# INTIMATE OTHER: THE RHETORICS OF RACE, GENDER, AND PLACE IN A SOUTHERN ENVIRONMENTAL IMAGINATION

by

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DISSERTATION ABSTRACT

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Title: Intimate Other: The Rhetorics of Race, Gender, and Place in a Southern Environmental Imagination

This dissertation explores the imbrication of race, gender, and place in the context of American Southern literature between 1911 and 1942. It examines Margaret Mitchell's *Gone with the Wind*, William Faulkner's *Go Down, Moses*, W.E.B Du Bois *The Souls of Black Folks* and *The Quest of the Silver Fleece*, and Zora Neale Hurston's short stories from the New Negro Renaissance as well as *Jonah's Gourd Vine*. The project claims these texts are representative of how an environmental imagination rhetorically deployed the mutually constitutive categories of race, gender, and place during the decades when the United States experienced restructurings of social and cultural power as well as came to a different relationship with the environment through the acceleration of modernity. Through literary analysis, the project argues each of the four authors utilize the imaginative resources of the environment as well as the overlapping categories of race, gender, and place to rhetorically instrumentalize an environmental imagination for cultural and political ends. In the case of Faulkner and Mitchell, this project argues these authors use history, the plantation romance, and a pervasive nostalgia to embed the hegemony of white supremacy into the landscape even as their text strive to present the land as a moral and ethical resource. For Du Bois and Hurston, this project argues their works use a rhetorically active environmental imagination to present readers with a more just and

economically viable future for the South as well as preserve cultural and social memories in the landscape even as the land itself proves an archive for memory. I build on research from a New Southern Studies, critical race studies, literature and the environment, and rhetoric to observe how intersections of environment, imagination, rhetoric, and narrative inflects both representations of identity and place within a particular literary artifact's historical context. Ultimately, the project argues that because we can neither get outside of language nor environments, studying how language and the environment interact with one another provides a better understanding of how rhetorics, narrative, identity, and place.

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# CHAPTER I

# INTRODUCTION

The American South is a contested and contradictory region. In terms of history, culture, and politics, the South is at once storied for its rebellion and reviled because it fought a war to preserve enslavement. It is the historical seat of a failed reconstruction that gave rise to the white fantasy of a Lost Cause ethos. Despite losing a war to preserve enslavement, its culture of white supremacy changed little as the South became the seat of racial terrorism throughout the twentieth century. Paradoxically, the South was central to the Civil Rights movement, with many of its leaders hailing from the region even as it became the nucleus for the Southern Strategy in Conservative, anti-progressive politics. More recently, the South has drawn national attention for its removal of Confederate monuments and its leftward movement on the political spectrum while the perpetuation of its more perverse ideologies has led to increased political and physical violence against non-white persons through police brutality, white vigilantism, and the restriction of voting rights. Returning to its history of insurrectionist roots, as reported by Alvin Chang in *The Guardian,* either a Senator, a Representative, or both from every State that was a former member of the Confederacy voted against the certification of Joe Biden's 2020 Presidential election.[1]

In terms of imagination, those with a vested interest in preserving white supremacy, racially oppressive cultural practices, and a white planter-class ethos have seen the South as "another land, sharply differentiated from the rest of the American nation, and exhibiting within itself a remarkable homogeneity" (Cash, xlvii). Through their persistent imaginative and

[1] Alabama: one senator, six representatives; Arkansas: one representative; Florida: one senator, twelve representatives; Georgia: six representatives; Louisiana: one senator, four representatives; Mississippi: one senator, three representatives; North Carolina: seven representatives; South Carolina: five representatives; Tennessee: seven representatives; Texas: one senator, sixteen representatives; Virginia: four representatives.

rhetorical influence, the South become in certain contexts a gothic land steeped in moonlight, magnolias, and racism, a land beholden to white supremacy, a political and cultural backwater wherein religion, Conservative politics, and a yearning for a past that never was precludes the march towards modernity. According to Angie Maxwell, the dominant identity for the South that "began and continued to be a non-black identity" became, in effect, "a nonnorthern, nonliberal, nonmodern, and nonscientific overdetermined southern whiteness" (22). Moreover, the habit of imagining the South as another land imbued the region with a rhetorical mobility wherein a host of ideologies, myths, and beliefs are written onto its landscape. At times, the South has become less a geographical region and more a convenient mobile concept signifier in public discourse with meanings ranging from what Leigh Anne Duck calls "the Nation's Other," to exemplum of national values, to scape goat for larger failures in social justice advances, to a bellwether region indicating a turning tide against racism through Black and nonwhite success. Across nearly every instance of such contestations and contradictions, the assumption of a South with a "remarkable homogeneity" has remained more-or-less intact by those seeking to preserve and or protect their investment in white supremacy. That is a problem.

The problem of an assumed homogenous South not only oversimplifies a radically complex region, the assumption that any environment is homogenous despite radical differences in lived experiences for those who make it their home also reinforces habits of singular thinking in terms of environmental rhetorics and ethics. The assumption of a homogenous South does not account for a plurality of experiences of place. A failure to account for a plurality of experiences for a place forecloses the capacity to see place in terms of multiple environments. The inability to think with such plurality limits the capability to recognize how rhetoric and rhetorical constructions of environments are used in history, culture, politics, and imagination as either

methods of control or liberation. A limited capability to recognize environmental rhetorics and rhetorical function means that discourse around and about environments is not conscious of itself—discourse fails to see the terms of its own world making. When discourse is not conscious of itself, ethical failings in the ways we imagine others as well as our environments are normalized. That, too, is a problem.

One way to begin redressing multiplying problems of normalized ethical failings and unquestioned environmental rhetorics in an environmental imagination is to examine how persons with a vested interested in either the preservation of a homogenous environment or persons with a similarly vested interest in dismantling assumed homogeneity through alternative renderings have gone about their rhetorical work. Here, the hope in such inquiries is two-fold. First, that the examination of environmental rhetorics and imaginations will reveal the inevitable ethical follies that follow closely on the heels of assumed sameness despite the persistent presence of remarkable difference. Second, that the consequence of rendering discourse, environmental rhetorics, and the environmental imagination conscious of itself will improve the ability to be with one another through the intimacies of difference.

This dissertation, *Intimate Other: The Rhetorics of Race, Gender, and Place in a Southern Environmental Imagination* strives to meet the hopes listed above. The project draws it objects of inquiry from American Literature, particularly twentieth-century texts across a thirty-one-year time span that concentrate on the South. The authors and novels of this project are: Margaret Mitchell and *Gone with the Wind* (1936); William Faulkner and *Go Down, Moses* (1942); W.E.B. Du Bois and *The Quest of the Silver Fleece* (1911); Zora Neale Hurston and a selection of her early short stories as well as her first novel, *Jonah's Gourd Vine* (1934). These texts were chosen because they represent, in their own unique ways, the constitutive processes

and intimacies of an environmental imagination through the rhetorics of race, gender, and place in decades where the United States experienced extreme restructurings of power as well as came to a different relationship with the environment through the acceleration of modernity.

*Intimate Other* weaves its method through several disciplines. The turn to critical race theory, ecocriticism, and rhetoric resonates through the fields of New Southern Studies, literature and the environment, and the more traditional field of Literary Studies. For New Southern Studies, this project answers the call issued by Houston Baker and Dana Nelson for a new approach to the South that "reconfigure[s] our familiar notions of Good (or desperately bad) Old Southern White Men telling stories on the porch, protecting white women, and being friends to the Negro" (232). The project does this by placing Southern authors (Mitchell, Faulkner, and Hurston) in the same scholarly context as New Negro Renaissance authors (Hurston and Du Bois) while also placing more traditional Modernist authors (Du Bois, Faulkner, and Hurston) together with a decidedly popular author (Mitchell). In addition, this dissertation responds to Baker's and Dana's claim that "[i]t is difficult to *imagine* an abstract violence dissociated from human and environmental bodies" by combining rhetorical and ecocritical methods in its interrogation of both the environment and identity as mutually constitutive. The inclusion of rhetorical methodologies respects their move to not limit the term "body" to the "spectacle lynchings, laborers' abjection, or the politics of the prison-industrial complex" by treating the body and the environment in literature as also a rhetorics in their own rights (233). Further, this project exploits the strangeness of the South to its advantage across New Southern Studies, literature and the environment, and Literary Studies more broadly because, as Jon Smith and Deborah Cohn note, the US South occupies "a space unique within modernity: as a space simultaneously (or alternately) center and margin, victor and defeated, empire and colony,

essentialist and hybrid, northern and southern" (9). The recognition of the intimate relationship between racial, gendered, and place-based rhetoric undergirding the imaginings of bodies in Baker and Nelson centers both the human and the environmental by admitting to their imbrication in the construction of these worlds. The turn to rhetoric and strange intimacy in Smith and Cohn disrupts comfortable patterns of critique and resistance by drawing attention to symptomatic language, form, style, and tone used to construct an environmental imaginary in the textual artifacts used to make such environments seem fully realized even as they are under the strain of a constant rhetorical making.

In ecocritical terms, this project enters conversation with a growing nexus of environmental scholarship concerned with the relationship between the social construction of race and the social construction of environments. The work focuses on the rhetorical imbrication of race, gender, and place as central to the construction of a Southern environmental imaginary while interrogating the political consequences when natural tropes are deployed to assert certain social or cultural practices. To accomplish such rhetorical deconstructions, this project is in conversation with Carolyn Finney's *Black Faces, White Spaces* where she argues that "racialization and representation are not passive processes; they also have the power to determine who actually participates in environment-related activities and who does not; which voices are heard in environmental debates and which voices are not" (3). This dissertation expands on Finney's claim that "whiteness as a way of knowing becomes *the* way of understanding our environment, and through representation and rhetoric, becomes part of our educational systems, our institutions, and our personal beliefs" by reading its set of texts in a way that at once recognizes the function of whiteness within environmental rhetorics while reading how Black authors from the same region and in roughly the same time frame wrote their own

environmental narratives (3). This project hopes to meet Finney's charge that "[b]y placing ideas of wilderness in a historical context and deconstructing their implicit and explicit racial connotations, scholars can push mainstream environmental institutions and society at large to consider alternate understandings and experiences of the outdoors" (6). Finally, this project agrees with John Claborn's claim that "Since black intellectuals and writers in the early twentieth century were not centrally concerned with developing views on environmental causes such as wilderness preservation, their engagements with environment, ecology, and nature were focalized through civil rights" (4). In this context, Du Bois and Hurston are read less as early environmentalists and more as Black intellectuals and creators who saw in their environments both a means of Black liberation and the ways in which whiteness could be deconstructed as the dominant, defining social force. As such, the readings of Du Bois and Hurston treat their environmental rhetorics as "more indirect and informal, and thus politically and aesthetically *plural*" (4). Based on the work of Finney, Claborn, and others, this project does not see or treat the environment as a uniform space outside human culture or as politically neutral. Instead, it sees the environment—and representations of its other-than-human aspects—as a rhetorically and socially constructed with political consequences and possibilities. The project takes the assumed background information of texts not seen as typically interested in the environment and places those rhetorics at the forefront of its analysis to argue for a mutually constitutive relationship between the social construction of race and the social construction of environments.

*Intimate Other* makes three arguments that interlock and build on one another. First, it argues that an environmental imagination as represented in Southern literature from the turn of the twentieth century until the start of WWII is distinctly structured by the imbricated rhetorics of race, gender, and place. This is not to claim that only Southern literature from this time frame

exhibits these qualities. Given the emphasis on rhetoric, it stands to reason that several other literary archives structure their environmental imaginations with a similar dependence on forms, styles, and tropes. However, the second argument this project makes is that Southern literature in the time frame I have identified offers a fecund archive for this environmental and rhetorical turn because of the unique function nostalgia plays in both southern literatures and discourses on the environment. Here, nostalgia—as a pervasive mood and tone—expresses a yearning for something seen as lost via the "Lost Cause" mythology as well as in environmental discourses wherein the sense of a lost "natural" world clings to those critical interventions. Finally, this project argues that because we can neither get outside of language nor environments, studying how language and environment interact with one another gives us a better understanding of how rhetorics, narrative, identity, and place shape one another while also shaping how we read for one or the other. Studying the relationship between language and environments shows that environmental rhetorics are imbricated, and that environments, identity, values, ethics, and politics are mutually constructed. The pathways to better understandings of one lies through the work of understanding how each is imbricated with the other.

*Intimate Other* uses several key terms in composing its argument. Some of these follow relatively traditional definitions whereas others are used in an idiosyncratic manner and need clarification from the outset. The first of these key terms is: environment. This project defines environment as the places where people live, work, and play. The project does not see environment as a monolithic, or singular category. Rather, environment is always contingent on social and cultural factors. It is taken as a given that environment is plural and fecund; the specifics of an environment are dependent on its narrative and/or rhetorical function in each context. There are a few sub-terms related to environment that need attention here as well.

Landscape is the first of these sub- terms. In this project, landscape adheres to a literary definition: a prose representation of the countryside or land considered in terms of its aesthetic appeal. Natural world is the second sub-term. Natural world categorizes or identifies an author's representation of a world in which the narrative/rhetorical aim of said representation is to show it more-or-less free from human influence or least-changed from a state prior to human contact. The third sub-term is other-than-human world. This term names a landscape or a depiction of the natural world wherein non-human actants are privileged, and when supposed non-human values or ethics are used in contradistinction to the human-made world. The combination of environment, as well as its three sub-terms, within the literary analysis of this project comprise an environmental imagination that is specific to each author and text.

Rhetorics and environmental rhetorics also require clarification. Rhetoric is one of the three ancient disciplines for discourse. The most accepted start date for study is the 5th century B.C. with Corax of Syracuse. To say that rhetoric has (and continues) to experience revisions, modifications, clarifications, and movements is an understatement. Instead of wading into such deep waters, this project takes the Aristotelian definition of rhetoric as its baseline: "Let rhetoric be [defined as] an ability, in each [particular] case, to see the available means of persuasion. This is the function of no other art" (37). The project also draws on Paul Ricoeur's work by seeing rhetoric as the art that "made discourse conscious of itself and made persuasion a distinct goal to be achieved by means of a specific strategy" (11). However, this project differs from these two definitions by treating rhetoric as multiple—out of respect for varying experiences, traditions, histories, places, and lives—and thus pluralizes the term. While rhetoric is certainly an ability to see the available means of persuasion because it is also a discipline that has made discourse conscious of itself, because the available means of persuasion are not always available to all

persons equally or even at the same time or under the same conditions, the term itself must be pluralized or risk stagnating in assumptions about universal access that are false. Thus, rhetorics is understood as an ability to recognize the means of persuasion while also understanding that access to those means is contingent and conditioned by various social and cultural factors. Environmental rhetorics use the persuasive power of an unquestioned or unassuming background to represent the environment as a set of givens even as it stands as a made thing. From this definition, environmental rhetorics are seen as specific representations of the environment from a particular subject position that write culture onto the landscape and into the natural world with specific cultural and political aims.

Imbrication is the last term in need of clarification for this project. The use of imbrication throughout this project draws on Kimberle Crenshaw's work, specifically her use of intersectionality to "account for multiple grounds of identity when considering how the social world is constructed" (1245). Crenshaw initially uses intersectionality within the confines of the law to "denote the various ways in which race and gender interact to shape the multiple dimensions of Black women's employment experiences" (1241). In her later work, she expands on the term to three new categories: structural intersectionality, political intersectionality, and representational intersectionality. Her expansion both moves her argument outside the strictures of legal debate and introduced it as a profound method of inquiry for Literary Study. Crenshaw's work changed not only the way we think identity, but also the way we recognize, teach, and mediate "the tension between assertions of multiple identity and the ongoing necessity of group politics" (1296). In doing this work, Crenshaw asserts that "recognizing that identity politics takes place at the site where categories intersect seems more fruitful than challenging the possibility of talking about categories at all." She goes on to conclude that "through an

awareness of intersectionality, we can better acknowledge and ground the differences among us and negotiate the means by which these differences will find expression in constructing group politics" (1299). Imbrication comes into the fold to acknowledge and understand the rhetorical construction of the ground on which these negotiations take place. Imbrication builds with Crenshaw's intersectionality to express how the environments in which intersectional identity construction happens are formed by the overlapping edges of cultural, political, and social assumptions about race, gender, and place. Whereas Crenshaw's intersectionality addresses the need to account for multiple grounds of identity in the construction of the social world, imbrication addresses the need to account for the overlapping edges of multiple rhetorics used to form the grounds of identity. Finally, like Crenshaw, my use of imbrication is not offered as a totalizing theory of identity in relation to environments. Rather, imbrication should be seen as a tool to account for the various means of persuasion in an environment, especially since both identity and environments are rhetorically made things.

Chapter one, "The Romance of Lost Causes: Margaret Mitchell's *Gone with the Wind* and a White Southern Environment" examines the pervasiveness of Southern plantation mythologies in Margaret Mitchell's *Gone with the Wind* (1936). The chapter examines the popularity of the plantation ethos and its dependence on rhetorical figurations of the land, racial identity, history, and gender as well as the rhetorical maneuverings necessary to go from the 1905 model of North/South reconciliation to the 1936 celebration of a Lost Cause South even as the region had become a national embarrassment. Through its focus on the literary, the chapter argues the success of the racist and othering mythologies these works use were enabled by an environmental imaginary structured on popular conceptions of race, gender, and place—conceptions that depended on the sanctification of white femininity and the Lost Cause, racial

tropes of Black men who are seen as either violent and hyper-sexualized or used as political surrogates for the Lost Cause's political mythologies. The chapter further argues that the imbrication of land, racial identity, and gender in this imagining reinforced white supremacist fantasies for racial systems manifested in the plantation South ethos. Finally, the chapter's argument follows an ecocritical line of inquiry by tracing the ways Mitchell's work fixes racial hierarchies in the environment implying these systems are somehow "natural" or permanent. In this way, *GWTW*'s entrenched racisms that rely on both genre conventions and environmental linguistic structures can be seen as satisfying the need for a kind of place-based, race-based constancy as the nation bore witness to lives and land literally being blown away by the Great Depression and the Dust Bowl effect.

*Intimate Other*'s second chapter, "Intimacy at Arm's Length: *Go Down, Moses* and a Failed Wilderness Ethic" offers another exploration of the southern environmental imagination. This chapter reads *Go Down, Moses* as a Modernist, Southern, and environmental novel to account for the intimate imbrication of rhetorics within its environmental imaginary. In addition, the chapter draws on Faulkner's *Go Down, Moses* to interrogate the consequential history of the South from the romance of plantations to the destruction of the southern environment by exploitation, logging, and politics of failed racial containment. It explores each of the novel's seven interlocking chapters to discuss the role history as narrative plays in the Southern imagination. Here, *Intimate Other* looks at Faulkner's *Moses* to argue an environmental reading of the text demonstrates how white supremacy's legacy of exploitation and strategies of containment for the bodies of others are continually implicated and ruptured by the very Blackness/otherness it seeks to delimit. The chapter moves from focusing on environmental, ideological, and racial narratives in the novel that perpetuate critical cycles of victimhood

towards the rhetorics used to construct a white Southern environmental imaginary and the effects of that construction on racism's perpetrators. Under these methodological conditions, the struggle for superiority over the natural world becomes an expression of white male hegemony; morally suspect planter-class environmental ethics are foundational in the exploitation of natural resources and as a form of social control; racial violence erupts when the unassimilable history of enslavement and Indigenous removal collides with racially delimited hunting grounds; land, property, and wilderness are governed by different temporalities that affirm racially dictated spatial organization for the Southern landscape.

The third chapter, "Swamps and Cotton: W.E.B Du Bois's *Quest of the Silver Fleece* and a Black South's Promise," shifts from white rhetorical frameworks for Southern environmental formations to Black treatments of the region. This chapter breaks with the chronological organization afforded by the first Mitchell/Faulkner pairing but keeps with larger geographical and regional principles to argue the intimacies Black people share with the South present alternative Southern environments and Southern imaginaries. These alternatives differ from their white counterparts in both rhetorical representations and political possibilities. By drawing on W.E.B. Du Bois's *The Souls of Black Folks* and *The Quest of the Silver Fleece*, the chapter claims that more than a counter-narrative to white supremacy, Du Bois's use of a Black Southern environmental imagination offers an alternative rendering of the region. For Du Bois, the lingering plantation ethos, a conjure-infused Southern landscape, complex racial and gender politics of the region, and the transnational markets for southern cotton combine in making Blackness the most ethical vision of the future and in making southern Black Folks the vanguard of modernity. The various elements of these tensions afford Du Bois the opportunity to slip his controlled and specific sociological literary habit to create a highly imaginative narrative that

offers alternative rhetorics and a divergent southern environment from Mitchell's and Faulkner's texts. In Du Bois's writings, the imbrication of race, place, and environment coupled with the rhetorics of nostalgia do not signify yearning for a lost past predicated on racial and environmental control. Rather, Du Bois's Southern environmental imagination recognizes the limitations of white supremacy in the face of modernity while also creating life-affirming futures through intimate relationships between land, history, and identity. Du Bois's rhetorics figure a more future-oriented, socially just South by showing how Black life, Black labor, and Black agency help direct the course of modernity for the region and nation even as Black Folks were regularly seen as stagnated in a past they could not escape. Lastly, the chapter asserts that *Fleece's* narrative complexity demonstrates political participation in larger discourses surrounding the significance of the Black South as actively contributing to the nation's future.

The fourth and final chapter of *Intimate Other*, "Resource and Rhetoric: Zora Neale Hurston and the Making of a World of Words" studies the rhetorical intimacies and complexities of Hurston's early writings from the New Negro Renaissance through her first novel, *Jonah's Gourd Vine* (1934). The chapter explores how Hurston's lived experiences as a Black woman in the South mediated her environmental imagination, especially her representations of Black Folks in the South and the politics of Southern Black life. By looking to Hurston's lived experiences—as well as the personal mythmaking she engages in representing those lived experiences through her fiction—the chapter argues her early works present a contrarian study of the Black Southern environmental imagination because of her rhetorical innovations that use the environment as a resource for individual expression and cultural preservation. Here, the chapter claims that her unique textual and dialogic style draw on the Southern environment as a metaphoric resource for folk wisdom and meaning making that is also culturally replenished through rhetorical play.

Thus, the chapter sees Hurston and her work as the most rhetorically complex because of her autobiographical tendencies and her use of fiction to do the work of theorizing identity. The final section of the chapter reads *Jonah's Gourd Vine* as a novel whose setting in a predominately, if not exclusively Black world demonstrates how an environmental awareness of race and gender signals neither racial destiny nor natural permanency but rather a complex series of negotiations played out in speech and actions. This section of the chapter takes up three aspects of the novel for closer study. First is Hurston's use of the environment as a liberating space where John finds his voice as well as discovers the power of language. Second is her blending of fiction with anthropology and ethnography to theorize the relationship between the natural world and language as an archive for folk traditions. Lastly, it explores Hurston's revision of environmental nostalgia wherein the iconic technologies of the locomotive and automobile no longer signify a threat to the natural environment or a preferred anti-modern way of life as they do in Southern literatures from a white subject position, but hail freedom, mobility, and opportunity even as these technologies play key roles in the end to John's life.

The emphasis placed on the relationship between rhetorics, the environment and their shared intimacy as well as the chiasmus of the chapter layout in *Intimate Other* may be best understood through the words of Rita Felski. She proposes that "reading involves a logic of *recognition*; that aesthetic experience has analogies with *enchantment* in a supposedly disenchanted age; that literature creates configurations of social *knowledge*; that we may value the experience of being *shocked* by what we read" (14). First, I recognize myself and an affectively complex home environment when I come to read the literature of the South, especially in the ways the logics of its rhetorics have and continue to operate in that region. Second, the aesthetic experiences of these literatures *do* enchant through their form and affective

conjurings, whether as romances, wounding satires, gothic stories, modernist texts, or declarations of cultural presence. Third, the intimacy of enchantment—created by a closeness to the text despite the radical otherness of the text—enables a new kind of social knowledge that questions the rhetorics necessary for that imagining to exist at all. Finally, the shock of that new knowledge leads to new understandings of both the self-narratives and larger, national narratives through that archive. All of which is to say that this project's focus on rhetorics and the environment has just as much to do with striving to offer a competent, useful argument for the field of literary and cultural studies as it does in using literary study to confirm a well-known tenet of the humanities: that the more we increase our understanding of the known, the more we increase our contact with the unknown.

## CHAPTER II

## THE ROMANCE OF LOST CAUSES: MARGARET MITCHELL'S *GONE WITH THE WIND* AND A WHITE SOUTHERN ENVIRONMENT

### Introduction

By June 19, 1936, two weeks before its first publication, Margaret Mitchell's *Gone with the Wind* (*GWTW)* already was billed as a genuine American literary phenomenon. A series of Macmillan Company press releases leading up to and in the aftermath of its first print run helped establish this status.[1] In one example, Ellen Glasgow, author of *Barren Ground* (1925), *Vein of Iron* (1935), and Pulitzer Prize winner for *In This Our Life* (1941), describes *GWTW* in terms of a Lost Cause ethos, praising the novel as a "fearless portrayal, romantic yet not sentimental, of a lost tradition and a way of life." Another compliments America's reading discernment while also situating Mitchell's work in a European line of descent: "The demand for the book certainly reflects credit on the taste of the American reading public, for *Gone with the Wind* has been likened by various prominent critics to the work of Thackeray, Galsworthy, Tolstoy, Undset, Hardy, Trollope, and Dickens—and to *The Three Musketeers*." Once it did appear, these releases celebrated the novel as a testament to American industry despite a lingering Depression: "It appears that if all copies of *Gone with the Wind* that have been printed were piled on top of each other the stack would be 50 times as high as the Empire State Building in New York City. Or if the pages of all these copies were laid end to end they would encircle the world at the Equator two and two-thirds times." On the one hand, Macmillan's releases can be understood as designed to garner maximum profit for an expensive publishing enterprise. On the other, their sheer scope

[1] All press releases are quoted from Malcolm Cowley's 16 Sep 1936 review "Going with the Wind" in *The New Republic*.

—from Glasgow to literary taste and legacy, to industry, monumental status, and the materiality of its publication—reveal just how effectively *GWTW* held sway over and planted deep roots in the American literary imagination. All told, one reads in these releases a sense that the Macmillan believed the novel would work, that it was somehow right for the time.

The novel's marketing strategy that generated claims of cultural influence without offering any details of the narrative beyond that of a "best seller" has frustrated scholars and arbiters of literary taste since its first release. Written between 1926 and 1932, the novel's production certainly spans some of the most significant years for American modernism, yet it decidedly has nothing to do with modernism as an aesthetic movement. Further, its publication in 1936, subsequent Pulitzer Prize, and later blockbuster movie casts a long shadow over other works from the same year. After all, 1936 also marks the publication of Djuna Barnes's *Nightwood*, Arna Bontemps's *Black Thunder*, John Dos Passos's *The Big Money*, and that miasmic storm of American Modernism, William Faulkner's *Absalom! Absalom!*. Instead of these darlings of academia, it is Mitchell's novel that shows a cultural staying power compared to more canonical works of American Modernism that are rarely encountered outside the literary classroom. Thus, even as the novel is a cultural sensation virtually unparalleled in American letters, *GWTW* remains at the margins of literary study, if not fully cauterized from the canon of taste.

My own interests in the novel focus less on pursuing arguments of literary merit and more on how *GWTW* overdetermines the Southern environment for both the regional and national imagination. Such overdetermination uses an environmental imagination shaped by racial and spatial rhetorics to meet the need for a sense of security in the face of tumultuous cultural and ecological changes. My analysis focuses on the imbrication of land, racial identity,

and gender to interrogate *GWTW*'s reinforcement of white supremacist fantasies for racial systems manifested in the plantation South and the Lost Cause ethos. Further, my reading of the novel follows an ecocritical line of inquiry by tracing the ways Mitchell's work fixes racial hierarchies in the environment implying these systems are somehow "natural" or permanent. In this way, *GWTW*'s entrenched racisms that rely on both genre conventions and environmental linguistic structures can be seen as satisfying the need for a kind of place-based, race-based constancy as the nation bore witness to lives and land literally being blown away by the Great Depression and the Dust Bowl effect. Indeed, as Charles Shindo's work on dust bowl migrants and the American imagination insists, "the irony of white, native-born, Christian farm families being discriminated against and ridiculed, made homeless and penniless, spoke most directly to the tensions felt by the world's richest nation in the midst of the Great Depression." He goes on to note that, despite the works of Dorothy Lange, Woody Guthrie, and John Steinbeck that represent white migrant workers open to the possibility of radical social change, the migrants themselves "tried to recreate an idealized past as expressed in their staunch defense of traditional values" as their lives were torn apart by an unyielding ecological disaster (4, 8). When these desires aligned with the release of *GWTW*, the power of the novel's affectively legitimating determinate racial system written onto an *unchanging* land doubled in force for popular readership through its deployment of a Lost Cause ethos and a concomitant fetishization of agrarian histories played out by an anti-modern South in broader cultural belief.

Yet, it bears noting that by the 1930s, the idea of southern anti-modern "backwardness" as a good thing was beginning to crack. In a context of a lingering Depression and Dust Bowl disaster that had finally captured the nation's attention, progress became the watchword, not

tradition.[2] By 1934, the work of Hugh Bennett as the head of the Soil Conservation Service was finally getting a larger swath of American farmers and politicians to understand it was adherence to outdated farming and grazing practices that led to over 850 million tons of topsoil being blown off the surface of the southern plains in a single year, not an act of god.[3] The total tons of soil lost amounted to 8 tons of dirt for every resident of the United States, or about 480 tons of topsoil per acre in the Dust Bowl region (Egan 254). In addition to the Dust Bowl effect, between 1930 and 1935, the South suffered over 750,000 bankruptcies or foreclosures on farms. In the southern tenant-farmer regions, New Deal economic strategies of buyouts of farmland increased landowners' capital but forced sharecroppers to flee dead, dying, or "bought out" lands. In the words of Timothy Egan, "shattered lives littered the land from sea to shining sea" (227). Considering such economic and environmental strife, Leigh Anne Duck's argument that during the Depression "southern traditionalism was increasingly seen as a threatening chronotope," a threat in which "the trope of a backward South began to comprise an image of what the United States could become," gains considerable strength (7). The south as the last bastion of tradition offered solace for those looking towards its mythic past as stable, but that same tradition was seen as unsustainable to others looking towards the future work of recovering

[2] On April 14, 1935, the United States experienced the worst dust bowl storm in history. Labelled "Black Sunday," the storm began in the Oklahoma panhandle and ended in Amarillo, Texas. The storm removed an estimated 300 million tons of topsoil. Skies were darkened in the surrounding areas, and dirt rained down as East as Washington, D.C. In the aftermath of the storm, the nation began to turn the corner on traditional farming methods in the plain states and the South. Despite its devastation, the storm shifted the national mindset from one wherein tradition was valorized and led to a call for progress and change to fight the ecological, economical, and environmental devastation the Dust Bowl left in its wake.

[3] Aside from being a progressive expert on soil management, Bennett was also a savvy politician. To overcome conservative resistance to his progressive plans, he leveraged the inarguable lived experience of the Dust Bowl to his political advantage. When he heard about the coming "Black Sunday" storm from his network, he implemented a strategy of delay on April 19th during congressional subcommittee hearings on the farming. The hearings, taking place three days after Black Sunday, had no idea what was coming their way. Bennett delated the hearings so that congressional subcommittee on farming would "get a taste of topsoil" that had blown in from the West. His strategy of delay and demonstration through nature worked to his advantage. The bill was unanimously approved after streetlights turned on at mid-day and soil fell like snow in D.C.

from mistakes of the past. In short, the South was a contradiction—desirable for its tradition and threatening because of its backwardness.

Given both this ecological and cultural frame, the following analysis interrogates *GWTW*'s imbrication of race, gender, and place to affectively legitimate an allegedly "lost" way of life, the consequence of which locks both the environment and racial others in a past that has no future. The decision to emphasize rhetorical detail, imbrication, and affect places this study in conversation with Édouard Glissant's "poetics of Relation," a theory which suggests that "in literature, just like everywhere else in the world, one of the full senses of modernity is provided henceforth by the action of human cultures' identifying one another for their mutual transformation" (24). I extend Glissant's work here (and in later chapters) by accounting for how relations between *GWTW*'s characters are rhetorically figured through practices of omission, suppression, substitution, and legitimation—practices that are made legible when one notices the environment's intimate presence in forming these relations. It is my contention that Mitchell's work offers a particularly fecund archive for such a method because the plantation, as an environment, fantasy, and nightmare reality "is one of the focal points for the development of present-day modes of Relation," and the ways "in this outmoded spot, on the margins of every dynamic, the tendencies of our modernity begin to be detectable" (Glissant 65). In Mitchell's case, even though her work reads as melodramatic and sentimental, the ways it overlaps white femininity with the plantation, Blackness with animality, and preferred racial order with preferred landscapes reveals much about how the illusion of a rural Southern landscape figures in modern relations. With such a possibility in mind, this chapter reads *GWTW*'s persistent cultural hold as growing from an overdetermined environmental imagination wherein race, gender, and place remain intimately, intractably, intertwined as well as fixed in the landscape. It argues that

these relations take form through the omission and suppression of indigenous presences in *GWTW*'s rendering of the southern landscape as propertied and white, the substitution of Blackness as indigenous to delimit the boundaries of Southern whiteness while buttressing hegemonic plantation romances, and the legitimation of both a Lost Cause ethos and environmentally fixed racialized systems that satisfy the need for structural certainty in the face of change. The chapter concludes by demonstrating how the details of *GWTW* intimacies expose persistent rhetorical habits wherein the processes of omission, suppression, substitution, and legitimation construct a vicious hope in a nostalgic tomorrow that confines both the environment and racial others to a mythological past.

Understandably, choosing *GWTW* to open such a study raises just as many questions as it hopes to address, especially when considering its status in popular culture. The groundwork for much of this critical unease surrounding Mitchell's novel arguably began with Malcolm Cowley's 1936 book review, "Going with the Wind," in the *New Republic*. There, Cowley signals a reluctance to engage with the work on literary grounds, instead focusing on the series of Macmillan press releases that he sees as "more impressive than any published review of the season's best seller." His dismissal is remarkable for two reasons. First, the initial focus on press releases implies *GWTW* ought to be treated less as a work of serious writing and more as a popular, marketing success, a "season's best seller." Second, he takes pains to note the market excitement for the text are not his but come to him by way of Rosa Hutchinson, a Macmillan press agent who sent the "series" his way in the first place. Cowley's review treats the publicity apparatus of the novel as more impressive than whatever merits *GWTW* might have, allowing him to limit engagement with the novel to superficial terms. Such maneuvering enables Cowley's back-handed compliment that "obviously, Miss Mitchell's first novel meets the

specialized demands of the book-buying public" because "it is written from the woman's point of view, and most book buyers are women." In effect, he dismisses the work's literary merit because of its "woman's point of view," its meeting of "specialized demands" therefore subtlety impugning the taste of the "book-buying public," and finally reducing women to "book buyers," to consumers instead of readers. His gendered critique leads into his own less-than-detailed assessment of the novel as an "encyclopedia of the plantation legend" that even though "false in part and silly in part" still "retains its appeals to fundamental emotions." All of which leads to his forked-tongue conclusion that, even though he would "never, never say that she has written a great novel" he grudgingly confesses, "in the midst of triteness and sentimentality," Mitchell did write a book "of simple-minded courage that suggests the great novelists of the past."

From its beginnings, then, *GWTW* occupied at least two positions in literature and culture. In one articulation, the novel's cultural significance and impact are undeniable. It sold 750,000 copies in the first five months of its printing despite a lingering depression and dismal economic market; was awarded Pulitzer Prize for Fiction in 1937; the Selznick film adaptation still stands as the most successful film in box-office history when adjusted for inflation; the novel was adapted into British, Japanese, American, and French musicals as well as a Hungarian three-act ballet; it has never gone out of print; and in 2014 a Harris Poll found the novel to be the second-favorite work of American readers, just behind the Bible.[4] In another articulation, the novel remains more-or-less in the hinterlands of "serious" literary scholarship, constantly flirting along the edges of (New) Southern Studies, Depression-era fiction, Transatlantic and Transnational literary scholarship, and as Cowley's review demonstrates, as a work that has

[4] For further information on *GWTW*'s continued international successes, see "*Gone with the Wind* into the Millennium: Sequels, Borrowings, and Revisions" in Helen Taylor's *Circling Dixie: Contemporary Southern Culture through a Transatlantic Lens*, pp. 28-63.

never overcome the damning baggage of the plantation romance. Historically romantic during the age of modernism and social realism, unapologetically sentimental in a time of disillusionment, *GWTW* remains a persistent cultural artifact that shapes a sense of place as well as being something of a modernist pariah—a genre-driven novel that rankles those who lay claims to more modern literary pretensions.

What scholarship that has been done on *GWTW* tends to complicate its relationship to genre and modernity by offering detailed analysis of its lasting cultural impact, gender politics, and enduring racism. Helen Taylor notes that, while "the novel belongs to a long tradition of southern plantation fiction and white apologist historiography" through its focus on the South's secession, the Civil War, and the "violent chaos of Reconstruction," the novel proves unique in that it focuses this complex history "through the experiences of a young white woman who begins by expressing boredom at the thought of war," and ends up married three times, having survived the siege of Atlanta, saved the family plantation, and become a successful business women under new cultural conditions (29). Amy Clukey reads the novel's "consolidated notions of southern culture" as a "remarkably flexible signifier whose meaning shifts according to the particular cultural context of its consumption" (9). Her analysis concludes that for audiences who survived both the Great Depression and World War II, "*GWTW*'s appeal lay in its themes of colonialism, violence and deprivation" over those found in traditional plantation romances (13). Patricia Yaeger reads *GWTW* as "offer[ing] an unwitting anatomy of *the spectacle of unknowing* built into very structures of white southern life" (102). Her reading leads to the provocative claim that the novel "explores—without quite intending to—the cult of fetishized, never-seen surfaces, what is hiding in plain sight, the preoccupation not with 'under' or 'beneath,' but with the cult of 'besides,' of what is proximate, next to, and therefore invisible" (108). Tara McPherson sees the

novel as "as story about the South in its transition to modernity, a tale about the formation of the regional as material conditions unevenly shifted in the 1920s and 1930s, even if the novel's subject matter focuses on an earlier period" (48). For McPherson, the novel's depiction of the South as a modernizing region reveals both backward-looking racial logics and forward-looking desires for modernity. Lastly, Mark Jerng's scholarship in *Racial Worldmaking* argues "the mechanisms of genre and race operate together" suggesting "[*GWTW*] constructs new logics for thinking about the intertwined relationship between the future of the U.S. South and the role of race in the making of the modern world" (2, 72). His analysis of the intersection of genre, race, and narrative argues texts and forms "teach readers to locate race in particular ways" creating "divergent explanations" for interactions and imaginings with racially motivated behavioral consequences (73). With each intervention, critics and scholars reveal *GWTW*'s intersection with larger cultural shifts through its narrative, form, and genre conventions. Their work demonstrates how the relationship between novel and the popular imagination complete a kind of circuit, one where *Gone with the Wind* becomes a "story that drives through slavery and Reconstruction like the energizer bunny—its racism just keeps going and going" (Yaeger, 99).

Even as such scholarship does the important work of interrogating *GWTW*'s racisms and cultural sway, a turn to an environmental or ecocritical analysis provides an opportunity to better understand the overlapping rhetorics of race, gender, and place in the novel because such a turn places culture, the environment, and language in the same field of inquiry. To begin such work, it seems necessary to state the obvious: *GWTW*'s story and epic character cast revolve around the fates of Scarlett O'Hara and Tara, her plantation home. The novel opens and closes with them, bookending the narrative with their relationship as something immutable, as affectively essential despite separations and changes. Arguably, and as Helen Taylor has consistently noted in her

scholarship, Scarlett constitutes one of *GWTW*'s two centers precisely because her ability to change with the times proves both an asset in the face of modernity and provides the occasion to long for lost ways of life despite the racial violence of such yearnings. Throughout the novel, Scarlett is treated as a survivor: a character who consistently demonstrates the power of adaptability during strife. In her, one finds both a character onto which environmentally determinate racial systems and Southern belle fantasies are projected as well as an opportunity to question the form of such projections. And then there is Tara, the other red-earth center with its "womblike security of hearth and home," the near loss, defense, and restoration of which powers the narrative engine just as much as Scarlett's story (*Scarlett's Women* 80). In Tara, *GWTW* discovers a second protagonist with which to provide space and place for its racist fantasies to abide. If Scarlett reveals nostalgia's power as a legitimizing affect for a Lost Cause ethos, then Tara provides the space in which such an ethos can be scaled up or down as the occasion demands. Together, Scarlett and Tara comprise a kind of cultural/environmental circuit that meets the emotional needs for the survivorship of values in the decimated landscape of the 1936. Between the two, *GWTW* not only actuates a plaintive yearning for history that never was, but it also fulfills a need for that yearning through their mutual rhetorical figuring.

**Race and Gender in Mitchell's Plantation Imagination**

The first encounter with Scarlett defines her and Tara in racially inflected environmental terms making possible a metaphoric exchange between Scarlett, Tara, and the land as white and feminine. The text provides a toothsome vision, placing her within the limits of the plantation home, "reenacting" in the words of Tara McPherson, "a spatial logic with a long and commonplace history in the region" (39). The narrative begins by stating that while "Scarlett O'Hara was not beautiful," the men in her life "seldom realized it when caught by her charm." It

goes on to note in her face were "too sharply blended the delicate features of her mother, a Coast aristocrat of French descent, and the heavy ones of her florid Irish father," that she has "magnolia-white skin" that her dress "sets to perfection" a "seventeen-inch waist" and that a "tightly fitting basque showed breasts well matured for her sixteen years." Her description ends by foregrounding her against the "cool shade of the porch of Tara, her father's plantation" where she makes a "pretty picture" (3). Scarlett appears as the traditional Southern belle, attractive, young, flirting with two of the most eligible bachelors in the county, the Tarleton twins. In more modern terms, she comes across as a young woman who overcomes a lack of traditional beauty with charm, persuasion, and sex appeal. Her attractiveness depends on a relationship between antebellum fantasies and modernity accentuated by the plantation setting. Certainly, she recalls cultural myths of white, aristocratic, Southern femininity wherein women served as virginal madonnas in need of protection from the environment and Black predatory sexuality. The naming of French aristocracy and coastal lineage signifies a desirable European filiation accentuated by her relative newness to the planter status captured in her "heavy" and "florid Irish" features. Paired with her "magnolia-white skin" in need of constant defense against the effects of the sun, the text further values Scarlett's character through intimations of purity, idealized flora, and implied racial superiority.[5] The terms of her first appearance, then, make Scarlett's appeal coextensive with the landscape and specific filial fantasies. The imbrication pairs the image of the young white belle with land and lineage, effectively omitting the violence—for both humans and the environment—of the plantation system, substituting in decidedly white romantic histories in the space left by their absence.

[5] While much work has been done on the "value" of whiteness and the politics of chromatics, Richard Dyer's work *White* remains one of the most insightful critical interventions on the subject. For more information on the the value, race, and color, see "The Matter of Whiteness" pp. 1-41 and "Coloured White, not Coloured" pp. 41-82.

Yet, Scarlett's early characterization is not the only one that depends on habits of omission and substitution to engender a desirable vision for the plantation romance to work. The Tarleton twins flanking her set the terms for white masculinity by association with the environment in a dizzying array of metaphors that establish racial hierarchies via the other-than-human world. Whereas the text substitutes European lineage, sexuality, and southern belle tropes for the violence of ripping a plantation into being for Scarlett, it speaks of Stuart and Brent Tarleton in anthropomorphizing logics to legitimate preferred white southern masculinity with contradictory environmental logics. After describing the Tarleton's pack of possum hounds and "aristocratic…black spotted carriage dog" waiting for them by their tethered horses, the narrative casts the young men with the other-than-human world to speak their virtues by association: "Between the hounds and the horses and the twins there was a kinship deeper than that of their constant companionship. They were all healthy, thoughtless young animals, sleek, graceful, high spirited, the boys as mettlesome as the horses they rode, mettlesome and dangerous but, withal, sweet-tempered to those who knew how to handle them" (4). The reliance on "kinship" with animals to frame Stuart and Brent as a certain kind of human—white, male, propertied, aristocratic—reveals just as much about their characters as it does about the ways environmental metaphors leverage habits of racial noticing. Rather than impoverished by their similarities with the animal world, the twins stock increases because, as Riché Richardson notes, "white masculinity in the South was defined by such concepts as chivalry, honor, and gentility" (5). The habit of associating whiteness with chivalric virtues in southern literature means instead of laziness, the Tarleton's "kinship" with a carriage dog bespeaks their own aristocratic line. A carriage dog is neither a mongrel nor a cur. Their relationship with a pack of possum dogs renders the boys endearingly "thoughtless" as well as "sleek." Whereas the possum signifies

Blackness, lowness, and a lack of courage—a long standing trope in Southern literature for African Americans—a kinship with a pack of dogs that hunts possums actuates a hierarchy of animal distinctions which translates into the human world permitting a “perverse manifestation” of chivalry wherein white virtue is measured by the hunting of Blackness in the service of “protecting the purity and sanctity of white womanhood” (Richardson 5). Finally, the boys’ “graceful, and high spiritedness” coupled with a “mettlesome” and “dangerous” disposition that masks a sweet temperament suggests a pure, thoroughbred line rather than a corrupted, mixed lineage acting on strong ties to eugenic language still trafficking in the larger popular imagination of 1936. From the opening pages, then, the details of *GWTW*’s linguistic intimacies render the environmental relations of southern whiteness in a romantic European line of descent that satisfies not only a Lost Cause ethos but also a hierarchical racial order coded into the landscape itself.

Stepping back from character depictions and looking to larger formal implications in the novel’s opening, Mitchell’s use of raced and gendered environmental language reveals a structural relationship between the text and the extra-textual world through the work of genre. John Frow’s theories on genre’s social consequences require that rather than treating genre as just a set of “fixed and pre-given forms,” or as a “matter of codes and conventions,” genre “calls into play systems of use, durable social institutions, and the organization of physical space” (3, 13). For him, the patterns of genre are “shaped by a type of situation and in turn shape the rhetorical actions that are performed in response to it” (15). Since any given situation must happen somewhere, this means the situational nature of genre has an environmental dimension as well. Genre is “neither a property of (located ‘in’) texts, nor a projection of (and located ‘in’) readers; it exists as a part of the relationship between texts and readers” and is formed by the

situatedness of both (112). For Frow, genre's work extends beyond the edge of the page, "it is a shared convention with a social force" (112). Such analysis proves exciting for at least two reasons: its recognition that genre is more than a set of codes and convention but also a force in larger cultural making, and that genre is revelatory of a relationship between readers and texts not isolated in one or the other. Genre, then, helps to organize a fictional world for readers while translating those organizational habits into an environmental one. Meaning making through reading, in Frow's assessment, becomes a shared enterprise between text and reader with real-world consequences. Put differently, the act of imagining the world in the text does not take place in isolation. Instead, it draws on a reciprocal relationship with the world beyond the text—a world of perception, experience, and expectation—to formally organize both environments by association.

The relationship between text, reader, textual environment, and extra-textual environment implies Mitchell's novel, as an example of genre fiction, influences the world as it makes a world. *GWTW* is certainly a plantation romance, albeit a somewhat modern update to the form. Arguably, it marks the pinnacle of the type insofar as no other novel of its kind garnered such global success. The plot follows established conventions, and if Cowley is to be trusted, it is a veritable encyclopedia for the type. But, in understanding genre as presented by Frow, the various ways *GWTW* also figures the "social institution" of southern white masculinity and femininity, the ways those constructs are tied to a larger "organization of the physical space" through the environmental imagination, and the ways that work gets used to figure race via the other-than-human world assumes a greater social force. Through the persuasive power of omission, suppression, substitution, and legitimation, the text creates a post-facto southern environment that simultaneously confirms the way present-tense readers understand that world

and their own lived experiences. This means that *GWTW* participates in structuring the world it is read in even as it creates a world through the act of reading; it bends the experience of narrative in such a way that the imagined environment—with all its racial and gendered codes—feels as if it always existed even as it stands as a thing in the process of being made. Such sleight of hand is accomplished through an intimate relationship between the text and reader in which rhetoric and reader, real and imagined environments, anticipate and mutually inform both the written and actual world despite their radical otherness.

*GWTW*'s imbricated rhetorics of race, place, and gender coupled with the legitimating power of an affectively leveraged plantation landscape met a larger cultural need for constancy during a time of environmental and economic disarray. The self-affirming feedback loop between text, genre, reader, and environment at large provided the reading public with a "history" where the overlapping social and natural environments followed a predictable order in a moment when the prevailing sense was that the land was broken, that nothing was right with the world anymore. The plantation, as an anchoring place in national memory, makes it so the key character Mammy' emergence in the novel as the "huge old woman with the small, shrewd eyes of an elephant," the "shining black, pure African" without history or future is immediately accepted because her appearance reads as if she has always served as the guardian of white femininity even as she remains associated with monstrosity (23). It makes Jeems, the "body servant" who, "like the dogs," accompanies the Tarleton twins everywhere, the naturalized interpreter of white culture and romance for his charges while simultaneously denying him access to a world he intimately understands—indeed *better* understands than his white charges (10-11). It makes the marriage between Pork, "shining black, dignified and trained in all the arts of sartorial elegance" and Dilcey, the "bronze giantess [who] did not grin pleasely or squirm

under praise like other negreos" because she is "part Indian" and "doan forgit them [white folks] as is good to them" the occasion to suppress indigenous presences by turning a seeming "native" Blackness into the means of indigenous erasure (44, 456).[6] And finally, the environment formed by *GWTW*'s rhetorics allows for romanticizing love of stolen land as akin to the love Scarlett has "for her mother's face under the lamp at prayer time," or for her father, Gerald, to declare land as "the only thing worth working for, worth fighting for—worth dying for" by omitting the thousands of lives lived and lost prior to and because of white colonization (28, 36). In other words, Tara's and *GWTW*'s success depend upon extraction of wealth from processes of omission, suppression, and substitution which nostalgically legitimates yearning for a dreamt-up white south that never existed in the first place.

While the intersection of gender, landscape, and environment for whiteness offers one sense of how the *GWTW*'s habitual rhetorics operate, a more illuminating yet subtle example can be found in the novel's treatment—or lack thereof—of indigenous presences. As Katherine McKittrick argues in "Plantation Futures," it was the plantation where "black peoples were 'planted' in the Americas—not as members of society but as commodities that would bolster crop economies" (8). Here, the "planted" metaphor relates Black labor and enslaved experience with the land as well as indicating a kind of "native" association with the land because of that

[6] For a novel that was panned by Harry Stillwell Edwards of the *Atlanta Journal* as "the greatest historical novel written by an American," *GWTW* is remarkably myopic regarding the history of Native persons, tribes, and Nations. Here, Dilcey stands as a remarkable example of Mitchell's blindness. Dilcey is the *only* indigenous character in a novel set in Georgia, land whose tribal histories included the Apalache, Cherokee, Choctaw, Hitichiti, Micosukee, Oconee, Muscogee, Creek, Yamasee, Timucua, Yucci, and Guale. Far from being a critique of absence, my noting of how Mitchell erases both the general history of Native presences in the South and Dilcey's Cherokee identity specifically speaks to the Southern environmental imaginary's habit of convenient mythologies. In Mitchell's hands, the history of Native persons is "erased" by the logics of southern Blackness because the force of her legend would not survive the truth of Removal and Federally sanctioned genocide that preceded the defeat of her beloved Confederacy. Indeed, such a rubric leaves her only one option: to have all other references to "Indian" after Dilcey is made Black to be about the weather (Indian summers) or used to enhance Rhett's sexuality (his "Indian, savage grace" (893)).

planting. After all, the idea of a Blackness that “grew” with the land because of white fortune offers a more emotionally palatable narrative than one written in genocide, kidnapping, rape, theft, and murder. Of course, the deep irony of the “planted” Blackness as indigenous—an irony McKittrick’s work is attentive to—is the very act of carrying Black peoples from their homeland, systematically enslaving them, and “planting” them in the Americas is the antithesis of indigenous. Indeed, much like the cash crops of cotton and tobacco that have become synonymous with the South despite being imported (the first cotton seed was planted in 1607, the first commercial tobacco plant for European consumption was planted in 1617), so too was Blackness in the South been viewed as “native” despite indigenous presences and historical realities to the contrary. Here it bears noting that such an analysis neither suggests Blackness does not have a place in the South not does it suggest that Blackness and indigenous presences are adversaries. Rather, it is to demonstrate how the logics of using Blackness as substitute for indigenous presences serves a white supremacist environmental imaginary because of what such a rhetorical move both omits and suppresses.

The habit of omitting indigenous presences and viewing Blackness as “native” to the south makes the plantation system seem inevitable and necessary because of the value placed on whiteness as a “civilizing” and “organizing” force. Tara and the other plantations like it came to signify human mastery over wild, untamed landscapes. It is a well-worn, somewhat vapid narrative played out across the plantation romance genre. However, that mastery comes with a cost—the maintenance of hard-won borders against the ever-present threat of invasion. The text describes Tara’s geographic region as “a land of contrasts, of brightest sun glare and densest shade” setting up a familiar Manichean light/dark, Black/white binary. The text renders the plantation houses and cotton fields sympathetic via association with light because they “smiled

up to a warm sun, placid, complacent" while at the edges rise threatening "virgin forests" whose "soughing pines" say with every wind "Be careful! Be careful! We had you once. We can take you back again" (8). Here though, the novel departs from the longer American literary tradition of forests as threatening because of "uncivilized" tribal nations by nearly omitting their presence entirely. Granted, the "savagely red land" implies native presences through long standing associations of "savagery" and "red" as synonymous with Native Americans. But *GWTW* twists such familiar patterns towards a distinctly southern rhetoric wherein redness becomes synonymous with darkness, and sinister woods become Black substituting Blackness as indigenous to the southern landscape. Such a twist both denies original, native presence on the land by making Blackness the means of its overwriting while erasing the horrors of the Middle Passage and chattel slavery from any popular imagining of Black history in the South. This subtle narrative move then allows the plantation center to signify as white and light whereas the forest edge signifies as Black and dark.

In many ways, *GWTW*'s whole world depends upon a Black presence on the land to delimit the white world. Again, the dependence on Blackness-as-indigenous starts in the novel's first scene on Tara's front porch. In language that enacts the hegemony of the plantation trope, the text describes white perceptions of enslaved persons returning from fields of stolen labor: "To the ears of the three on the porch came the sounds of hooves, the jingling of harness chains and the shrill carless laughter of negro voices, as the field hands and mules came in from the fields." From here, the description shifts to a vision of Scarlett's mother, Ellen, affectively pairing the specifics of white, feminine plantocracy with undifferentiated Blackness as she "call[s] to the little black girl who carri[es] her basket of keys" so that Ellen can "ration out the food to the homecoming hands" from the smokehouse as Pork (a name offered without irony),

the enslaved "valet-butler" of Tara, sets the white family's table for supper. While Ellen's gentile, near-saintly rationing of food for her enslaved workers strives to represent an idealized version of plantation life, Mitchell's use of food rationing within the narrative in fact speaks to the various ways the plantation system converted Black hunger and labor into white supremacy. As Walter Johnson argues in *River of Dark Dreams*, "by regulating the food that passed the lips of their slaves, planters materially affirmed and naturalized a version of social order based upon higher-and lower-order bodily functions: taste on the one hand, digestion on the other" (186). Ellen's food rationing and Mitchell's use of that practice to canonize a white, feminine plantocracy stratifies and naturalizes the social order of Tara. More to the point, if one considers that the literal Black "hands" picking cotton were solely responsible for the entire wealth of Tara, then Ellen's rations coupled with Pork's setting the master's table literally signifies white consumption of Blackness as a naturalized order to the plantation life. To draw on Johnson's work again, in using food to delimit and naturalize white order on the landscape, what is framed as a "moral obligation to provide a bare minimum subsistence for 'their people' [is] shadowed by [planter's] fear of what would happen if they could no longer do even that" (13). The returning hands delimit the white world through consumables and consumption. They allow for a troubling representation of food rationing for enslaved persons as a moral performance while simultaneously showing how dependent such white visions of the self were on enslaved Blackness.

In addition to the conversion of hunger to supremacy, Mitchell's use of racial contrasts shapes the larger environmental imagination by locating value in the white/Black dichotomy. Whereas individuated white characters are happy, flirtatious, and wrapped up in their own courtship melodramas, the "field hands" are depicted as happy, content, and cared for by their

white enslavers despite a precarious life along the edges.[7] With each set of characters safely ensconced in their racially determined environments, in representing the separated worlds without conflict, and in imagining the spatial logics of this intimate relationship as natural, the lie of a gentle plantation South gains greater suasive power. Here again McKittrick's work proves insightful. She notes that a deciphering of plantation logics "notices our collective participation in and rhetorical commitment to reproducing this system as though it is natural, inevitable, and a normal way of life" (11). By rendering Black presences on the land and their "satisfaction" with the order of things as a given condition, the text affectively legitimates the oppressive racial order of its imagined environment as natural, as something worth longing for in a modern world whose own center blew from under readers' feet.

**Nostalgia and the Lost Cause in the White Environmental Imagination**

*GWTW* drew much of its success from this terrifying plantation logic by providing a modern update to a traditional narrative, modern updates to traditional characters, and decidedly, viciously, nostalgic renderings of the land and its racial others. While Mitchell insisted *GWTW* dispelled myths of "moonlight and magnolias" Southern writing, patterns of omission, suppression, and substitution used to describe and situate the novel's characters and landscape demonstrate such a "break" was neither decisive nor complete.[8] Broadly speaking, most of the main white male characters are cast as sympathetic supremacists, and all voice Lost Cause

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[7] Throughout the novel, Mitchell uses the euphemisms "field hands," and "servants" to signal enslaved persons thereby rhetorically masking the more sinister aspects of chattel slavery. It is as if the world of the novel cannot exist if it names slavery; to name it would be to recognize the rotten core of Scarlett's world collapsing the novel's affective force from within.

[8] In a letter to Dr. Mark Allen Patton of Virden, Illinois from July 11, 1936, Mitchell thanks him at great lengths for noting the "historical nature" of the novel, and his comparison of it to the *Forsyte Saga.* In her enthusiasms, Mitchell further writes that she is thrilled the good Doctor noted the break from the "moonlight and magnolia traditions of Chandler and Page," going so far as to insist that "for anyone who cares to study that period [Civil War to Reconstruction], there lies the discovery that melodrama is too mild a word to use!" (Gone *with the Wind Letters* 43, 44).

convictions to some degree. In Scarlett's father Gerald, *GWTW* creates a patriarchal planter who takes the South and "adopt[s] its ideas and customs, as he understood them, for his own—poker and horse racing, red-hot politics and the code duello, States' Rights and damnation to all Yankees, slavery and King Cotton, contempt for white trash and exaggerated courtesy to women" (44). His affability, bluster, and caricatured Irishness suppress the historical nightmare of plantation farming; they transform him into a mythologized planter-father-victim rather than the racial profiteer his class historically signifies. In Ashley Wilkes, the man Scarlett loves above all others, the narrative offers its romantic ideal of the antebellum aristocratic southerner who, though forever changed by a war he was not equipped to fight, confesses that when he thinks of why he fought he sees his plantation home, "Twelve Oaks and remember[s] how the moonlight slants across the white columns, and the unearthly way the magnolias look, opening under the moon," he hears "the darkies coming home across the fields at dusk, tired and singing and ready for supper," and thinks to himself that perhaps the defense of that "lost world" is what is called patriotism (211). Far from dispelling myths of moonlight and magnolias, such rhetoric restores them for a popular reading public by drawing on Southern environmental fantasies that are traditionally secure. Even in Rhett Butler, the "tall and powerfully built man" with "animal white teeth…swarthy as a pirate…eyes bold and black," the text substitutes a culturally updated white southern "gentleman" that meets the needs of nostalgia and progress. While he does leverage a kind of critique against the Cause by refusing to fight until Confederate defeat at the siege of Atlanta is certain, by dealing with the damn Yankees throughout Reconstruction rather than eschewing any and all contact with them, and by flaunting his "pirated" wealth in the face of "established" southern society, he too legitimates white desires for old habits of oppression in a new, modern, Southern archetype (96, 852, 908).

While the white Gerald, Ashely, and Rhett offer one clear way to view the environmental rhetorical logics of *GWTW*, it is the work of the novel's non-white characters that offers the greatest insights into the formation of that imaginary through the novel's use of them as a resource for metaphor. Despite James Crank's claims that *GWTW* is "more interested in the dissolution of fantasies and the frustration of romantic typology" by "fram[ing] racial attributes in order to complicate them beyond what would be expected of a conventional plantation romance," when considering the intimate ways race, gender, and place remain intractably intertwined in *GWTW*, it becomes apparent that the text not only has no interest in their dissolution but also frames "racial attributes" in such a way that the narrative world depends upon long-standing tenets of Lost Cause ideology for race relations (1, 4). Notwithstanding the work of Mammy, Jeems, Pork, and Dilcey in the establishment of Black expectations and their continued use in delimiting the boundaries of whiteness, it is the peripheral character Big Sam who provides some of the most revelatory rhetorical manipulations in affectively legitimating environmentally fixed racial systems through his ties to a Lost Cause ethos and a more concentrated relationship to Tara, the Confederacy, and Scarlett in times of crisis.

Big Sam's first appearance in the novel comes after Ellen directs Gerald to dismiss the plantation's current white overseer because he has fathered an illegitimate child with Emmie Slattery, a member of the county's white-trash class (71). In absence of an overseer, Gerald turns to Big Sam to fill the role as foreman. The depiction of Big Sam as more trustworthy than his predecessor serves white plantation romance fantasies in several ways. First, the substitution of a Black "foreman" for a white "overseer" bolsters erroneous Lost Cause beliefs that "slavery was a feature monstrous enough in theory, but, more often than not, humane in practice" by giving yet

another euphemism for enslavement practices (*Stand* 14).[9] After all, a foreman has status, will, and direction while an overseer is marked by cruelty and a history written in violence. Second, Big Sam's role change adds new dimensions to the "happy darkey," suggesting an ability for enslaved persons to "lead" other enslaved persons in the plantation system thereby shifting a racially exploitative practice into a fictionally altruistic one. Lastly, the move places him in a more intimate relationship with Tara and the O'Haras, making him responsible for both their land and their financial successes. Under these conditions, Big Sam signifies as a fantasy exemplum of "humane" enslavement practices wherein white racial profiteers afford dispossessed Black subjects greater responsibility while also making him a trusted intimate in the family business and caretaker of the land.

After initially saving the aristocratic Tara from a white-trash scandal, Big Sam seemingly vanishes until the novel's action moves from Tara to the siege of Atlanta where he returns in a chance encounter with Scarlett as the city strives to shore up its defenses against an invading Union Army. The scene opens with Scarlett and Rhett Butler arguing over Atlanta's defense efforts when they are distracted by "a great cloud of red dust coming up the street and from the cloud came the sound of tramping of many feet and a hundred or more negro voices, deep throated, careless, singing a hymn" (306). Turning towards the commotion, Scarlett eyes "light" upon Big Sam, "nearly six and a half feet tall, a giant man, ebony black, stepping along with the lithe grace of a powerful animal, his white teeth flashing as he led the gang to 'Go Down,

[9] In his essay "Reconstructed by Unregenerate" in *I'll Take My Stand*, Agrarian John Crow Ransom writes that, rather than an "Aristocracy," the social organization of the South better reflects a "squirearchy." He defines this as "loosely graduated social orders" where "[white] relations were personal and friendly. It was a kindly society, yet a realistic one; for it was a failure if it could not be said that people were for the most part in their right places. Slavery was a feature monstrous enough in theory, but, more often than not, humane in practice; and it is impossible to believe that its abolition alone could have affected any great revolution in society" (14). In Mitchell's treatment of Big Sam and white trash, one sees the outline of Ransom's argument for the values that structure Southern society. It is a structuring that resonates with racial relations just as much as it does with environmental relations.

Moses'" (306).[10] The description of Big Sam's reappearance does double-duty by recalling the novel's opening tranquility where field hands sang their way back to their quarters and by associating Blackness with the land in a cloud of dust. The "careless" singing, and the seemingly undifferentiated happy Black mass in service to whiteness satisfies the fantasy of the happy slave even during a war that centered on their emancipation. In a larger cultural context, placing Sam in the center of the dust cloud turns that real-life threat into something safe, if not a means of

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[10] There is a delicious, unplanned irony in Mitchell using "Go Down, Moses" as Big Sam's walk-up music. As a traditional spiritual wholly invested in an African American signifyin' practice, the songs lyrics call out for liberation:

Go down Moses way down in Egypt land
Tell old Pharaoh Let My People Go.

When Israel was in Egypt land
Let my people go
Oppressed so hard they could not stand
Let my people go

So the God sayeth,
"Go down, Moses way down in Egypt land
Tell old Pharaoh to let My people go"

So Moses went to Egypt land
Let My people go
He made old Pharaoh understand
Let my people go

Yes The Lord said,
"Go down, Moses way down in Egypt land
Tell old Pharaoh to let my people go"

Thus spoke the Lord, bold Moses said,
"Let My people go
If not I'll smite your firstborns dead"
Let My people go

God, The Lord said,
"Go down, Moses way down in Egypt land
Tell old Pharaoh to let My people go"

In Mitchell's use of the song and her alignment of Big Sam with the Confederacy seen later, she attempts to turn the "Old Pharaoh" of the song into the Union Army. Unfortunately, her rhetorics fall flat. They are unable to overcome the long tradition of resistance to enslavement through song and spirituals by African Americans. The result is that, while Mitchell believes she is leveraging Blackness into the service of the Glorious South, she is, in fact, including a deep resistance to the rhetorics of her novel.

deliverance from invasion. Moreover, the physical intimacy of Black bodies and the red earth versus the emotional intimacy but physical distance from the land in white bodies implies a difference in humanness along racial lines. Though coated by the dust of the land and seemingly part of it, Blackness can never own the land and thus can never "understand" what is worth fighting for, worth dying for like their white enslavers. Representations of the land seemingly confirm these distinctions, suggesting a constant, reliable environmental order manifested in along racial lines. These men, impressed to fight a war *against* their freedom, remain locked in the past as their white counterparts hope for a future safely ensconced in that same past but safe from dust.

In further detail, Big Sam's description also calls to mind Rhett Butler's Blackness by metaphoric inversion. His "lithe grace" and "white teeth" coupled with his animal-like power recall Rhett Butler's bold, black eyes, "animal-white teeth," and his powerfully built body "almost too heavy for gentility" (96). The descriptive racial relations reveal a pattern in the larger rhetorical structure of the novel wherein men are often painted with the same environmental brush yet kept safely separated by racial hierarchies. For Rhett and other white characters, associations with the other-than-human world elevate their sexual status while for Big Sam and Black characters that same association diminishes or debases their human capacities. The metaphorical logics themselves are racially inflected by an environment simultaneously revealing those habits in diegetic treatments of race and the novel's rhetorical structure teaching the reader how to "read" race into the extra-diegetic environment. The racially coded environment does just as much to stunt any futurity that violates the "natural" order of things captured in metaphor as it does in satisfying the need for underlying structural constants in the face of change.

The wider-reaching importance of the chance meeting lies in recognizing how Blackness functions in legitimizing the Lost Cause ethos and environmentally fixed racial order. As the encounter between the Scarlett and Sam continues, it becomes apparent that Sam has been "pressed" into service to the Confederacy, ostensibly making him a veteran of the War and imaginatively confirming a central Lost Cause claim that enslaved persons were willing defenders of the Confederacy. The narrative affirmation of this fantasy happens when Big Sam and four other men from Tara break ranks to see her which results in a scolding from the Confederate Officer in charge of the labor party. Scarlett shakes hands with the men, her "small white hand disappearing into their huge black paws," while she stops the Officer from scolding them, saying "Oh Captain Randall, don't scold them! They are our people. This is Big Sam our foreman, and Elijah, and Apostle and Prophet from Tara" (307). Once again, the text uses a linguistic environmental association of Blackness with the other-than-human world to delimit the color line while also pairing such justification with biblical authority through naming. Scarlett's white hands disappear into the "paws" of her "people" signifying at once ownership of Black bodies under the guise of familial intimacy and animality for Blackness in word choice all of which gleans further credence by association with Christian values. Under these environmental rhetorics, white persons are owners, Black persons are owned, white persons have hands, Black persons have paws, and all of these "logics" are biblically affirmed.

Given the relationship between Big Sam, Scarlett and their intimate connection to Tara, the image of his "paws" enclosing her delicate hand may be understood as a tender moment wherein Big Sam's bigness—his strength, size, and power—signifies as a protective force in the defenses of white femininity not as a threat to it. And, by extension, Sam's protective role for Tara and the O'Haras moves outwards, affording the opportunity to "read" well-managed

Blackness as a means to "protect" whiteness and the South. The text offers support for such an interpretation when Sam tells his "pretty Young Miss" rather than running away as she playfully suspects, he and his companions are "ter dig de ditches fer de w'ite gempmums ter hide in w'en de Yankees comes" because, as her mother "Miss Ellen" has it, "De Confedtrusty need Big Sam mo' dan [Tara] do" (307). His garbled speech infantilizes him, rendering him childlike, consequently nullifying any potential threat his body or Blackness might otherwise suggest while also denying him any future beyond childlike loyalty to his oppressors.[11] The form of labor his willing protection assumes is one that literally changes the landscape repeating the pattern of Black labor changing the plantation landscape to meet white demands. The "miles of trenches" they are tasked with digging change the face of the land but do not change their material conditions of enslavement. *GWTW* represents Big Sam and his companions as willing defenders of their own oppression, as a Black force in service to white supremacy. What this suggests is that while Blackness does demonstrate environmental agency in *GWTW*'s narrative world, that agency remains constrained by white rhetorical control. Blackness superficially serves as a prop in and to prop up Lost Cause fantasies and their attendant nostalgia for racially fixed environmental systems.

Big Sam's and Scarlett's intimate relationship also uncovers a larger metonymic substructure for the novel in which she comes to stand both for the South and the racially

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[11] In July of 1936, Mitchell wrote a letter to Donald Adams who reviewed *GWTW* for the *Times Book Review* on July 5. In that review, Mitchell notes that Uncle Remus (made famous by Joel Chandler Harris's stories) would not have approved of Mitchell's dialect. In response, Mitchell writes that she "sweats blood to keep [her dialect] from being like Uncle Remus." She goes on to claim that, as a Southerner "usually refuses to read any dialect stuff that's like Uncle Remus" and that she wanted her language to be "easily readable, accurate and phonetic" (32). In other words, Mitchell believed herself to be both accurately representing the speech of Black folks in Georgia, and believed her efforts were done in good faith. By way of encouragement for Adams, Mitchell suggests that if he is ever down in Charleston "to go out to Magnolia Gardens where they give you a negro guide to show you through and listen to *their* combination of English accent and Gullah. 'Get' for 'gate', 'race' for 'rice' etc." She ends by stating "I can never understand half they say!" (33).

romanticized plantation home, and he comes to stand for ideal Blackness in white terms. While Big Sam may not be as constant a figure as Mammy in Scarlett's life, his appearances nevertheless harken back to more stable times for Scarlett, reminding her of Tara's idyllic racial organization. As Mark Jerng claims in *Racial World Making*, "the plantation romance draws from the literary pastoral and paints an idyllic landscape against which the benevolent planter…struggles to maintain existence" (71). The relationship between Big Sam and Tara—as filtered through a modern line of filiation beginning with Ellen, then Gerald, and finally Scarlett—depends upon this fantasy of benevolence wherein Sam becomes an essential fixture in the southern landscape.[12] He not only wants to work for the O'Haras but, through the projection of that desire onto all Black laborers in the South, becomes an intimate component of how that imagined region generates yearning for lost racial and environmental organization. As a stereotype for Black masculine power made docile by white femininity, Big Sam becomes a rallying point for *GWTW*'s racially stratified and controlled environment. His loyalty to the O'Haras, Tara, Scarlett, and by extension the whole South stabilizes a crumbling white hegemony because, at least in him, Scarlett, and the new southern aristocracy she stands for finds a racial and environmental force they can control. Further, since the whole of *GWTW* can be distilled into the story of Scarlett struggling to maintain existence as the world changes around her, Jerng's secondary claim that the postbellum plantation romance (and despite its late arrival, *GWTW* certainly meets the expectations of the genre) "is oriented both towards a more displaced past and a longer view of the future" suggests the collapse of Scarlett, Tara, and the South into one another reveals new ways the modernizing South imagines racial relations in paradoxically

[12] Jerng defines landscape as "certainly a setting, geographical background, and in a sense historical tapestry—but it is also the narrative and linguistic conditions that shape action" (81).

older terms by means of Big Sam's textual treatments (71).[13] Less a character and more an example of "southern habits of troping," or a "metaphor for somatic knowledge, for the ways in which an entire culture has taught itself to think about race" as Patricia Yaeger has it, Big Sam allows the reader to imagine how preferred Blackness looks, acts, and feels for a racially stratified and consistent environment in his interactions with Scarlett (5,6). The most concentrated example of such desire and slippage occurs in Scarlett's famous assault during the Reconstruction section of the novel where Big Sam reappears to save her life, her virtue, and Scarlett returns the favor by spiriting him back to Tara.

As plot devices go, Mitchell admitted she included the attack on Scarlett because she felt that section of the novel was dragging a bit.[14] Considering what the assault accomplishes—the inclusion of the KKK, the burning of Shantytown, the death of Scarlett's second husband, the rehabilitation of Rhett Butler in the eyes of Atlantan society, the impetus for Rhett and Scarlett's eventual marriage, and the final return of Big Sam to the narrative—the episode certainly speeds the novel along. Moreover, the idea that a racially charged assault would remedy a lagging plot reveals how pervasive fears of racial threats were for white communities and how playing on those fears proves effective for popular fiction[15]. Given its racial tensions, how its language confirms long-standing habits of southern literature wherein white women are threatened by undifferentiated Blackness, and its use of a chivalric fantasy to justify KKK terrorism, it stands

[13] In *Reconstructing Dixie*, Tara McPherson makes a similar argument for the rhetorical relationship between Scarlett and the South. She insists that *GWTW* "enacts a metonymic slippage by which Scarlett comes to stand for, to equal, the land its symbolic architecture" (51). Here, McPherson's "symbolic architecture" resonates with my own interests in the rhetorical structuring of the Southern environmental imaginary. The difference, though, is that while McPherson focus are architectural readings on the plantation home itself, my interests are wider. They seek to capture not just the plantation house, but also the plantation environment, the landscape, and the intimacies of all its occupants with one another through language.

[14] "Letter to Mr. Henry Steele Commager, July 10, 1936." *Gone with the Wind* Letters 1936-1949.

[15] For more information on the relationship between money, cultural authority, and popular publishing see *Black Writers, White Publishers* by John Young pp. 6-12.

to reason the episode would consistently draw the critical eye. As Deborah Barker notes, "those examining the Shantytown attack have compared it to *The Birth of the Nation* and the racial politics of what W.J. Cash refers to as 'the southern rape complex,'" a set of ingrained cultural beliefs wherein white femininity must be protected against the sexually assaultive desires of Black men in the region (110). In addition to Barker and Cash, Jerng also makes the connection to Thomas Dixon, understanding the Shantytown attack as an example of Mitchell using "different narrative strategies for building race into our everyday interaction with social structures," in this case through foregrounding the economic concerns of running a successful business rather than Dixon's "ugly, obvious racism" which serves as a "particular epistemology of using race to denote the moral status of the world" (76, 78). Tara McPherson understands the near rape as an attack on the whole South by Blackness because "the hyperfeminized figure of the southern woman" became a "discursive symbol for the region, with the land itself being figured as feminine as well" (19). All of which suggests that the attention the Shantytown assault has received is understandable because it represents a distillate of what scholars have come to expect and anticipate from Southern romances where the imbricated rhetorics of race, gender, and place concentrate larger cultural fears. Yet, in each case, the analysis overlooks Big Sam's legitimizing role in both Scarlett's standing as a symbol for the South and ways the assault coupled with his rescue substitutes preferred racial fantasies for perceived racial and environmental threats by drawing on the myth of better managed antebellum Blackness.

Mitchell uses Scarlett to frame Reconstruction's deleterious effects on the South with her critiques of post-bellum political changes. In the lead-up to her assault Scarlett mulls recent political developments from a decidedly Lost Cause apologist perspective, parroting popular opinions of Reconstruction and consequently standing in as a conservative voice for the region.

She reflects on how "the negroes were completely out of hand" since emancipation and the white Georgian legislature denying them the franchise thus giving voice to white fears of politically active Black voters.[16] She rails against a "North" determined to "force the negro vote on the state" by declaring Georgia in "rebellion and [placing the state] under the strictest martial law" (777). Her nascent, racially motivated political awareness mirrors twentieth-century historical understandings of Reconstruction—especially from the Dunning School—that saw that stage of Southern development as the darkest era in American history, claiming the South was internally colonized by an imperial North. Here, too, Scarlett's rhetorics seemingly slip the plantation romance genre, suggesting something more historical. The turn towards "history" at this moment not only perpetuates the larger cultural habit of substituting historical views that were sympathetic to the Lost Cause ethos for actual lived conditions for Black folks, but it also demonstrates what Leigh Ann Duck identifies as the "temporal divide" between southern culture/politics and the larger nation. For Duck, the divide is expressed when "associating the nation with democracy and change and the region with racism and tradition" (3). What is interesting in this case is that because of *GWTW*'s romantic mode, the pull of nostalgia, and Scarlett's appeal to popular readership, the substitution of "the nation" with "the Yankees" and "racism and tradition" with a defeated democratic ideal turns Georgia into the victim and the progressive nation into a villain. It follows a familiar conservative political narrative wherein

[16] In November of 1866, after the Fourteenth Amendment was ratified, the Georgia legislature met and almost unanimously rejected the Amendment. Georgia argued that if Georgia was not a state, its legislature could play no part in the ratification of amendments. It further argued that if Georgia was a state, the amendment had not been placed before it in accordance with its state constitution. In other words, Georgia was testing both the limits of its "state's rights" after defeat and attempting to preempt the consequences of the First Reconstruction Act of 1867. Despite epic bluster and saber rattling, the Georgia arguments remained impotent. The First Reconstruction Act passed in March of 1867 and Georgia, along with Alabama and Florida became part of "The Third Military District" which was supervised by General John Pope. The United States Military, then, was responsible for registering 93, 457 Black voters and protecting their right to vote. These are the conditions that Scarlett rails against when she declares Georgia an "occupied" territory while also living in fear of Constitutional rights for Black folks she claims to love so dearly.

tradition comes under threat by progress even though that "tradition" might be better understood as violent economic, political oppression and racial terrorism. The move to place Georgia under martial law for exercising its "rights" in denying African Americans the vote perversely makes the South *more* democratic and the North (really, the larger nation which the South is also part of) *less* democratic. Scarlett's politics expose an ideological geographic habit wherein a North/South division becomes emblematic for differences in political futures along specifically racial lines masquerading as democratic ideals under the authority of "history."

Amid this historical and political spin, Big Sam provides comfort because he remains grounded in the southern environmental imagination by affirming the virtues of white supremacy's desired, naturalized racial order. In bringing Big Sam back into the narrative at a moment of turmoil, Mitchell signals a longing for racial logics beneficial to white security in an array of animal-to-human associations and explicit, though forced, postbellum political critiques. At first, Sam appears as a strange, "huge negro" slipping "silently from behind a large oak tree" capturing both the looming threat Blackness represents to a white-ordered environment and the ways that threat now exists as part of unmanaged landscape. Scarlett, frightened by the threat his presence signifies for her white femininity, draws her pistol, demanding to know what he wants. Once successfully identified and accepted by Scarlett, Big Sam "gallop[s] over to the buggy, his eyes rolling with joy and his white teeth flashing." As with previous instances, his description returns to his hands describing how his "two black hands as big as hams" clutched Scarlett's own, while his "watermelon-pink tongue lapped out, his whole body wiggled and his joyful contortions were as ludicrous as the gambolings of a mastiff" (779). Mitchell's racial/animal logics not only reveal a reliance on racist habits to trope Black males to white advantage, but they also reveal an underlying environmental linguistic order that renders potential racial threats

safe through associations. The "rolling" of African American eyes has a long history of either sexual arousal or violence—especially from the Dixon's *The Clansman* and *The Birth of a Nation.* In this instance however, Sam's threat is neutralized by links to "hams," "watermelons," and the "contortions" of a "ludicrous" mastiff. In short, Scarlett turns Sam into her delicious pet, repeating habits of white consumption for Blackness seen in the opening of the novel with her mother's rationing of food for Tara's enslaved hands.

One of the key features in Sam's return as described by Mitchell through Scarlett is the repetition of a standard rhetorical operating procedure wherein formerly enslaved Black persons are associated with domesticated animals. Mitchell first uses this trope with Jeems, the body servant of the Tarleton twins, then Pork, the O'Hara's butler, as well as Mammy. The consequences of this rhetorical habit reveal, yet again, how whiteness depends on representing its consumption of Blackness as a natural order written in environmental terms. As Walter Johnson argues, "even as [southern plantation owners] were forcing their slaves into physical and symbolic proximity with animals, they were doing so with particular intensity at the junctures of the human and natural worlds" (191). He goes on to insist that white spatial practices as well as symbolic action "associate their slaves with carnality—with the flesh" (191). Mitchell's description of Scarlett's recognition of Sam fits with these charges. She sees him as edible, domesticated, delicious, and docile. In a moment of great uncertainty, just as Reconstruction threatened to undo the worst of the South's plantocracy's cultural habits, Sam appears to literally feed Scarlett's need for a natural order from the days prior to the Civil War's destruction. The irony of this meeting, when read through environmental rhetorics, is that the very language Mitchell uses to demonstrate the relief and joy Scarlett experiences in seeing Sam, and the joy she wants to capture for him in this reunion, in fact reveals the depravity of the Southern

enslaving class with its stomach-turning consistency.

Here too, Sam serves as the mouthpiece for Lost Cause yearnings by reflecting Scarlett's political ideologies from earlier. He explains to Scarlett what happened to him after Atlanta's fall, how a "Yankee gempmum" a colonel ("cunnel") made Sam into his "body serbant," traveling North with him where the "Yankee folks" treat him "lak [he] jes' as good as dey wuz" but in their hearts "dey din' lak no niggers. An' dey wuz sceered of [him], kase [he's] so big." He concludes by declaring, "Yankees is iggerunt folks!" asserting he's "done had nuff freedom" and "wants somebody ter feed [him] good vittles regular and tell [him] whut ter do an' whut not ter do, an' look affer [him] w'en [he] gits sick" (781). His critique of "Yankee folks" mirrors Scarlett's own complaints about "out of hand" Blackness, fictionally confirming the supremacist lies that the enslaved preferred enslavement because of the care they received, that they were unprepared for freedom, and that southern whites "understood" Black folks in far more nuanced ways than the ignorant North. Big Sam's return substitutes a pre-emancipation racial order for the alleged chaos of post-emancipation racial relations by speaking white fantasies of benevolent slavery and "fallacy" of progressive democracy in Blackface. When taken in conjunction with Scarlett's coming assault, Big Sam's words and actions provide a fantastical foundation for the legitimation of that racial order by contrast. The intimate relationship between Sam and Scarlett contorts memory and history through the power of nostalgia to build out a mythological past both long to return to in the future.

Following their reunion, and after promising to get Sam back to Tara, Scarlett's assault begins and ends with surprising narrative speed, comprising less than two pages in an otherwise epically long novel. The assault occurs as Scarlett passes through Shantytown on her return to Atlanta after checking on her mill business during the building craze of Reconstruction.

Traveling alone, unprotected in a threat-filled environment, Scarlett experiences an attempted robbery wherein a "big ragged white man and a squat Black negro with shoulders and chest like a gorilla" attack her. Although carrying a pistol, Scarlett fails to defend herself because she fears she might shoot her horse in the process. Her hesitation creates an opening which allows for the Black attacker to wrench the pistol from her grasp and attempt to drag her from the buggy. Scarlett fights back against the Black man, "madly, clawing at his face" to protect herself. Her efforts are not enough, and the man succeeds in tearing her basque "from neck to waist" leading to his searching for money between her breasts, his hand "fumbling," as a "terror and revulsion such as she had never known came over her and she screamed like an insane woman" (788). Big Sam, hearing Scarlett's screams, leaps to the rescue, defending her against the Black man as the white man runs away thus both effecting a rescue and maintaining racial order by defending her against the Black assailant while leaving the white man untouched. In the aftermath, Scarlett weeps, Sam hopes he "done kill dat Black baboon" and promises that if Miss Scarlett stands more harmed than he realizes he'll "go back an' mek sho of it" thus solidifying the dream of well-managed Blackness as always intimate to, and protective of whiteness (789).

Big Sam's final appearance in the novel signifies a nexus for race, gender, and place that writes preferred white racial order through violence into the environment in which that violence occurs. The political rhetoric voiced by Scarlett before the assault omits the reality of racial terrorism emancipated persons experienced as whites "rebelled" against the "iron heel" of Reconstruction. Further, the use of Sam as a mouthpiece for Lost Cause racial fantasies simultaneously suppresses any potential for critiques of Southern culture and legitimates said fantasies by speaking to them in Black face. The leveraging of the other-than-human world through metaphor and racially coded environmental linguistic substructures characterize Sam in

such a way that orders the South as a white space through its rhetorical distortion of him in the narrative. Finally, the violation of that coded order through violence causes Scarlett to become "mad," suggesting the only explanation for the new conditions of liberated Blackness is violence and insanity. In other words, by attending to the details of his final heroic scene as well as the details of all Sam's appearances, the focus shifts from Scarlett's and the South's alleged "crisis" to the rhetorical importance of Blackness in the creation of a southern environmental imagination; to the ways the omission and suppression of Black agency enables a substitution of white rhetorics of legitimation through managed racial relations; and a better understanding of how Scarlett's inevitable return to Tara at the end of the novel signifies the dream of white southern return to predictable environmental and racial systems with the rhetorics and logics of Lost Cause nostalgia.

## Conclusion: Tara, Mammy, and the South that Never Was

The final pages of the novel offer a wholly changed Scarlett even as Tara remains a fixed sanctuary in the landscape of her memory. No longer a vivacious, teenaged, southern belle, Scarlett is now a thrice married mother of three living children (two her own, one "adopted"), owner of Tara, owner of a successful lumber mill, widow, midwife, siege survivor, and war veteran. Her first two husbands are dead, her father is dead, her mother is dead, the Tarleton twins who squired her on Tara's front porch are dead, Melanie Wilkes—her angel and companion through all her strife—is dead, her daughter with Rhett Butler, "Bonnie Blue," is dead, her marriage with Rhett has come to ash after Bonnie Blue's death, and finally, in the rubble of the Ashley/Scarlett/Rhett love triangle Scarlett finds herself rejecting Ashely as a "something made up…something just as dead as Melly," and herself denied by Rhett's famous refusal to give a damn (1016, 1035). In the wake of these catastrophes, Scarlett's collected

traumas bring about a “merciful dullness” in her mind (1036). As she feels her unraveling begin, Tara becomes a “bulwark against the rising tide of pain” she knows will soon follow. Reaching out for sanctuary in response strife, she longs for her plantation seat, remembering it as “a gentle cool hand stealing over her heart.” In the temple of memory, she feels “the quiet hush of the country twilight coming down over her like a benediction” imagining Tara both a surrogate mother in the absence of Ellen and a religious proxy in the absence of belief. For Scarlett, Tara signifies as a “picture,” a landscape bounded by “the avenue of dark cedars leading to Tara, the banks of jessamine bushes, vivid green against the white walls, the fluttering white curtains” (1036). In the face of mounting trauma, Scarlett retreats to a mythologically unchanged land, to what Scott Romine calls a reproduced South “not as a *home* (inhabited place), but as *homesickness*, as an object of nostalgia in both the spatial and temporal senses of the word” (29). She dulls her pain by substituting in a sweeter, more desirable pain: the yearning for an impossible myth that paradoxically gives comfort in future return. At her lowest narrative moment, Scarlett’s hopes—and the rhetoric used to construct those hopes—create a sacred world in Tara: a space, place, and landscape ordered in regressive, oppressive racial hierarchies that omit and suppress Black agency to comfort and legitimize environmentally fixes racialized systems that buttress hegemonic plantation fantasies. Scarlett’s material conditions change, the political landscape and larger culture of the South and Nation changes, yet Tara remains an unchanged constant beyond modernity’s space and time, preserved in myth and memory as the last bastion of white order in the rubble of lost causes. And once again, the element that provides the intimate sanctuary of that landscape is Blackness captured in the figure of Mammy.

Despite Scarlett’s seeming hard-won maturity gleaned from survival and war, the relief she discovers in yearning for a return to Tara as she imagines it demonstrates the stagnate nature

of Southern myths for the environment. Here, Romine's understanding of home as "homesickness" assumes a kind of history sickness as well, one wherein the oft used metaphor of home-as-roots unearths the disease of environmental othering. On the one hand, the language used to describe Scarlett's longing for "home" renders the plantation, as already noted, a surrogate mother and religious proxy in her time of need. Tara as place, home, and environment signifies sanctuary in Scarlett's imagination just as the antebellum south holds as a sanctuary for larger, white environmental imaginings because of the seeming semblance of racial and spatial order it signifies. Moreover, the association of Tara with the South and Scarlett as a synecdoche for at least southern femininity if not the whole of a modernizing region in *GWTW* affectively authorizes that environment because Tara is the "place" where such emotions feel "right." On the other hand, the way that process works insofar as the dream of return inspires relief by future promise once again relies on Blackness to frame its rhetorical, plaintive yearnings. That promise, too, relies on keeping both the environment and racial order of that environment locked in the past to insure its comforting future. Indeed, Tara can only work as a sanctuary if Scarlett suppresses the violent history of enslavement, of reducing human beings to mere flesh, of omitting the changes to the Southern environment by the Civil War and substituting in false nostalgia for a generous, benevolent past.

While Scarlett's final declaration that "tomorrow is another day" is possibly *GWTW*'s most famous line (perhaps behind Rhett's frankly not giving a damn) because it seemingly articulates "the spirit of her people who would not know defeat," how the promise of that tomorrow is realized depends upon Mammy serving as a link to a fantasy past made history by the hegemony of plantation romances. A scant six sentences prior to the hope of tomorrow, Scarlett draws strength from Blackness, bespeaking a childlike desire during crisis that belies her

alleged growth: “Suddenly she wanted Mammy desperately, as she had wanted her when she was a little girl, wanted the broad bosom on which to lay her head, the gnarled Black hand on her hair. Mammy, the last link with the old days” (1037). At first glance, the line simply implies and association of comfort with a memory from childhood. Scarlett’s adult need of home and sanctuary in time of crisis becomes a child’s want. But, when considering the persistent processes of omission, suppression, substitution, and legitimation, her “want” reveals a more deeply rooted desire for unchanged conditions. Scarlett’s belief that Mammy remains fixed, comforting, and as she was in the past affords Scarlett the courage to imagine a future in the first place. The now offers no quarter so home becomes a return in time as well as place. For Scarlett, and in many ways for the South she represents, moving into the future means returning to the past. In the absence of her mother’s touch, Mammy’s “gnarled” hand and her “broad bosom” combined with Tara’s “gentle cool hand” together offer an other mother, one who lives only to serve and meet the needs of whiteness. This means that Blackness becomes the vessel by which white security bridges the gap between past ease and present strife; by denying Mammy any possibility of change, Scarlett shapes the landscape of memory and emotion to white benefit. In her time of greatest need, the promise of tomorrow becomes possible only through the other natures of Blackness and land, freeing Scarlett to move forward into a tomorrow grounded in a nostalgically legitimated past.

Yet, it is Mammy who pays the price and bears the burden of that tomorrow by being forever bonded as “the last link with the old days.” Indeed, Scarlett’s hope in tomorrow relies on suppressing any possibility of a future for Mammy thus turning white southern nostalgia into a kind of confinement as well as extractive industry. By keeping Mammy locked in the past, by treating both Mammy and Tara as unchanging, and by imagining Blackness and the land as

concomitant, Scarlett's homesickness denies a future for Blackness or the land to secure a white past. Moreover, Scarlett's need for intimacy captured in laying her head on Mammy's broad bosom and the tenderness of a gnarled, comforting hand stroking her hair, assumes a continued, willing servitude as well as a limitless caring resource in Mammy without ever questioning the cost. While the Mammy figure is certainly (and problematically) memorialized in the southern imagination as central to the caring home environment, by turning the legitimizing power of nostalgia against even the possibility of Black futurity, *GWTW* reveals how it has always warped its temporal register as well as understandings of otherness into a mythic one. And, once that rhetorical maneuver is accomplished, to borrow insight from Hortense Spillers, the shift "enables a writer to perform a variety of conceptual moves all at once. Under its hegemony, the human body becomes a defenseless target for rape and veneration, and the body, in its material and abstract phase, a resource for metaphor" (205). What this means is that in the white southern environmental imagination captured by Scarlett's final "tomorrow," Mammy can only be venerated as a surrogate mother to white children, never moving forward into a future all her own; her touch in abstraction serves only as a link to "lost days" of white memory, never as something wholly her own; her body—like all othered bodies in the novel—becomes coextensive with and indigenous to the land because of the comfort she provides, never once permitting her to exist beyond the scope of what southern whiteness needs. In other words, through Scarlett's homesick veneration Mammy serves as a metaphoric resource whose wealth is perpetually extracted by white needs, the cost of which means she remains trapped by a past whose tomorrow looks forever backwards.

When Malcolm Cowley wrote his review for *Gone with the Wind*, he could hardly have predicted the novel's long-lasting cultural resonances. Moreover, it remains hard to believe that

anyone in 1936 could have known how deeply Mitchell's work would take root in the American literary and cinematic imagination. He could not have anticipated the continued selling power of the novel, could not have known about its pending blockbuster status. Instead, he could merely, and begrudgingly admit that despite the novel being "vicious in its general effect on Southern life today," Mitchell did write something of a great novel. But it is this idea of viciousness that catches the eye so far into the future. Mitchell herself claimed she wrote the novel with "no hate and no prejudice." Yet, upon closer examination the novel offers clearly prejudicial caricatures of Black folks that are also outright racist. Moreover, while the novel may very well have been written without hate, the rhetorical habits of racial and environmental othering necessary to celebrate a Lost Cause ethos tell a somewhat different narrative. Maybe it is not outright hate directed towards another human being, but it is a vicious resistance of progress, a viciousness directed at having lost, at having to justify a defeated way of life built on stolen lands by the stolen labor of chattel slavery. It is a viciousness turned hate that denied Hattie McDaniel and Butterfly McQueen (the Black actors who played Mammy and Prissy respectively) entrance to the film's premier at Loew's Grand Theater in Atlanta simply because of the politics of their skin. It is a hate that saw the first photograph of a young Dr. Martin Luther King dressed as a plantation slave with his preacher father and the whole of the Ebenezer Baptist Church Choir singing to a whites-only audience at the premier of the same film. It is a hate that forced Margarett Mitchell herself into anonymity as she funded over fifty scholarships to Morehouse College (Dr. King's alma mater, no less!) and helped build a clinic in the "Sweet Auburn" neighborhood of Atlanta from the profits garnered in both book and movie sales simply because she did not want to upset the whites in town. All told, then, it is a vicious process that all too often omits and suppresses the consequences of its own past to substitute in the myth of glorious

tradition for a future legitimated by the romance of Lost Causes. And, for tomorrow's sake, we ought not ever look away.

## CHAPTER III

## INTIMACY AT ARM'S LENGTH: *GO DOWN, MOSES* AND A FAILED WILDERNESS ETHIC

### Introduction

*Go Down, Moses* (*GDM*) represents the last novel in William Faulkner's great period, a stretch of time and archive of works between 1929 with *The Sound and the Fury* and 1942 with the publication of *GDM*. The novel has produced—and continues to produce—a multitude of scholarly approaches. These interventions range from reading the text as a formal anomaly that challenges understandings of the modernist novel, as a novel about racial relations in the South, as a novel of the Great Depression, and more recently, as a novel of the environment. Yet, in the long arc of Faulkner scholarship reading *GDM* as an environmental work is not especially new. Cleanth Brooks's *William Faulkner: The Yoknapatawpha Country* (1963) first posits such an approach by insisting Faulkner is a nature poet and that a "sensitive apprehension of the natural scene is everywhere in Faulkner's work" (29). He argues that Faulkner not only uses nature to "reflect man's moods" but also as a means to "stand in sharp contrast to them" (31). He then draws on "Delta Autumn," the penultimate chapter of *GDM,* to argue "nature is not only set over against man's restless violence; it becomes a judgement on that impious violence" leaving Uncle Ike—the novel's presumed protagonist—a "wilderness [that] has been violated" and a "rich dark land [that] has been looted" with "the meaningless litter of civilization" (31). Over the years, scholars have continued offer increasingly complex readings of the environment's role in the novel after Brooks's readings. Judith Bryant Wittenberg draws on elegy to link the human and non-human world through affect, claiming the novel considers "with elegiac eloquence essential

questions about the interconnections between human beings and their environment" (69). Louise Westling reads Ike McCaslin as one who "excuses" his exploitation and pillaging of the land "by retreating into a nostalgia that erases [his] real motives and takes refuge in attitudes of self-pitying adoration" (5). Both Wittenberg and Westling use affect in terms of elegy and nostalgia, form, and the environment to articulate the ethical consequences of human interaction with the natural world. Interestingly, while both scholars look to the environment, they are less inclined to name the specifically Southern, specifically Lost Cause resonances of elegy or nostalgia in their turn to the environment. Their omission implies that the decidedly Southern tone of Faulkner's work does not bear out in his treatment of the natural world. This implication, in turn, exposes early habits of ecocriticism that simultaneously focused on the specifics of the environment in literature while allowing representations of that specificity to fall into the trap of universalizing values. An assumed objective view of cultural habits was read alongside literary depictions of the natural world without accounting for the importance of a specific point of view for the natural world represented in the text.

In more recent scholarship, Lawrence Buell argues "*Go Down, Moses*…elegiacally bears witness to the disappearance of the virgin forest and with it the imminent death of first nature as [Ike McCaslin] has known it" (176). Buell, too, develops an ethical line of inquiry with this environmental reading. His analysis insists that the novel "never developed a coherent environmental ethic" despite its sympathies for a lost wilderness. He further notes that "the space of the hunt, within the space of the wilderness, was no safe refuge" for Ike; it was "not immune from village and town institutions any more than Ike could realize his dream of self-extrication from economic entanglements" (180). Buell's readings of ethics, the environment, form, and affect center on Ike (Uncle Ike) McCaslin while also turning from the specifics of the novel

towards more universalizing claims that seemingly ignore Faulkner's deliberate Southern situation. Buell, then, while elaborating on what a wilderness ethic entails, also neglects the importance of a white southern environmental habit that writes its ethos and cultural values onto the land in its fictions under the guise of objective universalisms.

The trend of emphasizing ethics while avoiding the importance of a white Southern context for the novel follows into Gary Harrington's work. He argues that, while Ike is "without question" a "superior woodsman, his activities in the woods demonstrate a dangerously casual disregard for the wilderness and its animal inhabitants, both of which the hunters [in *GDM*] profess to revere" (518). Mark Decker somewhat improves on the trend by at least recognizing the force of the plantation in conjunction with the wilderness. He reads Ike's (in)famous decision to repudiate his plantation/propertied birthright to pursue an environmental ethics grounded in a kind of wilderness monasticism as "giv[ing] voice to the fears of a Southern society trapped within its own dread of cultural change that can be easily coded as contamination" (471). In both Harrington and Decker, the environmental turn accounts for the important role animals play in the novel. They trace animal representations as both projecting fears of racial containment through animal logics and in the idea of hunting as a stand-in for racial violence in the plantation system. However, they, too, do not complete the cultural circuit between white southern environmental imaginaries, culture, and the persuasive force of a landscape written in a decidedly Southern habit of racial control. Finally, scholars such as Matt Low, Tony Vinci, Zachary Vernon, and Bart Welling have all offered varied takes on the novel with their shared aim being one that "challenges some ecocritical models of transparent textuality and a transcendent, monolithic Nature" to argue for the "logographic richness" of the "ecological networks" the novel signifies for both the human and non-human world (Welling 462). For them,

the modernist complexities of the novel resonate in the varied fields of intertextual inquiry, animal studies, and human violence in the other-than-human world thus adding even more nuances to the novel's growing body of scholarship.

As scholarship on *GDM* and the environment has expanded into questions about race, racism, property, the other-than-human world, and plantation legacies, that work often treats these concepts as a series of discrete oppositions that, while resonating with the environmental turn, nevertheless use Faulkner's environmental imaginary to read through the natural world to hidden universalized environmental narratives. The focus on supposedly hidden universalisms pushes the racial and Southern dimensions of the novel to the margins, implying that the Southern environmental context, replete with its racialized miasma, is not a significant contributing factor to a disappearing environment writ large. These readings, then, often reflect what Toni Morrison identifies as a pattern in American criticism that thinks "of [literature] in terms of its consequences on the victim," with the victims under their rubric being either the environment, non-white, or other-than-human characters (*Playing* 11). While it does matter that *GDM* offers something of an environmental ethics couched in nostalgia and white wilderness monasticism, it also matters that such a premise is quite literally dependent on how Faulkner uses his non-white and non-human characters to write such an ethics. Moreover, it matters that such representations in fact reveal far more about Faulkner's imagining of both the environment and victimhood than actual victims. In short, it matters that Faulkner's view is a view from his specific somewhere.

Like Morrison, my interests in *GDM* propose to shift from a study of victimhood to one that examines the impact of racism on those who perpetuate it to place both environmental destruction and non-white character exploitation in conversation with one another. This chapter

builds on previous scholarship but moves from focusing on environmental, ideological, and racial narratives in the novel that perpetuate critical cycles of victimhood towards the rhetorics used to construct a white Southern environmental imaginary and the effects of that construction on racism's perpetrators. Under these methodological conditions, the human struggle for superiority over the natural world becomes an expression of white male hegemony; morally suspect planter-class environmental ethics are foundational in the exploitation of natural resources and as a form of social control; racial violence erupts when the unassimilable history of enslavement and Indigenous removal collides with racially delimited hunting grounds; land, property, and wilderness are governed by different temporalities that affirm racially dictated spatial organization for the Southern landscape. By reading for how the novel explicitly constructs its environmental imaginary, the interdependency of wilderness, plantation legacies, race, racism, and the other-than-human world not only becomes visible but also becomes an open and obvious rhetorical strategy to screen white hegemony even as it ostensibly proposes to condemn it.

With these aims in mind, this chapter reads *GDM* as a Modernist, Southern, and an environmental novel to offer different ways to account for the intimate relations between its Others in an environmental imaginary. My contention is that these intimacies function in two distinct but interdependent ways. First, the manner of the relations themselves is one of intimacy at arm's length—a relational mode that admits to the presence of racial or environmental Others even as they are held at a discrete distance to both fetishize that relationship as a sustaining one and prevent it from tainting whiteness in such a way that white cultural authority diminishes. Second, the literal terms of the intimacies are structured by metaphoric condensation—a rhetorical habit wherein raced persons are described and imagined in tropological or animalistic

terms, non-human characters are anthropomorphized as well as racialized, and the natural world is both described in and becomes a repository for idealized white social values.[1]

### Caroline Barr, William Faulkner, and Intimacy at Arm's Length

Faulkner opens *GDM*, a novel that he described in a May 1941 letter to Robert Hass as being about "the relationship between the negro races here [in the South]," with a dedication to his childhood caregiver and family "servant" Caroline Barr (*SL* 139). His dedication reads: "To Mammy / Caroline Barr / Mississippi / (1840-1940) Who was born in slavery and who gave to my family a fidelity without stint of calculation of recompense and to my childhood an immeasurable devotion and love" (*GDM*). Prior to the novel's publication, Faulkner delivered Caroline Barr's eulogy at her funeral held in his parlor, a decision which offended Caroline's own surviving family (*Faulkner and Love* 27). In his eulogy, Faulkner describes the relationship between Caroline and his family was never one of "master to servant" (*Essays* 117). Rather, he insists she remained one of his earliest recollections not only as "a person" but more significantly as "a fount of authority over [his] conduct and of security for [his] physical welfare." He notes Caroline was paid for her labor, but that "pay is still just money. And she never received very much of that" (117). Finally, Faulkner reads Caroline's character in his eulogy, stating she "accepted [her wages] too without cavil or calculation or complaint so that by that very failure she earned the gratitude and affection of the family she had conferred the fidelity and devotion upon, and gained the grief and regret of the aliens who loved and lost her" (118). An intimacy of exchanges between Caroline and Faulkner resonates across the dedication to *GDM* and the

[1] In *Playing in the Dark*, Toni Morrison calls for "studies of the technical ways in which an Africanist character is used to limn out and enforce the invention and implications of whiteness" (52). She goes on to state, "We need studies that analyze strategic use of black characters to define the goals and enhance the qualities of white characters" (53). The method used in this chapter draws a direct line back to Morrison's call for such technical studies. Indeed, my use of "metaphoric condensation" is based on her naming of "techniques of 'othering'" (58). However, I expand on Morrison here as well by stretching the terms of her original call to include the environment since its representations are layered in with the larger structures use to represent race and gender.

eulogy. Julia Simon claims Faulkner's dedication "simultaneously evokes and blurs the distinctions" between gift exchanges. She sees the dedication and subsequent novel-as-gift both "asserting and denying the unreciprocated and immeasurable nature of Caroline Barr's gift of fidelity" even as it "invokes her status as slave and then house servant," setting in motion "competing economic logics that play out in the chapters that compose the novel" (32). While the idea of competing economic logics—one Black and enslaved, one white and enslaver—proves an enticing and necessary line of inquiry, I am interested in the ways that both the eulogy and dedication use the rhetoric of affection and exchange to keep a Black family servant at arm's length despite claims to remarkable intimacies.

Looking at both the dedication and the eulogy in more detail, one notices the underlying expectation of resentment or anger that ought to be present in Caroline Barr but is noted as absent. The dedication states she gave to Faulkner's family a "fidelity" that was "without stint of calculation or recompense." Faulkner's eulogy makes a similar claim declaring that she accepted both her position and low wages "without cavil or calculation or complaint." The absence or seeming absence of calculation grants Caroline Barr greater, although conflicted, stature in Faulkner's memory. She exceeds ingrained white Southern social expectations of "pettiness," "greed," and "cunning" for formally enslaved persons now post-emancipation servants. These exceptions grant her moral authority while nevertheless binding her to such expectations as the only way to have that authority in the first place. The exchange of fidelity for poor wages and predictable racisms without anticipated calculation for something more, then, is no exchange at all. On closer examination, Caroline Barr, the formerly enslaved woman turned underpaid house servant with moral authority over Faulkner's childhood merely gives the impression of authority couched in white rhetorics. Her "monumental status" remains contingent upon white

expectations for right behavior absent any demand for adequate wages, justified outrage over generations of enslavement, or justified moral demands for reparations over stolen labor. Her legacy as a "fount of authority" draws from the well of white world-making, *not* Black lived experience-- thus rendering her "authoritative" only insofar as she remains subservient to his status as the white family patriarch, even in childhood.[2] Faulkner's elegiac tone, while sympathetic and moving, nevertheless preserves cultural expectations and Lost Cause mythologies about the so-called relations between Blacks and whites in the biracial South. Even in death after her death, Faulkner calls on Caroline Barr to serve, in this case serving as the figurehead of his tragic nostalgia.

The racist afterlife of Faulkner's exchange-based rhetorics reveals what I call intimacy at arm's length: a relational mode that tries to contain the racial "taint" of the relationship by imagining the distance between oneself and an intimate Other as denoting a full break in contact which preserves the cultural power of whiteness while simultaneously fetishizing the Other as essential to whiteness. According to Judith Sensibar's work in *Faulkner and Love*, an oft-repeated trope in Southern fiction (one Faulkner uses throughout his oeuvre) is the "story of a Southern white boy's…psychologically violent education into race and racism" wherein the conceit depends upon a performance of whiteness that "always has to demean and to cut himself off physically and emotionally from the black mother who nursed him and the black child with whom he ate, slept, and played." Sensibar reads further into the trope, stating that "by denying his black family in order to define himself as white, [the southern white boy] experiences himself

[2] Faulkner notes in the eulogy that Caroline Barr saw him as the head of the household after his father's death even though he was a child. Here we might question this kind of deference on the part of Caroline Barr as read from Faulkner's position. Was he really seen as the head of the household, or was this merely a long signifying game played by Caroline to insure her wages and status for her already precarious position in the south? Meaning, there is an irony in Faulkner seeing that Caroline saw him as in charge, even in childhood where she was the "authority."

as permanently cutoff from love" (21). She completes her argument for the trope's significance in *GDM* by claiming his eulogy was a "public act" that "conformed to the conventions" of the "coming into racism" narrative in an adult setting (102). The material record held in Caroline Barr's headstone speaks to the permanence of such relations: "CALLIE BARR CLARK / 1840—1940 / "MAMMY" / Her white children bless her." (*F&L* 18). Here, the headstone (purchased by Faulkner), the eulogy, his dedication of *GDM* to her, and the afterlife of culturally entrenched racism coalesce into a clear example of intimacy at arm's length. The woman who "gave half a century of fidelity" to a family that was not her own is on the one hand celebrated for expected loyalty and on the other hand denied equal status with the family because of the politics of her skin (*Essays* 117). Caroline Barr lived with three generations of the Falkner family—William's father and mother, his own generation, and that of his daughter, Jill—by all measures exceeding the expectations of any family member towards another. Yet, in the final celebrations of her life she is held at a distance from her white "family" because fragile whiteness could not run the risk of contamination from her Blackness.

Faulkner's memory of Caroline Barr-as-Mammy provides the opportunity to witness how intimacy at arm's length works: as an elegiac performance that simultaneously draws towards and establishes distance from the Other; as a staging of intimacy that preserves vectors of power through racial distinctions which prove incapable of recognizing, let alone admitting to a need of the Other to assure power in the first place. Even as Faulkner's records for Caroline Barr—his eulogy, *GDM*'s dedication, and the novel—signify a kind of mourning, they also show how the admission of her presence serves to obfuscate her specific lived experiences by rendering her life in terms of the mammy trope. The tombstone he purchased, complete with a blessing from her "white children," etches in stone Caroline Barr's status within the Faulkner family as an Other

through the appellation of "Mammy," and her burial site—at the St. Peter's cemetery in the "colored section" of Oxford, Mississippi—completes her othering in geographical terms (*Faulkner and Love* 18). The treatment of a racial intimate as an environmental Other persists even in death. Racist expectations as seen in the dedication and eulogy coupled with environmental controls as seen in the headstone and segregated graveyard show an environmental and racial ethic are not divorced from one another. The imagining of racial intimacies across lines of division resonates with and becomes determinant in how the environment is imagined as well. While Faulkner very well did yearn for Caroline Barr after her death, and he most certainly loved her as a second mother, she also signified for him a time and place lost to a modernizing world, she became for him a fetish ensconced in nostalgia and elegy, a means to control space by burying her in the "colored section," to signify her Otherness in place, stone, and letters.

**Ike McCaslin, Planter-Class Nostalgia, and Lost Cause Transference**

As a Modernist novel, a novel of the environment, and of the South, *Go Down, Moses* repeats these same practices of intimacy at arm's length. Through its character relations, the novel reveals the incoherence of a white, Southern environmental imaginary founded on the transference of nostalgia and a Lost Cause ethos to a yearning for a disappearing, un-resurrected wilderness brought to ruin by its imaginers. Many of these practices begin with Faulkner's modernist fracturing of time and place. These techniques work in conjunction with one another to "stretch the capacities of literary form and language in relentless determination to imagine the reality of what it meant to be alive in a given place and time and to invent other lives that were partly [Faulkner's] own as their author and partly that which he could never fully inhabit" as John Matthews rightly notes (*Cambridge* i). What interests me in Matthews' claim is how

partiality plays a significant role in both a narrative of knowing through authorship and the impossibility of inhabiting other lives gleaned from the same conditions. In thinking in terms of wholeness, the concepts of reality, language, and literary form are stretched but do not break. But, as I want to argue, when thinking in terms of relation, a racialized environmental imaginary as the unifying feature dissolves exposing an ultimately incoherent semiotic system which then affords the possibility of a new imagining of the novel, its Others, and its othered world.

Understandably, much of the scholarship on *GDM* places Isaac (Ike) McCaslin at the center of the novel's larger racial and environmental tensions. The opening chapter "Was" establishes what Miles Orvell in a different context calls a "matrix of identity," a kind of linear transformation for Ike across generalized functions in a social system (109). Although speaking of small-town life in Faulkner's work, Orvell's identity matrix holds true for "Was" insofar as it reveals two currents that are always working on Ike's sense of self—a backwards urge into the past through cultural nostalgia, and a forward urge into the future through larger forces of modernity:

> Isaac McCaslin, 'Uncle Ike', past seventy and nearer eighty than he ever corroborated any more, a widower now and uncle to half a county and father to no one
>
> this was not something participated in or even seen by himself, but by his elder cousin McCaslin Edmonds, grandson of Isaac's father's sister and so descended by the distaff, yet notwithstanding the inheritor, and in his time the bequestor, of that which some had thought then and some still thought should have been Isaac's, since his was the name in which the title to the land had first been granted from the Indian patent and which some of the descendants of his father's slaves still bore in the land. (3)

Here, *GDM* offers Ike as a central character for the reader to latch onto while confusing the narrative basics of that relationship through fragmentation of sentences, paragraphs, and chronology. The opening gambit, much like Southern history as a mythologized Lost Cause, has a questionable reliability from the start. The reader experiences a narrative close-third person that feels authoritative yet undercuts its foundation through layers of separation: the memory of an elderly Ike is a family story relayed by his cousin McCaslin (Cass) Edmonds who has somehow become the "inheritor" and "bequestor" of land that ought to have been Ike's yet is still somehow seen as Ike's by some people given the cultural and legal memory surrounding property. The knot leaves the reader gasping and ungrounded. It entangles all cultural, factual, familial, and propertied history in one breath while leveling the distinctions between any point of view.[3] The hypotaxis interrupts narrative rhythms with excess and disrupts history with convoluted citations. The present-tense/past-tense grammatical palimpsest as history undermines presumed narrative objectivity. Given such a tangle, if Isaac McCaslin is at the "center," it is a center that flirts with the edge of coherence; it is a center that will not or cannot hold.

The opening passage also provides the first admission of intimate Others as related to Isaac, the land, and McCaslin history even as it keeps them at arm's length. The narrator recognizes that the McCaslin name gives Ike rights to the land because that family name was both on the "title" of the land "granted" by an Indian patent, and it is that McCaslin name which some formerly enslaved persons still claim and "bore in the land" (3). The inclusion of both patent and patrilineal relations between the white Isaac and the formerly enslaved McCaslins as

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[3] Mark Winchell offers a similar reading of this opening in his work, *Reinventing the South: Versions of a Literary Region*. There, he writes Faulkner created "a third-person narrator who tells us what the aging Ike McCaslin remembers of a tale that his cousin McCaslin Edmonds has told him about an incident that took place prior to Ike's birth" thus enabling Cass to place the tale "in the oral tradition of the McCaslin family" (142). While I believe there is much left to explore regarding the orality of Faulkner's baroque narrative style, for the purposes of this chapter my interest remains in how the style of this opening both centers and de-centers Ike in place and time.

reason for ownership of the land captures how the larger white South imagines Isaac's property rights: through a legal provenance wherein a "patent" transforms indigenous land into property and the legacy of slavery stands as a living record of white possession passed down through the family name. Thadious Davis's work recognizes the significance of Faulkner's property layering in *GDM*. She argues *GDM* "provides access to powerful representations and narrative constructions with which to grapple with the complexities of racial power and domination in property rights […] which provides a micro-environment for studying the relationships among property, race, gender, and law" (3). In a novel concerned with the environment just as much as racial relations, land figures all modes of relation. It signifies as property, right, claim, and bounded space. Land becomes an archive of identity that contains all records of being bought, sold, claimed, worked, gifted, and eventually bequeathed. Finally, land establishes a sense of time and history, persisting as a contested site for the various human relations that occur on it.[4] The opening Gordian knot of *GDM* reads as an abbreviated thesis statement for settler-colonialism by admitting to an indigenous presence, to Blackness, to a miscegenated whiteness, and to a land twisted in memory where individual strands can only be expressed through tangles

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[4] Albert Cowdrey in *This Land, This South: An Environmental History* writes about what he perceives as a Southerner's relationship to land, environment, and place. He claims "[b]seides being a subculture, a web of traditions, or a sequence of events, the historical South is a place, the life that is lived there linked beyond separation to a certain ridge, a certain river, a certain quality of days in summer. Its artists have affirmed what all southerners, including the numerous separated brethren, know in their bones—there is no life apart from place, and no place is exactly like any other anywhere. The link between man and land is not definable, and perhaps what matters most is least recorded. The intense, almost physical bond that ties the southerner to his place seems to develop independently of whether that place is grand or seemingly beneath notices" (6). I have quoted Cowdrey at length to point out two things of significance. First, that the myth of a southern connection to place persists even in the scholarship's rhetoric. The environmental imaginary is so persistent and pervasive that its mythological poetics makes its way into research with academic pretensions. Secondly, to point out the ruthless racializing and gendering of Cowdrey's claims to the power of place through omission and admission. Indeed, one is left to wonder if his transcendent rubric includes the displaced Native Americans as "southern brethren" even as the very conception of the South was not established until after their forced removal. One also wonders if Cowdrey's dream leaves room for formerly enslaved persons forced to work the land and turn the South into the place that is so romanticized and beloved by those southern "brethren." And finally, his rhetoric does beg the question of whether women and women of color, too, experience that same attachment to and longing for the land. All of which is to say, for all his naming of culture and the land's mystical power, Cowdrey remains blind to his regurgitation of that cultural mysticism in the first place.

of language.

Between an opening that layers its narrative through relayed memory, fractured time, and the representation of various intimacies at arm's length, *GDM* lays the groundwork to shift nostalgia and a Lost Cause Ethos away from a mythologized South towards a wilderness mythology. The larger chapter accomplishes this transference through the combination of a humorous yet vitriolic deployment of plantation romance tropes as well as metaphoric condensation for its intimates through the idealization of the "hunt" for an escaped slave. Following its dizzying opening, "Was" takes on a more comfortable narrative mode. The chapter offers an anchor point in time as the year 1850, before Ike is born, and with Cass Edmonds a nine-year-old boy living with his Uncles Buck (Theophilus) McCaslin and Buddy (Amadeus) McCaslin. Buck and Buddy, two sixty-year-old confirmed bachelors live in a filial partnership with Buddy playing the role of housekeeper while Buck plays the role of blustering eligible bachelor. Rather than live in the plantation house, the brothers occupy a cabin they built with their own hands, sharing the house with their pack of hunting dogs, a fox kept in a crate, and young Cass. Ironically, the McCaslin plantation house—the assumed estate of Southern gentry—remains incomplete, left this way by Lucius Quintus Carothers McCaslin, the first in the McCaslin line. Here, too, "Was" provides further humor insofar as once Buck and Buddy trade the big house for their cabin, they move enslaved persons *into* the big house. Overwhelmed by and uninterested in plantation management, the brothers depend upon an "unspoken gentlemen's agreement between the two white men and the two dozen black ones" in the house that "after the white man had counted them and driven the home-made nail into the front door at sundown" to "lock" them into the house even though most of the windows were unfinished and the backdoor remained unbarred, "neither of the [brothers] would go around behind the house and look at the

back door, provided all the [n*****s] were behind the front door…at daybreak" (263). Buck and Buddy are not the masters of their land in any sense of the plantation romance proper. The big house, just as much a figure in the romance as the Southern gentleman and Southern belle, stands incomplete; its rooms and galleries have been surrendered to the enslaved; domestic duties have been taken up by the presumed masters. Faulkner's parody inverts racialized spatial logics to serve as a larger uprooting of Lost Cause myths.

"Was" further dismantles the plantation romance through Fonsiba (Sibbey) Hubert, the "roan toothed," aged caricature of a Southern belle and her marriage plot with Buck McCaslin.[5] While Fonsiba's treatment in the novel provides some comedy, desperate sadness clings to her skirts as well. Relentless in his caricature, Faulkner shows a Fonsiba who becomes younger in her affectations the older she grows. As her body ages in her unwed years, marital desperation drives her beliefs and deportment deeper into a gilded past. At forty, she acts as an antebellum girl of sixteen. In many ways, she offers a fitting counterpart to her eventual husband, Buck. Whereas the McCaslin plantation has gone to ruin through deliberate disinterest and mismanagement, Fonsiba's own family plantation, a "seat" she insists on calling Warwick "after the place in England she said Mr. Hubert [her brother] was probably the true earl of" even though he "never had enough pride, not to mention energy" to establish his rights to, has gone to rot and ruin through cloying aristocratic ambitions doomed to fail (5). Just as Buck remains hellbent on never acting the part of the country squire, Fonsiba evinces a similar will by refusing to yield her status as a southern belle to spinsterhood. Between her roan tooth, overwhelming perfume, and toddy flirtations, Fonsiba provides a caricature of the prototypical southern belle.

[5] Over the years, the "roan tooth" description has caused some confusion for Faulker's readers. In *The Lion in the Garden*, he clarifies what the description means, stating the a "roan tooth" is one that has the color of a roan stallion and is thus a dead tooth.

Old where she should be young, pungent where she should be sweet, uninhibited where she should be graceful, and desperate where she should be pursued, Ike's future mother breaks the spell of romance by embodying a belle, long past her prime, hunting up a husband who is hunting down Tomey's Turl, the escaped slave, who also happens to be his half-brother on his father's side.

While Faulkner's acerbic treatment of Fonsiba is key to understanding his deconstruction of the planation romance, the second story in "Was," that of Tomey's Turl, the enslaved "half-white" half-brother of Buck and Buddy McCaslin that involves Fonsiba and her marriage plot, lays the groundwork for the complicated intersections of race, environment, and failed ethics in *GDM*. The privations of intimacy seen through the metaphoric condensation of Tomey's Turl imagined as an animal "hunted" by his own brothers for sport, shifts the enslaved man from human to non-human status and calls into question the hunt as an ideal pursuit and the hunter as a moral exemplum. While Fonsiba's marriage story offers a humorous if vicious take-down of the Southern belle and beaux respectively, Tomey's Turl undermines the idealized vision of a white hunter-as-exemplum because of the moral decrepitude "hunting" an enslaved, half-brother for sport as a "good race" entail (5).

Tomey's Turl's rhetorical metamorphosis from human to hunted animal takes place across various scenes in "Was" wherein non-human characters and racist cultural myths both shape white understandings of the environment and explain inexplicable Black triumph. As a process, this work begins with the narrative pairing of a fox chase in Buck and Buddy's house with the disappearance of their Black brother (5). In the chaos of witnessing a fox chase through a house that ends with the animal "treeing" behind a clock mantel, the reader learns the greater sense of urgency coming from Buck McCaslin has less to do with the fox and more to do with

their missing kinsman. When asked by Buddy why he "turned that damn fox out with all the dogs loose in the house," Buck response condenses both fox and Blackness: "'Damn the fox…Tomey's Turl has broke out again'" (5). Linking fox and brother together as objects of the chase, Buck shifts the ceremony of the hunt—however diminished—from fox to man. The treed fox behind a mechanical clock shifts the mechanical demands of plantation life into a time of the hunt. The next paragraph confirms the shift, noting that Tomey's "escape" and the brothers' "hunting" of him is a bi-annual affair, "because they [Buck, Cass, and Buddy] knew exactly where Tomey's Turl had gone, he went there every time he could slip off, which was about twice a year" (5). Simultaneously seasonal and thrilling, the race to the Beauchamp plantation further condenses Tomey's Turl into a nonhuman actant by mulish association (8). To start the hunt, Buck, astride the stallion Black John, attempts to ride down Tomey's Turl and his mule, Old Jake, with horse and rider looking "exactly like a big black hawk with a sparrow riding it" (8). Yet, for all their speed, Black John and Buck fail to catch the fleeing Tomey's Turl and Old Jake who outpace them in a manner that "was like he and Old Jake had added Tomey's Turl's natural walking speed to the best that Old Jake had ever done in his life, and it was just exactly enough to beat Uncle Buck to the ford" leaving Cass to admit "It was the best race he had ever seen" (9). Whereas the white hunter and horse become sparrow and hawk, Black prey and mule amble together, adding to one another in such a way that long-standing myths of Blacks and mules sharing a deep kinship are affirmed and become the means to understand the defeat of whiteness by Blackness.

While the race to the Beauchamp plantation and the relationship between Tomey's Turl and Old Jake does not mark the final instance of metaphoric condensation for him in the chapter, the process, and its association with the ceremony of hunting proves essential in understanding

how both work in conjunction to write racism into Southern environmental culture. As "the best race [Cass] had ever seen," the hunt for one's brother also signifies a process in which Black relatives become prey. The transposition of kinship between mules and Blackness, stallions and whiteness signals Buck and Tomey's Turl sharing a patrilineal line while ensconcing deep racisms in the logics of the other than human world. Finally, the "best" of a hunt harkens back to a plantation system founded on a racial nightmare wherein "the imagery of a group of white hunters and their dogs returning from the forest with a fresh kill" served as a stark reminder for enslaved persons considering escape and/or insurrection of "the power of white hunters to track down and kill their defenseless quarry" (*Subduing Satan* 72). All of which suggests the white hunter as ideal misses the moral mark because their singular scope of the world cannot abide with the intimacy of a "damn white half-McCaslin" as anything more than some*thing* that "stole away" in the final mile (*GDM* 6,8).

From the outset, then, *GDM* shows a reliance on relations between persons, family, land, and time wherein all are imagined as interdependent. Moreover, given the rhetorical resistances of such intimacies and the intersection of indigenous persons, enslavement practices, settler-colonialism, the plantation's role in modernity, and family, *GDM* also situates itself in the history of stolen lands from indigenous persons, the history of enslavement, fears of miscegenation for families in South, environmental exploitation, and the perverse structures of white property predicated on fetishized histories. When experiencing the novel along these lines, it becomes possible to see how *GDM*'s imagined environment works as both a synecdoche for Southern States and a fictional construct that, as Jay Watson states, "participates actively in a regional, national, and global landscape of mobility, exchange, and flow, what the Martinician novelist and critic Edouard Glissant might have called a *geography* of relation" (*Faulkner's*

*Geographies* x). The importance of this web of relations and geography finds an additional voice in Thadious Davis's work wherein she claims *GDM* is a "bounded but multivalent space, mirroring enslavement and bondage, in which collisions of ideologies and stories occur" (26). When speaking to race's function in the novel, she asserts, "race, seemingly constructed in the text as black, white, and native, is another matter. In all of its formations and discourses…race permeates and structures *Go Down, Moses"* (36). Lastly, she turns to whiteness in the space of the novel, insisting "a discourse on whiteness as privilege and power is central to reading property claims in *Go Down, Moses* and to recognizing how gender, specifically masculinity, is marked and consolidated out of race and property relations" (40). Between Watson's and Davis's arguments it becomes apparent that thinking of space, race, place, and gender together in terms of an environmental imaginary opens the novel in ways that significantly shape both Modernist and New Southern Studies interventions. As a new method in reading, it recognizes, as Ramon Saldivar does, how Faulkner's environmental and ecological aesthetic constitutes "another mode of articulating otherness that brings history and historical violence into the frame with more precise mimetic accuracy" (185).

"Was" accomplishes three things that carry forward into Ike McCaslin's story-as-Southern history. First, the chapter sets the initial terms for the larger theme of intimacy at arm's length through the admittance of indigenous presences for the McCaslin plantation, by naming a miscegenated family with both Black and white lines of descent, and through Buck's and Buddy's refusal to recognize Tomey's Turl as their half-brother, choosing instead to fetishize his movements as the occasion for a hunt. Second, "Was" lays the groundwork for the rhetorical habit of metaphorical condensation by describing Tomey's Turl in tropological and animalistic terms, and by turning the natural world into a repository for idealized white male values even as

those values fail the most basic tests of transcendent morality Ike later uses to fashion his wilderness monasticism. Finally, the rejection of both nostalgia and the Lost Cause ethos transfers those values to the wilderness rather than eliminating them. Although humorous, the mockery of a marriage plot paired with a valorized *human* hunt shows that Ike's organizing virtues rely on clay-footed ecological ethics thus anticipating his inevitable moral collapse. Taken together, these threads indicate how even a somewhat reformed planter class ethics does not get outside settler-colonialism's morally debased paradigm that depends on exploitation and environmental control. They demonstrate how culturally ingrained racial violence springs from the unassimilable history of slavery and indigenous removal. They show that both an environmental and racial imaginary are inextricably linked. In other words, *GDM* shows that, from the outset, the way Others are treated, defined, and placed goes together with how one respects and imagines their relationship to the land itself.

### Sam Fathers, Wilderness, and Ike's Failed Ethical Reformation

In the chapter scheme for *GDM*, the obvious connection between Ike McCaslin, hunting, the idea and reality of the wilderness, and the intimacies of racial and environmental Others plays out in three central chapters: "The Old People," "The Bear," and "Delta Autumn." Across their long arc, the reader learns about Ike's coming of age as a hunter, experiences the death of several significant human and non-human characters for Ike's development, learns of his complicated family tree (complete with miscegenation, incest, and rape), grapples with the torturous reasoning for repudiating family lands, and bears witness to generational degradation, environmental destruction, and Ike's own devastating racial reckoning. Whereas the importance of the environmental imaginary serves as a backdrop in the novel's other chapters, in those that take Ike and the wilderness as a focal point the racialized human and non-human characters

signify both a repository for and projection of white values. Yet, it bears note that, across these three chapters, an obvious Black presence fades.[6] Instead of Blackness, Sam Fathers, Lion, and Old Ben assume the role of racial and environmental Others. Here, my use of environmental other draws from Sarah Jaquette Ray's work in *The Ecological Other*. Ray defines the "ecological other" as "the antithesis of […] empowered ecological subjects" (5). By empowered ecological subjects, Ray means those subjects who are deemed successful in a capitalist society, able to take responsibility for their activities, and generally seen as participating in the decision-making processes of environmental or ecological conservation (5). Ray sees the "ecological other" as "those from whose poor decisions and reckless activities the world ostensibly needs to be saved" (5). Ray's definition carries an implicit indictment of the assumed cultural and political power of so-called empowered ecological subjects. In other words, the body (and I would go so far as to argue the very presence) of the ecological other becomes "the site of traffic between nature and culture" (9). Given these parameters, reading Sam Fathers, Lion, and Old Ben as environmental others whose Blackness fades in the wilderness is a means to identify Faulkner's rhetorical use of the wilderness as it relates to race in order to preserve it for white cultural practices.

Moreover, Faulkner's rhetorical marginalization of Blackness within the wilderness calls to mind Caroline Finney's work in *Black Faces, White Spaces* that explores questions of

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[6] There are exceptions to this claim, most notably Lawrence Buell's reading of "Pantaloon in Black" where he argues for a reading of Rider's pain that demonstrates "what saw milling does to the woods, what skid way gouges do to the hillsides is what the social system does to uppity black workers—and vice versa. Rider's logs come from the same hardwood forests of cypress, gum, and oak whose disappearance old Ike McCaslin laments in "Delta Autumn"" (8). Here, I am sympathetic to Buell's reading of the imbrication of Rider's pain and environmental destruction. However, I do think a focus on Rider as the sole example of that imbrication only serves to perpetuate the long-standing tradition of a bi-racial South. For this reason, I have chosen to focus on Sam Fathers and, later, the figure of the Delta Woman in this chapter to better articulate how I see Faulkner's racial rhetorics working outside that familiar binary. For further reading, see "Faulkner and the Claims of the Natural World" by Lawrence Buell in *Faulkner and the Natural World* edited by Donald M. Kartiganer and Ann J. Abadie.

environmental belonging for Black people. In her study of outdoor life, she claims "racialization and representation are not passive processes; they also have the power to determine who actually participates in environment-related activities and who does not" (3). She goes on to insist that the "narrative of the Great Outdoors" is "informed by a legacy of Eurocentrism, and the linkage of wilderness to whiteness, wherein both become naturalized and universalized" (28). Faulkner's marginalization of Blackness in his wilderness and hunting chapters bears out Finney's later analysis. The near total absenting of Blackness in the woods coupled with his emphasis on the Chickasaw Sam Fathers carries significant consequences for how intimacy at arm's length works in wilderness spaces. Granted, Sam Father's parentage also renders him "Black" under the conditions of Southern racial culture. Yet, his Blackness is consistently and quietly erased throughout the novel. Based on these terms, Faulkner's marginalization of Blackness in the wilderness suggests that the threat of a "polluting" Blackness for whiteness carries forward into "pure" woods from town spaces. It also suggests that indigeneity does not pose a similar threat to whiteness because of both the highly mobile and appropriable noble savage trope captured in Sam Fathers.

The first chapter in the wilderness triptych, "The Old People," introduces Sam Fathers as the character responsible for Ike's training as a hunter. Sam serves many rhetorical functions interns of ethos. He fills the role of mentor, sponsor, father, spiritual guide, and attractive alternative to whiteness. Matt Low identifies Sam as "a priest-like woodsman" and describes Ike as his "loyal novitiate," a relationship that highlights the "ritual and ceremony" of both "The Old People" and "The Bear" (57). These varied roles demonstrate the pernicious, persistent nature of the noble savage trope while simultaneously obfuscating the lived history of Choctaw and Chickasaw persons in the region. As Michael D'Alessandro notes, "critics have continually

tried—and failed—to tie the Native Americans of Faulkner's fictional Yoknapawtapha county to the actual Choctaw and Chickasaw tribes," ultimately (and rightly) conceding that his "Native American creations [are] unapologetic fictions" (375). He is not alone in his assessment. In the *Faulkner Journal*'s special issue devoted to Native presences in Yoknapawtapha, (18, 2002/2003), Robert Woods Sayre labels Faulkner's Indians "demonstrably false" (34), Patricia Galloway asserts they are "an amalgam of received stereotypes and modernist orientalist" (13), Gene Moore insists Faulkner's representations are "historically inaccurate" as well as politically incorrect, while Robert Dale Parker simply calls them "nonsense" (81). Melanie Benson Taylor's work in *Reconstructing the Native South* argues the "assumption of extinction" for Native persons in the South opened the door for "liberal reimagining[s] of Indians with metaphorical potency but no claim to authenticity." She goes on to advance a more rhetorical analysis of how native presences work in Faulkner's fiction, claiming he "invented stilted dialogue; curiously oriental, effeminate, and sometimes grotesque features; bizarre and homicidal lusts and compulsions, which include intimations of cannibalism; and extraordinarily implausible and inconsistent genealogies" (32). These critiques suggest that Faulkner's Native Americans offered what D'Alessandro calls "an alternate country" with the possibility of a "new identity" (379). In the case of Sam Fathers, one sees that Ike's "naive worship" and his later performance of "presumed Native American traditions" reveal how "white Americans often struggled to confront a modernizing nation" as their ways of life disappeared, and as environments were radically changed in material condition. All of which suggest Ike's "misreading" of Sam as a "genuine Indian marks his wilderness initiation as a sham and his enactment of inherited Native American traditions as a failure" (376).

Although Faulkner's depiction of Sam Fathers is deeply flawed and should not be seen in

any way as representative of Indigenous history, he does provide an opportunity to understand how fantasies of Natives work in conjunction with whiteness to reinforce the Southern environmental imaginary. Sam's tropological mobility throughout *GDM* highlights the relational mode of intimacy at arm's length as essential to its construction. Sam's various roles fetishize him, enabling Ike to accept neither the reality of Indigenous history in the South nor risk contaminating his white fantasies through *too* intimate a knowledge of Sam. Rhetorical invention becomes the method to signal intimacy. Sam provides Ike with the occasion to experience the pleasure of playing a different race while maintaining white structures of power. He serves as the conduit for whites to assert environmental belonging in a manner that skirts responsibility for destruction, the legacy of enslavement, as well as Indigenous relocation and termination through state-approved genocidal practices.

A turn to Sam's formal and narratological treatment in the novel helps to clarify how his presence reveals the limitations of Faulkner's environmental imagination in his failed ethical reformation. The text holds Sam at arm's length by never allowing the reader to experience his interiority or hear his thoughts. The narrative voice in "The Old People" offers the most complete description of Sam, at once contradicting the Noble Savage trope by describing him as "squat" and "almost sedentary, flabby-looking though he actually was not," yet also drawing on the same trope by making Sam appear animal-like with "hair like a horse's mane" that showed no trace of white even at seventy and also ageless with "a face that showed no age until he smiled" (167). That same description obfuscates Sam's Blackness to enhance his Indianness, stating his only "trace of negro blood" was a "slight dullness" in the hair and nails as well as an indescribable quality in the eyes, something that is "not the mark of Ham" as Cass insists, but rather "the mark of bondage," a knowledge allegedly visible to Cass's white gaze which reveals

part of Sam's heritage had suffered enslavement and raged against that condition, "like an old lion or bear in a cage" (167). He furthers Native tropes by reading Sam as "a wild man," ascribing to his blood a special knowledge that had been "tamed out" of whiteness. Here, Cass participates in common Southern blood fantasies by fetishizing both the epistemological capacities of Sam's hemoglobin and his lineage, noting that he is the direct son of "not only a warrior but a chief" (168). Cass follows suit with the narrator in his anti-Black imagining of Sam, forgetting not only that Sam was sold into slavery by his "warrior" and "chief" father, but also that Sam Fathers's very name signifies that he has both a Chickasaw and Black father. Moreover, Cass and the narrator seem to conveniently forget the blood-logics of Blackness in the South. Their conception of Sam's combined Native and Southern status suggests that Chickasaw heritage (and by extension potentially *all* persons with native lineage) provides some immunity to contaminating Blackness. Sam cannot be both high priest and master hunter if he is also black. Instead, his Indianness supersedes his Blackness allowing him to teach white folks the ways of the wild and preserve the racial sanctity of the woods that eventually comprise his home and burial ground. The limits of Faulkner's ethics, then, are shown through selective identity politics for the moral exemplum. By effacing and placing under erasure key features of Sam's history, Cass and the narrator render his ethos compatible with their world view rather than take his presence as the occasion to effect change. Rhetorically, such habits model no reform at all.

Young Ike follows similar rhetorical patterns of intimacy at arm's length. He fantasizes about Sam's status as wilderness priest, accepting his baptism into the woods by Sam's hand while simultaneously keeping him at distance by *not* calling him a "true hunter" like Walter Ewell, Major de Spain, Old General Compson, and Cass even though it is Sam who "taught the boy the woods, to hunt, when to shoot and when not to shoot, when to kill and when not to kill,

and..what to do with [the kill] afterwards" (164, 170). Ike, too, strives to place Sam's Blackness under erasure, noting that while he "had been a negro for two generations" he also insists in the same sentence that his "face and bearing were still those of the Chickasaw chief who had been his father" (164).[7] Ike's fetishization of Sam's Chickasaw past neither explains the rather ludicrous claim that he occupies a Black racial category for only two generations nor does it offer any clarification on how Sam switches from Black to Chickasaw in time. Further, Ike's reading of Sam stands in contrast to Melanie Benson Taylor's assertion that Native Americans in the South are "caught in the ruthless mechanisms of a reductively biracial system" wherein "Indians become functionally white or black depending on the civic context…and their own familial situation and needs" (80). Arguably, though, Ike's understanding of Sam's identity is possible because of the wilderness setting, a space Ike also fetishizes. It is Ike's willing discipleship to Sam and the vestiges of playing Indian from his youth that led to his repudiation of his lands based on a tortured, convoluted land ethic that traces all the way back to Sam Fathers's forefathers.[8]

These conflicting racialized vectors suggest the constrictions of the biracial South come under duress in the untainted woods. Sam's Blackness recedes in the white environmental

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[7] Here, Ike also follows suit with Cass insofar as he forgets Sam's other, Black, father. Further, the claim to Sam's bearing is in itself somewhat of a stretch given that Ike would never have seen Sam's Chickasaw father. Such a stretch further indicates the lengths and depths the white environmental imagination goes to in the construction of its others, going so far as to invent a vision from the past to reshape the conditions of the present so that the white sense of future being will be self-justifying even as it remains predicated on its own bad-faith constructions.

[8] Ike's attempts to untangle the knot of Southern history and the "original sin" of slavery lead him in the argument portion of section four in "The Bear" to go beyond his own family's reckoning into a deeper past that includes Sam Fathers's lineage. In a typical Faulknerian passage, Ike speaks of the land that would eventually pass on to him. He states that God, because of the original sin of slavery, "saw the land already accursed even as Ikkemotubbe and Ikkemobtubbe's father old Issetibbeha and old Issetibbeha's fathers to held it, already tainted even before any white man owned it by what Grandfather and his kind, his fathers, had brought into the new land" (259). Here, Ike's version of history ignores the practice of slavery in the Native community that lead to Sam Fathers's Blackness. It also fetishizes a purer sense of land that was corrupted by whiteness and slavery in such a way that the trope of the pure Indian works to make a full relationship with Sam impossible. History, too, serves as a means to keep his adoptive wilderness father at arm's length.

imagination as the fantasy of Cass's "wild man" and/or Ike's high priest of the wilderness rises to the foreground. However, Ike's rhetorical fetishizing of Sam in his environmental imaginary does not bring them closer together. Instead, the ritual denies intimacy, or at the very least reveals the bad faith of that rhetorical fetish by imagining both man and woods as concomitant. By these measures, the wilderness is both "bigger and older than any recorded document" like the myth of Sam's blood, and the personality of the wilderness as "lurking," "myriad" and "one" is like Sam being at once "tremendous, attentive, impartial and omniscient" (191, 181). This distancing, as Taylor's work argues, creates "a veritable trinity of the dispossessed: the [eventually] contrite white southerner, the freed slave, and the tragic Chickasaw" (33). It is a trinity that protects whiteness from the taint of Blackness through erasure, co-opts Indianness to absolve white environmental mythologies of real-world habitual destruction, and allows for the structuring affects of nostalgia and the Lost Cause ethos to be transferred from an unreconstructed, unregenerate South to the myth of wilderness.

While Ike remains Sam's disciple across both "The Old People" and "The Bear," his burgeoning independence as an accomplished woodsman coupled with a growing sense of his family's plantation legacy expand that relationship to increasingly broad questions of form, environment, and racial relations. As Ike matures, his wilderness belief systems in "The Bear" become less siloed off in terms of a clear divide between cultural limitations and the free woods. Rather than persisting as a separate place and space, cultural and environmental histories contaminate Ike's environmental imaginary. This is accomplished through compositional arrangement wherein the chapter explores nature and racial history with a nesting strategy. The first three sections are concerned with the hunt for Old Ben, the legendary bear of Major de Spain's hunting grounds. They track the annual ritual of hunting for Old Ben, the birth of Lion

(the half-mastiff mongrel that ultimately bays the bear), and the death of Sam, Old Ben, and Lion. The fourth "ledger" section for the chapter, perhaps the most studied portion of the whole novel, takes place outside of the woods. It tracks Ike's repudiation of his plantation inheritance, explores the ramifications of incest and miscegenation that comprises the McCaslin family tree, philosophizes on private property and the rights of ownership, and presents one of the most turgid Southern apologist tracts in all of Faulkner's writings. The fifth and final section follows Ike's return to the last of Major de Spain's hunting grounds before they are decimated by the logging bonanza of the Mississippi forests in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

The layout of the sections formally surrounds the ledger section with the wilderness sections. On the one hand, such an arrangement could be seen as a modernist convention wherein a chapter's form is dismantled in service to unconventional presentation. On the other hand, such an arrangement serves as a compositional signifier wherein the interests of the environment and the interests of Southern racial history are nested together. Taking such logics a bit further, the inverse of this mode of relations becomes apparent in the arrangement of the chapters for the novel. In other words, just as "The Bear" nests its racial concerns in the fourth ledger section inside its four other sections concerned with the environment, *GDM* mirrors that arrangement by nesting its three environmental chapters within its four other chapters. For the novel, matters of racial relations surround a deep concern for the environment, and in the most environmentally focused chapter, matters of racial relations are surrounded by the wilderness. The racial and environmental imaginary are rhetorical and compositional intimates.

In many respects "The Bear" gives credence to *GDM* being a novel of the environment. The hunting narrative and its concerns with a disappearing wild signal clear connections between literature and the natural world. The arrangement of the chapter's five sections suggests a racial

imagination and an environmental imagination are interdependent, and Ike's growth—both in terms of racial awareness and environmental ethic—further suggest cultural formations of race and nature are mutually constitutive. Moreover, the chapter's arrangement draws attention to the organizational scheme of the novel wherein the wilderness chapters are surrounded by interconnected narratives that are less occupied with the immediate environmental concerns of Ike and more concerned with racial relations in the South. The compositional order of "The Bear" surrounds culture with a fetishized wilderness in such a way that the intimacies between whites and racial others literally marks the heart of the chapter. The compositional order of *GDM* surrounds its wilderness with a fetishized intimacy at arm's length between its racial and environmental others in such a way that the wilderness marks the heart of the novel. These features make the novel one of racial relations and of the environment. In returning to the specifics of "The Bear," one discovers Ike dually mediating his wilderness and racial ethics through one another. In the case of the former, his wilderness training by Sam enables his repudiation of McCaslin lands. In the case of the latter, his choice to repudiate his family lands informs both his hunting stewardship and larger environmental conservatism. Race and the environment, then, share a sense of urgency and revision in the novel through Ike.

Unfortunately, Ike's revisionist stances do not lead him to a fully realized ethic in either a racial or environmental sense. The mediations themselves take as their base both the relational mode of intimacy at arm's length made apparent through his fetishizing practices for Sam and the wilderness and draw on the rhetorical habit of metaphoric condensation that utilizes a problematic comparative mode for both racial and environmental Others. What this means is that even as Ike believes he has paid due penance for the sins of his past with his faith in an eternal wood and his repudiation of family lands, he has merely transferred one fantasy into the form of

another. In giving up his planation seat, he seemingly rejects the legacy of slavery and nostalgia for the fallen South and the Lost Cause ethos. However, his actions merely focus regionally aggrandizing values to self-aggrandizing values. After all, his refusal of McCaslin patrimony is, as Theresa Towner notes, an indulgent, "culturally privileged gesture" that nevertheless preserves the hegemony of white patrimony for the South by giving the lands to Cass (52). In this way, Ike turns nostalgia for the South into nostalgia for the disappearing wild while still preserving whiteness and land control; he changes himself from a plantation figure in Southern Lost Cause ideology into a sylvan priest for the Lost Cause of the Southern wilderness; and he potentially increases his property holdings by rejecting titled land ownership and replacing it with a claim to all undeveloped lands as eternal. His actions perpetuate racism's continued rituals of exploitation and oppression while also enabling the consumption of his beloved woods by suspect conservation, the greed of timber interests, and failed land stewardship.

Ike muddles his symbolic representations of the natural world in condensed form with Old Ben, the bear hunted by the men in "The Bear." Old Ben is described as an "anachronism indomitable and invincible," as a "phantom, epitome and apotheosis" of an "old wild life," as "widowered" and "childless," an "Old Priam" both "reft of his old wife" and has outlived all his sons (194). From this mythological status, he later becomes "a woman who has loved and been loved by many men," an "ungendered progenitor," Ike's "alma mater" a "ruthless and irresistible locomotive" and finally the object of Truth as captured by Keats's "Ode on a Grecian Urn" (204, 210, 211, 297). Semiotic disorientation makes it nearly impossible to understand Old Ben as a figure. In another sense though, the method used to express the disorientation is contradictory because it uses hypotaxis in its search for understanding. To articulate the bear as beyond human understanding, human language and cultural referents are required. However, language as an

orderly signifying system fails. Thus, Old Ben claims dual status at the same time: as a figure beyond comprehension and as one signified through cultural referents. Such linguistic tension renders him both the acme of all hunted figures, as "the best game of all," and signals his status as "a definite designation like a living man," forcing him into an impossible subject position of indefinite game whose legend speaks a definite being (195). Ike's semiotic treatment of the wilderness follows similar lines as those used for Old Ben. He identifies the woods as a "doomed wilderness," a space of truth and wildness which, upon entering, Ike "witness[es] his own birth," and as a place of "shadowy limbo from which time emerged and became time" (193, 195, 204). Much like he does with Old Ben, Ike elevates the wilderness to a place of higher learning, making it his "college," a temple with "twinned walls of unaxed wilderness," and finally an anthropomorphized, transcendent entity that is "musing, inattentive, myriad, eternal, green; older than any mill-shed, longer than any spur-line" (210, 319, 322). Ike's use of the wilderness struggles to define what he sees as an impossible transcendent quality. In turn, he draws on the white, Western world—colleges, religion, trains, lumber, and railroad industries—to articulate what he sees as beyond human capacity to know. At once "doomed" and "eternal," the wilderness occupies its own impossible position: multiple and singular at the same time. Old Ben and the wilderness, then, are singular, specific bodies and general, indeterminate ideals figured in language that ultimately fails to limn their dimensions. Like Ike's racial imaginary wherein Sam Fathers is both a person and the embodiment of Indianness, his environmental imaginary ultimately sublimates the specific to the white Western universal by subjecting the beauty of the multiple to the tyranny of the singular, to the hegemony of the figure at every turn.

"The Bear" teaches the reader that the most important symbols for Ike's development fail to make semiotic sense even as they comprise the core of Ike's proto-environmentalist ethos.

While at the outset of the chapter, the narrator—one that is deeply sympathetic to Ike—asserts "only Sam and Old Ben and the mongrel Lion were taintless and incorruptible," presumably through association with the wilderness, that claim does little to elucidate the terms of their incorruptibility. The reader knows from "The Old People" that Sam is, in fact, "tainted" by white Southern standards: he is just as much an African American as he is Chickasaw. Here, Sam's racial formation troubles both his status as a paragon of the wilderness and Ike's most intimate mentor. Sam's embodied intimacies with both Blackness and his Chickasaw heritage as expressed through his literal place in the world cannot be partitioned off as Ike's imagination would have it. Since Ike's wilderness cannot abide a Black presence as anything other than subordinate, his racial imagining of Sam cannot abide with his Blackness either. He must, then, un-imagine Sam's Blackness, accepting him only in part while claiming that part as an uncorrupted whole. Such a rejection masked as acceptance is, in fact, not an expression of "incorruptible" intimacy at all. Rather, it is a mobile semiotic screen that blinds Ike to the lived experiences of his intimates and enables his environmental ignorance as the woods he so desperately loves fall, tree by tree, all around him.

Later, the reader will learn that Old Ben too is tainted, bearing the mark of an intrusive civilization through a trap-ruined paw. The ruination of the foot-as-injury marks Old Ben, making him discernible from other bears through the imprint he leaves behind. His footsteps literally leave the mark of man in his wake thus tainting and corrupting even as he walks. Again, much like Sam's Blackness, Ike cannot accept Old Ben's wound as an intimate marker thus leveraging his bad-faith belief systems to use Old Ben to an end rather than seeing him as a life in his own right. Lion, identified as a mongrel, a description that by its very definition implies taint, also fails any test of purity. He is, after all, a mongrel that is also figuratively in a

miscegenated marriage with Boon wherein Boon assumes the role of a woman, supplicating himself before a king, living with Lion, caring for him, and eventually loving him as a wife loves a husband even unto death (220, 243). And if, as the narrative implies, it is through association with the wilderness that these figures ascend to an incorruptible status, it bears mention that the first year of the chapter is 1883, twenty years after lumbering became Mississippi's number one industry.[9] In the 1880 alone, Mississippi produced 1.68 million board feet of lumber, had 295 sawmills active in the state with a total investment of 1 million dollars (26.8 million dollars in today's money), and the industry was converting to railroad logging which required one million board feet of timber *per mile* to be cut in order to meet expenses.[10] Far from an incorruptible, or even *uncorrupted* wilderness, Ike's beloved woods as a place of purity have already began to disappear. His symbols lack a clear referent which they point towards; they serve as screens, shielding him from the actual consequences of a legacy he will eventually attempt to repudiate.

The point here is to see that Ike's environmental imaginary reduces the specifics of place to a universalized Natural world in much the same manner that his racial imaginary erases the specifics of identity to universalize persons to tropes, intimates to undifferentiated figures. In Ike's racial imaginary Sam Fathers is both a remarkable intimate and the embodiment of Indianness. The members of Ike's Black family are both individuated relatives and embodiments of Blackness for his racial imaginary. In his environmental imaginary the specific concerns of denuded Delta bottomland are also an eternal "unnaxed wilderness," which by virtue of its eternity ought not fear modern progress. Finally, Old Ben is simultaneously a personified hunted animal and a universalized symbol for the spiritual awakening of a hunt. The consequences for

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[9] *Mississippi Forests and Forestry* by James E. Fickle, pg 50. For further information on the start of Mississippi timbering see Fickle, chapter 4: "The Bonanza Era: Mississippi Lumbering's Rise to National Prominence."
[10] *Mississippi* 75, 78, 80, 81.

this kind of metaphoric condensation matter for both the world of the novel and its extra-textual, real-world counterpart. In the most general of terms, Ike's semiotic nonsense shows that "The Bear" as well as the other wilderness chapters in *GDM* are much less about making any kind of specific environmental or racial intervention and are "really about the *invention* of nature or, more accurately, about the way…Ike McCaslin defines a natural world to invest it with special significance" (Evans 180). Taken a step further, such a claim suggests that Ike's articulations of the natural world as both immanent and transcendent are part of a larger complex of distinctly white, distinctly Southern ideas about nature's mythology because those distinctions are imbricated in the South's project of place-making and race-making in the American landscape.

If behavior is a function of the person in their environment, then the way that the person fantasizes and imagines that relationship as both immanent and transcendent, spiritual, and corporeal are also functions of the way they interact with the intimates around them.[11] Louise Westling's work supports this idea while also bringing gender to bear on the conversation. For Westling, "the landscape is at the heart of a gendered symbolic economy" in Faulkner's work (134). That economy maintains "the land [as] always female, always associated with dark powers and repulsive, mucky substances" (134). She further claims that in *GDM*, Faulkner accomplishes "a calm integration" of Ike into the "body of the earth," making Ike at once a potentially prototypical environmentalist and racial progressive. Yet, she also insists "the semiotic coding underlying this progressive understanding requires that African-Americans, and any dark-skinned people such as Indians, must be defined as extensions of a primal, essentially

[11] In 1936, six years before the publication of *GDM*, psychologist Kurt Lewin wrote a simple equation about the relationship between persons and their environment that still impacts today's economy. That equation is: B = f(P,E). Translated, this means "behavior is a function of the Person in their Environment." In other words, the environment is the invisible hand that shapes human behavior. By extension, then, the way a person imagines their environment is also an invisible hand that shapes the way they imagine their relationship to persons and figures that occupy that environment. A person's environmental imaginary, then, shapes a person's racial imaginary as well.

‘female’ reality” (135). The limitations of the Ike’s semiotic systems haunt him, much like his irreconcilable past, the unassimilable history of enslavement and Indigenous removal, and his morally suspect planter-class ethics which his alleged progressivism are predicated upon. Ike’s racial and environmental imaginary screen his exploitative rituals even as he believes they are how he has absolved himself from the failings of his white Southern culture.

### “Delta Autumn,” a Denuded Wild, and Uncle Ike’s Legacy

By the time *GDM* reaches Ike in “Delta Autumn,” he is more-or-less a living anachronism: an aged hunter on what may well be his last hunting trip whose legacy and structures of belief are out of sync with the present tense of the novel. The journey to the hunting grounds, and the wilderness itself have materially changed. Cars have replaced wagons, dirt roads have been replaced by asphalt, and by his own admission Ike is the “last of those who had once made the journey in wagons…and now those who accompanied him were the sons and even grandsons” of the first hunting parties (336). Whereas in Ike’s younger years the wilderness was located thirty miles from his home, now his party must drive two hundred miles from Jefferson (the county seat of Faulkner’s fictional Yoknapawtapha County) before finding wilderness to hunt in (340). The face of the land has changed as well. Paths made by deer and bears in time became roads, then highways. With the spread of the highways came more towns, replacing plantations with sharecropping farms, clear-cutting woods for cotton fields. In the absence of pinelands and hardwood forests, annual flooding from the Tallahatchie, Sunflower, and the Yazoo now bring both destruction and rich diluvium soil for cotton that is grown “up to the very doorsteps of the negroes who [work] it and of the white men who [own] it” (340). Along with these changes, the nonhuman world has changed too. The scream of the panther has been replaced by “the long hooting of the locomotives,” the inertia and power of bears (here, Old Ben

leaps to mind) have been replaced by “trains of incredible length” that are “drawn by a single engine since there is no gradient anywhere” (341). Modernity has destroyed Ike’s “unnaxed wilderness,” rendering that which he sees as beyond time, as eternal, a victim of time and progress.

Aside from exposing a culture of environmental destruction, the opening reverie of “Delta Autumn” also reveals Ike McCaslin’s troubling vision of his environmental stewardship. In his recollections of his early hunting years, Ike notes, “A man shot a doe or a fawn as quickly as he did a buck, and in the afternoon, they shot wild turkeys with pistols to test their stalking skill and marksmanship, feeding all but the breast to the dogs” (319). While Lawrence Buell uses Ike to argue that “Faulkner chose hunting narratives as his preferred vehicle for dramatizing and environmentalist commitment for a reason,” the reasoning Buell takes from Faulkner’s use of Ike stands at odds with the details of Ike’s wilderness practices (12). Certainly, there is merit to Buell’s claim that “it is arguably the case that since the birth of organized environmentalism in the late-nineteenth-century sportsmen have led the movement” (12). However, his association of Ike with narrative practices in the sporting world that retold “hunting and fishing stories in wilderness-friendly ways” rests on less stable ground. Ike’s recounting of his early hunting days does not show him or the members of the original hunting party as environmentally conscious in the least. In fact, they *over* hunt the land for “sport,” literally wasting and laying to waste the wilderness they claim to love so much.

Ike’s failure to realize an environmental ethic hinges on sentimental fantasies that comprise his later imaginary. There was no need to think in terms of an imminent conservation because game was everywhere, because the wilderness was too ubiquitous to be seen as fragile, and because he imagined the wilderness as an infinite, eternal resource. Considering the

consequences of this imaginary, Christopher Rieger's claim that "Faulkner shows humans dominating their natural environment to such a degree that interdependent natural and cultural systems are degraded" stands as the more apt reading over Buell's reading of Faulkner's hunters as early conservationists (140). According to Rieger, Faulkner "does not condemn certain actions as bad or immoral but eschews an authoritative center of value by portraying the rippling consequences of those actions through interconnected networks" (144). Instead of conservation, hunting signified and provided the means for a pervasive culture of taking. As Nicolas Proctor notes in his study on hunting traditions in the South, "as a definitively masculinist pursuit, hunting made an effective stage for increasingly elaborate exhibitions of masculinity and power" (1). In the place of conservation or stewardship, Ike's religiously flavored environmental imaginary expresses a kind of environmental mastery, a "multifaceted concept [that] helped white southern men define themselves as patriarchs and even, in some cases, paternalists" because that mastery represented "control over other people, animals, nature, and even death" (Proctor 61). Ike admits as much on his final hunting trip, stating "he still shot almost as well as he ever had, still killed almost as much of the game he saw as he ever killed" while also taking on the role of paternalist when telling the hunting party over dinner "Eat…eat it all up. I don't want a piece of town meat in camp after breakfast tomorrow. Then you boys will hunt. You'll have to" (320, 344). Even as the wilderness recedes and game grows ever scarcer in proportion to the years Ike has left, he continues to hunt, shoot, and kill just as much game as he sees while encouraging others to do the same thing. Practically, that means he has neither changed the culture of, nor developed an environmental ethics for the hunt. He has merely been slowed in his destruction by the consequences of his own choices while still fostering a sentimental love of the woods that enables an apologist's elegiac tone.

What this means for Ike's culture beliefs and environmental practices, then, is that while he understands the wilderness and its animal life as something to be protected and defended, as a resource that is somewhat a finite and disappearing, he also sees them as eternal, as ideals that exist for white men to become sanctified through the assertion of dominance. In the break between the practically finite woods and the culturally transcendent wilderness Ike makes himself a victim of his own imagination. Even as his beloved woods disappear around him, and even as he rightly sees humankind as responsible for that demise, he cannot see himself as complicit in the process. His vision of an ideal wilderness separated from culture makes it impossible for him to see the relationship between the very idea of a transcendent woods and the devastation of his cultural practices. Taken one step further, the relationship between Ike's past habits of exploitation predicated upon dissonant cultural beliefs and environmental practices are directly linked to a Southern racial imaginary. As Harrington points out, while Ike is surely an excellent shot and superior woodsman, his troubling legacy in the woods represents a "continuum in which disregard for creatures in the wild is linked to contempt for marginalized people in society" (523). The woods are supposed to be Ike's great cathedral—the place that god created "to give man the opportunity to learn restraint and responsibility" according to Robert Myers, or as the place where hunters could "control the world outside of themselves" according to Proctor (Myers 659, Proctor 65). However, Ike's "casual disregard" for environmental others in his most sacrosanct space unmasks the ways the white Southern environmental imaginary shapes its racial imaginary and vice versa. Environment and culture are mutually informative just as racial and environmental ethics are mutually constitutive. According to Rieger, *GDM* demonstrates that what Faulkner believed in his attitudes about race, gender, and intimacy are bound up with how one relates to nature, "but the text's ambivalence makes it unclear what

Faulkner thinks should be done about it" (153). While Rieger's grappling with the text's ambivalences is admirable, the specifics of "Delta Autumn" tell a different story. The actions of the men in the woods, complete with Ike's impotent sermons and his failure to get out of bed to greet his black cousin, reveal that all white men in the hunting party, not just Ike, imbricate their environmental and racial imaginaries, their hunting and social values. All of which is to say that while it may be difficult to parse exactly what Faulkner thinks ought to be done about the imbrication of cultural values, racial, and environmental ethics, the brief yet devastating "Delta Autumn" makes it quite clear how the men of the new hunting party act under that imbrication: with behaviors not much different from Uncle Buck's hunting his brother, or from those which allowed William Faulkner to presume he was the white child of the Black Caroline Barr.

Ike and the whole white hunting party's exploitative practices links to environmental and racial ethics with the metaphoric collapse of the Delta Woman—Roth Edmonds's former lover and the mother of his child—by Will Legate, the foul-mouthed hunting buddy of Roth and Ike. On the long drive from Jefferson to the hunting grounds, Roth jerks the car Ike, Roth, and Legate are riding into a halt and declares that his lack of desire to go on the annual trip. While Ike appears unaware for the reasons why Roth remains reticence in taking the trip, Legate hints through racist double-entendres that he is far more in the know about Roth's intentions. He calms Ike's frustrations with his kinsman, assuring Ike that Roth will continue with the trip: "Oh, Roth's coming…But he's got a doe in here. Of course, an old man like Uncle Ike can't be interested in no doe, not one that walks on two legs—when she's standing up that is. Pretty light colored too. The one he was after them nights last fall when he said he was going coon-hunting" (337). Legate both tropes on the Black female body as hyper-sexualized and collapses the Delta Woman's humanity into animality. He makes her an object of prey and marks her as expendable

game. Her value, if she has any in this white male space, comes from her status as a hunted animal—one that offers no trophy except for her meat. In one snide remark, Legate renders the Black female body animal, expendable, carnal, and consumable. In addition to those reductions, Legate's shift of doe to raccoon with "coon-hunting" puns on the all too familiar insult used by whites against Black people. Here, environmental beliefs and imagination coincide with racial beliefs and imagination to dehumanize the Black female body. The ingrained habits of white mastery over the environment imbricate with racist signification systems to render the Delta Woman racially other, environmentally other, and prey. Despite her status as Roth's lover and mother of his child, despite the remarkable intimacies needed to constitute such a relationship and bring life into the world, Roth, Legate, and the clueless Ike imagine her as hyper sexualized, like meat, like a second-rate piece of game.

The point in naming Legate's vulgarities is not just to indict the hunting party's seething racism, it is also to draw attention to the imbrication of racial and environmental imaginaries and the ethical failings of both that the Delta Woman exposes. Legate's metaphorical collapse of the Delta Woman into two animals that are stalked and killed makes it impossible for any member of the party to see the failure of personal ethics the wilderness allegedly cultivates because of their position inside false mastery from the start. The doe and raccoon ascribed to her identity communicates both their contempt and irreverence for her humanity. Or, conversely, as Christina Colvin argues, "the lack of ethical consideration for social others marked as 'animal' determines how real, material bodies and lives are treated" (95). Far from cultivating higher virtue, grander ethics, or a more refined sense of intimacy with others, the wilderness space these men have constructed through their environmental imagination enables the racism of their racial imagination. Ike's sacrosanct woods that have now become a degraded landscape are no

longer—if they ever were—a cathedral. Instead, it is a perverse space wherein the worst white cultural rituals are enacted and written into the landscape's code.

Legate's vulgar reductions of Ike's epic wilderness show how *all* Others who are not white and male and valued for their humanity are denigrated by Southern whiteness. Just as they are blind to their culpability for the clear-cut pines, the denuded delta, the over-worked soil, the acres of stumpage and the devastation of wildlife, so too are these first and second-generation progressive conservationists blind to the Black bodies, the Black lives, they leave in their wake. His language and belief structures reveal what is all too often missing from Ike's—and by literary extension Faulkner's—epic proclivities: an understanding and respect for the ways race functions in the non-epic, everyday experience, and construction of the epic imagination. The Southern white environmental imagination, as seen in Ike and Faulkner, is all too often blind to "a long history [that] exists of making nonhuman nature reflect racist exploitation and violence" (*Black on Earth* 4). In other words, the degradation of white Southern culture manifested by the denial of intimacies through Jim Crowism, deeply imbedded rituals of racism, and through the concomitant destruction of the larger Southern environment that all Southerners live in reveal that, while on the surface of things the South "is a land of great physical beauty and charm," beneath those lies lay "black blood and decayed black bodies. Beneath the charm [lies] the horror" (*Dirt* 37).

The legacy of white exploitation undergoes further complication because of the Delta Woman during the party's debate over dinner in the hunting camp. In typical Faulknerian fashion, the conversation winds and thickens around itself, spanning topics from Ike's humanist ethic, the past abundance of the woods as compared to its depleted present, the ethics of hunting and the role of game wardens, to finally Ike's view on god's reasoning during creation (345-49).

Running beneath the surface of Ike's sermonizing and the younger generations' resistances lurks the carnal reality of hunting in general and the racial tensions the Delta Woman literally brings to the table. Complicating matters further is that, even as the debate between the men spirals into abstraction, the "quasi-senile octogenarian" Ike seems unable to grasp the sexual double-entendres his younger companions intermingle with the terms of the conversation.[12] The ever-vulgar Legate breaks through Ike's high-minded rhetoric, crassly returning to the subject of Roth as the most accomplished hunter in the face of environmental demise: "I wouldn't say that Roth Edmonds was a poor hunter or [an] unlucky one either. A man that can hunt one doe every day and night for two weeks and still have the same doe left to hunt again next year—" (346). The party is spared the finer details of Legate's musings, but the point is nevertheless made: Roth is an accomplished hunter because he can take a doe, claim his trophy, and hunt that same doe again.

Legate's use of doe hunting as sexual conquest does not find a warm welcome amongst the others attempting to have something of a meaningful conversation. His return to Roth's sexual relationship with the Delta Woman as an open secret to everyone except Ike leads Henry Wyatt, Faulkner's "third speaker" to admonish Legate, telling him to eat some more on the off chance a full mouth will silence him (347). However, Legate's continued objectification of the Delta Woman points out the limitations of intimacies across racial lines in the wilderness. The fact is, Roth Edmonds had a relationship with the Delta Woman that lasted for months, including living together in New Mexico, and resulted in a child. Earlier on the trip, Legate signals that he is aware of those living conditions as well, again putting Roth on the spot and upsetting the balance of semi-unspoken, racially determinate controls. Cohabitation, the literal sharing of life,

[12] I am indebted to Lawrence Buell for that wonderfully succinct description of Ike in "Delta Autumn."

space, bodies, love, and a child across racial divisions, by necessity happened in a wholly different environment: a different state (New Mexico), in a different region (the West instead of the South), where the desert is the dominant landscape not the woods, delta, or semi-tropics of Mississippi. This suggests that the depleted and denuded Southern woods are not just dead and dying but also incapable of supporting new life, new cultural horizons, new terms and forms of intimacy as longs as whiteness remains in control of the culture and environment.[13] The only way the relationship between Roth and the Delta Woman can be discussed is through metaphoric condensation. The Delta Woman's reduction to animal status denies her humanity and, in turn, continues practices of intimacy at arm's length by protecting white social values while simultaneously exposing the underlying cultural delimiting of the woods along racial lines.

Ike's limited ability to follow along with the racial twists of the dinner debate stem from the complicated racial heritage he carries with him into the wilderness. While he views himself as a moral exemplum, or at least someone who has lived an ethically bounded life because of his love of the woods and his repudiation of the past, he nevertheless carries the trappings of whiteness and Southern culture with him into the big woods. Harry Thomas notes a similar translation of white culture into the woods of the South, stating, "The power structures which exist in and around the plantation do not wither away and disappear inside the big woods; the men who go to the camp to hunt each November carry their privileges and prejudices with them, quite intact" (568). Caroline Finney goes even further, arguing in the context of environmental belonging for Black folks in presumed white environmental spaces that "whiteness as a way of

[13] Faulkner's use of New Mexico as the setting for this relationship is not arbitrary. While California and Nevada both had anti-miscegenation laws as well as prohibitions against cohabitation for inter-racial couples, New Mexico did not. New Mexico's anti-miscegenation laws were appealed in 1866 before it became a state in 1912. Thus, New Mexico was not only a new environment for the lovers, it was also a legally safe one. For more information on the timeline of prohibitions against interracial marriage and cohabitation, see Werner Sollors's *Neither Black nor White yet Both*, "Appendix B: Prohibitions of Interracial Marriage and Cohabitation" (395-411).

knowing becomes *the* way of understanding our environment, and through representation and rhetoric, becomes part of our educational systems, our institutions, and our personal beliefs" (3). In other words, Ike can neither repudiate his plantation past by retreating to the woods as a pure space nor can he or the other members of the party leave whiteness at the border of the woods because that racial, social, environmental, and cultural construct forms *the* backbone of how they know and understand the space in the first place. For the younger Legate, Wyatt, and Roth, the privileges and prejudices of whiteness manifest in their language, habits of intimacy, and the hyper-sexualization of the Delta Woman. But for Ike, things are more subtle. That he fails to grasp Roth's lover is Black speaks to his failed repudiation of his plantation past, family, and title. Even in a place and space, even in an environment of "time becoming time," there is no escaping the past. There is only a slow coming reckoning with that past in the present.

While Ike's complicated relationship with his past (and the hunting party's failures to rise to his ethical standards) expose how his privilege works in mutually constructing a racial and environmental imaginary, there are less mythical and more quotidian ways racisms undergird the space as well. In particular, the arrangement and hierarchy of the camp exposes substructural labor expectations along racial lines like those followed in Major de Spain's camp. Even as "Delta Autumn" is set in the contemporary moment of the novel (signaled by Roth Edmonds's reference to Roosevelt and Willkie, Presidential candidates for the 1940 election), readers do not learn that there has been a physical Black presence on the trip until the party arrives at the site (327). Here, Ike's ability to lead two horses from a trailer functions as an early signal of both his insulation against "the corruption of steel and oiled moving parts which tainted the others," as well as mastery over his environment (342). Along similar lines, Ike's authority in directing Isham, the Black camp cook, to gather firewood, set camp, and have breakfast ready by 4am

affirms a domesticated status to the racial intimates that share the wilderness space with him while also signaling a sense of mastery of intimate Others that has been ingrained in him through his own Southern culture. Even though these same Black men have been coming with him every year and are no doubt just as familiar with the woods as he is, the legacy of his white privilege—the very thing he thought to repudiate—makes him blind to their presence in that capacity. To borrow from Thomas once again, "The disintegration of race in the wilderness is a story that the members of Yoknapatawpha's ruling class like to tell themselves, not a fact" (568). Or, as Finney argues, representations of the Great Outdoors are racialized, which results in a "narrative about the environment that is deemed at once authentic and universal and that denies the complexity of experiences that non-dominant groups have encountered historically" (10). However repudiated, Ike remains a member of that ruling class because of the elite access he has to the culturally marked white space of the wilderness. However progressive Ike imagines his wilderness ethic to be, the environmental imaginary such an ethic depends upon remains imbricated with a racial imaginary in such a way that ingrained habits of racism and racialization are always carried into the wilderness on an epic or quotidian scale.

Even as Ike's cultural memory allows him to believe his strict binaries between Black/white and wilderness/civilization are absolute, the presence of Blackness begins to desediment his certainties and assumed environmental authority. In a night of haunted memory, Ike returns to his repudiation of his birthright noting that in his actions he was "juxtaposed not against the wilderness but against the tamed land" and that although his abjuration could never "cure the wrong and eradicate the shame" of incest and miscegenation in his family, at least he could "repudiate the wrong and the shame, at least in principle, and at least the land itself in fact" (334). Ike's reverie calls attention to three important instabilities. First, his comparison of tamed

land versus wilderness presupposes a primal landscape understood as wild prior to the land being tamed. What he fails to understand, however, is that much like Ta-Nehisi Coates' claims that the formation of race comes after racism, so too does the wilderness come after the primacy of tamed land. In other words, Ike fails to see that his repudiation of his plantation under the rubric of a wilderness ethic is only possible because of the rituals, habits, and relationship to the land established by the plantation past. While he does very well believe he has removed himself from the limitations, racisms, and trapping of civilization by retreating to the wilderness, that retreat is only possible because of culture's tamed land in the first place.

Second, Ike's self-justifying arguments on rather unstable ecocritical ground. While such a claim is certainly open to charges of anachronistic application, given Ike's firm belief in his own progressive ethics and critical claims of the same certitude, the claim nevertheless obtains. The wilderness is a social construction and, as William Cronon argues, "if by definition wilderness leaves no place for human beings, save perhaps as contemplative sojourners enjoying their reverie in God's natural cathedral—then also by definition it can offer no solution to the environmental and other problems that confront us" (17). Ike, literally, cannot get outside of himself or his environment to solve the problems of both his wilderness and social environments. He is trapped by the imbrications of his own imaginary.

Finally, by the end of his reverie a slippage happens in Ike's white proprietorship: he claims the *wilderness* as his own, "Because this was his land— " (335). His claim to ownership of the wilderness suggests Ike has not repudiated anything, further indicating the limits of his racial and environmental imaginary. As a white man he has merely shifted his ownership of titled land to untitled land—a shift that is wholly within the legacy of settler-colonial white exploitation, and one that brings Ike's compromised position all the way back to Sam Fathers,

indigenous understandings of belonging, and Ike's importing of white values into his habit of playing Indian. This slippage excavates the failure in Ike's denial of the wrong and the shame of his past: to deny a wrong and a shame one must first admit to their existence. Ike cannot deny the thing that he must first admit into being. That is an act of bad faith. While Ike is no environmentalist, he is certainly no stranger to God's cathedral and creates the wilderness to "solve" his other problems, specifically those of incest and miscegenation.

Ironically, it is at this moment when Ike lays claim to the wilderness as *his* land, that Blackness looms large over him in his tent. Ike, lying in bed, sees in the dark what he thinks is the youngest servant in the camp rise to stoke the fire. The text reads, "The shadow of the youngest negro loomed" (335). The heavy literariness of the passage is a bit contrived. The looming shadow of Blackness over the aged white hunter not only feels forced on the part of Faulkner but also reads like an overly deliberate attempt to account for Blackness in what has otherwise been understood as a white space. Yet, the literariness can be forgiven because of the transformation that takes place in a moment of recognition: "the negro's shadow remained, by its length and breadth, standing, since it covered most of the ceiling, until after a moment he raised himself on one elbow to look. It was not the negro, it was his kinsman" (336). Here, the specificity of a particular Black body slips into the more mythic "negro's shadow" that becomes "not negro" to finally "kinsman." The Blackness that Ike sought to contain by first creating an unstable juxtaposition between wilderness and tamed land, and then sought to contain through a failed repudiation of the past ruptures both of these limits by appearing in Ike's most intimate space—his hunting tent in the wilderness that forms the substructure of his liberal repudiation—in the guise of his kinsman Roth, who, too, is repeating the past that Ike thought to escape—at least in principle. In other words, Blackness undermines Ike's narrative of liberal progression

from plantation heir to wilderness priest by exposing the residues of settler-colonial practices that established his patriarchal status, the afterlife of enslavement from the subject position of enslaver that forms his racial imaginary, and the intimacies he shares across racial lines in his family history. While the ground has yet to disappear from beneath his feet, the textual agency of Blackness has begun to undermine the limits Ike has set throughout his life. Despite his best efforts, Blackness has entered his spaces, challenged his understanding of self, and began uprooting his sense of righteousness through revelation of his morally untenable contradictions.

Predictably, even as the hauntings of his past begin to take form, and even as Blackness begins to unravel and break the confines of a white signification systems, Ike retreats to the sanctity of his imagined woods. Rather than accept the totality of his racial and environmental imaginary as intimately co-inscribed, rather than evolve into a more just mode of relation, Ike regresses to a simpler binary wherein environment and his intimacy with it has no racial dimension. Falling into the trap of eternity once again, he sees himself and the woods as "coevals" as "two spans running out together, not toward oblivion, nothingness, but into a dimension free of both time and space" (337). This "escapist fantasy" of Ike's, as Lawrence Buell calls it, marks his last effort to avoid integrating "his mythic wilderness experiences into a problematic civilization" as Robert Myers points out (656). Yet, within his "mythic wilderness experiences," the binaries Ike has depended upon throughout *GDM*, wilderness/civilization, past/eternity, freedom/repudiation, culture/hunting, are further undercut by the textual agency of Blackness, the racial marker that continually breaks free of all limits imposed on it. Seen this way, the woods materialize then, not as some antithesis of the plantation life as Ike claims, but as the last remaining residue of the transgressions Ike sought to negate by denying that plantation life. Richard Godden suggests, then, "In Ike's world, nothing is what it seems; rather it is what it

is not: evoked without being made quite manifest" through the lingering experiences of his failed negation of his familial past (6); through the legacy of white exploitation Ike seeks to repudiate but unknowingly embraces; through his dependency on the wild.

The final catastrophe for Ike's containment strategy is a slow one, beginning just before the actual arrival of the Delta Woman to Ike's tent on the morning after his night of the dark soul. Old, tired, and weak, Ike remains in his pajamas as the other men in the camp head out to hunt. Roth, rather than face the woman he knows is stalking him, makes Ike the messenger of his own present-day repudiation. Unable to face the consequences of what his exploitative practices and privileges have wrought, Roth's flight into a deforested and denuded wild falls short of the ethic Ike believes the wilderness teaches all men. Gary Harrington reads Roth's flight as evidence that he is "a bad hunter, and he is a worse human being, repudiating both the mother of his child and the child himself because of a trace of black blood" (522). Roth, then, misses two marks: hunter as ideal and moral exemplum. Rather than master of his environment, he is a coward fleeing from the possibility of love his past choices contain.

The second fissure of white containment comes when the Delta Woman enters Ike's tent. Ike, still in his undressed state, receives the woman who enters "in a man's hat and a man's slicker and rubber boots" (339). Here, the legendary white male hunter that Ike embodied in youth is reduced to dirty underwear and old age with "the soiled undergarments bagging about him and the twisted blankets huddled up to his hips" whereas the Black female body comes garbed as a man, entering into a male space. She is composed, in control, and dangerous, "bringing something else, something intangible, an effluvium which he knew he would recognize in a moment because Isham had already warned him" (340). Blackness here is described as an "effluvium" a sensible thing, like an odor—a stench—that cannot be contained. While

Faulkner's descriptions of Blackness are problematic, the main point is to see the ways that Ike *already* knows without admitting it to himself that his control and containment of Blackness has been compromised (if he ever had control in the first place). The white space of the tent is already no longer Ike's, he simply lacks the capacity to understand its loss. The Delta Woman who has, this whole time, been limited by her sexuality and racialization enters Ike's world in the position of power. Wilderness as an escapist fantasy has faded and the reality of Blackness has taken the lead. Ike's presumptive control over his environment in the white male space of the camp has been compromised; He cannot even stand before the strength of a Black female presence—a presence that has persisted and survived in the face of destruction, a presence that brings new life into his place of old death.

When Ike racially identifies the Delta Woman because of her labor as a laundress, his thoughts spiral out of control, skipping both time and space. His racial epiphany leaves Ike screaming internally, "*Maybe in a thousand or two thousand years in America…But not now! Not now!*" (343). Ike, in the winter of his life, cannot stomach the miscegenation that had his kinsman Roth living as a man and wife with a Black woman. Moreover, his terror exposes his timeline for change for racial intimacies: one or two millennia. So much for being progressive. Mark Decker reads Ike's break as "giv[ing] voice to the fears of a Southern society trapped within its own dread of cultural change that can easily be coded as contamination" (471). This idea of contamination fits well with the "effluvium" Ike senses in the Delta Woman as well as the ways her presence can be seen as "contaminating" the hunting grounds and the pristine imaginary that Ike has constructed for himself after his own act of repudiation. Louise Westling assumes something of a more generous tone, arguing that "if Isaac McCaslin cannot rise to welcome his young cousin and her young baby," and if Ike's thoughts are bitterly racist,

"Faulkner nevertheless sets them in a context that condemns Ike's passivity and his meanness of spirit" (141). While Ike cannot fathom the Delta Woman's choices knowing full well the incestuous implications of her actions, nevertheless she opposes Ike's expectations while *standing* in judgement of him. When she refuses to conform to Ike's ingrained cultural expectations of Blackness, the Delta Woman not only bursts the limits of his language, but she also exposes the deep flaws of Ike's exploitative legacy by admitting to him she came to the camp with an expectation of "nothing," thus asserting her radical agency through intentionally emptied expectations.

In the end, the Delta Woman wounds Ike to the point where he can no longer recognize himself in the words he speaks or the actions he takes. As the scene reaches its fullest pitch, Ike gives her the gift of his hunting horn and in a "voice running away with him" he tells the woman to "marry a black man" because "then she will forget all this, forget it ever happened, that [Roth] ever existed" (346). Ike's urge to forget marks his last effort at containment wherein he orders the Delta Woman to simultaneously abandon the past that brought the promise of new life in her child and to foreclose any potential future that child might have beyond the limitations of a white imaginary. It is the last of his white legacy before the future Delta Woman represents. Harry Thomas suggests that in this exchange the "fiction of white supremacy and the poisonous legacy of racism, which Ike thinks he has renounced, have caused him to see her this way, and his lifetime spent observing the aristocratic code of Southern sportsmanship shapes his interactions with member of the lesser species" comes full circle (573). Ike's admonishment to forget not only hopes to reassert his deeply racist habits couched as aristocratic values, but it also perpetuates the habits of destruction he has lived his whole life because the order itself shows a desire for the Delta Woman's future to follow the same racially isolated and determinate patterns

of the past. His efforts fail. Blackness and the life of the child will not be held in check or kept contained by the whiteness of Ike or any others in the camp.

Thus, at the height of Ike's failing legacy, in the most intimate of his spaces, the Delta Woman says to him, "Old man…have you lived so long and forgotten so much that you don't remember anything you ever knew or felt or even heard about love?" (346). The Delta Woman who has been identified as a doe, a sexual object, as something to be hunted, a piece of town meat, a raccoon, the carrier of an effluvium, breaks free of all these signification limitations with her singular recognition of love—her recognition that Ike has never known, felt, or heard of that love in her way. Moreover, her claim to that knowledge ruptures the racisms used against her in her absence. She stands for love, not hate. She defies white expectations of recompense just as Caroline Barr confounded Faulkner's expectations expressed in the novel's dedication. Ike's failed expiation of whiteness and cultural habits of exploitation are exposed in all their frailty by love and Blackness. By entering the camp, seeking the father of her child, bringing life into a space of death and destruction, and standing in the face of old customs, traditions, prejudices, and racisms that undergird Ike's world, the Delta woman singularly offers a reckoning for white southern environmental imaginings. She destabilizes, denaturalizes, and demystifies Ike's corrupted ethos as well as his fantasy environment. She reconfigures that space on her terms through the fierceness of her survival, with the power of her otherness, the multiplicity her child signifies. She stands for hope.

## Conclusion

In *The Limits of Critique*, Rita Felski takes issue with a critical assessment rubric wherein literature's aesthetic and social worth "can only be cashed out in terms of a rhetoric of *againstness*." In her argument, she asserts that critics "shortchange the significance of art by

focusing on the ‘de’ prefix (its power to demystify, destabilize, denaturalize) at the expense of the ‘re’ prefix: its ability to recontextualize, reconfigure, or recharge perception.” For Felski, too much emphasis has been placed on the power of art to subvert and not enough has been placed on the power to convert; there has been too much “highlight[ing] the sphere of agon (conflict and domination) at the expense of eros (love and connection).” Contrary to these trends, her interests lie in the power of art to transform, “a transformation that is not just a matter of intellectual readjustment but one of affective realignment (a shift in mood, a sharpened sensation, an unexpected surge of affinity or disorientation)” (17). As such, Felski’s assessment of critique leads to her assertion that “critique overestimates the transcendent force of its own self-consciousness” because “to believe that we can ‘denaturalize’ the assumptions that make our thinking possible, that we can distance ourselves from the very patterns of belief that make us who we are, is to chase the old dream of philosophical transcendence, of the view from nowhere” (81).

While I am sympathetic to Felski’s frustration with the “againstness” in criticism, her move to be against criticism’s “againstness” overlooks the intimate relationship between the “de” and “re” she insists upon separating. *Go Down, Moses* speaks directly to the power of that intimacy. Without the demystification of Ike’s environmental imaginary through a close reading of the rhetorical contortions necessary for its construction, there could be no recontextualization of that transcendent fantasy as wholly bound by racial, cultural, social expectations. Without the destabilization of Ike’s—and by extension Faulkner’s—environmental ethics through an interrogation of intimacy at arm’s length for Indianness, Blackness, as well as the metaphorical collapse of racial and environmental others, there could be no reconfiguration of that ethics as a perpetuation of settler-colonial values despite claims to progressivism. Indeed, without the

denaturalization of Ike's world made possible by recognizing the radical textual agency of Blackness and the Delta Woman in Ike's last grasp at an eternal woods, there would be no chance at recharging a decimated, denuded, and depleted landscape through the hope and promise of otherness and multiplicity the Delta Woman and her child signify. In short, without a critical recognition of the text's self-desedimentation, there would be neither an intellectual readjustment regarding how environments are imagined and represented through language, nor would there be an affective realignment to those environments as specifically made, specifically structured, and specifically racialized formations.

When William Faulkner claimed to Robert Hass that *Go Down, Moses* was a novel about racial relations in the South, he no doubt made that claim in earnest. When Faulkner dedicated the novel to one the most significant intimates of his life—Caroline Barr—he no doubt made that gesture in earnest as well. Yet, in writing a novel about racial relations, a novel that has been consistently described in terms of elegy, Faulkner also wrote a novel just as invested in the environment. Even as the language of the novel oscillates between a view from nowhere and a view from a specific somewhere, the novel's textual richness requires a multi-valent approach wherein Modernism, Southern Studies, and ecocritical approaches to literature work as critical intimates in the pursuit of a more nuanced understanding of the novel's rhetorical work. Faulkner's last great work implicitly and explicitly recognizes that race and the environment are wholly intertwined, are mutually constitutive because of the intimacies shared between his imbrication of race, gender, and the land throughout the novel. While the novel expresses neither a complete racial nor environmental ethic let alone an overarching one that can encapsulate both on equal terms, such shortcomings do not mean the novel ought to be judged by its failures alone. Rather, such failures can be more productively understood as providing an opportunity to

hold the agon of conflict and domination and the eros of love and connection together in one space. Understood this way, reading the novel becomes and exercise in changing perspectives; it becomes a matter of attending to a multitude of critical intimacies.

CHAPTER IV

# SWAMPS AND COTTON: W.E.B. DU BOIS'S *QUEST OF THE SILVER FLEECE* AND A BLACK SOUTH'S PROMISE

## Introduction

While the first two chapters of this project argue Margaret Mitchell and William Faulkner often dominate conversations of popular and Modernist understandings of the South in terms of whiteness, this chapter turns to representations of a Black South to argue whites neither have a monopoly over the region nor exercise complete control over its environmental imagination. Just as Mitchell and Faulkner draw from personal Southern experiences as the source for their works—works that present varied, yet similar kinds of conservative racial modernity reliant on the imbrication of environmental and racial rhetorics as a bedrock—the South has loomed large in the works of Black authors, artists, and scholars. Authors, poets, and public figures such as Frederick Douglass, Harriet Jacobs, Ida B. Wells, Charles Chesnutt, Paul Lawrence Dunbar, Booker T. Washington, James Weldon Johnson, Richard Wright, W.E.B. Du Bois, Alain Locke, Langston Hughes, Jean Toomer, Zora Neale Hurston, Toni Morrison, Alice Walker, Alice Randall, and Jesmyn Ward (to name only a few) draw on their own double-edged relationship with the South and its environment as a made thing. Their works evince a complex affective attachment to the region that speaks to the doubleness of both belonging to and feeling alienated from the region. This is a doubleness that also uses the region to metonymically bespeak a similar relationship with the larger nation. Given the scope of African American literary engagement with the South, it stands to reason that whatever hegemonic grip the white Southern environmental imagination claims for the region continues to exist alongside other, alternative

imaginings afforded by Black authorship.

Considering those alternatives, this chapter breaks with the chronological organization afforded by the first Mitchell/Faulkner pairing but keeps with larger geographical and regional principles to argue the intimacies Black people share with the South present alternative Southern environments and Southern imaginaries that differ from their white counterparts in both rhetorical representations and political possibilities. By drawing on W.E.B Du Bois's *The Souls of Black Folks* and *The Quest of the Silver Fleece*, this chapter claims that more than a counternarrative to white supremacy, Du Bois's use of a Black Southern environmental imagination offers an alternative rendering of the region. In Du Bois's writings, the imbrication of race, place, and environment coupled with the rhetorics of nostalgia do not signify yearning for a lost past predicated on racial and environmental control. Instead, Du Bois's Southern environmental imagination recognizes the limitations of white supremacy in the face of modernity while also creating life-affirming futures through intimate relationships between land, history, and identity. Du Bois's rhetorics figure a more future-oriented, socially just South by showing how Black life, Black labor, and Black agency help direct the course of modernity for the region and nation even as Black Folks were regularly seen as stagnated in a past they could not escape. Through his use of sociology, racial uplift, activist scholarship, and self-theorizing fiction, Du Bois offers an informed alternative to the white South that places Black Folks at the vanguard to its potential progress. By attending to the correlations between racial and environmental rhetorics in Du Bois's early writings composed during his time in Atlanta, this chapter argues his attachments reveal a confidence for the region despite the South's status as the historical seat of racial terrorism. Finally, the chapter asserts that *Fleece's* narrative complexity demonstrates political participation in larger discourses surrounding the significance of the Black

South as actively contributing to the nation's future.

### The Black South and Du Bois's Theoretical Foundations

W.E.B. Du Bois stands as one of the great lions in African American literature and American history. The first Black man to earn a doctorate from Harvard, a sociologist, socialist, historian, writer, activist, long-term editor of *The Crisis*, key participant in the New Negro Renaissance as well as an original founder for the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, one is hard pressed to find a more towering intellect. However, when thinking of the South and Southern literary production, he is hardly the first person that leaps to mind. Du Bois is more readily associated with the industrial, metropolitan, and progressive North rather than the contrarily imagined agrarian, rural, and conservative South. Moreover, scholarship on Du Bois has followed an understandable trend over the last few decades wherein the arc of his influence and thought traces a more pronounced diasporic line. With the shift in Modernist Studies towards a transnational scope, with Black Studies—especially in an American context—turning towards Black cosmopolitanism and Black internationalism, and with New Southern Studies' own struggles to include non-white writers and figures in its archival choices, that Du Bois's earlier Southern contexts would fall to the wayside is understandable. Yet, to overlook the force of the South on Du Bois's work at the turn of the twentieth century potentially diminishes a key—if not central—context for his theoretical formations of the Veil and double-consciousness that find their origins in *The Souls of Black Folks* and his understudied first bildungsroman, *The Quest of the Silver Fleece*.

Du Bois's attachments to the South as a region steeped in both the problem of the color line in the twentieth century and, to a lesser realized extent, the relationship between Black Folks and the environment arguably begins with his first college experiences at Fisk University, a

"bundling off" he describes variously as heeding "the call of the Black South," as a move from the North to "the South of slavery, rebellion and Black folk," and as a geographical relocation where he was "going to meet colored people of my own age and education, of my own ambitions" (*Dusk* 569-70). From these experiences, Du Bois writes how the "continuing and recurring horror" of lynchings during his college days was a "scar upon [his] soul" and led to a discovery of his initial "problem": how, "into the inevitable and logical democracy which was spreading over the world, could [B]lack folk in America and particularly the South be openly and effectively admitted; and the colored people of the world allowed their own self-government" (*Dusk* 575). Here, Du Bois speaks of an early sense of both American democratic failures for Black Folks and global racial politics that comes to him through his Southern experiences. By his own admission, his interest in global Blackness and American politics for Black Folks began with his Southern journey—a migration he expresses in geography, thought, and experiences. This is both a cultural and historical argument on his part. Not only was the South a radically different agrarian environment than his home in Great Barrington, Massachusetts, the South was also the seat of Blackness in the United States. In 1885, the year he went to Fisk, ninety-percent of the Black population in the United States lived in the South.[1] In 1900, less than 740,000 Black Folks lived in the northern states, a number just shy of the eight-percent of the nation's total Black population.[2] In other words, for the seventeen year-old Du Bois to go from Great Barrington, Massachusetts to Nashville, Tennessee and Fisk University was not only a move in pursuit of a college education, it was also a move that gifted him a more intimate understanding of Blackness in the United States because in the early 1900s, the South was Black.

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[1] Census, United States Bureau of the (July 23, 2010). "Migrations – The African-American Mosaic Exhibition – Exhibitions (Library of Congress)"

[2] Gregory *The Southern Diaspora*, 18.

During his three years at Fisk (he was admitted as a sophomore due to his superior Northern education),[3] Du Bois learned a good deal about the South. According to his biographer, David Lewis, he "had experiences no amount of reading in the North could have equaled. First came the barbaric violence as pandemic to the South as kudzu. Lynching of African-Americans, soon to reach such volume as to become one of the region's past-times, was beginning its steady, ghoulish rise" (56). In 1888, the year he earned his bachelor's degree, there were 137 lynchings in the South alone. In the three years he spent in Tennessee, there were an estimated total of 287 Black lives taken by this preferred method of racial terrorism.[4] Alongside these horrors, various legislative moves across the Southern states began their focused project of disenfranchisement and legalized social controls for the Black body. Jim Crow was on the rise, stealing the right to vote and alienating one of the South's largest political bodies in a bid to protect and preserve the interests of white supremacy. These experiences from Du Bois's undergraduate work sowed the early seeds of what would grow into the racial activism of his later years. After his time at Fisk, Du Bois would move on to Harvard from 1888 through 1890 where he was awarded the Bachelor's in History. In 1891 he studied in Harvard's graduate sociology program for one year before moving to Berlin to continue his work. He returned to Harvard in 1895 where he earned his PhD. He completed his global and intellectual travels by returning to the South with his doctoral thesis: "The Large and Small-Scale System of Agriculture in the Southern U.S., 1840-1890."

As a newly-hooded PhD, Du Bois spent two tumultuous years at Wilberforce University, one year at the University of Pennsylvania where he worked on his first major scholarly work,

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[3] Lewis; 49

[4] "Lynchings: By Year and Race". University of Missouri-Kansas City School of Law. Archived from the original on July 24, 2010. Retrieved July 26, 2010. "Statistics provided by the Archives at Tuskegee Institute."

*The Philadelphia Negro*, and then finally returned to the South to accept a professorship at Atlanta University, a position he held from 1897 until 1910 when he left Atlanta for New York. According to Lewis's biography, "for Du Bois, the twelve Atlanta years were the best and worst of times" wherein he created some of his longest-lasting and most significant friendships, grew his young family, and "suffered [the South's racial climate] philosophically in the belief that a few years of pathbreaking scholarship would draw the generous attention of mainstream academe and philanthropy" (154). Those twelve Atlanta years included the publication of *The Philadelphia Negro* in 1899, an annual conference he hosted titled, "The Atlanta Conference of Negro Problems" from 1896-1914, his attendance at the first Pan-African Conference in 1900, the publication of *The Souls of Black Folks* in 1903, the founding of the Niagara Movement in 1905 (incorporated in 1906), much of the drafting of *The Quest of the Silver Fleece* (published in 1911, his first year in New York), and finally his decisive break with Booker T. Washington and what Du Bois referred to as "the Tuskegee Machine,"—a separation that catapulted him to the forefront of race leadership in the United States.

Personally, during his Southern years, Du Bois lived the nightmare of Sam Hose's lynching in 1899, a life-altering event that led to his declaration in *Dusk* that "one could not be a calm, cool, and detached scientist while Negroes were lynched, murdered and starved" (603). He also lived through the Atlanta Race Riot of 1906. Du Bois saw during this two-day massacre an estimated one hundred Black lives taken with impunity while he guarded his family and home by sitting on his front porch with a shotgun.[5] His Atlanta years also saw the birth, and death of his son Burghardt, a tragedy that provides the elegiac prose of "The Passing of the First Born" in *Souls*, as well as the birth of his daughter, Yolande, in 1900. In *Dusk* he notes that between 1895

[5] Lewis; 224-26

and 1909, the bulk of which he lived in Atlanta, "the whole South disenfranchised its Negro voters by unfair and illegal restrictions and passed a series of 'Jim Crow' laws which made the Negro citizen a subordinate class" (594). As he writes in *Dusk,* he saw in the sixteen years of his teaching nearly two thousand Black lives murdered through racial terrorism while expressing outrage that "not a single one of the murderers were punished" (593). Du Bois's Southern years wholly coincided with the nadir of racial relations in the United States at the turn of the century while also forming, through his various personal and professional triumphs and losses, the heart of his racial awakening.

Given the cultural, social, and political contexts throughout the time of Du Bois's early writings, his interest in the South as well as the conditions of Southern Black Folks as indicative of the larger problem of the color line makes sense. While racism was (and is) present in all regions of the United States, the South presented a particularly focused and concentrated area to study. Jim Crow laws, the perpetuated fantasy of a Lost Cause by Southern whites, the politics of disenfranchisement, the economic exploitation of share cropping, and racial terrorism from lynch mobs all made for a more compelling ground on which to build an argument for racial uplift. As Daphne Lamothe argues for *Souls* and Southern Blackness, "Du Bois produc[ed] an alternative reading that underscores the Southern country Folks' passage through time. He emphasizes the importance of their temporal progress, their steady, collective march into the future not visible to the outside" (52). The importance of Du Bois's Southern visions become particularly convincing when looking to the earlier, thematically correlated *Souls* and *Silver Fleece.* In these two texts, the imbricated relationship between race and the environment, the politics of racial uplift and Black labor, the Southern Black environmental imagination and the processes of modernity come into sharp focus. By looking to Du Bois's rhetorics in these works from the earlier part of the

twentieth century, the impact of his alternative South on the course of modernity through its representation as the seat of Black hope and the wellspring of Black life are made apparent. One sees the importance of such an alternative in his environmental emphasis on agrarianism, and Black Folks as the highest representation of American culture.

The interlocking theoretical formations of the Veil and double-consciousness in Du Bois's *Souls* comprise the foundation for much of his interventions throughout that text as well as his first novel, *The Quest of the Silver Fleece*. He introduces the idea of the Veil in the "Forethought" of *Souls* wherein he implicitly links the "strange meaning of being Black" to the process of modernity at the dawning of the Twentieth century in the first sentence (359). After his rather Victorian opening asking the reader for "charity" while simultaneously begging preemptive forgiveness for any "mistakes or foibles" for the sake of his "passion" and "faith," Du Bois tells the reader that, in writing *Souls*, he has "stepped within the Veil, raising it that you [the reader] may view faintly its deeper recesses,—the meaning of its religion, the passion of its human sorrow, and the struggle of its greater souls" (359). Through this gambit, Du Bois rhetorically positions himself on one side of the color line by stepping "within" the Veil while simultaneously positioning the reader as, if not a white and on the other side of the line, then at least as one ignorant of the "deeper recesses" of Black life. Such positioning, in turn, supports his implicit argument that there is not only deeper meaning to Black life in religion, human passion, sorrow, and "struggle," but that this life has always existed within the larger doings of American culture.

Later, in his first chapter, "Of Our Spiritual Strivings," Du Bois elaborates on the concept of the Veil by linking the logics of "between-ness" to Blackness. This connection, in turn, makes his very being a problem of identity that can only expressed with his idea of double-

consciousness (363). By first drawing on the question of his reaction to "these Southern outrages" (a generalized reference to any number of racial crimes not the least of which include voter suppression, disenfranchisement, Jim Crow laws, and lynchings), then the larger question of his "status" as a problem, and finally the childhood memory of his first realization of a racial divide at school, Du Bois notes that, with a "certain suddenness" his experience of racial difference shut him out of a white world with a "vast Veil" (364). From this articulation of national tension, ontology, personal history and social forces, he expands outwards in his theoretical intervention, stating famously that "the Negro is a sort of seventh son, born with a Veil and gifted with second-sight in the American world,—a world which yields him no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world. It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity" (364). Here, Du Bois conjoins his figuration of the Veil and his realization of a double-consciousness while weaving together the various threads of Black experience covered in the first two paragraphs of the chapter. With this new outline, Du Bois shows how the Veil and double-consciousness work in concert with one another to *gift* a "second-sight" to Black Folks in the America.

The gift of second-sight transforms Blackness—which was assumed and continues to be assumed by many to be a limitation—into an advantage. Yet, in turning limitation into advantage, Du Bois does not lose sight of the problem of Blackness, at least when imagined by the white world; he still recognizes the peculiarity of the sensation of this "two-ness" as well as the burden of "measuring" a "soul" by the tape of a world that itself is limited in its view by "contempt and pity." As such, the coeval concepts of the Veil and double-consciousness are

never without irony. They are always at once seemingly restricted by the measurements of pity and contempt from a non-Black vantage point yet personally, intimately, and culturally enabling through alterity, and by the repository of Black life and culture that remains protected by the Veil itself.

Since their appearance in *Souls*, the complexity of Du Bois's Veil and double-consciousness has garnered significant scholarly attention. While an all-encompassing study of these Du Boisian concepts, their evolution across time, and the critical archive they have given rise to is outside the scope of this project, the relatively recent works of Houston Baker, Daphne Lamothe, and Kimberly Smith add clarity to Du Bois's Southern choices and the development of his alternative Southern Black environmental imagination. Houston Baker, in *Turning South Again: Re-thinking Modernism / Re-reading Booker T*, uses Du Bois's Veil to elaborate on the "Black public performance standard" of the Black body and the anxieties of a divided consciousness the "mental screen" of public Blackness creates in the South. Baker argues the Veil "might be thought of as the 'edge' of the performative frame, the dissonant rim where safe, colored parochialism is temptingly and provisionally refigured as an anguished mulatto cosmopolitanism." He goes on to describe the Veil between the frames of a Black, Southern, parochial, and "mulatto cosmopolitanism" as "like a scrim between dark, pastoral, problematic folk intimacy with Black consciousness, and free-floating anxieties of a public mulatto modernism that subjects one to the white 'gaze.'" He concludes by stating, "the 'Veil' hangs as maddeningly and terrifyingly as the lynched body, between the white world and the public emergence of a modern *Blackness"* (53-4 emphasis in original). Baker's reading offers a useful simile for the Veil with the scrim: a theatrical curtain that appears opaque until lit from behind. His scrim clarifies the doubled affects of problematic Folk intimacy with Black consciousness

and the terror of a lynched body as public spectacle for the Black body destroyed.

Two things interest me in Baker's analysis. First, problematic folk intimacy and mulatto modernism are linked if also divided by the Veil concept. Second, Baker uses the idea of a dark pastoral to communicate the lasting force of Southern Blackness with its "colored parochialism" on a modern Blackness that did not want to be trapped by such a limiting, racist, cultural memory yet must also recognize that parochialism as part of its past. The Veil, then, problematizes the dark pastoral for folk intimacy, Blackness, and modern cosmopolitanism. The Veil makes the doubleness of Black consciousness possible, performative, and terrifying because of the always-present threat of racial terrorism captured in the spectacle of lynching and the long-arm of Southern outrages in the twentieth century. Taken a step further, the imprint of Southern dark pastorals as seen by Du Bois and the fact of Black cosmopolitanism potentially render a manifestation of the Veil as performative division between the Black South and Black modernity with the former traditionally understood as behind modernity's curve through its connection to the land and the latter represented as leading the way through its urbanity.

Daphne Lamothe draws on the Du Boisian Veil in *Inventing the New Negro: Narrative, Culture, and Ethnography* to elaborate on her own study of the New Negro as well as to complicate Baker's reading. Lamothe argues Black intellectuals in the early decades of the twentieth century "adopted and adapted anthropology, folklore, and sociological discourses to name and create a cohesive, collective, and modern Black identity" which places Southern and rural Black Folks in a central position for the development of the New Negro Renaissance more traditionally understood as bounded by urban spaces and informed by modern, cosmopolitan proclivities (1). She goes on to identify Du Bois as one of the central persons in her study and takes up his concept of the Veil in her analysis as both a revelation for Black and White worlds

as well as a more subtle means to distinguish between the cosmopolitan world of the New Negro ethnographer and the pastoral world of Black Folks. For Lamothe, the insights afforded by Du Bois's "multiple allegiances to scholarly and racial communities"—and here I want to also argue his freedom with the generic conventions of sociological argumentation, lyrical essays, and narrative—made the very idea of the Veil possible in the first place (49). In her reading of the Veil as introduced in "Forethought" from *Souls* "to step within the Veil is to traverse anxiously between, and live partly in, both White and Black worlds, a circumstance that may lend its own insight but that also speaks of alienation." She then reads Baker's "performative space inhabited by the cosmopolitan Black (or racially hybrid) modern" as also "a space of undefined possibility for the audience as much as it is for the narrator." Finally, Lamothe claims, "the image of the reader viewing beyond the Veil [as presented by Du Bois in "Forethought"] promises and withholds the possibility of his identifying with the author's Southern Black subjects" (49). As with Baker, Lamothe's work signals a correlation between modernity and folkways for Black modernity but differs from Baker by suggesting that correlation is captured by the multiple allegiances in Du Bois's texts.

Lamothe's work also provides two complications to Baker. First, rather than continuing with Baker's "maddening and terrifying" affective resonances of the Veil, Lamothe shifts to one that is "anxiously between" yet alive in two worlds. The turn away from terror and madness as well as the recognition of two worlds creates alternatives for Black Folks that also comes with more affective freedoms. The terror and madness of the white world does not disappear in Lamothe, but neither does it reign as the dominant emotional atmosphere. Second, Lamothe recognizes the alienation produced by the Veil while also taking that alienation in her reading to revise Baker's performative space as "undefined possibility" for audience and narrator. Again,

Lamothe's undefined possibility does not eliminate the fact of terror and/or madness from Baker's reading. Her revision works with the alternative Black world to create possibilities for the Black narrator that are other than those of a white audience. The Veil, alienation, undefined possibility, and the alternative Black world helps articulate the relationship between Black modernity, Black Folks, and an alternative Black environmental imagination. This is a new reading that is at once intimately associated with a white environmental imagination yet demonstratively other than it at the same time.

Du Bois's concepts of the Veil and double-consciousness not only signal how Black Folks lived and experienced life on the white side of the Veil, they also reveal the enduring presence of an other, alternative, Black world. Kimberly Smith's work in *African American Environmental Thought* takes interest in the possibilities Du Bois's alternatives afford Black environmental thought in the "canon of American environmentalism." For Smith, the contributions of Du Bois (and other Black writers) to environmental thought have less to do with "a set of ideas and arguments aimed at preserving wilderness and maintaining a viable ecosystem," and more do with "a set of ideas concerning the relationship between humans and the natural environment, including the norms that ought to govern that relationship" (3). By expanding the scope of environmental thought with African American literatures, Smith argues Black Folks were not "indifferent" to the land as has been often assumed in the "conventional wisdom" of ecocriticism but rather had an alternative relationship with the land and that their arguments regarding that relationship offer "valuable insights into humans' relationship to nature in general" (3). In the case of Du Bois and *Souls*, she argues the work "announce[d] a new theme in Black environmental thought: the Romantic conception of Southern Blacks as a peasant community with an organic connection to the land." She goes on to link Du Bois's

characterization of African Americans as Folks to the processes of modernity and the "modern movement away from the land" as "an attempt to express what was valuable about Southern Black agrarian life even as it dissolved under the forces of modernization" (98). Smith's association of modernity, Folk, and Black environmental thought refocuses Du Bois's titular Black Folks as the "true Folks" in American culture who "serve as a source of cultural vitality" and who use "their artistic gifts to inspire an industrializing American civilization" without falling into the modernist primitivist trap of reducing Black Folks to a "simple harmonious relationship with nature" (99). As Smith rightly notes, Du Bois's work in *Souls* recognizes that the community of Black Folks and their alternative environmental thought does not just grow out of the injustice and violence they experience in their daily lives but also from the power of Black life, labor, and an other world wholly their own.

To be fair, Du Bois's environmental rhetorics in *Souls* are more contextualizing, narrative breaks that support his larger project of presenting life on the other side of the Veil rather than rhetorics designed to bespeak a particular corpus of Black environmental thought. However, this does not mean those breaks are merely incidental and fleeting points of interest. Instead, they signal an early concern with how the environment of the Black South as experienced from within the Veil, filtered through a double-consciousness, and presented by his writing shapes and influences Black life. While representations of the Black South and the early contextualization of Black environmental thought and environmental imaginary add depth to *Souls* through their correlation with Black modernity, it is in *The Quest of the Silver Fleece*—Du Bois's first novel, drafted in 1905, revised around 1909, and published in 1911 after he assumed the editorial helm of *Crisis* (Lewis 444)—that a more ambitious interrogation of a Black South, a Black Southern environmental imaginary, and Black environmental thought takes place.

### *The Quest of the Silver Fleece*, Black Rhetorics, and the Bildungsroman

In his first novel, Du Bois seemingly answers his own call to "frame a pretty and not far-fetched analogy of witchery and dragon's teeth, and blood and armed men, between the ancient and the modern Quest of the Golden Fleece in the Black Sea" from "The Quest of the Golden Fleece" chapter in *Souls* (456). Granted, he does change from silver to gold to describe cotton production and value for the South. But, as a novel, *Fleece* allows Du Bois to commit more fully to a narrative mode to theorize how the Veil, double-consciousness and a Black Southern environmental imaginary can serve a future Black modernity in a Southern context. By moving from the essay collection to the novel, Du Bois discovers a greater freedom in representing Black life, the Black South, and a Black future grounded on collective agricultural practices because of the imaginative possibilities fiction affords him. *Fleece* and the novel form, then, extend many of the ideas and concepts introduced by the Southern contexts of *Souls*. However, the novel form also gives Du Bois greater liberties in his exploration of national politics for the color line, cotton markets in the South, and the potential for a new Black South grounded in land stewardship and community organizing. With *Fleece*, Du Bois authors what Mark Van Wienen calls a "multi-plot novel in the American muck-raking tradition" joining a "fiction sub-genre in which virtually all the novels are written with definite polemical purpose…a sub-genre well suited to Du Bois's political-artistic aims" (69). In *Fleece*, the lingering plantation ethos, complex racial politics of the region, and transnational markets for Southern cotton all combine in Du Bois's wild gothic romance of the South. The various elements of these tensions provide Du Bois the opportunity to create a highly imaginative narrative that offers alternative Black environmental rhetoric as well as future-oriented Black South.

Summarizing Du Bois's *The Quest of the Silver Fleece* is no simple task. The novel's

highly ambitious main plot, its various augmentative subplots, and the novel's combination of romantic, realist, and naturalist literary conventions complicates the act of summary itself. The complexity with which the text interdependently provides critiques of and alternatives to racial, economic, environmental, and political interests makes the novel a Gordian knot. Set in the fictional Tooms County, Alabama, the main narrative line of *Fleece* also sends its protagonists through New York and Washington D.C., tracing the *Bildungsroman* plot of Zora, "child of the swamp," and Bles Alwyn, the son of farmers from Georgia who travels to Alabama to attend a Black school run by the northerner Miss Sarah Smith. Running parallel to Zora's and Bles's love story, is a double-marriage subplot that links pairs of siblings from the Southern aristocratic Cresswells to the northern industrialist Taylors enacting the common postbellum reunion romance common in most Southern novels from the turn of the century. Another subplot of the novel pits Miss Smith and her school for young Black Folks against the patriarch of the former plantation owning Cresswells in an economic struggle for property and racial uplift. Then, too, there is the combination of cotton market speculation on the part of the Taylor/Cresswell union and a jointly run Cresswell/Taylor cotton mill that exploits both poor whites and Black Folks in the region. Through all of this, Zora continually seeks "The Way"—the concept-metaphor Du Bois leans on to capture the path for romantic love, spiritual awakening, collective racial empowerment, and right moral as well as ethical action in the face of adversity. In addition to Zora's journey, Bles seeks his own path of righteous manhood, moral and ethical fortitude, and spiritual maturity. Finally, in every aspect of plot for the novel, Du Bois returns the reader to "The Fleece," a symbolically rich cotton crop of the highest quality brought to life by the twinned agrarian efforts of Zora and Bles in the heart of a swamp. Du Bois deploys "The Fleece" to simultaneously critique contemporary racialized farm labor practices, racial politics at the

national level, and racial capitalism while also using "The Fleece" as the catalyst to imagine alternative Southern Black environments, a female-led Black agrarian future founded on socialist principles, and an alternative Black politick emancipated from the moral failings of white democracy.

Much of the early scholarship on *Fleece* generally agrees that its wide-ranging, complex plot jerks the reader between romance and realism, conjure and racial uplift, critiques of both New South cotton economics and northern industrialist racial capitalism, making it something of a disorganized, lesser work in Du Bois's canon. These assessments have their merits. As first novels go, *Fleece* does not come close to the same heights as *Souls, Darkwater*, or *Black Reconstruction*. The seemingly over-burdened plot potentially dilutes many of the novel's political interventions while also masking Du Bois's complications of both the Veil and double-consciousness. Yet, the novel does provide key insights into the relationship between race, racial formation, the environment, and the politics of a Black Southern environmental imaginary precisely because of the ways Du Bois weaves together so many threads of social forces and cultural powers.

Maurice Lee is one of the first scholars to argue for the potential of the novel. He insists that "*The Silver Fleece* is immensely interesting, not only because it suggests new ways to read Du Bois's work, but also because it reveals a very literary figure critics have yet to acknowledge—a serious novelist with ambitious designs for the United States and its literatures" (389). In his study, Lee invokes both Henry Louis Gates's "signifyin'" and Houston Baker's "deformation of mastery" to claim Du Bois "escapes the bounds of romance and realism" through rigorous experimentation that "subverts novelistic tradition and its politics" at the turn of the century. Lee's analysis attends to the various literary tropes Du Bois uses throughout

*Fleece*—the reunification plot of post-Reconstruction fiction, the *Bildungsroman*, the democracy of character from realism, the gothicism of conjure, the romance of Zora's and Bles's triumphant marriage, as well as the influence of materiality and economic forces of naturalism—ultimately arguing Du Bois "escapes the bounds of romance and realism to wage battles on grounds of his own" (390).

Kimberly Smith follows in Lee's footsteps by regarding the novel as something more than a failed first attempt at fiction. She argues Du Bois's *Fleece* evinces an interest in "widespread land reform in the South" through the novel's analysis of "economic, social, and political forces that prevented Black farmers from acquiring land or competing in the marketplace, including Blacks's lack of capital and education, white resistance to Black economic advancement, and the anticompetitive practices of monopolies that oppressed all farmers" (81). In her reading, Smith concludes that *Fleece* presents Du Bois's solution for the Black community as grounded on organization and "pool[ing] their resources, buy[ing] land, and operat[ing] collectively" (84).

Jarvis McInnis advances the environmental study of *Fleece* in a similar fashion to Smith. He reads the novel as an anti-plantation romance "to revaluate the relationship between Blackness, cotton, and global capitalism," claiming Du Bois "explores the aesthetics of cotton cultivation to imagine Zora and Bles's burgeoning romance and to expose Black people's contributions to the global economy" which "offers a vision of cotton cultivation that is rooted in human need instead of global capitalist accumulation." McInnis concludes by showing how "the novel extends this revaluation of Blackness and cotton to interrogate the libidinal economy of the plantation and the commodity form" (74).

Finally, John Claborn's recent work captures economics, race, and the environment in his

reading of the novel. He asserts *Fleece* "ambitiously interweaves multiple characters and storylines into a Marxian attempt to imagine the global cotton economic system in its totality." He further identifies the novel as a *Bildungsroman* that uses the space of the swamp as the means to communicate Zora's growth in the novel (114). For Claborn, his tracing of the economics, the *Bildungsroman*, as well as the intersection of environments and Civil Rights reveals the novel is oriented by three primary spaces, "the mythical swamp, the plantation zone, and the urban environment," ultimately transforming the swamp into a "synthesizing vision of pastoral reconciliation between the primitive swamp and modernity" (115).

What interests me in the novel and this scholarship is the interaction between environmental revision and reclamation, Du Bois's narrative use of the Black South's influence on modernity through reform and the *Bildungsroman*. I am also interested in the swamp's representation throughout the novel as a veiled space complete with its own doubled-sense of identity, and its rhetorical mobility as an analogy for urban spaces, economic manipulations, and political machinations. In *Dusk of Dawn*, Du Bois speaks of a what he calls a "double environment," a logical spatial extension of double consciousness that argues "[t]he Negro American has not only the white surrounding world, but usually, and touching him much more nearly and compellingly, is the environment furnished by his own colored group" (173). In *Fleece*, the rhetorical deployment of the swamp stands as an early use of this double environment.[6] It is at once surrounded by a white plantation but is also a nearer, more intimate

[6] John Claborn also recognizes Du Bois's use of double environments in *Dusk of Dawn*. In *Civil Rights and the Environment*, Claborn reads this doubleness as an experience of an "an immediate environment as it is moated by the larger white environment." Because of this "enfolded" experience, Claborn argues, "the concept of double consciousness can be augmented to include the psychic internalization of double environments" (46). I agree with the idea of a "psychic internalization" as presented by Claborn. However, I extend his analysis by arguing such internalization, especially in *Fleece*, ultimately proves enabling for both Zora and Bles through the Du Bois's combination of environmental rhetorics and the *Bildungsroman* form. In this way, Du Bois can imagine what the manifestation of that internalization looks like in a Black cotton future for the American South.

environment for Black Folks. Further, as a representative landscape in the novel, the swamp becomes what W.J.T. Mitchell calls "a process by which social and subjective identities are formed." In this way, the swamp in *Fleece* "has a double role with respect to something like ideology: it naturalizes a cultural and social construction, representing an artificial world as if it were simply given…and it also makes that representation operational by interpellating its beholder in some more or less determinate relation" (2). Du Bois's environmental imagination captured by the mobility of the swamp is a rhetorical and ideological intervention. It takes the doubleness of Black consciousness and environmental experiences as the occasion to offer an alternative to naturalized assumptions about racialized human capacity from a Black perspective. Rather than disorganized, then, *Fleece* stands as one of the first novelistic uses of the Black environmental imagination wherein Du Bois modifies the familiar *Bildungsroman* form through an environmental intervention that conjoins triumphant character maturation with a politically charged agricultural future.

With *Fleece,* Du Bois extends much of the work he began on the Black Southern environmental imagination in *Souls.* In the novel, he undertakes the same project of representing an emergent Black nationalism that actively participates in modernity. He accomplishes this work by depicting Black Folks' relationship to the land in a Southern context while also elaborating on the affective force of that relationship through the power of story. We can see the connection between modernity, Black nationalism, and Black Folks between *Souls* and *Fleece* with passages whose rhetorics take up the Southern environment as the correlative for the oft-ignored contributions of Black Folks to modernity. Describing the South as the "Cotton Kingdom" in *Souls*, Du Bois writes, "So, the Cotton Kingdom still lives; the world still bows beneath her scepter. Even the markets that once defied the *parvenu* have crept one by one across

the seas, and then slowly and reluctantly, but surely, have started toward the Black Belt" (457). Here, his sociological training pairs with his Romantic poetics by naming the reach of the South's global commodity while binding its power to the arrival of the Black Belt (and hence Southern Black Folks) on the global scene as an emancipated people. He goes on to challenge white supremacists' and slavery apologists' vapid claims that the Black Folks were producing less cotton at the turn of the century than during enslavement, arguing instead that "the cotton crop has doubled, and more than doubled, since the era of slavery, and that…the Negro is still supreme in a Cotton Kingdom larger than that on which the Confederacy builded its hopes" (457). With his sharp sociological analysis and lyrical assertion of Black supremacy, he breaks the spell of white nostalgia for the lost plantation system. He rightly insists that Black Folks in the cotton South "form to-day one of the chief figures in a great world-industry," and that they had in fact increased the production of cotton in the South after Emancipation. Finally, he ties that increase to liberation, presenting an alternative narrative to the white South's Lost Cause ethos which frames Black Folks as marching along with modernity and providing the verve for modernity's advancement.

Daphne Lamothe recognizes a similar intervention in Du Bois's work. In her study of the Black Belt from his writings, she concludes that "Du Bois produces an alternative reading that underscores the Southern country folk's passage through time" (52). For Lamothe, it is a passage that emphasizes "the importance of [Black Folks'] temporal progress, their steady, collective march into the future not visible to the outsider" (52). Therefore, by lifting the Veil through the essay form from *Souls*, he reveals the existence of an alternative South that has always existed alongside white imaginings of the region but is not always, by necessity, a counter narrative to it. In this way, Black progress is not limited to a politics of against-ness but rather demonstrative of

a Black alternative that is an equal, if not greater force for modernity.

In a similar passage from *Fleece*, Du Bois advances his argument for Black Folks' participation in modernity through cotton labors. In one example from the sixth chapter, "Cotton," he positions the Black Belt as responding to "[t]he cry of the naked [that] was sweeping the world" (49). He frames the response to the call for cotton as "the Song of Service" coupled with a "poetry of Toil" wherein "the dense Black land sensed the cry and heard the bound of answering life within the vast dark breast" (49). Here, Du Bois rewrites Black Folks working cotton from an exploited labor force into morally just actants in modernity with a unique call-and-response model. In doing so, he shifts the Lost Cause ethos of the white plantation South to a Black ethic of service and toil expressed in song and poetry. He makes the land Black, drawing a direct line from Blackness to service to toil to ethical participation in modernity on a global scale.

In another example from "The Cotton Corner," *Fleece*'s eighteenth chapter, he describes Southern cotton fields just before harvest, writing "The Silver Fleece lay like a mighty mantle across the earth. Black men and mules staggered beneath its burden, while deep songs welled in the hearts of men" (166). This passage, too, elevates the moral status of cotton out of the Black South on a global scale. The cotton's "mighty mantle" covers the earth, and the link between cotton and song remains strong. In a more subtle rhetorical turn, this passage also shifts the burden of modernity onto Black Folks through their labors in cotton that were often imagined as a hindrance to rather than a driving force for modernity. Black Folks working the land become the bearers of modernity's burden rather than the more commonly represented burden to and drag on modernity's speed.

Du Bois's shifting of modernity's burden to Black Folks and their agricultural labors

offers an alternative understanding of that burden than the more popular understandings of it for both literature and politics at the turn of the century. Jeremy Wells in *Romance of the White Man's Burden* notes how Rudyard Kipling's 1899 poem "The White Man's Burden" captured the white Southern sentiment that it was "only white Southern men [who] were capable of solving [the burden of modernity]" (7). He reads Thomas Dixon's *The Leopard's Spots: A Romance of the White Man's Burden* (1902) as a text that shows "within a single novel, the figure of the burdened white manhood could assume multiple roles, from ruined but resilient planter to robed Klansman to white supremacist soldier and statesman" (7). Finally, Wells discusses the force of "the white man's burden" fantasy in political terms. He notes that both Senator "pitchfork" Benjamin Tillman (South Carolina) and Governor William J. Northern (Georgia) argued in political forums that the white men of the South imagined themselves as bearing "this white man's burden" of a colored race in the white nation's midst from its founding to post-Emancipation racial strife (9). Du Bois was no doubt aware of these political arguments given his Southern and political experiences. However, his rhetorical intervention in *Fleece* re-presents the burden of modernity as a *Black* burden through service and toil effectively offering a Southern Black imaginary. Du Bois's shifting of modernity's burden through the "Song of Service" and the "poetry of Toil," then, is both a novelistic rebuttal to white supremacy in the mouths of elected officials and stands as an offering of an alternative narrative for the Black South, and Black modernity with the Black environmental imaginary providing the ground on which his intervention stands.

In *Fleece,* the novel allows for an expansion of that Romanticism through the *Bildungsroman* form, also a popular genre from German Romanticism.[7] As Mark Whalan notes,

[7] In *Civil Rights and the Environment,* Claborn draws a connection between Du Boisian concepts of the wilderness and the Herdian philosophy of the *Volk* "in order to promote Black nationalism" (51). He goes on to note a

Du Bois studied under Wilhelm Dilthey, the first major scholar of the *Bildungsroman,* which suggests the form was both familiar to him as well as seen as a politically viable narrative intervention. However, just because Du Bois was influenced by German Romanticism does not mean he mirrored the form. Rather, both the racial dimensions of his novel as well as its particularly Southern context lead to differences in representing the nation-state identity that is central to the German *Bildungsroman*. Whalan's study notes these distinctions as well, claiming Harlem Renaissance *Bildungsromans* offered correctives for Herderian nationalism, with its "ethno-racially homogenous and bounded nation-states" that were closely linked to linear emplotments of "narrative-historical time" (1, 13). While those correctives hold for *Fleece*, arguably, Du Bois's early training led him to see the *Bildungsroman* in its most idealistic capacity for Black Folks. Under that rubric, Tobias Boes defines the *Bildungsroman* as a "narrative response" to what the author sees as "a politically repressive atmosphere" (3) In this way, the form becomes "a universal marker of modernity, a literary response to changing times in which individuals have to secure their own place in the world rather than find it pre-given by tradition or inheritance" (4). When the influences of both the Southern experiences as well as the *Bildungsroman* are taken together, *Fleece* stands as Du Bois's own unique revision of German Romanticism to depict Black political and cultural reality and a triumphant maturity in the South. In the novel, he both generalizes Black Folks' commensurate struggle with the specifics of cotton markets and he offers a literary response to the generally changing conditions of modernity through the specific narrative of Zora and Bles, his two protagonists. In this way, Du Bois's literary contributions from his first novel are certainly influenced by his time in Berlin,

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connection between the *Sturm und Drang* and the "objective correlative" function of the landscape in *Souls*. I agree with Claborn's connection between German Romanticism, *Souls*, and the *Sturm und Drang*. In my readings of both *Souls* and *Fleece,* I extend the connections by drawing out more specific details of the *Sturm und Drang* as well as making the ties between that movement and Du Bois's contemporary political moment.

but they do not define it. Instead, they help formalize his representations of an alternative Black South and an alternative Black environmental imagination that is not without its own politics.

Du Bois signals his commitments to the *Bildungsroman* form, the concept metaphors of the Veil and double-consciousness, as well as connections to the environment from the start of *Fleece.* He accomplishes this rhetorical intervention by linking the development of Bles and Zora to the development and reform of the Southern landscape. Yet, given genre conventions of the *Bildungsroman* that follow a teleology from undeveloped (or under-developed as the case may be) to maturity, Du Bois's first introduces his protagonists and the land considering their potential promise and pitfalls. In the first chapter, "Dreams," the reader encounters Bles, the male counterpart to *Fleece*'s heroine, Zora, walking from Georgia to a Southern school for Black Folks run by the northerner, Miss Smith in Alabama. Far from home and unsure how much farther he must walk to get to school, Bles finds himself on the edge of a swamp, whose "red waters" grow more "sinister and silent" as night comes on. Du Bois's describes the coming of night in harrowing terms, writing:

> Yet now [Bles] was alone; the empty night was closing all about him here in a strange land, and he was afraid. The bundle with his earthly treasure had hung heavy and heavier on his shoulder; his little horde of money was tightly wadded in his sock, and the school lay hidden somewhere far away in the shadows. He wondered how far it was; he looked and harkened, starting at his own heartbeats, and fearing more and more the long dark fingers of the night. (13)

With this description, Du Bois captures many of the expected characteristics of the *Bildungsroman*: the young, provincial protagonist leaving home, the pain of separation, the search for education, and the conjoined threat and promise of a broader world one must mature

into as a reliable citizen. Du Bois also offers the first of several depictions of the swamp as an environment that shapes the protagonist's mood in relief, in this case serving to amplify Bles's fear of "the long dark fingers of the night" (13). The strangeness and threat of the new world Bles has entered are captured by the Veiled nature of the swamp, a liminal environment that teems with life even as it is an abject environment that is neither an arable nor desolate. Bles and his new environment are on the precipice of possibility. But there is also an inherent danger Bles faces as a strange Black man in unfamiliar territory in the South. In "Dreams," then, there is a double-ness of hope and nightmare, possibility and being consumed by an unwelcoming land.

When the text turns to Zora, it does not depict the swamp and night with the same threats that round out Bles's experiences. Du Bois captures Zora's different relationship with the land through song, dance, and a representation of her as a child of the wilderness. As Bles lives through his fears, he is drawn deeper into the swamp's recesses by music "of a wildness and weirdness" whose "strange power" compels him to follow "the song hungrily" (14). Once in the swamp, he follows the music, discovering the home of Elspeth, a conjure woman and Zora's witch-like mother holding some kind of gathering. Bles sees "[a]mid this mighty halo, as on clouds of flame, a girl dancing. She was black, and lithe and tall, and willowy. Her garments twined and flew around the delicate moulding of her dark, young, half-naked limbs (14). It is a vision that peaks with Zora's singing in a voice that is neither tune nor melody but "formless, boundless music" which transforms all of Bles's darkness into "sudden light" (14). Granted, the tone of Bles's first vision of Zora remains ominous. It is not so much that Zora, her song, and her and dance—in their formless, wild, and boundlessness beauty—immediately redefine the swamp's atmosphere. Instead, it is that her presence in the swamp signifies a different possibility that Bles was unable to see in the darkness: even as the swamp remains wild, uncertain, and

threatening it also holds aesthetic beauty and potential.

Du Bois rhetorically capitalizes on that ambiguity by literally using the face of a white devil in the darkness to break Zora's spell over Bles and remind him of the danger he still abides with for the moment. Seeing "a white face, drawn, red-eyed" and "peer[ing] outward from some hidden throng within [Elspeth's] cabin," Bles flees, "stumbling through the swamp, hearing strange sounds and feeling stealthy creeping hands and arms and whispering voices" trail him (15). Bles ends his flight at the foot of an oak tree on the border between the swamp and the road. After spending a dreamless night of sleep underneath its branches, he wakes to find Zora watching him sleep and laughing at his fear of the night. In their morning conversation, Zora comes across as mysterious as the swamp, her descriptions of the environment saturated with gothic colors and language:

> I goes there sometimes. I creeps in 'amongst the dreams; they hands there like big flowers, dripping dew and sugar and blood—red, red blood. And there's little fairies there that hop and sing, and devils—great, ugly devils that grabs you and roasts and eats you if they gets you; but they don't get me. Some devils is big and white, like ha'nts; some is long and shiny, like creepy, slippery snakes; and some is little and broad and black. (18)

Here, her mythic, anthropomorphizing language communicate real cultural threats in gothic, fantastic terms. The oblique reference to sugar hints at the terrors of sugar plantation life for Black persons in the South as well as the Caribbean where Elspeth's conjure most likely finds its cultural roots. The atmospheric blood harkens to white rape culture and the one-drop rule used to oppress Blacks. Finally, the thinly veiled big white devils foreshadow the discovery of Zora's rape by Harry Cresswell in later chapters. Thus, Zora's understanding of the swamp, and the imaginative possibilities that understanding affords both her and the reader through her

alternative viewpoint suggests the swamp can be read as a double environment that plays with the idea of the Veil as well. Racial violence, sexual violence, and cultural history obtain in the alternative archive of the swamp and in the language Zora uses to maintain that record. In this way, the doubled swamp is a space where the violence of outside whiteness can be re-imagined in mythic and ecological terms. Still threatening, beauty can be seen as well; at least by those who live within its world.

The first meeting between Zora and Bles establishes the rhetorical means by which Du Bois uses the swamp to set early conditions of his *Bildungsroman* for both protagonists. In Bles's case, the swamp represents the arc of his formation through physical trial, moral and cultural struggle, educational and aesthetic cultivation, and realized potential in finding a sustainable way through a political and racial mire. In Zora's case, it reflects a similar narrative of formation with its mercurial character becoming the core analogy by which Zora understands the world beyond her home in Alabama and the ground upon which she builds her "free community" in triumphant adulthood (314). Despite the environmental correlations between Zora and Bles, it bears noting that a defining feature of the swamp for Du Bois's early *Bildungsroman* is the differing relationships Bles and Zora have with it that develop independently into a kind of conceptual resource that helps them understand their broader cultural experiences. In Zora's case, her language reveals a childlike phantasmagoria—a vision that is at once underdeveloped and in line with the Romantic and gothic undertones of the nature scenes in *Fleece*. Du Bois goes so far as presenting Zora as a Romantic a child of nature, or in his case a "child of the swamp:" a "heathen hoyden of twelve wayward, untrained years" who "dreamed her life away in willful wandering through her dark and sombre kingdom until she was one with it all its moods; mischievous, secretive, brooding; full of great and awful visions" (40). The swamp is simultaneously a zone of

freedom for Zora and a means by which she can organize the violence of her sexual exploitation by the white Cresswell men. Comparatively, Bles sees the swamp and its surrounding region as "the Black Sea" where the land-owning Cresswells are "thieves" who were "born to the purple" (33). In Bles's understanding, the swamp turns from the gothic to the classically mythological, fitting with the terms of the Jason and the Argonauts motif Du Bois weaves into Bles's story.

Zora's lack of development and her association with the swamp as its own kind of raw space does not register as a complete disadvantage when placed alongside Bles's more classical rendering. Her "untrained" state allows for a different understanding of white Folks than that of Bles. Whereas he sees them as full of knowledge that "give[s] them power and wealth and make[s] them rule," Zora's unique point of view has taught her to "see right through people," leading to her understanding of white Folks as "just think[ing] they rule" because "they got things—heavy dead things. We Black Folks is got the *spirit*. We're higher and cunninger; we fly right through them; we go and come again just as we wants to. Black Folks is wonderful" (42). As such, the swamp signifies key rhetorical maneuvers in the Black environmental imagination for Du Bois. It allows him to play with the idea of whether that which is undeveloped is without value while also drawing distinctions between Bles and Zora with the doubled nature of the swamp itself. Clearly Zora "child of the swamp" is in a less culturally conditioned state of being insofar as her understanding of the more developed world is concerned. Moreover, until her meeting with Bles, she appears to have been content with the freedoms her "heathen hoyden" life afforded. Yet, her under-developed awareness of a world beyond the swamp's Veil as compared to Bles's seemingly more racially attuned understanding allows her to have greater insight into both the ways of white Folks and the promise of Blackness. Her cultural innocence pits the spiritual promise and power of Black Folks against the appearances of power for white Folks

enabling her to give the lie to white power.

Alongside the distinctions between Zora's and Bles's cultural development are their differences in sexual continence and sexual experience. In Bles, Du Bois provides a more staid representation of sexuality for a Black man coming of age in a time where the sexual exploitation of Black women and the sexual threat of Black men was ever present in the larger white culture imaginings of Blackness. Young Bles's rising awareness of Zora as a woman counters damaging representations of Black men by white culture in the South, in particular from Du Bois's contemporaries Thomas Dixon and Thomas Nelson Page whose fear-driven racially motivated representations of Black men as either sexual predators or effeminate servants dominated popular conceptions of Black masculinity in the post-Emancipation fiction of the South.

While Bles's attraction for Zora grows throughout the portions of the novel, Bles remains loyal to more Victorian morals about sex. Du Bois uses Bles's desire for Zora—one bounded by virginal innocence that is almost ambivalent about sex itself—to communicate "notions about propriety, thrift, and moral discipline" that Michele Elam and Paul Taylor name as central to Du Bois's erotics in terms of a perfectionist agenda (219).[8] This is not to suggest that Bles has no regard for or interest in sex. Rather, it is to read Du Bois's characterization of Bles's sexual awareness as informed by the risks and violence he faces as a Black man in a broad American culture dominated by white men who contrarily imagine Black men in diminished masculine capacity and as hyper-developed sexual threats. In reading how Du Bois uses sexual desire and art as propaganda for racial uplift, Elam and Taylor claim that "Du Bois's priapic license was a

[8] Elam and Taylor define "prefectionism" as "a species of the nineteenth-century ethics of self-realization" (211). They articulate their understanding at the intersection of Nietzsche's "talk of Dionysian self-overcoming, in Margaret Fuller's and Ralph Waldo Emerson's transcendentalist focus on self-evolving, and in the progressive-era pragmatic emphasis on what John Dewey called 'growth'" (211). Here, their definition of perfectionism as a series of overlaps between thinkers of self-realization and self-overcoming demonstrates a unique blend of transcendentalist, existential, and pragmatic thought. It is a blend that serves *Fleece*'s complexities well.

consistent manifestation of his thoroughgoing interest in the sensual, affective, and especially sexual aspects of experience, and that the persistence of this interest reveals itself in the ethical commitments that frequently shape and permeate his nonfiction and fiction" (215). Bles fits this assessment perfectly. He becomes aware of Zora as a potential match while remaining committed to an ethical scheme that abstains from sex until marriage. Moreover, in the swamp, Bles takes it upon himself to teach Zora about sexual propriety and restraint—lessons that are part of her core curriculum as she moves from her "heathen hoyden" life into near-pious womanhood. Interestingly, Elam and Taylor conclude by insisting "[p]rivate desire and ethical fulfillment [in Du Bois's works] occurred when physical passion and political commitment were joined in what amounted to unions divinely sanctioned" (211). In this way, Bles's awareness of Zora as desirable does not rule out sexual union. Instead, the make-up of Bles's character shows his erotic sensibilities as sexually ambivalent if also aesthetically articulated while nevertheless bounded by underdeveloped Victorian social proprieties. Thus, in Bles's case the swamp environment also figures as a mire of sexual threat, exploitation, eroticism, and rape culture in terms of whiteness as well as an eventually perfected sexual desire for Zora on his part through the purification process of socially uplifting labor that happens by the novel's end.

In Zora's case, her physical sexual experiences tragically exceed Bles's because of her victimization through white rape culture in the South. When the aftermath of those sexual assaults combines with her under-developed sense of cultural propriety because of her isolation in the swamp, Zora evinces a lack of sexual continence that proves deeply problematic for Bles later in the novel (148). Here, it bears noting that Du Bois takes care to avoid presenting Zora in the trope of a fallen women or hyper-sexualized Black femininity. He does not engage in a rhetoric of victim shaming in service to his politics of racial uplift. Instead, he places Zora's

under-developed cultural sensibilities and her sexual victimization in concert with one another to show the dangers Black women in the South faced when forced to live under a white male rubric that simultaneously sexually objectified and intellectually isolated them. His characterization of Zora as it relates to her nascent understanding of sex and larger cultural paradigms succeeds in indicting white male culture.

However, it also reveals some limitations regarding his thoughts on sex and women. When compared to Bles, Zora's characterization reveals, as Hazel Carby insists in *Race Men*, that "there is, unfortunately, no simple correspondence between anyone's support for female equality and the ideological effect of the gendered structures of thought and feeling at work in any text one might write and publish" (13). While Zora's exploitation and serial rape as a child exposes the moral failures of white masculinity that treats Black women as expendable, it also exposes the ideological structures undergirding Du Bois's intervention regarding sex and politics along gender lines. To draw from Carby again, the conflict that arises from the differences between Zora's and Bles's experiences also exposes how, at times, "the future of Du Bois's imagined [B]lack community is to be determined by the nature of the struggle among men over the bodies of women" (248). That said, her additional claim that *Souls* "suffers from Du Bois's complete failure to imagine [B]lack women as intellectuals and race leaders" seems less applicable to *Fleece*'s narrative world. Indeed, given that *Fleece* was the first major fictional work that followed *Souls,* and that *Fleece* does imagine Zora as both a triumphant intellectual and a race leader, it seems that the importance of reading *Fleece* as a narrative extension of *Souls* gains greater momentum when considering Du Bois's imagining of Black women. Both the actual swamp and its rhetorical use as a conceptual resource provide a testing ground for Bles's and Zora's spiritual fortitude. It also functions as an alternative instructional site for redeemed

Black femininity, compassionate Black masculinity, shared labor practices between genders, cultural disenfranchisement, commodity market economics, and national politics. The swamp functions as an environment of raw possibility wherein the doubleness of Zora's and Bles's growths converge. It amplifies their development into adulthood because it functions as the site of discovery for their conjoined potential in the first place. Finally, it stands as a landscape that will be reformed into a productive and socially just space by the protagonists through shared labor.

### Swamps, Politics, and Du Bois's Environmental Re-Imaginings

Du Bois creates three distinct movements within the novel wherein political, social, and actual swamps allow for character development as well as future re-imaginings. The first tracks with the adolescent-to-young adulthood of his two protagonists. In the opening of the narrative, Zora and Bles come to see the physical swamp as the "heart" of their dreams for growing cotton outside the interests of the Cresswells (47). While they dream, beyond the scope of their global understanding, both the Taylors and Cresswells succeed in manipulating the markets to white economic advantage (50). The young labors of Bles and Zora, while heroic, are at least placed in a position of disadvantage as they relate to larger economic markets if not wholly and preemptively disenfranchised because of larger machinations by the Cresswells and Taylors that are beyond their ken. Their shared labor does rhetorical double-duty, at once a herculean task "beyond exhilaration," that is a combination of "sickening weariness and panting despair" and a moral task symbolizing the uprooting of historic racial oppression and social resistances to their shared potential (80). The seed that they plant, according to Zora's witch-mother Elspeth, is a "wonder seed" that has been "sowed with the three spells of Obi in the old land ten thousand moons ago;" it is a seed that contains a constellated history from the West African slave trade to

the South's cotton kingdom to the Cresswell planation to northern industrial interests of the Taylors back to Bles and Zora and their coming of age (67). As the two clear, plant, and care for the "silver fleece," their love for one another grows alongside their additional instruction for active participation in an adult world replete with cultural expectations bounded on all sides by concomitant racial limitations for Black Folks.

In Zora's case, she becomes more civilized through her love of Bles and her submission to Ms. Smith's pedagogy (108-10). Zora grows from the "child of the swamp" into what the narrator predicts will be "a brilliant, sumptuous womanhood; proud, conquering, full-blooded" a "passionate mother of men" (110). However, Zora remains a sexualized, exploited object to both the gossip mongers of Tooms County and Harry Cresswell, the heir-apparent to the Cresswell planation and the serial rapist of Zora in her youth. Therefore, even as she matures, Zora remains tied to an old-world order of white supremacy regardless of her growing rejection of its premises.

In Bles's case, his labors awaken him to a self-sufficient manhood, one that comes with a more highly attuned awareness of racial injustice. His agricultural labors give him the confidence that comes with knowledge. Du Bois presents him as an expert in an essential global commodity through his agricultural knowledge even if he has yet to develop an understanding of cotton's global reach. Du Bois's depiction of Bles as an expert agriculturalist for all aspects of cotton production "ruptures the reductionist and hackneyed representation of Black people in American arts" thus revising the Black South as not only essential to modern progress but also revising its laborers from anti-modern "Folks" to full participants in modernity with their own highly specialized knowledge (McInnis 78). Yet, as he grows in expertise so too does he become "conscious of the narrowness and straightness of his Black world" which leads to a "red anger" that "flashes" in him as his "mental horizon" broadens and he begins to grasp the "wider, fuller

world, and its thoughts and aspirations" (111).

Sadly, but in expected fashion, this first movement ends in heartbreak. While the cotton they plant—the silver fleece—grows into the finest crop in the county, their labors are not enough to overcome the larger cultural obstacles they face. Bles learns Zora has been sexually assaulted by Harry Cresswell, a knowledge that destroys his world of purity and optimism (146-149). In what amounts to a gut-wrenching example of victim shaming, he leaves Zora, telling her she can never be pure because she "Knew! All women know!" He ends by simply telling his love, "You should have *died*!" (148). The declaration and abandonment leaves Zora a husk of her former self, leads to her selling the silver fleece at a bottom-market price (a final "rape" of Zora and the labor of her body), and precipitates Zora's own exodus from Alabama and the swamp she loved.

The labor and first losses of Zora and Bles meet with two defining features for the novel of formation as identified by Mark Whalan in "The *Bildungsroman* in the Harlem Renaissance." The first is how the clearing of the swamp and adolescent growth of the protagonists highlights significant scenes of instruction that center on "education as crucial terrain for the fight for fuller Black civic enfranchisement," but also recognizes that "American racism [possesses] its own kind of pedagogy" (1). As Zora and Bles transform their swamp into cotton-producing land they develop alongside the land, becoming more mature participants in larger economic and agricultural systems even if those changes remain screened by the Veil the swamp affords said development. Inside the swamp, the two youths live and labor under conditions that are less impacted—at least in the short term—by the South's (and nation's) larger racial politics. Their land-clearing labors incite stronger attachments to the formal educational system found in Miss Smith's school, especially in Zora's case thus highlighting the theme of burgeoning self-reliance

and a desire for knowledge Du Bois argues for in *Souls*. Further, their agricultural labors are also aesthetic, teaching both Bles and Zora the value of working the land in terms other than those attached to profits. Finally, their entrepreneurial endeavor, taken up by their own agency, presents an alternative representation of Black agricultural futures in the South than the more common version wherein Black Folks are trapped in the past. Such an alternative teaches both protagonists and the reader that Black Folks are full participants in modernity and contribute to its progress on a much larger scale than previously imagined. In this way, the two youths represent the promise of Black Folks, their thriving spirit, and a youthful idealization of both communal practices and labor equality ostensibly offering an alternative vision of a Black South independent of white control.

However, Du Bois is a good historian and sociologist, especially when transferring those skills to fiction. Thus, he must visit both Zora and Bles with tragedy to show that, while Black Folks certainly hold promise for the future, the reality of their present is all too often delimited by exploitation and limitation. By this measure, then, Bles's and Zora's loss of innocence and crop to the Cresswells also captures the devastating reality of life in the South for Black Folks. As such, the first movement meets a second feature of the Harlem Renaissance's *Bildungsroman* identified by Whalan: "showcasing a civic situation where achieving the enfranchised maturity of full citizenship" is seemingly "endlessly deferred for many Black Americans" (2). Du Bois shows the deferring of "enfranchised maturity of full citizenship" in the same way he captures the lie of American democracy as dictated by white control: through both Bles and Zora being denied equal participation in cotton markets; being denied a say in the commodity practices of those markets notwithstanding their labors being essential to profits; and by showing how both live under conditions of impossible cultural expectations with a constant barrage of

contradictions—not the least of which is fully realized yet simultaneously deferential independence and impossible burden of purity in white rape culture for Black women. The experience of denied participation, of disenfranchisement, and the personal consequences of an impossible identity for Black people in white Southern culture are essential milestones in the coming of age for Black adolescents. More to the point, the particularly Southern aspects of that coming of age also carry consequences on the national scale. After all, the South has never held a monopoly on racism even if it persists as one of the more dominant regions for its interrogation.

The loss of the cotton crop in Alabama as well as the subsequent shattering of youthful optimism Bles and Zora live through links their coming of age in the South with larger cultural currents for both modernity and nationalism in the United States. In *Formative Fictions* Tobias Boes identifies two main camps for the *Bildungsroman* form. The first sees the narrative of formation as a specifically German "species" that espouses an historically located German ideology in fiction that coincided with the rise of nationalism (3). According to Boes, this camp sees the *Bildungsroman* as providing a "narrative response to the provincial and politically repressive atmosphere that prevailed in Central Europe throughout the nineteenth century (4). The second camp contrasts with the first by approaching the form as "a universal marker of modernity, a literary response to changing times in which individuals have to secure their own place in the world rather than find it pre-given by tradition or inheritance" (4). Between both camps, Boes identifies a tension playing out in the interpretation of the form.

In the first camp, the protagonist comes into adulthood or maturity by conforming to a specifically German, specifically nationalistic culture. This potentially makes it less a novel of individual development and more a novel of social becoming. The second camp understands the novel form as about the rise of the individual as both part of and apart from larger culture and

society—not necessarily only German culture and society. The *Bildungsroman* becomes a modern form with a concern for nationalism, not just a German form concerned with the rise of German nationalism. In this way, the confluence of national-historical time identified by Mikhail Bakhtin and the individual's experience of historical time come into play leading to a resistance in fulfillment as part of the modern experience (6). All of this leads to Boes's assertion that "the *Bildungsroman*, in short, is neither the product of an aberrant national tradition, nor is it the specter that wonders through literature" (7). The important revelation born from this comparison is that both camps ultimately "define the *Bildungsroman* via the question of form rather than content, and thus also via its ultimate telos" that includes a national character to some degree (21).

Boes enters conversation with Jed Esty and his work, *Unseasonable Youth: Modernism, Colonialism, and the Fiction of Development* through his understanding of form and content for the *Bildungsroman*. Esty argues that "if the nation was the proper cultural container for the bildungsroman's allegory of development, then modern imperialism was a culture-diluting practice that violated 'national-historical time' and set capitalism loose" (6). The consequences of freed capitalism were that "colonial modernity unsettled the progressive and stabilizing discourse of national culture by breaking up cherished continuities between a people and its language, territory, and polity" (6). Between Boes and Esty, the *Bildungsroman* can be understood as a form whose content never realizes its own aims because of its telos of fulfillment. For Boes, that fulfillment is impossible because of either the lack of a unifying sense of German nationalism in the first camp or because of an intruding modernity that challenges the relationship between national character and personal identity in the second camp. For Esty, the unsettling combination of colonial modernity and global capital means fractured continuities for

the core elements that lead to fulfillment for a national character or a smooth integration of the individual character into a national one.

Du Bois's first novel takes what is ostensibly a narrative form of failed individual realization and national integration and eventually re-writes it into one of triumphant adulthood for both his protagonists. One of the ways he accomplishes such a feat is through his combination of character struggles in both regional and national forms that, by extra-textual design, deny such a telos. Bles's and Zora's cotton cultivation is at once an obvious means of economic participation and simultaneously one of the most exploitative capital markets Black Folks faced at the turn of the century. Modern colonialism, national and international capital markets, regional and national racisms, and structured white supremacy all contribute to the personal deferral or denial experienced by his protagonists. While their labors in the swamp proved equal to the task of turning an abject space into a productive one, those same labors proved ineffective in altering the abject cultural landscape they faced as full participants on a national scale. Bles's and Zora's first movement ends tragically because, even though both transition from promising youths to a developing maturity just as the swamp transitions from undeveloped mire to cotton-producing land, they nevertheless come to that maturity within institutionalized structures designed to defer fulfillment of full citizenship. Monopolistic capital destroys the possibility of rich individuation. Because of this, the first movement of formation matches with a central claim by Boes that "any attempts to give national form to the life of a protagonist will always resist fulfillment in institutional structures, thereby violating the demands for finality and normative closure that are constitutive of traditional *Bildungsroman*" (7).

Du Bois's environmental imagination comes to the foreground at the intersection of character fulfillment and institutional structures because of the space he draws on to narrate these

losses. The swamp's "scrim" (to borrow from Houston Baker) only screened the protagonists for a time where their "safe, colored parochialism" necessarily crashes into the realities of a larger system predicated on Black exploitation. John Claborn understands Du Bois's environmental rhetorics in concert with double-consciousness as a version of the complex pastoral, one that "frames nature and wilderness tropes within a larger social critique of racism and the experience of double environments" (49). Based on that complex pastoral, the long-arc of the first movement is arguably predicated on Zora and Bles experiencing the impossibility of their subject position even with the seeming retreat offered by the Veil of the swamp. They face two realties in the same environment, a doubleness in both space and cultural experiences that further implies a doubled participation in modernity for Black Folks with one bound to the past and another actively shaping the future. In this way, *Fleece* represents the swamp in what Anthony Wilson describes as a trope in which its "mercurial trace…inscribes themes of purity and adulteration played out in an array of political, cultural, and psychological contexts" making the swamp "more than anything else a physical reminder of the barrier between the actual and ideal" (ix). In other words, rather than leave off with a *Bildungsroman* form that denies fulfillment, Du Bois turns to content to help revitalize an optimism that was falling apart at the seams. His *Bildungsroman* utilizes its own swamp-ish "mercurial trace" to accomplish this revision as Bles and Zora experience a rural-to-urban shift even though this new political swamp proves less than fertile under its current cultivation practices.

In the second movement, Bles's relocation to Washington completes his education in national forms and their intersection with racial formation. By shifting the narrative to D.C., Du Bois turns from the physical swamp to an allegorical political swamp. In this geographical relocation that nevertheless remains bound by the same racial limitations Bless lived through in

Alabama, he goes from a country bumpkin to adept politician and race-minded activist under the tutelage of Ms. Caroline Wynn, a District socialite and politically ambitious woman. Du Bois describes Bles's urban instructor and future fiancée as a "brilliant and well-trained" woman with an eye for sculpture, "sprung from at least three generations of respectable mulattoes"—a clear representative of the "Black 400" of Washington, D.C. (219). Historically, this group marked the "center of [B]lack aristocracy in the United States" from the end of Reconstruction until the start of WWI (Gatewood, 39). This same group of Black aristocrats came to be known as a "Blue Vein Society"—a term prominent during the turn of the twentieth century that referred to an institutionalized form of colorism wherein light-skinned Black Americans characterized themselves as a separate, elite social group.

Ms. Wynn's cultivated sensibilities, keen eye for politics, and a hand for social ambitions "not always sympathetic in its touch," make her both a representative of the Washington 400 and a foil for Zora (211). Zora awoke in Bles a deep of love the land, cementing his understanding of labor and his ambitions to see their just rewards realized only to later become the object of their dissolution. Ms. Wynn awakens Bles's political ambitions, enlivening his love of Black Folks and their enfranchised potential while simultaneously presenting him with the temptations of politics on the national level that necessarily separates him from the daily experiences of Black people. Additionally, whereas Zora was Bles's guide through the swamp, lifting its Veil to show him its beauty and potential, Ms. Wynn is Bles's guide through parlors and politics, lifting the Veil of Black Washington, showing him its politics, struggles, and nearly leading him into its trap of immoral muck wherein principles are sacrificed for prestige, where political position carries more value than social purpose.

Bles's scenes of development in Washington are not limited to Ms. Wynn's influences.

His government ambitions see him, once again, unwittingly influenced by the political machinations of both the Cresswells and Taylors, two families now joined through marriage as well as an unholy economic marriage of cotton market manipulations by the Taylors and senatorial manipulations by Harry Cresswell. Yet, in this new swamp environment of D.C. politics, Bles becomes intimately aware of just how deeply the racial, economic, and political mire runs in the nation. His meteoric rise coupled with Ms. Wynn's ambitions force him to choose between the realization of a combined social and political appointment or remaining a principled man committed to racial uplift. The conflict between ambitions and morals leads his realization, at the nadir of his fall, that "the city he once found so alluring somehow looked like the swamp, only less beautiful" (276). Here, Du Bois captures the larger social forces assailing Bles by rhetorically deploying the swamp to present the deferral of full citizenship for Black Folks in the heart of the nation.[9] In Alabama, Bles learns the impossibility of full agency for Black Folks in the white South because of economic and cultural conditions beyond his control. He learns these lessons through his intimate, personal labors in the swamp and relationship with Zora. In Washington's swamp, Bles learns that even exercising the full limit of his political participation does not get him outside the first problem of an impossible subject position in a system designed to always already compromise his integrity for political gain. He learns this lesson through both his intimate, personal relationship with Ms. Wynn as well as through being trapped between the Scylla of realizing his public ambitions as a Black man in Washington politics and the Charybdis of a public betrayal of his morals and subsequent betrayal of racial

[9] In *The Color of Race in America*, Matthew Pratt Guterl explores the tensions between W.E.B. Du Bois and Booker T. Washington regarding Du Bois's failure to be appointed as the superintendent of schools in Washington, D.C. in 1903. Gurterl writes, "Having assured Du Bois that he was the first choice for the job, Washington withdrew his written support and then, after urging Du Bois to have faith, cast his vote publicly for another man. From that point onward, Du Bois was increasingly sensitive to Washington's political abuses" (109). Arguably, Bles's trials in Washington are influenced by Du Bois's personal experiences.

uplift to realize his political ambitions.

The correlations between Alabama and Washington D.C. in Du Bois's environmental imagination are rhetorical tools of instruction for his readers that use the swamp as common ground. The swamp as place and organizing concept is also how Bles comes alive to the reality of endlessly deferred citizenship for Black people in the United States. He learns this fact by drawing on the established environmental experiences from his youth regarding his labor and living the reality of systemic injustices in both the South and the nation's capital. Such a lesson leads to not only finding Washington swamp-like but finding in its political mire an expression of the swamp's ugliness rather than its beauty. Washington D.C. is just as much a double environment as the swampland of Alabama. Bles's pedagogical environmental comparison, then, is less about a specific ecological world view and more about how his environmental experiences enable a greater understanding of racialized politics on the national scale. He finds the seat of American democracy trapped in habits of a racist past wherein he cannot rise to office without compromising his integrity. By then leaving Washington's swamp politics for the swamp-South once again, Bles's movement suggests that hope for the future lies in the Black South—a region where an abundance of Black life holds the greatest promise for democratic ideals.[10]

For Zora, her urban experiences as well as her further development under the direction of Mrs. Vanderpool complete her education in national forms and the limitations of a Black subject position inside a white-controlled world. Zora's movement from the Alabama swamps to the allegorical swamp of social manipulations and political intrigue shows how Du Bois draws on

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[10] Guterl follows a similar line of analysis in Du Bois's work. He argues, "As Du Bois well knew, all studies of that 'Negro problem' were rooted in southern history. In the New South, the quirks of the *fin-de-siécle* economy—the disastrous depressions that raced like tornadoes over the farming and agricultural regions of the South and West—led to widespread social strife" (103). Here, I expand on Guterl's reading, insisting that Du Bois, at least during the time he composed *Souls* and wrote *Fleece* saw a future for Black people in the South despite the backward urges and constraints of white supremacy.

the Black environmental imagination to articulate the impossibility of fully realized citizenship for Black womanhood under white limitations. Yet, rather than seeing defeat in the world, Zora provides the more optimistic and aesthetically developed point of view, seeing this new urban world as "like the swamp, always restless and changing" but "not nearly so beautiful…and yet more interesting" (213). Here, Zora's second sight of the world around her draws from the wealth afforded by the Black environmental imagination to help her make sense of her new situation. She differs from Bles in that her aesthetic developments take the lead, allowing her to see the beauty of a swamp-like metropole rather than its ugliness. Yet, her ability to see the beauty of the world ought not to be taken as an instance of blind optimism. Instead, seeing the beauty of a world in swamp-like terms points to the double environmental potential of those spaces even if that potential has not been realized by its denizens. Here, Zora's maturation reveals a familiar habit of using the swamp as rhetorical means to make sense of the world around her even as that sense-making effort captures the threats of white supremacy. Zora has an alternative world view, one that sees potential under the right stewardship in much the same way her early views on the swamp reflected the same hopes without eliminating its threats.

Zora's hopes and developments, the lessons she learns under Mrs. Vanderpool's patronage, all lead to a realization of limitations inside white systems of racial control and assumptions about Black Folks. In Zora's case, her tracking the political career of Bles (for whom she still carries a torch) coupled with the pressures of her own attempts to discover "the way" to live a moral and ethically sound life transform her from a raw "child of the swamp" into an exemplum of triumphant womanhood that "look[s] on her world with the keener vision of one who, blind from the very seeing, closes the eyes a space and looks again with wider, clearer vision" (308). The trace of the swamp in Zora's development manifests in the earnestness of her

desires and the folk-like wisdom she carries with her even as she grows more sophisticated in thought and taste. Like Bles, Zora experiences her own moment of disillusionment with national politics when her patron, Mrs. Vanderpool, betrays both her and Bles to advance the political career of her husband to a French ambassadorship, justifying to Zora in a fit of guilt and frustration her decision to support her husband (and by extension whiteness) over Bles by declaring, "I am the world" (284). Zora lives this betrayal not through anger but through a superior pity. She comes to understand Mrs. Vanderpool's "world" is not her world, a realization that enables her to understand the limitations of the institutional structures in which she had placed her faith.

In what amounts to a kind of variation on a theme of development, Zora, comes to realize the role Black Folks play in shaping the course of modernity through political and social betrayal. Mrs. Vanderpool's moral limits, the political ambitions she holds for her husband, and the selfishness with which she orchestrates her success cement Zora's understanding of how even the best-intentioned white Folks are nevertheless unable to stop cultivating white supremacy in service to equitable toil. Mrs. Vanderpool's betrayal shows Zora the full measure of white institutionalized racisms that are both backwards looking, and exploitative in nature. Rather than succumb to similar measures of pettiness and greed, she responds with pity for a white woman whose status and wealth, by any outside measure, ought to be enviable. She learns the superiority of her spirit over the selfish ambitions of her white benefactor by breaking ties with her patron. Her break also demonstrates a more finely developed moral and emotional intelligence, proving she has superseded Mrs. Vanderpool in both moral rectitude and spiritual virtue. Considering this, Zora leaves Washington and the Vanderpool mire for Alabama.

Zora experiences a moral epiphany on her journey back to Alabama. Riding a train back

South, in what amounts to a kind of prodigal daughter's return, sees the world in a new vision:

> So she looked on the world about her with new eyes. These men and women of her childhood had hitherto walked by her like shadows; today they lived for her in flesh and blood. She saw hundreds and thousands of black men and women: crushed, half-spirited, and blind. She saw how high and clear a light Sarah Smith, for thirty years and more, carried before them. She saw, too, how that the light had not simply shone in darkness, but had lighted answering beacons here and there in these dull souls. (308)

Zora's epiphany leads her to dedicate herself to the Black folk of her home. She chooses to serve her "people" with all their "vast unorganized power" ostensibly fulfilling the call of Du Bois's Talented Tenth to engage in the project of racial uplift. Moreover, the epiphany marks the end of her educational journey. While not yet triumphant, her return home signals a maturity of spirit and virtue she struggled to realize when first leaving. In her own way, then, Zora begins to sing her own song of Toil and Service.

When Zora and Bles return to Alabama for the third and final movement of their *Bildungsroman* in *Fleece*, they are more educated, cosmopolitan, and capable of reform if not also disillusioned to the failed promises of a national forms founded on systemic racism. Zora, who returns first, finds Black Folks suffering under the exploitative practices of the Cresswells and their plantation. She sees a young plough-boy whipped by an overseer (310), interrupts the possible rape of a young girl on the "plantation road" by a white man (311), and realizes from these new-yet-old horrors that she must "make it possible for these poor beasts of burden to be decent in their toil;" that she must "out of the protection of womanhood as a central thought…build ramparts against cruelty, poverty, and crime" (311). In the aftermath of this epiphany, Zora confesses to Miss Smith—the northern school mistress—her scheme to purchase

the swamp from the Cresswells to build a future for her people, "to be the beginning of a free community" (314). Bles, in his return finds Zora hard at work on her community, having made good on her promise to buy the swamp with money from a final payment given to her by Mrs. Vanderpool in her guilt over the Washington betrayal (319). Bles's homecoming finds him "shorn, powerless, and in moral revolt" because the world and his Washington experiences had left him "a mere clerk, an insignificant cog in the great grinding wheel of humdrum drudgery" (328). In the depths of his "spiritual perplexity," Bles rediscovers both Zora and her swamp with a small, cleared space complete with a log cabin as a refuge for young girls—a "centre for settlement-work" that becomes his rallying point on the road to rejuvenation. Together, the two rekindle their love for one another but experience that love as both tempered and matured by their time apart and their joint service.

Together they transform the swamp into an autonomous commune designed with several twenty-acre farms that support one central plantation of one hundred acres for the school. Their swamp community becomes a "centre for agencies to make life better" for Black Folks. Under the direction of Zora and Bles, the two see an industrious future with a hospital, resident physician, a few nurses, a cooperative store, a cotton-gin and saw-mill. They insist on keeping the one hundred acres for "the public good," while deeding the land to a board of trustees comprised of persons who buy small farms out of the one hundred acres (350). Zora and Bles return to the South to discover a future for themselves and Black Folks that claims a seemingly abject stretch of swampland, reforms and revitalizes that environment into a sustainable model, places the value of communal uplift over individual profits, organizes itself around the public good, and makes the heart of their labor efforts education. In short, the protagonists come to realize their full potential in triumphant adulthood by returning to the Black South, by founding a

community based on socialist principles that is at once more democratic than the nation that failed to see their potential, and they accomplish all of this behind the Veil of the swamp whose doubleness as danger and promise, abjection and beauty, they are able to bend to their collective will.

## Conclusion

With *Fleece*, Du Bois uses the *Bildungsroman* form as well as the Black environmental imagination to show a future where realized potential, land ownership, communal values, spiritual strivings, education, and economic cooperation offers a solution to the racial struggles of Black Folks in the South, if not also to the problem of the color line on a national scale. Jarvis McInnis reads this combination of narrative interventions as an "anti-plantation romance," that also preserves "agriculture, and specifically cotton production, as a viable way of life for Black Southerners" (91). Certainly, *Fleece* has aspects of the plantation romance running throughout its various subplots. As previously stated, the double-marriage of the Cresswells to the Taylors relies on the familiar reunification marriage plot between Northern and Southern States from the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Du Bois's representations of the planter Cresswells and the industrial Taylors showcase regional stereotypes in contemporary American literature. The political ambitions of the younger Harry Cresswell and his vitriolic racist rhetoric in the middle section of the novel reflect similar viewpoints of the most popular plantation romances of the day, including Thomas Dixon's *The Leopard's Spots: Romance of the White Man's Burden* (1902) and *The Clansman: Historical Romance of the Ku Klux Klan* (1905). Similarly, the views of his father, Colonel Creswell, follow the racist logics used by Thomas Nelson Page, most notably in *Red Rock* (1898), whose depictions of Black Folks as either happy slaves, ignorant children, or hyper-sexualized predators and prey shaped much of the tropes for Black characters

written by Southern whites at the turn of the century. Finally, *Fleece* does use the plantation to bookend its narrative, depicting it as a miniaturized version of Du Bois's contemporary America, especially in terms of its reliance on white supremacy in a rising Black South, the incursion of modern markets on an antiquated plantocracy, the troubled relationship between northern industrial interests and the South's agrarian roots, and above all else its social complexity and the ways in which this mirrored national anxieties involving class, race, and citizenship rights. In support of McInnis's claims, *Fleece* can reasonably be seen as an "anti-plantation romance" through the various character failures in these subplots. Harry Cresswell's child with his northern wife, Mary, is stillborn symbolizing the impossibility of a viable North/South union based on racism. In another turn against of the plantation romance, rather than coming to see the good in a Southern husband, Mary discovers in Harry a sexual predator and villain—a discovery that drives her back to the South and into further service for Black Folks at Miss Smith's school. John Taylor, Mary's brother and the northerner industrialist manipulating the cotton markets, also lives through an unhappy marriage with his vacuous Southern wife, and rather than becoming a convert to the values of the Southern plantocracy, ultimately rejects that ethos because of its ignorant racisms that stand in the way of profits.

However, it bears remembering that these conflicts are subplots in the novel, and as subplots they are better understood as points of comparison to the main Bles/Zora story rather than as definitional features of the novel. In other words, the overlap of genre conventions from the plantation romance and their repudiations in *Fleece* is perhaps more productively understood as an alternative rendering of a Black Southern romance within a *Bildungsroman* that carries the hope of a socially just future rather than simply an "anti" romance. An understanding of the novel in those terms not only frees Du Bois's first novel from the trap of an axiomatic genre-

signaling system that limits the reach of his interventions, but it also celebrates the self-theorizing aspects of his formal maneuvers as an alternative to that system. To provide that alternative, Du Bois utilizes a rhetorics of otherness that pivots on how the Southern environment is imagined and represented from a Black subject position in a politically and generically innovative narrative form. To that end, Zora and Bles are characters that experience the Veil and double-consciousness as conditions of their growth but not necessarily always as ones of limitation to that growth. Although their character arcs begin and end with the plantation and there are subplots in *Fleece* that draw on the conventions of the plantation romance, the novel neither relies on those conventions to drive their narrative from youth to maturity nor limits their coming-of-age story as its counter-narrative. Instead, Zora's and Bles's arcs combine the philosophical power of Du Bois's concept metaphors with the pedagogical force of *Fleece*'s literary intervention to create future-oriented Black Southern environmental imagination. The novel affords Du Bois greater freedoms than the essays from *Souls* precisely because of what fiction makes possible. *Fleece* allows him to show the intimate workings of both the Veil and double-consciousness, land and identity, Blackness and modernity, as his two protagonists come of age in the United States. He revitalizes the *Bildungsroman* in a Black American context with both his character's beginnings and endings being decidedly Southern but not bound to a backwards looking rhetoric of nostalgia so common to the South's literary productions. The future-oriented nature of *Fleece*, then, allows him to break with his white authorial contemporaries' habits of nostalgically representing the South to signal a yearning for a "lost" past. Du Bois's use of the Black environmental imagination represents the Black South as a full participant in modernity while simultaneously providing a moral direction to its verve.

As the first fictional work in Du Bois's impressive literary archive, *The Quest of the*

*Silver Fleece* will most likely never rise to the significance of *The Souls of Black Folks*, *Darkwater*, *Dusk of Dawn*, or *Black Reconstruction*. Yet, this does not mean it should be overlooked as an important work. As both an example of Du Bois's formal innovations and as a fictional expansion on his understanding of the Veil and double consciousness, *Fleece* provides valuable insights for anyone interested in the development of African American literature, the importance of Black thought for Southern Studies, and the intersection of Du Bois's concept metaphors with his environmental imagination. Moreover, when read in conjunction with *Souls*, one gains a better understanding of how Black life, labor, and agency are shaped but not necessarily limited by the Veil and double consciousness. Indeed, Du Bois takes advantage of what the novel form affords him in terms of imaginative scope for his sociological reasonings. He demonstrates those concepts in action through narrative's power in telling the story of two young, Black persons coming of age at the turn of the century. He provides a not so far-fetched possibility of what Black life and a Southern future could look like when grounded on moral rectitude, just political agency, and social equality. While Du Bois's view on the South would change dramatically over the course of his lifetime—changes that were altered by the New Negro Renaissance, two World Wars, a Great Depression, American Imperialism, and the Civil Rights Movement—the early hope that he places in the Black South and his demonstrated belief that Black Folks were at the vanguard of the region's march towards modernity reveals the existence of another understanding of the South's identity and potential from a Black vantage point. All of which is to say that, in his first novel, Du Bois draws on a uniquely just, optimistic, and politically engaged Black Southern environmental imagination. He re-presents the region as liberated from the confines of a Lost Cause ethos by imagining a triumphant, egalitarian Southern modernity with Blackness leading the way.

# CHAPTER V

# RESOURCE AND RHETORIC: ZORA NEALE HURSTON AND THE MAKING OF A WORLD OF WORDS

## Introduction

Zora Neale Hurston has experienced one of the most successful revivals of any American author in the last four decades. Once nearly forgotten by scholarship, Hurston came back into focus around 1971 through the work of Alice Walker and then later through Henry Louis Gates's seminal work, *The Signifying Monkey* (1988). A cursory search of the Modern Language Association's bibliography for "Zora Neale Hurston" with a date range from 1953-1977 returns a mere 28 results whereas the same search corrected for a date range from 1977-2020 returns a total of 1189 results. That is an increase of over one thousand percent. Arguably, Walker's trio of Hurston essays between 1975-77 deserve much credit for her recovery.[1] Walker's launch of the "Hurston Boom" as Leif Sorenson calls it was "both a scholarly and popular phenomenon" (141). Walker's first essay, "In Search of Zora Neale Hurston" was originally published in *Ms.*, a feminist magazine targeted for popular readership co-founded by Gloria Steinman and Dorothy Pitman Hughes in 1971. Walker's second essay, "Saving the Life That Is Your Own" was delivered at the San Francisco MLA conference in 1975 then later published in a collection of feminist writings curated by Barnard College. Walker's third essay, "Zora Neale Hurston" bridges the popular and scholarly by serving as the "Foreward" to Robert Hemenway's 1977 biography of Hurston, a rare scholarly work that went on to become a New York Times

[1] "In Search of Zora Neale Hurston" (1975); "Saving the Life That Is Your Own: The Importance of Models in the Artist's Life" (1976); and "Zora Neale Hurston: A Cautionary Tale and Partisan View" (1977). All citations of these essays will be from reprinted versions in *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens: Womanist Prose*.

bestseller the following year. The Hurston revival continued with Henry Louis Gates Jr.'s *The Signifying Monkey.* In this key work, Gates draws on Hurston's novels to present the idea of the "speakerly text" and the importance of the frame narrative for African American literature to scholarly attention. Since Walker's, Hemenway's, and Gates's work, Hurston has become something of a hyper-canonical figure for Black feminism, African American Literary Studies, anthropology, folklore, Caribbean studies, Modernist studies, Southern Studies, and more recently ecocritical approaches to literature and the environment.

However, Hurston's return to prominence was never a foregone conclusion. In "The Political Incorrectness of Zora Neale Hurston," Andrew Delbanco argues that Hurston experienced a fall from grace that left her to die in poverty because of her ideas on race that differed from many during the Civil Rights era. For Delbanco, "the real reason Hurston's reputation declined between the 1940s and the 1970s was that the civil rights movement led most intellectuals to regard southern black folk culture as a residual symptom of slavery and segregation." During that time, Hurston's characters who spoke in idioms and appeared anti modern "became faintly embarrassing" and "her affection for the sealed Black world in which she had grown up came to seem, in other words, politically retrograde" (106). Alongside a subject matter that, at least on the surface of things, appeared to be behind the curve, Hurston also experienced controversy because of her views on segregation. Olivia Marcucci tackles the complexities of Hurston's history regarding segregation and the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision from 1954. In her article, "Zora Neale Hurston and the Brown Debate: Race, Class and the Progressive Empire," Marcucci emphasizes Hurston's central thesis from her "Letter to the Editor" of the *Orlando Sentinel* from 1955 that "forced desegregation leads to spiritual and cultural oppression, disguised within the ostensibly progressive" *Brown* ruling. Marcucci takes

issue with condemnations of Hurston's disappointment with the decision that cast her as pro-segregation and anti-progress, or in the words of some critics turned her from "former darling of the Harlem Renaissance and a Langston Hughes endorsed 'Niggerati'" into an embittered woman who had "settled into a belligerent conservatism" (Plant 106). For Marcucci, she reads in Hurston's letter a continuation of her complicated, often slippery rhetorical positioning wherein Hurston sees the "progressive empire is a farce, because it disguises colonial oppression in humanitarian and liberal gestures" (13). Marcucci goes on to insist that rather than seeing White schools as inherently "better because they had White students," Hurston advocated for "Black self-association" and a standard of excellence within the Black community.

In addition to her political controversies, Hurston's relationship with Charlotte Osgood Mason has long been a point of contention. Here, Hurston's long involvement and financing by Mason—the funding lasted from 1927-1932—coupled with the fallout between Hurston and Langston Hughes over their play *Mule Bone* cast a pall over her work. Whereas Hughes broke contact with Mason, Hurston maintained the relationship, a continuance which opened her to criticisms of "recreating what [Mason] viewed as important about the black experience" rather than create art independent from white control (Story 289). As such, the Mason/Hurston relationship not only led to accusations of minstrelsy and the reproduction of racisms by Hurston for a white patroness, but the relationship also led to Mason seemingly having an untoward control over Hurston's production. While revisionist critics have now come to see Hurston as a victim or unwilling captive of the patronage system, the combination of Mason's overreach, coupled with Hurston's own recalcitrance and strategy of a "feather bed resistance" still lend some measure of credence to less flattering claims regarding Hurston's works during that time.

Finally, Hazel Carby offers one of the most penetrating critiques of Hurston's rise. In

"The Politics of Fiction, Anthropology, and the Folk," she claims that the Hurston revival finds her appealing because her work constitutes "a representation of 'Negroness' as an unchanging, essential entity, an essence so distilled that it is an aesthetic position of [B]lackness" (122). Carby's argument names the problem of authenticity that Black scholars, artists, and authors have always faced in an American context. For Carby, Hurston's untoward appeal in both scholarly and popular discourse lies in her claim to authentic Blackness. Carby also sees in Hurston's rise a re-entrenchment of authenticity's specter for Black scholarship and the social power of Blackness in the already resistant environments of academia and popular culture.

Hurston's meteoric return to popularity and the valid concerns raised by her more cautious critics highlight the pitfalls of making a single author representative of a literary tradition, gender, race, or culture. However, that a debate over Hurston's work started over thirty years ago continues into today's scholarship speaks to the significance of her writings and the status of her as a key figure in American letters. These continuing tensions reveal how, on the one hand, resistances to Hurston's importance indicate a lack of consensus regarding the function of Hurston's "assertive individualism" that enabled her to "confidently articulate her ideas however discordant they sounded" to both the race leaders of her contemporary moment, and Black scholarship today (*Assertive Woman* xii). On the other hand, the celebration of her recovery and rise to canonical status highlights the richness of Black literature in the modernist era, and the importance of Hurston as "a crucial link in the [B]lack female literary tradition" with her masterpiece *Their Eyes Were Watching God* as a "mother text" in that same tradition (West 1). The disagreement between scholars that her work generates as well as Hurston's mobility indicates a need to return to Hurston's works because it is through disagreement that cultural progress derives its verve. As such, rather than attempt to resolve the continuing Hurston debate

given its scope in terms of academic, political loyalties, and literary traditions, I elect to see the fact of the argument itself as confirmation of Hurston's importance across the fields of African American, Modernist, Southern, and ecocritical approaches to literary study. Instead of seeing these disagreements as a sign of limitation for Hurston's works, a more productive way to understand such discourse is as a continuance of Hurston's own playful legacy in an academy that never quite accepted her on her own terms.

In celebration of Hurston's alterity and challenges, this chapter, "Resource and Rhetoric: Zora Neale Hurston and the Making of a World of Words" attends to the rhetorical intimacies and complexities of her early writings from the New Negro Renaissance moving through her first novel, *Jonah's Gourd Vine* (1934). The chapter explores how Hurston's environmental imagination informed representations of Southern Blackness and the politics of Black life in the South. I argue that Hurston's early works present a contrarian study of a Black Southern environmental imagination because of her rhetorical innovations that use the environment as a resource for individual expression and cultural preservation. By recognizing the ambiguity generated in Hurston's environmental rhetorics, it becomes possible to understand how the larger political innuendos of her early works neither limit Black expression to the "sobbing school of Negrohood" that marks a "sorrow dammed up in [her] soul" nor renders Black expression dependent on the environment to affirm that "nature has somehow given [Black Folks] a low-down dirty deal" because they are "tragically colored" (827).[2] Hurston's unique textual and dialogic style demonstrates an agile use of the natural world to celebrate, express, and represent Black life in a Southern context. In this way, Hurston's early works can be understood as drawing on the Southern environment as a metaphoric resource for folk wisdom and meaning

[2] "How It Feels to be Colored Me" (1928)

making that is also culturally replenished through language play. By authoring texts set in predominantly, if not exclusively Black worlds, her works demonstrate how an environmental awareness of race and gender does not signal racial destiny or naturalized permanency but rather a complex series of negotiations played out in speech and action as her characters pilot the often-troubled waters between individual desire and cultural expectations. The chapter concludes by contending that these works allow Hurston to depict a Black experience of the environment that is not delimited by the rhetorics of a white supremacist culture. In other words, a close study of Hurston's Black worlds and Black environment rhetorics reveal both a semantic resource in the natural world and an unapologetic assertion of the power of belonging for Black life.

### Early Life, Early Wanderings, and Hurston's Contrarian Streak

I want to begin studying Hurston's environmental rhetorics by first turning to the mobility of her early life to discover the importance of community and belonging for her first writings. Laying out Hurston's early wanderings and struggles serves two key purposes. First, her lived experiences during the same years that Du Bois's *Fleece* ostensibly takes place demonstrates that the life challenges Black persons, and particularly Black southern women, faced were not as seamlessly resolvable as Du Bois's optimism implies at the close of his novel. While Hurston was able to cobble together a successful life, complete with somewhat steady work and intermittent education, the precariousness of that success depended more on her own hustle than the triumph of civic or moral virtues. Hurston did not strive to reform the muck of life. Rather, she remained down in it, all the while cultivating her own sense of self in its rich loam. Second, remembering the travels and travails Hurston faced and overcame contextualizes her contrarian, individualistic streak that ultimately helped her become one of the most consequential artists of the Harlem Renaissance, African American, and Southern literature.

Hemenway's biography tells us that Hurston was born on January 7, 1891, in Notasulga, Alabama, the fifth of eight children and youngest daughter of Lucy Ann Potts and John Hurston. The daughter of a formally enslaved sharecropping father and a mother whose family were upwardly mobile, property-owning African Americans in the South, Hurston's proximity to enslavement and Black achievement provided her with an experiential archive that shaped how she would later represent the generational tensions between those born into enslavement and the first generation of emancipated Blacks in *Jonah's Gourd Vine*.[3] When she was three years old, she moved with her family from Notasulga to Eatonville, Florida in 1894. Eatonville—the setting for many of her plays, short-stories, and novels—was incorporated in 1886, and later described by Hurston as the first incorporated Black community in America. In her autobiography, *Dust Tracks on a Road,* Hurston would claim she was born in Eatonville, not Alabama, signaling a preferred alignment with an independent, politically actualized Black community rather than the more regressive Alabama. Hurston's father, John, would serve three terms as mayor of Eatonville, become the pastor of the Zion Hope Baptist Church as well as the Macedonia Baptist Church, and served as the moderator for the South Florida Baptist Association. With the help of her mother, Lucy, the family eventually own five acres of land, and an eight-bedroom house.

The domestic and political successes for both Hurston's family and Eatonville stand as examples of what Koritha Mitchell calls "homemade citizenship," by which she means "a deep sense of success and belonging that does not depend on civic inclusion or mainstream recognition" (3). Indeed, Eatonville and the Hurston's status in the town itself can be seen as

[3] As a proof in point for the importance of that proximity, Hurston uses both the names of her mother and father for the protagonists of *Jonahs's Gourd Vine*. The intensely autobiographical features of this first novel suggest both a way for her to honor a familial past that had become fractured as well as a reservoir of personal experience that supplied her early works.

practicing a set of communal traditions that are less interested in "responding to the [white supremacists] forces that oppose them so much as continuing community traditions of affirming themselves while acknowledging that the resulting success will attract hostility" (3).[4] The untimely death of Lucy in September, 1904 was both a tragedy for Hurston—in *Dust Tracks on a Road* she confesses to being her mother's favorite child—and precipitated another move within Florida. One month after her mother's death, thirteen-year-old Hurston found herself living in Jacksonville with family while her father remarried within the year back in Eatonville. Hurston lived with her sister Sarah and attended a Baptist Boarding School during her Jacksonville time. However, less than a year after the move to Jacksonville, her father and stepmother, Mattie Moge, failed to pay her tuition resulting in Hurston having to leave the school for home, with the school officials paying for her return trip when her father did not send money for her train fare. From 1906-1911, she shuttled from house to house of family friends and relatives of her mother, never staying with her father or stepmother for long because of the tensions that existed between her and Mattie. During these five years she attended school intermittently while working in domestic services, and grew increasingly resentful of her stepmother, blaming her for the dispersal of the family and her father's public fall from grace and prestige.

In 1912, Hurston's conflict with her stepmother over a dispersed family after her marriage to John and her father's falling social stature within the larger Eatonville community came to a violent head. According to Hurston in *Dust,* Mattie took it upon herself to discipline

[4] One way to measure expected hostility for both the Hurstons and Eatonville is through an examination of so-called "Sundown Towns" in the South. While James Loewen notes that between 1890-1940—the date range that is considered the "nadir" of racial relations in the United States—the plantation South had only 9 "confirmed" sundown towns (27), the non-plantation South had 59 "confirmed" towns (24). In Florida, the most notorious were Cedar Keys, Ocoee, and Yankeetown. Given that Eatonville was incorporated in 1886 (just before the start of the nadir) it stands to reason that while the town citizens were aware of the threats surrounding them, they nevertheless chose to affirm the power of their community and Blackness by making themselves a recognized democratic body. For more information on sundown towns see, "Sundown Towns and Counties: Racial Exclusion in the South" by James W. Loewen, *Southern Cultures* v. 15 no. 1 (2009) 22-47.

her for challenging Mattie's authority in hopes that her father would jump in and take Mattie's side. Mattie, missing the mark with a thrown bottle to start the melee, unleashed the "primeval" in Zora, making her alive to the "corn [she] wanted to grind" (76). Leaping to the fight, Hurston writes, "Consequences be damned!…I wanted her blood, and plenty of it. That is the way I went into the fight, and that is the way I fought it" (76). If Hurston's notoriously unreliable autobiography is to be trusted, the fight was a lopsided brawl of epic proportions. In the end, Hurston's father pulled her from her stepmother, with Hurston confessing that she "had not beaten more than two years out of her yet" leaving poor Mattie four years shy of her total credit owed (77). Here, Hurston's recognition—even celebration—of intra-familial violence between two perceived matriarchal personalities troubles the waters of smooth domesticity often seen as necessary for the politics of racial uplift and Black womanhood. Her use of a cutting Southern idiom to launch the narrative of the fight coupled with a palpable sense of satisfaction in her triumph seemingly reinforces popular depictions of Black violence and familial dysfunction. Yet, Hurston's fight with her stepmother can also be understood as a defining moment in her young life—a kind of contrarian representation of housekeeping that at once situated her as the defender of her mother's legacy and as one who was able to see the dangers of allowing an intra-familial threat to go unchecked. Hurston's use of a fight with her stepmother, then, accomplishes two things. First, it allows Hurston to represent herself in a righteously combative light that further cultivates her narrative/performative persona as a keeper of Black community standards. Second, it narrates an instance of intra-familial strife as belonging within a Black community that, to draw on Mitchell's work once more, "can never be defined by U.S. politics and mainstream standards" (16).

The aftermath of the violence with her stepmother saw Hurston on the move again.

Again, according to Hemenway, she left her father's house in Eatonville relocating to Memphis where her brother Robert, a soon to be practicing physician, promised to send her to school. However, as a condition of her schooling, Hurston was required to help her sister-in-law with the children, a requirement she rebelled against leading to more intra-familial strife and obstacles to her education. She left her brother's home in 1915 to travel with the Gilbert and Sullivan troupe, as the only Black person they employed. In *Dust*, she writes that she was treated well or, as a "new play-pretty" who still "had the map of Dixie" on her tongue. The now twenty-four-year-old Hurston posits that she was so well received by the troupe because she was raised, as "an average southern child, white and black, is raised on simile and invective" (104). Here, again, Hurston uses her narrative/performative persona to affirm her ability to capitalize on white implicit racism for her own gains while such gains revealed her somewhat contrarian approach to Black success. In short, it was with the Gilbert and Sullivan troupe that Hurston began to master what she would later call "a feather-bed resistance" to whiteness and white supremacist limitations on her Black identity.

By playing her expected role within the troupe, Hurston was able to travel, earn money, and gain experience of a wider world even as that performance potentially affirmed debilitating, racist stereotypes. It was a bargaining Hurston entered into with open eyes. While her sojourn with Gilbert and Sullivan certainly started a life-long love of performing arts and the theatre, Hurston's tenure with the troupe was cut short by appendicitis in 1917. Left behind in Baltimore to recover after surgery, Hurston once again found a home with her widely dispersed family: her sister who had moved to Baltimore after their father's fall from social grace. In Baltimore, Hurston found work as a waitress and attended a night high school where she lied about her age to gain free admission, giving her birth year as 1901, effectively lopping off a whole decade from

her age.[5] It was a trimming that stayed with her for the rest of her life. Finally, in 1918, Hurston graduated from Morgan Academy—the high school division of what is now Morgan State University—and took full advantage of her proximity to Howard University by enrolling in the class of 1919.

1925 marked a dramatic turning point in Hurston's life and literary career. As Genevieve West notes in *Zora Neale Hurston and American Literary Culture*, Hurston had spent 1919 to 1924 struggling to make ends meet as a Howard student (14). She worked as a manicurist, maid, and waitress but had missed enrollment for her latest semester at Howard due to illness. Despite her best efforts, prospects were not bright. It was in this moment that Charles S. Johnson, the founder of *Opportunity Magazine* offered Hurston a literary lifeline. Impressed by her short story, "John Redding Goes to Sea," published by Howard's literary magazine *The Stylus* in 1921, Johnson sent her a letter informing her of his interest in introducing new Black writers to the public. Hurston responded to the kindness—albeit later than most editors are likely to appreciate—with "Drenched in Light" which Johnson published in 1924.[6] One year later, Johnson put forward a second Hurston short-story, "Spunk," that was later reprinted in Alain Locke's *The New Negro.* While "Spunk" marked Hurston's only contribution to the anthology, it went far in solidifying her position as a leading female author in the New Negro Renaissance, placing her in the company of race leaders such as Locke, Du Bois, Langston Hughes, Claude McKay, and Jean Toomer.

[5] Robert Hemenway writes in his Hurston biography (1977) writes she was "purposefully inconsistent in the birth dates she dispensed during her lifetime…Depending on the document, and whether she was trying to impress someone with her youth or her age, she claimed to be born in 1898, 1899, 1900, 1901, 1902, or 1903." Anna Lillious in *Crossing the Creek: The Literary Friendship of Zora Neale Hurston and Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings* suggests multiple ways to understand Hurston's choice to change her age: "perhaps in order to be thought a child of the new century, to be admitted to high school when she was in her twenties, or to gain an advantage in appearing younger while being older" (5).

[6] Hemenway, 19

Both of Hurston's *Opportunity* short-stories and her contribution to *The New Negro* should be understood as her Dixie calling card to the Black literary scene. To say that she took Harlem by storm is something of an understatement. Not only did she break onto its stage with "Drenched in Light," but in 1925, her short stories "Spunk" and "Black Death" as well as two plays, *Color Struck* and *Spears* won awards in *Opportunity*'s first literary competition. These works, judged by a panel of established artists Eugene O'Neil, Fannie Hurst, and James Weldon Johnson, show that even in this early stage of her career, Hurston was already experimenting with various ways to represent Black life. Given the success her writings found in New York, Hurston decided to leave Washington for Harlem. She arrived in the first week of January 1925, with "$1.50, no job, no friends, and a lot of hope" (*Dust* 138). Through Johnson and her own growing network of New York connections, Hurston found a job as Fannie Hurst's secretary (Hurst would later write a book jacket review of *Jonah's Gourd Vine*), became an award-winning playwright and writer, and by 1928 entered Barnard College with Annie Nathan Meyer's help capturing a scholarship. As Hurston writes with a fun chiasmus in *Dust Tracks*, she "came to New York through *Opportunity*, and through *Opportunity* to Barnard" (139).

What interests me about Hurston's move to Harlem, her participation in the New Negro Renaissance, and her subsequent writings from the 1930s is that she arrived in New York with her artist's gaze set on the South. Hurston's commitments to a Black South worked well with Alain Locke's claims from "The New Negro" that "the days of 'aunties,' 'uncles,' and 'mammies' is gone" and that "Uncle Tom and Sambo have passed on" because her work did not fall in line with the tradition of plantation romances and the representations of Black persons so damagingly common within that genre (5). Her arrival in Harlem also aligned with Locke's insistence that the Great Migration, what he called "the wash and rush of this human tide" could

be explained in terms of “new opportunity, or social and economic freedom” and as a “deliberate flight not only from countryside to city, but from medieval America to modern,” after all, Hurston’s own migrations coincided with Locke’s rushing tide metaphor making her one of the its many beneficiaries (6).

In a literary context, Hurston came to a full sense of her art and fiction through a decidedly Southern vantage point like her contemporary William Faulkner. Yet, Hurston preceded Faulkner in identifying her postage stamp of the South by some years, a bibliographic fact Southern and modernists scholars often overlook. Moreover, Hurston provides a decidedly different rhetorical approach for the Southern environmental imaginary than that other Dixie Limited of Southern letters. While much of Faulkner’s use of the environment—despite a somewhat burgeoning sense of ecological ethics—simply rewrote white supremacist ideals into the Southern landscape and transferred Lost Cause yearnings to a disappearing wood, Hurston’s environmental rhetorics are decidedly more life-affirming in nature. For her, the environment provides the occasion to represent Black life in the South *as* Black life. Drawing on Locke once more, Hurston’s works—fictional as well as folkloric and anthropological—demonstrated that Black Folks “contributed not only materially in labor and social patience, but spiritually as well. The South has unconsciously absorbed the gift of [their] folk-temperament” (15). In this way, her rhetorics are more alive to the ways language and culture change an environmental atmosphere for those living, working, and playing within its folds just as the environmental conditions change the language habits used to represent the business of living.

**Hurston’s Literary Breakout and Her Playful Environmental Rhetorics**

Hurston’s break-out short-story from *Opportunity*, “Drenched in Light” can be seen as her pencil draft beneath later masterpieces because of how it introduces several core themes in

her later, developed style. On the surface of things, the narrative tracks the episodic events throughout a day in the life of precocious Isie Watts, a young black girl in Eatonville, Florida. In one regard, Isie's adventures can be seen as something of a nostalgic treatment of Southern adolescence by a northerly relocated Hurston. Isie's battle with her grandmother over chores, etiquette, the dangers of "womanish" behaviors, and the freedoms of youth provides both the occasion for humor in generational struggles and a sympathetic portrait of Black girlhood. Moreover, Hurston's depiction of a Southern environment replete with possibility for young Isie runs contrary to cultural assumptions about the region and its practices of racial terrorism in the South. Isie's happy childhood coupled with her free movements within a Jim Crow restricted world potentially understate if not wholly eschew the threat white racial violence and white cultural control imposed on Black life. In this sense, Hurston's light tone and nostalgic optimism ostensibly confirm Hazel Carby's insistence that Harlem artists desired to "re-present African American cultural authenticity to a predominantly white audience as a mark of change from and confrontation with, what were seen by them to be externally imposed cultural representations of [B]lack people produced within, and supported by, a racialized social order" (30). When one carries forward Carby's claims into an aftermath of rhetorical interpretation reliant on both racial authenticity and the consequences of an environmental rhetorics, her assertion that Hurston's work signifies an inflection point between representations of Black life in a post-WWI, post-Great Migration United States and "representations in African-American humanist intellectual work that determines cultural and critical responses, or the lack of response, to the contemporary crisis of [B]lack urban America" rings true. Stated differently, while "Drenched in Light" shows early marks of genius, those same marks serve as early warnings for the coming crisis of representation often seen in Hurston's works.

While the inflection point between Hurston's story and later critical tensions over Black representation is certainly rich for inquiry, reliance on those tensions runs the risk of missing Hurston's rhetorical agility because they potentially over determine habits of reading and interpretation from the start. Another way to approach these works comes through paying closer attention to Hurston's details of place, character, and environment to speak something less of a total commitment to authentic folk representation and something more of a style that uses the adornment of authenticity within the lie of fiction to leverage folk life, urban ambitions, and generational resistances into an exploration of southern Blackness beyond its popular caricatures. Taking this approach, one can see Hurston's mercuriality comes through a rhetoric that is not particularly attached to one political stance or another but rather sees the terms of both camps and playfully offers both while leaving the reader to decide on a potential agenda. To understand such interconnected nuance, one needs to turn to how Hurston makes Isie's world and to how she depicts her interactions with it. A good place to start is the "shell road" that runs through Isie's life and serves as the resource for her ambitions.

The centrality of the shell road not only signifies the source of distraction and worldly connection. In broader cultural contexts, it represents the promise of migration from the restrictive South for young Blacks willing to undertake the risk of travel outside their prescriptive Southern scope. The "burning ire" Grandma Potts experiences at Isie's distractibility and desire to venture forth draws attention, on the one hand, to generational struggles all younger persons face when their attitudes conflict with changing social proprieties (940). On the other hand, Grandma Potts' belief that there are certain things "no one of this female persuasion should—one was to sit with the knees separated , 'settin' brazen' she called it; another was whistling, another playing with boys, neither must a lady cross her legs" and Isie's resistance to

those strictures can be seen as Hurston's narrative critique of double-standards Black women faced—strictures that led to a kind of compounding social formula wherein racial, gender, generational, and environmental expectations exacerbate the burdens placed on Black women from an early age (941). Isie's dancing, her seemingly primitive play, and her free spirit as "joy itself," as a child "drenched in light," while not liberated from the problematics of Black folk representation that Carby takes issue with, nevertheless provide an informed contrairian's view of what acceptance and celebration of Black aesthetic potential means in a modernizing world (947). In each case, Hurston's organizing symbol of the shell road serves as a resource for signifying labor while also restoring Isie's joy in the face of various resistances.

"Drenched in Light" takes Isie's world as well as her imaginative environmental play as the occasion to express the limitless, unhindered possibilities of creativity. For Isie, her child fantasies within Grandma Potts's house allow her to see herself as "various personages" with "trailing robes, golden slippers with blue bottoms." In her mind, she rides "white horses with flaring pink nostrils to the horizon for she still believed that to be the worlds end." The whole of her private world building allows for the vertiginous "contemplation of the nothingness at the horizon," suggesting that, while in future adulthood Isie will most certainly encounter social and cultural restrictions, in the wonder of youth there are few, if any restrictions on her horizons (942). Thus, Isie's world view, as captured through Hurston's environmental rhetorics, remains an open one. Both her imagination and her ambitions have yet to be hemmed in or corrupted by too much cultural intrusion. The world as a made environment—even if it is made through a child's imagination—is an egalitarian one where, at least provisionally, all roads remain open until otherwise blocked.

When Isie's free, imaginative world is threatened by cultural and social intrusion as seen

with Grandma Potts's ruination of Isie's performance at a barbecue as well as her promise of corporal punishment for the audacity of her actions, Hurston offers a subtle resistance to those strictures from older generations within the Black community by, ironically, making white patronage the "savior" of Isie's imagination. Isie's willful, even contented acceptance of Helen's bought and paid for release quietly rebukes Grandma Potts's generational views because Helen's patronage allows Isie to continue her play although Grandma Potts has spent the whole story trying to bring that play to an end. Isie's performance, willing—even eager—acceptance of white patronage carried to her by that shell road, therefore, works as a double entendre of Black modernist aesthetic ideals and restrictive social structures within the Black community. Historically, these sometimes contrary cultural and aesthetic intersections placed unfortunate yet real limitations on Black female artistic production (945-6). Between Grandma Potts's scolding because of her free spirit and the communal celebration of her dancing, Hurston uses Isie's childhood struggles as an allegory for a younger generation of Black female artists yearning for expressive freedom as they strained against the orthodox ethics of middle-class deportment. Indeed, it is amid those tensions that Hurston offers her most cutting, understated critique of said conventions. After all, it is only after adopting Helen, the somewhat vacuous if not mildly depressed white benefactress in the story, that Isie finds herself free and able to afford singing and performance as she has always wanted (948). Helen's purchasing of Isie for the day, then, can be read as both a condemnation of the patronage system through the echoes of purchased Blackness Helen's actions hail and as a recognition of the need for that Devil's bargain when gendered, generational conflicts within the Black community limit the artistic expression of New Negro artists.

Like "Drenched in Light," "Spunk" takes place in Eatonville, but differs in its use of

environmental rhetorics to represent the complexities of Black life beyond caricatured representations by turning from youth to adult themes. The story traces the conflict between the titular character Spunk Banks, his married lover Lena Kanty, her cuckold husband Joe Kanty, and Eatonville's reaction to two deaths over the illicit affair. The virile, assertive, gun-toting Spunk, daredevil of the local sawmill has openly taken Lena Kanty as his lover. The whole town of Eatonville, captured by Hurston's famous store porch gossip mongers, knows of the affair, even going so far as admiring Spunk's "big as life an' brassy as tacks" flaunting of his masculine power as he leads Lena off into a palmetto thicket to consummate their tryst (949). After Hurston's chorus witnesses Lena and Spunk walk into the woods, Lena's husband Joe Kanty visits the store and is subjected to a public shaming of his compromised masculinity by one of the lead talkers, Elijah. In response to being called out of his seeming willful submission to Spunk's and Lena's affair, Joe heads off into the woods with his "hollow ground razor" to "fetch her back" because, according to Joe, "Spunk's done gone too fur" (950). While the narrative does not provide a point of view on the action in the woods, Spunk's testimony after the fact coupled with the reportage of the porch sitters by way of a mediating narrative voice tells that Joe attacked Spunk from behind, failed in his attempt to kill him, and was shot dead in front of his wife, Lena. The town buries Joe Kanty in "ole stoney lonesome" with something of a subdued mourning. At the funeral, Spunk walks away from the men of the town who are simultaneously talking over their need to do something even as they fail to confront or detain Spunk over the murder. Later, back on the porch, all the men "talked of locking [Spunk] up until the sheriff should come from Orlando, but no one did anything but talk" (952). In time, Spunk and Lena move in together and plan to marry. However, their marriage does little to restore their social standing after Joe's death. Instead, the town begins judging their marriage in a sharper

light than their affair.

The town, while still bearing witness to Spunk's strength, see the marriage itself as something unnatural. Here, Hurston weaves folk lore, themes of gossip, and the natural world together through a haunting black bobcat that stalks around the newlywed's house at night, howling. The narrator tells the reader that town believes the bobcat is the ghost of Joe Kanty come back to assail the lovers while the symbolic function of the cat also gestures towards the idea of town gossip itself combining the other-than-human world and human superstition into a singular yet varied stylistic turn. After several nights of terrors, Spunk has an accident at the sawmill where he is nearly cut in half when he falls across a log he was riding up to the edge of the bandsaw blade. Spunk ultimately dies from his wounds, laid low by the same daring that raised him so high in masculine esteem. On his death bed, he confesses to Elijah, the man responsible for initially goading Joe to his death, that it was the ghost of Joe that pushed him into the mill saw, killing him.

"Spunk" uses natural world beyond human engineering to signify a space of possibility for Hurston's characters albeit for adult behaviors that are nevertheless outside the demands of traditional, marital propriety. Significantly, this story introduces her famous porch chorus and their power of "talk" which both consumes and swerves various lives even as the narrative shrouds those consequences in environmental rhetorics that combine folk superstition along with social judgements of infidelity with the other-than-human world. In this sense, Spunk and Lena, while certainly known as lovers within the town as confirmed by the porch chorus, leave the town for the palmetto thickets to enact their illicit if also envious love affair and are also consumed by the gossip mongers through talk. While the thickets just beyond the town's edge are where lovemaking outside the confines of marriage is most possible because they are outside

the boundaries of the town that places those strictures on behavior in the first place, the thickets are not outside the reach of talk, of language itself. Finally, in a twist that is both a critique of consumption practices for all parties involved, Hurston closes the story by suggesting the cycle has the potential to continue because the town looks on in wonder and anticipation at who Lena might choose as her next lover.

In a similar fashion, Joe's move to interrupt the affair by entering the woods demonstrates another way Hurston uses the town environment and the natural environment to her rhetorical advantage. Joe's decision to try and put a stop to Spunk's and Lena's infractions begin with his public shaming with Elijah noting Joe's failures to live up to the expectations of a married man. Moreover, it is through Elijah's specific hail that Joe finds the courage to go into the woods and set things right. Marriage, its expectation of monogamy, and the strictures regarding right behaviors for husband and wife are culturally made just as the mores governing the town are culturally made. The thicket allows Spunk and Lena an escape from those limitations even if their move is neither furtive nor timid. The brazenness with which the lovers violate cultural rules has the additional effect of bringing the usually unspoken expectations of marriage into open conversation. As such, the woods are both a resource to assert and subvert social rules and mores. Joe's movement into the woods carries town expectations into a non-town environment and allows Joe to act contrary to his town nature. The natural environment—no less culturally made than the town if it is less obviously constructed—enables Joe to be a different, more assertive man and that difference is made possible because he carries the assumed righteousness of town rules with him. Granted, Joe's efforts to enforce town standards outside of its limits fail which, in turn, adds verve to Hurston's move in making the natural world through superstition the means of Joe's final retribution.

Hurston rebalances the narrative environment of "Spunk" after Joe's failure to rectify the privation of his marriage by using natural world superstitions to explain Spunk's violent death against a town that failed to enforce its own mores and ultimately consumes all three characters. Hurston's pivot hinges on the totemic all-black bobcat that haunts Spunk and Lena as they move into a new house together. Elijah, the leading voice of the story, provides the fulcrum as he once again holds court on the store's front porch. He tells his audience that on the first night Lena and Spunk lived under the same roof, "a big black bob-cat, all over, you hear me, *black*, walked round and round that house and howled like forty, an' when Spunk got his gun an' went to the winder to shoot it, he says it stood right still an' looked him in the eye, an' howled right at him. The thing got Spunk so nervoused up he couldn't shoot. But Spunk says want' no bob-cat nohow. He says it was Joe done sneaked by from Hell!" (953). Hurston frames Elijah's telling as a re-telling of what Spunk has said to her speaker. Elijah is not a direct witness to the haunting. Rather, he functions as the relay point for the story—the voice by which the reader learns of Spunk's haunting and the voice by which both a natural, yet unnaturally behaving bobcat has been found in the town. The orality of Elijah's word, the textual stage of the front porch, and the use of an audience of listeners—an audience that includes the reader at this point—indicate a larger town environment out of balance because Spunk has somehow gone too far in his flaunting the order of things. After all, as Walt tells Elijah, "Joe ain't had time to get cold yit" when Spunk and Lena move in with one another (952). The bobcat from Hell allows the town to escape from its own failures to condemn the affair while providing Spunk an embodied explanation for his guilt. Even the narrative distance Elijah cultivates from the actual events uses the town's practice of oral archives as shared property to dilute culpability for the crimes against Joe and the violations of social propriety. The howling, all "*black*" bobcat not only fills the

silence left by the town's failures to speak against Spunk's crimes. It also represents the town itself in a double play on Blackness for character and race.

Finally, when Spunk dies in a particularly gruesome manner, the bobcat as an embodiment of Joe's ghost, town gossip, town character, and the town's talk helps account for Spunk's failure to survive by his own prowess. Spunk cannot accept the means of his death as a mere workplace accident but rather sees it caused by a haunting that violated the order of his world wherein he was pushed into the ban saw by Joe's ghost (954). The end of the story leaves the reader with a newly balanced narrative world. Both Joe and Spunk have been removed as variables in the town's business, and both were eliminated by unnatural means. In Joe's case, he was killed by Spunk who violated the order of the town in a non-town environment. In Spunk's case, he was allegedly killed by Joe's ghost, a haunting outside the known rules of the natural world that nevertheless accounts for an unexpected death of a virile man. The all-black bobcat, like the talk that preceded its arrival, fades into the woods as a remembered presence become absence like rumor itself.

Between "Drenched in Light" and "Spunk," Hurston's shows an early agnostic strategy for her environmental rhetorics as they relate to the New Negro Renaissance expectations of art and racial propaganda or her southern contemporaries William Faulkner and Margaret Mitchell who used their rhetorics for white supremacist purposes. While both stories create narrative worlds wherein various environments are shaped by and shape character actions, her rhetorics neither align with the demands of art as propaganda as espoused by Du Bois in 1926 nor does it attempt to re-present history in more amenable terms as seen with Faulkner and Mitchell. Hurston's early stories show a pattern of using environmental rhetorics to reveal and explain human character that do not rely on naturalizing race based on individual decisions. For Hurston,

the other-than-human world does not reveal or confirm any racial essentialism. While certainly aware of race as a rhetorical component within the stories, since her fiction centers on Blackness and Black life, Hurston gives herself freedom to focus on the actions of the stories, their unique characters, and the kind of life they strive to capture. In this way, "Drenched in Light" and "Spunk" are works that express and celebrate unique facets of Southern Black life without needing to be propped up by an abiding white presence.

As for Hurston's alignment with Du Bois's artistic conventions, the early agnosticism seen in her environmental rhetorics demonstrates a different approach to the struggles of Southern Black Folks that allows characters to speak for themselves rather than using a narrator to speak for or about them with a dominant, politically motivated voice. While her first two Harlem stories evince an implicit sympathy with Du Bois's claims from "The Negro in Art and Literature" that "the Negro is primarily an artist" and "never in the world has a richer mass of material been accumulated by a people than that which the Negroes possess today and are becoming conscious of," her lack of an overt, aggressive, propaganda strategy with her fiction potentially places her at odds with his assertion in "Criteria of Negro Art" that he "do[es] not care a damn for any art that is not used for propaganda" (862, 866, 1000). In Hurston's case, her critical interventions bubble up from within the story rather than suffer a narrator's pedantic voice expressly committed to a political (and in the case of Du Bois, economic) intervention. The point being the writings that heralded Hurston's arrival in Harlem's literary scene captured the verve of Black life in the South wherein people tried to do the best they could with what they had to do, sometimes acting with honor, sometimes not, sometimes with love and compassion and mercy, and sometimes not. Which, of course, is not to say that race in general or, Blackness had nothing to do with such a life. Rather, it is to assert that in Hurston's fiction such characters and

lives are possible because the world of her fiction is more-or-less a Black world. Blackness allows her greater freedom for her environmental imagination and rhetorics. While racism remains a very real experience for Hurston and her characters, since her literary world and environmental imagination is unapologetically Black, it is in Blackness that Hurston finds her creative archive and the liberty to speak. As such, Hurston's agnosticism shows in the ways that the environment serves as a semantic archive that aids in the wholly human enterprise of world making through narrative.

### ***Jonah's Gourd Vine* and Hurston's Rhetorical Resources**

*Jonah's Gourd Vine* (*JGV*), was published in 1934 after Hurston established herself as a widely traveled social anthropologist, field observer, and leading participant in the New Negro Renaissance. She wrote the novel in just a few short weeks while living in her home state of Florida.[7] In terms of plot, the novel traces the rise and fall of John Buddy Pearson and his marriage to Lucy Potts as he makes his way from Alabama to Florida, from a poor black family from "over the creek," to field hand on his white father's plantation, to railroad worker, to carpenter, to the Mayor of Eatonville, to founding pastor of the most popular church in town, and finally to his sudden death when he is struck by a train returning home to his third wife.

In terms of themes, the novel frames Black life in the South as a modern experience, miscegenation, the potential violence of blended families, misogyny, migration, Black success in Black community, infidelity, Black social politics, and the power of language to authorize,

[7] Hurston began writing on July 1, 1933, and completed her manuscript by September 6. Adding to Hurston's personal legend, Hemenway's biography tells us that Hurston lived in a one-room house in Sanford, FL while writing the novel, had no means of support, composed *Jonah's Gourd Vine* "on a flimsy card table" and survived on fifty cents for groceries each week (189). When the novel was completed, she owed eighteen dollars in back-rent, was evicted on October 16, the same day she received her letter of acceptance from Lippincott and a $200 advance. According to Hurston's autobiography, she was buying new shoes when she opened the publisher's telegram. When she saw the $200 figure, she "tore out of that place with one old shoe and one new one on and ran to the Western Union office" (*Dust* 220).

persuade, and empower. Further, many of the narratological devices within the novel demonstrate Hurston's growing expertise in cultural anthropology as well as her interests in gender power dynamics within the Black South through her incorporation of conjure, strong male and female characters, and her brilliant inclusion of a full sermon delivered by John Buddy Pearson at the rhetorical height of the novel. The sheer weight of these interlocking—and sometimes clashing—elements, coupled with the novel's decidedly autobiographical leanings, have made *JGV* an under-studied novel in Hurston's oeuvre. However, to overlook *JGV* in favor of Hurston's later works such as *Mules and Men* as well as *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, misses an important opportunity to study one of Black Modernism's central figures in the early stages of her development as a novelist. In more specific terms, reading *JGV* with an eye towards the intersection of the environment and rhetoric, one sees how Hurston's first novel made clear use of the environment as a resource to challenge assumptions about modern Black experiences belonging to the metropole and a Northern Migration as well as the impact Black Folk language use had on the process of becoming modern.

Scholars generally see the autobiographical tendencies of *JGV* as both a mark of a first novel and to identify it as a lesser work when compared to either *Their Eyes Were Watching God* or *Mules and Men*. Granted, the charge of autobiography is not without its warrants. John, the novel's protagonist is named after Hurston's father. John's first wife, Lucy Potts, shares her mother's name, personality, and Lucy's death in the novel tracks with Hurston's experiences of her own mother's death. John's second wife is essentially a fictional avatar of Hurston's own hated stepmother. The narrative of John Buddy, Lucy, the Pearson family, and their Southern migration patterns more-or-less follow the same trajectory as Hurston's family. Within the novel's plot, John's philandering mirrors the similar habits of her father in real life. John's rise

from poverty to minister and mayor also trace her father's success.

However, that Hurston drew on autobiography in crafting *JGV* neither means the novel should remain overlooked in Hurston scholarship nor does it mean the novel should be treated as a document to understand Hurston's private life. Rather, the extent to which Hurston draws on her lived experiences to present a novelistic vision of the Black South are best understood as Modernist use of autobiography in fiction and as an ethnographer's presentation of both people and region using data sets of experience. When shifting the matrix of inquiry to this mode, the initial sense of a thematically over-burdened and awkwardly autobiographical novel gives way to an appreciation of Hurston's interdisciplinary Modernist ambitions as well as the rhetorical depths of her first work.

*Jonah's Gourd Vine* is a story that belongs to John Buddy Pearson. John is presented as the illegitimate child of Amy Crittenden, a formerly enslaved women on the Pearson plantation in Alabama, and Alf Pearson, the white owner of the planation. The early chapters of the novel follow John's troubled home life in a post-Emancipation world in which his mother marries a cruel husband, Ned, who still carries the emotional and physical traumas of enslavement. Ned's demons most often manifest in violence against John through both physical confrontations and inverted colorism wherein John's "yaller" skin tone make him the object of near constant verbal assault (5-11). Hidden within Ned's abuses, Hurston implies John's father is most likely the white enslaver, Alf Pearson, whose family owned the Pearson planation where Amy was born. Later, when John leaves his mother's home for the plantation, Hurston further intimates John's parentage through a series of noblesse oblige innuendos and Alf Pearson's interest in the successes of John coupled with a toxic paternal pride in John's sexual conquests on the plantation. Based on his strength, intelligence, and his father's favoritism, John rises to a position

of authority and is sent to school to make him a better, more efficient worker. At school, John falls in love with the much younger Lucy Potts, the smartest girl in class. Despite Potts family objections, and Lucy being barely past puberty, the two eventually marry and move into a house on the Pearson property. It is here, on his white father's plantation, that the tragic seeds of John's hyper virility and womanizing come to bear on his life. John continues his philandering ways, entering several trysts with other women on the Pearson plantation even as Lucy bears him three children.

The Alabama sections of the novel end when John beats his brother-in-law to near death. Lucy's brother takes John's and Lucy's marriage bed from under her the same day that she goes into labor forcing her to bear her third child on the floor. John, absent from the scene because he is with another woman, returns home and learns the conditions of both Lucy's labor and the consequences of his philandering on a new scale. John's guilt over failures to provide for his wife, protect her, and remain faithful manifest in the beating. In the end, John is arrested, arraigned, and set to stand trial. However, Alf Pearson ensures John's release, advising his son that, "distance is the only cure for certain diseases." Alf sends John on his way further South with a further advice to "not fool with any baggage" and use the railroad to get further off than he could by foot (86).

John's flight from white "justice" and Hurston's discreet critique of planation afterlives for Black folks in the South ends with his arrival in Eatonville, Florida. Along the way to the new town and his new life, John earns money and travels as a railway worker and begins discovering his voice as a preacher. Once in town, John delays in sending for Lucy and his young family because, as has become a discernible character pattern for him, John has been too busy pursuing other women. Eventually John does bring Lucy and his children to Eatonville.

Upon her arrival in the new town, Lucy immediately sets to work in driving John towards greater successes. She is influential in both his success as a carpenter, his purchase of a home for the family, and his rise within the Black Church through preaching and his rise in politics. With Lucy at his side, the family gathers success unto itself despite John's indiscretions and various affairs. Lucy eventually grows terminally ill. Despite his intense love for his wife, John can only think about the release from his guilt that will come with her death.

After Lucy passes, John marries his most recent mistress, Hattie, a woman who placed a conjure on John prior to Lucy's death and goes about bringing his reputation to ruins once the two have completed their nuptials. John's once loyal congregation plots his downfall because of the public nature of his affairs coupled with his marriage to Hattie that happened far too soon for propriety's sake. John also experiences trouble at home with his children. They all, more-or-less become estranged because of Hattie's presence in the house and her continual failures to live up to the memory of Lucy's goodness. Hattie's manipulations of John and her own philandering ways reach an apex when John discovers evidence of conjure magic at the house. John confirms Hattie's use conjure on him, breaking her spell over him and unleashing his rage. John becomes bewildered at the prospect that he has been married in the first place and finds himself unable to fathom how his life has come to such a pass. John exacts violent revenge on Hattie by savagely beating her. In return, Hattie publicly demands a divorce while proceeding to make a spectacle of the marriage's collapse. The struggle between Hattie and John over their divorce and property becomes a public fascination in both the Black and white community. John refuses to contest the terms of Hattie's demands because he recognizes the racism of the white court where the divorce proceedings will take place and refuses to become any more of a spectacle. He accepts the divorce and whatever consequences come with that choice.

In the aftermath of his silence, John's church once again attempts to oust him from his leadership role. John overcomes the attempted coup in what can only be described as the greatest "preach off" in American Literature. He proves himself the superior rhetorician with a locomotive sermon of poetry and force. Despite his victory, John nevertheless steps down from his position, and learns all too well how a community swiftly relishes the downfall of a great man. After moving to a nearby town, he meets the widow, Sally Lovelace, who helps rehabilitate him, raising him back to a semblance of his former glory. He returns to preaching but remains a deeply flawed man. He once again assumes his extra-marital affairs during a return trip to Eatonville. However, in the elapsed time from Lucy to Hattie to his third wife, John has become something of a changed man. Realizing the immorality of his choices, John vows to return home to his wife and remain faithful. Hurston brings the novel to a sudden, violent end at the apex of John's self-realization. He dies in a car accident where he is killed by a speeding train on his way home to make amends.

Hurston's study of John Pearson as a tragic man through a combination of the Modernist penchant for autobiography as well as her own pioneering use of ethnography to augment narrative offers an exceedingly rich text. Yet, within Hurston's complex first novel, the centrality of the environment as a rhetorical resource matters just as much as John's character because it is through the interconnectedness of language, world making, and character that the sometimes-competing forces of individual desire and cultural expectations come into tension. Moreover, those tensions play out over a much wider reach than her earlier short stories while nevertheless representing Black experience generally independent from the limiting caricatures of white supremacy for Southern Blacks. To that end, three aspects of the novel demand closer study. First is Hurston's use of the environment as a liberating space where John finds his voice as well

as discovers the power of language. Second is Hurston's use of an ethnographer's and anthropologist's spy glass in fiction to show the relationship between the natural world and language as an archive for folk traditions. Third is Hurston's revision of environmental nostalgia wherein the iconic technologies of the locomotive and automobile no longer signify a threat to the natural environment or a preferred anti-modern way of life but hail freedom, mobility, and opportunity even as these technologies play key roles in the end to John's life.

One of the most important examples of Hurston's use of the environment as a liberating space wherein John finds his voice occurs in the early, Alabama sections of the novel when he anthropomorphizes a burnt tree into his stepfather so that he might finally speak his mind, letting loose all his rage. Hurston builds towards John's eruption by framing his outburst against the backdrop of several local migrations. She begins with John's first movement "crossing the creek" to his maternal grandmother Pheemy's house on his presumed father's plantation. John, fleeing the abuses of Ned, comes into work because Alf Pearson—however quietly—recognizes a responsibility towards his son who was "born on [his] place since surrender" (18).[8] John's first migration from one local environment to another delineates his first movements to becoming a modern Black man. After all, it is on his way to the Pearson plantation that John sees his first locomotive, attends school, courts Lucy Potts, and discovers the need for "speeches full of big words that would make [Lucy] gasp and do him 'reverence,'" (40). Yet, John's first taste of modernity does not last. His mother calls him back home—ostensibly away from modernity—to a sharecropping lifestyle that John finds demeaning. After a particularly rough day in the

[8] Alf Pearson's description of John as "a boy born on my place since surrender," dates John as the first generation of Black persons born into freedom rather than enslavement. It strikes me that Hurston makes this choice deliberately, to mark a different kind of Modernity for Black persons in the South. The idea of being the first generation born into freedom marks John in a way that separates him from his mother, grandmother, and stepfather. Given that John also becomes the first in his family to own himself since birth, to own property, to attend school, to ride a train, to own a business and work for his own wages, to sub-contract labor, found a church, and drive a car, Hurston is also making a rather keen argument for John (and those of John's generation) as the first Black moderns.

plowing fields, John and Ned nearly come to blows because of Ned's continual shirking of labor combined with his belittlement of John's production.

After threatening John with a shotgun, Ned limps back to the house under the auspices of retrieving the firearm while John hides behind a hickory tree, waiting and plotting to strike first. Ned fails to return, John comes out from behind the tree, and in a moment of "revelation," John grasps that "distance was escape" from Ned's oppression (43). It is in this moment that John, standing on the edges of a plowed field, steps before a burnt-off tree trunk and throws "the character of Ned Crittenden upon it," using the fullness of his voice to begin the process of liberating himself:

> And you, you ole battle-hammed, slew-foot, box-ankled nubbin, you! You ain't got nothin' and ain't got nothin' but whut God give uh billy-goat, and then round tryin' tuh hell-hack folks! Tryin' tuh kill somebody wid talk, but if you wants tuh fight, —dat's de very corn Ah wants tuh grind. You come grab me now and Ah bet yuh Ah'll stop *you* from sucking' eggs…Youse mah race but you sho ain't mah taste…Ahm goin' way from heah. Ahm goin' tuh Zar, and dat's on de other side of far, and when you see me agin Ahm gointer be somebody. Now dat's de word wid de bark on it. (44)

Hurston uses John's voice to show the relationship between language, the environment, individual desire, and cultural expectations. She opens John's rage against Ned by having him anthropomorphize a tree so that he may speak his mind. John's use of the tree as a surrogate for Ned, while seemingly comical, reveals both how features of the land become a resource for individual expression and how the use of those features provides the speaker with a novel opportunity to use language. John's string of "double descriptives" as insults make "new force words out of old feeble elements" in language just as Hurston describes in "Characteristics of

Negro Expression" from 1934 (831). Further, John's repetition of "you aint' got nothin'" acts as a rail line that helps John speed from god to billy goat to Ned's failure to link talk with action. John's use of the accusatory "you" throughout his diatribe creates a separation between Ned and his values (as well as failings) from himself. He marks difference from his stepfather with the assertion that while they might share a racial heritage, that heritage does not define individual taste or desires. Here, difference in seeming sameness creates room for ambition. It is at once a denial of heritage while also an acceptance of heritage.

John closes his diatribe by expressing a desire for mobility. His naming of "Zar," a mythical place within Black Folklore that Hurston describes in her unpublished WPA writings from 1938 as "the farthest known point of the imagination" reveals the deep roots John's speech patterns share with Black Folklore while also demonstrating the reach of those patterns shares a border with the farthest edge of imagination.[9] John ends by insisting he has not only spoken his mind, but in fact has spoken it in such a way that his words carry with them the weight of God's "word" as affirmed by the "bark" of the cross and the "bark" of the tree before which he delivered his testimony. His turn of phrase adds an epiphanic quality to his first self-sermon and anticipates the force of his preaching style that wins him fame and standing later in the novel. Therefore, John's first full use of his voice draws on the natural world and folk wisdom as a resource to make independent meaning of his desires that he weds to action. The environment as seen in the anthropomorphizing of the tree on the edges of a plowed field affords him the means for individual expression that also challenges the limiting cultural expectations of Black men

[9] Hurston includes a "Glossary" at the end of *Jonah's Gourd Vine* wherein she provides definitions and explanations for several aspects of folk speech in the novel. In what I believe is one of the greatest examples of Hurston's contrarian rhetorics, she chooses not to include any explanation of "Zar" despite knowing full well the importance of that mythical place for Black life and John's vision. Indeed, for an outsider, it took reading her unpublished works for the WPA to discover the significance of that reference. In other words, rather than letting her readers into the know completely, Hurston's glossary pulls off a tongue and cheek move of seeming to open doors for her readers while serving as a gatekeeper for Black culture.

within his community. The tree, rooted in place, becomes the resource used to discover the epiphany of movement. His standing on the edge of the plowed field just as he is on the edges of a new, modern Blackness, frame his voice and actions as forward looking. Finally, his word moves seamlessly to God's word through the last synecdoche of bark transforming his flight from Ned into a kind of pilgrimage.

However rich John's voice reads in this moment, the potential for Black caricature in Hurston's use of dialect and folk traditions remains strong as well. On the one hand, John's language patterns seemingly follow a similar path as Hurston's contemporaries, William Faulkner, and Margaret Mitchell. For every moment of power and self-realization presented in John's rage, Hurston also dances with a dangerous line for Black representation because that representation runs the risk of confirming persistent racisms around Blackness. John's anthropomorphizing a tree can just as easily be interpreted as ignorant or childish as it is empowering. The same holds true for his use of double descriptives and his folkish religious turn at the end of his speech. Rather than seen as a celebration of Black language play and imagination, John's use of barnyard analogues and his religious turn can also be read as an example of underdeveloped, uneducated rural Blackness. Finally, his "Youse mah race but you sho ain't mah taste" readily swings from a rhythmic denial of association to a confirmation of a long-standing racist formula wherein certain Black persons are preferred over others.

Despite these possibilities, Hurston's representation of John is more productively understood as an expansion on her main project of folk representations of Blackness, not caricature. As David Chinitz points out, while authenticity has multiple meanings (some of which are "incommensurable" across contexts), the general expectation of an authentic folk representation "depends on it emerging naturally—i.e., without conscious manufacture—from an

oral tradition believed to be in some sense pre-modern" (11). In the case of John, Hurston's interpretation of racial authenticity is "demonstrated through and constituted by behaviors, speech patterns, and attitudes that—thanks to their constant repetition—are commonly held to be characteristic or intrinsic" (16). While the argument that authenticity without "constant manufacture," also depends on "constant repetition" leads to a common belief of "characteristic" or "intrinsic" values does not fully disentangle Hurston from the web of caricature, the larger context of her short stories and her training as a folklorist, supports the more generous reading of John's language and environmental rhetorics as a resource for individual expression. In this light, John's self-realization and actualization becomes a representation of Blackness "unspoiled by the Anglophile aesthetics" and "middle-class values" of her Harlem contemporaries while also tracking with Hurston's larger project of celebrating Black lifeworlds she knew from the intimacies of her own experiences (12).

Hurston expands the relationship between environment and language to capture and represent folk traditions throughout *JGV*. She seeds most conversations of heightened social or emotional stakes with folk aphorisms whose terms—whether with metaphor, simile, or metalepsis—draw their linguistic resources from the surrounding environment to express desire, concern, fear, or wisdom. What is striking about Hurston's use of environmental rhetorics in this way is the quickness with which these examples come and go with minimal clarification from an allegedly reader-allied text complete with a "Glossary" for Folk language. In other words, Hurston's use of language-as-archive does not offer universal access to Black life for all readers. The combination of language, Folk tradition, and environments as linguistic resources serve as understated gatekeepers to protect or shield a Black world from prying eyes even as that world is ostensibly on display for the reader. They allow readers to glimpse a world through apparently

simplified rhetorics but, only grant full access to readers if they are already in the know for the word games being played by its characters. Far from democratizing linguistic expression, Hurston uses the kind of environmental rhetorics she knew intimately through lived experience and study to reveal and protect culture at the same time. In this way, Hurston's language games are a rejoinder to real-world environmental gatekeeping by white folks that denied Black people access to spaces while also limiting Black mobility.

One of the better examples of Hurston's use of environmental rhetorics in this fashion comes when Pheemy (John's grandmother) and Lucy are hiding on the Pearson plantation after John has been released by the white courts without charge for beating his brother-in-law nearly to death. While John has already fled the state, Lucy remains behind to face a terrifying night wherein white terrorists roam the surrounding land seeking violence under the mask of justice and retribution. As the two women watch the "twenty or thirty men in the cloud-muddied moonlight" ride passed the gate that leads into the planation and the quarters where the women shelter, Lucy asks why the men did not turn down the lane. Pheemy, a woman experienced in the ways of whites and white violence from her days as a formerly enslaved woman answers, "Dey ain't gwine set foot on Judge Alf Pearson's place…Dey might go in some folks' quarters, but tain't never no patter roller set foot on dis place. Dey know big wood from brush" (87). Pheemy's answer uses language-as-archive to contain two aspects of life in the South for Black folks. First, she does not name the dreaded Klu Klux Klan even though that is certainly the band of terrorists Hurston hints at in her description. Instead, Pheemy makes use of the more colloquial, dialect-guided descriptive "patter roller." Context clues surrounding the phrase indicate who and what these men stood for in times past. Turning to Hurston's accompanying "Glossary" for *JGV*, the reader learns the descriptive means (according to Hurston), "an

organization of the late slavery days that continued through the Reconstruction period. Its main objective was the intimidation of Negroes. Similar to the K. K. K." (169). The glossary confirms Pheemy's hints about the intent of these men while also drawing a connecting line through the history of racial terrorism enslaved persons experienced to the same experiences they encountered after emancipation. Here, then, Pheemy's descriptives work in concert with Hurston's "Glossary" to express a whole kind of historical violence experienced by Black persons in the South with two separate strategies: the first is the folk/dialect driven naming of racial terrorist organizations founded during the era of enslavement, and the second is the more official use of a "Glossary" entry to inform readers the meaning while confirming the continued memory of that terrorism in language.

Pheemy's second colloquialism, "Dey know the big wood from brush," draws on the environment to further justify her confidence in the protective aspects of the Pearson Plantation's boundaries with a racially bounded, class-oriented play on words. Here, context suggests the Pearson Plantation is "the big wood" while the land not encapsulated by its boundaries constitutes the "brush." Pheemy's turn of phrase, then, implies that the lesser—if more terrifying—authority of white violence does not hold the same power as that of the plantation. The propertied "big woods" has more order and safety than the diminutive "brush." The property boundary lines, and authority are captured through metaphor that draws on the surrounding environment to express the difference. Yet, the linguistic distance between "big woods" to land-owning white men to poor whites and "brush" also stretches the limits of imagination for the reader. It removes the class and propertied distinctions to a second or even third rhetorical degree. The tropes of poor white versus propertied whites as big woods and bush respectively refers the reader back to class distinctions and authority limits within whiteness that Pheemy

knows through experience. The use of the environment to explain the threat of the night, then, moves from metaphor to metalipsis. With one sentence, Pheemy's metaleptic multiplication captures class distinctions within white culture, indicates the variances of whiteness in the South, and offers an underhanded insult to the "brush" prowling whites who do not have access to nor can claim—at least provisionally—the safety afforded by the "big woods."

John's discovery of his voice and Pheemy's explanation of presumed safety under threat are strong examples of how Hurston uses language as an archive that also draws on the surrounding environment as a resource for expression. With the former, environment and language and culture combine to provide John the will and imagination to move beyond the limits of Ned's world. With the latter, the same elements provide Pheemy the means to explain the conditions of racial terrorism while affording an understated assessment of intra-white class politics as framed and expressed through Black environmental experiences. Looking at John's epiphany in the broader context of the novel, each of his language choices, the rhythm of his speech, and his rhetorical flourishes anticipate his preaching style. Additionally, John's diatribe incorporates Hurston's ethnographic observations of speech patterns through demonstration and indicates the importance of mobility for rural Black subjects as modern Black subjects into her fiction.

As for Pheemy's language choices, the Folk wisdom, dialect, and her own assertive style, however compressed in length, model similar rhetorical forms for most of the female speakers in *JGV*. Whereas the men of the novel speak at length and with exaggerated force, the women deliver their wisdom succinctly, with the sharpness of an understated oyster knife. When the context and content of both moments are placed side-by-side, Hurston's ironic use of the plantation for the South and modernity become apparent as well. For John, his first sojourn on

the Pearson plantation after "crossing the creek" transports him into a more modern landscape, specifically through education, technology, and more modern agricultural practices. Here, the irony is that to think of a plantation as providing access to modernity for Black folks post-Emancipation is largely out of step with more urban assumptions for writers of the New Negro Renaissance because the plantation figured as a space bound to and held by the past. Hurston modernizes John by sending him to a plantation, a journey forward in development but ostensibly backwards in time. Thus, Hurston not only plays with metropolitan assumptions about the rural South, but she also uses John's movement, experiences, language, and environmental rhetorics to formulate her counter argument to metropolitan views of the South by having John's epiphany return him to plantation life as a "cure" to Ned's stagnation. Pheemy' provisional trust in the vestiges of antebellum structures of power, her naming of plantation borders as providing protection, and the class distinctions she makes between those whites within and beyond plantation borders ironically makes white behavior anti-modern while placing her own views of her environment on the edge of a developing era. Pheemy, then, while not as advanced in her shift from an antebellum metric to a more modern one as Lucy or John, nevertheless occupies a cusp position; Hurston figures her as informed and shaped by two places in time—a dualism captured by her language choices and her understanding of delimited space. Finally, both ironies and representations of rural Black modernity come across in the subtlety of Hurston's use of autobiography coupled with her experiences as an ethnographer and anthropologist demonstrating that she, too, used the same strategies of environmental rhetorics and language as archive as her characters making her both author and model at the same time.

**John's Trains and Sermon: Hurston's Re-Imagining of an Environmental Trope**

Hurston's use of language as archive, as well as environment as a resource for language

and culture to represent rural Black characters as modern subjects is a hallmark of her novels and ethnographic texts that began with *JGV*. Eve Dunbar makes a similar argument in *Black Regions of the Imagination* wherein she claims the emphasis on non-Northern Black life seen in *Mules and Men* (1935) and *Tell My Horse* (1938) "goes against the cultural climate of the moment…which insisted that [B]lack modernity and progress was commensurate with migration to northern metropolises." Dunbar further insists that Hurston's work in the rural South "requires that [scholars] think differently about how [scholars] constitute the relationship between 'black modernity' and 'black folk'" (17). For Dunbar, Hurston's ethnographic works show an author and scholar "wrestl[ing] to create a new understanding of black rurality that was able to coexist with the increasingly urban-dwelling African American experience brought about by the Great Migration" (21). Here, Dunbar's scholarship on Hurston's later works provides a salient point for the earlier *JGV*. Whereas *Mules and Men* and *Tell My Horse* are modernist versions of ethnographic writings because they bend the genre to the will of invention as well as anthropological research and observation, *JGV* draws on the modernist combination of fictional autobiography, ethnography, environmental rhetorics, and language as archive in a way that anticipates the style and modernist interventions of Dunbar's selections. Hurston's first novel is also a first in long-form experimentation that challenges assumptions about rural Blackness. Indeed, John Buddy Pearson's story can be read as a distinct challenge to said assumptions, especially when considering the significance of trains throughout his life and the use of a train's image in his greatest rhetorical triumph of the novel: his final sermon at Zion Hope Baptist Church.

Both the train and John's sermon have received significant attention in scholarship on *JGV*. Martin Bone, in "The (Extended) South of Black Folk" sees the figure of the train

throughout John's life as Hurston "construct[ing] a detailed narrative cartography of migrant labor patterns around the rural South—patterns more localized but no less 'monumental' than those involving the more familiar Great Migration to the urban North" (760). He goes on to insist that "John Pearson's 'highly mobile' search for greater opportunities encompasses not only eh *interstate* train journey from plantation life in Alabama to 'de new country' of Florida but also his *intrastate* movements even before leaving Alabama" (761). Helen Yitah argues in "Rethinking the African American Great Migration Narrative" that Hurston "challenges dominant ideological models of the migration narrative, such as the 'urban adjustment' model that looks outward to socio-cultural factors to explain the plight of [B]lack migrants" (10). She reads John's travels as movements without "reasoned, justified destination" despite reasons and justifications for the flight. For Yitah, John's "journeys constitute mainly a series of escapes from difficult situations…rather than carefully planned trips towards a particular goal" (14). Yitah places the train at the center of John's development, claiming "John's movement from innocence to experience which, together with the 'purely accidental' trajectory of his journey farther and farther south, indicates that his story moves on a deeper level, a growing up narrative and his journey as a quest for self" (18). Here, Yitah's reading makes *JGV* a bildungsroman with the train as the literal vehicle that moves John towards maturity and prepares him to be a modern citizen as seen in his holding public office and his position within Eatonville as a spiritual leader and successful business owner. Anthony Wilson, in "The Music of God, Man, and Beast" links "modernity's general assault on religion, spirituality, and transcendence" to the withering of John's "sanctuary" that was built on the "solid foundations of community, self, and agency" (64). Wilson understands the train as "the universal symbol of modernity that bears John away from his community, enables his betrayals of Lucy, and robs him of his very humanity as he

surrenders to the urges of "De Beast" within him" (66). Ultimately, Wilson argues the train fills a "double role" in the novel's symbology. First, signifying as "both sexuality and phallic power" for John, and second as "the encroachment of technological modernity and its attendant threats to community and self" (74). He goes on to conclude—in keeping with the reading of John as a tragic hero—that the train, "both symbol and enabler of John's driving sexuality, becomes a signifier of his *hamartia*, or tragic flaw…and is thus directly opposed to his place in his new spiritual community" (74). In each of these studies, the main points of inquiry focus on challenging the Great Migration narrative of a Northern exodus and the interconnection of folk religious fervor with modernity. However, none of them link Hurston's use of the train and sermon to the longer tradition of trains in American literature as either an intrusion or threat to the natural world.

Granted, Hurston does not focus on the sanctity or loss of the natural world in the same way as, say Faulkner does in *Go Down, Moses*. Neither does Hurston treat railroad systems or trains to recuperate lost capital and white power as Mitchell does in *Gone with the Wind*. The train in *JGV* does not stoke the fires of Agrarian or Lost Cause desires wherein that beast of modernity symbolizes the shattering of mythic wholeness in a particular experience of the Southern environment. Instead, Hurston seemingly centers the human world over the natural world—when the natural world is conceived of as something outside of or, other than human. John's first experience of the train leaves him at first frightened out of his mind, seeing in the train with a "great eye beneath the cloud-breathing smoke-stack" whose "very sides seemed to expand and contract like a fiery-lunged monster" and then enamored with the train, seeing it as "uh pretty thing" (16). Here, Hurston revises the train and its meaning for American literature through the power possibility locomotion signified for southern Blacks. Rather than a machine

eviscerating the pastoral, rather than enabling nostalgia for lost wilderness—which is really code for lost White supremacy—the train is alive and beautiful. John experiences it is a breathing, moving, living, *speaking* thing. Indeed, John's reaction shifts from terror to wonder to a desire to understand: "Ah lakted dat. It say something but Ah ain't heerd it 'nough tuh tell what it say it" (17). Even in the face of more experienced persons denying speech to the train, John protests, claiming that the train speaks more than a "powerful racket," insisting "it say some words too" (17). When John is angry and ashamed that he must leave the Pearson plantation and return to Ned and his mother, John thinks of fleeing on the train. While he changes his mind, in his moment of listening desperation, he hears the train speak again: "Opelika-black-and-dirty! Opelika-black-and-dirty…Wolf coming! Wolf coming! Wolf coming! Opelika-black-and-dirty" (39). Here, Hurston offers another variation on the train in American Literature. This time, the train speaks of both the threat that John knows is coming in Ned and captures his deep distress at heading back into an environment of sharecropping defined by immobility as well as developmental and economic stagnation. Rather than a monster, the train communicates with John through metonym while also using rhythmic geographic reference (Opelika is the name of the county seat in Lee County, Alabama) to demarcate the physical location that brings him sadness. John's urge to see the train before being pulled back into the sharecropping system figures the train as an ally—as both a speaking confidant and a future means of escape. Later still, Hurston builds out the train from promise to actual ally when John moves to Florida from Alabama, writing "[h]e got off the train at every stop so that he could stand off a piece and feast his eyes on the engine. The greatest accumulation of power that he had ever seen" (89). In this instance, the train serves as means of escape, as a model of power, as well as the vessel that literally carries John and eventually his family into a better environment further South.

In other words, by not using the train as a threat or destroyer to the natural world, the train exemplifies the sharpness of Hurston's environmental rhetorics in which she draws on the environments as a resource, rewriting dead symbols into new possibility and growth. Whereas the train for some white environmental rhetorics symbolizes a threat to the natural world and then hails nostalgia for lost causes and the Lost Cause, John's story argues the train is not the symbol for environmental nostalgia because the train is a new, magnificent environmental and rhetorical resource. It leads to the freeing of Black ambition and the liberation of Black imagination; it speaks to, speaks with, and provides resources for speech; it enables mobility; it gifts freedom. In short, the train becomes the metaphoric and actual resource John uses to build his Black world rather than be railroaded by white supremacy.

Returning to John's sermon at Zion Hope, it is fitting that John's greatest rhetorical triumph in the novel ties itself so explicitly to the figure of the train. In Hurston scholarship, it is well known that John's sermon is a verbatim transcription and reproduction of a real-life sermon delivered by Reverend C.C. Lovelace. She gathered Lovelace's work on a collecting trip to Eau Gallie, Florida on May 3, 1929 where she recorded it. She later published it in 1934 as part of her folkloric essay "The Sermon" in Cunard's *Negro: An Anthology* as well as made use of Lovelace's poetry within *JGV*. Indeed, the acme of John's rhetoric shows Hurston fully coming into her stride as a modernist. The sermon, the weaving of the train throughout the novel, and her blending of genres and disciplines shift Hurston-as-observer to transcriber to author to modernist while also proving her a leading innovator on art as she moves through academic disciplines to character to fiction to belief to performance in one poetic tour de force.

Jay Watson and Patricia Yaeger provide two prominent readings for John's sermon within Hurston scholarship. For Watson, when John takes to the pulpit, the intersection of

religion and trains and character and belief and sound in the novel show that "it *isn't* him talking: it's the locomotive talking, and the church choir, and the lining crew, and the school pageant, and the thunder and lightning, and the wood and creek at night, and the African drum, and the ax man in the tie woods, and on and on and on" (114). Watson goes on to insist that, in this moment, John's identity that has been "personified" throughout the novel is "displaced and subsumed beneath the amassed weight of this sonic content." Watson reads John, then, as less a person and more as a personified representation of modern technologies such as the "locomotive" and the "talking machine" that is as unpredictable and uncanny as the technologies themselves were to rural Black folks on their first encounters. Thus, Watson sees John's rhetorics as a "fundamental rule of his character: that there is no there there, only a stockpile of accumulated gestures, voices, and sounds" (115).

Yaeger provides a different reading that preserves identity. In her work, "[t]he train becomes John Pearson's alter ego, a great cipher in his efforts to construct the edifice of black patriarchy in a world where all the power seems sewn up by whites" (37). She asks whether John's relationship and experiences of the train render him as a "primitive" whose identity disappears into the community, or if Hurston is "capturing a new phenomenology: the myriad ways that southern world was changing for African Americans born just after emancipation who were still harnessed by the scarcity and immobility of the sharecropping system" (35). Answering her own question, Yaeger argues John's sermon and the figure of the train cannot be read separate from other figurations of the train in American and Southern literature. Yaeger sees John, his sermon, and the train as demonstrative of a crucial fact in southern literature: "African and Anglo Americans often experienced a world of similar objects—but from within completely different semiotic and cultural systems" (36).

Together, Watson's and Yaeger's readings offer differing, if overlapping consequences for interpretation. Watson's attention to sound, rhythms, and the aspects of place, Black community, and culture they represent lead him to conclude that at the height of his rhetorical power, John disappears—if he was ever "there" in the first place. Rather than a modern Black man speaking to his congregation while giving full-throated authority and power to his rhetorics and invention, Watson sees an amalgamation of cultural signs and signifiers that absent identity into personified technologies that are uncanny and unpredictable. Yaeger's attention to difference, and her desire to "dynamite the rails of the Dixie Limited"—the name she gives to Southern literary studies—enable her to read John as part of a world of similar objects and phenomena with different, intimate, and other experiences. She sees language and its world-making power as the sign of a phenomenology for Blackness where environment cannot be assumed to level distinction but rather the language used to describe that environment—from the politics of the everyday to the pyrotechnics of a pulpit—must also be read as signifying radical differences and presence at the same time. Watson's filtering of modern experiences of technology and worlds absents specific identity and place while Yaeger's recognition of difference in presumed universalities of environment glimpses otherness by decentering dominant points of view.

Formally, Hurston's transcription of the sermon into the novel remakes the page from prose into free-verse poetry, absent punctuation except for emphatic exclamation points and line breaks as breath markers. The change in form demonstrates Hurston's awareness and practice of modernist genre innovations. Her blending of genres matches that of other New Negro artists such as Jean Toomer, Langston Hughes, W.E.B. Du Bois, and Claude McKay. In terms of subject matter, John's sermon takes up the theme of "the wounds of Jesus" (145). John

establishes a relationship between himself as the preacher wronged by his congregation and Jesus who was wronged by his disciples in the narrative of the crucifixion. In terms of content, the sermon runs from the Christian creation myth through Old Testament anticipations of Christ in Isaiah and Ezekiel to Jesus's recapitulation of the Old Testament into his New Gospel through miracles to his betrayal and the drama of the crucifixion including both the "cry of dereliction" from Matt. 27.46 and the conclusion to the Christian theodrama in John 19.30. Additionally, the sermon is the most pronounced rhetorical incidence where the other-than-human world comes to bear with blatant symbolism on John's life. His use of the creation myth to speak on his own struggles as a "natural man" aligns his carnal struggles with a biblical allusion that is less a justification for those actions than a reason for accepting man's failures (145). His sermon ties together God's weighing "de hills in scales / That painted de rainbow dat marks de end of de partying / storm" after the flood of destruction to show the greatness of compassion in the face of extreme loss (146). The destruction of Jesus's body at the crucifixion leads to the "geological strata" falling loose from the world just as the social ground has fallen from beneath John's feet considering his promiscuity both while Lucy was alive and too soon after her death (150). Further, the sermon complicates many of the novel's leitmotifs gleaned from John's experiences and environments to add fervor and urgency to the reading. The "hammers of creation" that fall upon the "anvils of time" and "hammered out the ribs of the earth" are a poetic figuring of creation that incorporates the modern experience of laying railroad tracks to create a new world through allusion and metaphor, as John did in his first and second flight from the Pearson plantation (145). The drums of John's first celebratory barbecue on the Pearson plantation appear in the sermon as "de drums of de wind," and the "worlds within worlds" that "begin to wheel and roll / De sun" (146). These symbols code the multiple worlds John experienced on both sides of

the creek in Alabama, the labor camps of his youth, in the full-fledged maturity of his time in Eatonville, and anticipate the final worlds of automobile and train that collide in his death.

Thus, the sermon is not just a remaking of the page, it is an accelerated revision of John's image from a "natural" man to a man whose closest analogue in all his worlds is a train. The movement from John-as-natural to John-as-train signals a semiotic symbiosis between the two figures wherein the train is naturalized as a part of life and progress through association with John. The train that tracks throughout the sermon links the rural and the modern through technology, environment, religion, and language. John's use of the train begins with "God A'mighty" grabbing "de throttle / Of de well ordered train of mercy" only to later have a second locomotive appear as "de damnation train / Dat pulled out from Garden of Eden loaded wid cargo goin' / to hell" running at a break-neck speed straight through the "prophetic age" (148). Eventually, the "damnation train" gathers so much speed it must "[blow] for de switch" and tear a wound in the side of Jesus with a cow-catcher, leading to a vision of "de two trains of Time" that will meet "on de trestle / And wreck de burning axles of de unformed ether" (151). Here, the inherent speed of John's sermon, complete with the rhythmic count of the lines, breaks, and breath markers, reveal what Joel Dinerstein calls an "aesthetics of acceleration," a term he uses to name the change in music aesthetics during 1910-1940 that reflects how locomotive travel and the rhythms of the train influence sound and culture for Black Americans (7). Indeed, John's swift changes of pace reflect the rhythm of swing music popular at that time just as the lamentations of his sermon capture the dizzying highs and lows of the New Orleans blues and jazz made popular by Louis Armstrong. Drawing on Dinerstein's study a bit more, one can see how the sermon's use of "the sounds and symbology of the train journey" creates "a rhythmic center" for John's environment just as Dinerstein sees the train creating a center for American

music (21). All of which is to say that the combination of natural, religious, and locomotive imagery does not create an enemy out of the train for the natural world. Rather, the train becomes the organizing theme of a world and identity wherein the modern and the natural must collide as part of some cosmic prophecy that is less anathema and more inevitability because of the naturalness of human rhythms from the start.

Hurston's use of the train to both end John's life and *JGV* remains consistent with her broader rhetorics in the novel that avoid implications of technological determinism over an against the natural world. John's death is sudden in the novel. It comes as he drives home to Sally Lovelace—his third wife—after he has been visiting Eatonville. Fleeing the scene of yet another infidelity, and once again making promises to mend his ways, John realizes that he had prayed for the return of Lucy and sees that "God had answered with Sally" (167). Hurston breaks the paragraphs between this epiphanic moment and John's death paragraph, ending John's life in three sentences: "The engine struck the car squarely and hurled it like a toy. John was thrown out and lay perfectly still. Only his foot twitched a little" (167). The abruptness of John's death shocks the reader. In a novel so enamored with language, and with a character so defined by the power of speech, the rhetorical economy of this image stands out from the novel's dominant emplotment strategies. On the one hand, its suddenness comes across as a novice's move to find a way to end a story. Given that Hurston's early writings leading up to and through *JGV* as well as her later writings attended more to the episodic performance of speech acts, it makes sense that the train ends things so quickly. John's story has more-or-less run its course. His return to Eatonville sees him repeat past sins. The novel, then, has lost its forward momentum leaving Hurston with a pressing need for closure, and what better way to find it than with the vessel that has been with John throughout the novel.

On the other hand, John's death from a collision with a train while driving an automobile can be seen as Hurston remaining consistent in her fascination with a temporality of an ever-evolving present. John's return to Eatonville and his philandering ways shows a man trapped in a cycle even as he has advanced into a modern world. The car represents a new kind of progress for him because it is a vehicle of individual rather than communal travel. With the automobile, John—and all other modern travelers as well—are not subjected to the schedules, depots, delays, and routes of an outside agent. However, in this new aspect of movement and freedom, John remains trapped in old ways unable to evolve even as he prays, and the narrative voice professes a profound personal revelation. Despite moving forward in time and advancing along with the times, John repeats the past. Therefore, his death by a train while driving an automobile after fleeing from past mistakes with a promise in the present to do better in the future captures the double-bind of Black modernity from a Southern perspective: the need for both communal and individual progress inside of an evolving present despite conflicts with the past over speed, direction, and destination. Hurston's rhetorical use of the train once again breaks with more traditional uses of it as a mechanized destroyer or as a symbol of an inevitable technological future. The train persists as a fecund symbol as well as an archive of meaning that both renews itself and contains histories even as it advances in narrative time. In John's case, it is the train of time that wrecks his present world because of a failure to move along the tracks of progress. In the context of the novel, it becomes an archive of meaning that at once holds a future promise made possible by the inevitable locomotive inertia of the past. In other words, the train, as an aspect of Hurston's narrative and actual world, is a semiotic and environmental resource that enables her to carry the places of her past worlds with her as she moves her fiction forward in the present.

## Conclusion

*Jonah's Gourd Vine* will never rise to the status of *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, *Mules and Men*, or *Tell My Horse.* This is the case partly because first novels always tend to be understudied, and partly because it does leave itself open to many criticisms that first novels face: it is too autobiographical, it is too thematically over-burdened, it cannot bring itself to a comprehensive close, it is inconsistent with its aesthetics and genre, it does not fit with any particular aesthetic mode or expectation. While these charges have their merits in a certain school that goes looking for such things, when meeting Hurston on her own terms, those charges begin to lose their suasive power—they read more as Pharisean judgements rather than insights. I believe Hurston, John, and *Jonah's Gourd Vine* lie somewhere in between—or perhaps outside—such trains of thought. I believe this is the case not because my readings of this first novel are set to collide in the ether with those other ways of reading. Rather, I believe Hurston, John, and their novel are elsewhere—always elsewhere—because their rhetorics have taught me how to look for the vantage point of the speaker or author who is also observer of the possible collision in the first place. This means that there is a there there—it's just not where most people expect or even know how to look. This also means that we—Hurston's readers who have been placed in the position of John's congregation who has been given the words of Reverend Lovelace whose sermon as transcribed has bent the rules of prose, poetry, and academic discipline to near breaking points—will always be a little displaced by that world made of words—that we are always going to be left astounded at the sudden softness of such collisions. Indeed, whatever place Hurston makes with her words will also draw on the environment from which that imagining or experience or some combination of both was born out of in the first place. Her rhetorics are of a place and time, but her rhetorical style will never set those terms for

certain. Hers—much like John's world—is not a world of nostalgia and loss. It is a world of potential whose stylistic resistances never show the full picture even as everyone feels a measure of welcome in kind. In short, Hurston teaches that we are all subjects of our environments—and that our subjectivity is formed by language wherein community, culture, and time are all our resources.

# CHAPTER VI

## CODA

Frances Beatrice Bibbins Latimer—Mrs. B to those of us who knew her—was born on October 4, 1941, in Seaview, a small town on the Eastern Shore of Virginia. She was the second child and only daughter of Paul and Lillie Bibbins and the sixth generation of a Shore family whose recorded roots stretch back to at least 1738. Mrs. B was a graduate of Hampton University, and later received her master's degree in Teaching from New York City University where she met George Latimer, her best friend and future husband. After George's second retirement from the New York City Transit Police Department where he made history as both the youngest Police Captain in the Department's history and as the first Black Chief of Police for the Transit Police, Mrs. B and George moved from Harlem back to the Shore. They used the funds from George's retirement to start a poultry farm, the profits of which they used to purchase the land and plantation house where Mrs. B's ancestors had been formerly enslaved. Once she had reclaimed the home and land her family helped cultivate and build, Mrs. B took a teaching position at Capeville Elementary school. She later transitioned from that position to running the local Head Start Program for both Northampton and Accomack Counties. During her tenure at Head Start, Mrs. B became interested in local history, specifically the long, unspoken yet legally documented history of African Americans in both Accomack and Northampton counties. She founded her own publishing firm (ran from her living room and second floor office), named Hickory House, with the express intent of printing books on local Virginia history, especially Black History. She was also a founding member of the Eastern Shore Historical Society, a group that worked preserve many of the colonial buildings on the Eastern Shore. In 1998, Mrs. B was featured in *Africans in America*, a PBS special wherein she discussed her research of the

Accomack County Court Records—some of the oldest in the United States—that date back to 1632. Mrs. B published several books, including *Landmarks: Black Historic Sites on the Eastern Shore of Virginia*, and her autobiography, *Life for Me Ain't Been No Crystal Stair: Stories from Virginia's Eastern Shore*.

I met Mrs. B through George Latimer when I was 18 years old, during my first tour of duty in the Coast Guard at a Search and Rescue Station (SAR) on the Eastern Shore of Virginia. George was part of the Coast Guard Auxiliary, a volunteer civilian service that helped under-staffed SAR stations with Radio Watch. Every Wednesday, George stood an eight-hour radio watch. Every Thursday and every-other Saturday, George volunteered his boat, the *Misnomer*, for SAR training exercises by playing the part of the distressed vessel. He was a mentor to every sailor that served at the station. Additionally, George had a keen understanding of the challenges younger sailors faced during their first tour of duty away from home. He helped combat both homesickness and the struggle to fit in with a new unit by hiring a few of us to do yard work for "Mrs. B's house" on our days off as well as work as Mrs. B's chauffeur when he was at the station. The pay for our services was not much in terms of money. However, Mrs. B always made sure we were fed. If we did not stand Sunday duty, we were invited to her house for Sunday dinner. If we were off on Saturday, and the Ebenezer Church in Capeville was holding a social, we were invited (if not expected to come since Mrs. B *did* offer an invitation). Finally, if our driving duties took us to Eastville, VA, or points farther north, Mrs. B would always spring for lunch at the Eastville Diner, Machipongo Clam Shack, or if we were lucky, "a little chicken place the county doesn't know about." What I did not know then, but I have come to realize now, is Mrs. B planted the first seed of the intimacies of language and place and the imbrication of environment and rhetorics in me. She did so long before I even know that such concepts existed,

much less understood how these concepts shaped the ways that we all move through, imagine, make, narrate, speak, and revise the worlds we live in.

Every watch stander and boat crew member must memorize the station's area of responsibility as part of their breaking-in requirements. After knowing the names, lights, channels, and locations, the trainee must be able to determine where a person or vessel is on the water by a description of the surroundings such as prominent land features, the varied sequences of flashing lights from buoys, or in some cases, descriptions of house lights and radio towers that can be seen on shore from the water. As part of the boat crew exam, sailors are taken out on the water both during the day and at night to test their knowledge. The trainee is placed in the cabin with blacked out windows. After a certain amount of time and distance, the trainee is taken from below deck outside. They are given a pair of binoculars and five minutes to determine both the relative position of the boat by visual cues and a rough distance back to the station. To pass the test, the trainee must take the helm and pilot the boat back to the station, without the aid of electronics, and moor up the boat. This is a hard test.

I do not know if Mrs. B ever knew, or particularly cared, about the requirements of these exams. What I do know, though, is that Mrs. B took a keen interest in my learning the names and places of things. Maybe it was because, at eighteen years old, all I could talk about over Sunday dinner was how much I needed to learn these things so that I would not fail and that hailed the teacher in her. Maybe it was because, as her part-time landscaper, I would often wander down to her shoreline and name channel buoys, radio towers, and side creeks from the vantage point of her bluff and keeping me gainfully employed with her roses and tomatoes rather than staring at channel markers was a better use of my labor. Maybe it was because she overheard my not-so-quiet sing-song place naming as I drove her to and from the Accomack County Courthouse, the

Barrier Island Center, Eyre Hall, Arlington Plantation, or helped her move boxes of notes, photocopies, and long-hand transcriptions of 17th century court records from the trunk of George's Crown Victoria (a retirement "gift" from the Transit Police) to her second-floor office. Whatever her reasons, I do know that Mrs. B changed the way I learned of an environment through the naming of places. She did so with the lightness of a feather and the sharpness of a knife.

Mrs. B taught me a place is a process of narrative, time, and in some cases attempted erasure. Her first lesson—one of her most jarring—involved the entrance light to the Cape Charles channel and the famous Smith Island Lighthouse. On the NOAA chart of the region, to most locals, fishermen, and commercial sailors, the entrance light is known as Old Plantation Light. It sits more-or-less one mile off the mouth of Old Plantation Creek and serves both to mark the entrance to the channel, and to warn vessels of about the hazards of Old Plantation Flats to the East when approaching from the South. When Mrs. B asked me what I knew about the light, that was the answer I gave. I probably threw in its flashing sequence as well (white, every four seconds). Then she asked me what I knew about Eyre's Light. I told her I had no idea. She asked me what I knew about Thomas Flats. I gave the same answer. Dale's Grift? I told her I had never heard of it—that it wasn't on the map. Then Mrs. B told me the places I had come to know and memorize were both the same and different from the places she knew. Old Plantation Light was Eyre's Light. The old plantation of the name referred to the Eyre Plantation that was now known as Eyre Hall. Her people still called—had always called—the light by that name because they did not want to forget. She told me Thomas Flats was Old Plantation Flats, that they were named after the first Eyre to receive a land patent to build his plantation, and her people called them Thomas Flats so they would not forget. Dale's Grift was June's Creek which was Old

Plantation Creek. It was called Dale's Grift and June's Creek because her people had been sent to the shallow, brackish creek to boil water and salt fish in June—a labor began in the early 1600s by order of Governor Thomas Dale that carried through the late 1800s and fed her people and the Eyre's through the winter. The salting of fish was an industry that involved the Custis Family and Robert E. Lee. The Custis and Lee family-owned Smith Island, the location of the Smith Island Lighthouse—at least until 1911—but Mrs. B's people never called it Smith Island, they called it either "Teach's Island" after William Teach (the dread pirate Blackbeard) or "The General's Island" or "Custis Island." She then asked me what I thought of all these names and the stories they held, she asked me if they were the same places I knew, or if they were different. Looking back, I would like to think that I gave something of a competent answer. The truth is I probably sat there, at the dinner table, staring at my plate, looking for an answer in her potato salad.

My reason for talking about Mrs. B, these names, histories, and places is not so much an autobiographical geography lesson as it is an example of how environments are always plural, are always imbricated because of varied experiences of a place, and how communicating the experience of living, working, and playing in an environment does not necessarily mean we all experience the same environment even as we are sharing a dinner table. What this means is that in putting an environment into words as well as the rhetorics inherent in that move potentially persuade us that place is singular even as narrative and the environmental rhetorics of place expose a plurality. The white light that flashes every four seconds and marks the entrance to Cape Charles Channel is both Old Plantation Light and Eyre's Light. The light is a warning for both Old Plantation Flats which is Thomas Flats and a resource for memory and sign of resistance against erasure at the same time. June's Creek, which is Dale's Grift, which is Old

Plantation Creek occupies the same location in the physical world but attending to the environmental rhetorics of that place upends the assumption that being together in the same location means we are also sharing the same environment. One name becomes accepted nomenclature that makes its way onto a NOAA map even as the name layers over the history of enslavement and settler-colonialism. Another remembers the history of enslavement, the hardships and possible joys of shared labor, the promise of food, the season of its harvesting, and the names of colonizers who decreed such things. The difference between the two reveals we are not all sharing the same environment. Rather, the experience and formation of environments, just like the formation of identity, are made through a multitude of cultural forces, political objectives, and existential variables. Mrs. B's Eastern Shore is not my Eastern Shore. And while those Shores overlap when we share the same space and we take the time to be with one another, because we were radically different people, so too are our environments different even as we were together. I find a vertiginous hope in such intimate otherness.

The assertions that environmental rhetorics are imbricated, and that environments, identity, values, ethics, and politics are mutually constructed have been at the center of this project. I used a rhetorical method for interrogating and examining the underlying structures of these relationships because both environments and rhetorics are ever present even as they are often the overlooked givens of our worlds. We can neither get outside of language nor environments therefore it makes sense to look at how these two certainties interact with one another in narrative form. I took up four different authors and their works that, more-or-less, shared a region—the South—as well as demonstrate how a supposedly neutral natural world is instrumentalized through environmental rhetorics. Margaret Mitchell's *Gone with the Wind*, the South, the plantation landscape, the form of the plantation romance, race, whiteness, and the

politics of the Great Depression combined to write a fictional history of the Civil War and its aftermath in such a way as to preserve and advance white supremacy within the Lost Cause ethos. William Faulkner's *Go Down, Moses* used intimacy at arm's length, a supposed wilderness ethic, and a revised plantation romance to at once impugn both the progress of modernity and the failings of a gilded Southern plantocracy even as a close examination of the rhetorics used to make such an argument revealed a persistent undercurrent of white supremacy written in and on the very landscape the novel hoped to save.

Whereas both Mitchell's and Faulkner's rhetorics looked to the past, leveraging decidedly nostalgic tones for specific racial and environmental control, W.E.B Du Bois and Zora Neale Hurston differ in rhetorical strategies, racial representations, and political possibilities. In Du Bois's case, the Black Southern environmental imagination uses the rhetorical imbrication of race, place, and environment to demonstrate both the political limits and moral failings of white supremacy. Rather than nostalgia, *The Quest of the Silver Fleece* is a future-oriented text that imagines a socially just and economically viable South with Black life, Black labor, and Black agency directing the course of modernity. Hurston's early short stories and *Jonah's Gourd Vine* mark a different use of the environmental imagination and environmental rhetorics. Her unique style that blends fiction, autobiography, and anthropology uses the natural world to celebrate, express, and represent Black life in almost completely Black lifeworlds. Her environmental rhetorics neither limit Black life to a racial destiny nor demarcate Black experience in terms of naturalized permanency. Rather, they draw on the Southern environment as a metaphoric resource while also culturally replenishing that resource through language play. Across the four authors, close readings showed how the specific rhetorics of each text leveraged the environment to present a vision of place, race, gender, and culture. In each instance, the author's rhetorical use

of the environment varied to meet with the social and cultural politics the authors sought to preserve, impugn, advance, or establish.

My selections of authors and texts should not be seen as implying that only Southern literature across a white/Black binary reveals the use of environmental rhetorics and the imbricated relationship between identity, culture, and environments. I made my selections because of the unique rhetorical choices each author makes in terms of nostalgia, modernity, progress, and environments and the richness of their respective texts. That said, the emphasis on rhetorics here does mean to argue that other literary traditions, eras, movements, and archival combinations can and should be used to better understand how the imbrication of literature, environment, identity, rhetoric, and imagination works.

Mrs. B once said "We see the whole human condition in our records. We just need to read."[1] She said this in *Africans in America* while discussing her work on the Accomack County and Northampton County records to better understand life on Virginia's Eastern Shore from its earliest days. In one sense, her words fit perfectly with a broadcast show on *PBS*. They are earnest, honest, and have a broad appeal. They seem to ruffle no feathers and seem to be about as apolitical as a Black woman talking about the processes of enslavement could have been in the late 1990s. However, I see more in her words than a humanist's love of humanity, a historian's love of records, and a teacher's plea to read. I see in them a rhetorically playful plural hidden within the singular. Granted, this vision comes from an insider's advantage because I know Mrs. B did not believe in the hegemony of the human experience so readily read into her naming of "the human condition." Indeed, it was Mrs. B who taught me that the human condition—whatever that may be at any given time—is radically contingent upon a whole host of factors that

[1] Susan Bellows, Orlando Bagwell, and Boston WGBH, WGBH Educational foundation, 1998. Alexander Street, https://video.alexanderstreet.com/watch/interview-with-frances-latimer-historian.

layer upon one another like the pages of the books she loved so well. And it was Mrs. B who taught me that the more we read, the more questions we will have, and the more answers will escape us. What this means is that, by continuing to expand the field of inquiry regarding the imbrication of rhetorics and environments, by continuing the work of reading our records and reckoning with the plurality of the human condition, the worst we could possibly do is come to a marginally better understanding of the intimacies of language and place by seeking an ever-better question through the practice of searching.

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