' mimetic voices.

The roles of narrator and author have been made different from the role of the storyteller. A narrator is no longer necessarily or generally the fictive representation of an oral storyteller. Though the beginnings of the novel lie in the unselfconscious attempt to transcribe oral traditional materials, the novel as a genre is defined by authors consciously writing to a reading audience in a voice whose authority derives from their ability to use the written word and their individual creative imaginations. Writing in the accepted standard voice is to write in the voice of authority. Each of these authors are presented with conventional literary ideas of authority that conflict with their own. Each uses formal methods to deal with this conflict. Their effort to

authorize speaking voices is a result of their conviction that the speaking voice is vitally important. This work will look at the different voices in play in these three writers' works.

## Storytelling Voices and Narrative Authority

When Mark Twain begins his career as a writer, the figure of the author is closely, but even then not always, connected with the narrator. Whether or not there is an ironic gap between author and narrator, the conventional narrator is a writerly persona connected with elite culture, and it is inappropriate not to write in an educated voice. Though some authors use a lower style, one marked as substandard in relation to the dominant discourse, they are either “vulgar”—lesser artists not worthy of serious consideration—or they are masters of literary discourse who are mimicking the “lower” style from the position of someone above it, and they mark the “vulgar” by conventional means that signal the difference. Stephen Ross argues that the spoken voice is always necessarily represented at a level of authority lower than that of the conventional writerly narrator (108). All three of the novelists in this study attempt to negotiate what Henry Louis Gates, Jr. calls the speakerly paradox—the paradox of representing the spoken word in writing; specifically, they attempt to authorize not only the speaking voice but the colloquial voice, that is, the spoken voice that is usually considered not only nonstandard but substandard. Lee Smith, Mark Twain, and William Faulkner came from areas of America that were more “oral” than the dominant discourse that controlled the medium of print, at least on the national scale, and the mindset of orality they retained is reflected in their fiction.

I will not be making a historical argument about the development of voice in American literature. I want to study instead how these authors approached similar difficulties in realizing their individual artistic visions. There has clearly been a historical progression. It is not scandalous or even particularly odd that Lee Smith uses vernacular narrators. This is in part because Twain’s work helped make the use of vernacular voices acceptable. But a conflict

remains. There is always a difficulty in authorizing a voice that is different from the “standard.” This was a difficulty faced by Geoffrey Chaucer, Giovanni Boccaccio, Augustus Baldwin Longstreet, Johnson Jones Hooper, Charles Chesnutt, Zora Neale Hurston, Twain and Faulkner, and it is one that Lee Smith still faces. This difficulty appears to be inherent in the novel as a genre and, as such, does not necessarily benefit from arguing an elaborate theory of the development of the novel.

I plan to differentiate storytelling events embedded in literary works from the larger narrative, while still looking closely at both. It will be methodologically useful to narrow the definition of narrator by distinguishing narrators from storytelling characters. I will be looking closely at the idea of voice as it is outlined by Susan Lanser and Stephen Ross, respectively, specifically the concept of authorial, personal and mimetic voice which name the crucial distinction between the narrative voices of characters and the different types of narrators used by these authors. By looking at types of storytellers, both narrators and characters, and the types of voice used by authors to represent them, we will see how each type of voice establishes and maintains authority. I will adapt Lanser and Ross’s concepts of voice in order to begin a discussion of voice in the works of Twain, Faulkner and Smith, and show that each of these authors attempts to give mimetic voices a discursive authority that they would usually not receive.

In this chapter I will sketch out the difference between the terms orality and literacy and the persistence of orality in American culture, and the importance of it to these authors. *Beowulf*, the first narrative work written in English, will serve as an example of early narrative as a transcription of traditional storytelling and will show how traditional storytellers established

their authority by mastery of a communal tradition. I will discuss how oral narrative is constructed in writing, and the creation of the roles of author and narrator, which did not exist in the first written narratives but which help define the novel as a genre. These changes also affected the sources of authority individual artists appealed to. The author becomes an individual creative artist who is a master of the literate tradition. In a discussion of frame tale narratives by Chaucer and Longstreet we will see authors present aspects of oral culture in print while also taking steps to retain their status as members of the written discourse community by overtly separating themselves from the folk characters. All of this will help show that the figure of the author gains and maintains what Susan Lanser calls discursive authority, authority and influence outside the fictive world, through demonstrating mastery of the appropriate discourse, a discourse incompatible with the vernacular.

This will lead to a discussion of the term voice in relation to the idea of narrative authority. The concept of voice is pivotal to my overall argument—specifically three kinds of voice: Lanser’s idea of personal and authorial voice, and Ross’ of mimetic voice. The distinction and interplay between these three types of voice will help us understand how these authors present storytelling characters and other spoken voices.

### The Persistence of Traditional Orality

First, I want to discuss the difference between oral and literate modes of thought and how oral thought processes persist in literate culture. Tex Sample, at the beginning of his book, *Ministry in an Oral Culture*, tells about his experience as a college freshman. His advisor had suggested that he take a course in philosophy: “I was thrilled with the very idea that the college taught such a course,” he writes, “and that there was a book where someone had written down all

the great lines of Will Rogers and Uncle Remus and Minnie Pearl. That all this would be available in one book that we would study throughout the fall semester filled me with excitement” (3). Sample was disappointed to find no mention of the philosophers he was familiar with; instead, he read about a “Socrates” who discussed ‘chairness’ and ‘thingness’ and other things that seemed uncomfortably abstract.

Sample describes the difficulty he had adapting to college discourse. “My world was not one of discourse, systematic coherence, and consistent use of clear definitions, and the writing of discursive prose that could withstand the whipsaws of academic critique. Rather, it was a world made sense of through proverbs, stories and relationships” (3). Though a high school-educated member of a literate society beginning his college education, his basic engagement with the world was one far more similar to the thought processes described as “oral” by Walter Ong in *Orality and Literacy*. Ong describes the oral mindsets that persist in literate cultures as “residue.” Sample describes his culture as one of “traditional orality” in order to avoid the negative connotations of Ong’s term.

Much of Sample’s understanding of orality comes from reading Ong’s book (which is itself a very literate activity). In it Ong argues that there are “certain basic differences . . . Between the ways of managing knowledge and verbalization in primary oral cultures (cultures with no knowledge at all of writing) and in cultures deeply affected by the use of writing” (1). In primary oral cultures the only way to store information is in memory. Because of this, the only information that can be preserved is that which can be remembered. The “whipsaws of academic critique” are structured in a fundamentally different way because academics can not only refer back to texts, they can also jot notes to themselves--writing their thoughts out in a form that is



available for them to refer to while articulating their thoughts. Long argumentative sentences with subordinate clauses are too complex to be stored in memory. The relative fixity of the written and the printed word not only enables people to more easily remember and reorganize their thoughts, it makes different kinds of thought possible.

These modes of thought are unavailable in oral cultures. Instead of relying on written records, all knowledge in oral cultures must be stored mnemonically. “Heavy patterning and communal fixed formulas in oral cultures serve some of the purposes of writing in chirographic cultures, but in doing so they of course determine the kind of thinking that can be done, the way experience is intellectually organized. In an oral culture, experience is intellectualized mnemonically” (Ong 36). Experience is intellectualized mnemonically because any other type of thought can not persist in memory. One popular kind of mnemonic organization is the story.

Once writing is introduced, and the pressure to think only memorable thoughts is removed, man soon finds new ways of thinking. “Without writing, the literate mind would not and could not think as it does, not only when engaged in writing but normally even when it is composing its thoughts in oral form. More than any other single invention, writing has transformed human consciousness” (Ong 78). This transformation has created new kinds of storytellers and given them a new set of tools.

Writing, commitment of the word to space, enlarges the potentiality of language almost beyond measure, restructures thought, and in the process converts a certain few dialects into ‘grapholects’ (Haugen 1966; Hirsh 1977, pp. 43-8). A grapholect is a transdialectal language formed by deep commitment to writing. Writing gives a grapholect a power far exceeding that of any purely oral dialect. The grapholect known as standard English has accessible for use a recorded vocabulary of at least a million and a half words, of which not only the present meanings but also hundreds of thousands of past meanings are known. A simply oral dialect will commonly have resources of only a few thousand words, and its users will have virtually no knowledge of the real semantic history of any

of these words. (Ong 7-8)

One of the things this work will focus on is the use of the grapholect known as “standard English,” or the variants of standard English that novelists have at their disposal, to represent various American dialects, and how authors use the culturally powerful grapholect to empower alternate forms of communication. It is my contention that the authors in this study were all strongly influenced in their writing by what Sample calls “traditional orality” and Ong calls “verbomotor culture,” which is similar to primary oral culture. “Today primary oral culture in the strict sense hardly exists, since every culture knows of writing and has some experience of its effects. Still, to varying degrees many cultures and subcultures, even in a high-technology ambience, preserve much of the mind-set of primary orality” (Ong 11). Sample feels a significant number of Americans are influenced by this mindset:

It is my contention that about half of the people in the United States are people who work primarily out of a *traditional orality*, by which I mean a people who can read and write—though some cannot—but whose appropriation and engagement with life is oral. More than this, I am convinced that most churches have a clear majority of their membership who work from a traditional orality. (6)

I wouldn’t hazard a guess at even vague figures like “about half,” but I would certainly contend that traditional orality plays a significant part in the lives of many Americans. A great many Americans still make sense of their worlds through “proverbs, stories, and relationships” (Sample 6). The authors examined here come from backgrounds where traditional orality does play a significant part.

Though Sample feels he is from an oral culture, all the “oral” sources in his book’s title are from what Ong calls print culture or “secondary orality.” Secondary orality consists of oral/aural forms that rely on a technology unavailable to primary oral cultures. Sample, I assume, had

never been in the same room with Minnie Pearl; he heard the Grand Ole' Opry on the radio. His exposure to Will Rogers could have been from several sources, including his father, but the ordinary source route was either print, radio or film—literate technologies. Of course, Uncle Remus is a fictional character created by the writer Joel Chandler Harris, yet Sample doesn't seem to differentiate him from Rogers or Pearl. He writes at one point that he “knew about the great wisdom of Uncle Remus” (3), not that he had read Harris' work.

Lee Smith describes formative experiences similar to Sample's. In her introduction to the Oxford Edition of Mark Twain's *Sketches, New and Old*, Smith describes her father telling her personal experiences stories, local legends, tall tales, and also reading from the works of several writers, including Twain. Smith was influenced by all of these stories. Whether they were products of written or oral traditions, her initial exposure to all of them was aural.

My whole sense of story is, as a consequence, *oral*, and it comes from them. Of course it does—as writers, we cannot really choose our truest material, any more than we can choose to have, say, curly hair. Our material is given to us. It all has to do with where we were born, and the circumstances we are born into, and how we first hear language. What I hear is a *voice*, always one particular human voice, telling the story. (xxxii)

Smith was born into a cultural heritage that led her to privilege the oral remark. Even when reading, she hears a voice, and this is reflected in her work.

The interplay between oral and written imaginative traditions is discussed in Carl Lindahl's book, *Earnest Games: Folkloric Patterns in the Canterbury Tales*. “In any society where oral art and art literature coexist, there is some degree of interdependence between the two. . . . This interdependent process is still at work in contemporary peasant communities, where narrators sometimes tell tales from memory and sometimes read them aloud from books.”

(6). Smith's father and other members of her community told stories both from memory and

print. Smith was born into her material and the experience of hearing Twain's stories read aloud is part of it, and it resonates for her as do the other stories. Writing about Twain's short story "The Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras County," Smith says: "This story—like all these stories I heard as a child—was doubly oral. The oral remark was privileged, and the story was always told aloud" (xxxvii).

I am not suggesting that stories are important only in oral or verbomotor cultures. All societies use stories to teach their children. All cultures have myths that contribute to the construction of their identity. Karl Kroeber writes that "*all* human societies have employed narrative, usually making it the preferred form of expression for systems of moral judgement—systems, of course often violently antithetical to one another" (9). We all tell stories; we order and delimit the flow of experience into an intelligible form and transmit these orderings to others. Environmental historian William Cronon writes: "like all historians we configure the events of the past into causal sequences--stories--that order and simplify those events to give them new meanings" (1349). We tell ourselves stories to help us understand our surroundings and ourselves. "Not merely information storage devices, narratives structure perceptual experience . . . individuals become the autobiographical narratives by which they tell about their lives. These private constructions typically mesh with a community of life stories, 'deep structures' about the nature of life itself" (Riessman 2).

Though all societies relate stories, in oral cultures they are necessarily more important and they are necessarily told aloud. There are no records that report historical facts. There are only the stories people tell—built out of the memories they have. "In a writing or print culture, the text physically bonds whatever it contains and makes it possible to retrieve any kind of

organization of thought as a whole. In primary oral cultures, where there is no text, the narrative serves to bond thought more massively and permanently than other genres” (Ong 141). Eric Havelock writes that the “only possible verbal technology available to guarantee the preservation and fixity of transmission was that of the rhythmic word organised cunningly in verbal and metrical patterns which were unique enough to retain their shape” (42-3). The most common and familiar verbal and metrical patterns are those of proverbs. A stitch in time saves “nine” instead of ten or eight because of the rhyme with time, not because it is more likely that nine stitches will be necessary.

Sample writes about his upbringing, where we see, among other things, a recurring theme—that experience, “doing,” is privileged. The important point now, however, is that an orality persisted in the culture Sample was raised in:

A great deal of what we knew was tacitly understood: we often knew a lot that we could not put into words (because we didn’t *have* the right words) but that we nevertheless knew how to *do*. We knew things we couldn’t say, we felt things we couldn’t name, and we did things we couldn’t explain. So proverbs and stories helped us. They pointed to what we meant. No, actually, they *were* what we meant. (3)

Despite the introduction and use of the technologies of writing and print, Sample lived in a culture where traditional stories, and other mnemonic structures, retained their cultural importance. Though interiorizing literacy gives people access to entirely new ways of thinking, not all cultures necessarily become literate in the sense of embracing writing and the thought processes Ong associates with it.

Robert Pattison claims that “literacy” is the recognition of the difficulties inherent in language, and mastery of the modes of thought that one’s specific culture uses, regardless of whether they are oral or chirographic. “Consciousness of the uses and problems of language is

the foundation of literacy” (6). The technology of writing is not a necessary component of literacy.

New technologies do not drive out old forms of literacy. Rather, the new technology, be it print or television, lives side by side with the existing state of literacy and gradually blends with it in complex ways that change but do not necessarily diminish or abolish it. Print and written record did not destroy but supplemented the oral literacy in which they emerged. (Pattison 115)

Terms like literacy and orality may be problematic, but I will use the term orality to describe the mindset, the type of literacy, the cultural perspective, the method of engaging reality that Ong and Sample describe. This mindset does not preclude the individual from being literate in the contemporarily accepted sense. All of these authors are very literate—very well read—very much aware of the literary traditions in place when they are writing and conscious of the uses and problems of language. They are also very oral; stories and proverbs point towards what they mean. The cultures they took part in retained a state of literacy that privileged (for lack of a better word) oral modes of thought. This is also why a continuum-based model of orality and literacy is inadequate for my purposes. These authors are both very “oral” and very “literate.”

The influence of oral modes of thought on these authors is a significant part of why all the texts I will be discussing are in a very broad sense “speakerly.” Henry Louis Gates defines the speakerly text as:

a text whose rhetorical strategy is designed to represent an oral literary tradition, designed “to emulate the phonetic, grammatical, and lexical patterns of actual speech and produce the ‘illusion of oral narration.’” The speakerly text is that text in which all other structural elements seem to be devalued, as important as they remain to the telling of the tale, because the narrative strategy signals attention to its own importance, an importance which would seem to be the privileging of oral speech and its inherent linguistic features. (181)

The only hesitation I have about this definition is the idea of the other elements being

“devalued.” Perhaps this is only a fear of overemphasis. What I will address is these texts’ “paradoxically written manifestation of the aspiration to the oral” (Gates 208), and how these authors approach or attempt to overcome this paradox. The paradox that these authors are dealing with involves not just the spoken word but all aspects of the oral—the paralinguistic and the cultural factors that combine with the spoken word to produce meaning.

In *The Nature of Narrative*, Robert Scholes and Robert Kellogg argue that “genuine” oral traditions can be “challenged by a spurious, pseudo-‘oral tradition’ arising out of the newly established textual tradition” (30). Oral traditions that meet their definition of genuine are different than the ones Sample and Smith describe, but I would hold that all traditions that are passed down orally are something other than spurious. As Lindahl argues, even in contemporary peasant communities “narrators sometimes tell tales from memory and sometimes read them aloud from books.” (6). Even stories told by Mother Goose or Uncle Remus, ones that have become part of or at least passed through the literate tradition are not any sort of threat or challenge to any ‘genuine’ tradition. Robert Georges argues that “there is nothing especially authentic or traditional about the messages of storytelling events generated by the interactions of the nonliterate or the preliterate” (“Towards” 323). He does not argue, of course, that they are inauthentic or untraditional, only that “storytelling events constitute one kind of communicative event within a continua of human communication . . . irrespective of their relative social, educational, or economic statuses” (“Towards” 323). Storytelling, written and oral, is pervasive in all cultures. More importantly for my purposes, the interplay between oral and written traditions is a significant factor in the development of American literature. Devaluing either is of little practical use. Carl Lindahl writes that folklore “is more than an item or means of

transmission: it is a community-based process, embodying the values and beliefs of that small closely-knit group, and generating works of art that reflect them” (9). Any artwork that reflects this community-based process can be considered “folk.” Though they are influenced by literate modes of thought, many Americans are also parts of rich oral traditions that are constantly making use of parts of “print culture.” Sample writes:

In the oral culture of my youth we knew how to read and write, but these skills were used basically to fill out forms at work, write checks or recipes, make lists of things to do, sign our names, read sports pages or romantic novels, take tests for driver’s licenses, and, very occasionally, write letters or notes to friends and family. But the way we approached life—the way we celebrated things, the way we understood, the way we handled, mishandled, or avoided our feelings, hopes, or dreams—was oral. (5-6)

Because a culture that does not make lists, fill out forms, or exchange recipes—more specifically one which doesn’t know what forms or lists are—is so drastically different than one that does, Ong has rightly focused on “primary oral cultures.” When Sample read Ong’s book, which is proof of Sample’s literacy, he found statements which resonated so strongly in his experience he chose to write a book stating that he was part of an oral culture. Though members of Sample’s culture participate in literate culture, by filling out forms, making lists and recipes, and writing books about their orality, their approach to life is still one tremendously similar to primary orality.

Traditional orality played a very significant part in the lives of Mark Twain and William Faulkner, and continues to do so in Lee Smith’s, though all three are certainly literate in every sense of the word. The works of all three reflect an interest in and the influence of traditional orality, both formally and thematically. What I wish to study specifically is who actually does the telling in these works, how these tellings are represented and how these authors address the



difficulty of representing the spoken in writing. Much of the time I will be focusing on storytelling that is represented inside of fictions. Of course the vast majority of novels have stories, but oral storytelling is a very different mode of communication than the narrative generally found in the novel.

A fundamental fact of storytelling events is face-to-face communication; “it cannot and does not occur unless two or more individuals are willing to interact by behaving in a particular way while communicating at first hand” (Georges “Communicative Role”<sup>52</sup>). The key to storytelling events, for Georges, is that the teller responds to listener feedback and shapes the evolving story accordingly. “Once the storyteller begins to receive and decode the responses of the story listener and to interpret and respond to them as feedback, the storyteller and the story listener begin to shape the message jointly (“Towards” 322). As Neville Dyson-Hudson writes, “Narrative, then, through the act of narration, becomes a form of behavior, rather than a form of literature . . . it becomes an interactive form of behavior” (338).

Because novels are written, they cannot accurately replicate oral storytelling. Reading a novel is not a truly interactive form of behavior. For Georges there is no message without listener feedback that helps determine the content. This is clearly impossible with a novel; we cannot see individual tellers shrug their shoulders or hear the variations of their voice, no matter how strident the authors’ italics are. More importantly, we cannot materially change the outcome of the telling, even when we are fictionalized as the story-listener. We can have different experiences with a text, and we do, but we cannot change the telling, only the reading. Jay Bolter writes: “Writing changes the intimate relationship between the creator and the audience: it is no use shouting at a novel whose plot is heading in a direction we do not like: the book cannot

adjust itself to our wishes” (109). We can, of course, terminate the event, but the words remain unchanged. Reading fixed texts of a story and storytelling are two very different acts, even though the teller/listener relationship is replicated in both to some extent. Authors are forced to present storytelling in a way that suggests the event, even though some techniques of both are the same. As Joseph Sobol argues:

Conversational discourse is characterized by linguistic, paralinguistic and kinesic ‘involvement strategies,’ designed to create interaction and integration between speaker and listener. Linguistic involvement strategies, such as repetition, constructed dialogue, and representational imagery, are common to oral and literary storytelling, though originating in speech. (70)

Many of the linguistic aspects of storytelling can be transferred to print; however, part of the way meaning is constructed during face-to-face communication is by the physical interaction between the participants, and by the participants with the physical surroundings. There are also other factors which make up the context of the event, which may be difficult or impossible to replicate in print. Whether we choose to label these aspects of the communicative event “involvement strategies” or not, they are a part of the process.

Paralinguistic and kinesic involvement strategies can include variation in pitch and tempo, gesture, physical and emotional mirroring, as well as the vast register of implicit information that constitutes the *relationship* of conversational partners. None of these are available to the writer, except in a refracted and distanced form. He has to rely instead on a range of ‘contextualizing’ conventions to fill in what is sacrificed to print. (Sobol 70)

These contextualizing conventions, the methods for transcribing storytelling, have developed over time. They were not used or even conceived of by the first authors of narrative, however. Initially, authors wrote with an eye toward recitation, and didn’t see representing these events or speech as problematic. Indeed, they saw no other way to commit stories to paper. As Ong writes,

Written narrative at first was merely a transcription of oral narrative, or what was

imagined as oral narrative, and it assumed some kind of oral singer's audience. . . . How these texts and other oral performances were in fact originally set down in writing remains puzzling, but the transcribers certainly were not composing in writing, but rather recording with minimal alteration what a singer was singing or was imagined to be singing. ("The Writer's Audience" 12)

In the first written narratives the distinction between author and narrator was not recognized because the individual who actualized a specific version, who was the author in our understanding of the term, did not consider himself as such. He was instead one who transmitted the work which held the authority of the cultural tradition. As Jean-Francois Lyotard writes, "the narratives themselves have this authority. In a sense, the people are only that which actualizes the narratives . . . they do this not only by recounting them, but also by listening to them and recounting themselves through them" (23). The written narrative works were, in effect, represented storytelling events, and they were authorized in the same manner as actual storytelling events.

#### Authors, Narrators and Storytellers

Novels are authorized in a different manner. A novel's authority comes from the status of the author as a member of an elite literate community. The idea of an author comes from the word "auctor," which, as Donald Pease points out, "denoted a writer whose words commanded respect and belief" (107). This respect, however, was not based on the artist's imaginative power to create new stories. Instead his power came from his knowledge of and "adherence to the authority of cultural antecedent" (Pease 105). The meaning behind the word author is one of an "authority"-that which guarantees the validity and truthfulness of the work. The author knows what he is talking about- he is transmitting wisdom. The novel's origins lie in different sources of authority. Whoever produced the manuscript that contains the story we call *Beowulf*, for

example, was not the originary source or authority of the work. The authority that produced *Beowulf* is its own tradition. The text of *Beowulf* is a particular written performance or manifestation of oral traditional materials. The literate editor, the author, the amanuensis of the work is not the source of the work—he is not the auctor; he is a carrier of tradition. This is not to suggest that he did no creative or interpretive work. It is to suggest that his creative work was significantly influenced by his interaction with a communal storytelling tradition, and that he considered himself a part of this tradition.

*Beowulf* begins with a clear exposition of the audience and the writer's authority: "Hwaet, we have heard how in olden times" (1). Robert Weimann writes that the "we" in *Beowulf*'s first line "is designed to link the audience and the narrator in a common act of remembrance . . . meant to underline and draw authority from a sense of community" (86). The narrator of *Beowulf* is a member of a story listening and telling tradition that goes back in time. He is both a creator and carrier of his tradition. He is part of the listening audience that has heard this story time and again, and part of the culture that uses the epic story as what Havelock calls the "encyclopedia" of the culture. However much this narrator has transformed the tale from the pagan past to reflect the Christian present, he has also remained faithful to a tradition that presents him with the way one should live his life in society.

What is more important about the *Beowulf* narrator for our purposes is that the narrator speaks in the work; he is present in the work in that he is the medium through which the story is being related, but he does not exist as an embodied "character" in the performance. The narrator of *Beowulf* is unselfconsciously the teller of the tale. It is an attempt at a direct transcription of an oral performance—the narrator's discourse is the direct discourse of a storyteller, and the reader is

quite effortlessly imagined to be the listening audience. However the tale was committed to paper, the role of the narrator is as a teller who is in fact physically present to the listeners at the time of performance. He is literally the “I” of the work because he is the person standing there saying “I”. This kind of self-identification is certainly problematic now, but the writer of the manuscript appears to have had no problem with it, and senses no absence in the work. There is no absence because all of the intended participants are part of an oral/aural tradition that has maintained and retold versions of this story countless times, and because the work was written to be read aloud.

As written narrative flourished and became more than the transcription of oral traditional materials, authors were presented with the challenge of how to give their readers the contextual clues that live performance and community membership provided. “Literature” Lindahl writes, “must incorporate a context to be understood, because the author’s work must survive on paper, outside the situation in which it was created” (128). The writer/reader relationship of the novel is, in part, based on how these authors met this challenge. As Ong points out “If the writer succeeds in writing, it is generally because he can fictionalize in his imagination an audience he has learned to know not from daily life but from earlier writers who were fictionalizing in their imagination audiences they had learned to know in still earlier writers, and so on back to the dawn of written narrative” (“The Writer’s Audience” 11). The writer must also fictionalize a storyteller—a narrator. He must create a fictive voice to address this fictive audience. As Scholes and Kellogg write, the “traditional, oral narrative consists rhetorically of a teller, his story, and an implied audience. The non-traditional, written narrative consists rhetorically of the *imitation*, or *representation*, of a teller, his story, and an implied audience” (52-53). In effect, every voice in a

novel is mimetic; every voice is at least one step removed from the author.

Rhetorically, the use of writing permits the individual, creating narrative artist to add an important level of complexity and of potential irony to his story. The new level has always appeared to result from the introduction of a self-conscious narrator and an opening of ironic distance between him on one side and the author and audience on the other. In the light, however, of our discussion of oral narrative we can see that what in fact made possible the revolutionary complexity of point of view in written narrative was the introduction, not of narrators, but of *authors*. (Scholes and Kellogg 53)

Another important development is when the distinction between authors and narrator became self-conscious. The development of both roles is significant. The representation of a teller that has come to be known as the narrator has been transformed from an imitation of a specific social role into a literary function, a set of conventions of representation with powers and prohibitions different from those of traditional storytellers. Novelists do not unselfconsciously attempt to replicate the storytelling dynamic. They now choose the types of narrators they will use. A narrator is not a social role; it is a literary construct. The complexity of the novel that Scholes and Kellogg discuss arises from the creation of fictive voices—voices that do not necessarily represent the author, and the audience’s awareness of this possibility. One of the defining features of the novel is the potential for significant difference between the author and the narrator. This does not mean there is necessarily anything more than the potential for irony—it is possible for there to be no significant difference between the author and the narrator. Scholes and Kellogg point to a specific example: “In Hemingway’s *The Sun Also Rises*, for example, the artist, the narrator, and the protagonist are almost united and certainly share the same viewpoint on the action and the same attitude toward it” (269). The roles of narrator and author have, however, evolved in such a way that a narrator is no longer necessarily or generally the fictive representation of an oral storyteller.

This separation of author and narrator, and of narrator from storyteller, has also changed the sources of authority. As this process evolved, authors achieved their status by absorbing and relating written sources instead of by absorbing and relating the communal tradition. They had to demonstrate their mastery of the literate tradition, the tradition they shared with their new audience. Robert Weimann argues that as “the author assimilates the role of fictional narrator, the presence in the text of the performer is either displaced or transmuted into artifice. It is in this new space for projecting a fiction, that the author claims his own authority as the maker of a ‘well-joined’ composition” (90). In this new paradigm of authority the author is thought of as not merely a transmitter of tradition but as a creative force. It is the figure of the author that has this authority. The author can choose to create a narrator who wields this authority, but the novelist is the master of the discourse who wields authority outside of the text.

In a very important sense, the method of demonstrating and establishing authority has not changed; authors must prove that they have absorbed the tradition—that they are masters of the discourse. What has changed is the nature of the tradition at the source. Throughout this process, authority is achieved through mastery of a respected tradition, primarily through the use of the appropriate voice. The authority shifts from mastery of a local, communal and spoken tradition to a written one of a more widespread elite community.

Even in the Twentieth Century, T.S. Eliot’s essay “Tradition and the Individual Talent” still looks for the author to have a sense of the literary tradition which “cannot be inherited, and if you want it you must obtain it by great labor” (467). For Eliot an understanding of the tradition consisted in part of “the historical sense [which] involves a perception, not only of the pastness of the past, but of its presence; the historical sense compels a man to write not merely with his

own generation in his bones, but with a feeling that the whole of literature of Europe from Homer and within it the whole of the literature of his own country has a simultaneous existence and composes a simultaneous order” (467). Of course, for Eliot and for the novel as a genre, individual talent is also important. The novel’s author is one with a creative talent as well as an historical sense, but his status still derives from mastery of the tradition.

Despite the differences between early written narratives and the novel, the author’s need to retain status has remained. In the *Canterbury Tales* Chaucer chooses to frame his represented storytelling events to preserve his status and to give his reader’s guidelines to comprehension. In fact, collections of framed tales are an important bridge between the modern novel and the orally-derived text. Mary Louise Pratt writes that frame-tale collections, like the *Canterbury Tales* and the *Decameron*, comprise “many of our earliest novel-like literary texts” (105). In both the *Decameron* and the *Canterbury Tales* a series of storytelling events is created and all of the listeners and tellers are named, with a few exceptions; this provides a context for the reader. The “reader,” the author’s audience, is no longer necessarily a present auditor, as he is treated in *Beowulf*, and he may not have the expectations of one. The reader may be, in fact, a solitary individual reading to his or her self separated by both time and distance from the author. Both Chaucer and Boccaccio present their readers with sufficient clues, with a recognizable, well-defined context that they can use to understand the work. The frame creates a context familiar to someone unfamiliar with the author/narrator/reader dynamic.

This is one advantage to the frame tales common in Southwestern humor, one of several literary traditions Mark Twain used to formulate his style, a style which helped define the American novel. Such frame tales allow readers to fictionalize themselves relatively



easily—giving them indicators to help them properly interpret the event as it is represented. In the *Canterbury Tales* Chaucer is not only representing storytelling events in order to represent the actual dynamics or realities of storytelling, he is also giving his readers indicators of how they should react to the story. In “The Writer's Audience Is Always a Fiction,” Ong argues that Chaucer’s frame allows readers to fictionalize themselves:

There was no established tradition in English for many of the stories, and certainly none at all for a collection of stories. What does Chaucer do? He sets the stories in what, from a literary-structural point of view, is styled a frame. . . . In terms of signals to his readers, we could put it another way: Chaucer simply tells his readers how they are to fictionalize themselves. He starts by telling them that there is a group of pilgrims doing what real people do, going to a real place, Canterbury. The reader is to imagine himself in their company and join the fun. Of course this means fictionalizing himself as a member of a nonexistent group. But the fictionalizing is facilitated by Chaucer’s clear frame-story directives. And to minimize the fiction by maximizing real life, Chaucer installs himself, the narrator, as one of the pilgrims. His reader-role problem is effectively solved. (16)

The narrator Chaucer creates has the social status of an author, but also has status as part of a storytelling community. This character is authorized to tell this story because he was a witness to all the events- not because he is a carrier of a tradition. Though he is a master of the appropriate discourse; he also has the authority of an eye witness and as such merely reports what he has seen. He is attempting to replicate “everich word” that was spoken, arguing that a man retelling a tale must attempt this although he may have to speak “rudeliche and large,/ Or ellis he moot telle his tale untrewē” (731-735). The writer is not inelegant; instead, he records the broad and vulgar speech of others correctly in order to avoid being “untrewē.” The narrator plays the roles of story listener and storyteller and invites the reader to play similar roles.

Katharine Slater Gittes writes that “Chaucer’s role as pilgrim and eyewitness . . . acts as a unifying force to some extent, authenticating the framing story and making the pilgrimage appear

actual” (248). Bonnie Irwin writes, however, that “as author he distances himself from his own text by insisting that he merely presents the tales of others. This ironic distancing allows him to fend off criticism from those who believe his tales to be too risqué” (50). Though verisimilitude is important; it is also important that Chaucer the poet retain his social status. His General Prologue includes a direct appeal to his readers. In order to protect his status, he asks his audience not to attribute to his “vileynye,” that he: pleynly speke in this mateere, / To telle yow hir wordes and hir cheere, / Ne thogh I speke hir wordes proprely” (726-30). “Vileynye” is generally glossed as “bad manners,” or even “coarseness”; Chaucer remains aware that he has an audience that will find his use of the vernacular inappropriate, but he is protected because he is writing “their” vulgar words in an attempt to write authentically.<sup>2</sup>

Chaucer has in effect drawn what Kenneth Lynn calls a “cordon sanitaire” around his narrator to protect him from the criticism of being vulgar (64). In fact, Southwestern humorists and Chaucer use the same framing device to solve similar problems. The audience for Southwestern humor was familiar with the narrator/author dynamic; however, it was unfamiliar with the specific context in which these stories took place. In effect literate authors created narrators who guided the reader through the oral world—a world outside of the dominant discourse and foreign to the majority of readers. They also kept them separate from it. Bridgman writes that “the presence of a literate narrator to introduce the vernacular speaker permitted the reader to enjoy colorful informality, yet be assured that the hierarchy of social values still stood,

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<sup>2</sup> For insight on similar appeals to realism in the *Decameron*, see N.S. Thompson’s “Local Histories: Characteristic Worlds in the *Decameron* and the *Canterbury Tales*.” *The Decameron and the Canterbury Tales: New Essays on and Old Question*. Leonard Michael Koff and Brenda Dean Schidgen, eds. Cranberry, NJ: Associated UP, 2000.

that the vulgar were still under control” (23). This statement is as true for the frame tales Chaucer wrote as it is for those written by Southwestern humorists. One of the most important collections of frame tales in American literature is Augustus Baldwin Longstreet’s *Georgia Scenes* (1835). In a letter written before the collection’s publication, Longstreet also claimed to wish to present his subject truly. “The leading object of the Georgia Scenes, is to enable those who come after us, to see us *precisely as we are*” (qtd in Kibler ix). During one of the Scenes a character is represented as cursing: “‘Well d–n\* the man’” (44). Even though half of the four letters of the word are omitted, Longstreet chooses to add a footnote where he directly appeals to his readers:

I should omit such expressions as this, could I do so with historic fidelity; but the peculiarities of the times of which I am writing cannot be faithfully represented without them. In recording things *as they are*, truth requires me sometimes to put profane words into the mouths of my characters. (44)

Note the repetition of the idea of historical accuracy, and how truth requires inelegancies. He is also certainly trying to insulate himself from criticism. In the Preface to *Georgia Scenes*, Longstreet echoes Chaucer’s General Prologue by apologizing for the coarseness of his character’s speech. Interestingly, he also apologizes for the crudeness of his narrators’ speech.<sup>3</sup>

I cannot conclude these introductory remarks without reminding those who have taken exception to the coarse, inelegant, and sometimes ungrammatical language which the writer represents himself as occasionally using, *that it is a language accommodated to the capacity of the person to whom he represents himself as speaking.*” (xxiv)

In other words, if the writer, the narrator, is represented as speaking in a voice that is ungentle, not the voice of authority, it is because he is speaking down to the characters in order to make it clear to them. He does not apologize for the coarseness of the other characters; they are coarse

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<sup>3</sup> *Georgia Scenes* has two named narrators, Lyman Hall and Abram Baldwin, who narrate individual scenes, respectively. The preface is signed “The Author”.

and inelegant and may be represented as such. Longstreet may not be asking for forgiveness from his readers, but he is defending himself from attack and maintaining his status as a master of the dominant discourse.

While presenting mimetic voices—specifically vernacular speakers—Chaucer and Longstreet increase the sense of realism and authenticity. At the same time these substandard dialects threaten their authority as masters of the appropriate literary discourse. Both address this threat in their introductory sections in attempts to maintain both authority and authenticity. It must also be said that they do so ironically. Gittes adds, following E. Talbot Donaldson, that there is ironic space between author and narrator. “Standing behind Chaucer the reporter is Chaucer the poet, a figure who . . . is a manipulator of irony, of details, of structure” (248). I would argue that both Chaucer and Longstreet felt that the use of the vernacular was vitally important and objections based on a sense of propriety were overly fastidious. What is important for our purposes is that both authors felt that those objections would be forthcoming, and that it was necessary to comment on them. I don’t want to overstate the similarity, but both Chaucer and Longstreet find themselves addressing this issue in their prefaces—both have to address an objection, or perhaps an expectation, at least some of their readers will have in order to help maintain their authority.

It continued to be important that the writer remain the “morally irreproachable gentleman,” particularly if he was dealing with regional or folk material. Even in the twentieth century it was important for Allen Tate to point out that both Longstreet and his material were above the folk. “*Georgia Scenes* is a collection of tall tales written by an accomplished gentleman for other accomplished gentlemen; this famous book is in no way folk literature”

(591).

Even in the latter part of the twentieth century, Lee Smith wrote of the difficulty she faced when trying to write about “the character of the people” of her hometown of Grundy, Virginia and “document that rich language I had—thank God!—grown up on, all those wonderful expressions so much more exact and robust than the TV talk now going into every mountain home” (“Introduction” xli). Though she didn’t have to worry that substandard language would be banned, as Twain’s was, by the Concord Library for being “rough, coarse and inelegant” (???? 308), she did feel a gap between the written and spoken. The use of vernacular may not have been considered inappropriate by her audience, but a gap remained:

The problem was that I was writing this novel in the third person, in good standard American English, so that every time one of my characters piped up and said something like, ‘He’s daddied more children . . . ,’ he sounded like he was on *Hee-Haw*. And I sounded like I was condescending to my characters—the last thing in the world I intended to do. The gap between the third-person narrative voice of the novel and the characters’ own voices was simply too great. (xli)

In Chapter four we will discuss Smith’s specific attempts to solve this problem. What I want to stress here is the persistence of written/spoken and elite/folk distinctions. Note that Smith uses the term “condescending,” which Ross also uses when speaking of all mimetic voice. She also writes of a “standard” narrative voice. In all of these works, separated by 400 years, we still see that the narrator is expected to be genteel—elegant—to conform to the precepts of the dominant discourse—the dominant discourse represented by what Lanser describes as authorial voice.

#### Authorial, Personal and Mimetic Voice

There are three types of voice that will be discussed in reference to the works of all three authors in this study. All three authors use types of authorial, personal and mimetic voices. Examining

similarities and the differences between the kinds of voices these authors use, and how they employ them will help us understand how they attempt to negotiate the speakerly paradox. We will see how these authors attempt to give their character's colloquial voices what Lanser describes as "discursive authority."

Before we discuss voice, I want to define authority. There are two types of authority that can generally be attributed to narrators. The first is the type of authority associated with omniscience: the narrator can read minds, and travel effortlessly through time and space, knowing and understanding all of the relevant causal relationships. Authors choose whether or not to give their narrators this authority. An author is the source of this authority because the author has created and is in control of the world of the novel.

The second type is discursive authority. In *Fictions of Authority*, Lanser defines discursive authority as "the intellectual credibility, ideological validity, and aesthetic value claimed by or conferred upon a work, author, narrator, character, or textual practice" (6). Discursive authority reaches past the narrative authority generally associated with the term 'omniscience' and refers instead to wisdom that stretches beyond the world of the fiction and into the culture at large. Lanser calls the act of authorship "a quest to be heard, respected, and believed, a hope of influence" (7). When I speak of authority, I will be primarily concerned with discursive authority.

Different voices hold different kinds of authority and establish or maintain it in a number of ways. Lanser identifies three narrative modes "authorial, personal, and communal voice. Each mode represents not simply a set of technical distinctions but a particular kind of narrative consciousness" (15). Though I will discuss communal voice in reference to *Absalom, Absalom!*

and *The Devil's Dream*, I will primarily be concerned with her theories of personal and authorial voice. Lanser calls authorial voice the unmarked case for the novel.

Authorial voice is “‘extradiegetic’ and public, directed to a narratee who is analogous to a reading audience” (16). Extradiegetic narrators are outside of the narrated events, and are, in effect, the creators and masters of the fictive world. More precisely, they are the fictive figures who appear to speak as the creators and masters of the fictive world. Lanser doesn’t wish to lose the distinction between narrators and authors, only to show that some narrators are more closely associated with authors:

I have chosen the term ‘authorial’ not to imply an ontological equivalence between narrator and author but to suggest that such a voice (re)produces the structural and functional situation of authorship. In other words, where a distinction between the (implied) author and a public, heterodiegetic narrator is not textually marked, readers are invited to equate the narrator with the author and the narratee with themselves (or their historical equivalents). This conventional equation gives authorial voice a privileged status among narrative forms . . . Moreover, since authorial narrators exist outside narrative time (indeed, ‘outside’ fiction) and are not ‘humanized’ by events, they conventionally carry an authority superior to that conferred on characters, even on narrating characters. (16)

“Author” and “narrator” are rightly two distinct entities in literary theory, but authorial voice exists when we are encouraged to—or, perhaps more precisely, not discouraged from—equating the narrator with the author. Authorial voice is that which seems like the author’s direct speech; like the author’s unmediated or perhaps unmasked writing. Authorial narrators generally hold discursive authority. In authorial discourse the unmarked case is that there is little or no ironic distance between the author and the narrator. Also, the narrative voice has the power of author as creator of the fictive world—as much knowledge as the author wants to have. Authorial narrators’ position outside of the fiction gives them their authority, but their authority also comes from their

mastery of the dominant discourse. This is has generally been the unmarked case in American literature. Until a text indicates otherwise, readers assume the narrator is using authorial voice. For example, Twain's narrator in *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* announces his difference from authorial voice in his first sentence. "You don't know me, without you have read a book by the name of 'The Adventures of Tom Sawyer,' but that ain't no matter" (13). By his use of nonstandard grammar, and his reference to himself as a character in an earlier fiction, Huck marks himself as something very much other than an authorial voice. His voice is one that Lanser calls "personal."

I use the term *personal voice* to refer to narrators who are self-consciously telling their own histories. I do not intend this term to designate all 'homodiegetic' or 'first-person' narratives—that is, all those in which the voice that speaks is a participant in the fictional world—but only those Genette calls 'autodiegetic,' in which the 'I' who tells the story is also the story's protagonist (or an older version of the protagonist). (18-19)

The distinction between authorial and personal voice is quite clear. There is, however, a great space between these two types of narrators that is unaccounted for in Lanser's taxonomy, primarily because this space is historically only available to male authors. For my purposes another category is called for: genteel narrators exist in the interstices between authorial and personal voice. Chaucer's "pilgrim" and Longstreet's Hall and Baldwin are genteel narrators, as is the narrator that Twain will finally abandon when he writes *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. The genteel narrator claims the discursive authority of an author—the mastery of the tradition and the wisdom associated with this mastery—while not enjoying the god-like powers associated with omniscience. They do not claim to have created the fictive world. They claim to be insightful observers of the real world, and as such they retain a status apart and above their characters.



I would contend that personal voice can be the voice of any homodiegetic narrator because they all face the same challenge to their authority that Lanser correctly describes in the following excerpt:

The authority of personal voice is contingent in ways that the authority of authorial voice is not: while the autodiegetic 'I' remains a structurally 'superior' voice mediating the voices of other characters, it does not carry the superhuman privileges that attach to authorial voice, and its status is dependent on a reader's response not only to the narrator's acts but to the character's actions, just as the authority of the representation is dependent in turn on the successful construction of a credible voice. (19)

All of a personal narrator's actions reflect on his or her authority. In fact, the authority of a personal narrator is often determined in much the same way as that of any storyteller. In authorial voice, authority is contingent on the author being able to construct a narrator who conforms to the language of the dominant group. The personal narrator, conversely, is judged by his or her actions inside the fiction as well as the manner by which he or she presents the story. A personal narrator has only the authority of the eye witness. Lanser adds that an "authorial narrator claims broad powers of knowledge and judgment. While a personal narrator claims only the validity of one person's right to interpret her experience" (19). Because personal voice seeks no authority beyond that of the individual, personal narrators like Huck Finn must be distinguished from what I will call genteel narrators, like "Misto C- in "A True Story" and the Pilgrim in *The Canterbury Tales*. These narrators generally seek and hold the authority as masters of the dominant discourse and not merely as eye witnesses. Since Lanser's study is of women's writing, and the voice of authority has, "with varying degrees of intensity, attached itself most readily to white, educated men of hegemonic ideology" (6), for Lanser the line between authorial and personal voice is relatively clear. In this study we will see male personal narrators who use the language of

authority. These narrators have access to almost all the validity and credibility of authorial voices because of their connection to elite culture. A difficulty arises when these voices seek to validate folk culture using the medium of the elite.

These genteel narrators have access to almost all the validity and credibility of authorial voices because of their connection to elite culture. A culture separate from that associated with traditional orality. Carl Lindahl writes:

The superorganic *authority of elite culture* comes from outside the boundaries of one's community, from great distances of space and time. . . . The *community of experience* of folk culture, on the other hand, is based almost wholly on what one sees and does. Everything, even the most distant past, takes on the shape of the palpable present. A man may tell a thousand-year-old tale, but its style, form, and content are determined by a situational esthetic; the tale must reflect the exact circumstances in which it is told. The 'rules' of such a community, though unwritten, are constantly apparent in the behavior of its members. (10)

Experience is valued in traditional cultures, as Tex Sample said it was in the culture of his youth. Compare Lindahl's discussion of authority during Chaucer's time with what Henry Nash Smith writes about Mark Twain. Smith writes that Twain was "in a society encumbered by a traditional culture that had hardened into a set of conventions having little relation to the actual experience of its members" (viii). The authoritative language—the literary language—was one alien to his experience. However, in order to reach an audience of readers, he had to use this language and its conventions. This is the challenge all three of these writers face: how to bring an evocative and authoritative spoken voice into a medium that is ruled, because of convention and biomechanical factors, by a different type of "voice." Smith writes:

[Twain's] efforts to find an alternative to the prevailing cult of gentility and to define his own role in society appear in his work as a series of difficulties in the management of narrative viewpoint. His degree of success in solving all three problems can be traced in his progress toward the creation of a consistent fictional persona to serve as the

protagonist in first-person narratives. Thus his technical innovations might be described with equal accuracy as an ethical, a sociological, or a literary undertaking. (vii)

Twain, Faulkner and Smith were faced with literate forms of power that had less relevance to their experience but still exerted great influence. Similarly, when they wrote novels they found that the primary narrative voice of a work has a greater authority, by literary convention, than other voices in the work. They were faced with the challenge of trying to represent something important to them in a medium that is less than ideal for doing so. All of these authors wish to publish the authority that the community of experience holds. What interests me is the literary undertaking of creating voices that can speak in a manner other than that of the dominant discourse. The author's challenge is to try and create a community—a context—in which the utterances of characters can be evaluated appropriately, where the spoken voice carries the authority the author wishes it to have and not a structurally or culturally predetermined one.

These utterances are generally represented by the third type of voice I wish to discuss, what Stephen Ross calls mimetic voice. Before I define mimetic voice, I want to first clarify my definition of “voice” in literature. In *Fiction's Inexhaustible Voice*, identifies four types of “voices” in the works of William Faulkner. I will use his taxonomy in reference to the work of all the authors in this study. He suggests that “together they can provide a taxonomy of voice in Faulkner (and perhaps in fiction generally) that will allow us to explore systematically this special source of Faulkner's power” (15). The power Ross writes of is Faulkner's ability to evoke presence in his work. Ross argues that:

The word ‘voice’ has been employed traditionally as a metonymic designation for the human presence we hear or imagine whenever we read a poem or a story. In its commonsensical way ‘voice’ signifies expressive ‘sound’ in literary speech, those inscribed, perceivable differences among characters’ talking, among narrators’ story

telling, and among authors' styles. (4)

I would not concede that voice signifies sound, specifically because human presence can be evoked through writing. Like "narrator," voice as a literary term must cover more ground than its metaphorical connection with speech implies. The baseline definition of voice will concern the human presence we imagine whenever we read literature. We will see examples, in both *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* and *The Devil's Dream*, of a presence that does not speak in any sense of the word. I would also, however, again quote Lee Smith, writing about her idea of literature. "What I hear is a *voice*, always one particular human voice, telling the story" (xxxii). She hears a voice, and the metaphorical relationship with speech is far from inconsequential.

Though writing often and quite naturally evokes the idea of the human voice, Gerald Prince's definition of voice does not refer to sound except through the use of Gerard Genette's distinction between "who sees," (mood) and "who speaks" (voice) (*Narrative Discourse* 186). Prince defines voice as the "set of signs characterizing the narrator and, more generally, the narrating instance" He argues that the term "provides information about who 'speaks,' who the narrator is, what the narrating instance consists of" (102-103). Voice is a set of signs, which evokes presence, not necessarily speech.

I contend that voice should not be limited to narrators or speaking characters. With the work of all of these critics in mind, I would argue that "voice" designates the set of signs characterizing both the narrator and all expressive sound or represented speech in literary discourse. I think it is important to note that not all the human presences who speak in a work are narrators; some characters who speak are not narrating, some narrators are not speaking, and some characters who tell stories should not be considered narrators. I will discuss the distinction

between narrators and storytelling characters at length. Right now the important thing to remember is that the word “voice” refers to the set of signs that characterize representations of human presence. Not all voices are narrators or narrative voices. Though voice is the answer to the question “who speaks?” we should remain aware that all literary voice is only a written representation with no inherent sound qualities—that “who speaks” is, for Genette and generally speaking, a metonymic designation, and does not necessarily refer to speech anymore than writing the sentence “Genette says ‘voice’ is the answer to the question ‘who speaks?’” suggests that the writer heard Genette say those words. Literary voice that is specifically linked to human speech is the third kind of voice we will be studying. Ross calls it “mimetic voice”:

The phrase ‘mimetic voice’ refers to a represented speech in fiction, to the illusion that a person—character, narrator, even sometimes author—is speaking. ‘Mimetic voice’ is constituted by those features of a text’s discourse that prompt readers to regard a particular portion of the text’s total discourse as the utterance of an imagined person. (67)

This definition is certainly clear. What can be tricky is how this illusion is created. One method of representing the speaking voice is to use dialect writing, which Sumner Ives calls literary dialect. In “A Theory of Literary Dialect,” Ives defines a literary dialect as “an author’s attempt to represent in writing a speech that is restricted regionally, socially, or both” (137). Literary dialect is not merely dialogue. It is not merely words in quotation marks which are attributed to characters. It is an attempt to represent speech in writing, specifically a speech that is markedly different from standard English. Ives mentions a variety of techniques a dialect writer may employ in order to represent speech:

His representation may consist merely in the use of an occasional spelling change, like FATHUH rather than *father*, or the use of a word like *servigrous*; or he may attempt to approach the scientific accuracy by representing all the grammatical, lexical, and phonetic peculiarities that he has observed. (137)

Though authors may wish to represent speech exactly, Ives writes that nearly all “examples of literary dialect are deliberately incomplete; the author is an artist, not a linguist or a sociologist, and his purpose is literary rather than scientific” (138). Even if the alternate spellings and other techniques available to authors could adequately represent the variants of speech, an author **may** not choose to use them. As Ives argues, “both the author’s desire to keep his representation within readable limits and his difficulties in finding suitable spelling devices will inhibit his portrayal of a speech type. Any literary dialect, therefore, will necessarily be a partial and somewhat artificial picture of the actual speech” (152). The goal is to make this artificial rendering seem as real as possible, at least for some authors. Ives’ definition only includes “serious attempts to suggest an actual speech” (137) and includes Twain as one of the authors whose aim is “the serious representation of a genuine speech or dialect” (137-38). What is important is that all dialect writers, serious or not, use it to signal difference.

Paul Hull Bowdre Jr. differentiates substandard dialect from regional dialect, codifying Ives’ distinction between regional and social differences by defining dialect writing primarily by its use of non-standard spellings. Regional dialect consists of non-standard spellings used to “indicate pronunciations that are standard in a certain region (or regions) of the United States” (2). A substandard dialect, on the other hand, uses non-standard spelling to “represent pronunciations which are not standard in any section of the country” (2). Obviously substandard dialects can and often do have regional characteristics.

Literary dialect marks difference, and in order to mark this difference clearly, authors may exaggerate the specific qualities of a dialect. Ives argues that characters whose speech is represented by literary dialect are usually “set off, either socially or geographically, from the

main body of those who speak the language. Usually the suggested difference carries some connotation of inferiority, but not always” (138).

It is not only theoretically possible, but it is sometimes the case that dialect is meant to represent the speech of a character of a social class superior to the narrator. But it is rarely the case, and may be theoretically impossible. Also, some may hesitate to call this writing dialect. An authorial narrator may present the speech of a member of the elite class or a scientist, but even these representations may be condescending, as Ross argues. Ross writes:

Dialect writing epitomizes a condition of all literature that evokes mimetic voice. Transcribed speech, the product of mimicry, always occupies an inferior position in relation to the diegetic discourse of its production. The mimetic voices we hear are always secondary, indulged and condescended to by the reader who shares (as an audience shares the mimic’s knowledge) the author’s power over all the voices. (108)

For Ross, the way that transcribed speech is presented is not relevant—all mimetic voice is a copy of a copy and therefore secondary to “the diegetic discourse of its production.” Lanser contends that “within the hierarchical structures of the realist novel, any project to authorize characters outside the social hegemony is already undermined by the conventions of narrative form” (125). Writing specifically about African-American novelists, she argues that the containment of vernacular “to orthographically marked and framed ‘dialect’ is an emblem of a larger containment of folk cultures in novelistic worlds where social and textual success is measured by educated white standards. Such a practice leaves formally unchallenged the implied race and class of realism’s ‘generic’ voice, the overarching consciousness that adopts an authorized language in order to forge a collusion between narrator and narratee” (125). It seems that Lanser suggests a mimetic voice that conforms to the standards of the dominant discourse could hold discursive authority. She also suggests that all of folk culture is necessarily secondary. Clearly,

authorizing a literary dialect, which is by definition a nonstandard discourse, faces both structural and social difficulties.

In the following chapters I will discuss voice and authority in the works of Mark Twain, William Faulkner and Lee Smith while delineating the differences between narrators, storytelling characters and other voices. I hope to show how all three authors attempt to give their characters speaking voices which are not necessarily inferior to the other voices in their works. In the next chapter I will discuss Mark Twain's use of genteel and personal narrators, and the relationship between these narrators and the storytelling characters they present. I will argue that the personal voice he creates in *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* is an attempt to imbue a speaking voice with discursive authority, with ideological validity outside of the fictive world.



HOW TO TELL A STORY  
GENTEEL, PERSONAL, AND MIMETIC VOICES IN MARK TWAIN

Critics never seem to tire of pointing out that both Ernest Hemingway and William Faulkner cite Mark Twain as the father of the American novel. Apparently I'm no exception. Actually, while calling Sherwood Anderson the father, Faulkner called Twain the grandfather of his generation of American writers (Gwynn 281). Twain's status hangs almost entirely on his use of personal voice in *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, which the narrator of Hemingway's autobiographical novel *Green Hills of Africa* calls the best American novel. "All modern American literature comes from one book by Mark Twain called *Huckleberry Finn*. . . . All American writing comes from that" (22). Richard Bridgman writes: "Whatever the merits of Mark Twain's other writing, and whatever the weaknesses of *Huckleberry Finn*, everyone—literary hacks, artists, and critics—agrees that the style of this single book has had a major effect on the development of American prose" (5-6).

Twain's stylistic achievement was to give a marginalized voice the primary position in *Huckleberry Finn* and thus pave the way for other marginalized voices. Bridgman notes that this was only one step in a longer process. For our purposes, we must remember that Huck's values gain no better than a pyrrhic victory in the novel; finally he cannot fight the dominant structures because he cannot believe that they are wrong. After finally creating a vernacular character that has as much authority as a speaking voice can have in a novel, Twain has that voice abrogate that authority to someone the voice considers to have the authority of the dominant discourse community.

Henry Nash Smith writes that Twain's "efforts to find an alternative to the prevailing cult of gentility . . . appear in his work as a series of difficulties in the management of narrative

viewpoint” (vii). One can quibble with particular phrases, but one of the goals in Twain’s struggle with narrative viewpoint is to authorize vernacular voices—to show that the dominant discourse does not necessarily have superior access to truth or wisdom. Twain found himself trying to authorize speaking voices, ones outside of the dominant discourse, in a medium that privileged the written. The method he finally arrived at was the removal of the standard authorizing voice. One of the things we will see in this chapter is that Twain moved his author-surrogate narrators, the authorial voices, farther into the background until, in the case of *Huckleberry Finn*, he is almost imperceptible. In *Huckleberry Finn*, there is an authorial presence, but he does not dominate the primary narrative voice.

The style of the narrative voice in *Huckleberry Finn* has been described as vernacular or colloquial. Vernacular is broadly defined as the “native language of a country or people; sometimes it is extended to include native customs as well” (Childers and Hentzi). Bridgman notes that vernacular is the noun directly relating to the adjective “colloquial” (17). So vernacular is language in a colloquial style.

Porter G. Perrin argues that the vernacular “now usually means Nonstandard and perhaps Informal English, the native homely, spoken language as contrasted with formal or literary English, usually with the implication that the vernacular has more vitality and force” (Qtd. in Bridgman 18). While Perrin suggests that the vernacular “usually” contains an implication of “vitality and force,” Bridgman finds this definition lacking, suggesting that Perrin believes this usual implication is a defining characteristic:

The idiom marked by formality and appearing in print is ‘standard.’ However, the definition continues, it is usually thought to be less forceful than the vernacular. For the vernacular to be regarded as possessing more force and vitality than standard English is perhaps a triumph of democratic sentiment, but it is no great advance over the opposite

nineteenth-century assumption that the lower strata of society made animal noises (that is, spoke the vernacular) while the upper, educated classes emitted harmonies (standard English). If one attempts to particularize the general description of the vernacular offered by this modern definition, one may find it difficult to imagine a 'native homely, spoken language,' for such a definition reflects nostalgia for a rural simplicity no longer, if ever, available. While the definition is emotionally accurate, it is practically useless. (18)

There is a certain amount of nostalgia in Perrin, but this doesn't necessarily invalidate contrasting the vernacular with a formal or literary language. The difficulty lies more in finding an apt definition of the non-literary language than with saying that the vernacular has marked difference from the literary language. Bridgman's first attempt at defining vernacular—the colloquial style—is a good starting place:

The answer most ready at hand is to define the colloquial mode as any prose written as if it were spoken by someone. To this, one must add that the presence of a narrator is no guarantee that the result will be colloquial, just as, conversely, the basic features of colloquial writing may appear even without an announced narrator. Those colloquial features are derived from the psychology of speech. (20)

It is particularly helpful to say that the features are derived from the "psychology of speech." The colloquial voice is not merely spoken; however, it is also indicative of a nonstandard dialect. Certainly spokenness is not an adequate criterion, as one very significant example will demonstrate. In George Washington Harris' *Sut Lovingood: Yarns Spun By a Nat'ral Born Durn'd Fool* almost all of the prose is written as if it were spoken by someone. The two most prominent voices represented are of the narrator "George," who obviously is meant to represent the author, and the storytelling character Sut Lovingood. Both characters utterances are contained in quotation marks in most works, though some of the chapters are made up only of Sut's speech and do not use even initial quotation marks. Every chapter of the book is a storytelling event where Sut is the teller and George is the story listener, though sometimes, later in the book after the setting has been established, this is only implied. It is a represented dialogue between these

two characters with minimal diegesis; there is some description of Sut and his surroundings, and occasionally phrases like “he said” are included. Only one of these characters, however, uses the vernacular.

The entire preface of *Sut Lovingood* is quoted dialogue. George begins with a question: “We must have a preface, Sut; your book will then be ready. What shall I write?” (viii). Ben Harris McClary writes that “Sut’s mountaineer speech [is] set within the framework of George’s stilted conventional language” (234). Sut’s language is almost immediately marked as different, his syntax and word choice are different, and his pronunciation is marked as different by both phonetic writing and eye dialect. He quickly states his difference explicitly. “Sumtimes, George, I wishes I cud read an’ write, jis’ a littil; but then hits bes’ es hit am, fur ove all the fools the world hes tu contend wif, the edicated wuns am the worst; they breeds ni ontu all the devilment a-gwine on” (ix).

Though both of these characters are represented as speaking, their modes of speech are markedly different. Sut speaks in what Paul Bowdre calls a substandard dialect. If George, who Bridgman calls “the representative of normality” (27), is using any sort of dialect, it is not marked in any way in the text. Even though he is represented as speaking, George still distinguishes himself as a master of the dominant discourse. Quotation marks are the only difference we see between George’s speech and his writing; there is no difference in vocabulary or grammatical features. It is level of language that distinguishes the two characters; the narrator is not using the vernacular, even when he speaks. It is not important that he be represented as writing; it is important that he is a writer.

The writerly character’s status is based on his ability to adhere to the language of the

dominant discourse community, and this assumes that he is also adhering to other social attitudes and behaviors. Henry Nash Smith widens the definition of “vernacular” to also include ethical and aesthetic assumptions.

The most obvious distinction between ‘straight’ and ‘low’ characters in writing of this sort lay in their speech; the exploitation of local dialects was one of the most common sources of comedy. It is therefore appropriate to use the term ‘vernacular’ to designate not only the language of rustic or backwoods characters but also the values, the ethical and aesthetic assumptions, they represent. (4)

We can define the vernacular only negatively, perhaps, particularly if we are going to distinguish it from dialect and mimetic voice. Bowdre defines a dialect primarily by its use of non-standard spelling. He differentiates substandard dialect from regional dialect. Regional dialect consists of non-standard spellings used to “indicate pronunciations that are standard in a certain region (or regions) of the United States” (2). A substandard dialect, on the other hand, uses non-standard spelling to “represent pronunciations which are not standard in any section of the country” (2). Dialect refers to mimetic voice while the vernacular refers to all nonstandard dialect. Bowdre also distinguishes between these two types of dialect and eye dialect:

Eye dialect consists of words and groups of words which for any one of a number of reasons have been spelled in a manner which to the eye is recognizably non-standard, but which to the ear still indicates a pronunciation that is standard throughout the United States or, in most instances, throughout the English-speaking world . . . Thus the two spellings represent the same phonetic shape; no difference in what they represent is detectable to the ear. The eye, however, detects a considerable difference in the appearance of the two spellings. (1)

In the example of Sut’s dialect above, I would argue that “littel” for “little,” and “ove” for “of” are examples of eye dialect. More clearly the use of “tu” for “to,” and “wuns” for “ones” signal no pronunciation difference. They only signal that Sut’s speech is different from George’s. These are not the only examples of eye dialect in the passage, which also contains many nonstandard

spellings that are attempts to represent different pronunciations.

Bowdre's distinctions will become particularly useful in discussion of *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. Right now they are interesting because the short stories we are looking at make little or no use of regional or eye dialect. As Sumner Ives points out, in the case of regional dialects this may be merely because the regional dialects that educated people in these works speak are considered the proper English pronunciation by the authors. "As a matter of fact, the speech of educated persons is not ordinarily represented in 'dialectal' spelling by authors who are portraying their own region. . . . the speech of persons from the educated classes is shown without the 'dialectal' indication found in the speech of the less educated" (159). But there is more to mark literary dialect than simply pronunciation. Ives writes that "an author's . . . representation may consist merely in the use of an occasional spelling change, like FATHUH rather than *father*, or the use of a word like *servigrou*s; or he may attempt to approach the scientific accuracy by representing all the grammatical, lexical, and phonetic peculiarities that he has observed" (137).

The language of the narrator of *Sut Lovingood* is unmarked by non-standard spellings, and his level of vocabulary clearly marks him as educated. In all of the short stories I will discuss in this chapter, there are only three types of voice: the genteel, which is the voice of a personal authorial surrogate, and two levels of mimetic voice. The genteel voice is an individual voice which displays mastery of the dominant discourse and is represented as the writer of the work. Even if he is represented as speaking, he uses substandard spelling or idioms only in an ironic or condescending manner. The second type is a storytelling character—a character represented, in these examples, in literary dialect—a mimetic, speaking voice which, in these instances, would

have to be considered as speaking in a substandard dialect. The third consists of any other mimetic voices used by the previous two.

In *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, the narrator is not a writer; he is not part of the dominant discourse community. In what may now seem an inevitable and logical progression, Twain, along with some of his contemporaries, reduced the mediating presence of the educated, genteel narrator characteristic of Southwestern humor and thereby raised the potential for the marginalized speaking voice to have discursive authority. The personal voice of Huck Finn was developed from the dynamic where an intradiegetic narrator, writing in the voice of cultural authority, presented a mimetic voice—a metadiegetic narrator—a storytelling character. Huck is an example of mimetic voice used by an author, instead of a narrator. Twain's achievement was to make the mimetic voice of Huckleberry Finn the intradiegetic narrator, and therefore the most authoritative voice in the work. Through this he attempted to give the power of the pen to what Kenneth Lynn calls "an ignorant river waif" (96).

Before we look more closely at Huck, we will look at some of Twain's most important short stories. We will see Twain progressively move his authorial presence further into the background, and how these short stories negotiate the speakerly paradox. In "How to Tell a Story," Twain frames a traditional story inside an essay describing proper storytelling technique because it is a story that cannot be effectively translated to print in a conventional manner. All of the versions of the Jumping Frog story and "A True Story" are represented storytelling events that Twain claimed were based on actual storytelling events where he was a story listener. They both employ a framing device similar to that of what Walter Blair calls the "mock oral tale" characteristic of Southwestern humor. Though both stories follow some generic conventions of

southwestern humor, they also show an author who is struggling with the conventional notions of narrative authority and who has a deep understanding of storytelling events.

There is no question that the cultures of traditional orality that Mark Twain experienced, both in his childhood in Missouri and his travels in the west, had a tremendous influence on his thought and writings. Twain's love of storytelling is unquestioned. In "How to Tell a Story," Twain writes "I do not claim that I can tell a story as it ought to be told. I only claim to know how a story ought to be told, for I have been daily in the company of the most expert story-tellers for many years" (263). His success on the lecture platform and the anecdotal evidence from family, friends and acquaintances suggest that his disparaging his own skill is modesty of some sort. He certainly participated in a great many storytelling events. Fred Lorch writes of Twain's "exposure to a number of exceptionally able raconteurs and his own gradual absorption of their skills. The importance of this has long been recognized in the development of Mark Twain as a writer" (9).

Lorch's description echoes Albert Bates Lord's description of the development of Yugoslavian epic singers. "Before he actually begins to sing, he is, consciously or unconsciously, laying the foundation. He is learning the stories and becoming acquainted with the heroes and their names, the faraway places and the habits of long ago. . . . at the same time he is imbibing the rhythm of the singing and to some extent the thoughts as they are expressed in song" (21). There are differences, of course, but Twain was raised in the midst of a storytelling tradition and that experience influenced his life and his fiction. This influence is not limited to the stories themselves. He also absorbed the uses of language characteristic of traditional storytelling—the rhythm, the mannerisms and the particular language. This language also influenced the way he



engaged the world. Lorch cites Twain's mother as one able storyteller he learned from:

But in those early years Mark Twain had the high fortune of listening to other masterful raconteurs besides his mother . . . It was during these early years, also, that he heard and never forgot the stories told at his Uncle John Quarles' farm, near Florida, Missouri, where, up to the age of twelve, he spent most of his summers. (10)

In his autobiography Twain specifically recalls storytelling events at his uncle's farm. The primary storyteller was the slave Uncle Dan'l.

I know the look of Uncle Dan'l's kitchen as it was on privileged nights when I was a child, and I can see the white and black children grouped on the hearth, with the firelight playing on their faces and the shadows flickering upon the walls, clear back toward the cavernous gloom of the rear, and I can hear Uncle Dan'l telling the immortal tales which Uncle Remus Harris was to gather in his books and charm the world with, by and by; and I can feel again the creepy joy which quivered through me when the time for the ghost-story of the 'Golden Arm' was reached—and the sense of regret, too, which came over me, for it was always the last story of the evening, and there was nothing between it and the unwelcome bed. (121-22)

We see that the story "Golden Arm" was, in itself, an important one to Twain. He performed it on the platform frequently, and sent a version to Joel Chandler Harris in 1881 "suggesting that it would make a good Uncle Remus story" (Burrison 44). Harris asked around and found a different version (Shiny Pennies) of the story being told in Atlanta. Harris published a version of Shiny Pennies as "A Ghost Story" in *Nights with Uncle Remus* shortly afterward. "It is interesting to note that on Mark Twain's reading tour with George Washington Cable in 1884-1885, during which Twain's 'Ghost Story' was a constant feature, he would alternate, from city to city, his own 'Golden Arm' version with Harris' 'stolen coins' versions, presumably to avoid the monotony of telling the exact same story time and again" (Burrison 11-12).

As Burrison writes, Twain "acquired the tale in his childhood through an unselfconscious traditional process" (13). Twain inserts the Golden Arm into his work "How to Tell a Story." He also makes it clear that the experience of this story cannot be adequately realized in print. As

Burrison notes, “‘The Golden Arm,’ even more than many other folktales, is ear literature, far more effective when heard than when read to oneself” (13). While describing the American art of humorous storytelling, which he specifically qualifies as “by word of mouth, not print” (264), Twain describes four important features. For our purposes now, the fourth is of some interest. “The fourth and last basis of the American art of storytelling is the pause” (267). He justifies the use of the “Golden Arm” as an example of a story that relies on well-measured pauses to have its effect.

His interest in the tale extended beyond this short story. Twain inserted excerpts from his daughter Suzy’s biography of him into his autobiography. In one excerpt she mentions the “Golden Arm” specifically:

He read ‘A Trying Situation’ and ‘The Golden Arm,’ a ghost story that he heard down South when he was a little boy. ‘The Golden Arm’ papa had told me before, but he had startled me so that I did not much wish to hear it again. But I had resolved this time to be prepared and not to let myself be startled, but still papa did, and very very much; he startled the whole roomful of people and they jumped as one man. (61-62)

Twain writes that the secret to making a whole roomful of people jump is a well-measured pause followed by abrupt movement and speech. Part of the reason Twain includes this excerpt is the pride he takes in correctly executing the pause to startle Suzy, even though she had already heard the story told and been startled. Like a two-out-of-three rock-paper-scissors match, Twain knows that Suzy knows that he hopes to startle her, and still he does. The exact pause necessary to startle a little girl a second time, one who is far less likely to be a far-gone auditor is different, as each pause is in each performance.

He frames “the Golden Arm” in the form of storytelling instruction. In the script of the story he inserts parenthetical stage directions, for example “(pause—awed, listening attitude)”

(269). The last parenthesis never closes:

Den de voice say, *right at his year*—‘W-h-o--g-o-t--m-y--g-o-l-d-e-n *arm*?’ (You must wail it out very plaintively and accusingly; then you stare steadily and impressively into the face of the farthest-gone auditor—a girl, preferably—and let that awe-inspiring pause begin to build itself in the deep hush. When it has reached exactly the right length, jump suddenly at that girl and yell, ‘*You’ve* got it!’

If you’ve got the *pause* right, she’ll fetch a dear little yelp and spring right out of her shoes. But you *must* get the pause right; and you will find it the most troublesome and aggravating and uncertain thing you ever undertook. (270)

Even the last bit of dialogue is inside the parenthetical stage directions. It is in parentheses, or at least can be, because it cannot be adequately dramatized in the kinds of represented speech available to writers. The dramatic effect of the story is neither heightened nor diminished by this method because it can only be properly realized aurally. Obviously the narrator of a written work cannot single out a particularly susceptible reader and write in a pause in such a way as to make that reader yelp, dearly or otherwise. Also, dramatizing this moment is not particularly effective. In fact the only way to dramatize this is to have a represented story-listening character.

Twain frames the Golden Arm in such a way that the mimetic voice of the storyteller is also the authorial voice, albeit in a different context. He shows that the spoken voice is a different means of expression—not necessarily a secondary or a better one—simply a different one. The mastery of oral storytelling is as practiced a skill as any literary venture. In this instance the master of literary discourse is also the master of spoken discourse—a discourse learned at the feet of a slave.

One speculation I want to make is that the storytelling events he participated in as a listener and as a teller were very important to Twain, and the Golden Arm was closely related to his memory of these experiences. So important that he not only performed it frequently (publicly and privately), he also included his daughter’s writing about it in his autobiography, as well as

his personal reminiscences of hearing it as a child, sent a version to Harris encouraging him to print it, and made the story a crucial part of “How to Tell a Story.” He mentioned this story in print in all of these instances even though he clearly understood that the story could not be adequately realized in that medium.

In “How to Tell a Story,” Twain shows how one part of the art of humorous storytelling cannot be realized in print. Another part of that art, and the mastery of it, concerns what many critics have come to call the deadpan style. Twain’s use of the deadpan style in his platform performances and his advocacy of it in print have heightened what Peter Messent calls the indeterminacy of “The Jumping Frog of Calaveras County.”

Twain explains part of the deadpan style, and names Artemus Ward as one of the masters of it, in “How to Tell a Story.” Its foundation is in the storyteller’s pretending to be unaware of the humor of his story. “The humorous story is told gravely; the teller does his best to conceal the fact that he even dimly suspects that there is anything funny about it” (264). Henry Wohnam writes that Twain’s platform speaking technique “owed a great deal to Artemus Ward, whose deadpan absurdities Twain had witnessed and appreciated” (147). Wohnam also argues that his style was not learned from Ward:

Twain’s platform technique was a direct and uncomplicated extension of the yarn-spinning style he had known since childhood. The persona he invented for the stage was that of a tall-tale teller who speaks gravely but knows better. His drawling speech and affected seriousness served as an invitation to excessively naive listeners—if any such listeners could really have existed—to adopt a correspondingly grave interpretation of his words, while the yarn-spinner shared a tacit joke with those members of the audience who saw through the deadpan and appreciated its crafted absurdity. (147)

The challenge in interpreting the Jumping Frog story lies in determining who exactly is appreciating what and whether the absurdity of the tale is crafted or unconscious. The actual

story inside the frame may be merely an amusing oral performance, but the frame calls the purpose and meaning of the event into question. The genteel narrator, who we are called on to identify directly with the author, claims to write the story as an example of a trick played on him. Apparently, a friend has tricked him into listening to a pointless narrative told by a boorish storyteller. He flees the event at the earliest possible moment because it is, among other things, rambling and disjointed. Of course in “How to Tell a Story,” Twain identifies the humorous story as one that is “rambling and disjointed” (264). So we are left with a narrator, a genteel narrator who is supposed to act as our guide and mediator, who finds a deadpan performance, the height of humorous storytelling, dull and pointless. Our educated guide is ignorant of the proper way to interpret the story. But before we talk more about this narrator and establish the meaning of the frame of the story, we have to address the fact that the frame itself is not stable.

“First published as ‘Jim Smiley and His Jumping Frog’ in the New York *Saturday Press* (18 November 1865), the story was reprinted ten times in the ten years following its initial publication” (Wilson 163). There were some changes in some of those versions; “the many authorial changes were designed, for the most part, to increase both the number and consistency of nonstandard spellings so as to enrich the regional flavor of the tale” (Wilson 163). The version that appeared in Twain’s first book, *The Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras County and Other Sketches*, which was published by Charles Henry Webb in 1867, has significant changes in the frame. Twain published a version that included a French translation and his translation back into English in 1875. This version was occasioned in response to a French version of the story published by *Revue des Deux Mondes*. “Private History of the ‘Jumping Frog’ Story,” which was written in response to Twain’s receiving a copy of a version of the story that Arthur Sidgwick

claimed was of ancient Greek origin, was first published in the April 1894 issue of the *North American Review* (Wilson 164). All of these versions, published in a span of twenty-nine years, include the basic story that Twain first recorded in his notebook in 1863, which is here quoted in full:

Coleman with his jumping frog—bet stranger \$50—stranger had no frog, & C got him one—in the meantime stranger filled C’s frog full of shot and he couldn’t jump—the stranger’s frog won. (80)

The available evidence strongly suggests that a miner named Ben Coon told Twain this story. In a letter to Jim Gillis, who was with Twain when he heard the story, Twain reminded Gillis of the specific storytelling event that helped make his literary reputation:

You remember the one gleam of jollity, that shot across our dismal sojourn in the rain and mud of Angel’s Camp—I mean that day we sat around the tavern stove and heard that chap tell about the frog and how they filled him with shot. And you remember how we quoted from the yarn and laughed over it, out there on the hillside while you and dear old stoker panned and washed. I jotted down the story in my notebook that day and I would have been glad to get ten or fifteen dollars for it—I was just that blind. I published that story, and it became widely known in America, India, China, England—and the reputation it made for me has paid me thousands and thousands of dollars since. (qtd. in Williams 90)

There are two speculations I’d like to make based on this letter. One is that there is no evidence in this private letter, or from Twain’s notebook, what kind of narrator Coon was. It does suggest that hearing him tell stories was a pleasant experience, but it gives no indication of the manner of his telling. Perhaps, then, the description of the deadpan storyteller, Simon Wheeler, is entirely fictional. Certainly his calling the event a “gleam of jollity” conflicts with Twain’s description of the event in “A Private History”: “in my time I have not attended a more solemn conference” (624).

The second speculation I’d like to put forth is that Twain’s memory of quoting from the yarn and laughing about it with friends during their work could have been a strong enough that

some of Coon's language may have survived, even though Twain made no notes about it. I am thinking specifically about the stranger's repeated phrase "I don't see no p'int about that frog that's any better'n any other frog." Retelling the story among friends could lodge some catch phrases in his mind.

I cannot hope to prove either of these speculations, nor are they vitally important in our effort to understand the story itself. However, in my discussion of "A True Story," the question of Twain's recall of specific language will come up again, and I want to advance the possibility that a key phrase like that would have stuck with Twain. And, more importantly, that his sparse notebook entry could have evoked more of the experience in his memory of the experience than it may suggest. On the other point, Coon could have been consciously or unconsciously deadpan or he could have been as animated as the Big Bear of Arkansas. What certainly is important is Twain's consistent insistence in print that Coon always seemed in dead earnest and that he never betrayed knowledge that the story was funny. In "The Private History" he calls the man who told the story a "dull and solemn Californian" (264). However Ben Coon told the story, the storytelling character Simon Wheeler never betrays that he is aware of the comedy inherent in his tale.

Though it is generally held that Coon was Twain's source for the basic story, there were three versions of the story published before Twain's. Jim Townsend's "A Toad Story," was published in the *Sonora Herald* on 11 June 1853; Henry P. Leland's, "Frogs Shot Without Powder," appeared in the *New York Spirit of the Times*, 26 May 1855; and the *San Andreas Independent* published Samuel Seabough's, "Tricks and Defeats of Sporting Genius," on 11 December 1858 (Wilson 166). Twain probably wrote his first version in 1865. In all of these

tales, a frog ends up with buckshot in his mouth. Even though Seabough's version, which Bernard De Voto argues Twain had read, is set in Calaveras County, it has no jumping contest, and only makes a weak pun on the word "shot." As Roger Penn Cuff argues, Twain "may have read any or all of the three accounts mentioned or he may have seen none of them" (156). It is theoretically possible for Twain to have read all of these, but he need not have in order to have created his version. George Williams III summarizes the argument that I find the most convincing:

'Lying' Jim Townsend wrote a brief version of the jumping frog story which appeared in the *Sonora Herald* in 1853. Angel's Camp, where Twain would first hear the story of the jumping frog, was but twenty miles from Sonora. After Townsend's publication of the jumping frog story, miners retold it throughout the mining camps until the original source was forgotten. Twain was to rehear Townsend's story in Angel's Camp eleven years after Townsend originally published it. (64)

If we are to believe Williams, Twain had heard a story created by a newspaper writer that entered an oral tradition in Northern California. But this is not the only source Twain used for his short story. The basic story of the jumping frog contest is central to the work, but Twain augmented this story with two episodes which demonstrate Jim Smiley's penchant for gambling, and provide a great deal of the humor of the work. This sort of stringing together of discrete episodes, sometimes from different sources, is common in oral storytelling.

After some iterative examples of Smiley's gambling, which steadily escalate in absurdity to a specific example of Smiley betting against the survival of the ailing wife of a Parson, Wheeler tells of a horse of Smiley's that people called the fifteen-minute nag. Along with containing humorous description of the horse, the episode helps establish Smiley's adeptness at gambling, and at deception. "He used to win money on that horse, for all she was so slow and always had the asthma or distemper, or the consumption, or something of that kind" (264).



Despite the horse's seeming incapacity and a tendency to start races poorly, she consistently finished "just about a neck ahead, as near as you could cipher it down" (264). Edgar M. Branch establishes that Twain had written several newspaper reports of horse races that are similar in theme and tone to the "fifteen minute nag" section; specifically tales of horses whose character overcomes their lack of physical ability (493-94).

The second episode concerning an animal Smiley owned is more unlikely than the first, and becomes more unlikely as it goes on. Smiley's bull-pup, Andrew Jackson, appears as unimpressive as the fifteen-minute nag, and has the same ability to appear like a loser early in contests and finally emerge victorious. His victories hinge on his "pet holt." When victory for the other dog seemed insured he would grab on to his opponent's hind leg and hold on until he secured victory. In a classic bit of comic escalation, Andrew Jackson is defeated when he comes up against an opponent with no hind legs, which is unlikely enough, but his reaction is more unlikely still. After losing to the crippled dog, the pup "he give Smiley a look as much to say his heart was broke, and it was *his* fault, for putting up a dog that hadn't no hind legs for him to take holt of, which was his main dependence in a fight, and then he limped off a piece and laid down and died" (264-65).

An item in the *Dramatic Chronicle*, published two days after Twain had published his first sketch in that paper, notes that White's Museum had a "three-quartered dog, a fine handsome fellow, and as intelligent and good-natured an animal as we have ever had the pleasure of being introduce to, [which] is a most wonderful freak of nature" (qtd. in Branch 595) The item goes on to compare the dog to Richard III. Branch persuasively argues that Twain wrote this item. Whether he did or not, he clearly used it as a springboard for this episode in "The Jumping

Frog.”

In summary, one can argue that there are three separate sources for the episodes that make up the story inside the frame of “The Jumping Frog.” Twain used these sources, some from his own work, to create a larger work. Some might find this method of composition less than imaginative, lazy, or even plagiarism, but I don’t think Twain saw it that way. He saw the composition process as oral storytellers see it. Ong writes that in oral storytelling:

Narrative originality lodges not in making up new stories but in managing a particular interaction with this audience at this time—at every telling the story has to be introduced uniquely into a unique situation, for in oral cultures an audience must be brought to respond, often vigorously. But narrators also introduce new elements into old stories. In oral tradition, there will be as many minor variants of a myth as there are repetitions of it, and the number of repetitions can be increased indefinitely. (41-42)

Oral composition is not the creation of a new work from the artist’s imagination. Instead the storyteller creates a unique text by combining pre-existing stories and/or parts of stories (commonly called “motifs” by folklorists) in response to his specific needs at the moment of composition, he does not create a completely original story. Havelock writes that “bold invention is the prerogative of writers, in a book culture”(46). Bruce Rosenberg argues that originality in oral narrative “as we conceive of it does not exist—it is not valued—as every writer on the subject has noticed, but originality exists . . . in plot combinations of subsumed, previously discrete narratives” (161). My point is that, as someone reared on traditional storytelling, Twain was capable of and comfortable with synthesizing preexisting episodes and stories in order to create his original version of the jumping frog story.

He was also comfortable with reusing it and altering it in response to new situations. As Messent writes, “‘The Jumping Frog’ story was something of a work in continual progress for Twain, subject to authorial change and revision at any stage of its (many) reprintings” (25). There

is no one version of the jumping frog story that we can privilege as the authoritative text. Messent argues, “there was no ‘authentic’ version of the text generally available to those who actually read Twain at the time, just a story that tended to change its shape at each reappearance” (25). Some of these reappearances were spurred by outside influences—in fact by competing versions of his story. He framed two versions of the story in direct response to competing versions. In other words, different contingencies spurred Twain to publish different versions of the story.

Oral performers don't work from a fixed text as literates understand it. Instead, the moment of performance is also the moment of composition, and each performance reflects the teller's goals in that particular moment. They develop a large repertoire of tales, motifs and phrases that they use to form the specific texts of their unique performances. In effect, the "jumping frog" story was one in Twain's repertoire and he retold and reprinted it in different forms because he had different goals in the different instances, and because it was an audience favorite.

Almost all of Twain's works are episodic. Whether or not he was capable of a sustained and intricate plot, he was more comfortable stringing episodes together and using this structure to show characters' arcs. Part of the reason he was comfortable with this method is because it is analogous to methods of traditional storytelling composition that he had learned.

Bernard De Voto discusses Twain's form, and suggests that it is based on the oral anecdote:

His imagination was rich and vivid, but incapable of prolonged creation. He could not sufficiently objectify his material to give it the discipline of form. His fiction is episodic—as loosely constructed as the picaresque romances of eighteenth-century Spain or France. Form, as a reasoned and achieved technique, was not possible to him. The

mode of creation that expressed him was a loosely flowing narrative, actually or fictitiously autobiographical—a current interrupted for the presentation of episodes, for, merely, the telling of stories. It is in these stories that the best of Mark Twain exists, from the humbler level of the Jumping Frog, to the episodes in ‘Huckleberry Finn’ that are shot with fire. The oral anecdote thus becomes a narrative interlude, a sophisticated art form charged with the expression of genius. (244-45)

Ong writes: “We must not forget that episodic structure was the natural way to talk out a lengthy story line if only because the experience of real life is more like a string of episodes than it is like a Freytag pyramidal plot” (148). Ong argues that tight pyramidal plots, De Voto’s prolonged creations, are the result of the selectivity literate artists have because of their ability to revise their work, saying this “selectivity is implemented as never before by the distance that writing establishes between expression and real life” (148). As Lord explains, “For the oral poet the moment of composition is the performance. In the case of a literary poem there is a gap in time between composition and reading or performance; in the case of the oral poem this gap does not exist, because composition and performance are two aspects of the same moment” (13).

Though Twain would revise his work before publishing it, his composition process was in some ways analogous to the oral process:

Twain was not much bothered by the fact that he could not write from some well-defined plan because, by writing first to acquire his plan, Twain learned to consider creativity as essentially an act of discovery. He discovered his subject not before, but *as* he wrote. In the process of composition Twain felt that organization would occur simultaneously with his immersion in his subject and that a unique form would arise from the spontaneous adaptations of his heated imagination. (Krause 172)

Twain’s discovery of his material took place as he wrote—as he composed. He did not start with a grand outline that he then executed. This resonates very strongly with Lord’s description of the oral traditional composition process. “An oral poem is not composed *for* but *in* performance” (13).

This isn't to suggest that Twain was purely an improvisational artist. He was a tireless reviser of his work. What I am suggesting is that what he carefully revised for publication were works that were initially created in a way that were to some extent analogous to oral performance. Another way he is like an oral performer is that his creative process included recreation of earlier works at different times. For example, in *The Complete Sketches and Tales of Mark Twain*, there are two versions of the same story. "How the Author Was Sold in Newark" is basically an elaborated version of "A Deception." In both stories the narrator is meant to be, in fact, Twain. He is fooled into trying to make a blind and deaf audience member laugh. The elaborated version places the story specifically in Newark and includes more material. Both end in very similar manners. "A Deception" ends "Now was that any way to impose on a stranger and orphan like me?" (208), while the more elaborate version ends, "Now was that any way to impose on a stranger and orphan like me? I ask you as a man and a brother, if that was any way for him to do?" (218). They are clearly two versions of the same story.

As I have mentioned, Twain revised and republished the jumping frog story several times. One important change between the first published versions and the version published in Twain's first book is in the outermost frame. The first published version is framed as a letter from Twain to "A. Ward," who Twain mentions as a master of the deadpan style in "How to Tell a Story," and dramatizes as one in "First Interview with Artemus Ward." Ward was a western humorist who also was closely associated with literary hoaxes. In the sketch "First Interview with Artemus Ward," Twain is the narrator and primary audience for a deadpan storyteller, as he is in the jumping frog stories. Twain meets Ward in a restaurant. Ward ostensibly has a question about silver mining. In fact, Ward rambles disjointedly in an authoritative sounding language about

silver mining and ends his two jumbled disquisitions with questions Twain is at a loss to answer or even understand (186). In the second instance he becomes “even more fearfully impressive than ever” (187). As readers we know Twain is being sold, because of the set up which suggests a disjunction between Ward’s superhumanly earnest countenance and his purpose in speaking, and because of Ward’s rambling discourse. But the narrator only finds out when “Hingston,” who we were told earlier is present, is unable to contain himself and is observed by the narrator “quaking with a gentle ecstasy of laughter” (188).

Only the inability of a copresent auditor to maintain the deadpan manner allows the protagonist to understand he is being sold. This third party, a member of Ward’s interpretive community, helps Twain catch the joke and thereby enter into the community of insiders. Through this understanding—this initiation—Twain can begin to become a deadpan narrator himself. In the jumping frog story, there is no third party to help us negotiate the communication breakdown between Wheeler and the narrator. There is no insider who is willing to let anyone in on the joke:

In the tale the character Mark Twain (in life, the relatively unknown but promising humorist) is directed by the character Artemus Ward (in life, the nationally acclaimed maker of laughs) to find ‘a cherished companion’ of Ward’s boyhood, ‘Rev. Leonidas W. Smiley—a young minister of the gospel.’ The minister turns out to be a chimera, a shade. (Branch 600)

Instead of Reverend Smiley, the narrator finds Simon Wheeler<sup>4</sup> dozing. When he is asked, he has never heard of Leonidas Smiley. Instead he recalls Jim Smiley and begins a monologue that is uninterrupted by the narrator until it abruptly ends, conveniently subsequent to the conclusion of

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<sup>4</sup>Actually, in the first published version his name is Greeley. Since there is no substantive difference between the two characters, I will refer to the character as Wheeler throughout.

the jumping frog episode, when Wheeler is temporarily called away and the narrator is able to effect his escape. Wheeler's being called away is in the same kind of brackets that the stage directions of "How to Tell a Story" are: "[Here Simon Wheeler heard his name called from the front yard, and got up to see what was wanted.]" (264). He returns shortly and begins another tale of "thish-yer Smiley;" this one about a "yaller one-eyed cow that didn't have no tail, only just a short stump like a bannanner" (267).

The narrator makes a hasty and less-than graceful exit. "'Oh! hang Smiley and his afflicted cow!' I muttered, good-naturedly, and bidding the old gentleman good-day, I departed" (267). He flees the storytelling event, incapable of understanding or silencing Wheeler. Even retrospectively, while writing the account, the narrator is not certain a joke has been played on him:

I have a lurking suspicion that *Leonidas W. Smiley* is a myth; that my friend never knew such a personage; and that he only conjectured that if I asked old Wheeler about him, it would remind him of his infamous *Jim Smiley*, and he would go to work and bore me to death with some exasperating reminiscence of him as long and as tedious as it should be useless to me. If that was the design, it succeeded. (262)

The narrator only has a lurking suspicion based on the fact that he was finally subjected to a long, tedious and useless narrative. We are certainly encouraged to believe a joke has been played on him, but it is not explicitly stated. And we don't know if Wheeler is a knowing participant in the prank. Though Wheeler certainly inflicts the tale on the narrator, the narrator cannot tell us what level of awareness Wheeler has of Twain's reaction to the narrative. Wheeler's storytelling manner is described immediately before he begins his narrative:

He never smiled, he never frowned, he never changed his voice from the gentle-flowing key to which he tuned his initial sentence, he never betrayed the slightest suspicion of enthusiasm; but all through the interminable narrative there ran a vein of impressive earnestness and sincerity, which showed me plainly that, so far from imagining that there

was anything ridiculous or funny about his story, he regarded it as a really important matter, and admired its two heroes as men of transcendent genius in *finesse*. (263)

Having read “First Interview with Artemus Ward” and “How to Tell a Story,” we know that never betraying “the slightest suspicion of enthusiasm” and having “impressive earnestness and sincerity” are dead giveaways that a humorous story is being told. But this narrator, who should be our authoritative guide—who should be the one to tip us off to the joke—instead, himself, betrays no knowledge of Wheeler’s actual purpose. Instead the narrator believes that Wheeler plainly shows that he regarded it as “a really important matter.” Though we are certainly encouraged by the narrator to believe that a trick is being played on him, he, himself, remains unsure, and is convinced that Wheeler is entirely in earnest. As Messent argues, “if Wheeler is deceiving his auditor, there is no hard evidence of it. The author, Mark Twain, remains silent throughout the tale, and there are no other members of the Angel’s Camp community represented who might give evidence—as ‘privileged members’ of Wheeler’s audience—of a deliberate joke being played on the stranger” (30).

Messent’s argument is convincing, but one important point to make here is that it is based on the version published in Twain’s first book, and not the original version which explicitly mentions Artemus Ward. I think the use of Ward as the instigator of the joke because of his close connection to the deadpan delivery, requires us to believe that not only Wheeler, but the narrator are in on the joke and do not drop their deadpan masks at any time in the story. If we aren’t yet initiated in the ways of the American humorous story, we are not equipped to correctly interpret the manner of telling of Wheeler or the narrator. But if we are, we know that Wheeler knows the humor of the story and we know that the narrator knows. Using Ward as the instigator of the joke makes it clear that Wheeler is a deadpan storyteller, and so is Twain.



Most versions of the jumping frog story, however, make no mention of Artemus Ward. Wilson argues that the most “significant change introduced in the text of the Webb edition [Twain’s first book] is Mark Twain’s abandonment of the frame letter to ‘Mr. A. Ward’ . . . the Webb text replaces the references to A. Ward with one that more securely identifies the gentleman narrator’s ‘eastern’ connections” (163).

I think it is fair to say that the new frame does create an eastern connection, though it only strongly implies it. “In compliance with the request of a friend of mine, who wrote me from the East, I called on good-natured, garrulous old Simon Wheeler” (262). The friend who wrote may have only been visiting the east when he wrote, but this new friend does suggest that both the initial prankster, and the narrator could be from the east, and therefore less well-equipped to appreciate a humorous story. If the narrator is a stranger from the east, he may be more likely to consider Wheeler’s performance boring—he would be less likely to belong to the proper interpretive community.

The narrator’s language is markedly different than Wheeler’s dialect, as Messent points out. “The first narrator’s language is both grammatically and orthographically correct, and it only departs from Standard American English in its somewhat elaborate formality (‘hereunto append’ and ‘conjectured,’)” (31). He seems to be the genteel narrator characteristic of southwestern humor, while Wheeler’s nonstandard pronunciation puts him on a lower discursive plane.

The contrast of speech patterns of the first narrator does accordingly point to some regional dimension to the story (western vernacular versus eastern genteel), however relatively undeveloped and even blurred the boundaries between the various voices might be. The first narrator clearly belongs to a different world than Wheeler and has, as his response to the latter’s stories suggests, a different value scheme. But we are kept as readers from any substantial form of identification with him. (Messant 31)

Forrest G. Robinson comments that “generations of readers have found out too late that

identifying with the narrator of ‘The Jumping Frog’ is perilous business” (47). Yet the structure of southwestern humor relies on the reader identifying with the genteel narrator. If he decides that the vernacular character is noble or filled with an admirable vigor, we can readily agree. But this narrator flees from a storytelling event he finds boring that we can see is funny. The authorial figure isn’t the semantic authority. He states he was fooled into asking for a long and boring narration, then inflicts this narrative on us as evidence of the tedious, infuriating narrative. But it is not tedious; it is not infuriating. It is off the point if Leonidas Smiley is the point, but that is not the point—the performance of an engaging tale is the point.

Wilson argues that the narrator’s inability to understand that Wheeler is a deadpan storyteller “reverses the typical pattern in southwestern humor, for the obtuseness of Mark Twain as character disqualifies him as an authority who explicitly describes the real situation before him” (168). He cannot explain the real situation before him. He presents it with what we assume is reasonable accuracy, but he doesn’t appreciate Wheeler’s skill and artistry. The cultural authority who is supposed to guide us to understanding instead flees in confusion. Critic Richard Gray observes that:

as critics have observed time and time again, the classic humorist tale consists of a narrator, identifiable as superior in class and education, setting up the scene and bringing on the rustic characters, putting them through their violent routines complete with comic dialect, and then returning us at the end of the story to his own stable, secure world and standard English. (63)

At the end of the jumping frog the “superior” narrator flees to his stable and secure world, while the chaotic Wheeler talks on. That is, perhaps, the point. Oral storytelling doesn’t fit neatly into a newspaper sketch. It is a free-flowing, associative process that cannot be contained in a sketch or by a genteel narrator, however superior his social and language skills. The tale also suggests that

the genteel narrator's superiority may only be imagined—perhaps the voice of the vernacular storyteller should be the authoritative one. But it only suggests it.

In “A True Story, Repeated Word for Word as I Heard It,” Twain tries to break the containment of the southwestern frame tale and give the platform over to a vernacular storyteller. It is an attempt that, as we shall see, requires Twain to be very aware of the role of the two voices in his story. One thing of particular interest in this story, as it is in the jumping frog stories, is how Twain adapted and organized his recollections of an actual storytelling event and how he framed it for publication. Twain changed the story he was in told in several ways, all of them, I believe, in order to better realize the oral tale in the medium of print. Also, he ends the story, not with a coda from the genteel narrator, enclosing and containing the vernacular speaker, but with the voice of the storytelling character, ending her own narrative in her own way. And he had to end it this way in order to avoid having her voice being indulged and condescended to, as Ross argues is the case for all mimetic voices. In fact, Twain keeps the narrator out of the last two-thirds of the story in order to allow the storytelling character to establish and maintain her own authority—the authority of her own personal voice. In order to do this and to dramatize all the aspects of the storytelling event, Twain puts words that describe the character's movements into the mouth of his storytelling character.

Former slave Mary Ann Cord was a cook at Quarry Farm in Elmira, New York, where Twain stayed in 1874. Cord apparently told Twain a story from her personal experience, and after Twain had retold it to friends who gave him positive feedback, he wrote “A True Story, Repeated Word for Word as I Heard It.” He submitted it to William Dean Howells, editor of the *Atlantic*, who published it in November of 1874.

This story was somewhat of a departure for Twain, as he admitted to Howells. “I enclose also a ‘True Story’ which has no humor in it. You can pay me as lightly as you choose for that, for it is rather out of my line” (Smith and Gibson 22). The lack of humor baffled some contemporary critics, but Howells lavished enthusiastic praise on it whenever the opportunity presented itself. In a review of *Sketches New and Old*, Howells writes that “evidently the critical mind feared a lurking joke. Not above two or three notices out of hundred” recognized the story for what it was, “a study of character as true as life itself, strong, tender and most movingly pathetic in its perfect fidelity to the tragic fact” (104). As we have already seen, critics could be forgiven for fearing a lurking joke in the story, as Messent argues. “The elements of sentimentality, melodrama, and generic predictability (the separation and emotional reunion of mother and son) in the narrative are rather too close for comfort to those Twain would mercilessly burlesque elsewhere” (61). But, Messent goes on, there is no doubt in critic’s minds now that there is no joke being played and that “in terms of his control of the vernacular voice, his changing attitude towards race, and the very nature of his subject matter, this story marks an important stage in Twain’s literary development” (61).

Though the story is subtitled “Repeated Word for Word as I Heard It,” it clearly is not a word-for-word transcription. I will argue later that Twain put some words into his storytelling character’s mouth that describe her gestures during the storytelling event. There is also evidence that Twain changed one important phrase from the manuscript to the printed version. This phrase is, in itself, interesting.

At one point Aunt Rachel, the storytelling character based on Cord, describes a twenty-seven-word phrase her mother commonly used as “her word,” and even “one word.”

“she always had one word dat she said. She’s straighten herse’f up an’ put her fists in her hips an’ say, ‘I want you to understan’ dat I wa’nt bawn in the mash to be fool’ by trash! I’s one o’ de ole Blue Hen’s Chicken’s, I is!’ ’Ca’se, you see, dat’s what folks dat’s bawn in Maryland calls deyselves, an’ dey’s proud of it. Well, dat was her word. . . . So I says dat word, too, when I’s riled.” (203)

In *Huckleberry Finn*, Huck says that his father took a jug and “said he had enough whiskey for two drunks and one delirium tremens. That was always his word” (41). In both of these works, the vernacular character uses the word “word” to describe a phrase another speaker commonly repeated—so commonly that they became identified with the phrase. Lord addresses a similar phenomena in his study of epic singers. He argues that in oral cultures “the word for ‘word’ means an ‘utterance’” and that singers will not understand questions which ask specifically for a word (25). “Man without writing thinks in terms of sound groups and not in words, and the two do not necessarily coincide. When asked what a word is, he will reply that he does not know, or he will give a sound group which will vary in length from what we call a word to an entire line of poetry, or even an entire song” (25). The length of these utterances is not determined by how any system of writing organizes meaningful units of sound; it is determined by the fact that they are inextricably linked. Pap would not say he had enough whiskey for two drunks and then stop. The utterance would not be complete. Both of these vernacular characters, Huck and Aunt Rachel, use and understand “word” in an oral way.

Aunt Rachel uses her “word” to establish her identity. Neil Schmitz calls it a “familial trace” and a “documentary text” (“Mark Twain’s Civil War” 83). It is a formulaic phrase that both helps her long-lost son recognize her and a proud statement of family heritage. The part of the phrase that Twain changed was written in the original manuscript as “I ain’t no hound dog mash to be trod on by common trash.” The “mash” “trash” rhyme is retained in both versions.

There is no compelling evidence that explains the change. Susan Fisher Fishkin wonders “was he improving on Mary Ann Cord’s original story, or merely revising his record of it to read more accurately?” (33). There is no way we can establish if the change is a more accurate rendering or one that Twain did for thematic reasons, or because he thought it looked better.

Whether or not he changed this phrase, or any other phrase, this does not necessarily invalidate his claim to not have altered the story. Again, comparing Twain to singers of oral epic may provide us with some insight. Epic singers do not replicate even their own works word for word as they heard them, or as they sang them in the past, even though they sometimes claim to sing their own songs exactly the same way:

What is of importance here is not the fact of exactness or lack of exactness, but the constant emphasis by the singer on his role in the tradition. It is not the creative role that we have stressed for the purpose of clarifying a misunderstanding about oral style, but the role of conservator of the tradition, the role of the defender of the historic truth of what is being sung; for if the singer changes what he has heard in its essence, he falsifies truth. (Lord 28)

Traditional storytellers feel a responsibility to their tradition and to the tellers who came before them. If Cord’s story moved Twain as much as he claims, his feeling of responsibility could be very strong, both to the tradition and to the historical truth of her story. This responsibility does not entail parroting the tradition, but in internalizing it and recreating it as a new living entity. The exact mechanical reproduction that we may now equate with accuracy, is not the accuracy a traditional storyteller strives for. He cannot help but change the wording because memory is to imperfect a record to produce word-for-word accuracy.

We think of change in content and in wording; for, to us, at some moment both wording and content have been established. To the singer the song, which cannot be changed (since to change it would, in his mind, be to tell an untrue story or to falsify history), is the essence of the story itself. His idea of stability, to which he is deeply committed, does not include the wording, which to him has never been fixed, nor to the unessential parts

of the story. He builds his performance, or song in our sense, on the stable skeleton of narrative, which is the song in his sense. (Lord 99)

Traditional storytellers recreate the stories they have learned from their memory, and from their experience of other stories. When they recreate the story, when they tell their unique version of the story, they will not repeat it word for word, even if they could, but the commitment to their role as part of the preservation of a tradition and to the truth of the experience binds them to what they believe is the essence of the story. This emphasis on essence and truth is echoed by Fishkin, in her discussion of Twain's work on the sketch. "Whether the words on the page were Mary Ann Cord's exact words, as Twain claimed, or whether they were shaped by Twain's own ear and imagination, Twain allows the sheer force of her character and the concrete truth of her pain to shine through her colloquial speech with clarity and radiance" (99). Transmitting the force of her character and the truth of her pain on to the page is more important than exactly replicating her words.

Whatever changes he made in specific words, critics agree that Twain took great pride and made an earnest effort to reproduce her language in print in an authentic manner. Wilson writes that it is his "concern for language that reveals Mark Twain's care in composing and revising this story to give it authenticity. He copied as exactly as he could the speech and demeanor of Auntie Cord and carefully revised the dialect in proof" (268).

Twain did revise the dialect carefully in proof, but exactness was not his primary goal. His goal was to create the best representation of exactness and authenticity he could in print. His goal was to evoke the storytelling event for the reader, and to do this required something other than exact transcription. Fishkin writes that Twain "had a genius for transferring the oral into print" (4). This returns us to the speakerly paradox, to the challenge authors face who wish to

represent the spoken in print. One way Twain faced this challenge was to talk his work out. Through this exercise, and his reading of the results, Twain realized that exact phonetic reproduction wasn't the answer. He discusses his revisions of "A True Story" in a letter to Howells:

I amend dialect stuff by talking & talking & *talking* it till it sounds right-& I had difficulty with this negro talk because a negro sometimes (rarely) says 'goin'' & sometimes says 'gwyne', & they make just such discrepancies in other words-& when you come to reproduce them on paper they look as if the variation resulted from the writer's carelessness. But I want to work at the proofs & set the dialect as nearly right as possible. (Smith and Gibson 26)

Pronunciation of individual words is not always stable regardless of who is speaking. "Quite a few words in the English language have different pronunciations when they occur in an unstressed position in a sentence from those they have in a stressed position" (Bowdre 84).

Twain saw this while working on his literary dialect, in this instance with the word "going," and also saw that representing this faithfully in print looked wrong. Note that they may have sounded right when spoken aloud, but they looked wrong on the page. Print is a medium of uniformity; specific situational variations do not always translate. If he wrote his dialect as correctly as possible it would not look like an accurate representation-it would look like carelessness. Twain acknowledged that he could not get the dialect "right" and still appear authentic; he strove, instead, to get it as "nearly right as possible."

Sumner Ives, in his work "A Theory of Literary Dialect," writes that nearly all "examples of literary dialect are deliberately incomplete; the author is an artist, not a linguist or a sociologist, and his purpose is literary rather than scientific" (138). Even if the alternate spellings available to authors could adequately represent the variants of speech, an author may not choose to use them. As Ives argues, "both the author's desire to keep his representation



within readable limits and his difficulties in finding suitable spelling devices will inhibit his portrayal of a speech type. Any literary dialect, therefore, will necessarily be a partial and somewhat artificial picture of the actual speech” (152). The goal is to make this artificial rendering seem as real as possible.

Making Aunt Rachel’s literary dialect as real as possible may have required changing Cord’s words, but Twain was clearly impressed by her words and her delivery of them. Fishkin writes that Cord “told her story so artfully that Twain felt he had to do little to its structure other than start it at the beginning rather than in the middle. Her story impressed Twain as a ‘curiously strong piece of literary work to come unpremeditated from lips untrained in literary art’” (36-37). As Fishkin points out, Twain felt it necessary to make what I would call a significant change in transferring the oral tale to print. In his letter to Howells about the story Twain writes, “I have not altered the old colored woman’s story, except to begin it at the beginning, instead of the middle, as she did—and <worked> traveled both ways”<sup>5</sup> (Smith and Gibson 22-23).

Cord’s structuring her story in this way is not odd; neither is Twain’s changing it. Robert Georges argues that “most narrators do not characterize events simply, straightforwardly, and sequentially” (“Communicative Role” 54). As Ong argues, it is common for oral storytellers to begin stories at a significant point in the narrative, and then to add expository material as necessary. In fact, the idea that epics should begin *in media res* is a result of this type of narrative ordering. “Starting in ‘the middle of things’ is not a consciously contrived ploy but the original, natural, inevitable way to proceed for an oral poet approaching a lengthy narrative (very short accounts are perhaps another thing)” (Ong 144). The impulse to begin at the beginning, and then

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<sup>5</sup>In Twain’s letter the word “worked” is crossed out.

move directly forward, is in a way the result of the influence of the technologies of writing and print. More precisely, the ability to maintain a narrative in strict chronological order is the result of that technology. Working purely from memory one is bound to leave parts out that must, therefore, be alluded to outside of the chronological order. This is part of the art of oral storytelling.

Twain isn't telling a story orally. However strong the influence of traditional orality on his work and on his life, he was a professional writer transferring this story into the medium of print. Both in his manipulation of language and of the structure of the story, Twain was adapting traditional material to better suit the medium of print. Changing the structure of Cord's story made it conform more closely to the notion of story that Twain's audience had.

The story he did publish hinges on the relationship between the storytelling character, Aunt Rachel, and the story listening narrator, Misto C—. When the story begins their relationship seems unproblematic, even idyllic. She is seated respectfully below her employer and enjoying some good-natured teasing. "It was summer time, and twilight. We were sitting on the porch of the farm-house, on the summit of the hill, and 'Aunt Rachel' was sitting respectfully below our level, on the steps,—for she was our servant, and colored" (202). The relationships are set. It is a beautiful happy farm where the contented servant jokes easily with the benign master. She begins literally below the narrator's level, physically, socially and in terms of her position in the narrative—she is the secondary voice in the diegesis. She is literally being indulged and condescended to. She appears to be contented and carefree; happy and satisfied as she sits at the foot of the steps laughing. As she laughs the narrator tells us that she is a "cheerful and hearty soul, and it was no more trouble for her to laugh than it is for a bird to sing" (202). Note that the

word “trouble” is introduced here. Watching her laugh, a question occurs to the narrator, one that uses the word “trouble” again, and puts the word “into play” (Schmitz “Mark Twain’s Civil War” 82).

“Aunt Rachel, how is it that you’ve lived sixty years and never had any trouble?” (202).

This question abruptly ends her laughter, and Neil Schmitz argues causes her pain.

It is the lie of the euphemism that gives Aunt Rachel her sudden stab of pain, that snaps into sharp focus her relation to Misto C and her family, her alienated difference. “Trouble” is Misto C’s cloaking term for slavery, his denial of its experience and its consequences. *How is it you’re so merry—you who were once a slave? Slavery could not have been that bad since it has left you the joyous creature that you are.* (“Mark Twain’s Civil War” 82)

Schmitz may be overstating the case, but Aunt Rachel’s reaction to the comment is immediate and drastic. “She stopped quaking. She paused, and there was a moment of silence. She turned her face over her shoulder toward me, and said, without even a smile in her voice:—

‘Misto C—, is you in ‘arnest?’” (202-03).

This is the first time the narrator is addressed, and note that the narrator is not Mark Twain. He is not the noted humorist; he is a representation of the private citizen Samuel Clemens. He is not the genteel narrator, or at least not the burlesque of one that the name Mark Twain indicates. He is perhaps a representation of the authentic individual, one who truly believed she had known no trouble. This narrator is asked if he is a humorist or in earnest. This question “surprised me a good deal; and it sobered my manner and my speech, too” (203). Whatever his attitude before this time, he is not now a humorist, he is in earnest. He stammers out a reply:

“Why, I thought—that is, I meant—why you *can’t* have had any trouble. I’ve never heard you sigh, and never seen your eye when there wasn’t a laugh in it.” (203). The narrator’s

response to her demeanor is not typical of a genteel narrator. Already he has lost control of the event. He stutters out an explanation that he has already begun to doubt.

“She faced fairly around, now, and was full of earnestness” (203). She asked if he was in earnest and then she is represented as full of earnestness. This is not the seeming earnestness, the appearance of earnestness of Simon Wheeler; she is full of earnestness—it is a fact the narrator supplies us with, as certain as her sitting on the steps. And in all earnestness, and with all due respect, she answers his question with a story.

‘Has I had any trouble? Misto C–, I’s gwyne to tell you, den I leave it to you’” (203). She going to tell the story then allow the narrator to judge for himself. She is not going to overstep her boundaries—the truth of the story she will tell will be the evidence that the wise man will be able to evaluate. She claims, here, that the authority to judge remains with the socially superior narrator. Her authority stems only from her knowledge of her own history, whatever else her tone might foreshadow. Lanser argues that an “authorial narrator claims broad powers of knowledge and judgment. While a personal narrator claims only the validity of one person’s right to interpret her experience” (19). Like personal narrators, storytelling characters claim only the authority of their own experience. Here the genteel narrator, the representative of authority, has presented an interpretation that the subordinate voice, the voice that is indulged and condescended to, will demonstrate is incorrect.

In order to establish the scope of her trouble, she must first argue that she can have any sort of trouble analogous to her listeners. She must establish, respectfully, her own humanity. She starts slowly but strongly:

I was bawn down ‘mongst the slaves; I knows all ‘bout slavery, ‘case I ben one of ‘em my own se’f. Well, sah, my ole man—dat’s my husban’—he was lovin’ an’ kind to me, jist as

kind as you is to yo' wife. An' we had chil'en—seven chil'en—an' we loved dem chil'en jist de same as you loves yo's chil'en. Dey was black, but de Lord can't make no chil'en so black but what dey mother loves 'em.' (203)

She acknowledges that blackness is a handicap given from the Lord, but that still her love for her spouse and children is just the same as his, and therefore the grief she will shortly tell of should be a type he could imagine.<sup>6</sup> I am not claiming that she ascribes to any sort of white/black good/evil dichotomy; however, by speaking from within these terms she is able to establish a common ground with her audience. Here she maintains her difference while stressing her sameness. She will, as the story moves on, deny her difference, but for now she maintains her position at the bottom of the steps. Even though she has upset Misto C-'s comfort already, she still has to retain her social role as a servant and an inferior at this point in the telling. As she continues, however, her ability to transcend her social role will increase.

Robert Georges argues, in "Communicative Role and Social Identity in Storytelling," that storytellers and story listeners form a sort of contract during a storytelling event. They agree to "assume contrasting, but complementary, communicative roles, and that they can and will behave in ways that they and others judge to be appropriate, first and foremost, to those roles" (52). Though Misto C- and Aunt Rachel have social identities that require Aunt Rachel to defer to Misto C-, the act of becoming a storyteller gives her some rights appropriate to formulating and effectively communicating the message that Misto C- has asked for in earnest. "The implicit or explicit agreement to interact as narrator and audience member indicates a willingness to

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<sup>6</sup> Twain has Huck come to a similar conclusion about Jim in *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, when Huck sees Jim pining for his missing family. "I do believe he cared as much for his people as white folks does for theirs. It don't seem natural, but I reckon it's so" (170).

subordinate behavior appropriate to social identity to that appropriate to communicative role, while at the same time acknowledging that identity-based and role-based behaviors are intricately and inextricably interrelated” (Georges 52-3). Though she is a servant, she is also a storyteller, and she is allowed and obligated to transmit this message in answer to her superior’s query. One of Georges’ more interesting claims is that as the event continues “the social identities of storyteller and story listener become increasingly prominent while the other social identities coincident with these during the storytelling event decrease in relative prominence” (“Towards” 319). Participants become caught up in the event and tend to lose sight of their other social roles. Of course social roles are never entirely forgotten, but one thing that this story clearly illustrates is how the storyteller can bridge the boundaries of social identity and make a significant contact with her audience inside the boundaries of the storytelling event.

After Aunt Rachel has completed her exposition, she introduces the story’s complication. She tells of when she discovered that she and her family were to be auctioned off by their long-time owner. She has already established that the love and respect in a colored family, and of a colored mother, are as strong as any. If this is so, then the tragedy that she now speaks of is inescapable. This point is where we hear from the narrator for the last time.

“Aunt Rachel had gradually risen, while she warmed to her subject, and now she towered above us, black against the stars” (204). She has apparently risen from her seated position below the narrator on the steps. Realistically that shouldn’t be enough to be now towering over them. This rising, which is the last word from the narrator, describes also how she has metaphorically risen in the estimation of her auditors. They cannot ignore or explain away her story, and the experience which authorizes it. This is the only interruption in her monologue, and the last word

from the narrator. She goes on to describe the last time her family was together.

“‘Dey put chains on us an’ put us on a stan’ as high as dis po’ch,—twenty foot high,—an’ all de people stood aroun’, crowds an’ crowds” (204). It is entirely acceptable and indeed common to use objects in the sight of event participants in order to describe objects in the story. There is nothing inappropriate or transgressive about saying the owner’s porch is the same height as the auction block where her children were taken away from her. In doing this, however, the porch is transformed into a slave block, and the white residents are implicated in the culture of slavery. She towers above them, black against the stars, and implicates them in the tragedy that befell her family.

At this point, the narrator has removed himself from the story, so any information we are to glean about the event has to now come from Aunt Rachel’s speech. The first indicator she gives of her movements is a small one: “‘an’ I drops a kurtchy, so” (205). Georges argues that the codes involved in a storytelling event are not only linguistic, but also paralinguistic and kinesic (“Towards” 318). The use of the word “so” here indicates to the reader that she has replicated the curtsey for the present story listeners—that part of the message is conveyed by her physical movements.<sup>7</sup> The narrator, however, does not tell us this, because his intrusion into the monologue at this point would undermine her authority as a storyteller, as the authority of this literary work. Instead, words Mary Ann Cord may not have spoken are put in Aunt Rachel’s mouth. She narrates her own movements two more times in the work. Both of these instances

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<sup>7</sup> In *The Jumping Frog* story, Simon Wheeler indicates his gesture with speech as well. “Dan’l give a heave, and hysted up his shoulders—so, like a Frenchman.”(39). Even though the genteel narrator doesn’t interrupt Wheeler’s telling either, he does re-enter the story at the end. This is also interesting because the narrator’s initial description of Wheeler’s storytelling technique suggests that he is so solemn as to be immobile.

bear close scrutiny.

Right before she narrates the third repetition of her “word,” the repetition that will help identify her to her son, Aunt Rachel replicates her past movements for her present audience. “I jist straightened myself up, so,—jist as I is now, plum to the ceilin’, mos’—an’ I digs my fists into my hips” (206). Again the use of the word “so’ signals that her actions are part of the message being constructed. This indicator would be enough for physically present auditors. Twain gives his readers a clearer indication of this by having her add “jist as I is now.” Having already been describe by the narrator as towering over him, she now describes herself as rising even further—“plum to the ceiling.” Again, most of this elevation seems metaphorical, whatever the ceilings actual height, because the next time we are made aware of her orientation she is stooping at Misto C—’s feet.

Aunt Rachel describes in detail the climactic scene where she and her son recognize each other, and she helps dramatizes the scene by using Misto C— as a prop. “I was a-stoopin’ down by de stove,—jist so, same as if yo’ foot was de stove,—an’ I’d opened de stove do’ wid my right han’,—so, pushin’ it back, jist as I pushes yo’ foot” (207). She begins, appropriately enough for her station, stooping at the narrator’s feet. She uses one of his feet as a representation of a stove door—a relatively neutral and harmless analogy, and her pushing his foot is neither intimate nor threatening. Her next actions, though following logically and seemingly effortlessly in terms of the story she is engaged in telling, break down all pretense of the narrator’s superiority. She rises from her subservient position and faces the narrator, eye to eye. Or nearly so.

—an’ I’d jist got de pan o’ hot biscuits in my han’ an’ was ‘bout to raise up, when I see a black face come aroun’ under mine, an de eyes a-lookin’ up into mine, jist as I’s a-lookin’ up clost under yo’ face now; an I jist stopped *right dah*, an’ never budged!” (207)



Again, there is an overt indicator in her monologue that her past actions are being staged inside the storytelling event, and that these actions are necessary to successfully transmit the message of the event. Aunt Rachel is up close under the narrator's face. This violation of the appropriate deferential distance that existed at the beginning of the story is not describe by the narrator, because his description or commentary, positive, negative or otherwise, would have reestablished the hierarchy inside the story. It would have made the narrator the explicit semantic authority—our guide to understanding the meaning of Aunt Rachel's monologue. Instead we are not given his reaction, we are merely given Aunt Rachel's words and her description of her actions. Perhaps we can then judge for ourselves.

She looks at her son, and at the narrator, and she realizes that she sees her son. “‘I jist gazed, an’ gazed, so; an’ de pan begin to tremble, an’ all of a sudden I *knowed!* De pan drop’ on de flo’ an’ I grab his lef’ han’ an’ shove back his sleeve,—jist so, as I’s doin’ to you,—an’ den I goes for his forehead an’ push de hair back, so.’” (207) She first touches his arm; she expressly states what would be obvious to present auditors, telling the reader that she is touching the narrator, and then pushes his hair back, “so,” all the while gazing into his eyes, and recognizing “her own.” “‘Boy!’ I says, ‘if you an’t my Henry, what is you doin’ wid dis welt on yo’ wris’ an’ dat sk-yar on yo’ forehead? De Lord God ob heaven be praise’, I got my own ag’in!’” (207). The narrator has gone from a social superior to an inanimate object, to her long-lost son—one of her own. Aunt Rachel has gone from implicating Misto C— in the culture of slavery and her own tragedy to acknowledging their common humanity. In doing this she establish, above all, her own humanity.

The story closes with Aunt Rachel's last word on the subject an ironic evaluative

comment, which returns us to the present and what we now all know was an ignorant question: ““Oh, no, Misto C—, *I hadn’t had no trouble. An’ no joy!*” (207). Her coda returns us to the frame and the genteel narrator, enclosing the narrative and bringing it to a conclusion, but this is not a humorous sketch, and his world is no longer safe and secure. The frame is reasserted, but the storytelling character, not the narrator, does it. Instead of reporting an observation of quaint rustic behavior, the narrator has been struck mute by an experience richer and more deserving of narrative authority than his own, and a teller who deftly conveys that experience. I would argue that her evaluative comment is an extrarepresentational act. Through her story she has demonstrated her discursive authority inside and outside the fiction. If Aunt Rachel does not gain authority outside the fiction, her authority is certainly greater than the narrator’s. her authority has been expanded to “‘nonfictional’ referents and [she is allowed to engage], from ‘within’ the fiction, in a culture’s literary, social and intellectual debates” (Lanser 17).

Critics have called the narrator of “A True Story” the butt of Twain’s joke—equating him with other genteel narrators that Twain subjected to ridicule for their ignorance and naivete. This is not, however, an overconfident, self-assured ass who is hoisted on his own petard for our amusement. This is an earnest witness, a man who even Aunt Rachel says is a kind and loving husband and father, a man who has also deluded himself as to Aunt Rachel’s personal history of suffering. As Lee Smith writes “we as readers *become* the oblivious questioner, all of us, first showing our ignorant bias in even asking such a question, then forced to open our minds and hearts as we listen to the answer” (“Introduction” xl). A comedic narrator who carries these kind of misconceptions can be dismissed as a fatuous ass, but a kind and wise narrator who still holds these beliefs suggests that all of us hold these beliefs, all of us are willfully blind, all of us are

accountable, and all of us are “our own.” The importance of Aunt Rachel transforming the narrator from a stove to her son is both striking and well documented. What I want to stress is that assuming the role of storyteller authorizes her to make these connections—to touch Misto C—, physically and metaphorically, personally and meaningfully. She is allowed to go from that contact to a coda that can chastize him for believing that her life could have had no trouble.

The other point is that only by withdrawing the voice of the primary narrator from the work can the author allow his storytelling character to establish her own authority. Of course, Twain is still the one authorizing this voice—the author still has the power to decide where and how Aunt Rachel may establish a voice. However structurally inevitable her secondary status is, during the act of narration her authority is established—she knows more about this topic than the narrator; she holds more knowledge and more wisdom. She remains a mimetic voice that is being presented by a narrator inside quotation marks, but she establishes her own discursive authority. This type of mimetic voice is analogous, I would argue, to Lanser’s notion of personal voice.

Personal voice, for Lanser, is used only by narrators who tell their own story inside the fiction. If we were to call Aunt Rachel a narrator (which I wouldn’t do, but Genette would) hers is a personal voice—one whose authority is contingent upon her actions inside the fiction. She is certainly not the primary narrator; she is a storytelling character, which is a specific type of mimetic voice, one whose authority is contingent in the same way as a personal voice, but one that is also represented as speaking to present auditors. For there to be a storytelling character there must be a defined storytelling event. In this case Aunt Rachel tells her story to Misto C— in the evening on the front porch.

A storytelling character uses a private voice, which Lanser defines as “narration directed

toward a narratee who is a fictional character.” She contrasts this with public voice: “narration directed toward a narratee ‘outside’ the fiction who is analogous to the historical reader” (15). The two most common types of private personal voice are letter-writing and storytelling characters. Both of these types of characters engage in acts of narration that are private in Lanser’s sense. I would argue that both of these voices are presented by narrators of some sort. Neither of these types of characters directly address the reader—they often do not know that there will ever be any readers to address. Their intended audience is inside the fiction. Simon Wheeler is talking to the unnamed narrator, who is closely identified with the author, and not to any reader; Aunt Rachel is directly addressing and touching Misto C–, and however much Miss Rosa, in Faulkner’s *Absalom, Absalom!*, may or may not wish that Quentin (her story listener) will some day write her story, she is telling it to him and not to the historical reader. Aunt Rachel and Simon Wheeler are storytelling characters. They are both, clearly, mimetic voices presented by narrators. Their methods of gaining discursive authority are analogous to those of personal narrators and of oral storytellers.

It may be problematic to call Aunt Rachel a personal voice, but she is certainly an example of mimetic voice. As Ross writes “‘Mimetic voice’ is constituted by those features of a text’s discourse that prompt readers to regard a particular portion of the text’s total discourse as the utterance of an imagined person” (67). The use of the narrator to set the scene and quotation marks show that this is the character’s utterance. This mimetic voice is presented by a narrator, an authorial presence, who then withdraws from the stage. Regardless of her exact status, Aunt Rachel establishes her authority, or is allowed to establish her authority by an authorial voice that chooses to withdraw into the background after setting the stage. At the end she has established

her authority both inside and outside the fictive world. Her experience has given her the wisdom and the right to speak.

In *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, Twain sets the stage for Huckleberry Finn and then allows him to speak in his own voice throughout the entire work. The difference between Huck and Aunt Rachel as narrative voices, as narrators, as storytelling characters, as mimetic voices, is only one of degree. The genteel narrator—the authorial voice—has taken one step further into the background. But it is the step that distinguishes narrators from storytelling characters. Aunt Rachel’s private narration to Misto C— is mimetically presented by a genteel narrator. Though there is an authorial voice in *Huck Finn*, he presents a public narration that has no clear setting and is not as obviously mediated. Huck is aware that his audience is a readership. Aunt Rachel is a storytelling character; Huck is a narrator. Though he is one step back, the authorial presence is still felt in the novel. Tom Quirk writes:

It is not for nothing that Twain added the elaborate introductory apparatus to his novel—the heliotype image of him as a frontispiece, sternly presiding over his book; his parenthetical identification of Huck as ‘Tom Sawyer’s comrade’; his setting of the scene and the time of the novel; his ‘Notice’ and his ‘Explanatory.’ These were no doubt, in part, attempts to reassert his own authorial presence in the narrative to follow. (99)

There is an authorial presence that makes itself felt before the first chapter. Lanser notes that “substantive prefaces, generalizations in the narrator’s voice, explicit allusions by the narrator to literature or history, direct addresses to a public narratee, and explicit references to the narrating subject or the narrative act” are “extrarepresentational structures” which are “constituents of authoriality”(48). Though these prefatory sections are very short, they are direct addresses to the readership and are explicit references to the narrating subject (in the case of the “Notice”) and to

the narrating act (in the case of the “Explanatory”).<sup>8</sup> A physical image of the author and the signature “the author,” strongly encourage us to equate this voice with the author. Sometimes you have to state the obvious. This voice never again explicitly speaks, but remains responsible for the novel’s production.

In his explication of James Joyce’s *Ulysses*, David Hayman identifies an “arranger” who “should be seen as something between a persona and a function, somewhere between the narrator and the implied author . . . Perhaps it would be best to see the arranger as a significant, felt absence in the text, and unstated but inescapable source of control” (122-23). This “felt absence” is an authorial presence. There is an “unstated but inescapable source of control” in *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. Genette names a similar “*directing function*” as one a narrator performs (255), but he gives no indication how we should react if this is performed by a presence separate from the other functions. The closest he comes to describing this is an “author absent from the story” (187). I find myself forced to name this arranger as a kind of covert narrator, particularly because “narrator” denotes, in the novel, a literary function which facilitates storytelling as opposed to a representation of a storyteller. A narrator does not necessarily tell. We have defined voice as a set of signs indicating presence, and this “felt absence” is a presence regardless of whether it speaks or not. There is an authorial voice, but he is barely if at all evident throughout the novel. As in “A True Story” the character’s speech is framed by an authorial presence who then withdraws and does not overtly reappear. This framing allows the speaker to establish his or her own authority.

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<sup>8</sup> We saw, in the last chapter how Longstreet and Chaucer used their prefatory sections to establish and protect their authorial privileges.

What is framed is Huckleberry Finn's voice, speaking. Though Huck says towards the end that "there ain't nothing more to write about" (295), even there he doesn't say he was doing the writing. When he complains about the trouble he had he describes it as trouble in "making a book." Though he is the narrator there is no compelling evidence to suggest Huck is represented as having physically put the words on paper. There is compelling evidence to suggest that someone other than Huck did the writing.

Quirk notes that originally, "Twain had given his story the working title 'Huckleberry Finn/Reported by Mark Twain,' thus placing himself in a rather definite relation to his created character" (6). In his other works narrated by Huck, Twain does explicitly state a relationship between the figure of the author and Huck. In *Tom Sawyer Abroad* he explicitly names Huck as the author and Mark Twain as the editor. The authorial credit for *Tom Sawyer, Detective* is "as told by Huck Finn," with Twain being the implied amanuensis. These credits are consistent with what Twain writes about the genesis of the novel's narrative voice:

'if I tell a boy's story, or anybody else's, it is never worth printing, it comes from the head and not from the heart, and always goes into the wastebasket. To be successful and worth printing, the imagined boy would have to tell his story himself and let me act merely as his amanuensis.' (Qtd in Knoper 94)

All of these suggest that we should consider the novel as the transcription of Huck's speech, but they do not prove it. All of these pieces of evidence are outside of the published work. The proof inside the final work lies in the uses of nonstandard spellings. Richard Bridgman sums up one argument:

Ostensibly Huck writes his own story, but in fact his story is recorded as if he were telling it to someone. So when Tom Sawyer writes a letter warning that Jim is going to escape, Huck calls the letter a 'nonamous' one, a neologism faithfully reproducing Huck's misapprehension of the word 'anonymous.' On the other hand, the letter itself contains such words as 'religgion,' 'helish,' and 'leasure,' the results of Tom's uncertain spelling

(ch. 39). A stenographer would have spelled them correctly, but since Tom is understood to have written the letter himself, the misspellings stand. Therefore, when the writer plays the role of the vernacular character *writing*, the misspellings are no longer employed solely for the sake of phonetic accuracy. (57-58)

Misspellings in Tom's writing, misspellings that don't appear in the diegesis, reflect his ability to spell. In the scene where Huck asks Buck Grangerford to spell his current alias, Buck spells the name George Jackson "Gorge Jaxon," and Huck recounts how he wrote the misspelling down "private, because somebody might want *me* to spell it, next, and so I wanted to be able to rattle it off like I was used to it" (120). There is no suggestion that Huck is any more aware of his mistake during his subsequent narration than when he originally made it. Yet "Jackson" and many other names and relatively difficult words are spelled correctly throughout the work, "conscience" being, perhaps, the most interesting example. How can anyone spell "conscience" correctly and misspell "George"? This demands that we posit the intervention of someone more literate than Huck.

Bridgman also makes an important distinction between different nonstandard forms. A dictating Huck's substandard dialect is reproduced by the amanuensis. For instance, Huck says "warn't" instead of "wasn't," "carlessest" instead of "most careless," "catched" instead of "caught" and "clum" instead of "climbed;" these are not corrected. All of Huck's nonstandard morphological and syntactical constructions are preserved in the written text, as they would be in a text he himself had inscribed. Other nonstandard spellings are employed for "the sake of phonetic accuracy," as Bridgman puts it. In the diegesis "risk" is spelled "resk," and "rather" is spelled "ruther" in order to reflect Huck's pronunciation, not his conception of how these words are spelled. How Huck, the narrator, speaks is represented in the written text, which is produced by a literate mediator.



As in other dialect writing, some words are given alternate spellings in order to signal pronunciation differences. Bridgman describes these varying uses of language in all dialect writing as “vernacular tricks.” He argues that “the reader’s mind is more than normally engaged by the actual structure of the vernacular word” (25). He gives some examples to illustrate the different techniques.

*Norate* is no word, *cowcumber* is a partly familiar one, *salt and batter* are familiar words in the wrong context, and *yellocution* is at once no word and a neologism superior to the proper one. The effort to understand in each of these instances accentuates the word itself. (Bridgman 25)

All nonstandard forms a writer uses bring the facts of language and difference into view. The effort it takes to interpret “nonamous” makes us think about the word “anonymous,” the meaning of that word and about the reasons someone might make this mistake. “Nonamous,” like “yellocution,” isn’t a particularly rich example; it is more of a humorous play on words than it is indicative of a gap in understanding between two discourse communities. It does, nonetheless, point to such a gap. It makes us aware that the user’s language, and perhaps his entire engagement with life, is markedly different.

In his insightful explication on the uses of language in *Huck Finn*, Neil Schmitz incorrectly imagines Huck writing. More importantly, he doesn’t differentiate between the different vernacular techniques, placing all of them under the heading of “phoneticized writing.” “There sits the writer at his manuscript,” he writes, “all scrunched up in his chair, his face screwed, speaking aloud the words he painstakingly inscribes: *sivilize*, *nonnamous*, *considerble*” (*Of Huck and Alice* 27).

These three words are very different. When the word “considerable” is used in Huck’s direct discourse, the standard spelling is used. It is also spelled correctly when it is used in the

diegesis.<sup>9</sup> It is misspelled only in the direct discourse of other characters, characters whose level of discourse is represented as lower than Huck's. Pap Finn and the King use "considrble" and this spelling is meant to represent a substandard pronunciation. Jim pronounces it differently. He tells Huck "You gwyne to have considable trouble in yo' life, en considable joy" (30).<sup>10</sup> In every case, the nonstandard spelling is used to indicate a nonstandard pronunciation. As we have just seen "nonamous" is not a nonstandard pronunciation, it is a misapprehension of the word anonymous, which could also be considered a neologism. It is a vocabulary—not a pronunciation—error.

I am less interested in criticizing Schmitz than I am in pointing out what we can clearly see by differentiating the different vernacular tricks in the work. All of these techniques make the reader aware of the structure of language. Though they are all generally indicative of speech, the different techniques behind the words *sivilize*, *nonnamous*, and *considerable* are in and of themselves important. The latter two are not eye dialect. Twain uses nonstandard constructions both in the diegesis and in reported speech. He uses more nonstandard spellings in Huck's reported speech than in the diegesis, though his other nonstandard constructions are substantially the same in both. His literary dialect clearly signals class and education differences among the

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<sup>9</sup> Twain is not consistent in his spelling of this word. Later in the novel the nonstandard spelling is used in the diegesis, and in Huck's direct discourse. As David Carkeet shows, "In the parts of the novel written in the summer of 1883 (the latter half of the novel and the chapters 12-14 interpolation), Huck shows several nonstandard features which do not appear in the parts of the novel written earlier"(328). This is all a little bit academic: "considrble" is an example of "phoneticized writing," or nonstandard pronunciation. My point remains that it is a different vernacular technique than *sivilize* and *nonamous*.

<sup>10</sup> Fishkin, in *Was Huck Black?* and Jon Powell in "Trouble and Joy from 'A True Story' to *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*: Mark Twain and the Book of Jeremiah" discuss the connection between the use of "trouble" and "joy" here with its use in "A True Story."

various characters. I would say that the two functions his literary dialect perform are to signal class and education differences and to create an aura of authenticity in character's speech. Twain's literary dialect throughout the work does not include the use of eye dialect, with the possible exception of his African-American dialect.

As Bowdre demonstrates, many authors who take literary dialect very seriously (he specifically names Joel Chandler Harris, Twain and Faulkner as well as some others) rarely if ever use eye dialect. Instead, they show difference by techniques that one would have to call more mimetic. They only use nonstandard spellings to indicate nonstandard forms. Discussing Harris' eye dialect Bowdre writes "The fact that there is very little of it, considering the large number of nonstandard spellings he uses, indicates that Harris was making a real effort to see to it that his nonstandard spellings actually represented pronunciation differences" (30).

As we've already discussed with "A True Story," Twain took great pains to make his literary dialect as authentic seeming as possible in print. Apparently his representation of dialects was so important to him that he felt compelled to explain the dialects in *Huck Finn*. In his explanatory note, Twain claims that "a number of dialects are used," and then explicitly mentions three, including "the ordinary 'Pike-County' dialect; and four modified varieties of this last" (5). Some critics have found different numbers of dialects in the work, but as Fishkin writes, "whatever position one stakes out on the 'number of dialects' question, Twain clearly was fascinated by the variety and distinctiveness of American vernacular speech" (103).

Neither the number nor the actual authenticity of these dialects interests me as much as one might think. What does interest me is Twain's claim that the "shadings have not been done in a hap-hazard fashion, or by guess-work; but pains-takingly, and with the trustworthy guidance

and support of personal familiarity with these several forms of speech.” As I have already mentioned he asserts and establishes his authority as a master of vernacular discourse. He signs this note “THE AUTHOR” (5). Schmitz argues that this “is his last word in *Huckleberry Finn*” (*Of Huck and Alice* 97). But perhaps this isn’t actually the author’s last word. What Twain certainly does with this note is take direct responsibility for the variety and quality of the literary dialects in the work. Huck may be telling his own story in his own words, but the author has transcribed the different types of speech accurately, and his authority as a master of both spoken and written discourse is behind their authenticity. If we can differentiate the various dialects and draw conclusions about the speakers it is because the author, the source of authority, has authentically replicated them.

There is an authorial voice in the work, or at least near the work, but he never uses his own voice inside the work. He never speaks, but his presence, which is what Ross says voice evokes, is felt. He takes credit for controlling the literary dialects. All of these things signal authorial control, but they are all very much in the background in an important sense.<sup>11</sup> From the start of chapter one, the “me” of the work is Huck. His voice, however, is transferred to print by this presence, and it is this authorial presence that gives us the most famous use of eye dialect in American literature.

There is only one notable example of eye dialect in *Huck Finn*. As Schmitz says, “the first misspelled word in *Huckleberry Finn*, and the last, is *sivilize*” (*Of Huck and Alice* 32). It is the only example of eye dialect in the work that is not contained inside quotation marks. Huck uses

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<sup>11</sup>We will see a similar, though more overt, example of authorial voice in Lee Smith’s *The Devil’s Dream*.

the word “sivilize” in the diegesis on both the first and last pages of the novel. He uses it another time as well, but these two instances are particularly notable. Bridgman writes about the passages on the two extreme pages: “Three terms appear in both passages: ‘sivilize,’ ‘can’t stand it,’ and ‘light out.’ although some of the efforts to make *Huckleberry Finn* a unified book seemed strained, here is evidence of significant verbal repetition at the two extremes of the book” (113-114).

The repetition of these terms frames the novel, and hints at an authorial control that many find lacking. On the first page of the text, after Huck has introduced himself and summarized *Tom Sawyer*, he picks up the story shortly before the end of the earlier novel. He explains that the widow Douglas “allowed she would sivilize me . . . and so when I couldn’t stand it no longer, I lit out . . . and was free and satisfied” (13).

The narrator of *Tom Sawyer* explains the same situation in a more elevated discourse. Huck’s “sufferings were almost more than he could bear. . . . he had to talk so properly that speech was become insipid in his mouth; whithersoever he turned, the bars and shackles of civilization shut him in and bound him hand and foot” (205). On the next page Huck twice tells Tom that he “can’t stand” his current situation, and Tom convinces him to endure it in order to become a robber. Already in *Tom Sawyer*, Huck’s conflict is laid out. This narrator, however, is clearly condescending, though somewhat sympathetic, overstating Huck’s conflict and thereby reducing it. Civilization “shackles” him, but they are benign shackles that reduce his ability to smoke and cuss while providing him an opportunity for the happy life that proper education provides. What civilization does to him in the sequel is something very different.

The word *sivilize* is clearly significant. It is the only example of eye dialect in the diegesis

and one that is on both the first and last pages of the work. Every competent reader of the text knows that the word *sivilize* is important, because of its prominent positions in the text and its clear thematic importance. However, by differentiating eye dialect from Twain's other techniques of representing dialect we can empirically prove what we already know: the word *sivilize* is uniquely marked in *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*.<sup>12</sup>

Sivilize is clearly and uniquely marked in the novel. The question is who exactly marks this word in the text. A speaker does not use eye dialect. Eye dialect is a writer's tool, used for specific purposes while representing speech, usually as a signal for the lower status of the speaker. "The writer of Eye Dialect wishes to convey the impression of differentness with his nonstandard spellings" (Bowdre 105). If Huck is speaking to an unnamed amanuensis, he shouldn't be able to use this tool of the writer.

The word may be strange for Huck—the author may wish to suggest that his pronunciation of the word is somehow different, but this spelling does not represent that. And if Huck is not the one doing the writing—inscribing the words on to the paper—then some other presence, a writer, has made this term strange for us. The word *sivilize* is different, and Hayman's arranger, a covert narrator not Huck, has made it so. Only writers can use eye dialect. Huck would no more recognize this misspelling than he would notice his misspelling of the name "Jackson." Twain does not mark the word in order to signal class or educational difference, at least not primarily.

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<sup>12</sup>One thing I've done with students is to go over the difference between eye dialect and other vernacular techniques before they begin reading *Huckleberry Finn*, and then tell them that one of the daily quiz questions will be to give an example of eye dialect from the first section of the novel. This invariably has two very gratifying results: a great many students read the first section of the novel aware that the word *sivilize* is somehow important, and, less noble but still gratifying, students who skipped the last class don't even understand the question.

He marks it in order to put the specific word into play—to cause the reader to think about the word itself and what it means to us and to Huck. What this does at the beginning of the novel is signal the author’s contention that there is something wrong with the process which this word describes. And at the end of the novel there is still something wrong.

Though the novel ends with Jim free from slavery, Huck safe from his father and Tom once again envied by all his peers, the spelling of the word *sivilize* has not changed and neither has Huck’s resistance to it. “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”(296).

The ending of *Huck Finn* has been called everything from fitting to uncomfortable to unforgivable. Questions about whether the ending is somehow flawed or inappropriate avoid “a full reckoning with the novel’s conclusion” (Robinson 179). What is interesting about the ending for our purposes is that Huck denies the authority he builds throughout the novel, or that the author allows him to build. Fishkin writes that “by making Huck the ‘author’ of his own book, Twain validated the *authority* of vernacular culture more boldly than any book that had gone before” (116). But at the end of the novel, the vernacular representative has ceded this authority; he has allowed his voice to be silenced. He has given his “own” book to someone else, specifically to Tom Sawyer. As Leo Marx writes, “*Huckleberry Finn* is a masterpiece because it brings Western humor to perfection and yet transcends the narrow limits of its conventions. But the ending does not” (205). What the ending does is conform to the narrow conventions of Western humor, of comedy in general, and make us acutely aware of how inadequate these conventions are.

The achievement of *Huck Finn* centers on Twain turning a storytelling character into a

narrator. He authorizes a speaking voice by placing it in the primary position—by making the speaker the narrator. Huck is not a storytelling character even though he is a speaking character. We don't know where, when or to whom Huck is speaking. There is never a hint of any of the dynamics of Huck's telling, or of his auditors. There is only his speaking voice, acting the role of narrator. Huckleberry Finn is a personal narrator—a public personal voice. Huck's authority remains contingent in the same way as every personal voice, but it also holds the primary position in the novel, making the other voices secondary to his. He has the potential for more discursive authority than any vernacular character before him.

Huck's is a personal voice, in a way a mimetic voice used by an author, and his voice is initially, like Aunt Rachel's in "A True Story" and perhaps all mimetic voices, "secondary, indulged and condescended to" (Ross 108). Bridgman argues that in the novel "we hear no condescending adult voice by which Huck can be judged insufficient. His idiom is the standard" (9). I would argue that the adult voice is heard in the introductory section, and this is enough to create an initial condescension and judgment. The comic absurdity of many of Huck's observations early in the novel also paint him as a comic figure. Huck's voice becomes, however, the standard in the novel. The reader is aware that there is the authorizing presence of the author somewhere behind Huck, but this voice is not constantly reasserted in the work. As Henry Nash Smith writes, Twain eliminates "the author as an intruding presence in the story" (113). No authorial voice inserts evaluative comments—Lanser's extrarepresentational acts. Huck is able to establish his own authority, in the same manner as Aunt Rachel.

As a personal narrator, Huck builds his own authority outside of the dominant discourse while using its medium. We come to believe that an "ignorant river waif" holds knowledge and



wisdom—access to the truth. When Huck sees the King and the Duke tarred and feathered, we believe his reaction is the truth because we have learned that he has the “sound heart” that Smith writes about<sup>13</sup>, and because we know that he has experienced cruelty in his life and that he has been wronged by these two. If Huck “couldn’t ever feel any hardness against them any more in the world” (239), how can we? We absolutely trust in his wisdom when he says that it “was a dreadful thing to see. Human beings *can* be awful cruel to one another” (239). While we see the wisdom in his words, we must also see that the society that Huck resists is responsible for this cruelty—supports and justifies this cruelty. As Smith argues “the satire of the towns along the banks insists again and again that the dominant culture is decadent and perverted” (117). We see Colonel Sherburn gun down a man in cold blood, then almost be lynched himself; we see the Grangerford’s and the Sheperdson’s slaughter each other, and we see that the society Huck resists should be resisted, and should not finally sivilize him. It does not hold the moral authority inside the fiction to dictate Huck’s actions.

While Huck tells his story, the reader is shown that he has at the very least a capacity for wisdom and a viewpoint with validity outside of the fictive world. We also see that Jim, who has the thickest substandard dialect in the work, is also imbued with wisdom and dignity. In fact, Huck comes to see Jim as an equal almost immediately after he mimics his dialect.

One of the pivotal episodes of the novel is when Huck and Jim are separated in heavy fog and Huck finally finds Jim asleep on the raft which is “littered up with leaves and branches and dirt” (93). Huck feigns sleep and convinces Jim that their separation was only a vivid dream that Huck encourages him to relate. “So Jim went to work and told me the whole thing right through,

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<sup>13</sup> Smith entitles his chapter on Huck, “A Sound Heart and a Deformed Conscience.”

just as it happened, only he painted it up considerable. Then he said he must start in and “terpret’ it” (95).

Here Huck uses “terpret” in what is otherwise Jim’s indirect discourse. Huck signals the secondary status of Jim’s language. Huck condescends to Jim, and then expresses his condescension when he reveals his trick, using the standard pronunciation: ““Oh, well, that’s all interpreted well enough as far as it goes, Jim,’ I says; ‘but what does *these* things stand for?’” (95). Jim stares at the debris which confirms it was no dream. Huck describes the debris as “trash’ twice. Jim then describes the genuine concern he had for Huck safety and his knowledge that Huck had tricked him and says ““Dat truck dah is *trash*; en trash is what people is dat puts dirt on de head er dey fren’s en makes ‘em ashamed’” (95). Even though Jim’s dialect continues to be substandard, his dignity and humanity are undeniable. He has the authority to label Huck as trash. Huck, even with his superior position in society and language ability, must accept this assessment.

In one of the two most significant decisions of the novel Huck determines he is in the wrong and must apologize to Jim, though he doesn’t refer to him as “Jim.” “It was fifteen minutes before I could work myself up to go and humble myself to a nigger—but I done it, and I warn’t ever sorry for it afterwards, neither” (95). Henry Nash Smith argues that “Huck’s humble apology is striking evidence of growth in moral insight” (119). He certainly grows in the eyes of the reader. The reader sees that Huck may be able to overcome his clear prejudice and treat Jim as a human being and a friend. But he still has a great deal to overcome. Even when he makes the decision to help free Jim, he hasn’t overcome it. Smith argues that the novel is, in part, a satire of “decadent slaveholding society” and that the satire:

gains immensely in force when Mark Twain demonstrates that even the outcast Huck has been perverted by it. Huck's conscience is simply the attitudes he has taken over from his environment. What is still sound in him is an impulse from the deepest level of his personality that struggles against the overlay of prejudice and false valuation imposed on all members of society in the name of religion, morality, law, and refinement. (122)

Twain shows that Huck has been perverted by society, by having Huck believe himself to be wrong when he decides to do the right thing. While he is debating whether to turn Jim in or not, Huck knows that his impulse to help Jim is morally wrong. He believes it is wrong because he has been taught it is so. We have seen, through Huck's narration, that society was wrong to teach him this. Meanwhile, He chastises himself for his sinfulness:

Well, I tried the best I could to kinder soften it up somehow for myself, by saying I was brung up wicked, and so I warn't so much to blame; but something inside me kept saying, 'There was the Sunday school, you could a gone to it; and if you'd done it they'd a learnt you, there, that people that acts as I'd been acting about that nigger goes to everlasting fire.' (222)

This something inside Huck is connected to the same force attempting to sivilize him. Huck absolutely believes that he will burn in everlasting fire if he helps Jim. In Huck's mind this crisis of conscience does not result in him choosing the right action. He chooses to break the law; he chooses, according to all the authorities he knows, to do the wrong thing—the thing that will literally damn him as a low-down abolitionist.

He can't do the appropriate thing because his heart is not as hard as that of the society around him. He tries to steel himself to betray Jim, but "somehow I couldn't seem to strike no places to harden me against him, but only the other kind" (222-23). Huck sees his inability to harden up against Jim as weakness, as he does his failure to betray Jim earlier. "I warn't man enough—hadn't the spunk of a rabbit. I see I was weakening; so I just give up trying" (111). He gives up trying to do what he believes is the right thing and instead protects Jim from slave

hunters, which we know is the right thing to do.

When he makes his final decision to free Jim, it is in his mind a decision to go to hell. He doesn't decide to tell society to go to hell, confident in the knowledge that he knows what is true and right. He decides to damn himself to hell. We see that what he decides is true and right, at least that his actions are, but he does not. This choice for hell is not insignificant. It is awful:

It was awful thoughts, and awful words, but they was said. And I let then stay said; and never thought no more about reforming. I shoved the whole thing out of my head; and said I would take up wickedness again, which was in my line, being brung up to it, and the other warn't. And for a starter, I would go to work and steal Jim out of slavery again; and if I could think of anything worse, I would do that, too; because as long as I was in, and in for good, I might as well go the whole hog. (223)

Though Twain does put some comic escalation in here, having Huck decide to go “whole hog” towards damnation, we should not let this blind us to the fact that Huck believes he is wrong, and, in fact, evil. Concomitantly, he believes that the society that condemns him to hell is wise and just. As Robinson observes:

At no point in his famous crisis in Chapter 31 does Huck seriously question the premise that Jim has ‘*got* to be a slave.’ True, he bridles against the Christian civilization which enforces the institution, and thus betrays an impulse to question the justice of slavery. In the main, however, he concedes the necessity and propriety of slavery, and centers his troubled soul-searching on his own sinfulness in failing to ‘do the right thing and the clean thing.’ His decision to ‘*go to hell*’ is quite unmistakably an assertion of the justice of the system that enslaves Jim. (200-01)

As Robinson argues, Huck's decision is his affirmation of the moral authority of the society that his narration has shown us does not have this moral authority. Cox argues that Huck's rebellion is “negotiated in a society which the reader's conscience indicts as morally wrong and which history has declared legally wrong” (169). Huck has built his own authority in our eyes, but he doesn't trust it himself. He believes that the dominant discourse holds the truth, the wisdom, and that he is in error. The reader sees that he is wrong, that he should trust what Smith calls his

sound heart, but he does not. This is the tragedy that pervades the comic ending of the novel.

Shortly after Huck decides to free Jim, Tom arrives on the scene and Huck blurts out his intentions. Tom almost tells Huck that Jim is already free, but quickly stops himself. As Smith writes, “Tom withholds the information, however, in order to trick Huck and Jim into the meaningless game of an Evasion that makes the word (borrowed from Dumas) into a devastating pun. Tom takes control and Huck becomes once again a subordinate carrying out orders” (133). He evades responsibility because Tom has given him the ability to do so. Huck allows himself to be secondary, indulged and condescended to because he believes that is the appropriate state of affairs. Huck resumes a subordinate position after we have seen him appear to be stronger and more mature. But he isn’t actually changed; his belief system still holds sway. Things seem somehow wrong to him; he bristles against becoming civilized, as he has from the start, but he firmly believes that his resistance is indicative of a fundamental flaw in his character, not in society.

What makes the ending so important for our purposes is that, as a personal narrator, Huck does build authority, even though his voice does not conform to the standards of the dominant discourse community. After having built this authority through the novel, he cedes it to Tom because, in Huck’s mind, Tom has greater access to the truth. As a representative of the dominant discourse community, as an educated white male of hegemonic ideology, Tom holds the cultural authority. Tom is in some ways a surrogate for the genteel narrator, using the rustic experience as fodder for his fiction. However much he bristles against his methods, Huck has faith in the rightness of Tom’s actions. He feels this faith despite Tom’s outrageous acts, partly because he lacks faith in himself, and because of the awful consequences of his decision to free Jim.

Huck's psychological equilibrium is more precarious than ever precisely because of his heroic resolve to rescue Jim; for that decision is a conscious and manifestly consequential violation of social prohibitions which he has internalized. Thus divided against himself, the real Huck Finn—the marginal, ambivalent, guilt-haunted fugitive—falls prey to demons that arise from within his troubled mind. In this perspective, it is neither inconsistent nor surprising that he should take refuge in the comparatively unambivalent and supremely socialized identity of Tom Sawyer. (Robinson 201)

What is inexplicable is not Huck's deferring to Tom, but Tom's decision to help. Huck wonders about this, and reveal his opinion both of Tom and himself:

One thing was for sure and that was, that Tom Sawyer was in earnest, and was actuly going to help steal that nigger out of slavery. That was the thing that was too many for me. Here was a boy that was respectable, and well bring up; and had a character to lose; and folks at home that had characters; and he was bright and not leatherheaded; and knowing, and not ignorant; and not mean, but kind; yet here he was, without any more pride, or rightness, or feeling, than to stoop to this business, and make himself a shame, and his family a shame, before everybody. I *couldn't* understand it, no way at all. (242)

This passage is particularly significant because we will soon see clearly that Tom is certainly not kind, nor is he what we would consider knowing or respectable; he is all of these things in Huck's eyes. However much we hope Huck will resist Tom's influence, that he will rebel against the society that we can clearly see is in the wrong, Huck believes in the rightness of Tom's actions. As James Cox writes, Huck

is certainly not a rebel; he is in a tight place and does the *easiest* thing. The role of Abolitionist is not comfortable nor comforting to him and in turning over to Tom Sawyer the entire unpleasant business of freeing Jim, Huck is surely not acting out of but remarkably *in* character. (173)

He is acting in character because Tom Sawyer has always been his model for a right thinking boy. And why wouldn't he be? In *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*, Tom always wins. Tom transgresses the boundaries of appropriate behavior and is rewarded in the end with wealth and acclaim. This book ends no differently. Tom is, in fact, right. His successful evasion results in a gunshot wound that he can show off, along with the bullet itself, for years to come. He does it

because he “wanted the *adventure* of it” (292), and he gets the adventure, and no punishment that we are told about. The sequel to *Tom Sawyer* ends the same way as the original: tragedy is averted and everyone lives happily ever after. And yet the reader is left unsatisfied, or at least should be. Though Huck believes he is doing the right thing, “when he submits to Tom’s role, we are the ones who become uncomfortable” (Cox 181).

Though we see how wrong Huck’s actions are, he is acting entirely in character. Throughout the novel, Tom is held up as the standard for cleverness and right action. Before the ending of the novel Huck makes some evaluative statements that assert and demonstrate his authority outside of the fiction. One of the longest ones, presages some of Twain’s later remarks about conscience. After Huck makes his strong comments about a subject that has validity outside of the novel, he appeals to authority: ““It takes up more room than all the rest of a person’s insides, and yet ain’t no good, nohow. Tom Sawyer he says the same” (240).<sup>14</sup> He is the authority of the novel, and his authority over Huck comes from books—from his perceived mastery of the dominant discourse. Tom is in control, and he revels in it. In a discussion of *Tom Sawyer*, Schmitz writes:

For Tom the pleasure of play is in the manipulation of it. He directs the play, controls the players, and always comes into the play referring to the authority of a script: *it is written* that we do this or that. The scripture of Tom’s ‘adventures’ reveals the character of his personality. (*Of Huck and Alice* 70-71)

When he is leading the band of robbers early in *Huckleberry Finn*, Tom expressly states the

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<sup>14</sup> Other examples: “I was just a-biling with curiosity; and I says to myself, Tom Sawyer wouldn’t back out now, and so I won’t either; I’m a going to see what’s going on here” (77); “I felt very good; I judged I’d done it pretty neat—I reckoned Tom Sawyer couldn’t a done it no neater, himself. Of course he would a throwed more style into it, but I can’t do that very handy, not being brung up to it” (205).

source of his authority. Though the reader knows that Tom doesn't understand what the word "ransom" means, and the other children see that his plan isn't logical, Tom crushes their resistance by appealing to the authority of the written word. Things are to be done Tom's way, and not Ben Rogers's,

'Because it ain't in the books so—that's why. Now Ben Rogers, do you want to do things regular or don't you?—that's the idea. Don't you reckon that the people that made the books knows what's the correct thing to do? Do you reckon *you* can learn 'em anything? Not by a good deal. No, sir, we'll just go on and ransom them in the regular way.' (22)

Tom's authority comes not from his own wisdom or experience, but from his knowledge of written works that hold authority. Tom's power, like that of an author and of a genteel narrator, comes from his knowledge of and "adherence to the authority of cultural antecedent" (Pease 105). The cultural antecedents that Tom cites are the written romances he has modeled his play after.

Twain has removed the authorial presence, the genteel narrator, from the position of primary narrator, but he has not dispensed with the genteel perspective and values. In some important sense Tom plays the role of the genteel narrator at the end of the novel and closes the frame that the authorial figure opened. Recall that Gray argued that:

the classic humorist tale consists of a narrator, identifiable as superior in class and education, setting up the scene and bringing on the rustic characters, putting them through their violent routines complete with comic dialect, and then returning us at the end of the story to his own stable, secure world and standard English. (63)

At the end of *Huckleberry Finn*, Tom arrives, superior in class and education, and puts Jim and Huck through "violent routines complete with comic dialect" and then through the power of his



voice sets Jim free<sup>15</sup> and returns us to “his own stable, secure world and [such as it is] standard English.” The narrator doesn’t bring us back to stability, but Huck heeds Tom’s voice and submissively allows the novel to be returned there. In fact, the narrator can’t stand this stability. The primary voice of the novel doesn’t use the dominant language, but the power of this discourse to determine what can be said is reasserted. In the end we are returned to the safety that the frame tale structure provides, but we see that this safety relies on the denial of the character’s basic humanity.

Smith argues that this is necessary if “everything is to be forced back into the framework of comedy” (133). At the ending of a comedy equilibrium is established. Societies rules are reimposed, allowing everyone noble the opportunity to live happily ever after. For this to happen in this society, Jim must become a nigger who can be bought for forty dollars and Huck must not only be marginalized, but he must feel that his marginalization is appropriate. However uncomfortable the ending may feel, it is very conventional. Cox calls the ending a “cost which the form exacted” (181). “Turning the story over to Huck brought into view previously unsuspected literary potentialities in the vernacular perspective” (Smith 113). One possibility it created was “transforming the vernacular narrator from a mere persona into a character with human depth” (114). Smith goes on to argue that Twain could not complete the novel in a manner consistent with his initial conception and allow Huck and Jim to maintain the depth they had established.

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<sup>15</sup> Tom regains consciousness and, upon hearing that Jim is imprisoned, roars: ““They hain’t no *right* to shut him up! *Shove!*—and don’t you lose a minute. Turn him loose! He ain’t no slave, he’s as free as any cretur that walks this earth!” (291). Tom’s performative utterance only carries power, however, because Aunt Sally arrives and confirms it.

Mark Twain's portrayal of Huck and Jim as complex characters has carried him beyond the limits of his original plan: we must not forget that the literary ancestry of the book is to be found in backwoods humor. As Huck approaches the Phelps plantation the writer has on his hand a hybrid—a comic story in which his protagonists have acquired something like tragic depth. (133)

Smith argues that Twain found that he could not end the novel in a way that allowed Huck his humanity. “The perplexing final sequence on the Phelps plantation is best regarded as a maneuver by which Mark Twain beats his way back from incipient tragedy to the comic resolution called for by the original conception of the story”(114).

The original conception was influenced by the clash of discourses characteristic of southwestern humor, though the traditionally contained voice was given a far looser rein and a more prominent position. Schmitz argues that the “familiar structure of the conventional exchange in humorous writing, that opposition of illiterate speech and literary writing, *is* the structure of *Huckleberry Finn*. Jim and Tom struggle fore and aft for the mastery of Huck's discourse” (112-13).

At the end, Tom wins. Order is restored. The reader is returned to safety, but it a hollow and twisted safety. The representative of the dominant discourse, the educated white male of hegemonic ideology, is no wiser than Huck. In fact, he is clearly disconnected from reality. His romantic ideals deny the humanity of all of the other characters involved in his story, and yet they prevail. Jim is no longer a father figure or a potential equal, or a slave—he is a character in Tom's play.

In a sense, Tom should have the authority, as should the widow Douglas and Judge Thatcher. The masters of the dominant discourse, the educated, those who are successfully integrated into society, should be wiser than Huck. The people who have mastered the language,

whose speech is judged as standard, or at least better, should know the right actions. And people whose speech is marked as substandard, as uneducated, shouldn't hold the greater wisdom. This isn't the case. Those who master the dominant discourse are more successful, they aren't ridden out of town on rails or hunted by dogs, but this isn't because they are morally superior to those who speak in substandard dialects.

This is because that in *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, the speech itself isn't the point; the point is that mastery of the dominant discourse or lack of mastery of this discourse is not the measure of moral value. Judge Thatcher and Colonel Sherburn have this mastery; Huck, Jim and Pap do not. Tom has a childishly perverted ability to appropriate the dominant discourse to his own ends. Noting Pap Finn's lack of moral authority, Smith writes: "speaking in dialect does not in itself imply moral authority" (122). This is certainly true, but I would argue that there is no correlation between speech levels and levels of wisdom or morality. We are forced, in the novel, to judge people by something other than their speech. Instead we must judge them by the content of their speech and by their actions. We learn this lesson; Huck does not.

Huck builds as much authority as a personal voice can; as much as Aunt Rachel does, but he does not believe in the authority to make moral decisions that we are willing to grant him. We see he is wiser and kinder and more moral than Tom, but he cannot see it. The fact that he defers to authorities that his narration has convinced us are wrong is the point of the novel. He defers to Tom's authority, the authority of the dominant discourse and the written word, because he never truly believes in his own authority. We see this, and we see that authority should not derive from the conventional sources.

The authority he gains through the act of narration is what makes the ending

uncomfortable because we know that we are complicit in his misjudgments. At the end things we laughed at in the beginning are no longer funny. However, no one has been transformed—Tom is still as inexplicable and powerful and confident as ever. Tom is not different, nor is Huck, nor is the society in which they live. The reader is different. The reader sees that Huck’s method of viewing the world has been inextricably warped by the society that maintains authority over him.

In “The Jumping Frog stories the genteel narrator flees Wheeler’s interminable and inexplicable storytelling. He flees back to the safety of genteel society. There is no such comfort in “A True Story”—the frame does not close and return us to safety, but as Twain wrote to Howells, there is no humor in that story. The strength of *Huckleberry Finn*’s ending is that all of the conventions of the romance and of comedy are met, but the reader sees that society’s equilibrium is unjust and Huck’s marginalization is not only hurting him, but perpetuating an unjust system. At the end of *Huckleberry Finn* Huck flees genteel society, equally unable to understand or stand it.

This is part of the reason George Santayana, in “The Genteel Tradition in American Philosophy,” claims that American humorists:

only half escape the genteel tradition; their humour would lose its savour if they had wholly escaped it. They point to what contradicts it in the facts; but not in order to abandon the genteel tradition, for they have nothing solid to put in its place. When they point out how ill many facts fit into it, they do not clearly conceive that this militates against the standard, but think it a funny perversity in the facts. Of course, did they earnestly respect the genteel tradition, such an incongruity would seem to them sad, rather than ludicrous. Perhaps the prevalence of humor in America, in and out of season, may be taken as one more evidence that the genteel tradition is present pervasively, but everywhere weak. (139)

Because the vernacular perspective does not have the power to become the dominant discourse the only way that Huck Finn, the novel and the boy, can survive is to conform to the expectations

of the dominant discourse community or to light out for the territory. Huck, certainly, can put nothing in the place of the genteel tradition because he has no other tradition that he believes in. The power of the tradition is so strong that Huck cannot imagine its replacement, nor that it should be replaced.

At the end of *Huckleberry Finn* the personal narrator abrogates the authority he has established through his telling, and this acts as a critique of the conventions of authority in the novel. There is a similar movement in Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom!* where a relatively conventional authorial narrator brings his own authority into question and thereby authorizes the novel's storytelling characters.

“HE SOUNDS JUST LIKE FATHER”  
STORYTELLING AND AUTHORIAL VOICE IN *ABSALOM, ABSALOM!*

William Faulkner’s *Absalom, Absalom!* is the reason I began looking at storytelling characters in fiction. As James Matlack writes, “*Absalom, Absalom!* is self-consciously devoted to an analysis of oral narration. It is not so much a book about a story as about storytelling itself” (343). Though each of the characters tells the “same” story, their versions differ in ways great and small. Critics often disagree about the number of narrators in this novel because almost everyone who speaks is telling a story—almost everyone is narrating. Cleanth Brooks reminds us, however, “that in spite of the many conversations between characters and the long reveries and monologues of a single character, *Absalom, Absalom!* is finally a novel written in the third person by an omniscient narrator” (308). The narrator of the novel is an example of authorial voice. He is a public extra-diegetic narrator who is closely identified with the author. I will argue that he may also be an example of one type of communal voice—the type that Lanser calls “singular”: “in which one narrator speaks for a collective” (21). This collective is the people of Faulkner’s fictional Yoknapatawpha County. It is debatable whether this narrator is an example of only either authorial voice or communal voice, but it is more useful to note that he shares qualities of both types. Part of the continued interest in the novel rests on the fact that it is such a rich field for the study of voice. The novel also contains other types of communal voice. When Quentin and Shreve are collaborating on the Sutpen story towards the end of the novel, they are, with the narrator, creating “a *simultaneous* form, in which a plural ‘we’ narrates.” This plural we is sometimes realized through a communal type of free indirect discourse. The entire novel could also be considered an example of the “*sequential* form in which individual members of a group narrate in turn” (21).

Almost all of the voices in the novel use what Ross calls “oratorical voice,” where the voices reflect the specific discourse associated with southern colloquial oratory. Since the primary storytelling characters in the novel and the narrator speak in this voice, which, as Ross argues, is closely associated with Faulkner, their voices could be considered to be on the same dialogical plane as the narrator, and perhaps by having his characters speak in oratorical voice Faulkner has evaded the structurally secondary status of mimetic voice and written what Mikhail Bakhtin calls a dialogical novel.

*Absalom, Absalom!* has examples of communal and authorial voice, as well as oratorical voice. Other critics have contended that it is a dialogical novel where all of the voices (or at least some of them) exist on the same dialogical plane as the narrator’s, with none of the voices having final semantic authority. One reason all of these theories have explanatory power is because they all touch on the fact that this novel is an exploration of authority in novels and in oral traditions, and it is about how Quentin Compson uses the oral tradition of his community to try to arrive at a truth he can live with.

The novel has a public extradiegetic narrator—an authorial voice—who seems to refuse to take all the authority he possesses by literary convention. By refusing to take authority, he encourages his voice to be on an equal dialogic plane with the voices of the individual storytelling characters in the novel. However, the narrator makes no overt statements that bring his authority into question until Quentin and Shreve begin their intensely collaborative storytelling event at the novel’s end. Until then he exerts a fairly conventional amount of authority and tacitly endorses the narratives of Mr Compson and Thomas Sutpen. After these

events have been presented, Shreve and Quentin begin their telling, which the narrator's overt comments simultaneously problematize and, in a sense, legitimize.

The relationship between the narrator, the storytelling characters, Quentin and the Sutpen story seems to change as the novel progresses. Later in the novel the storytelling seems to have greater evocative power and the author seems to give up authority he has exerted earlier. As we look at this novel we will see a narrator who seems to refuse to take the authority that is his by narrative convention. In fact, the narrator is always authoritative when it comes to relating the facts of the events dramatized in the novel. What the novel dramatizes is Quentin's attempt to understand the Sutpen story. "The attempt to reconstruct Sutpen's life and to evaluate his character, particularly by Quentin, is more important than the life and characters themselves. The attempt is always made in the role of a teller of tales" (Matlack 343). These character's attempts are presented by an extradiegetic narrator.

Estella Schoenberg usefully differentiates between what she calls the "Sutpen" and the "Quentin material." This split is not entirely distinct because the narrator directly gives "Sutpen material" in the second chapter. Most of the story of the Sutpen family, however, is related by storytelling characters, and this is what Schoenberg calls "the unknowable past" while calling the Quentin material "the observable present" (79). She shows that all of the much discussed discrepancies in the novel (save one) are relayed by storytelling characters, and not by the narrator, whom she labels the "objective or impersonal author—Faulkner himself—who offers no information at all about Sutpen or his immediate family and only minimal stage directions for Quentin and his informants" (73). I would argue that the narrator plays a greater role than this, and that he is no more objective than any authorial narrator, but I want to focus here on his



reliability in terms of the action of the novel's diegesis, which Schoenberg shows is very strong. "The Quentin part of *Absalom, Absalom!* is left in no doubt whatever and contains no miscalculations except the count of months between September and January" (79). Except for this one minor error, the diegesis of the novel is reliable.

*Absalom, Absalom!* has an authorial voice that exercises its authority over the events that take place in the present of the novel. Quentin certainly sits in a room with Rosa Coldfield and listens to her tell about Thomas Sutpen. This event is narrated completely reliably. The authorial voice of the work is less reliable, or authoritative, when discussing the events these characters tell stories about. This is because this is a novel about the truth that oral traditions can give us, not about the historical events this particular tradition uses. It is, as Bakhtin argues the dialogical novel is, about "only *the truth of the hero's own consciousness*" (*Problems* 55). The only time the narrator tells the Sutpen story he seems completely authoritative, but he only narrates public acts, so his authority is very similar to Mr Compson's, who is a master of the local oral tradition. Quentin strives, in this novel, to arrive at his own truth through an exploration of an oral traditional story of his community. "*Absalom, Absalom!* is not primarily about the South or about a doomed family as a symbol of the South. It is a novel about the meaning of history for Quentin Compson" (Poirier 4). He attempts to use the discourse and symbols of his community to understand his own existence. Through storytelling he seeks to define himself.

Like Twain before him and Lee Smith after him, Faulkner's love of storytelling and his interest in committing the spoken word into print came from more than one source. In his biography of Faulkner, David Minter writes:

At home he spent much of his time reading. . . . At the stove in his father's office he watched and listened as his father's friends drank whiskey and swapped tales. At the

courthouse he listened to old men tell stories about the War. At the fireplace in Mammy Caroline Barr's cabin he found another place to listen. (12)

Like Twain, part of Faulkner's love of storytelling came from listening to African-Americans as a child. Minter writes that while listening to Barr, a former slave and a family servant, "secure in her presence, he [Faulkner] crossed from listening to speaking, and so he began telling tales of his own—versions, one judges, of those he was hearing at his father's livery stable, at the courthouse, or on the porch of 'The Big Place,' his other regular stop" (13). Minter describes an apprenticeship that, as Twain's did, echoes the experience of epic singers that Lord writes about.

Before he actually begins to sing, he is, consciously or unconsciously, laying the foundation. He is learning the stories and becoming acquainted with the heroes and their names, the faraway places and the habits of long ago. . . . at the same time he is imbibing the rhythm of the singing and to some extent the thoughts as they are expressed in song. (21)

Lord describes a transition from listening and absorbing the discourse to becoming proficient enough to begin singing on one's own. Faulkner learned not only specific stories and characters, historical and fictional, from the people around him; he also learned cultural values and storytelling techniques. Of course, you cannot reduce Faulkner's influences to any one medium.

Ross reminds us that Faulkner was a voracious reader:

but listening fed his imagination's growth, as did reading, not simply because specific told tales became sources for his own, but because the very act of listening placed him in a certain relationship to the discourse of the world: 'I was just saturated with [history] but never read about it,' he claimed, and his image of saturation speaks accurately even if his denial of reading does not. (2)

Here, as in other instances, Faulkner stresses the importance of his oral traditional background to his work. Ross's writing that "listening placed him in a certain relationship to the discourse of the world" resonates for me with Tex Sample's statement that traditional orality is a culture where the people's "appropriation and engagement with the world is oral" (6). Part of Faulkner's

appropriation and engagement with the world was profoundly influenced by his exposure to traditional orality.

Sample's statement also strongly resonates with the description of Quentin Compson in the first chapter of *Absalom, Absalom!* where Quentin is described as having grown up listening to stories:

Quentin had grown up with that; the mere names were interchangeable and almost myriad. His childhood was full of them; 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 backward-looking ghosts. (7)

What resonates here even more strongly is how the stories are tied in with Quentin's sense of community and his sense of self. I don't want to argue too strongly for anything more than a certain similarity between Quentin and Faulkner, but I would argue that both of them felt the influence of both written and oral traditions and this is the significant difference between the "two Quentins" described in the first chapter:

Then hearing would reconcile and he would seem to listen to two separate Quentins now—the Quentin preparing for Harvard in the South; the deep South dead since 1865 and peopled with garrulous outraged baffled ghosts, listening, having to listen, to one of those ghosts which had refused to lie still even longer than most had, telling him about old ghost-times; and the Quentin Compson who was still too young to deserve yet to be a ghost but nevertheless having to be one for all that, since he was born and bred in the deep South the same as she was—the two separate Quentins now talking to one another in the long silence of notpeople in notlanguage. (4-5)

One could say that the two Quentins represent the literate and oral cultures—the dominant and the marginalized discourses that Quentin is being pulled between (and wouldn't that be handy?), and there is certainly something to be said for this. The stories of the oral tradition, the mythology of a defeated culture, stay with Quentin as he goes north to the seat of the genteel tradition. I will argue later that it is more important to establish that the two Quentins who

struggle here with understanding the past can be compared with the divided Sutpen who tries to understand his rejection at the door. This is important not only because it suggests a parallel or identification between the two characters but also because the similar presentation of the two character's internal monologues lends authenticity to Sutpen's dialogue, which is mediated by three generations of storytellers.

Faulkner felt a pull between oral and literate cultures. He was tremendously well read, he has been rightly described as a high modernist and some of his works have been described as post-modern, but he also was deeply influenced in his life and in his writing by the oral traditions that persisted in his community. In an interview with Simon Claxton, Faulkner said: "I'm a storyteller. I'm telling a story, introducing comic and tragic elements as I like. I'm telling a story—to be repeated and retold" (277). In his book, *Telling and Retelling: The Fate of Storytelling in Modern Times*, Karl Kroeber argues that there is a "fundamental—and paradoxical—fact that is addressed by none of the contemporary essays and books about narrative theory I have consulted: stories improve with retelling, are endlessly retold, and are *told in order to be retold*" (1). One of the reasons narrative theory does not generally address this is because of the relative permanence of printed texts. Written narratives seem finalized, fixed, and therefore not eligible for retelling. The written text resists the retelling that is constitutive of the oral story which is meant to be retold. No American author demonstrates this fact about storytelling more consistently than Faulkner, and none of his novels enact this paradoxical fact more effectively than *Absalom, Absalom!* where several individuals tell and retell the story of one family.

Which of these tellers are we to believe? In "The Fundamental Unfinalizability of *Absalom, Absalom!*" Minghan Xiao adapts some arguments from Bakhtin's *Problems of*

*Dostoevsky's Poetics*, calling *Absalom, Absalom!* a polyphonic novel, where “instead of a ‘multitude of characters’ silenced by the overwhelming unified voice of the author, we find a group of, in Bakhtin's words, ‘thinking human consciousnesses’, all speaking for themselves” (Xiao 34).<sup>16</sup> All of these thinking human consciousnesses try to tell Sutpen’s story. We see the story told and retold. Xiao argues that the novel has five narrators: Rosa Coldfield, who was engaged to Sutpen; Mr Compson, whose father was Sutpen's “first Yoknapatawpha County friend” (*Absalom, Absalom!* 309); his son, Quentin; his Harvard roommate, Shreve McCannon; and a third-person narrator who sets the scenes and gives us Quentin's thoughts. These narrators sometimes quote other characters during their narrations. Quentin is the focal consciousness of the novel; every word we get from the other characters who speak in the novel’s present is said in Quentin's presence. I would argue that these four characters, and perhaps Thomas Sutpen, are the potential “thinking consciousnesses” of this novel, if it is to be considered dialogical.

There has been some disagreement as to the number of narrators in the novel. Schoenberg claims there are “nearly a dozen of them in the novel” (73). Lynn G. Levins writes of four narrative perspectives, without mentioning the role of the third-person narrator (35). Finally, though it is valid to label these storytelling characters as narrators, there is only one narrator in the novel—there is one third-person omniscient narrator who narrates part of the Sutpen story, the three primary storytelling events and the other action of the novel. There are four characters who tell stories about Sutpen in the novel’s present during three storytelling events (other storytelling

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<sup>16</sup>Other studies of *Absalom, Absalom!* as a polyphonic novel include Olga Scherer, “A Dialogic Hereafter: *The Sound and the Fury* and *Absalom, Absalom!*”, and Stephen H. Ross, “Oratory and the Dialogical in *Absalom, Absalom!*” *Intertextuality in Faulkner*. Michel Gresset and Noel Polk, editors. Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 1985:73-86.

events are flashed backwards or forwards to from the novel's present) and whose tellings I am primarily interested in; Rosa, Mr. Compson, Quentin and Shreve. One other storyteller who is mediated by at least two tellers is particularly significant: Thomas Sutpen tells his own story, and in many ways understands it no more than any other teller.

Quentin is clearly the focal consciousness of the work. Though all the information is not filtered through him, he is present with the reader at all times. However, Xiao argues, no one "is dominated by the others in the sense that he discovers the truth of the Sutpen legend, as some critics believe that Quentin does, or that he has the truth all the time, as others hold the third person narrator to have" (Xiao 34). Terrell Tebbets states that the third person narrator is "repeatedly noncommittal about the accuracy of the facts supplied by the roommates" in the final section of the novel (17). The narrator is "noncommittal." If he knows the final truth, he's not telling. Quentin and Shreve sit "creating between them . . . people who perhaps had never existed at all anywhere" (*Absalom, Absalom!* 243). "Perhaps" they had never existed: the tone of the third person narrator doesn't reveal whether he has the facts or not. It is important to distinguish where the narrator does exert authorial control, because he is reliable and authoritative throughout most of the novel. It is more interesting and useful to look at why Faulkner created a narrator who either will not use the knowledge it is conventional for him to have or somehow does not have it.

In his study of *Absalom, Absalom!*, James Matlack states a simple truism: "by literary convention, one accepts portions of omniscient narration as truthful" (345). This novel's narrator does not violate this convention. There is nothing the narrator says is a fact that we shouldn't trust. The characters may all speak for themselves; none of them may hold a privileged position

in terms of knowing the truth of the Sutpen story, but to discuss the facts suggests that the historical truth about Thomas Sutpen is the point of the novel.

The truth in a polyphonic novel is not a historical one. “The ‘*truth*’ at which the hero must and indeed ultimately does arrive through clarifying the events to himself, can essentially be for Dostoevsky only *the truth of the hero’s own consciousness*” (Bakhtin *Problems* 55). The primary question of the novel is not what the actual truth of Sutpen’s life is, but what truth Quentin can take from the story to live with—how he can clarify the events for himself. Louis Rubin argues that “he is the one upon whom the events that take place . . . have their emotional impact. . . [he] has by the close of the story experienced pity and terror through remembering, retelling, and coming to understand the meaning of those events” (339). This is what stories do for people. Whether Quentin truly understands the events or not, his experience with the story helps him arrive at his own truth. One he may be unable to live with.

Each of the storytelling events, and how the narrator presents them, bear close scrutiny. Our ideas about Quentin and the Sutpen story may evolve throughout the novel, but they are all dealt with in detail in the first chapter. The context for the novel’s exploration of narrative authority is established by the narrations in the early chapters.

The arrangement of scenes and the narrative voice at the beginning of the novel are relatively conventional. The first chapter begins with an undramatized narrator describing the room where Quentin and Rosa Coldfield sit. The participants and the setting for the first storytelling event are described. This is the first storytelling event in the novel, but it is not the first one Quentin has been a part of. The first page gives us the room which is described as almost dead.

They sat in what Miss Coldfield still called the office because her father had called it that—a dim hot airless room with the blinds all closed and fastened for forty-three summers because when she was a girl someone had believed that light and moving air carried heat and that dark was always cooler, and which (as the sun shone fuller and fuller on that side of the house) became latticed with yellow slashes full of dust motes which Quentin thought of as being flecks of the dead old dried paint. (3)

Here we have an authorial narrator who tells us definitively, or almost definitively, why Rosa<sup>17</sup> keeps the room the way it is. Someone believed that shuttered, dark rooms were cooler, and she believes it. We are also given a description that is Quentin's—he thinks of the dust motes as dead old dried paint, not the narrator. This is a limited omniscient narrator—the only thoughts he gives us are Quentin's. It is Quentin who thinks of the paint as “dead and old;” it is the narrator who describes the room as dim hot and airless.

Part of the initial description of Rosa deserves closer scrutiny because the narrator appears not to have all the facts. She is described as sitting in “the eternal black which she had worn for forty-three years now, whether for sister, father, or nohusband none knew” (3). The narrator knows that she has worn similar clothes for forty-three years but seems not to know why. Specifically, he says “none knew.” What that means is that no one in Jefferson knows exactly why she wears black. The “none” here is, more specifically, “no one in the community.” The narrator is telling us the level of the community's knowledge. He is, even here, at least partly a communal narrator, speaking for the town. I don't wish to read too closely, particularly at this point, because the narrator here has all the knowledge a limited omniscient narrator should have. He often gives us the information an authorial narrator can and is expected to give, including

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<sup>17</sup> He calls her Miss Coldfield. One of the easiest ways to distinguish voices, at least early in the novel, is by the names they use.



what we must believe is an accurate representation of Quentin's thoughts. In this chapter, there is nothing unconventional about the narrator.

In the first section of the chapter the effect of Rosa's storytelling on Quentin is described, even though her words are not presented. Her words are not given, but the effect of her words is. Her speaking is described without the author using mimetic voice. This is an example of what Ross calls phenomenal voice, which he describes as "a voice depictive of speech (or writing) as an event or object in the fiction's world" (15).

When voice is named, described, commented upon, employed metaphorically, or in any way explicitly presented, phenomenal voice is created. . . . Whereas voice in some sense always results incidentally from represented speech acts, *phenomenal* voice exists only when explicitly mentioned in the diegetic discourse as sound, act, gesture, or the power of speech irrespective of speech's semantic 'content.' (19)

The following example may be slightly outside of what Ross was trying to describe, but I want to highlight this section anyway because it clearly describes the "power of speech." It is a diegetic passage describing speech and storytelling and the power it has. Rosa Coldfield is described as:

talking in that grim haggard amazed voice until at last listening would renege and hearing-sense self-confound and the long-dead object of her impotent yet indomitable frustration would appear, as though by outraged capitulation evoked, quiet inattentive and harmless, out of the biding and dreamy and victorious dust. (3-4)

There are two important things in this quotation. The first is the narrator's authoritative description of Rosa's 'grim haggard amazed voice' and her "impotent yet indomitable frustration." Both of these evaluations are the narrator's, and they are entirely authoritative. These evaluations effect our understanding of Rosa's subsequent narration. These evaluations are not the only factor in our understanding of her telling, but they are examples of overt and authoritative evaluation on the part of the narrator.

The second point is how her voice disappears and the figure of Sutpen appears in its stead. He is evoked by Rosa's storytelling. This image is created in Quentin's mind, and it is clear that the act of telling evokes a very powerful image. It is also important to note that this does not signal a cessation either of her speaking or in Quentin's listening; it is an explicit mention of the power of speech—it is phenomenal voice. The next excerpt directly describes the effect of her telling on Quentin.

Her voice would not cease, it would just vanish . . . and the voice not ceasing but vanishing into and then out of long intervals like a stream, a trickle running from patch to patch of dried sand, . . . Out of a quiet thunderclap he would abrupt (man-horse-demon) upon a scene peaceful and decorous as a schoolprize water color, faint sulphur-reek still in hair clothes and beard. (4)

Sutpen abruptly enters into Quentin's imagination in response to Rosa's telling. He appears to Quentin as the demon that Rosa would have him be remembered as. What is important to note is how powerful and evocative this storytelling event is for Quentin. Some critics privilege the power of the collaborative storytelling of Quentin and Shreve in the later chapters, and this is a persuasive argument, but this event, initiated by a frustrated and impotent old ghost, has a very strong effect on Quentin which should not be underestimated. Even here the story and the telling of it are very powerful.

At this point a brief abstract of the Sutpen story has been related: Sutpen arrives, builds a plantation and a family, there is some destruction, and he dies. The story will be retold and expanded upon innumerable times throughout the novel, as Kroeber says all stories are meant to be. This is not the first time Quentin has heard it, nor is it anywhere near the last. In a prolepsis set off in parenthesis Quentin asks his father why he has to hear it yet again. ““But why tell me about it?” he said to his father that evening” (7). This prolepsis is very straight forward—the time

shift is explicitly stated and then clearly signaled by the parentheses which close to indicate our return to the novel's present.

After this further explanation of the context of this storytelling event, the parentheses close and we are transported back to the novel's present. The transcription of this first part of her telling begins after it has taken six pages to create the context for it. The narrator has established the storyteller's social role in the community, her status relative to her story listener and a compelling theory to explain why the event is taking place, along with the time and place. We have also been shown an internal conflict in the story listener. Even though Quentin gives her almost no feedback during the ensuing pages, we know that this event is powerful and important to him. He may not be particularly active, but he is nonetheless deeply involved.

Her words are presented in quotation marks with only two interruptions for five pages; there are five pages of her direct discourse—of mimetic voice. Having established a context for the event, the narrator stays out, somewhat like Twain's narrator in "A True Story". He does not relate her movements, any changes in her tone of voice, nor does he state what Quentin's reactions are. He does not even use any "she said" tags. Often in the novel, the narrator withdraws, encouraging us to forget his presence—to forget the frame—but, unlike the case of "A True Story," it is always reestablished, often abruptly, jarringly, as we will see it is at the end of the first chapter.

Rosa's story is centered on Sutpen and is almost unremittingly negative. All of his admirable qualities spring from his demonic strength, but the facts of the story make it impossible for her to be completely negative. She begins with one of her primary theses: "He

wasn't a gentleman. He wasn't even a gentleman'" (9). Here, as she does later on, Rosa establishes her authority as a witness to events:

'I saw what happened to Ellen, my sister. I saw her almost a recluse . . . I saw that man return—the evil's source and head which had outlasted all its victims—who had created two children not only to destroy one another and his own line, but my line as well, yet I agreed to marry him.' (12)

She, like Mr Compson, derives part of her authority from her knowledge and mastery of the communal tradition, even though she has isolated herself from the community, and we might assume that she is not as conversant with the communal tradition as Mr Compson. Part of her authority comes from her being a first-hand witness to the events in her narrative; she recounts what she saw, but she also sees clearly how her judgment is suspect. She sees Sutpen as evil and yet acknowledges that she was unable to reject his initial proposal of marriage. Also here we as readers hear about her agreeing to marry Sutpen, but no other details about that. Part of the reason she doesn't expand on this part of the story is that Quentin already knows it. She also doesn't tell that part of the story here because it does not support the argument she is making at this point. And at this point she is making an argument.

Philip Egan rightly argues that Rosa's first monologue, which is contained in chapter 1, has two distinct parts, and that the first part's structure is less like a narrative than the second, or than her other monologue contained in chapter 5. Egan writes that the tone of this first part is "more like oratory than conversation or storytelling" (203).

I would argue that all of her tellings are close to oratory, but Rosa's style here is more closely aligned with oratory than the other tellings because she is more overtly arguing a thesis than any of the other tellers. The argument that Rosa is seeking to prove is that Sutpen was not even a gentleman and was a demon (in a metaphorical sense, I assume) and that the entire

community, the entire South, is to blame for allowing him to flourish, and that it is no wonder “Heaven saw fit to let us lose the War” (13). She has other motivations, but I am more interested in the fact that she is arguing than in what she is trying to argue. All of the primary storytelling characters in the novel sound very much alike. I wish to establish that the marked difference in Rosa’s telling arises not because she is using a different type of discourse, but because she is using the same discourse in a different manner. Egan points to some of the differences in Rosa’s section: “Rosa summarizes events rather than dramatizes them. She rarely sets a scene in the first part of the monologue: rather, she alludes to incidents and people in brief statements and catalogues them with her parallel structures” (203). Rosa’s voice is clearly the most oratorical, but I would argue that part of the reason for this is that she is more intent on making and supporting specific arguments than in telling a cohesive story. The incidents and people she catalogues are evidence to support her argument. Of course, she does not need to tell a cohesive story to Quentin because they have already told him; he has heard the story countless times. The reader needs the information provided in chapters 1-4 more than Quentin because he already knows much of the story.

Displaying oratorical style is not a cause but a symptom of Rosa’s effort to argue her case. The first section’s broad strokes ease the reader into the stream of traditional narrative. Rosa introduces the reader to a mythic figure, and to the ornate language that the other storytelling characters will use. While she establishes the myth, she also helps establish the form by which the myth will be related in the tradition. She introduces both the communal language and her own terminology. Both will be used by subsequent tellers. One of her most obvious contributions is the term “demon,” which Ross argues affects our response to all subsequent

tellers: “The demon image will be carried through to the end of the novel, revised and humanized but never fully rejected. Our succeeding responses to Sutpen depend on Rosa’s demonology” (207). Both readers and subsequent tellers form their image of Sutpen in response to the term.

Her authority, with Quentin and with the reader, comes primarily from the fact that she was there. We have good reasons to doubt that she is anywhere near objective about the object of her “impotent yet indomitable frustration.” She was, however, a first-hand witness to some of the events she describes, though not all of them. In fact, most of her telling recount events that occurred before her birth. We should remember that her story is also shaped by the communal understanding of the Sutpen story. Rosa cannot stray too far from what the community believes to be the truth, and if she does, she must more strongly rely on her personal authority.

The first diegetic section after five pages of transcribed speech, excepting two short statements by Quentin, describes how Rosa’s telling has evoked an image of her as a child for Quentin.

‘Yes,’ the grim quiet voice said from beyond the unmoving triangle of dim lace; and now, among the musing and decorous wraiths Quentin seemed to watch resolving the figure of a little girl, in the prim skirts and pantalettes, the smooth prim decorous braids, of the dead time. (14-15)

Rosa will resume telling with little authorial intrusion right after this reminder of the setting for the event and its importance to Quentin. Again the storytelling evokes very strong images for Quentin. This section also marks a change in her telling that Matlack describes:

When she picks up the thread again, she is spinning it quite differently. She still uses many of the same techniques, but her emphasis changes in important ways: the prominent word becomes ‘yes’ instead of ‘no’; the mode becomes drama instead of summary; the style depends less upon parallel structure and oratory; and the subject changes from Sutpen to his children . . . She does not summarize large tracts of plot here but focuses on two specific scenes involving Judith. (204)

Rosa has begun to argue less and to tell more; she has put forth her primary argument and is now relaying events that support it. She relates the story of Judith and Sutpen's wedding, which includes an image of Sutpen standing silently in front of a crowd of angry townspeople.<sup>18</sup> The wedding took place before she was born. She ends the chapter by describing an episode which took place when she was about seven and includes an important part of the Sutpen legend—his public fighting with his slaves (21). Ellen is described as also seeing her son and daughter observing the fight, both with very different reactions. The image of the young Sutpens is important to the Sutpen legend, but what is important for our purposes is the admission that Rosa closes the chapter with: ““But I was not there. I was not there to see the two Sutpen faces this time—once on Judith and once on the negro girl beside her—looking down through the square entrance to the loft”” (22).

At the end of the first chapter we find that Rosa has realistically narrated an event she was not witness to, directly quoting dialogue and describing individuals, even though much of her authority is as a first-hand witness to events. This is also important because we do not doubt her; we are given no reason to do so. We believe that Sutpen said ““I don't expect you to believe that. But I swear to it”” (21), and we have no reason to disbelieve that Henry was unable to watch the fight while his sisters looked on. The chapter doesn't end with the image of Judith and Clytie watching the fight. It ends with an admission by the storytelling character that she has this vivid and compelling image second-hand.

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<sup>18</sup>Sutpen stands before so many angry groups that it should be considered an important motif in his story.

Chapter 1 ends with Miss Rosa's admission that she was not there for the scene she has just narrated and with our awareness of the frame being aggressively reasserted; chapter 2 begins with the narrator once again setting the scene for a storytelling event—creating a new frame for a second portrait of Sutpen. Quentin is again the listener; this time his father is the storyteller. But Mr Compson's is not the first voice that tells in this chapter, either directly or indirectly. Instead the narrator takes his turn at telling the Sutpen story; he summarizes what Mr Compson may be telling Quentin in the novel's present. There are examples of indirect discourse in the novel, but here the narrator is telling Sutpen's story. He gives information that Quentin already knew before this event and which, therefore, Mr Compson may or may not have told him during this sitting. What the narrator does is fill in the reader, who was not born in and did not breathe the same air as Sutpen—who was not raised with the Sutpen story as part of his heritage. But first he sets the scene:

It was a summer of wistaria. The twilight was full of it and of the smell of his father's cigar as they sat on the front gallery after supper . . . It was a day of listening too—the listening, the hearing in 1909 even yet mostly that which he already knew since he had been born in and still breathed the same air in which the church bells had rung on that Sunday morning in 1833. (23)

That Sunday was the first day Sutpen was seen. The narrator describes the surroundings and he says that Quentin already knew most of the story. And then, in what Brooks describes as a “fade out dissolve” (317), he sends us back to the day when Sutpen arrived, or at least drove through, Jefferson, and gives us a view from behind the townsfolk, but it is a well-informed view. The narrator knows what the town knew and thought and when they learned the facts. The narrator is also able to talk about how the town's attitude was formed and how it evolved.

That was all that the town was to know about him for almost a month. He had apparently come into town from the south—a man of about twenty-five as the town learned later,



because at the time his age could not have been guessed . . . That was what they saw, though it was years before the town learned that that was all which he possessed at the time. (24)

The town is clearly a separate entity from the narrator. At the same time, he clearly speaks about their level of knowledge and it is their perspective, not Quentin's that we see from. Quentin has heard all of this information before, but the narrator is not merely relating "mouth-to-mouth tales." He is stating facts from a limited omniscient viewpoint. He tells of "two pistols of which Miss Coldfield told Quentin, with the butts worn smooth as pickhandles and which he used with the precision of knitting needles" (24-25). For Lanser, a singular communal voice "is manifestly authorized by a community" (21). This narrator is one who, in effect "speaks for a collective" (21). However, his authority comes from authorial sources—he speaks for the collective in that he relates the information and attitudes of the collective, but he is outside of this collective, even if the knowledge he relates is no greater than the community's. The *Beowulf* narrator says "we" while this narrator says "the town." This narrator is an authorial narrator rather than a communal one, but he gives us the community's version of events.

The narrator is stating the town's knowledge—he is telling us the story that Quentin has already heard. He is also putting his authority behind this version of the story. Instead of saying that Miss Coldfield told Quentin about the two guns, the narrator says "the two pistols of which Miss Coldfield told Quentin." The guns did exist—they are not a product of her imagination—and the pistols' butts were "worn smooth as pickhandles". The narrator asserts that this is a fact that Rosa related to Quentin; it is not a speculation or distortion of the truth on her part, nor is she mistaken about the facts of the pistols. "Later Quentin's grandfather saw him ride at a canter around a sapling at twenty feet and put both bullets into a playing card fastened to the tree" (25).

In fact Sutpen did this. This is a historical event that the narrator tells us that General Compson saw. Quentin learned of this through hearing the story told, but it is a fact that he has learned in this manner. Sutpen is not merely a mythical figure—a demon. Here, in the first chapters there is a relatively conventional authorial narrator who confirms elements of the Sutpen story.

It may seem that there is little warrant to make this fine a distinction, but to have the narrator assert something “of which” Quentin was told is a far stronger assertion of truth than evaluations like “true enough” that Quentin and Shreve will receive later in the novel. It would be simple enough to write that she told Quentin that he had two pistols, but the narrator instead says that there are two pistols. Faulkner has chosen a distance and perspective for his narrator that does not allow him to reveal other’s thoughts, but he does reveal some facts which includes the general attitude of the town. This section is from the town’s perspective. Since it is a public perspective it is one that Mr Compson and the narrator, regardless of his omniscience, or lack thereof, can know. Because of the limits of his omniscience and his being situated as, in effect, the voice of the town, the narrator’s authority, his entire discourse, is little different from Mr Compson’s, who is a representative of the communal tradition—one of the town’s voices. At the same time it is different, and it is an entirely conventional level of authority for a narrator to have. Ross argues that: “Mr Compson’s account, especially in chapter 2, blends more smoothly with the authorial voice than the other narrators’ accounts, picking up without missing a beat the story of Sutpen’s arrival in Jefferson and his marriage” (225). He writes that Mr Compson picks up the story “without missing a beat,” and the musical metaphor is apt. Mr Compson picks up the narrative very smoothly, but the change is nonetheless clearly marked. We cut to Mr Compson with the very real sense that we are coming in to the middle of his telling. What has happened is

that the narrator has told us the story up to the point where we are able to join Mr Compson as he tells. It has not been an example of indirect discourse; it is not a summary of what he has just told Quentin. The narrator has been telling, and we should assume that his telling is different because the reader's level of knowledge is different from that of Mr Compson's audience. When we are up to speed, when what Mr Compson is telling is similar to what the narrator would be telling, we shift to Mr Compson's direct discourse. A new paragraph starts with quotation marks:

“‘Then one day he quitted Jefferson for the second time,’ Mr. Compson told Quentin” (33). The change in tellers is clearly signaled, but there is no discernable difference other than the quotation marks and the fact that “Miss Coldfield” is now “Miss Rosa” and “General Compson” is “your grandfather.” Mr Compson cannot give us Quentin's thoughts, but the narrator hadn't been involved in Quentin's thoughts directly before this, so only these small, yet distinct, differences mark the difference between the two voices.

Though the musical metaphor works well, it is perhaps better to follow Brooks in his use of cinematic metaphors. We begin the chapter on the Compson's porch and then flashback to Sutpen's arrival. We are then returned to the point where Mr Compson's direct discourse is presented. The debatable question is whether his voice fades into the background, making the section pseudo-diegetic, or if the constant reassertion of his sources of information leaves us too aware of the frame to become absorbed in the story, or to trust his authority. Mr Compson does tell a vivid and compelling story but he also constantly reminds us that it is a story—that he is retelling what he has heard from a variety of sources. He has to remind us of his sources because he is not an author or a narrator; he is a storytelling character and his authority as a storyteller comes in part from his familiarity and adherence to the communal tradition.

He has two sources of authority; he is familiar with two oral traditions. First, he is a bearer of the communal tradition; whenever he says “All I ever heard,” “I have heard” or even “no one ever knew” he is relating the communal knowledge similar to that which the narrator was relating earlier in the chapter. Much like the narrator of *Beowulf*, Mr Compson’s authority comes from his adherence to the communal tradition. Both he and the narrator know what the community knows. Later in the novel he will also explicitly state where the community gained specific pieces of information. Though it is a level of knowledge close to that of the narrator, the narrator never suggests that he “heard” anything—he is the source of his knowledge.

The second of Mr Compson’s sources is his father. He relates a description of Sutpen: ““your grandfather said that his eyes looked like pieces of a broken plate and that his beard was strong as a curry-comb. That was how he put it: strong as a curry-comb”” (34). Here Mr Compson repeats exact words and reinforces them as exact words—the words of an eye-witness to Sutpen’s appearance. This is another example of Mr Compson’s effort to establish and maintain his authority. Note that the exact words are used to describe a specific physical feature, much like the pistol butts. He also directly quotes here because it is an interesting turn of phrase. Interesting turns of phrase like “strong as a curry-comb” or “demon” will tend to be retained in subsequent versions of any story. He sticks to his sources both because of his commitment to the tradition and because he finds them interesting and useful.

This could be called a family tradition both because it is transmitted from grandfather to father to son, and because Mr Compson relates parts of the family’s history, including what his mother (Quentin’s grandmother) had to say, or, in one instance, what his mother was unwilling to talk about (42). Here Mr Compson is relating not the communal tradition, but a story of his own

experience and that of his family. He does it in part as evidence to the veracity of his story but mainly to show the effect of the Sutpen family on his own family. His mother's reaction was to Miss Rosa's aunt who helped arrange the wedding that ends with townspeople throwing things at the couple. The chapter ends with a version of Sutpen and Ellen's wedding, one that is certainly more sympathetic towards Sutpen than Rosa's. He ends the chapter saying of Sutpen that, "He did not forget that night, even though Ellen, I think, did, since she washed it out of her remembering with tears" (45).

Chapter 2 ends with a version of Sutpen's marriage, and Mr Compson's speculation about Ellen's tears. The marriage part of the Sutpen story has been told by two characters. There are no discrepancies between the two versions, but Mr Compson's is more sympathetic towards Sutpen, which certainly isn't difficult. These two chapters have had two different storytelling characters. Mr Compson will continue to tell for two more chapters, though each chapter has individuating characteristics. Chapter 3 continues chronologically from the end of chapter 2. There are, however, some differences. Though they are all part of the same storytelling event, they are presented differently and the level of detail Mr Compson gives and his use of qualifiers are different in each chapter.

Chapter 3 looks different. It begins with Quentin asking his father a question, that leads him to tell a different part of the story. "If he threw her over, I wouldn't think she would want to tell anybody about it *Quentin said*" (46). The only quotation marks in the chapter surround the voices that Mr Compson quotes. Instead the difference between Mr Compson and Quentin's voice and the diegesis is marked by standard type and italics, respectively, and the only diegesis consists of the initial *Quentin said*, one *Mr Compson said*, and one other *Quentin said*. I don't

want to overemphasize this, but this does mark this chapter as different from the ones flanking it and it clearly has the effect of making Mr Compson's direct discourse the unmarked case in the chapter. It makes his mimetic voice appear like diegesis, even while the reader remains aware that it is his speech. Since Mr Compson tells in the two flanking chapters, the narrator only needs to confirm for the reader, with the first exchange, that Mr Compson is still telling during the same storytelling event. The narrator does not need to tell us that they are still on the porch, that it is still that evening. He can present only the speaking voices because we have enough of the other pertinent information. We know the frame exists, so the narrator does not need to emphasize it, and this lack of emphasis gives the mimetic voice more weight.

This suggests an increase in Mr Compson's authority. He also uses terms like "I heard" significantly less, and when he does it is in relation to thoughts or events that the narrator also has not given us. In chapter 2 Mr Compson describes what he had "heard" about the confrontation between Sutpen and townspeople—a public event. In chapter 3 all of his qualifiers are in relation to events that had very few or no witnesses. He still seems to take no liberties with the story or to go outside the realm of what is plausible for him to know, but he reminds Quentin of the secondhand nature of his knowledge far less frequently. He speculates more and more as he establishes his authority. In each chapter he describes events in more and more detail and presents more and more speculations that he cannot know with any certainty, however reliable the tradition is. De-emphasizing the frame like this while also increasing the amount of specific detail cannot help but increase his authority.

Mr Compson tells about Rosa's childhood and Judith and Charles' courtship. The important event in this chapter for our purposes is the confrontation between Henry and Thomas

Sutpen where Henry reportedly rejects his father and subsequently leaves Jefferson with Bon. Mr Compson's description of the event reflects his level of knowledge:

And then something happened. Nobody knew what: whether something between Henry and Bon on one hand and Judith on the other, or between the three young people on one hand and the parents on the other. But anyway, when Christmas day came, Henry and Bon were gone . . . and so the tale came through the negroes: of how on the night before Christmas there had been a quarrel between . . . the son and the father and that Henry had formally abjured his father and renounced his birthright . . . and that he and Bon had ridden away in the night. (62)

In chapter 4 he will imagine this scene, but here he only repeats what the town knew, and how the town came to know about these particular private events. The negroes are the source of information about what took place behind closed doors. They are, of course, both an integral part of and entirely separate from the communal tradition. "No one knew" until the negroes, who already knew, told. They are not part of the communal tradition even though they are an important source of knowledge. Here Mr Compson does not go beyond his plausible knowledge and his authority—his knowledge of events and the reliability of this knowledge—is, for all practical purposes, the same as the narrator's.

Mr Compson's "nobody knew what" in this chapter is functionally the same as the narrator's "none knew" in the first chapter. Mr Compson and the narrator have the same perspective. The perhapses and doubtlesses that Mr Compson uses are in regard to speculations about motivations; they are not about facts. In this chapter Mr Compson has the same kind of knowledge, the same kind of perspective, as the narrator. In chapter 2 Mr Compson makes it clear that he has "heard" how Sutpen walked across the square, a very public act that was witnessed by many townspeople—in that chapter Mr Compson used qualifiers while the narrator did not. In chapter 3 all public actions are narrated in a manner that suggests that they are not

hearsay, that there is no reason to doubt them. Of course, they are hearsay; almost all of Mr Compson's knowledge comes from what he has heard. In this chapter, however, he states this less explicitly.

In chapter 4, Mr Compson speculates a great deal more and describes scenes he admits are the product of his imagination. Though he does use qualifiers to justify his expansions of the story, there are long passages that are introduced with a qualifier but then stretch over a great deal of text. These stretches, like all of Mr Compson's speech, do sound a great deal like the narrator's voice. Chapter 4 begins with a description of Quentin waiting to leave to go to Sutpen's Hundred. Mr. Compson continues to be the primary storytelling character. Here, however, his speech is transcribed conventionally.

In this chapter Mr Compson presents a scene he alluded to in the previous chapter, where Henry abjures his father. He imagines what he believes Henry thought and felt, but he does not dramatize the event. He does not present dialogue or action; he only paints a picture of the scene; he imagines how it would look and how Henry felt. "I can imagine him and Sutpen in the library that Christmas eve, the father and the brother, percussion and repercussion like a thunderclap and its echo and as close" (72).

Here Mr Compson uses the terms "I can imagine it" not "perhaps." He also says "He must have known." You could say "I imagine" "perhaps" or "maybe" he knew and these would perform the same function. The repetition of "he must have known" is followed by the term "as he knew" which suggests even more confidence on the part of the speaker while still remaining subject to the original qualifier. They all state that the speaker is speculating. To say it "must



have happened” is to argue for greater certainty, but it actually has no greater certainty than “perhaps.” It does not reflect any greater knowledge of facts, only greater confidence.

His confidence in his speculations is such that he imagines what Henry Sutpen thought, and these thoughts are presented in the text in the same manner as the narrator presents Quentin’s thoughts and as Thomas Sutpen’s will be in subsequent chapters. Inside Mr Compson’s mimetic voice the same typographic system as the narrator’s represents Henry’s psychic voice. Ross defines it as the voice “of and in the psyche, the silent voice of thought heard only in the mind and overheard only through fiction’s omniscience” (132).

\_\_\_\_\_ Mr Compson describes what he imagines was Henry’s internal conflict; he claims to understand Henry’s motivations and even his thoughts. Even though psychic voice is a written phenomenon, part of Faulkner’s writing style, it is used in Mr Compson’s direct discourse, in his reported speech. It is an example of the written psychic voice that Faulkner uses throughout the novel, indeed throughout his oeuvre, which the narrator used with Quentin in the first chapter, being used by a storytelling character. The result is what looks like psychic voice, a narrator’s tool, being used by a storytelling character, who by definition cannot give us anyone’s thoughts “through fiction’s omniscience.”<sup>19</sup> We will see this throughout the novel, and also in Lee Smith’s *The Devil’s Dream*, which is the subject of my next chapter. In contrast neither Aunt Rachel or Huck ever present the thoughts of any of the characters they speak of.

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<sup>19</sup> Of course a storytelling character can represent the thoughts of a character he/she considers fictional. In that case a storytelling character can act in every way like a narrator when transmitting a fiction inside the fiction. But here Mr Compson is telling a story he would have his listeners believe is true.

If the storytelling character cannot have a narrator's omniscience but uses all of the orthographic techniques available to the narrator, where are the guidelines for the reader? Are we to accept Mr Compson's speculations as likely or even the truth? Is there any reason given to us to either accept or doubt his speculations? We have been told that Mis Rosa's telling is fueled by an impotent rage that has not dissipated in forty-three years, but we are given no reason to doubt her on matters of fact. The narrator never questions or corrects her. Her story does not conflict with Mr Compson's, and we aren't informed as to what fuels his narrative. We know he is a father talking to a son, but the narrator does not expand or even comment on this dynamic, nor does he comment on Mr Compson's veracity. The only indication we have for Mr Compson's authority is how closely his voice is associated with the narrator. Though he has grown bolder with each chapter, he never says anything that elicits a comment from the narrator.

One must assume that Mr Compson's level of authority is equal to the narrator's. I am arguing that the closeness of the voices that Mr Compson and the narrator use and their similar level of knowledge put them on the same dialogical plane. We cannot say whether the narrator holds the same kind of knowledge as Mr Compson, or if he chooses to withhold his knowledge. The narrator does not comment on Mr Compson's reliability and this lack of evaluation leads us to consider him reliable. Unless any narrator explicitly or implicitly leads us to doubt a storytelling character, we tend to believe him. In any case a storytelling character should establish and maintain authority in the same manner as any other storyteller. Mr Compson would hold that his authority comes from both his familiarity with the communal tradition and his privileged insight as the son of Sutpen's friend and apparently the closest thing Ellen had to a friend. He

does seem to have unique access to the story. The narrator gives us no reason here to doubt him or his sources.

Chapter 4 ends in regular type with Mr Compson quoting Wash Jones. Chapter 5 begins in italics with Miss Rosa taking up the telling at exactly that point in the story, though it isn't clear when in the chronology of the novel she is telling. The chapter begins with a phrase she will repeat throughout this monologue: "*So they will have told you doubtless already*" (107).

The chapter is dominated by her mimetic voice; the italics mark her direct discourse, which takes up all but the last two pages. It does not follow from where Miss Rosa stopped talking, but it does follow directly in the story from where Mr Compson has just left off. Just as Mr Compson picked up the story from the narrator without missing a beat in chapter 2, Miss Rosa seems here to take over for Mr Compson. This smooth transition is brought about by the narrator and comes at the expense of the chronology of the diegesis. It also shows, as did the narrator's telling in chapter 2, that the reader is not presented every word that is told in Quentin's presence during these storytelling events. The narrator omits some redundant tellings in order to better relate his story, but this should not lead us to believe that they didn't take place.

In chapter 5 we are prepared for Miss Rosa's narration. We know most of her arguments, biases and the story up to the point where she is picking it up, and we are ready to hear her tell her story. We finally know enough about Sutpen and Rosa to hear her side of the story, and two remarkable things happen: she reveals an ability to love that it would be an understatement to call unexpected and her story listener doesn't hear her reveal the depths of her emotions.

Before she can tell her own story, she has to address the fact that the communal version of the story and hers are somewhat at odds, though even here there isn't a tremendous discrepancy

in the basic facts. One of the reasons Miss Rosa keeps repeating the phrase “they will have told you” is to show that she is aware that Quentin and the town know much of the story. They are part of the same community of memory and hold this story in common. However she may wish to portray Sutpen and her relationship, she is constrained by the knowledge that this is not a new story to Quentin; she cannot manipulate the story at will. At the same time, she lived through the events she is narrating and she has private knowledge that Mr Compson and the community cannot have. Egan suggests that her repetition of the phrase is part of a frame surrounding a longer narration emphasizing Rosa’s personal experience:

Every major incident is either part of the popular lore, which the townspeople will have told Quentin already, or part of Rosa’s personal history, which they cannot have told them. Rosa organizes the popular view into a thin frame enclosing a long narrative of the personal view. (205)

After she has told part of the public story involving her drive to Sutpen’s Hundred she tells Quentin that “*they cannot tell you how I went on up the drive, past Ellen’s ruined and weed-choked beds and reached the house*” (108). Her use of this phrase argues for her own privileged access to this part of the story. And she clearly does have privileged access here. She relates her personal experience where it intersects with the Sutpen story—she tells parts of the story that no one else ever has.

Quentin, however, doesn't hear her emotional confession. Olga Scherer argues, in an intertextual reading of *Absalom, Absalom!* with *The Sound and the Fury*, that this door image evokes in Quentin memories of his sister Caddy and as a result he is not really listening to her (306-9). Brooks agrees that Quentin does not hear: “Quentin was not listening to Miss Rosa’s account because his imagination remained gripped by the confrontation between Henry and Judith when Henry bursts into her room to tell her he has killed her fiancé” (306). Brooks argues

that he was gripped by the confrontation, but I would argue, with Scherer, that Quentin's imagination at this point cannot take him through the door to this confrontation. "But Quentin was not listening, because there was also something which he too could not pass—that door" (139). He will not be able to pass through the door metaphorically until he does so literally later that evening at Sutpen's Hundred.

Though audience inattentiveness is a very real problem in oral-aural transmission, it doesn't matter whether Quentin hears Miss Rosa's telling because she cannot reveal a great deal about Sutpen, Charles or Henry, and it is their stories which have meaning for Quentin. We see Rosa's side, and we learn that even bitter old ghosts are capable, or at least were once capable, of smelling the wisteria—can have loves and losses we may not have believed possible. Brooks writes that: "Whether or not Quentin was listening or merely sitting there bemused, the reader, of course, has the benefit of Miss Rosa's account" (307). Though her story may have limited interest for Quentin, even if he had heard, we see that there is more to these historical events than the community can tell.

This telling has been placed here because this is where the events Rosa narrates occur in our reception of the story and because it continues a trend that Mr Compson started when he imagined private scenes in chapter 4. Though the novel will revisit parts of the communal tradition, there is a clear movement from public to private. We have gone from the events in Sutpen's life that were witnessed by the town to accounts of individuals' thoughts and motivations, and the narrator has exerted a conventional type of authorial privilege making descriptive and evaluative remarks about Rosa and arranging the sections. Making this move from public to private requires either first-hand testimony, like Miss Rosa's and perhaps Thomas

Sutpen's, or the storyteller's imagination. The communal tradition has given Quentin all the information it can, and it has left many things inexplicable. Now perhaps only imagination can take him any farther.

Who exactly is telling will be less straightforward for the rest of the novel. Mainly because the storytelling event that Shreve and Quentin take part in is far more collaborative than the previous ones, where Quentin was listening to his elders. Who speaks is also less clear because Quentin and Shreve are both also clearly influenced by the earlier tellings, and adopt much of their language. Their use of the language of the communal tradition is at the heart of Ross's contention that *Absalom, Absalom!* has an oratorical Overvoice that is closely associated with the author.

The authority of oratorical voice comes from its relationship to a specific discourse community. It is a type of communal voice, connected with a large but identifiable community. In Faulkner's case, since Southern colloquial oratory is a part of his heritage, his narrator's or storytelling character's use of oratorical voice necessarily places their voices closer in status to the author, than, as a specific example, Wash Jones's mimetic voice, which is depicted as a substandard dialect. In *Absalom, Absalom!* all of the primary storytelling characters use oratorical voice, as does the narrator, and, Ross argues, all are therefore closely associated with the author. All of these voices, that are not initially greatly divergent, merge in these later chapters.

All speakers evince the features of the oratorical style discussed earlier. All the narrators more or less 'sound like father'—and 'father' names a principle of authority greater, of course, than Mr Compson. The Overvoice envelops the discourse, taking up into itself all subsidiary voices. (Ross 220-21)

There is certainly movement toward a single voice, but to suggest that the other voices are subsumed by a single authoritative voice, which is the definition of a monological novel, may give the individual voices less credit than they deserve. We hear the terms the of the individual tellers—their echoes resound. Shreve is not enveloped or subsumed by the Overvoice. The tradition has little power over him—it consists of a set of signifiers to be manipulated. The voices that help create the discourse are not necessarily determined by it.

The last four chapters of *Absalom, Absalom!* are set in Quentin's dormitory room at Harvard shortly after Quentin has received a letter from Mr Compson telling him that Miss Rosa has died. The letter reminds Quentin of the wisteria and cigar smoke that were part of the earlier events, but can't exist here. The letter is presented in italics. After the transcription of the letter we read Quentin's thoughts about how the letter evokes not only the smells but brings "with it that very September evening itself" (142). He recalls an earlier storytelling event in much the same manner the narrator takes us to "that Sunday morning in June 1833" (7). As that evening is evoked for him, Shreve interrupts him and Quentin recalls the numerous times his fellow students have asked him:

*Tell about the South. What's it like there. What do they do there. Why do they live there at all*—that very September evening when Mr Compson stopped talking at last, he (Quentin) walked out of his father's talking at last because it was now time to go, not because he had heard it all because he had not been listening since he had something which he was still unable to pass: that door. (142)

Quentin begins to remember the trip to Sutpen Hundred, but Shreve interrupts before he gets there. Then Shreve recapitulates the story. When Shreve takes over the narrative, he runs through several different signifiers, acclimating himself to the role of storyteller, calling Sutpen "a widowed Agamemnon to her Cassandra an ancient stiff-jointed Pyramus to her eager though

untried Thisbe...this Faustus, this demon, this Beelzebub” (144-5). Situated outside of Quentin’s community of memory, he has a different frame of reference, and a different language, but the two pistols and Rosa’s term “demon” remain: “–this Faustus who appeared suddenly one Sunday with two pistols and twenty subsidiary demons and skuldugged a hundred miles of land out of poor ignorant indian and built the biggest house on it you ever saw” (145). By framing the story in terms of signifiers he is more familiar with, Shreve is able to better understand it for himself. Shreve is playing—he is enjoying his turn at storytelling. While Shreve is playing with some of the signifiers in the story, he is also recapitulating it and acquainting himself with the discourse. This passage recounts, in different terms, events that were told in the first chapter. Shreve is playing and treating the tradition with a youthful irreverence. At one point Quentin describes the duration of Sutpens’s family’s trip: “(you couldn’t call it a period because as he remembered it or as he told Grandfather he did, it didn’t have either a definite beginning or a definite ending. Maybe attenuation is better)—an attenuation” (182). In a later chapter Shreve jokingly uses the term attenuation, which the narrator has also already used. Talking about Henry’s trip to the University of Mississippi, Shreve says, ““Bayard attenuated forty miles (it was forty miles, wasn’t it?); out of the wilderness proud honor semestrial regurgitant”” (288). Here again Shreve jokes about the tradition and its language. But he also demonstrates that he is learning how to use the discourse. Shreve recasts the local particular tradition, which “he must have got from Quentin, perhaps weeks before” (Brooks 311), into more widely known mythical terms—showing how this story is similar to other myths, other stories.

Quentin has already told Shreve much of the story. We don’t hear every word that is spoken in this or any of the other storytelling events in the novel because that would create



needless redundancies. The point of recapitulation here is to provide a much-needed summary, and to show Shreve familiarizing himself with the discourse.

While Quentin is listening to and agreeing with the gist of what Shreve is saying, we hear Quentin's psychic voice instead of Shreve's mimetic voice. Quentin thoughts refer overtly to the similarity in the storytelling voices in the work for the first time :

*He sounds just like Father* he thought, glancing (his face quiet, reposed, curiously almost sullen) for a moment at Shreve . . . *Just exactly like Father if Father had known as much about it the night before I went out there as he did the day after I came back thinking Mad impotent old man who realised at last that there must be some limit even to the capabilities of a demon for doing harm.* (147-48)

Here we find out that Quentin had learned something during his trip to Sutpen's Hundred, and that that knowledge informs the versions we will subsequently hear, even though we do not know what he has learned or how. We are told that the languages of the individual tellers are similar; we also see that they are similar. Recall that Rosa characterized Sutpen as a "furious mad old man" in her telling, though she certainly did not characterize him as "impotent," yet the narrator described Rosa's frustration as "impotent yet indomitable" (3). Here Quentin thinks of Sutpen as a "*Mad impotent old man*" and calls him a demon. All of the previous versions are coming together.

At the end of this italicized section, Shreve breaks in to tell another part of the story—actually to ask about how a storytelling event with Quentin and Mr Compson came about. "How was it?" Shreve said" (152 ). Shreve asks about Mr Compson and Quentin's trip to the Sutpen family grave site and the narrator picks the story up and shows Mr Compson telling about the graves and about Charles's son.

The language here, and the shift from italic to regular type, do not mark a clear difference because Shreve's participation in the storytelling event is so active that he is affecting how Quentin tells the story, even if he is only telling to himself. This italicized section represents Quentin's thoughts, which are very similar to what Shreve is saying to Quentin at the same time; all I want to emphasize is that this shift from italics to regular type isn't the clear kind of shift of speakers that takes place in earlier chapters. The telling is becoming more collaborative, more communal some might say, and the distinction between speakers is blurring. The lack of clear boundaries is not only between Quentin's mimetic voice and his various levels of psychic voice. Shreve's voice—his presence—is also helping to blur the boundaries. The interaction of these two consciousnesses is creating a new version of the Sutpen story. A version which is realized by the narrator.

Robert Georges might well claim that this kind of blurring of teller and listener is indicative of storytelling events, which rely on listener feedback: "As the storyteller receives and decodes the responses of the story listener and interprets and responds to them as feedback, the interaction between the storyteller and the story listener intensifies and begins to shape the message" (321). For Georges, the message, the linguistically coded semantic content, is only part of the event, indeed only part of the story, and is only formed with the active involvement of all participants. The final chapters of *Absalom, Absalom!* are an attempt to show the kind of collaboration that Georges talks about in the pages of a novel. This section could be described as a version of the story told by Shreve, or as feedback which helps shapes Quentin's message. It is both. This type of collaboration, when it is rooted in a communal tradition, creates communal

voices like those Lanser identifies. Matlack argues that their collaboration is a type of communal voice:

Confusion in determining the locus of narration arises in the late chapters because these two are speaking with a common voice which cannot be separately attributed to either of them . . . This community expands to include the whole of what I have called the oral tradition in the novel. The narrative structure and the external unity of the novel cause all the storytellers to fuse into a single process, a common identity. (351)

The common identity that Matlack writes of is obviously very similar to the Overvoice Ross writes of, as well as Lanser's idea of communal voice. Matlack does not connect the communal voice to the author, as Ross does. By definition Lanser's communal voice is separate from an authorial presence. Ross would have the Overvoice be imbued with the god-like power of the traditional authorial voice, hence the capitalization of the term. I am arguing for a merging of the voices that is a result of the communal nature of storytelling events and a concomitant equality of all voices. But this equality of voices is still mediated, made possible, by the narrator who seems to retain control of all the voices, though he chooses to make very few evaluative comments.

For Lanser, communal voice is "a practice in which narrative authority is invested in a definable community and textually inscribed either through multiple, mutually authorizing voices or through the voice of a single individual who is manifestly authorized by a community" (21). Here we have multiple voices who are part of an identifiable community. Rosa, Quentin and Mr Compson authorize themselves, in part, by using the communal discourse—by using the language of the identifiable community of memory they establish their authority. The discourse of the characters and the narrator are so closely associated, are so thoroughly intermingled, that the structurally dictated difference between the different voices on different narrative levels and with different levels and types of knowledge is blurred and diminished, if not eliminated.

However much the characters may be contending for authority (and I see less of this than many critics) the author has created a community of voices. We have been presented with several storytellers from the same community who do authorize each other through their familiarity with the communal tradition. We have also seen a narrator who speaks for the communal “we.” What we are beginning to see in this chapter is Shreve, someone outside of the community, begin to appropriate the discourse and tell his version of the story—one that reflects the influence of earlier versions, but also reflects his sensibilities.

While Shreve is actively and energetically participating at this point, the outward manifestation of Quentin’s involvement consists only of occasional “yesses.” In response to Shreve’s question the narrator gives an account of a storytelling event that occurred well before Quentin’s visit to Rosa. This event is the source of what Brooks calls “Stratum B” of Quentin’s knowledge: “*What Mr Compson told Quentin in the talk that was set by their visit to the Sutpen graves*” (142).

In the middle of this represented storytelling event Quentin imagines a scene Mr Compson is telling about: “It seemed to Quentin that he could actually see them” (152). Though this is presented in a later chapter, where the storytelling is usually attributed to Shreve and Quentin, it is Mr Compson’s telling which is evoking strong images for Quentin. The story evokes strong reactions and vivid images regardless of who is telling the story. In the middle of this event, set in the Sutpen family graveyard, Quentin imagines Sutpen’s tombstone as it was when it was leaning against the wall inside the house (though it may never have actually have been there):

where Miss Coldfield possibly (maybe doubtless) looked at it every day as though it were his portrait, possibly (maybe doubtless here too) reading among the lettering more of

maiden hope and virgin expectation than she ever told Quentin about, since she never mentioned the stone to him at all, and (the demon) drank the parched corn coffee and ate the hoe cake which Judith and Clytie prepared for him and kissed Judith on the forehead and said, 'Well, Clytie' and returned to the war, all in twenty-four hours; he could see it; he might even have been there. Then he thought *No. If I had been there I could not have seen it this plain.* (154-55)

The use of "Miss Coldfield" and "Quentin" signal the narrator's voice, but here the narrator uses terms indicative of Mr Compson's style, through the use of the qualifier "possibly" and the parenthetical modification of "maybe doubtless," though it could be Quentin's thought process which calls for the use of, or at least modifies, those qualifiers. This is a less contentious version of the psychic dialogue inside Quentin in the first chapter, though what is being contested here is not terminology but certainty. The parenthetical expressions could signal conflicting voices inside Quentin, or Quentin's modification of the story being told. But this is the narrator's voice we are reading. Ross describes psychic voice passages such as this as "free indirect internal discourse with uncertainty as to source" (142), and I agree with this assessment. In fact, this particular passage has two types of psychic voice: most of the passage is free indirect discourse, but the passage ends with "direct quotation marked by italics and absence of punctuation" (142), which Ross also identifies in Faulkner's oeuvre. "Then he thought *No. If I had been there I could not have seen it this plain*" (155). Once again, the italics indicate a change in voice even if both voices are inside one character.

Donnelly writes that "as Quentin visualizes past events, the material temporally distanced becomes presently evocative and significant" (112). Quentin, three generations removed, can see it more plainly, but it is Shreve, unfettered by tradition, who can finalize the Sutpen story and confidently answer the question why. His confidence and finality should not be confused with

fact. But before Shreve can take the telling past Quentin's knowledge, Quentin must first tell him more. Again, even this early, Shreve is affecting how the story is being told.

The chapter ends with Shreve recapitulating the story up to the point where Rosa and Quentin arrive at Sutpen's Hundred, but, as it is many times in the text, the forward movement of the story is stopped—continuation is deferred—this time by a frantic plea: "'Wait then,' Shreve said. 'For God's sake wait'" (175). Shreve says "wait" because he feels inadequately prepared to move forward. He doesn't have the information necessary to understand where he is. Before he can move forward he must have some gaps filled in for him. As chapter 7 begins, Shreve says: "'So he just wanted a grandson'" (176). Shreve's comments refer to a portion of the storytelling event that we have not just heard. This does not follow directly from the last chapter, except that it refers to the back story Shreve needs in order to understand. It certainly does introduce the topic of this chapter: Sutpen's childhood, his "innocence" and his "design." In order to show why Sutpen "just wanted a grandson" Quentin presents, in effect, Sutpen's life story. Particularly the story of his life before "that Sunday morning in June 1833" (7), when Sutpen first arrived in Jefferson. Quentin sets the scene for a pair of storytelling events where Sutpen was the teller and General Compson the listener. This story could only have come to Quentin through his father. But Quentin never mentions his father as a conduit. Instead he uses two tags: "grandfather said" and variations on "Sutpen told grandfather." Skipping mention of his father has two advantages: it is more convenient, and it increases his authority.

Obviously, for Quentin to narrate to Shreve a storytelling event about how his father related a storytelling event where his father (Quentin's grandfather) told him about a storytelling event between him and Sutpen is unwieldy. "Quentin told Shreve that father told him that

Grandfather told him that Sutpen told him about his childhood” slows things down quite a bit. It is very reasonable to not mention many of these layers. In fact, it is more than understandable, it is preferable. However, all of these layers exist in the oral tradition. All of these characters’ consciousnesses are theoretically responsible for the substance of Quentin’s telling. But this isn’t a real storytelling event—it is a work of fiction that is presenting these events, and the question we should be focusing on is who the author wants us to believe.

However much I would like *Absalom, Absalom!* to be an accurate model of storytelling events and oral traditions, it is not. In this section the author wishes to present some of the thoughts of a character who cannot directly take the stage. The only way that Sutpen can speak for himself is for the author to create a past storytelling event for him. In order to retain the basic structure of the novel, this event has to be passed down through two generations, creating not only the possibility but the theoretical likelihood of distortion over repeated tellings, no matter how committed the tellers are to maintaining the integrity of the tradition. If this were an oral tradition we would have to be skeptical about how much of what is being transmitted can be considered as actually coming from Sutpen, but it is not an oral tradition. The way that Sutpen’s story is presented in the text encourages us to believe it is authoritative. I would argue that we are to believe that the words that are given as Sutpen’s thoughts are his thoughts, or at least what Sutpen claimed were his thoughts. The only distortion we should take into account are Sutpen’s.

The more important reason to omit mention of Mr Compson is because the more narrative levels that are overtly mentioned between Sutpen and Quentin, the more aware we are of the likelihood of distortion. Instead of presenting an event where we doubt the words of the characters, Faulkner has Quentin directly quote Sutpen and give us his thoughts in the same

manner that the narrator has given us Quentin's thoughts. The only way to maintain the integrity of the fictional frame and give Sutpen a chance to speak for himself is to create storytelling events that have themselves been passed down through the Compson family tradition; however, in order to give his telling equal weight with those of the others, the frame must be de-emphasized.

Genette describes intervening layers of narrative like we have here as metadiegetic. In this case Sutpen's story is meta-meta-meta-metadiegetic. Genette also describes forms of narrating "where the metadiegetic way station, mentioned or not, is immediately ousted in favor of the first narrator, which to some extent economizes on one (or sometimes several) narrative level(s)—these forms we will call *reduced metadiegetic* (implying: reduced to the diegetic), or *pseudo-diegetic*" (236-37). I would rather use pseudo-diegetic (or perhaps pseudo-meta-diegetic) here because the reader remains aware that this section has not actually been reduced to the diegetic—the reader knows that this is not the narrator directly presenting Sutpen's speech and thoughts. In another important sense it is not pseudo-diegetic because terms like "grandfather said" reassert the intervening levels. But the similarity of the voices, Ross's Overvoice, and the similarity Sutpen's psychic voice has with the psychic voice the narrator uses for Quentin reduce the sense of intervening storytellers. Again the two reasons for making a section with this many layers pseudo-diegetic are to remove unwieldy phrases in order to promote ease of reading and to increase the authority of Sutpen's telling. At no point in this chapter does the narrator make statements that might bring the veracity of Quentin's account into question.

Initially Quentin tells his story in indirect discourse using the term "he told grandfather". This construction is also similar to the narrator's description of Sutpen's pistols in the first



chapter, where the pistols' butts were "worn smooth as pickhandles" (25). When Quentin sets the scene for the two events where Sutpen is the teller, he uses the term "grandfather said" (178). He only uses "grandfather said" when setting the scene and when he is presenting General Compson's evaluative comments. Every other time he uses "he told grandfather," or a similar term, which not only eliminates Mr Compson as a conduit, it also reduces General Compson's input. An omniscient narrator who presents the event can also say "Sutpen told him." In terms of the point of view there is little difference between Quentin and the narrator in this instance.

In answer to Shreve's comment about Sutpen wanting a grandson, Quentin sets the scene for a storytelling event where Sutpen "'told Grandfather something about it'" (178). After he sets the scene he doesn't present any of the other intervening tellers' mimetic voices. Instead he summarizes and uses indirect discourse to relate Sutpen's story. He explains that Sutpen's "trouble was innocence" (178). For the first section of Sutpen's story Quentin primarily uses indirect discourse, though some of it might better be called summary. He is retelling Sutpen's story, but he is telling. The first part of Sutpen's story is about his family's move from what will become West Virginia to the Virginia tidewater area. Here is an example of Quentin's mimetic voice:

"But he—" ("The demon," Shreve said) "—didn't know, or remember, whether he had ever heard, been told, the reason or not. All he remembered was that one morning the father rose and told the older girls to pack what food they had, and somebody wrapped up the baby and somebody else threw water on the fire and they walked." (181)<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>20</sup>While Quentin is narrating and mentions Sutpen's name, Shreve interjects "the demon." (181, 198) When Shreve is telling the story he calls Sutpen "the Demon." He does this because he enjoys it.

Here Quentin comments directly on Sutpen's state of knowledge. Quentin does not say that "he didn't tell grandfather." Instead he says that he didn't know, or remember. He directly comments on Sutpen's knowledge—explicitly stating what he remembered and what he did not. He also comments on how Sutpen told the story. Though apparently he does have the ornate style associated with Southern colloquial oratory and the other storytelling voices of the novel, he is relatively taciturn in his telling. He omits, so the other characters tell us, a great many details, and some facts, which he does not consider relevant to his specific purpose.

Quentin narrates Sutpen's flight to a private spot after his pivotal rejection at the doorway. I use the term "narrate" quite consciously because this section seems very much like the narration of a novel. Quentin is narrating the initial storytelling event in a viewpoint very similar to the narrator's. Quentin comments on how Sutpen told the story—on his lack of ornamentation or even elaboration—as if he heard how he told it, and he comments on the state of his memory. He says: "That was how he told it. He didn't remember if it was weeks or months or a year they traveled" (181). The intervening layers are ousted in favor of Quentin's narration.

Quentin narrates Sutpen's flight to seclusion, and then tells Shreve about his inner turmoil, which is represented as a dialogue:

"He was quite calm about it, he said . . . arguing with himself quietly and calmly while both debaters agreed that if there were only someone else, some older and smarter person to ask. But there was not, there was only himself, the two of them inside that one body . . . arguing quiet and calm: *But I can shoot him.*" (189)

Just as there are "the two separate Quentins now talking to one another in the long silence of notpeople in notlanguage" in the first chapter negotiating the meaning and signifiers of the Sutpen story (5), Sutpen's inner turmoil is represented with two distinguishable psychic voices. In both cases the "notlanguage" of consciousness is represented. Not only are they the same kind

of voices in the general sense, but Sutpen's psychic voice is presented on the page by Quentin's mimetic voice in the same manner the narrator has presented Quentin's psychic voice. All of Sutpen's thoughts are presented in a section which is enclosed by quotation marks that signal Quentin's mimetic voice—his direct speech. Though most of Quentin's telling presents Sutpen's indirect discourse, his psychic voice is presented by the storytelling character in the same manner as the authorial voice presented Quentin's thoughts; the same orthographic system is employed. If you look on the page at how these two psychic voices are graphically presented, the only discernable difference is the quotation marks enclosing Sutpen's section.

The narrator, of course, does not qualify Quentin's thoughts in the manner that Quentin admits that these thoughts are second hand. But Quentin's knowledge of Sutpen's thoughts seems to be as good as the narrator's knowledge of any other character's, and the similarities in presentation remain. Quentin does add various forms of "he said," but he does not mention the intervening diegetic levels, and there are long stretches where the "he said"s and "he told"s are few and far between. Instead, Sutpen's inner dialogue is presented in a very authoritative manner:

*"But I can shoot him: and the other: No. That wouldn't do no good: and the first: What shall we do then? and the other: I dont know: and the first: But I can shoot him. I could slip right up there through them bushes and lay there until he come out to lay in the hammock and shoot him: and the other: No. That wouldn't do no good: and the first: Then what shall we do? And the other: I dont know."* (190)

Like Mr Compson earlier, Quentin's mimetic voice, his transcribed speech, uses the same orthographic system as the narrator. The italics do not signal a change in inflection, or any other sort of paralinguistic factor. They are literally a graphic reminder that psychic voice is being employed.

During his telling, Sutpen omits large portions of the narration which he considers inconsequential. When he tells of traveling to the West Indies, he doesn't explain how he got there, though he was probably only twelve years old and had never seen a ship or the sea. "He went to the West Indies. That's how he said it . . . He just said, "So I went to the West Indies"" (193). In order to prove his taciturnity, Quentin momentarily abandons indirect discourse and directly quotes Sutpen. Even though we could put at least two more sets of quotation marks around Sutpen's statement, we are expected to accept it as accurate. When Sutpen tells of subduing a native uprising in the West Indies he merely says he subdued them:

"Not how he did it. He didn't tell that either, that of no moment to the story either; he just put the musket down and had someone unbar the door and then bar it behind him, and walked out into the darkness and subdued them, maybe by yelling louder, maybe by standing, bearing more than they believed any bones and flesh could or should (should, yes: that would be the terrible thing: to find flesh to stand more than flesh should be asked to stand); maybe at last they themselves turned in horror and fleeing from the white arms and legs shaped like theirs and containing an indomitable spirit which should have come from the same primary fire which theirs came from but which could not have, could not possibly have (he showed Grandfather the scars)." (204-05)

Sutpen did not elaborate on this section of his story purportedly because the details, and in fact telling an interesting story, were not important to him. He was trying to relate enough expository information to make his present state of affairs clear. His "indomitable spirit" is of "no moment" to his telling. It is, however, important to Quentin, as it doubtless was to Mr and General Compson. So in this version of the story the confrontation is elaborated. Here again qualifiers are employed to make it clear that Quentin is extrapolating (or passing on a previous teller's extrapolation). Note, however, that Sutpen's scars are a testament to what he had to endure. Note also that "he showed grandfather the scars." This is the same kind of construction as "he told grandfather" which acts again to make Quentin's claims seem more a matter of fact than hearsay.

Quentin tells in a different manner than Sutpen, and for different reasons; both use the oratorical voice of the Southern tradition. Though Shreve sometimes chides Quentin about his language he also encourages him to continue on several occasions. Shreve is clearly as absorbed by the story, or nearly as absorbed, as Quentin. “‘Sure,’ Shreve said. ‘That’s fine. But Sutpen. The design. Get on, now.’” (209). As Quentin is using indirect discourse to relate how Sutpen is explaining his design, Shreve makes a comment about Quentin’s use of the language of the tradition: “‘Dont say it’s just me who sounds like your old man,’ Shreve said. ‘But go on. Sutpen’s children. Go on’” (210). Quentin’s verbal response is another “yes”, but Shreve’s statement leads him to think about the connection between all of the storytellers and their subject:

‘Yes,’ Quentin said. ‘The two children’ thinking *Yes. Maybe we are both Father. Maybe nothing ever happens once and is finished. Maybe happen is never once but like ripples maybe on water after the pebble sinks, the ripple moving on, spreading, . . . thinking Yes, we are both Father. Or maybe Father and I are both Shreve, maybe it took Father and me both to make Shreve or Shreve and me both to make Father or maybe Thomas Sutpen to make all of us.* (210)

This is also an attempt to explain the type of communal voice that the novel is enacting. It is like a type of communal voice that Lanser describes “a *simultaneous* form, in which a plural ‘we’ narrates” (21). Of course, Shreve is outside of the community whose story this is, but he has internalized the story and the linguistic norms to some extent. More importantly, Shreve and Quentin are forming a sort of community that is also connected to the story’s tradition. The narrator who actualizes the story they are imagining is neither a personal nor an authorial narrator. However limited their community is, and I would argue that they retain a strong connection to the tradition, it is a community, and the narrator acts as their plural “we”. The communal narrator here is different than the communal one in chapter 2. More precisely, the

narrator speaks for a different community in this chapter, and his authority is derived from communal and not authorial sources.

Quentin's understanding of his heritage—of the Sutpen story—is based not only on hearsay, but on his experience at Sutpen's Hundred. While Quentin is relating a storytelling event with Mr Compson to Shreve, Shreve comments on how Mr Compson's state of knowledge has seemed to change: "'Your father,' Shreve said. 'He seems to have got an awful lot of delayed information awful quick, after having waited forty five years'" (214). Mr Compson's and Rosa's earlier tellings suggested, based on the evidence of Bon's son and a picture of Bon's wife in a locket, that Henry killed Bon in order to prevent him from involving his sister in a bigamy scandal. Here, Quentin relates Mr Compson's speculations based upon the premise that Bon was Sutpen's son, a different story than the one he told in chapters 2-4. Shreve's confusion is understandable; Quentin's response is pivotal:

"He didn't know it then. Grandfather didn't tell him all of it either, like Sutpen never told Grandfather quite all of it."

"Then who did tell him?"

"I did." Quentin did not move, did not look up while Shreve watched him. "The day after we—after that night when we----"

"Oh," Shreve said. "After you and the old aunt. I see. Go on." (214)

Here Quentin, the son, the story listener, becomes the teller, and he has gained this status because he has experience and knowledge that he can add to the tradition. It is made clear that Quentin's superior knowledge is a result of his trip to Sutpen's Hundred with Rosa. It is never made clear what exactly he learns or how what he learns leads him to the conclusion that Charles Bon was the son Sutpen abjured, but it is clear that this is a piece of the puzzle that Quentin's experience supplies. In chapter 8 Shreve recapitulates his understanding of how Quentin knows, and it is clear that no one tells him anything. Many critics have speculated on exactly where, how and

what he learns; Brooks tries to posit additional conversation between Henry and Quentin, but this is what the reader gets. Any additional speculation goes beyond the available evidence.

Shreve is only too happy to speculate; he begins racing ahead of Quentin, prompting him to cry “wait”:

‘Wait, I tell you!’ Quentin said, though he still did not move or even raise his voice—that voice with its tense suffused restrained quality: ‘I am telling’ *Am I going to have to hear it all again* he thought *I am going to have to hear it all over again I am already hearing it all over again I am listening to it all over again I shall have to never listen to anything else but this again forever.* (222)

Here, as in other places, Quentin attempts to curb Shreve’s forward momentum. Here his hesitation is based on his desire to tell the story properly, and on a desire to escape the story at the same time. Only by telling the story can Quentin keep control of it, but telling the story also bring his ambivalence to the foreground, and it threatens to overwhelm him. The “commonwealth” of voices dominates his consciousness. But Shreve is less interested in Quentin maintaining control.

‘No,’ Shreve said; ‘you wait. Let me play a while now. Now, Wash. Him (the demon) standing there with the horse . . . then the voice of the faithful gravedigger who opened the play and would close it, coming out of the wings like Shakespeare’s very self: “Well, Kernel, they mought have whupped us but they ain’t kilt us yit, air they?”’ (224-25)

Again Shreve connects the Mississippi story with stories he is more familiar with, casting Wash Jones as Shakespearian comic relief, showing that the specific story and its characters have universal qualities. Wash speaks a substandard dialect similar in social status to the Shakespearian character’s. Shreve seems to be clearly enjoying making light of the story, but here the narrator aggressively intervenes to make it clear that he is not taking the story lightly:

This was not flippancy either. It too was just that protective coloring of levity behind which the youthful shame of being moved hid itself, out of which Quentin also spoke, the

reason for Quentin's sullen bemusement, the (on both their parts) flipness, the strained clowning. (225)

Here the narrator tells what is behind the two voices we hear. This is one of the most overt signs of authoriality in the novel. We hear very little from the narrator about the other storytellers. In particular the narrator never discusses how we should read Mr Compson's tone. His words are presented with little or no evaluation and are tacitly endorsed by their similarity to the narrator's. Here the narrator explains not only how their speech should be interpreted, but the feelings underlying their speech. However much they are shamed by it, however much Quentin has been trying to hide it here and throughout the other storytelling events, they are moved by the story. In chapter 9 Shreve tries to explain to Quentin what the narrator has just claimed:

“Wait. Listen. I'm not trying to be funny, smart. I just want to understand it if I can and I don't know how to say it better. Because it's something my people haven't got. Or if we have got it, it all happened long ago across the water and so now there aint anything to look at every day to remind us.” (289)

Shreve takes the communal tradition seriously, in part because he realizes it is something he doesn't have. He is not consciously part of a community of memory, and he feels that it is a lack. He has used fragments from the stories he has learned, the stories of the literate tradition, in order to try and understand a tradition he is not a part of. Though Shreve tries to take a turn at telling the story here, Quentin almost immediately takes back the floor: “Quentin did not even stop. He did not even falter, taking Shreve up in stride without comma or colon or paragraph” (225). Quentin picks up the story in stride. Previously it had been the intervention of the narrator that allowed people to take each other up in stride. Mr Compson takes over for the narrator in chapter 2, and the narrator at other times arranges the chapters so separate storytelling events follow each other. Here the narrator doesn't need to intervene because Quentin and Shreve are collaborating



so closely that they can pick up for each other. Their collaboration will become so intense that their voices will later seem to merge, but even here they have a very strong rapport.

Quentin narrates Sutpen's death at the hand of Wash Jones twice in this chapter. He repeats their final dialogue word for word both times. In this section, Quentin once again becomes the carrier of the communal tradition. Here his authority comes from his father, from Mr Compson's mastery of the communal tradition. The story of Wash and Sutpen is peppered with the phrase "father said". Mr Compson's knowledge of the final confrontation comes from the same place as the town's knowledge, from the black midwife who was helping to deliver Milly Jones' daughter (229).

The chapter ends with Shreve suggesting they stop talking and go to bed. Chapter 8 will end the same way. Shreve's suggestion has gone unheeded. Instead he takes an even more active role in telling the story. Instead of recapitulating parts of the story he has heard from Quentin, he begins to tell his own versions of the story.

Chapter 8 is remarkable. The novel has several storytelling events and shows us that Quentin is both deeply moved and deeply conflicted by the story he is reconstructing. In this chapter, he and Shreve collaborate on the story so closely that the boundaries, not only between teller and listener but between teller and subject become blurred. We are given a story that is not clearly assigned to one speaker, because we are to believe that they are so closely collaborating that it is not relevant or even clear who the author of individual statements is. The voice that tells us they are collaborating is the narrator's. This collective voice is a kind of communal free indirect discourse. I would call some sections more examples of phenomenal voice, like in the first chapter where an image of Sutpen is evoked for Quentin by the power of Rosa's speech. The

narrator dramatizes parts of Shreve and Quentin's version, mainly because to have either character identified as the speaker would distinguish the line between storyteller and story listener that Faulkner wishes to blur. It is dramatized also because straight mimetic voice can not represent the power this storytelling event has for the participants. Most of the chapter, however, is told in Shreve's mimetic voice. Quentin's mimetic voice in this chapter is limited to feedback he gives Shreve.

There are two tellers in this chapter, Shreve and the narrator. It begins with Shreve's mimetic voice. Shreve recapitulates the private scene where Sutpen supposedly tells Henry about Bon. In the second paragraph the narrator describes the state of the storytelling event, but then shifts not to what either of them is telling, but to what they are both thinking:

Not two of them in a New England college sitting-room but one in a Mississippi library sixty years ago . . . and they—Quentin and Shreve—thinking how after the father spoke and before what he said stopped being shock and began to make sense, the son would recall later how he had seen through the window beyond his father's head the sister and the lover in the garden. (236)

The narrator doesn't tell us what either of them is saying. Instead he tells us the two have in some sense become one, and then he tells us what they are thinking.<sup>21</sup> Here they identify with Henry; they "see" this scene from his point of view. Brooks argues that the events that Shreve and Quentin imagine "are given something like the authority of objective events. It is no longer *I think this* or *I believe that*, but the events take place before the waking eyes of Quentin and

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<sup>21</sup>There are several instances where the narrator suggests that they are merged. At several points in this chapter the narrator says that Quentin understood Shreve's unclear pronoun references. The narrator simultaneously shows how closely they are linked and supplies the proper noun so the reader can understand: "neither of them said 'Bon'. Never at any time did there seem to be any confusion between them as to whom Shreve meant by 'he'" (249). Our confusion is eliminated while their level of understanding is highlighted.

Shreve” (317). This is true, at least to some extent. However, one of the things they see is the garden with a “shrub starred with white bloom.” The narrator explicitly states that the garden could not have looked as they think it did—as they see it, and that their inaccuracy is irrelevant to their purpose: “it would not matter here that the time had been winter in the garden too and hence no bloom nor leaf even if there had been someone to walk there and be seen there since, judged by subsequent events, it had been night in the garden also” (236). The narrator does not show any omniscient knowledge of what went on that evening—he only demonstrates the communal and general knowledge of when any such meeting could have taken place. He does not commit to anyone actually being in the garden, but he states that there would have been no white blooms. Their story is inaccurate, though in this case only in a largely irrelevant fact. Even though, as Brooks says, their imagined events are presented very authoritatively, they are also contradicted by the narrator, who explicitly states that it could not have been as they imagine it.

This doesn’t entirely invalidate their story, however. The narrator also claims that “that did not matter because it had been so long ago. It did not matter to them (Quentin and Shreve) anyway” (236). Again, the truth of a dialogical novel is the hero’s own truth, not an objective one. For these tellers, the historical facts are not necessarily relevant. The authorial voice uses the extrarepresentational acts to focus us on the fact that truth is more complex than what happened. The small details, and some of the facts, are not important. It is important to find the parts of the story that are relevant to their lives, what they can identify with. They put part of themselves into the characters, their conception of the characters is based in part on their conception of themselves. Quentin and Shreve so closely identify with the historical subjects of their story that they imagine themselves in their places: “not two of them there and then either but four of them

riding the two horses through the iron darkness and that not mattering either: what faces and what names they called themselves and were called by so long as the blood coursed" (237). Here they are physically riding the horses. They don't "almost see it"; it is not that they "could have been there"; they are there. And they can only be there because they are far enough away from the story to be able to vividly imagine it—it had been so long ago. The fact that they can vividly imagine, that this event is highly evocative, does not necessarily give it the authority of objective events. The facts, the events that can satisfactorily be proven, do not explain. In order to create a satisfying explanation, Quentin and Shreve must fill the gaps by using their imaginations. Only their active construction can build a story that meets their needs. Throughout the novel there has been a movement towards greater concreteness. In Rosa's telling, in chapter 1, a "demon" "abrupts" into Quentin's consciousness "upon a scene peaceful and decorous as a schoolprize water color, faint sulphur-reek still in hair clothes and beard" (4), and he is a shadowy relatively insubstantial figure, placed against an artificial backdrop; while Mr Compson is telling, Quentin thinks: "he could see it; he might even have been there. Then he thought *No. If I had been there I could not have seen it this plain*" (154-55). In earlier chapters Quentin can see it, but he isn't there. In this chapter he is there.

Quentin is there and so there is greater power, for Quentin, in this event, where his imagination is more actively involved in the construction of the story, and where Shreve has in part freed him from the constraints of the communal tradition. The narrator, however, also makes statements that act to diminish the authority of these events. The narrator reminds us that, no matter how important these versions are to Quentin, they do not necessarily reflect what actually happened. The narrator indicates that Shreve is speaking, but "it might have been either of them

and was in a sense both: both thinking as one, the voice which happened to be speaking the thought only the thinking become audible, vocal” (243). Here we have an authoritative omniscient narrator, as we have had throughout the novel. The narrator tells us that this storytelling event has brought the two so close together that their thoughts are identical. The narrator is describing the power of storytelling. I would call this phenomenal voice because Ross describes it as existing “when explicitly mentioned in the diegetic discourse as sound, act, gesture, or the power of speech irrespective of speech’s semantic ‘content’” (19). Here it is the power of speech. These two who are one create a compelling version of the Sutpen story.

the two of them creating between them, out of the rag-tag and bob-ends of old tales and talking, people who perhaps had never existed at all anywhere, who, shadows, were shadows not of flesh and blood which had lived and died but shadows in turn of what were (to one of them at least, to Shreve) shades too. (243)

Notice that the narrator acknowledges the distance Shreve has from the tradition—his people at least were shades of shades. There are two other interesting things about this passage: Quentin and Shreve create “people”, not shades—vague images, and these people “may not have existed.” The earlier tellings brought forth “shades” for Quentin, the image of Sutpen came to him, not Sutpen himself. Here they “create between them” actual people. They are far more real than the previous images. Language both brings the past to them and transports them back to the past.

At the same time, these people may not be accurate representations of the historical individuals. In fact, they “may not have existed”. Not only are their actions not necessarily those of the people who were involved, they may not have existed “at all anywhere”. These people may be entirely fictional. Though Mr Compson may also take liberties, though he may fictionalize almost as much as Shreve does, he never provokes this kind of statement from the narrator. The narrator never goes so far as to suggest that anyone Rosa or Mr Compson told of was even

possibly fictional. If the narrator only reveals knowledge available to the communal tradition, he still makes it clear that Quentin and Shreve have gone beyond the ability of this tradition and beyond the facts in order to shape their story.

I return again to Lord's description of epic singer's commitment to their traditions. Lord writes that singers assume "the role of conserver of the tradition, the role of the defender of the historic truth of what is being sung; for if the singer changes what he has heard in its essence, he falsifies truth" (28). Mr Compson and Rosa feel an analogous responsibility to stay faithful to their particular traditions. They don't want to "falsify truth." This is not to suggest that they, or epic singers, necessarily succeed. Of course, part of Rosa's adherence to the tradition arises from what "they will have already told" Quentin. She only veers from the tradition when she can appeal to her authority as an eye-witness to or a participant in events. Mr Compson does not stray far from the traditional knowledge he holds because his authority lies in his mastery of this knowledge and the discourse. Shreve doesn't feel this responsibility—he is not a "barracks filled with stubborn backward-looking ghosts" (7). He takes this story seriously, but he does not invest the tradition with the kind of authority Mr Compson does. He has not grown up with this tradition and he feels far less responsibility to it.

Shreve's goal is to tell an interesting and compelling story, and Quentin allows him to stray from the tradition. In this chapter he introduces a character even though there is no physical evidence he exists.<sup>22</sup> Shreve creates a character who is almost an avatar of greed: "that lawyer

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<sup>22</sup>This is not the first time it happens in the novel. In chapter 4, Mr Compson imagines Bon and Henry's New Orleans trip, including "a swarthy man resembling a creature out of an old woodcut" (89), who may or may not have existed. The narrator never suggests that this man is fictional, though Mr Compson admits to "imagining" this section.

with his private mad female millionaire to farm” (241). Hugh Ruppersberg calls this “Shreve’s most apparent fabrication” (124). Shreve posits the existence of a lawyer who represents Sutpen’s first wife and arranges for Bon to come into contact with the Sutpen’s. Ruppersberg adds that “Though Faulkner seemed to verify, twenty years after writing *Absalom*, the lawyers existence [see Gwynn 77], the narrative itself provides no such evidence” (124).

Events that might have been put in motion by Bon or his mother or may have even been purely coincidence are assigned to the lawyer. “Shreve uses the lawyer to provide a rational explanation for what he cannot otherwise explain” (Ruppersberg 124). Events that are inexplicable, or only explicable by assigning malevolent intent to Bon, which Mr Compson does, are explained by the creation of this malevolent figure. His existence fills motivational gaps in the story. The existing set of signifiers just did not explain.

At one point, Shreve does more than fill the gaps in the story—he changes it. Earlier in the novel, Mr Compson mentions that Henry saved the wounded Bon during the war, even though he knew he would eventually be forced to kill him. Shreve decides that Mr Compson is wrong:

‘He said it was Bon who was wounded, but it wasn’t. Because who told him? Who told Sutpen or your grandfather either, which of them it was who was hit? . . . it was not Bon, it was Henry; Bon that found Henry at last and stooped to pick him up and Henry fought back, struggled, saying, “Let be! Let me die! I wont have to know it then.”’(275)

Having Shreve tell this version allows an interesting possibility to come to light, but Shreve has no warrant to contradict Mr Compson. We should assume that Mr Compson is closer to the truth of this part of the story; he certainly relates what is widely believed to be the truth. Battles make history. Soldiers who save wounded comrades are talked about by other soldiers and perhaps written about in reports or dispatches. Also, there must have been other Jeffersonians who were

in their regiment who would have talked about it in town.<sup>23</sup> It is reasonable to assume that the common knowledge of Henry's saving Charles is based on reliable sources, while Shreve is calling him wrong only because it's an interesting version of the story. Shreve changes the story—boldly asserting that Mr Compson, who has been fastidious about his sources, got the facts wrong by using the argument “who told him?” An obvious response is “who told Shreve?” Though Ruppensburg says the lawyer is Shreve's most obvious fabrication, at least the lawyer's existence doesn't contradict the communal tradition's knowledge. Shreve has little commitment to the oral tradition, he wants only to tell a story that is interesting and that explains.

Colleen E. Donnelly argues that the version told mainly by Shreve is the most compelling. She writes that Shreve:

sorts through all possible causes and motive, as he questions and explores the ramifications of each, to find those that have the most power to explain. His method of inquiry, his attention to detail, works to assure us that he is on the right track and compels us to believe his conjectures, despite the numerous qualifying adverbs and phrases that appear in his narrative. He discards those details that do not explain and keeps what seems most capable of illuminating the destruction of the Sutpen dynasty. (115)

Since he more vigorously fictionalizes than any of his predecessors, what illumination he gives seems to necessarily be less historically accurate. Shreve's telling is certainly dramatic and compelling, but I find no reason to privilege it over any of the other tellings. Throughout Shreve's section I was always very aware that Shreve had no direct knowledge of these events, that he is playing. “Shreve's participation is neither more nor less than the joyous response to the challenge of creating a narrative by an intellect and imagination which are equal to the task” (Tobin 267). Shreve wants to play with the story, and he does not care if he is historically

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<sup>23</sup> Now I'm sucked in to the “must have been” game.



accurate or not. When he decides that Henry saved Bon at Pittsburgh Landing he is taking a liberty that a traditional storyteller would not take, no matter how neatly that change would fit the story he was trying to tell.

Quentin and Shreve know they are taking liberties, but they forgive each other their trespasses as they build their story together. Again and again the narrator stress the communal nature of their telling, how the material is very much alive for them, and also how we should be wary of their methods:

it did not matter to either of them which one did the talking, since it was not the talking alone which did it, performed and accomplished the overpassing, but some happy marriage of speaking and hearing wherein each before the demand, the requirement, forgave condoned and forgot the faulting of the other—faultings both in the creating of this shade whom they discussed (rather, existed in) and in the hearing and sifting and discarding the false and conserving what seemed true, or fit the preconceived. (253)

As in all storytelling events it is not talking alone that completes communication, but Faulkner here is certainly arguing for an unusual level of understanding between the two participants. Not only do they think together, their forgiveness for each other is certainly a sort of love—a close communion.

At the same time the narrator reminds us that their accuracy is not necessarily to be trusted. One thing they forgive each other for is distorting the material in order to fit their ideas of what the story should be. Donnelly's description of Shreve's method mirrors the narrator's. The narrator uses the terms "discarding" and "conserving" while Donnelly uses "discarding" and "keeping". While Donnelly argues that this is the soundest method, the narrator also mentions that they discard and retain material in order to make the story "fit the preconceived", and things that merely "seem" true. The narrator explicitly states that one of their criteria for retention of detail is its ability to fit preconceived notion about what the story should be about. Clearly

“fitting the preconceived” is not a criterion for truth, if truth is historical accuracy, but the truth that Shreve arrives at is not historically accurate.

This part is presented in Shreve’s direct discourse for several pages. After he stops talking, the two are once again represented as closely linked: “Shreve ceased. That is, for all the two of them, Shreve and Quentin, knew he had stopped, since for all the two of them knew he had never begun, since it did not matter (and possibly neither of them conscious of the distinction) which one had been doing the talking” (267). As in the first chapter where “hearing reneges” the talking continues even though the narrator says it might have “never begun”. In order to show the power of the event the narrator de-emphasizes the speaking itself because linking the story, on the printed page, solely to mimetic voice does not adequately represent the event. No sort of mimetic voice could adequately portray the closeness Shreve and Quentin feel, both to each other and to the characters they create. The narrator describes “not two but four of them riding the two horses through the dark over the frozen December ruts of that Christmas eve” after Bon and Henry have left Sutpen’s Hundred (267). Once again describing closeness between Quentin and Shreve and the characters they create, the narrator tells us what everyone involved is apparently thinking (267). The narrator attempts to represent the level of absorption of these two storytelling participants. At some point in this fictional storytelling event something that in part conveys these ideas is indeed spoken by one character or another. Quoting that character directly, however, would not adequately convey the sense of the event or the effect it has on its participants.

This begins a long section that is the narrator's and which is as full of qualifiers as any other section. Quentin and Shreve are described as "believing that that<sup>24</sup> must have occurred to Henry, certainly during the moment after Henry emerged from the house" (267). After Henry emerges, the narrator then tells a version of Henry's story as if it were diegesis, at least a version which "Shreve and Quentin believed" (268). And they believe "perhaps, doubtless" that there were several Christmas celebrations on their boat to New Orleans. Even though it is the narrator's voice here, the narrator is relating what they would have told, or perhaps are telling, including the qualifiers they would use. These are not the narrator's qualifiers; they are Quentin and Shreve's.

Employing the showing/telling contrast, Brooks suggests that "instead of having the character tell of a certain experience, we move through a fade-out-dissolve into a sequence that *presents* the experience" (317). Brooks concedes that "Faulkner cannot, with his verbal medium, quite manage a fade-out-dissolve;" instead there are the kind of transitions that I have described, where the narrator's voice takes up for a storytelling character (317). Except for the beginning of chapter 2 and probably chapter 9 there are no fade-out-dissolves that present experience. Instead these sections dramatize a teller's version of events. These versions appear to present the experience, but they do not. The sections of chapter 8 that are in the narrator's voice often have the feel of diegesis—have the tone of authoritative and reliable narration, but they are not. They are a recreation of events based on premises that may well be false. And the reader knows this because the narrator has explicitly stated it.

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<sup>24</sup> The "that" being referred to is not relevant to this discussion.

The narrator describes Shreve's conception of Charles's mother's drawing room. He describes "the four of them" (Shreve, Quentin, Charles and Henry) as being in this room, but the room itself is Shreve's creation—"that drawing room of baroque and fusty magnificence which Shreve had invented and which was probably true enough" (268). They are so vividly experiencing these scenes that they are described as part of them, but it is their own creation which they are a part of.

Sutpen's first wife is also in the room; she is described parenthetically as "the slight dowdy woman . . . whom Shreve and Quentin had likewise invented and which was likewise true enough" (268). Of course we have already heard from Sutpen that there was a first wife. Shreve and Quentin create a version of what we have every reason to believe was an actual person. This version is apparently "true enough" for the narrator. Her slightness and dowdiness have no factual or traditional basis.

At one point, the narrator evaluates their version of events, and also comments on how their version relates to Mr Compson's: "Bon may have, probably did, take Henry to call on the octoroon mistress and the child, as Mr Compson said, though neither Shreve nor Quentin believed that the visit affected Henry as Mr Compson seemed to think" (268). The narrator also says that Quentin did not tell Shreve what Mr Compson had said when he "related (recreated?) it" the night before Quentin went to Sutpen's Hundred. This is the first indication from the narrator that anything Mr Compson says should, perhaps, be doubted. The trip to New Orleans is one of Mr Compson's most fabricated sections, but the narrator has made no comment on its accuracy before this point. It is as if seeing the process Quentin and Shreve go through has brought Mr Compson's narrative into question. Note that the narrator's endorsement is a

qualified one—they are probably right. It is important to note that the reason the endorsement cannot be unqualified is that the narrator is speculating as much as the characters.

After he questions Mr Compson's credibility, the narrator endorses another speculation made by Quentin and Shreve: "both he and Shreve believed—and were probably right in this too—that the octoroon and the child would have been to Henry only something else about Bon to be, not envied but aped if that had been possible" (268-69). The narrator says they were probably right—he endorses their speculation, but he makes no claim to knowledge greater than Mr Compson, or Quentin. The omniscient authorial voice—who knows, at least, what Quentin and Shreve believe, doesn't seem to know if what they believe is true. In earlier chapters the narrator refrains from evaluating Mr Compson or Rosa's information. He knows what happens in the novel's present and he knows everything the town knows. He has the information a limited omniscient narrator is supposed to possess. In this chapter his level of knowledge has not changed. He has never claimed to know what happened in New Orleans, or anywhere except Jefferson and Cambridge, but this is the first time he comments on other characters' speculations and his opinion has no more weight than Quentin or Mr Compson. At least it appears no different from their speculation. His voice is in dialogue with those of the storytelling characters.

Shortly after this, Shreve's mimetic voice takes up the story. There is no signal for this shift other than the quotation marks and his distinctive use of "old dame," this time in reference to Charles's mother (268). This section ends with Shreve's description of Bon saving Henry at Pittsburgh Landing. Right after this extraordinary statement the narrator describes the two young men (alternately two then four then two) braving the tomblike cold of their dormitory, as if their

suffering in the New England winter was somehow equal to the scene we shift to “(—*the winter of 64 now*” (276).

The narrator then tells about a meeting between Henry and Sutpen. In order to signal the fade-out-dissolve in this case the narrator uses italics, and parentheses. This shift is neither to experience or to one character’s remembrance. Instead it is to a communal version of events. A few interspersed paragraphs in regular type present Shreve’s direct discourse. Shreve tells about Quentin’s trip to Sutpen’s Hundred, interrupting the narrator’s italicized version of Charles’ meeting with Sutpen, which may or may not have happened. There is a clear indication that these two scenes are closely related in Quentin’s mind, at least.

The transitions between Shreve’s direct discourse and the narrator are as smooth here as those with Mr Compson in chapter 2. The difference between the narrator here and in chapter 2, where Sutpen’s pistols, “with the butts worn smooth as pickhandles,” are authoritatively described, is that the narrator directly states that Shreve’s tellings are fabrications and that his narrations are based on Quentin and Shreve’s conception of the story. In both chapters 2 and 8 the narrator seemingly transports us back to the events which the character is talking about. Chapter 2, however, is presented as a limited omniscient narrator’s version of events, as diegesis, while in chapter 8 the same narrator presents what the characters “believe” the events were. This section is a type of free indirect discourse, straddling the border between narrative and mimetic voice. As Gates argues, free indirect discourse lies “in the middle spaces between these two extremes of narration and discourse” (191).

Free indirect discourse is not the voice of both a character and a narrator; rather, it is a bi-vocal utterance, containing elements of both direct and indirect speech. It is an utterance that no one could have spoken, yet which we recognize because of its characteristic

‘speakerliness,’ its paradoxically written manifestation of the aspiration to the oral. (Gates 208)

In this instance it is a poly-vocal utterance because it contains elements of all of the characters’ discourse; not just Shreve and the narrator, but Quentin, Miss Rosa, and Mr Compson have contributed to this version. More precisely, the narrator is attempting to represent the merger of Quentin and Shreve’s discourse which cannot be realistically represented with mimetic voice. It is not an effort at mimesis; it is more a type of phenomenal voice, an effort to show in print the collaborative nature of storytelling and its evocative power. As Gates argues, “free indirect discourse attempts to represent ‘consciousness without the apparent intrusion of a narrative voice,’ thereby ‘presenting the illusion of a character’s acting out his [or her] mental state in an immediate relationship with the reader’” (209). In this instance it is two characters’ mental state, a state that has been influenced by the oral tradition. It is also an attempt to dramatize the substance and effect of this particular storytelling event. This is a communal form of free indirect discourse. The merging of the voices is not the joining of all version into one truth—it is the merging of all versions into equally authoritative discourse.

Along with the narrator’s comments that mark these italicized sections as Quentin and Shreve’s, Bon saves Henry in this version, which marks it as their fabrication. Specifically, when Henry is meeting with Sutpen, Sutpen says he has heard he was wounded. Henry does not reply. “*He is about to say Charles carried me back but he does not, because already he knows what is coming*” (282). He knows that his father is about to order him to stop Charles. He doesn’t, however, know Sutpen’s reason. Here Sutpen is represented as telling him something the communal tradition has no knowledge of, or had no knowledge of before Quentin introduced it.

\_\_\_\_\_Quentin replies “yes” to Shreve’s questions, endorsing the truth of his claims. Through some of his earlier statements, where some of the assumptions about Charles were “true enough” or “probably” true, the narrator endorses this version of events almost as strongly as Quentin does. But now his authority is no greater than Quentin’s. He no more holds the truth to the Sutpen saga than Mr Compson, Miss Rosa, or Quentin. He privileges no version over any other.

The narrator shows himself as not holding authority right before he dramatizes the climactic scenes of the novel where Sutpen confronts Henry and where Henry and Charles confront each other. There are two pivotal scenes dramatized here. Both are presented as dialogues in italics with dashes indicating new speakers; and both are probably true enough, but not necessarily what actually happened. Both scenes are marked by the narrator as fabrications, even while he also admits they have some sort of truth, even if this truth is not historical accuracy.

Many critics believe that the truth of the story resides at Sutpen’s Hundred and that Quentin discovers it there. The final chapter of the novel presents Quentin’s trip there with Miss Rosa that leads to his confrontation with Henry Sutpen. As he listens to Shreve tell about that evening Quentin is described as jerking “violently and uncontrollably” (288). As Shreve tells, Quentin remembers: “He could taste the dust. Even now, with the chill pure weight of the snow-breathed New England air on his face, he could taste and feel the dust of that breathless (rather, furnace-breathed) Mississippi September night” (290). This fade-out-dissolve goes to diegesis. In this case the narrator presents the experience, though some may say that Quentin’s memory of the experience is being presented. I follow Brooks in calling these sections narrated experiences instead of narrated remembrance, but there is little evidence to support this. I think they should



be differentiated from the sections that Shreve helps fabricate—even if they are Quentin’s memory, the literary conventions at play would suggest that his memory is reliable.

The only interesting thing about the all-important revelatory trip to Sutpen’s Hundred which somehow led to Quentin’s greater knowledge and understanding is how uneventful it actually is. The face-to-face meeting with a pivotal player in the story does not explain anything. It may confirm or reinforce the existence of the whole tragedy, but it provides no insight. The insight Quentin gains comes either from his confrontation with Clytie, as Shreve has said, or from his finally forcing himself to literally go through the door and confront the past. It can be persuasively argued that Quentin is better able to put the already extant pieces of the puzzle together after he has forced himself to confront the implications of the past. Finally passing the door that has checked him throughout the novel is more important than what is on the other side. Perhaps he gains no knowledge at Sutpen’s Hundred, only courage.

Before he goes through the door, his courage seems to be lacking. He implores Miss Rosa to “wait” twice (294). Again a character asks another to wait, to slow down. This time it is about something other than talking. As always, people say “wait” when they are not ready to go forward. But this time Quentin isn’t stopping a storyteller, but an actor. There is not, however, a great difference in these acts—both move forward or delve deeper into the Sutpen story; both acts attempt to reveal truth that someone is resisting. The narrator says that Quentin remembered how: “he stood there thinking, ‘I should go with her’ and then, ‘But I must see too now. I will have to. Maybe I shall be sorry tomorrow, but I must see’” (296). Quentin must go through the doorway and he does, but we are not told what he sees or does on the other side. This revelation is delayed. When their meeting is narrated it is singularly unhelpful.

Countless critics have discussed the circular, closed nature of Henry and Quentin's exchange. There can be no question that Henry Sutpen tells Quentin nothing beyond what we are given and what we are given reveals nothing except for the continued existence of Henry Sutpen. This meeting was supposed to have revealed the truth of the past, but the ghost from the past has nothing to tell. Whatever truth Quentin arrives at comes from another source.

The source of truth remains murky. When he was speaking at the University of Virginia, Faulkner himself claimed to have a level of knowledge similar to the narrator's. Asked if Charles knew that Sutpen was his father, he replied with the same kind of qualifiers the novel has: "I think he knew. I don't know whether he--his mother probably told him. I think he knew" (Gwynn 79). Even the author, the creator of the fictive world who should have been able to answer all questions definitively chose instead to qualify his answer, with a familiar "probably". He did this because the nature of oral traditional knowledge, as well as all other types of history, is that there are some things we can not know. Faulkner explained that *Absalom, Absalom!* is about the nature of truth:

I think that no one individual can look at truth. It blinds you. You look at it and you see one phase of it. Someone else looks at it and sees a slightly awry phase of it. But taken together the truth is what they saw though nobody saw the truth intact. So they are true as far as Miss Rosa and Quentin saw it. Quentin's father saw what he believed was truth, that was all he saw. But the old man was himself a little too big for people no greater in stature than Quentin and Miss Rosa and Mr. Compson to see all at once. It would have taken perhaps a wiser or more tolerant or more sensitive or more thoughtful person to see him as he was. (Gwynn 273-4)

Some critics attempt to privilege one truth over another. I have tended to privilege the sections that appear to be more historically accurate; others privilege the sections that are more vividly detailed. Finally, I don't wish to privilege any of the sections. All of the tellers speak some of the truth, or some truth, and no voice should be privileged over any other because all of

them arrive at the truths of their own consciousnesses, and the author invites us to find the truth of ours. Brooks writes that: “There are, to be sure, obvious elements of the Sutpen story about which we can never arrive at certainty—matters of motivation and ultimate purpose that are involved in the mystery of the human spirit itself” (302). Of course an omniscient narrator can choose to reveal matters of the human spirit if he chooses to. A monological narrator provides certainty, or at least can. This author chooses instead to have us speculate about the mystery of the human spirit. There are some questions he cannot answer because the communal tradition does not—and cannot—have them. Of course, Faulkner also used authoritative narrators in the Yoknapatawpha series, and this narrator authoritatively presents Quentin’s internal struggle. This is part of the reason I cannot definitively state that *Absalom, Absalom!* is a dialogical novel, where no single voice has ultimate authority. If this novel is about Quentin and his struggle then the narrator presents all the information authoritatively and Quentin’s struggle is resolved satisfactorily. He goes through the door to face Henry—he finds the strength not to be a ghost, as Miss Rosa does.

KATIE COCKER TELLS IT LIKE IT IS  
THE DOWNSTAGE NARRATOR IN *THE DEVIL'S DREAM*

Though Lee Smith is college-educated and was on the faculty of North Carolina State University, oral traditions played a significant role in her development. Nancy Parrish writes that “Smith acquired certain tools for her literary work” from her father’s side of the family: “an Appalachian heritage, a storytelling tradition, and a proclivity for following one’s mind” (167-68). Parrish writes that Smith has also used “details of Ernest Smith’s Ben Franklin store and gossip of the county that gained an airing in their house during her grandfather’s forty-year tenure as county treasurer. From them, too, Smith began innocently collecting the story elements that would appear in later writing” (168).

Once again I will compare a novelist with Lord’s description of an apprentice epic singer. Lord describes them listening to other, more experienced tellers and “consciously or unconsciously, laying the foundation . . . learning the stories and becoming acquainted with the heroes and their names, the faraway places and the habits of long ago” (21). While they listen singers are “imbibing the rhythm of the singing and to some extent the thoughts as they are expressed in song” (21). Lord describes a transition from listening and absorbing the discourse to becoming proficient enough to begin singing on one’s own. Twain, Faulkner and Smith learned not only specific stories and characters, historical and fictional, from the people around them; they also learned cultural values and storytelling techniques. Smith has written that her “whole sense of story is, as a consequence, *oral*” (“Introduction” xxxii).

The stories themselves are also very important. Katerina Prajznerova writes that Smith is “convinced that remembering the stories of the past generations can offer a sense of rootedness and orientation in the quickly changing modern world and its increasingly homogenized mass

culture” (48-49). In the first section of Smith’s novel *The Devil’s Dream*, the novel’s protagonist, Katie Cocker, addresses the importance of past generations: “‘not a one of us lives alone, outside of our family or our time, and . . . who we are depends on who we were and who our people were’” (14). Katie’s sense of self is deeply rooted in her sense of belonging to a very specific community. That community’s story is the subject of the novel. Robert Bellah argues that stories play a significant role in the function of communities. He argues that communities “have a history--in an important sense they are constituted by their past--and for this reason we can speak of a real community as a ‘community of memory,’ one that does not forget its past” (153). A community of memory need not be connected geographically. All it requires is a strong feeling of community--of a past that binds the individuals together:

In order not to forget that past, a community is involved in re-telling its story, its constitutive narrative, and in so doing, it offers examples of the men and women who have embodied and exemplified the meaning of the community. These stories of collective history and exemplary individuals are an important part of the tradition that is so central to a community of memory. (153)

In *The Devil’s Dream* Smith tries to show the sense of community in Grassy Branch and the Bailey family, and how that community constructs meaning by retelling stories, and how who Katie Cocker is depends on these things. She sometimes shows this by using storytelling events where there is a storytelling character telling part of the family’s story and the reader becomes the implied story listener. In the novel, characters tell stories about their past and often in so doing come to a clearer definition of themselves. Smith uses other types of narration as well, including a third-person omniscient narration that I will argue is a type of authorial voice. One result of this third person narration is that the voices of the individual storytellers presented are, in Bakhtin’s terms, objectified, making *The Devil’s Dream* a monological novel, where all the individual

character's voices are subsumed by one semantically authoritative voice. Mixing characters' direct and indirect discourse with an authorial voice, Smith presents the history of the Bailey family leading up to Katie Cocker's telling which brings the novel to its present. In a way Katie is the novel's semantically authoritative voice, but her voice is authorized by a source outside of her. There is a pervasive authorial presence that sometimes narrates and other times performs the directing function. This narrator decides the order of the tellings and through this control manipulates our reactions to individual characters. These chapters prepare us for Katie's telling, which the narrator assures us is the direct discourse of an honest, wise and balanced character whom we should like, trust and respect. This voice, however, does not use the voice of authority. Instead this third-person narrative voice is similar to the storytelling characters' mimetic voices. Even though this voice is not superior in discourse level, it is structurally superior in its level of knowledge and insight.

The novel spans several generations and features a variety of narrative voices. In an interview Smith joked that "It's a mess, really. I've got a little bit of everything in there. But it is mostly each person telling his own story" (34). Conrad Oswald writes that "*The Devil's Dream* follows a family legend through 150 years from 1833 in a little cabin on Cold Spring Holler to the glitz and glamour of the lobby of the Opryland Hotel at Christmas" (98). More than half of the novel consists of the mimetic voices of individual characters. The two pages after the novel's dedication hold the Bailey family tree, which has Moses Bailey and Kate Malone at the top. This is followed by an italicized section, which is set off from the five larger, numbered sections. Rebecca Smith writes that "each of the five major divisions of *The Devil's Dream* begins with a transcription of a song that Smith herself writes to encapsulate a major idea of the section"

(*Gender Dynamics* 156). The novel ends with an italicized section which shares the first section's title. It would be fair to say that the two italicized sections, set at the Opryland hotel, constitute the novel's frame.

The first italicized section presents the colloquial voice of what one would assume is an average tourist at the Opryland Hotel. This section is physically set off from the rest of the novel, and it is marked as different by the use of italics. Like all the chapters of the novel it has an all-caps title. In this case it is the traditional hymn "Shall We Gather at the River." One of the things being described is a reunion of Katie's family—of her community of memory. We realize as we go along that the events related in the novel lead up to this gathering. The voice in this section is never identified. I assume it's a woman speaking.<sup>25</sup> She immediately sets the scene: "*It's Christmastime at the Opryland Hotel, and you never saw anything like it!*" (11).

This speaker introduces the novel's protagonist, Katie Cocker. This section is in the present tense. "*But look—right now, right over here . . . sure enough, it's Katie Cocker!*" (12). The events narrated are occurring in front of the speaker's eyes. She describes Katie as one "*of the real superstars of country music, looking just as natural—looking just like herself!*" (12). The statement "looking just like herself" is perhaps a little odd, but it conveys the idea that the speaker believes Katie to be authentic. Even with the wig that all country and western stars wear, she appears natural, real. The primary purpose of this section is to introduce the apparently self-actualized Katie of the present before we look at her and her family's story.

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<sup>25</sup>I assume this because the author is a woman and because few men are likely to mention Katie Cocker's wig and say "*She don't have to take off those twelve extra pounds if she don't want to, either. She looks okay. She looks fine!*" (12).

This monologue alludes to Katie Cocker's present stature as a country and western star, and to how she arrived there, hinting at what the novel itself will hold. "*God knows she's paid her dues, too. Some of the events of her life are just tragic, but she's weathered them*" (12). The narrator here gives us more than Katie's voice; she tells us she is a strong woman, one whose word should be trusted. "*When Katie Cocker answers a question she leans forward on her stool and speaks right to the one who asked it. She looks you dead in the eye*" (14). This direct statement of her strength and confidence introduces Katie's answer to a question about why she is about to record an album that looks back to her family's past.

*"it took me a long time to understand that not a one of us lives alone, outside of our family or our time, and that who we are depends on who we were and who our people were . . . I know where we're from. I know who we are. The hard part has been figuring out who I am, because I'm not like any of them, and yet they are bone of my bone . . ."*  
(14)

The section ends with an ellipsis, suggesting that what follows might be considered a flashback that will help us figure out who she is. Katie's direct discourse seems more confident than this narrator's. I think we are meant to lend her voice as much credence, if not more, than that of the narrator who presents her. I will argue that later in the novel an authorial voice, a narrator, will encourage us to trust Katie. Even though it is certainly valid and probably correct to call the unnamed speaker in this section a narrator, this is not the primary narrative voice of the work. She is clearly represented as speaking, and she has no authorial privileges. This novel has an authorial presence, a narrator, who can give us the thoughts of any character and who gives us indicators of which voices to respect and believe. This authorial presence sometimes narrates and other times only performs the directing function. The narrator of the italicized section is like Huck in that hers is a mimetic voice used by an authorial figure. Unlike Huck, there is no



indication she is aware a novel is being written; she is a private personal voice. In this section Smith chooses to present the direct discourse of a character who is not identified or described in any way.

There is no question who the speaker is in chapter 1, however, which begins when what appears to be an epigraph is revealed on the following page to be a transcription of part of a song that is sung by “Old Man Ira Keen.” The first words of the chapter establish that this is a storytelling event. “That the one you mean? Speak up” (17). A story listener that the reader never hears speak and that is never described is clearly being addressed by Ira Keen. He seems to be very comfortably in the midst of a storytelling event, promising his listener to play the whole song, “but first I’ll tell ye how come I was to write it in the first place” (17). The second paragraph begins with a dash that indicates a pause for the unnamed story listener to speak followed by Keen exclaiming: “–Well then, I’ll *sing* it, a course” (17). Three other times in the chapter there is a dash which is followed by what appears to be Keen responding to the listener. In one instance the listener must be expressing impatience with the pacing of Keen’s narrative. “–Well now, I’m a-getting to it. I’m getting to it. Anything worth hearing is worth waiting to hear, as the feller says” (20). Keen reacts to listener feedback that is not explicitly represented and thereby could be imagined as our own impatience with him. Keen even asks the listener to go get him some “tonic” and offers him some.

Internal evidence suggests that this storytelling event takes place early in the twentieth century, sometime between 1905 and 1915. Keen begins the story of the Bailey family for us by presenting the patriarch, the law giver, Moses Bailey:

Well, hit was in the year 1833 or 1834, as I figger it, that Moses Bailey . . . brung young Kate Malone over here to live in that little cabin right down there in Cold Spring Holler.

*Hell yes, that's what I'm a-telling you, right down this here hill and across Paint Creek yonder . . . you could see the cabin right from this porch where we're a sitting, iffen it weren't fer them cedar trees that has growed up so high over there. (19)*

Keen's storytelling event is not narrated; all we are given is his mimetic voice, which is not contained or marked by quotation marks. He speaks in a substandard dialect. We hear him responding to his listener, his personal thirst, and his own story. Like Aunt Rachel in "A True Story," Keen's statements help establish the context of the storytelling event without the intrusion of a narrator. Aunt Rachel describes her movements herself; Keen mentions they are sitting on the porch across the creek from the other cabin. These elements are not dramatized by a narrator, the characters reveal them in the course of their tellings. There is no omniscient narrator telling us anything. We know it's Keen because we have been given his name in the title at the head of the chapter. Throughout the chapter, Smith allows Keen to tell his story without interference.

Smith asks us to fictionalize ourselves as sitting on Ira Keen's porch. We are to imagine ourselves asking him to hurry up and handing him cider. Keen remains inside the fiction—unaware of the existence of a novel or a readership. He is speaking directly to a story listener inside the fiction. The leap required of us as readers is to put ourselves inside the fiction. Smith tries to present Keen's speech in such a way that it seems as private and unmediated as print can make it.

Keen has authority because he was a witness to past events. "I used to could see pretty Kate out there of a morning with a baby on her knee" (19). He didn't witness everything he narrates. He also provides information available from the communal tradition. He says that after Kate and Moses were married "it is said that Kate's mamma took to her bed the day of the

wedding, she was that upset about it, and hit is further said that all of Kate's brothers fell on the ground a-crying when Moses took her away" (23). He also relates information he obtained from his mother, who was with the Bailey family shortly after a pivotal incident where Moses beat all of them for playing "the devil's music": "But Moses was the one in torment, Mamma said . . . Kate never left his side, Mamma said . . . She said Kate's face gave off a light that calmed all who come around her that day" (29).

His authority is much the same as Mr Compson and Miss Rosa's in *Absalom, Absalom!* He is a member of a community and knows its story and has both personal and secondhand knowledge of the Bailey family. Like Mr Compson, Keen presents the mimetic voice of a character during an event he was not present for. He announces his separation from the event by stating that "it is said" (26). Moses reportedly told his son that "'The fiddle is a instrument of the Devil'" (27). Keen's description is relatively exact. He describes Moses's voice as "deep and terrible" (27), but this description is qualified by the use of "it is said."

While he tells the story of Moses and Kate Bailey, Keen also tells his own. As Faulkner said, about characters in *Absalom, Absalom!*, "every time any character gets into a book, no matter how minor, he's actually telling his biography—that's all anyone ever does, he tells his own biography, talking about himself, in a thousand different terms, but himself" (Gwynn 275). The storytelling characters in *The Devil's Dream* do this more overtly than those in *Absalom, Absalom!*, with the exception of Miss Rosa. Like Miss Rosa, the storytelling characters in this novel are witnesses to or participants in at least some of the events they relate. All of these characters advance the story of the Bailey family while they also tell their own stories. While telling Moses and Kate's story, Keen talks about his infatuation with Kate, who he first saw

when he was twelve years old. He also refers to his now-deceased wife, Piney, in part because the story is about how difficult Kate's life was. "I swear," he says, "hit's a sight what all a woman puts up with" (24).

The chapter ends with Keen associating Kate positively with music. At the end, it is his story and his dreams which he has been talking about, but he has also provided the reader with information about the Bailey family and about one of the major conflicts of the novel—the conflict between religion and secular music. Keen tells how Moses Bailey, who was deeply religious, severely beat his family and indirectly caused the death of one of his sons when he returned home unexpectedly to find them playing musical instruments which Kate had been hiding from him. This episode dramatizes a crucial conflict in the novel between religion and secular music, and shows Kate defying her husband because of her love for music.

Though Keen says that his own wife "was a good old woman. I wish I had loved her better" (31), his story is about Kate. He clearly recalls images of her while he "cannot now recall Piney's face, fer the life of me! Not the way I recall Kate Malone the day she made the apple butter when she was young" (26). He ends his story talking about how music comes from the Bailey house, which he claims is haunted. Of course, I say he claims the house is haunted, instead of suggesting it is. In this instance, the novel's narrator also doesn't have to comment on whether or not the cabin is haunted. Keen states his belief and is neither confirmed nor denied by an authoritative voice. One reason (though certainly not the only one) Smith uses a storytelling character here is so he can make supernatural claims while the narrator can refrain from commenting. As Lanser writes, "in realist fiction, characters may imagine the 'magical,' but the

narrator's superiority lies precisely in refraining to corroborate such imaginings as truth" (134).

Whether or not Smith believes people can be guided by voices, her narrator cannot.

Keen says that music comes from the Bailey cabin many nights, and that it doesn't bother him because it reminds him of Kate:

hit don't bother me none to stay up here the way I do now, hit don't bother me having that hanted cabin acrost the way there. Hell, that fiddle music don't even bother me, most times. Now I won't go over there, mind ye, on a bet, but I kindly like to hear that music. Most times it will start up about now, jest about dark, and iffent hit's a dance tune, why sometimes I'll lean my head back and close these old eyes and listen, and them times hit'll seem like I can fair see us, Kate and me together as we never was in life, a-waltzing in the dark. (32)

At this point in the novel the reader has heard two separate voices with almost no mediation from an overarching, controlling narrator. The novel appears at this early point to conform to the definition of a dialogical novel given by Bakhtin. A dialogical novel, he writes, "is constructed not as the whole of a single consciousness, absorbing other consciousnesses as objects into itself, but as a whole formed by the interaction of several consciousnesses, none of which entirely becomes an object for the other; this interaction provides no support for the viewer who would objectify an entire event according to some ordinary monological category (thematically, lyrically or cognitively)--and this consequently makes the reader a participant" (*Problems* 18). Individual characters speak for themselves and readers judge for themselves which voices they will give authority to, without the influence of an author who valorizes one character's "truth" over another's.

In a dialogical novel the individual "character is treated as ideologically authoritative and independent" (5). This independence spills over to the reader. "The direct and fully weighted signifying power of the character's words destroys the monological plane of the novel and calls

forth an unmediated response—as if the character were not the object of authorial discourse, but rather a fully valid, autonomous carrier of his own individual word” (5). Bakhtin suggests that the mimetic voice of individual characters can be presented in a novel without it being secondary to the primary narrative voice. The reader’s response to this autonomous consciousness is not dictated by a transcendent, controlling authorial voice.

Keen’s discourse appears to be entirely unmediated, as did the personal voice in the italicized section. There is no voice in this chapter other than his. There is, however, at least one other presence worth noting that is not exactly in the chapter. This presence is similar to “THE AUTHOR” who opens *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. A voice I am identifying as a narrator, Hayman’s arranger, has moved us through time and space and entitled the chapter, giving us Keen’s name. We gather from Keen’s monologue that he is at his home, on his front porch where he can comfortably point to the nearby landmarks that are part of his story, speaking to a listener who is something of an outsider. Keen appears to be an autonomous consciousness who is speaking his own individual word. We gather all of this information because an authorial presence, an “unstated but inescapable source of control” (Hayman 123), has arranged the information for us.

The novel to this point has had relatively unmediated first-person points of view. The story Smith wants to tell, however, requires a variety of viewpoints, some of which cannot be realized by storytelling characters. She also uses an omniscient narrator. As Gates observes “third-person omniscient voice . . . allows for a maximum of information giving” (185). Smith wants to give us more information than storytelling characters can. At the same time, a conventional authorial voice would stand on a higher plane than the other voices and lessen the

authority of storytelling characters. Smith had had this problem with earlier novels and has written about her problem and solution several times. In her introduction to the Oxford Edition of Mark Twain's *Sketches, New and Old*, she describes the problem she faced when she was one hundred pages into the novel that would become *Oral History*:

The problem was that I was writing this novel in the third person, in good standard American English . . . I sounded like I was condescending to my characters—the last thing in the world I intended to do. The gap between the third-person narrative voice of the novel and the characters' own voices was simply too great. (“Introduction” xli)

Her problem stemmed from her use of the conventional authorial voice that Lanser identifies—the unmarked narrative voice of the American novel, “good standard American English.” While using this voice Smith found that the mimetic voices in her work were secondary, indulged and condescended to, as Ross claims is the case with all mimetic voice. This was “the last thing in the world” she wanted. In response to this, she employs the downstage narrative voice.

At the beginning of the second chapter of *The Devil's Dream* the point of view shifts from a storytelling character to a particular third person voice which Smith first used in the writing of *Oral History*: she describes it as “using the way the characters spoke *in the narrative voice*” (“The Voice Behind the Story” 99). When she used this voice she felt she had overcome, at least in part, the secondary status of her characters' mimetic voices: “now I felt I could write about my characters without writing down to them, because I was using their words, but I wasn't restricted to their words, either. I was using what Tom Wolfe has called the *downstage narrative voice*” (100). The downstage narrative voice is a third-person voice that uses the idioms and rhythms of individual characters while maintaining an authorial point of view. This narrator does not use any sort of phoneticized speech; the difference in language does not include pronunciation differences. Smith's narrator, unlike Keen and other characters, does not use ‘hit’

for “it.” This narrator is not speaking, so regional pronunciation variation should not be represented. The narrator can relate events and use language the characters could not, while still using the character’s basic language style. Though the downstage narrative voice shares qualities with Henry Louis Gates’ definition of free indirect discourse, it is not indirect discourse. It is the narrator’s discourse; it is not a blend of narrator and character. The narrator retains separation and omniscience while using the same kind of language as the characters.

In the second chapter, Smith use the downstage narrative voice. The first signal that the narrative is not in the first person (other than the absence of the pronoun “I”) is in the fifth paragraph of the chapter. It initially appears to be the same as the last chapter, the direct discourse of a storytelling character—mimesis. We soon find that it is neither direct nor indirect discourse; it is diegesis. There is no specific characterized consciousness this colloquial voice is speaking for. This is a narrator—it is diegesis presented in a colloquial voice. It is “the way the characters [speak] *in the narrative voice*” (Smith “Voice” 99). It is the language of an omniscient third-person narrator who does not use the language of authority. A voice that is practically indistinguishable from Ira Keen’s gives us Ezekiel’s thoughts and actions: “even as a child, Zeke had sense enough not to tell anybody about the voices in his head” (34). Since Zeke never told anyone about the voices, only he and an omniscient narrator can know about them. The narrator also tells us that several spiritual experiences, sexual, musical and religious, quiet Zeke’s voices. Zeke likes going to “meeting; it helps him the way a woman and a fiddle tune help him” (38-39). After he is baptized, we are informed, the voices are taken away. This narrative voice gives Smith the freedom to give us Zeke’s thoughts, without creating a voice that is markedly on a higher dialogical plane.



The chapter begins with a sentence that deserves close attention. “Small wonder, then, that Zeke grew up so muley-hawed and closemouthed” (33). The “then” suggests a direct continuation from the last chapter even though the narrative voice has changed from first to third person, and we don’t initially notice this change. We had learned about how harsh Zeke’s father was and the incident that cost his brother his life. This phrase also indirectly endorses Keen’s narrative. Initially, we can not distinguish this omniscient, extradiegetic narrator from the storytelling character Ira Keen, but we come to see that this voice, which is similar to Keen’s, performs all the functions of an authorial narrator, even if this voice does not conform to the usual expectations for authorial discourse. This narrator gives us no reason to doubt Keen, and also subtly endorses his version of events.

In a monological novel “ultimate semantic authority,” Bakhtin writes, “resides in the direct speech of the author” (187). Given the facts of Keen’s story, the semantically authoritative narrator tells us, it is “small wonder” that Zeke grew up this way, and he did, in fact, grow up this way. The narrator is telling us that his story is true. “The author neither argues with his hero nor agrees with him. He speaks not with him, but about him. The final word belongs to the author, and that word--based on something the hero does not see and does not understand, on something located outside the hero’s consciousness--can never encounter the hero’s words on a single dialogic plane” (Bakhtin 71). The narrator, located outside of Zeke and Keen’s consciousnesses speaks, not with, but about them.

The narrator of this chapter knows and relates Zeke’s thoughts and actions. The narrator also relates the town’s opinion, in much the same manner as the narrator of *Absalom, Absalom!* The narrator describes Zeke’s ability to sit still as “unnatural” and adds, “Everybody said so”

(33). The “everybody” here is the community. This narrator speaks for Grassy Branch in much the same manner as the narrator of *Absalom, Absalom!* speaks for Jefferson. Smith’s narrator goes on to describe the community’s feelings towards Zeke:

For the pure fact was, Zeke spooked them. He spooked them all. They were not used to a big old boy that wouldn’t say a word. It made them feel bad, like they ought to do something about him, but they couldn’t think what . . . Finally they grew to hate the very sight of him sitting hunched on the floor thataway, staring into the fire. (33)

*The Devil’s Dream* has a strong authorial presence. The narrator tells us both specific facts and larger truths. Later in the chapter, Zeke’s Aunt Dot tells him “‘they is pretty singing and they is true singing,’ and although Ezekiel didn’t know what she meant then he does now” (40). This is one of several instances in the novel where Smith is stressing the importance of authentic voice.

This is also one of several examples where characters consider themselves wiser with age.

Though Aunt Dot speaks it and Zeke comes to understand it, “the idea is merely placed in [her] mouth . . . it could with equal success be placed in the mouth of any other character. For the author it is important only that a given true idea be uttered in the context of a given work”

(Bakhtin 79). Almost any characters could have said this with equal weight. Smith places it in the mouth of a minor character, who may only exist in order to say that, and this is a piece of wisdom the reader is to believe. Though this isn’t the most overt sign of authoriality, Lanser argues that “generalizations in the narrator’s voice” are one of the types of “extrarepresentational structures” which are “constituents of authoriality” (48).

The next two chapters follow the pattern of the first two. A character speaks in chapter 3 and is followed in the next chapter by a downstage narrator. Chapter 3 is subtitled “Zinnia Hulett Talking.” This title explicitly states that the novel is leaving third person narration, though her narration is different from Keen’s in some respects. Zinnia tells the story of her sister Nonnie, the

mother of R.C. Bailey; R.C. is one of the main characters in the Bailey story. Zinnia's first words delineate her as a first-person speaker. "I never did know what ailed Nonnie. Don't know to this day!" (48). She also quickly establishes herself as a very unreliable storyteller. "Why, the very first thing she ever done was kill Mamma!" (48). We soon learn that their mother died while giving birth to Nonnie, which is a far cry from the murder Zinnia hints at.

Rebecca Smith writes that "Zinnia's narrative recalls that of Sister in [Eudora] Welty's 'Why I Live at the P.O.,' for her unreliability stems from her jealousy of her brazen sister and her self-aggrandizement about her own hard work in the family home" (160). Though Zinnia does seem to work hard in the role of matriarch in the family home, she clearly reveals herself as both jealous and unreliable. She also recalls the character of Sister because she is a first-person speaker who does not refer to her surrounding storytelling event, and one who is seemingly unaware of how clearly she is revealing herself.

Lee Smith has acknowledged the direct influence of Welty's character, saying Sister was the genesis of Zinnia and calling "Why I Live at the P.O." "probably one of my favorite stories. It knocked me out many, many years ago when I first read it" (Herion-Sarafidis 94). Like Sister, Zinnia blurs the line between storytelling character and interior monologue. Zinnia blurs it to such an extent that the only warrant I have for calling her a storytelling character is the assurance in the chapter's title that she is "talking." A difference between Zinnia and Keen is that Zinnia's monologue has less of a sense of realism than Keen's; there is no sense of an actual event—a setting, a listener, a time of day. This difference between Keen and Zinnia may be academic, but I think there is one and it is often important. In *The Sound and the Fury*, for example, neither Jason nor Quentin Compson are storytelling characters but Jason's interior monologue could be

mistaken for a storytelling event where the story listener is only implied. Quentin's voice is clearly psychic, while Jason's is more like that of a speaker.

Stephen Ross rightly argues that even though Jason's narration has "none of the familiar textual signs of the Faulknerian psychic voice" what might seem to be mimetic voice is psychic voice (170). Though Jason's narration echoes "colloquial storytelling of the Southwest Humor tradition" (169), he loses control of his story and reveals far more of his private thoughts than he would in any sort of public speech. Jason is not speaking to anyone, and it is not always clear that Sister or Zinnia are either. All three are unsympathetic characters who reveal themselves as such. Jason famously begins his monologue: "Once a bitch always a bitch, what I say" (113). Zinnia waits until the second paragraph before she accuses her sister of killing her mother. All three also have a rambling, almost breathless quality that is often equated with stream of consciousness. There are, however, more than enough storytellers with disjointed, rambling styles.

Zinnia's monologue is presented in a colloquial voice that strongly suggests her direct speech; however, Zinnia never refers to her surroundings or to co-present auditors. Unlike Keen and like Jason Compson, she never overtly confirms that she is part of a storytelling event. More indicative of interior monologue is the way she reveals her own insecurities. It is difficult to imagine a woman like Zinnia referring to her own unattractiveness, yet she does so twice in the chapter. At one point she remarks that Zeke "did not even appear to notice my face none" (60). And at the end of the chapter, in a manner that is similar to the end of Keen's narration (where he imagines himself dancing with Kate), she describes riding away from the Bailey house with her father "in the pitch-black night, the night so dark I didn't have no birthmark, and I was just as pretty as Nonnie" (61).

Like Welty's Sister, Smith's Zinnia unwittingly reveals herself to the reader through her monologue. The ironic gap between character and author is absolutely clear. Zinnia accuses her sister of murdering her mother in childbirth and calls her "it." "Granny slapped it until it cried. Then she flung it down in the cradle they had there, *my* cradle, mind you, Daddy had made for me" (51). She vents her anger, and the reader and the author stand above Zinnia and see her ranting jealously, and see her unaware of how her words would affect her audience. She does not see or understand how she is perceived. The reader and the author exist on an entirely different plane from her.

Unlike Ira Keen, Zinnia is not affirmed by the narrator; she is repudiated. Chapter 4, "Nonnie and the Big Talker," like chapter 2, is not subtitled with the word "talking." In chapter 4 a downstage narrator gives us the thoughts of several characters. One of the first things we find out is that Zinnia's belief that she had positively impressed Ezekiel is incorrect. Shifting to the third person allows Smith to give us Preacher Stumps, Ezekiel and Nonnie's thoughts far more efficiently, and a better insight into their motivations. We also know Nonnie's last thoughts on earth—thoughts that only an omniscient narrator could give us. There is no debate among consciousnesses about these events. This narrator clearly demonstrates how far off the mark Zinnia is. In her narration Zinnia claims that Zeke preferred her:

He come out to the wagon grinning when we drove up, and he was just as nice to me as ever he was to that silly Nonnie who done nothing but cry and cry, and he did not even appear to notice my face none. I remarked upon how tight he held my arm when he helped me down off the wagon, and how much he appeared to like the fried apple pies we had brought them—which *I* had made!—and I knowed in my heart of hearts that Ezekiel Bailey preferred me over Nonnie. (60)

One of the first things we find out from the third-person omniscient narrator is that Zinnia's belief that Ezekiel preferred her (and her pies) is incorrect:

When Nonnie Hulett climbed down off her daddy's wagon to stand before him at Grassy Branch, Ezekiel Bailey thought she was just about the prettiest thing he had ever seen in his whole life. It made him happy to look at her, and he stood there looking at her for the longest time. . . . Her ugly sister had presented Ezekiel with a little bag of fried pies which he ate automatically, one after the other, watching Nonnie. Ezekiel did not look at the sister, who was poking around the yard and exclaiming over this and that and acting the fool in general. (62-63)

In a later chapter, Zeke's son R.C. says that after Nonnie died "that that strawberry-faced ugly old sister of Mamma's had come around . . . and Daddy had run her off" (86). Evidence from her monologue suggests that this occurred before she "talks" in her chapter, and yet she still claims that Zeke preferred her.

These are devastating refutations of Zinnia as a storyteller, and as a person, and ones that the reader is not surprised to hear. The downstage narrator in the second chapter had at least tacitly confirmed Keen's narration, while also moving the story forward. No other "talking" character is as overtly refuted as Zinnia is. The refutation in this chapter is related and orchestrated by an omniscient voice that seems to act as the author's proxy. There is no debate among consciousnesses about these events. Zinnia gets some of the basic facts of the story right, but her view is warped by hate; the narrator and the reader see the truth clearly—a truth Zinnia does not see or understand, located outside of her consciousness.

Smith uses the downstage narrative voice here to give us authoritative confirmation of Zinnia's unreliability, and to give us a better insight into Preacher Stumps, Ezekiel and Nonnie without having to go through the effort of constructing storytelling events for each of them, particularly when the information is that which someone would or perhaps could never actually tell anyone. The reader hears the thoughts of several characters in this chapter. While he is watching Zeke and Nonnie's first meeting, the aging Preacher Stump sighs and thinks "*This will*

*be a hard row to hoe*” (63). Note that his psychic voice is marked by italics, as it often is in Faulkner and in Smith’s other works. I don’t want to overemphasize this, but it is clearly an omniscient narrator representing the psychic voice of a character. Except for the fact that this narrator does not use the accepted authoritative discourse, she functions like a conventional authorial voice.

The narrator provides us with a quick glimpse into Preacher Stump’s thoughts, showing his evaluation of the impending marriage, and showing how his story is similar to those of the other characters we have seen.

Preacher Stump felt old and foolish, surveying this scene from his porch. It was not a thing like the time when Garnet had come to him, a young girl not yet sixteen, full-figured and trembling, with a look on her face that he knew. Bent double, barely breathing, Preacher Stump could see her still, his bride of sixty years before, could feel a stirring of the heavy passion he felt then. He had to go lay down. (63)

This is all the back story we get of Preacher Stump, but his recollections, like Ira’s, reinforce the themes of love, sex and memory that are repeated throughout the generations the novel covers. Though a storytelling event could have been constructed for Stump where he might have plausibly covered these ideas, an omniscient narrator can give us these two short glimpses in a far more efficient manner.

It would also be difficult to contrive a storytelling event where Nonnie could explain why she abandons her family for Harry, a member of a traveling show, in part because it is not a particularly appropriate topic for conversation, but also because she may not entirely understand it herself. When the narrator tells us how Harry makes Nonnie feel special it may in fact be a feeling Nonnie could not have put into words. Her husband Ezekiel is not a talker, but Harry encourages talk, and helps Nonnie find herself: “Nonnie never knew she had so much to say. She

told him her whole life, which grew in the telling until she found herself going on and on about things she never knew she'd noticed. Talking to Harry, Nonnie became more and more interesting; Nonnie became her own story" (78). I include this excerpt because it is one of the first times the act of telling is also expressly shown to be an act of self definition. One of the reasons Nonnie leaves Zeke is that she sees herself being defined as a mother and therefore old. Fleeing this role and singing for a living with the traveling show help her escape this definition, but her interaction with Harry also helps her arrive at a new one. Telling her story to Harry, she sees that she is more than any label—she is the sum of her thoughts and actions, and this sum is not inconsiderable. I also include this passage because it is a revelation she might never have told anyone, and therefore one that a storytelling event could not have revealed. Later the narrator reveals something Nonnie never could have told anyone. The chapter ends with the narrator presenting Nonnie's thoughts and her last words. Nonnie wakes in a hotel room during a fire: "The last thing she saw before she lost consciousness was the wide blank gaze of Ezekiel's blue-blue eyes as he led the high cold singing in the church at Chicken Rise. 'Oh God,' Nonnie said. 'Oh God,' for she really had loved him. Then her mouth was full of dirt and she was dead" (79). Since they are her last thoughts, there is no way she could tell anyone. It is important that we acknowledge the obvious limits of personal narrators and storytelling characters. Only an omniscient narrator can give us Nonnie's last thoughts. If Smith wants to include them in the novel, she has no choice but to use an omniscient narrator.

An example of another type of limitation of personal narrators is found late in *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, shortly after Huck and Tom have helped Jim escape. Aunt Sally tearfully asks Huck not to sneak out of the house to find the missing Tom. Huck promises not to



crawl down the drainpipe, telling the reader: “Laws knows I *wanted* to go, bad enough, to see about Tom, and was all intending to go; but after that, I wouldn’t a went, not for kingdoms” (286). It is important to the story that we see Huck’s empathy and that he can obey the right kind of maternal figure. But in order to show the reader that Aunt Sally is a figure worthy of this kind of obedience, Huck has to break his promise.

Even though he decides not to slip away, Huck crawls down the lightning rod three times—“the third time, I waked up at dawn, and slid down, and she was there yet” (286). Huck shows the reader that Aunt Sally had kept a vigil for Tom all night long. An omniscient narrator can just tell us this and can tell us Nonnie’s last thoughts, while an author must contrive reasons for a personal narrator to be present for events in order to relate them to the reader and simply can not know some things. Throughout the novel, the narrator fills in gaps left by storytelling characters. In order to give Huck’s voice the stage Twain must lose the authorial privileges an omniscient narrator must have.

The second section of the novel, “DOWN BY GRASSY BRANCH,” is mainly about how R.C. finds the Bailey family’s musical dynasty. The first four of the five chapters in this section consist of one personal voice each, while the fifth features a downstage omniscient narrator who focuses on R.C. taking the family to a recording studio in nearby Bristol. The first and third are narrated by R.C. There is no sense, in this or in the following section of a controlling authorial voice either confirming or repudiating the personal voices which dominate their respective chapters. The downstage narrator of the last chapter does not present any information regarding the preceding chapters. The voices in this section seem to speak for themselves.

Though the first chapter's title doesn't say that R.C. is talking, he speaks in the first person from the start. "When Mamma run off with the medicine show, I was working days. . . I was wild as any young buck" (83). Like Zinnia, R.C. never gives any indication of a copresent auditor or any other aspect of a storytelling event, but there is not the sense of ironic distance between the author and the character that Zinnia's narrative engenders.

Like storytelling characters in *Absalom, Absalom!* R.C.'s use of psychic voice is marked by italics. "Best I can recall, my thinking run kindly along these lines. *Mamma is a whore and I am a bastard*, and so by God I set out to prove it" (87). Also like the spelling of 'sivilized' in *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, there is an authorial presence transcribing his speech, transforming his spoken word into appropriate written discourse. This particular instance need not be considered a particularly significant act by the author. It could be argued that, given the conventions for italicizing psychic voice which Faulkner helped establish, Smith marks this psychic voice wherever it occurs for the sake of clarity. There is no need to posit any attempt to make this any more significant than the use of quotation marks when a character uses mimetic voice. Lizzie Bailey, who is represented as writing in the following chapter, also uses italics in this manner: "*I will not be like that*, I told myself over and over" (94).

The chapter entitled "Lizzie Bailey" is one of the more interesting of the novel. Lizzie doesn't speak for herself--she writes. Rebecca Smith argues that "Lizzie writes in a stilted Victorian prose . . . Lizzie in fact is an outsider in her own home of Grassy Branch, and her written text illustrates her distinction from other Bailey family members who favor orality over a more literate, written record of events" (54). Though she is different in some ways--her prose is certainly stilted and written, and she does not favor orality--she is not entirely an outsider. In

order for Lizzie Bailey to have a voice in the novel she must write because she has at least partly joined a different discourse community—a culture of the written word. The first sentence, “We depart for Europe in a fortnight” (89), throws the word “fortnight” straight at the reader. This is not someone sitting around talking in Grassy Branch. We soon find out that Lizzie is a trained nurse leaving for Europe during the First World War.

During her written reminiscence she presents a story her sister told her more than once. Lizzie’s use of literary dialect clearly marks the difference she perceives between her language and that of her sister. “Then as Lucie tells it, ‘we gone into the drugstore and got us a dope, and whilst we was a-setting there . . . All of a sudden I took this notion’” (102). Note that she announces that it is “as” Lucie tells it. She announces her intention to reproduce her speech. Lizzie’s representation of Lucie’s dialect may be a little more heavily marked than the literary dialect the author uses, but it would be difficult to prove this. All of the nonstandard spellings used here are also used elsewhere, but there is a greater frequency of nonstandard spellings here to help mark the difference between Lizzie’s literary dialect and grapholect, but it may also mark Lizzie’s condescension towards Lucie’s speech.

Throughout her account Lizzie shows her ambivalence about Grassy Branch, and the society she has entered. “We mountain people are a peculiar, proud lot, and must be approached correctly if we are to be approached at all. We will not brook contempt, or being talked down to-- ‘biggetyness,’ as Lucie would say” (100). She is part of this “we” even though she has more education and different life experiences. While she defends her people she puts her sister Lucie’s term into quotation marks because it is indicative of mountain people’s crude, uneducated speech. She condemns and confirms her own “biggetyness” at the same time.

While she uses written instead of oral discourse she also shows, as Nonnie does with Harry, that the act of narrating her past helps give her a sense of identity. No matter how far removed she is, in language and distance, from Grassy Branch, she remains tied to it:

Perhaps it is simply the writing of this account which has transported me back in time and place to Grassy Branch, to the little girl who lived there then with her old father and her little sister trying to be good . . . *what has become of her?* I believe this is the question I've been asking as I've written my way back through the years, and now the answer comes to me, for I see that *we are one* after all, she and I, a life as continuous as anybody's. (107)

These lines echo Katie Cocker's words in the prologue: "*not a one of us lives alone, outside of our family or our time, and . . . who we are depends on who we were and who our people were . . . The hard part has been figuring out who I am, because I'm not like any of them, and yet they are bone of my bone*" (14). Even though she has created an identity for herself outside of Grassy Branch, in effect divorced from her community of memory, the process of narrativizing her life has created a sense in her of personal wholeness and connection with the rest of the Bailey family. Who she is depends on who she was and who her people were. Lizzie is not like any of them, yet she is bone of their bone. This statement is as true from Lizzie's pen as it is from Katie's lips. Even though these characters speak for themselves, they also repeat and reinforce themes that are displayed throughout the novel. The repetition of major themes throughout the generations makes the conflict that Katie Cocker will resolve very clear and is orchestrated by an authorial presence.

The truth tends not to come from Blackjack Johnny Raines' lips. His section is unique in the novel. He doesn't tell his own story; instead his section is told in free indirect discourse: "it's raining the way it seems to do most of the time in Louisiana, a pee-warm drizzle that don't do much to cool things off, at least in Blackjack Johnny Raines's opinion but hell, what does he

know? What the fuck does he know anyway?" (165). Though this profanity clearly reflects Johnny's specific speech patterns and his attitude at this particular point in the diegesis, it is clearly not his mimetic voice—it is not his direct discourse. It is not a downstage narrative voice either because it is not simply a narrator's voice. As Gates argues, free indirect discourse lies "in the middle spaces between these two extremes of narration and discourse" (191).

Free indirect discourse is not the voice of both a character and a narrator; rather, it is a bi-vocal utterance, containing elements of both direct and indirect speech. It is an utterance that no one could have spoken, yet which we recognize because of its characteristic 'speakerliness,' its paradoxically written manifestation of the aspiration to the oral. (Gates 208)

A downstage narrator's utterance is not bi-vocal. A downstage narrator speaks in the same manner as the characters—not for, through or with them. Though the downstage narrative voice also uses speakerly diction, it does not actually blend the character and the narrator; the downstage narrator is a separate third-person narrator who uses speech patterns on the same plane as the character's voices. The downstage narrator does not state the character's opinion as if it were his own.

In his discussion of Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, Gates gives an example that shows that neither the character (Joe Starks in this case) nor the narrator is the sole source of the utterance in free indirect discourse:

the presence of the adverb *here* ('yes indeed, right here in his pocket') as opposed to 'there,' which would be required in normal indirect speech because one source would be describing another, informs us that the assertion originates within and reflects the character's sensibilities, not the narrator's. (210)

While the adverb "here" announces the difference from normal indirect discourse, it is also "his" pocket. The pronoun is indirect; the assertion originates within and clearly reflects the character's sensibilities, but the narrator actualizes it. A downstage narrative voice, on the other hand,

describes the other “source;” in free indirect discourse the voice is, in part, the source. “The principal indices of free indirect discourse direct the reader to the subjective source of the statement, rendered through a fusion of narrator and a silent but speaking character” (210). In *The Devil’s Dream* Johnny remains silent. We are told that “Johnny prefers to keep his bottle right here, in the inside pocket of his western jacket” (165). It is exactly the same type of discourse as in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. And this is different from the downstage narrator in the novel’s second chapter, who also mentions a pocket: “Zeke kept the steelie in his pocket always, and sometimes he’d roll it around and around in his fingers. He never traded it, or shot with it, or even took it out of his pocket” (35). Zeke’s pocket is never “here”. It is described by an omniscient narrator.

The discourse in Johnny’s chapter is unique in the novel, at least in part because transmitting Johnny’s information in any other manner would force the narrator either to be more directly judgmental or to take much more space. It’s difficult to imagine a storytelling event that Johnny would be a part of that could transmit as much information about him to the reader in as short a span. At the same time, since the chapter reflects his thoughts, the narrator can maintain an ironic distance that Smith’s downstage narrator cannot. The character’s sensibilities are, in effect, actualized by the narrator. The narrator, however, is no more responsible for the content of these remarks than of those of a storytelling character. All of the necessary information is transmitted while the narrator maintains distance.

Johnny is as clearly repudiated as Zinnia and, as in Zinnia’s case, there is evidence of this both in his chapter and outside of it—evidence that the characters give us, but cannot see themselves. This chapter recounts a night where Johnny is working as a touring musician. While

he is playing a sparsely-attended show at a run-down club, he is disdainful of his audience, and “reflects that if *he* ever gets this way, this sad-ass and beat-down, he hopes somebody will just shoot him in the head and put him out of his misery. Hell, he’ll shoot *himself*” (168). This statement is clearly revealed as ironic later when his wife shoots and kills him, but even in this chapter we see he is already relatively sad-ass and beat-down. He plays in clubs where the clientele is sad-ass and beat-down and the club owner neither trusts nor respects him; he has been evicted from his apartment; he experiences pain when he urinates, suggesting venereal disease; and he steals money from a lonely fan he convinces to have sex with him. There is a clear authorial judgement of Johnny, but there are no overt statements by the narrator that do so. Both Zinnia and Johnny are clearly repudiated, but not by any direct statements by any narrator. Instead the inconsistencies in their own narratives and statements in others’ show their shortcomings.

Later in the novel, Katie Cocker, who receives the closest thing to an overt endorsement the narrator supplies, confirms everyone’s opinion of Johnny: “I wasn’t too anxious to see Johnny again, to tell the truth, because of this one time I remembered when he tried to come on to *me* when we were kids” (262). We learn later in the novel that Rose Annie shoots Johnny after a woman comes to their home with Johnny’s illegitimate child. Johnny admits in his section that he has a child somewhere in Los Angeles, and the only defense he can muster is that “‘men are shits’” (180). The final judgment of Johnny is resoundingly negative. Every mention of Johnny outside of this chapter, except for some made by Rose Annie, who is insane and infatuated, is negative. In his chapter, he clearly conforms to the stereotypical patterns that he is accused of following throughout the novel. Rebecca Smith argues that Johnny is “one of Smith’s most

despicable male characters, one who never grows beyond seeing women as objects to be groped” (169). Johnny is almost that simple to dismiss and perhaps should be.

Johnny himself is conflicted, however. At one point he remembers an encounter with an attractive young woman that was surprisingly nonsexual. While driving at night to his next gig and musing about why he hates “college towns and college girls, smart-ass, got-it-all, know-it-all rich girls” (178), Johnny recalls an evening with two college-age women. He recalls returning to the home of the more attractive of the two women, Greer. Greer and her friend, “Buffy or maybe Muffy, one of those names” (178)<sup>26</sup>, strip and jump into the backyard pool, an experience Johnny finds strangely nonsexual.

So being naked in the water like this was no turn-on at all, in fact it was the opposite of a turn-on, in fact it put Johnny in mind of the swimming hole that Robert Floyd dynamited in Grassy Branch, it made him remember how long it took him to teach Rosie to swim and how little she looked in the water. She was just a kid then. At first, she was scared to put her face in. Later she was scared to lean back. She never did learn to swim very good, not like these rich girls who seemed to be part fish; they could tread water for hours and ask him innumerable personal questions. (179)

This passage suggests that his relationship with Rose Annie is deeper than one might think. Greer reminds Johnny of Rose Annie, but Greer also has a power and confidence in the water Rose Annie was incapable of. This affects Johnny strongly enough that he speaks frankly with her. “And for once, that night, Johnny just told the truth, fuck it, it was pretty clear he wasn’t going to get any off of Greer anyway, so what the hell. He told them about leaving home--although he left out the part about *why*” (179). Even when he chooses to tell the truth, however, he omits significant details, this chapter is in free indirect discourse instead of Johnny’s mimetic voice. This evening with Greer suggests far greater depths to Johnny than the rest of the novel does, or

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<sup>26</sup> An omniscient narrator—a downstage narrator—would, of course, know her name.



at least potential depth. It suggests that men may in fact be more than shits. Johnny finds himself uncomfortable with his actions—with the role he plays.

Johnny decides to call Greer the next day, not sure himself why, and is greeted by Muffy or Buffy, who he hears tell Greer that “Johnny Men-Are-Shits” is calling (181). This labeling of Johnny, this oversimplification of him, produces an immediate and indignant reaction. Another’s dismissive labeling of him leads him to retreat from a vulnerable position. At a crucial point where he might have grown, or at least revealed more depth, a wrong word leads him to recoil. “So when Greer finally came on the line, Johnny was damned if he’d say a word. He was Blackjack Johnny Raines, he would *not* be made light of” (182). After showing this vulnerability, Johnny resumes his “despicable” character, returning to the image of himself as sexual predator that he has cultivated. At the end of the chapter Johnny is still in his self-destructive cycle. “By the time he has broken the seal on a new pint bottle of vodka and taken a pill or so, he’s feeling pretty good. He’s feeling *right*” (183). He looks forward to repeating the events of the previous evening. He imagines the woman he will lie to—the same lie he told the night before to a different woman.

Johnny Raines doesn’t break the boundaries of his character, but there is a moment where we see that he is not as simple as his function in the novel or in society. He has, perhaps, the potential to exceed the boundaries of his character, but he does not. He is a monological character in a monological novel, but it is suggested here that he contains the ability to exceed his boundaries. Bakhtin writes:

In a monologic design, the hero is closed and his semantic boundaries are strictly defined: he acts, experiences, thinks, and is conscious within the limits of what he is, that is, within the limits of his image defined as reality; he cannot cease to be himself, that is, he cannot exceed the limits of his own character. (52)

Though I'm arguing that both Zinnia and Johnny are kept on a different dialogical plane than the primary narrative voice, these characters are not as two-dimensional as the term monological suggests. They are monological in the strictest sense. They hint at greater depth, but they never act in a way that reflects this. I'm not sure if monological or dialogical are entirely adequate terms. Smith has tried to allow at least some of her characters to be carriers of their own autonomous words. She also, however, has sections where the novel's authorial voice dominates the other's consciousnesses from a higher dialogical plane. There is never a character who knows more, or as much, as the primary narrative presence, except perhaps for Katie Cocker.

Katie is a different sort of storytelling character, and, like Huck, she tests the boundary between narrators and storytelling characters. As I've already argued, Huck is not a storytelling character. Even though he is represented as speaking, there is no explicit or implicit reference to a specific time or place where Huck actually speaks. Also, Huck is aware that the novel is being written and that his audience is its future readership. *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* records a very public speech act, though how exactly the book was "made" is not mentioned in the text. Huck is a personal, public, narrator.

Lanser would argue that Katie is a personal narrator, because, like Huck, she is a character inside the fiction telling her own story. It is difficult to argue against this because Katie and Huck are very similar, indeed. The definition of their exact roles, is not as important as the difference between their voices—their presences in the novels—and the authorial presences that dominate the novels in a way that no presence dominates *Absalom, Absalom!*

The last of the five major sections of *The Devil's Dream* consists of several chapters where Katie tells her own story. She begins by reflecting on her young adulthood in Richmond living with her Aunt Virgie and cousin Georgia:

We'd sit on the old iron bed in the boarding house in Richmond and giggle, me and Georgia, and not say out loud what we were thinking. Or at least I didn't say out loud what I was thinking, and I *know* what I was thinking. I reckon I've always had a dirty mind, or at the very least a mind which is *down-to-earth*. I will call a spade a spade. I will tell it like it is. I can't kid myself, or not for long, anyhow. Oh I guess we all kid ourselves a little bit (209).

Katie's self effacement is endearing and leads us to believe she will be a reliable narrator. In a way Katie's initial acknowledgment that she may not be entirely reliable—her simultaneous establishment and undercutting of her own authority—echoes the opening of *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. In that novel Huck marks himself as a very different sort of narrator while also making a similar acknowledgment of unreliability:

You don't know about me, without you have read a book by the name of "The Adventures of Tom Sawyer," but that ain't no matter. That book was made by Mr. Mark Twain, and he told the truth, mainly. There was things which he stretched, but mainly he told the truth. That is nothing. I never seen anybody but lied, one time or another, without it was aunt Polly, or the widow, or maybe Mary. Aunt Polly—Tom's aunt Polly, she is—and Mary, and the widow Douglas, is all told about in that book—which is mostly a true book; with some stretchers, as I said before. (13)

Though Huck doesn't explicitly state that he will "tell it like it is" or that he sometimes kids himself, he acknowledges that at least all men, even him, are somewhat unreliable—everyone lies at one time or another. He, like Katie, establishes a realistic credibility outside of the power of authorial voice. They are not authorial narrators; they do not have privileged access, but they are forthright and trustworthy. Of course Huck also undercuts the authority of *Tom Sawyer* and *Huckleberry Finn*'s authorial voice by saying that Twain "told the truth, mainly." Unlike Katie, Huck acknowledges the author and the novel's existence.

Katie and Huck are also similar in their presentation styles because both express reluctance to tell parts of their stories. Their hesitance gives a sense of honesty and forthrightness to their narratives. At the beginning of her fourth chapter Kate says: “Lord, I hate to even tell this next part, it makes me look like such a fool. Well, I *was* a fool, I might as well say it” (248). Her embarrassment about her actions is a very different emotion than what Huck feels before he tells about the bloody confrontation between the Sheperdsons and Grangerfords, which he claims to still dream about (134). He begins that episode by saying: “I don’t want to talk much about the next day. I reckon I’ll cut it pretty short” (132). Though both express reluctance, they both also tell these uncomfortable portions of their stories, showing admirable forthrightness which increases the audience’s admiration and trust.

Though Katie Cocker is a storytelling character, her status isn’t initially clear. The reader has already seen several storytelling characters, several chapters dominated by a downstage narrator, one chapter of free indirect discourse, and one where a character wrote her own story. It is not out of the question for the novel’s central character to tell in a different manner than all the others, so when we begin her section we are not sure how she will tell her story. She could initially be interpreted as either a private or public narrator.

The entire section is entitled “Katie Cocker Tells it Like It Is.” Two chapters have first-person pronouns in their titles (“I Have a Baby,” “I Act Like a Fool”), which suggests Katie’s authorship of them, an authorship reminiscent of 19<sup>th</sup> century personal narrators. None of the chapter titles contain the word “talking” which sometimes distinguishes authorial and personal voices in other parts of the novel, and there is no suggestion that she is writing her account. There are chapters which present storytelling characters that are not prefaced “talking,” so its

absence is not sufficient warrant to suggest that Katie is not a storytelling character. Her exact status is not spelled out initially, but it eventually becomes evident as Katie points to objects that are part of the storytelling event, for instance “two pictures taken on my wedding day. . . Here we are with Georgia. Here we are just the two of us, holding hands. We look like children. We *were* children” (227). Like Ira Keen and Aunt Rachel, her represented speech includes references to the context of the storytelling event. Katie is a storytelling character, and we are to fictionalize ourselves as story listeners.

One of my fundamental arguments is that there is a pervasive authorial presence in this novel. This presence is not manifested inside every chapter. In some chapters there is an unmistakable ironic gap between the storytelling character and the authorial presence. The storytelling characters exist on a different plane from the narrator. I’ve singled out Zinnia and Johnny as examples, but there are others as well. Other chapters are in the downstage narrative voice, which is a type of authorial voice where there is no perceptible ironic gap between the narrator and the author. All of the chapters are arranged, selected and titled by the authorial presence. This type of presence is felt in *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* as well, both in the novel’s prefatory section and in its ironic gaps.

There is an authorial presence, an arranger, in *The Devil’s Dream* who decides who speaks and when, and who decides which personal narrators will be followed either by downstage narrators or by personal narrators who sometimes either confirm or contradict them. This presence has orchestrated all of the voices in the novel in order to give us clear indicators of which voices to believe, and to what extent.

The authorial voice, by entitling the section “Katie Cocker Tells it Like It Is,” has already informed the reader that Katie is, in fact, telling it like it is. Other tellers were merely “talking”; Katie is “telling it like it is” and the reader has been conditioned by this time to accept the author’s judgement in these matters. This authorial endorsement, admittedly not the strongest one could receive, is not the only evidence that Katie is reliable. The narrator of the initial italicized section has described her favorably and given a supporting example, telling us that Katie looks people she is talking to “*dead in the eye*” (14). Katie, along with being the subject of the prefatory section, is also given more chapters in which to speak than any other character, and these chapters are in a later position in the novel which is generally a privileged one. Also, as Katie tells her story it becomes clear that her experience parallels those of her ancestors, and that she has gained wisdom by overcoming difficulties that defeated many of her forebearers. As she said in the novel’s first section, “*who we are depends on who we were and who our people were*” (14).

She is like and unlike almost everyone who has preceded her. Her story and her experiences are like and unlike those of other characters. Johnny’s chapter ends with him thinking about what will become his comeback hit song (falling upon it in a way similar to how Katie falls upon her song about him, “Borrowed Time”), and sees “all of Louisiana laid out before him like the future” (182-83). Katie sees similar hope in the Louisiana landscape: “I was used to mountains, hemming me in, holding me back. But Louisiana stretched out as far as I could see” (251). Both were raised in the mountains of Virginia and see Louisiana from a similar perspective.

Katie and Johnny's stories parallel each others in many other ways; Johnny is also similar to Katie's second husband, Wayne Ricketts. When Katie reads about Johnny's death, she sees one connection between the two: "As I was reading, it occurred to me that Johnny Raines had just been waiting for that bullet his whole life long. I can't tell you exactly what I mean by that, but I know it is so. There's some men that are born to be killed. Johnny Raines was one and Wayne Ricketts was another, and every minute they're alive is borrowed time" (269). Another interesting parallel exists between Wayne and the man Nonnie Bailey runs off with, Henry Sharp. Both seduce women, in part, through talking. Henry's talking is apparently a large part of his allure: "Nonnie couldn't get enough of his talking. Those first months, they'd sit up late into the night in a rented room in whatever town they were in, smoking cigarettes and drinking rye whiskey and talking, talking, talking" (78). Talking isn't the only thing alluring about these men, but it is important. Katie attempts to explain why she allowed Wayne to dominate her: "I see I have not said too much yet about sex. But sex is a factor here, let me tell you. So is talking. A big talker who is great at sex can have his way in this world" (254). This passage is interesting, in part because Katie uses the term "big talker" in reference to Wayne. We encounter that term earlier in the novel in reference to Henry, but no character calls him a big talker. The chapter that features Henry and Nonnie's relationship is entitled "Nonnie and the Big Talker" (62). Wayne and Harry are both identified as big talkers, but in Harry's case it is the arranger that helps to explicitly link the two characters. No one inside the chapter refers to Harry as a big talker. The parallels between Henry and Wayne are clear. These parallels are established by an authorial presence that has arranged the novel in such a way as to emphasize the similarities between individual stories, and uses the same idiomatic terms as Katie.

Time and again Katie faces the same challenges and experiences as her forebearers.

Sharing the name of the family matriarch, Katie hears a voice at a pivotal moment in her life—as does Kate Bailey’s son, R.C. Katie, hospitalized for nervous exhaustion, is told she is pregnant and contemplates an abortion:

So I lay there for a while, and then all of a sudden, the truth came to me. *Katie*, I heard a voice as clear as a bell. *Katie, sit up*. So I sat up. I looked around but nobody was in my room except my roommates sleeping their drugged sleep. The sun was coming up outside. *Katie Cocker*, I heard. I could tell it was a voice from home, from up on Grassy Branch. It sounded like something like Little Virginia, a woman’s voice, but it was not anybody I knew. It was a voice I had not heard before, yet it was as familiar to me as my own. Maybe it *was* my own, in some crazy way which is past understanding. I listened for more. *Katie, girl*, I heard. *You can either lay in this bed for the rest of your life, or you can get up and make something of yourself. It’s up to you. You’ve got some more singing to do. Get up.* (260-61)

Rebecca Smith argues that Katie “is the first character in Smith’s canon to hear the voice of God as a female voice” (155). Smith is talking specifically about Carole Bliss, who gives Katie important advice and elicits this thought from her: “If it is possible for God to speak to Paul on the road to Damascus, it is possible for Him to speak to me in the voice of a crackerjack lesbian accountant” (301)<sup>27</sup>. The voice Katie hears in the hospital, however, is also a woman’s, and has no clear human source. Katie’s is not the first character in this novel to hear a woman’s voice like this. R.C. finds himself at a crossroads and hears his dead mother’s voice speaking to him, “plain as that blazing sun.”

‘Go home now, son,’ she told me, and so I did.  
I got back to find that Daddy had had a stroke and couldn’t say a thing . . . Durwood and Lizzie and me figgered out later that Daddy had had the stroke just right about the time that I had heard Mamma speaking to me up in West Virginia. Somehow it didn’t surprise me none to learn this. (88)

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<sup>27</sup> Again the authorial narrator does not overtly endorse a supernatural event but does present two similar scenes told by characters.



The repetition of the sunlight motif, and the characters' prompt and simple obedience to the commands show that these two are analogous experiences. Katie's voice told her to sit up, so she sat up. R.C.'s voice told him to go home, and so he did.

What we see throughout Katie's section is that her family's story is her story. She faces the same conflicts her ancestors have. Conflicts that Fred Chappell summarizes:

The Baileys are a passionate tribe and they have only three things in mind: religion, music, and sexual love. Their religious faith is strong and usually sustains them, but for the sake of a man or a woman or for the sake of music they will turn their backs on their church beliefs and follow the willful ardencies that lead them crazily astray. (942)

Baileys are passionate about all of these things and the conflict between them is only slightly more complex than Chappell has put it. Religious and secular music and romantic and sexual love, in and outside of marriage, are all deeply moving experiences. The fact that some of these experiences are frowned upon by organized religion and sometimes an obstacle to religious experience, also deeply moving, is the source of almost every conflict in the novel.

What Katie tells us, and what we see, is that Katie has negotiated these conflicts, and built a life for herself that includes all kinds of music, sexual love and spirituality. Rebecca Smith writes that, through Katie, Lee Smith "finally has healed the breach of sexuality and spirituality that the patriarchal religion and culture have prescribed" (173). The author has healed this breach and the reader is clearly led to this conclusion.

Katie doesn't have the last word in the novel; the narrator does. In the last full chapter, Katie tells how Carole Bliss, the crackerjack lesbian accountant, suggested that Katie produce her own album of traditional songs. This is where her story catches up to the novel's present. Katie says to her undramatized story listener, who we learn is on her bus with her, "So we are going ahead with it . . . right now it's two a.m., the middle of the night, and I can't sleep a wink

thinking about this album” (301). She now speaks in the present and even the future tense. Her chapter ends with her looking forward to a bright future which includes family, spirituality and sexual love. It also includes recording an album with her family entitled “Shall We Gather at the River,” which is also the title of the italicized sections which bookend the novel. The first italicized section is narrated by an unnamed bystander. The final section is told by a downstage narrator. Instead of ending as it began, with an unnamed bystander narrating, the novel ends with a voice that enjoys the superhuman privileges of an omniscient narrator.

Both sections are in the present tense (in effect the entire novel has been a flashback) and quickly establish the setting: *It's Christmastime at the Opryland Hotel, and you never saw anything like it!*” (11). This is almost indistinguishable from the beginning of the finale: *The Opryland Hotel has got a lobby as long as a football field. Right now at Christmastime this lobby is decorated from top to bottom*” (303). In the second paragraph, however, we see this is not the bystander who spoke in the first section; this is an omniscient narrator who gives us the thoughts of several characters, beginning with Homer Oslow, who, we are told, would never admit “*out loud*” that he is happy to have the help of the “*slick little boys from the RCA record company*” (303). This narrator brings the novel to a close, telling us the thoughts and feelings of several characters and transporting us temporarily to Grassy Branch: “*Carole Bliss's walkie-talkie crackles smartly as she leads them around the corner at exactly the moment when R.C., in the barn at Grassy Branch, puts the barrel of his rifle in his mouth*” (309). The novel brings all of the storylines to closure. At the conclusion of a dialogical novel “*nothing conclusive has yet taken place in the world, the ultimate word of the world and about the world has not yet been spoken, the world is open and free, everything is still in the future and always will be in the*

*future*” (Bakhtin 166). At the conclusion of *The Devil’s Dream*, on the other hand, R.C. shoots himself while the rest of the family is gathered together to cut a record which will reflect their family heritage. “*After they make this album, after a decent length of time has gone by to mark R.C.’s passing, Little Virginia and Homer will decide to go along with Gladys and Tammy’s idea of opening up the barn to the general public*” (310). The world of *The Devil’s Dream* is closed. The past will soon be recorded—finalized—and the future is confidently predicted, not by any character, but instead from a plane inaccessible to the characters.

It is interesting that Smith would choose to wield the kind of authority she exhibits in *The Devil’s Dream*. In an interview she gave while she was writing the novel she said, “another thing that fascinates me about the notion of oral history is that I think it is an oxymoron: if it is spoken it is not history, if it is spoken it is automatically the storyteller’s tale . . . you can ask a whole bunch of people the same thing and get six different descriptions” (Herion-Sarafidis 95-96). In *The Devil’s Dream* there are different versions of some events, but these differences are always clearly resolved. Why would someone not only aware of how problematic oral history is, but indeed interested in the problem, finalize these narratives? One answer lies in her audience’s response to her earlier novels.

In an interview with Rebecca Smith, Lee Smith discusses a problem that arose with interpretations of her novel *Family Linen*. The interviewer suggests that one of the pivotal events of the book, Fay’s murder of Jewel (which is not narrated), may be considered open to interpretation, that “perhaps we’re not supposed to believe Fay’s or even Nettie’s narrative, since one point of the book is that the truth is very elusive.” Smith’s reply is to the point -“Well, Fay

did kill him” (25). In this interview she exerts her authority. As the author, as the creator of the fiction, she unequivocally states this.

It is understandable that some readers of *Family Linen* would find this fact elusive. There are two key passages which reveal Fay as the killer. First, late in the novel, there is an italicized section that gives the reader Fay’s psychic voice. It is disjointed stream of consciousness which reveals that Fay was angry about someone, who we easily infer is Jewel: “*He meant to go without me, I saw him trying to leave. He tried to sneak out in the storm in the night with Elizabeth [Jewel’s wife] sound asleep*” (207). The narrator shows us Fay laying down in the back of a car during the summer which leads to her death, and it is made very clear that she does so because the body of the long dead Jewel is about to be found. One reason people might doubt she is the killer is that she is clearly deeply disturbed, so even her psychic voice isn’t necessarily reliable. Also, she could certainly have known where the body was even if she wasn’t the killer. Even if she is somehow reliable, she never admits to killing or even attacking Jewel, though she clearly knows where Jewel is buried, and had a justifiable animosity towards him.

Two chapters later, a downstage narrator dramatizes Nettie’s realization that Fay is the killer. Nettie is probably the only person still living who knows of Jewel’s abuse of Fay. After reflecting on Fay’s death, Nettie makes an intuitive leap to solve the mystery:

‘She must of done it then, Fay. Why sure. She done it all along, and to think I never knew it, all these years.’ So the mystery is solved, but it’s more of a mystery than ever. Because Nettie won’t say any more, or explain it, not even when they sit her down at the kitchen table with iced tea. Nettie says, ‘*She* didn’t know it either. I mean Elizabeth.’ And that’s all. That’s all they’ll ever know. (255)

Smith's narrator does say: "the mystery is solved," but she also leaves a great deal unsaid. One can certainly understand how some people could miss these indicators or consider them inconclusive.

Smith goes on in the interview to tell about how Lee Yopp was writing a play based on *Family Linen* [which ran Sept. 26-9, 1991]:

he [Yopp] didn't get the point about Fay. And then he wanted to leave it ambiguous, and I told him I really didn't want to leave it ambiguous. I wanted to leave a lot of ambiguity-- I wrote that book right after I wrote *Oral History*, and I had been doing a lot of oral histories with my family and people up in the mountains, and I had come to the firm conclusion that there is no such thing as history. That it is only who tells the story. And I kind of wanted to reflect that point that the past can never be exactly known. But I clearly made it a little too ambiguous. (Rebecca Smith "Conversation" 25)<sup>28</sup>

*The Devil's Dream* is less ambiguous. The ambiguity that Smith is striving for may be the same kind of indeterminacy that Bakhtin attributes to the dialogical novel. The truth that Ira Keen, for example, arrives at is the truth as he sees it, one that cannot answer all of the reader's questions. He tries to explain the lives of Kate and Moses Bailey with the information he has, which is naturally limited. In one key scene, Keen admits his inability to understand why Moses would react as he did.

Now who knows what went on in Moses' head whilst he stood there a listening?  
Who can say what drives a man to do the things he does? Fer what Moses done  
was awful. He come busting outen them woods like God Hissself, a-hollering,  
snatched that fiddle and broke it over the porch rail, then beat all of them . . . At  
the last he throwed hisself down on the floor and cried like a baby the rest of the  
whole night long, or so Kate told it to Mamma. (29)

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<sup>28</sup>Of course, Smith is writing in a historical moment where readers often embrace and seek both ambiguity and indeterminacy. This is a significant contrast between one of the several initial reviews that damned *Absalom, Absalom!* for its ambiguity. "If in the great show-down of years," Max Miller of the San Diego *Union* writes "*Absalom, Absalom!* does prove to be a great book then the joke is on me. But I have yet to know a great book which was built exclusively on tricky confusion" (qtd. in Bassett 101-4).

This is the kind of ambiguity that Smith wants to show—our inability to say why exactly a man would do something that awful. As Brooks said of *Absalom, Absalom!* there is uncertainty concerning “matters of motivation and ultimate purpose that are involved in the mystery of the human spirit itself” (302). What Smith wants to keep clear is the fact that the awful event occurred. There were events that occurred in the past that have been chronicled and can be established as fact, but why these things happened, the truth behind them, is not something Ira can know. Ira’s knowledge of events and the oral tradition is similar to Miss Rosa’s or Mr Compson’s, and he is equally unable to explain. There are two kinds of truth personal narrators can give us. The first is the character’s interpretations and opinions. The second is the simple facts about individual events. Though storytelling characters often hold opinions and interpretations of events which vary from narrators or other characters, it is problematic to allow a novel’s character to misstate facts without giving the reader evidence that character is lying. It is of limited usefulness to present a character who lies to the audience and is not somehow refuted. If we don’t know a character is lying, what exactly is the point of the lie? As slanted as Rosa and Zinnia are, by literary convention, indeed necessity, we assume unless it is otherwise indicated that the information they give us is on some basic level correct. We have no reason to believe that any of the factual claims storytelling characters make in either *The Devil’s Dream* or *Absalom, Absalom!* are incorrect.<sup>29</sup> Their speculations and opinions may be skewed or downright

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<sup>29</sup> Again, some exceptions exist, but we know they exist because we are pointed to them. Shreve changes the story, but he says he’s changing the story—his changing of the story is clearly marked in the text. Zinnia says that Nonnie killed Momma, but we learn that her mother died during childbirth. The indeterminacy of Ryunsuke Akutagawa’s “In a Grove” is the kind of exception that proves the rule. The author arranges the conflicting testimonies in such a way as to show us that they are in conflict, that some, and perhaps all, are not merely biased but false.

wrong, but they give us the basic facts correctly, or we are shown where they err. Any other state would be incomprehensible. This is true for both personal narrators and storytelling characters; unless it is otherwise indicated in the text, both are reliable in terms of facts. The unmarked case is for them to be both relatively and predictably honest and accurate.

But there is more authorial control in *The Devil's Dream* than just insurance that basic facts can be confirmed. We are shown and assured that Katie has transcended the family narrative and closed the rift between the secular and the sacred. Though Smith shows ambiguity—more precisely uncertainty, she also shows us exactly why some characters do the things they do and she has presented her judgment of these characters, both through evaluative comments and through the arrangement of sometimes conflicting testimonies. She has allowed characters to speak for themselves, but these voices have been arranged in a way that leads us to see Katie's narrative in a particular context. The narrator of *The Devil's Dream* does not seem to seek authority outside of the novel's discourse, instead she seeks to give Katie that authority. She gives Katie's evaluations, her extrarepresentational acts, discursive authority. Katie is, in a way, the single consciousness which absorbs the other consciousnesses as objects into herself. She is the sum of the family narrative, but she is authorized by a voice that exists on a higher plane. All of the other voices are also organized and evaluated by a presence entirely above them. The novel arrives at the truth of Katie's consciousness, but there is an authorial voice that assures us that it is the truth.

This authorial presence does not use a voice that is recognizable as authorial. Instead this narrator exercises the super human privileges of authorial voice while using the discourse of the characters. The downstage narrative voice is an attempt to give authorial privilege to a narrator

whose discourse does not conform to the standards of the dominant discourse. Smith writes about her use of this kind of voice:

I can't say whether it's good or bad that I have fallen upon this kind of an intrusive, down-home narrative voice. I don't even know that it works. But it has made it possible for me to write about what I want to write about right now—the people I'm interested in, their lives and times. (100)

One of the things Smith wanted to write about was the power of oral storytelling. Whether Smith succeeds or not, she tries to represent oral discourse in a written medium without the storytelling characters' voices being automatically “secondary, indulged and condescended to by the reader who shares (as an audience shares the mimic's knowledge) the author's power over all the voices” (Ross 108). She adopted the downstage narrative voice for reasons similar to Twain's decision to make Huck the narrator of his own story: “if *I* tell a boy's story, or anybody else's,” he wrote, “it is never worth printing, it comes from the head and not from the heart, and always goes into the wastebasket. To be successful and worth printing, the imagined boy would have to tell his story himself and let me act merely as his amanuensis” (Qtd in Knoper 94). They are different techniques, but both are attempts at giving speaking voices the ability to speak for themselves without their level of their discourse, in relation to the authorial voice, determining their authority.

Ross argues that mimetic voice is structurally, necessarily, secondary to authorial voice. Because the authorial presence in the novel is a written one, all spoken voices are secondary at best. Whether or not it is necessarily the case, it is generally held to be so, and it is certainly reasonable to believe that the written presence would be the primary one in a written medium. The three authors studied here have struggled with this speakerly paradox. In their fiction, Twain, Faulkner and Smith all try to make the mimetic voices they present not necessarily



secondary—they try to allow them to be judged by criteria other than their structural position in the novel or how their language compares to the conventional voices of authority. As I have shown, the three novelists have all tried to imbue the spoken voices with authority at least equal to the written. Twain removed the primary authorial voice—first halfway through “A True Story” and then almost immediately from *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. He hoped that the removal of the authoritative presence would allow the speaking voices to take a position free of authorial evaluation, and then they could perhaps speak for themselves, even if the message they transmit demonstrates the power of the dominant discourse over them. In *Absalom, Absalom!* Faulkner has his storytelling characters use the same discourse style as the narrator, and has his narrator deny authority he conventionally would hold, bringing the notion of narrative authority into question, problematizing all of the versions presented. Smith, during a historical moment where readers are accustomed to and even seek indeterminacy, creates an omniscient narrator who uses the same discourse as her character’s while retaining and asserting the superhuman privileges of authorial voice.

The similarity in all three cases is that the discourse that a particular voice uses is not the measuring stick for discursive authority. In “A True Story,” and perhaps even in “The Jumping Frog,” the genteel narrator has less wisdom than the vernacular character. In *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* some characters who speak in higher and lower discourses than Huck have varying degrees of wisdom and honor. No one is more honorable than Huck, who believes society’s assessment of him as low down. In *Absalom, Absalom!* almost every voice, including the narrator, speaks in a similar manner, so the type of discourse is no indicator of authority, nor is the structural position of the narrator as presenter and creator of the fictive world. In *The*

*Devil's Dream* the level of discourse is again no indicator of reliability but the structural position and omniscience of the primary narrative voice lends it authority.

Attempting to have storytellers or any mimetic voices taken seriously does not necessarily require that they have authority equal to that of the narrator. They need not be better or smarter than the written voice. As Lanser argues is the case with all personal voice, and as is the case with all actual storytellers, storytelling characters must create their own authority through the act of narration. By the same token, these authors would have omniscient narrators have [earn] authority because of their status as creators of the fictive world and their demonstrable wisdom, and not because of their use of the dominant discourse.

If *Absalom, Absalom!* is about Sutpen, then it may be a dialogic novel. No one voice is privileged over any other. Ross argues, however, that “transcribed speech, the product of mimicry, always occupies an inferior position in relation to the diegetic discourse of its production. The mimetic voices we hear are always secondary, indulged and condescended to” (108). There may be no way to overcome the structural hierarchy inherent in all storytelling. The first layer, the diegesis, may be first, and all others are secondary. Faulkner tries, however, to level the dialogical playing field for his characters. He creates a number of communal voices which appear equally authoritative. If *Absalom, Absalom!* is a dialogical novel—if a dialogical novel is truly possible—we see the great lengths an authorial narrator must go to in order to relinquish his conventional semantic authority and to build authority for his characters—to show the “phase of truth” they saw without exerting the authority narrators have by literary convention. Faulkner tried to present thinking human consciousnesses thinking and speaking for themselves.

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