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**Space, Form, and Tradition: Recontextualizing the
Contemporary Ethnic-American Novel**

by

Denise Rodriguez

**A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in English
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree
of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York**

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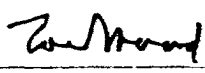
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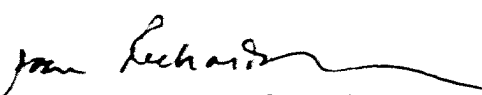
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Abstract

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Space, Form, and Tradition: Recontextualizing the Contemporary Ethnic-American Novel

By

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Advisor: Professor Louis Menand

This dissertation documents the rise of the twentieth-century ethnic American novel by tracing the under-recognized relationship between recent multicultural fiction and its literary antecedents, immigrant and African-American texts of the first half of the twentieth century. In advancing this cross-cultural, cross-temporal contextual reorientation, I establish thematic and stylistic ties between both periods and propose that the body of ethnic literature in the United States revolutionizes the novel as a form.

My methodology builds primarily upon feminist, postcolonial, and African-American theory and criticism. The theoretical core of this project is Houston Baker's and Henry Louis Gates' positioning of tropes as sites of inquiry into the ideological and aesthetic factors that shape a tradition. While drawing on a wide range of texts, my argument centers mainly on the following: John Edgar Wideman's Sent for You Yesterday and the black urban tradition, Toni Morrison's Beloved and domestic discourse, Jessica Hagedorn's Dogeaters and postmodern interstitiality, and Cristina Garcia's Dreaming in Cuban and the journey narrative.

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Chapter One

The Legacy of Ethnic Literature in the United States

"The novel begins by presuming a verbal and semantic decentering of the ideological world, a certain linguistic homelessness of literary consciousness. . . ." M. M. Bakhtin

This dissertation documents the rise of the twentieth-century ethnic American novel by tracing the under-recognized relationship between recent multicultural fiction and its literary antecedents, immigrant and African-American literature of the first half of the century. Generally, multicultural texts tend to be placed in ethnic-specific categories (i.e., Asian-American, Latino-American, etc.). While such critical focus provides fruitful structures and frames of reference--producing some of the most provocative studies in the field of multicultural criticism--it often fails to account for other areas of overlap and influence.¹ By advancing a cross-cultural and cross-temporal reorientation, I establish thematic, stylistic, and generational ties and propose that the body of twentieth-century ethnic literature revolutionizes the novel as a form. Thus, this contextual approach moves beyond interpretations of multicultural fiction as peripheral to the study of American literature.

The concept of a "migrant aesthetic" developed through my analysis of a range of ethnic novels--particularly John

Edgar Wideman's Sent For You Yesterday, Toni Morrison's Beloved, Jessica Hagedorn's Dogeaters, and Cristina Garcia's Dreaming in Cuban-- emphasizes the role of the common point of contact or the location of a collective space--American society--which, in each text under consideration, functions as a disruptive site and repository of cultural signification. This approach simultaneously challenges and appropriates an American tradition by signaling another point of collaboration and dialogue within the culture, thus disturbing the fixed identities of the American and foreigner, inside and outside, self and other, and past and present. The shift away from these binary structures of interpretation leads to the initiation of a "border discourse" or to the construction of a critical in-between, a position charged by the interplay of cultures, languages, and imperatives. Such an analytical field ultimately provides a more historically-encompassing approach to the relationship between multicultural literature and American society because it seeks to locate ethnic writing within the continuum of American fiction.

However, I do not propose that American formal practices influence these writers to such a degree that their work strictly can be read as a product of this cultural aesthetic legacy. On the contrary, my argument underscores ethnic writers' distinct contribution to the development of the American novel and their role as innovators of a specifiabale literary tradition. In other words, by shaping and reshaping

themes and stylistic elements, these authors occupy a pivotal role in the development of the twentieth-century American novel. Any construction of a U.S. literary canon that does not take into account the impact of ethnic writing is inherently flawed. For how can we, for instance, fully understand the historical significance of John Winthrop's prophetic image of the "city upon a hill" or Eliot's "unreal city" in the larger context of the American imagination without also looking at representations of ghettos in African-American and Jewish-American narratives? Similarly, an assessment of recent postmodern fiction (e.g., the novels of Don DeLillo, Thomas Pynchon, and John Barth) would be incomplete without an analysis of the coeval and overlapping movement in experimental ethnic fiction that has as its foundation a range of postcolonial concerns (e.g., the novels of Michelle Cliff, Miguel Elbias Muñoz, and Jessica Hagedorn).

For instance, DeLillo's White Noise and Hagedorn's Dogeaters resemble one another thematically and stylistically. Both authors employ a fragmented narrative mode and incorporate a range of paratextual materials—from television commercials to newspaper articles. Furthermore, both include gossip and rumors as legitimate expressive forms and rely on these modes of representation to describe the central events in the novel: "the airborne toxic event" and the dylarama incident (White Noise), and the art center collapse and Senator Avila's murder (Dogeaters). In White

Noise, "The family is the cradle of misinformation," while, in Dogeaters, the General exclaims that "'this country [the Philippines] thrives on misinformation'" (Delillo 81, Hagedorn 175).

However, the novels differ in significant ways. Delillo depicts a type of postmodern social ennui via the image of "white noise"—the cultural miasma that ebbs and flows through the sleepy college town of Blacksmith until it gains momentum and becomes a toxic event that sends residents running for cover. On the other hand, the social tensions Hagedorn depicts through a panoply of pop culture images have a more insidious political foundation. Tied to a history of colonial and neo-colonial pressures, these images carry traces of insurrections and covert political activities and reflect actual forms of displacement and dissonance.

The above example suggests that cultural and ideological diversity in the United States has created multiple aesthetic traditions that remain in dialogue with one another. As Edward Said argues, "dissenting literature has always survived in the United States alongside the authorized public space" (287). Within creative exchanges between these interfacing histories, we can locate a discernible U.S. literary tradition. At the risk of sounding reductive, American literature can be divided into two general categories: the works of authors who are members of the dominant culture and of those who maintain a "marginal"

position, either because they are recent immigrants-- particularly those from non-Western cultures--or, as in the case of Native Americans or African-Americans, because they often continue to face various forms of social exclusion. Confronted with the nation's hybridity and the paradox that lies at the heart of creating a unified national character out of disparate backgrounds and circumstances, writers on both sides of this border have consistently grappled with the contradictory nature of the American experience.

One of the most compelling inconsistencies shaping this experience involves our historical understanding of space, both in its public and private structures. As Fredrick Jackson Turner argues in the introduction to his seminal 1893 study, The Significance of the Frontier in American History:

American social development has been continually beginning over again on the frontier. This perennial rebirth, this fluidity of American life, this expansion westward with its new opportunities . . . furnish the forces dominating American character. (10)

The United States was, as Turner notes, built upon a principle of advancement, the ideal of a new frontier, and the acquisition and development of geographical space; and individual improvement was (and continues to be) construed as a natural corollary of the expansive American landscape. Furthermore, the American preoccupation with mobility and space as sources of sustenance and potential continues to

inform our thinking. As Walter Allen notes in The Urgent West, "The frontier, the movement westward, remains the great image of the American sense of possibility" (58).

Accordingly, American literature continues to consider these salient issues, dramatizing themes of expansion and settlement. However, like the actual history of the United States--from its agrarian beginnings to its current post-industrial culture--this literature often depicts a struggle between those with the power to control the American landscape and those who face exploitation and alienation. Ihab Hassan's statement that "the fact of slavery and the dream of the open road are thoroughly interfused in the novel" suggests how American literature encodes and dramatizes this politics of place and depicts racial polarity through images of landscape (Radical Innocence 38). These literary representations move between bound (physical) and unbound (imaginative) notions of space and point to a range of social challenges.

Seemingly unrelated concepts as, on the one hand, manifest destiny, which formulates a justification or rationalization for expansion, and, on the other, the creation of a black belt or the establishment of Jim Crow Laws, implemented for the strict control of public spaces, suggest the diverse ways in which the United States geographically comes to be defined based on an individual's cultural position. These political constructs reveal a relationship between expansion and restriction that forges a

"hierarchy of spaces" (Edward Said). For instance, in his study of architectural design and coterminous cultural determinants—such as national customs, ideals, and traditions—Amos Rapport points out the following:

The prevalent attitude toward planning and design in the United States makes the norm the white, middle-class family of parents and two children typified by advertising. This leaves out millions who have different values and do not fit this package, even though these subcultural difference are of great importance. (130)

Ethnic writers consistently limn alternative spatial and familial arrangements as a means of redressing this absence of representation in mainstream American society.

Two dichotomous impulses are at work here: the desire for expansion and the unassailable cultural factors that inhibit the attainment of freedom. Literary depictions of these spatial tensions reveal what J Hillis Miller refers to as the "embodiment of ideology in topography." In other words, literature reiterates the relationship between space and sociopolitical factors from a range of critical perspectives. For instance, Houston A. Baker Jr. aptly notes that in traditional African-American creative forms, such as the blues, work songs, and folktales, the "emphasis on 'frontier,' in the sense suggested by Fredrick Jackson Turner, is scarcely discernable" (Blues, Ideology, and Afro-American Literature 103). Baker's development of a

vernacular discursive framework based on the blues posits an alternative to the uni-directional, hegemonic notion of the frontier--since this blues form operates as a fluid, multi-directional force in a range of African-American cultural productions, from music to literature. For example, instances of these counter-representational spatial manifestations appear in various African-American novels, including Claude McKay's Home to Harlem, Nella Larsen's Quicksand, James Baldwin's Go Tell It On the Mountain, and Ralph Ellison's Invisible Man.

The conflict over space outlined above plays a particularly crucial role in twentieth-century American thought and concomitantly in its literature. Such transforming historical events as the Great Migration and the New Immigration brought with them new voices, concerns, and opportunities for greater creative freedom. America, forever being refashioned, was again undergoing a dramatic alteration; and while during the twenties many of the older generation Americans were writing about their expatriate experiences, the United States was being rewritten by immigrant and Harlem Renaissance authors. Thus, the United States functions as a defining absence in, for instance, Hemingway's The Sun Also Rises but stands under sharp scrutiny in the gritty, naturalistic portrayal of crowded city streets and tenement life in immigrant fiction of the twenties and thirties.

I will now briefly look at several depictions of the United States by older generation American writers and contrast these with immigrant and African American authors' representations of national space in order to bring into sharper focus the distinction drawn in this section. These illustrative spatial patterns include: expatriate views of America from a distance, depictions of tensions between foreign and local cultural spaces, critiques of small town life, and encomiastic portrayals of certain geographical regions.

For expatriate writers, the United States becomes a site of stifling limitations--creative and social--and thus often comes to be represented by an author's lack of focus on and movement away from it, both as place and subject. However, this representational shift does not suggest a dismissal; rather it constructs a reading of America formulated around a series of ambiguities and textual gaps. For instance, when Hemingway refers to the Midwest of Jake Barnes' youth, it appears as an elusive, unreal place that "seem[s] all new" and "strange" (192). Similarly, in a scene from her autobiographical novel, My Next Bride, Kay Boyle depicts America from a nostalgic distance and at an abstract, sensory level:

Peanut-butter, said Victoria in silence, peanut-butter . . . with taste like nothing else on earth. Heinz beans being born, hot in the mouth, a

bellyful of food. . . . America, she said . . .
touching the box of what had grown there, I want to
go back to you. I want a father with a voice like
baked beans and corn to put his hand around me. I
want a mother warm as cornbread to wash my ears at
night. (158)

In this instance, Victoria, an expatriate in Paris, sublimates her desire (i.e., hunger) for the United States by devouring its exported foods. In Nightwood, on the other hand, Djuna Barnes limns an obscure realm of intersecting foreign and local landscapes as well as interior and exterior spaces and draws a connection between emotional estrangement and the quest for a place of identification. The novel's culminating scene captures this sense of double displacement by enacting a return to a primitivist mode.

However, for immigrant and African-American writers of the same period, the United States is defined by a distinctly different "newness" than the kind Hemingway describes, and their sense of separation differs from the type of isolation Barnes depicts. This "newness" and corresponding feelings of alienation are the result of an author's arrival, rather than departure, and are charged with their own uncertainties, contradictions, and concerns--typically of a more immediate nature. For African-American writers in particular, the nostalgia motif--portrayed by Boyle via the image of coveted American foods that remind Victoria of her Midwestern youth--often produces more complex associations. This motif

reappears in a different cultural context in Ellison's Invisible Man, when the protagonist devours a yam that, both in its taste and through the linguistic play of "'I yam what I yam!,'" reminds him of his southern background (266). For the Invisible Man, this incident evokes feelings of intense homesickness, even while the novel's entire organizational structure stages a movement away from the South and its racist cultural underpinnings: "I took a bite, finding it as sweet and hot as any I'd ever had, and was overcome with such a surge of homesickness that I turned away to keep my control" (Ellison 264).

Similarly, in Jessie Redmon Fauset's Plum Bun, Angela Murry is confused by her feelings of homesickness when she first arrives in New York: "'Homesick,' Angela used to say to herself. And she would feel so, too, though she hardly knew for what,--certainly not for Philadelphia and that other life which now seemed so removed as to have been impossible" (91). Here again, the image of home forges problematic associations. While it reminds Angela of her sister, Virginia, and her deceased parents, it simultaneously evokes the memory of racism.

Unlike the novels discussed above, William Faulkner's exploration of the tensions between foreign and local spaces in Absalom, Absalom! is informed by a regionalist perspective. Exotic and local cultural forces collide in Sutpen's elaborately constructed house--the space that

structures the narrative. The role of the French architect from Martinique, for instance, provides a means of assessing the relationship between the creation of Sutpen's Hundred and the colonial project that serves as its insidious backdrop. In Sutpen's account of his time as an overseer on a Haitian sugar plantation, he describes "a little island set in a fury-lurked indigo sea, which was the halfway point between . . . the jungle and . . . civilization" (Faulkner 250). While Sutpen endeavors to repress the memory of this remote place, it resurfaces in the figure of his rejected son, Charles Bon--whose arrival disturbs the boundary separating foreign and local cultural realms. With this arrival, the meaning of Sutpen's Hundred shifts from the ostentatious display of Sutpen's power to the locus of his deepest secrets, and from the building erected by twenty slaves to the place that conceals traces of miscegenation.

By contrast, foreign places in immigrant narratives are often represented in positive and even nostalgic terms. Evoked in the stories mothers and fathers tell their children or the tastes and smells of certain foods that make what Michael Gold calls "the newsreel of memory" go off, these places embody a sense of comfort and familiarity often lacking in the adopted country (84). In this sense, these novels--including Jews Without Money and Call it Sleep--modify the traditional thematic correlation between foreign spaces and exoticism, since ironically, in these instances, the local is the exotic and the foreign the familiar.

The critique of small town life in Sherwood Anderson's Winesburg Ohio, Sinclair Lewis' Main Street, and Edith Wharton's Summer or exalting portrayals of specific American geographical regions--such as the idyllic New England town of Dunnet Landing in Sarah Orne Jewett's The Country of the Pointed Firs or the wide Midwestern prairie in Willa Cather's My Antonia--further stand in contrast to a simultaneously emerging body of ethnic literature centered around attempts to locate a site of entry into American society. These two dichotomous impulses, critique (Anderson, Lewis, and Wharton) and celebration (Jewett and Cather), similarly produce images of the United States as a familiar and accessible landscape.

Jewett's protagonist, for example, reveres "the unchanged shores of the pointed firs, the same quaintness of the village with its elaborate conventionalities, all that mixture of remoteness, and childish certainty of being the centre of civilization" (5). On the other hand, Wharton--who was living in Paris when Summer was published --analyzes the astringent conventions and values of small town America. Summer unfolds against contrasting scenes of the New England town of North Dormer, the more urbane town of Nettletown, and the liminal field of the mountain where an outlaw community lives. While the mountain community is negatively portrayed by the town members, it stands as a striking alternative to North Dormer's socially repressive nature. Despite their obvious differences, both The Country of the Pointed Firs and

Summer evoke the centrality of these respective American landscapes in the lives of their characters.

Ethnic writers often branch away from these thematic structures by dramatizing a prevailing sense of alienation and a concomitant desire to gain access to their surroundings. Through this process of divergence, these authors often adapt the tropic patterns of their contemporaries to expose alternative circumstances and interests. For instance, the pastoral vision F. Scott Fitzgerald's Nick Caraway has when he claims he "would not have been surprised to see a great flock of white sheep turn the corner" on Fifth Avenue comes to be replaced by the clatter of push carts and the voices of men who cash clothes in Michael Gold's Jews Without Money (32). Similarly, while, in Main Street, the "one word--home . . . terrif[ies]" Carol Kennicott when she arrives in Gopher's Prairie, Sara Smolinsky, in Bread Givers, revels in the idea of home when she finally "achieve[s] that marvelous thing, 'a place for everything and everything in its place . . .'" (Lewis 41, Yezierska 241). Both examples reveal variations of traditional spatial themes. In Gold's case, public space comes to be defined by the exertion of economic pressures on an urban Jewish subculture; while the Yezierska passage suggests how finding a place of identification--which, in part, can be read in relation to the myth of the "American

dream" where home functions as an ameliorative field--has far reaching class, gender, and racial implications.

The contrast between those who inherited America and those who needed to fight for their rights as heirs to its traditions posits a unique point of departure for a dissertation mainly concerned with works of the last two decades of the twentieth century. However, as Marcus Klein notes:

By 1930 an approximate one half of the population of the United States did in fact consist of marginal Americans, who necessarily were put to the task of discovering a native land from which they might claim rights of nativity. (Foreigners 183)

This earlier period is a defining moment in American literary history, for never before had there been such a unifying effort to articulate experiences of cultural "otherness." The intent of many of these writers was not only to write about the restrictive quality of the places they were forced to inhabit but to write themselves out of these constrictions, to transform the city squalor into an alternative, aesthetic landscape and, in the process, define themselves as Americans. This quest, however, remains at odds with traditional notions of Americanization or assimilation--for while these authors sought ways of belonging to American culture, their objectives involved a preservation of their specific position within it. Rather

than deny differences, the texts of this period heighten our awareness of the social and ideological challenges that marked the identity of individual writers and, more generally, a historical milieu. Thus, the purpose was not to redefine the self but to propose more pliant and embracing representations of the nation.

In analyzing this process and the way it emerges in the novels of this earlier period (between 1900 to 1952--the year Invisible Man first appeared), we discover a distinct use of space--both linguistic and geographical--that formulates a defining characteristic of the fiction of this tradition--a quality which ultimately carries over into the works of contemporary multicultural writers, where it is again recontoured to reflect the social, political, and artistic concerns of a new generation. While geographical space in relation to textual topography plays a suggestive role in the way we construct an American identity--an issue explored in Tony Tanner's City of Words, Marilyn Chandler's Dwelling in the Text, Arnold Weinstein's Nobody's Home, and, more recently, in Brian Jarvis' Postmodern Cartographies--it has particularly provocative implications for ethnic writers whose position is marked by displacement and for whom home often functions as a repository of the native culture (i.e., traditions and language). As Homi Bhabha, bell hooks, Toni Morrison, and others suggest, home, in such instances, becomes the locus of resistance. This spatial trope thus formulates a unifying, recurrent theme in these texts,

allowing one to observe the various shifts and relocations that play an integral role in the minority experience. Established through this process of cross-cultural "tropological revision"--which Henry Louis Gates Jr. defines as "repetition with a difference"--is an oppositional discourse that structures meaning within a dialectical framework (i.e., between self and other, centripetal and centrifugal forces [M. M. Bakhtin], inside and outside, and public and private) (The Signifying Monkey xxi).

Drawing on Hayden White's The Tropics of Discourse, both Houston Baker and Henry Louis Gates position tropes as a site of inquiry into the artistic considerations that shape the African-American literary tradition. Gates, for examples, defines "this form of critical parody, of repetition and inversion" as a "metaphor for literary history" (The Signifying Monkey 247). Similarly, Baker cites the "constant need for original and suggestive tropes to capture an ever changing American scene" (Blues, Ideology, and Afro-American Literature 112). Thus, for both, the way tropes are reinscribed through generations of writers provides critics with an overview of the creative resources and variations out of which is forged a specifiable tradition of black writing in the United States.

By looking at the way individual authors restate and revise the tropes of antecedent texts, both Baker and Gates assess a cross-generational relationship between a range of

African-American authors. However, their theories differ in important ways. While Gates mainly investigates the formal significance of this developing tradition, Baker, working within a marxist framework, analyzes political issues vis-à-vis a tropological aesthetic network. Both critical stances contribute to my study, but Baker's leap from aesthetic to sociopolitical concerns and implications through his application of marxist theory plays a prominent role in my cross-cultural inquiry into the relationship between narrative innovation and questions of class, race, and gender--issues approached specifically through a discussion of spatial tropes.

While both Baker and Gates use a tropological critical device to arrive at a more comprehensive definition of the African-American tradition, I build upon their respective investigations in order to chart a series of cross-cultural revisions and, in turn, to outline the broader legacy of ethnic American fiction. Michael Fisher's statement about "The paradoxical sense that ethnicity is something reinvented and reinterpreted in each generation . . ." suggests how Baker's and Gates' approaches provide a useful interpretive resource for analyzing ethnic fiction (195). In the following section, I will look at how this tropological framework applies to the series of "crisscrossings" this dissertation engages in.

II

In Negotiating Difference: Race, Gender, and the Politics of Positionality, Michael Awkward argues for a critical approach that takes into account the series of gender, racial, and class intersections which define the American experience:

As an image of translocational influence, 'crisscrossing' is not intended to suggest an America wherein each receiver passively imbibes specifiable aspects of others' culture . . . but a method of acknowledging and mapping, however imprecisely, the presence of a multicultural synchronicity in a variety of subjects. (14)

A tropological investigative model offers an ideal interpretive paradigm for this type of border crossing, particularly since it allows the critic to traverse historical periods and individual positions, in order to arrive at over-arching similarities or points of intersection. For instance, charting various manifestations of spatial tropes (such as domestic and urban spaces) in a range of ethnic texts expands the parameters of Baker's and Gates' projects and allows for a discussion of the social, political, and artistic significance of these specific sites of intertextual dialogue.

An analysis of these points of confluence is necessary--especially when we consider their prevalence versus how seldom they are evaluated in a critical context. As John Edgar Wideman states in an interview with Charles H. Rowell,

"You can't scratch very deeply below the surface before you discover evidence of cross-cultural borrowing, revisions, etc." (103). These artistic encounters create a confirming network and, in turn, result in the emergence of a recognizable literary tradition.

The role of African-American writers in this project of inter-cultural revision is particularly significant, since--both creatively and politically--their galvanizing presence in American society has, to a large degree, paved the way for other marginal groups. As Werner Sollers notes in Beyond Ethnicity: Consent and Descent in American Culture:

The discussions of ethnicity and the production of ethnic literature in the United States have been so strongly affected by Afro-Americans, and so actively and directly influenced by them since World War II, that an omission of the Afro-American tradition in a discussion of ethnic culture in America would create a very serious gap in our reflection. (36)

In terms of the artistic tradition outlined in this dissertation, I would suggest that African Americans began to assert their influence on the creative productions of minority groups long before World War II--particularly if we take into account early slave narratives, the fiction and poetry of the Harlem Renaissance, and the development of the protest tradition in the thirties.

However, by proposing these "subtextual bond(s)" (Baker), I do not overlook irreducible experiential differences and factors--such as slavery and the historical conditions that prompt migrations. Instead, I hope to advance an examination of the way marginal writers in the United States influence and motivate each other that acknowledges their individual voices and circumstances. While some of these relationships have been recognized by authors themselves, even those that have not been documented contribute to my overall thesis--since unacknowledged correlations still reveal common social, political, and cultural influences. For example, the theme of homecoming is replayed in a range of ethnic American texts--including Claude McKay's Home to Harlem, Langston Hughes short story "Home," Edward Rivera's Family Installments, Judith Ortiz Cofer's Silent Dancing, Amy Tan's The Joy Luck Club, Jessica Hagedorn's Dogeaters, Cristina Garcia's Dreaming in Cuban, and Edwidge Danticat's Breath, Eyes, Memory. In each instance, home embodies national or international tensions, and the journey home involves a search for resolution and closure.

In an interview with Gloria Naylor, Toni Morrison makes a significant point about these types of relationships:

many people who are trying to show certain kinds of connections between myself and Zora Neale Hurston are always dismayed and disappointed in me because I hadn't read Zora Neale Hurston except for one

little short story before I began to write. I hadn't read her until after I had written. In their effort to establish a tradition, that bothers them a little bit. And I said, "No, no, you should be happy about that." Because the fact that I had never read Zora Neale Hurston and wrote The Bluest Eye and Sula anyway means that the tradition really exists. (214)

Morrison's statement advances a distinct contextual approach to the concept of tradition. Rather than focusing exclusively on direct influences between specific authors, Morrison proposes that tradition emerges out of a social/cultural matrix. In other words, although Alice Walker documents her creative indebtedness to Zora Neale Hurston, Morrison's relationship to Hurston is equally important--for they are linked by ineluctable historical and experiential factors, such as race and gender.

Thus, overlapping backgrounds and situations, including a broad range of historical determinants, create a connective framework. In the following section, I will look more closely at how specific spatial tropes offer examples of the types of definitive circumstances--such as migration, urban renewal (which James Baldwin referred to as "black removal"), and poverty--that shape an emerging ethnic American tradition in literature.

III

As Timothy Brennen notes in "The National Longing for Form," the word nation comes from the Latin "natio," meaning "local culture" or, more specifically, "domicile." The etymology of the word reveals the way in which home (private, individual) and nation (public, communal) intersect and, in turn, frame one another. In the texts under consideration, home comes to be defined by positing the private in the public field, a subversive act which Said, drawing on French urban sociologist Paul Virilio's work, calls "counter-habitation." According to Said:

Virilio suggests that the modernist project of liberating language/speech has a parallel in the liberation of critical spaces--hospitals, universities, theaters, factories, churches, empty buildings; in both, the fundamental transgressive act is to inhabit the normally uninhabitable.

(326)²

While in their heuristic endeavors both Said and Virilio have actual public spaces in mind, I appropriate this critical abstraction to suggest that the novel itself functions as a public space and thus, as Bakhtin argues, that writing performs a mediation of the personal and the public, whereby the boundaries slip--causing a relocation of the private to the social realm. Defined in this way, the concept of "counter-habitation" plays a particularly charged role in multicultural fiction, since it represents a disruption of the enforced boundaries drawn between an

interior (private) and exterior (public). The formulation of these private spaces shifted to the social arena, via the text, stands against the broader geographical and psychological backdrop of the nation itself, in certain cases becoming a metonym for national identity.

In order to further elucidate this point, I will briefly turn to two examples. One of the most striking instances of a spatialized vision of racism and social exclusion is proposed by Ralph Ellison when he suggests "that we view the whole of American life as a drama acted out upon the body of a Negro giant, who lying trussed up like Gulliver, forms the stage and scene upon which and within which the action unfolds" (Shadow and Act 28). In this transgressive distortion, the individual (private) becomes a public stage; the objectified body manifests itself as the American landscape, and the person who has been historically "kept in his place" transforms into a grotesque dramatization of the wider geographical field upon which the social and political restrictions that determine his position are formulated. In a distinctly different yet related sense, Toni Morrison refers to spatial forms in an effort to remap the field of American literature: "I want to draw a map . . . of a critical geography and use the map to open as much space for discovery, intellectual adventure, and close exploration as did the original charting of the new world . . ." (Playing in the Dark 3). Her project involves a rethinking and theoretical dismantling of the way America was constructed

that ironically draws on those very patterns of production but "without the mandate for conquest" (Morrison 3). Both of these instances articulate the personal by performing a movement into the social field--discursive and geographical.

The novel as a form plays an invaluable role in constructing this distinctly new critical landscape. Bakhtin traces the rise of the novel to a moment of "international and interlingual" contact in Europe. He argues that "A multitude of different languages, cultures and times became available to Europe, and this became a decisive factor in its life and thought" (The Dialogic Imagination 11). In other words, the novel, as a heteroglossic form, comes into being through transcultural intersections. Bakhtin's emphasis on the "verbal-ideological decentering" embodied in the novel--again a result of international contact--further links this genre not only to formal innovations but to a rethinking of power relationships (370). Thus, for marginal groups in particular, the novel represents specific empowering possibilities--especially since the conditions for its emergence to some degree parallel the dislocations and intercultural exposure experienced by ethnic minorities in the United States.

"The dream of American form" (Houston Baker), linked as it is to the politics of identity--ethnic, gender, and class--posits a connection between external spatial patterns and individual concerns responsible for the construction of a

type of linguistic topography. Like the characters in Song of Solomon who call Mains Avenue "Not Doctor Street" after they are told that it is *not Doctor street*, the process of renaming and rewriting remains intimately tied with the construction of an identity plotted via American space (i.e., homes, streets, and cities). Georg Lukacs argues that "The hero of the novel is the product of estrangement from the outside world"; however, the heroes of ethnic fiction, acutely aware of their condition, often seek to move beyond estrangement to a redefinition of the social sphere and their position within it (66). And while for those writing during the first half of the century, up to and including Ellison, this process involves a distinct desire to define themselves as Americans, their contemporary counterparts replace this commitment with critical endeavors that result in more fluid and subversive visions of the nation as it relates to the self.

This transition plays a pivotal role in the shaping of the tradition under consideration. While a distinct line of influence has not ended and while the new generation continues to assert its position within American culture, the emergence of this group of writers represents a broader, international movement toward reconstituting national space, linked, for instance, to a post-Civil Rights cultural framework, changes in immigration patterns and policies, and to the process of decolonization--along with the critical concepts borne of this phenomena. In terms of the spatial

tropes central to my argument, these writers take up residence in what Homi K. Bhabha calls "interstitial spaces," symbolic in-betweens that suggest a critical deviation in the way marginal constituencies position themselves in relation to mainstream society. No longer concerned with adopting a specifically American identity--if such a thing exists--these novelists either write about a specific local community that functions as an interstitial site (Morrison, Wideman), on the one hand, or they seek to develop an explicitly migrant aesthetic, on the other (Garcia, Hagedorn); however, each author remains in dialogue with America as a dynamic field of cultural signification.

Relevant to this emerging discourse are questions of form, similar to those presented earlier in the century. Like the distinction between high modernist aesthetics and the proletarian concerns of the thirties, the advent of postmodernism in the United States raises questions about the way we define a multicultural novelistic form--an issue which I focus on particularly in relation to Jessica Hagedorn's *Dogeaters* and Cristina Garcia's *Dreaming in Cuban*. Space in these instances is recoded via the process of theoretical "decentering," a concept that plays a salient role in postmodern discourse. As Cornel West, R. Radhakrishnan, bell hooks and others argue, this critical transformation--which on the surface seems to provide leverage for those who never held a position at the center to begin with--merely enacts a movement from one location of authority to another, and thus

produces a similar traceable hierarchy. This approach, however, is countered by what bell hooks terms "a postmodernism of resistance," which seeks to redress the absence of minority concerns from the broader postmodern debate and "involves chang[ing] the exclusionary practice of postmodern critical discourse" ("Postmodern Blackness" 517). As I argue, the authors who engage in this analytical project tend to create "conceptual utopian spaces" (Fredric Jameson) that allow them to mediate the American landscape, without the risk of falling prey to any idealized notion of nationhood.

By emphasizing the way contemporary ethnic literature, coming out of the defining period that precedes it, employs spatial constructs, I move beyond looking at these works in isolation or as separate from an American literary legacy--which is often how they are contextualized--while simultaneously preserving what distinguishes them and characterizes their distinct and often dissenting position within this larger tradition. The reference to spatial tropes that initiate an over-arching dialogue between these novels plays a important role in highlighting the central concerns, political and stylistic, that help shape this form.

IV

In this section, I begin to chart some of the pertinent thematic and generational features that contribute to the

overall construction of the tradition under consideration, before turning to the contemporary ethnic novels that are the primary focus of this dissertation. I trace a connection between reading space, acquiring a voice, and, in turn, constructing an identity and suggest that, for marginal writers, tensions between self expression and broader sociopolitical imperatives formulate a new aesthetics that--while connected to currents in American literature--posits its own discernible legacy. I will focus briefly on four novels of the first half of the century--Paul Lawrence Dunbar's The Sport of the Gods, Henry Roth's Call it Sleep, Anzia Yezierska's Bread Givers, and Ann Petry's The Street--as a means of contextualizing some salient cultural and stylistic concerns of this earlier period. My selection of these particular texts is mainly illustrative; a variety of other works could be substituted to chart similar tropological patterns.

However, I do not wish to suggest that my specific choices are arbitrary. On the contrary, in its strategy of representation, each text under consideration reveals an acute awareness of ethnicity, class, and gender, and its selection for this project, in turn, stresses my own commitment to a critical evaluation of these interpenetrating factors.

While Dunbar's The Sport of the Gods predates Alain Locke's publication of The New Negro Anthology and what later

came to be known as the Harlem Renaissance, it sets the stage for a particular African-American novelistic tradition that takes shape during the twenties and thirties. Dunbar bequeaths a specific expression of New York City as a delicate blend of danger and possibility to a range of authors, including James Weldon Johnson, Claude McKay, Langston Hughes, and Nella Larsen. More important, Dunbar's text distinctly enacts this stylistic transformation in its thematic construction. In other words, by consciously rearranging creative modes of representation--painting (Francis), Broadway shows (Kitty), and newspaper reporting (Skaggs)--Dunbar assess the role of African-Americans within the larger context of American expressive culture.

Houston Baker states that Dunbar "rather than aspiring to a mastery of form . . . chose the *deformation of mastery* as his strategy" (Modernism and the Harlem Renaissance 49). This representational mode, according to Baker, involves a deconstructive impulse and is often characterized by the rearrangement of traditional expressive forms and motifs. As a "deformer of mastery," Dunbar subverts the plantation tradition in The Sport of the Gods by positing New York as an oppositional imaginative resource. However, while Baker indicates that Dunbar undermines this mode through the incorporation of a "blues detective" form introduced via the character of Skaggs--the white, New York journalist described as "aggressively unprejudiced"--I would argue that the figure most responsible for the insertion of an alternative creative

model is Kitty, who oddly enough all but disappears from the narrative after her brother kills his lover and her father is set free (Dunbar 120).

The Sport of the Gods is divided between three general spaces: the South (a post-reconstruction southern plantation), New York City (the Tenderloin), and Paris (the Latin Quarter). Each of these spaces embodies a specific creative force. Maurice and his wife feel that the Latin Quarter, where Maurice's brother, Francis (the aspiring artist), lives is "at least a bit too free and unconventional for their traditions" (Dunbar 12). This area thus comes to stand against the South, while New York City, by contrast, functions as Paris' symbolic analogue--since both cities apotheosize a certain risqué, alternative mode of perception. However, what differentiates New York from Paris is their respective representations of art. While Paris personifies high art, New York, with its coon shows and jazz music, represents low art. Ironically, the South centers both artistic realms, since, on the one hand, it provides Frank the economic resources to study art in Paris, and, on the other, its racist underpinnings lead to the Hamilton family's eviction from the Oakley estate and to their migration North.

When Frank, after pretending that the money is stolen from his room, tells his brother that "'such a thing as theft seemed so foreign to this place . . .,'" he hints at the actual source of corruption in the text--since we later find out that his experience in Paris leads him to the lie that

forms the central tension of the novel (emphasis added, Dunbar 20). Later, when Maurice receives a letter from his brother that he muses must contain news of Frank's achievements as an artist, we are not surprised to discover that it is actually a confession to the crime. Thus, Frank's most significant creative endeavor comes in the form of an elaborately constructed lie. By undermining the position of the artist in this way, reducing his talent to a single duplicitous act, Dunbar shifts the reader's attention to other forms of creative expression, ones typically considered unacceptable when measured against traditional cultural standards.

While Frank is in Paris, presumably developing his skills as a painter, Kitty discovers an entirely different realm of artistic representation in New York City. As Nathan Irvin Huggins observes, "The Negro migration into cities like New York dramatically shifted the Afro-American image from rural to urban, from peasant to sophisticate," and Kitty personifies the results of this physical and psychological relocation through her personal evolution (302). When she first goes to the theater, Kitty notes that "there was something weird to her in the alternate spaces of light and shade. Without any feeling of its ugliness, she looked at the curtain as at a door that should presently open between her and a house of wonders" (Dunbar 99). Enchanted by these enterprising possibilities, Kitty eventually becomes a singer, and, while Frank's education in Paris merely results

in the violation of his brother's trust, Kitty, who has no prior formal training, comes to enjoy a certain degree of success as a Broadway performer.

Just as Sadness claims that "dancing in rag-time is the dialect of poetry," singing on Broadway functions as a subversive variation to the high art represented by Frank (Dunbar 203). While the more obvious creative antithesis to Frank's artistic "performance" is Skagg's investigation and report that ultimately result in Berry's freedom, Kitty's position in the novel offers more compelling implications--since she is both black and a woman. In other words, while Dunbar supplies a white male character with the interpretive strategies needed to vindicate the Hamilton family, he at least points to another source of agency in his text and, in doing so, anticipates a range of empowering representations of African-American women's creative resourcefulness in a range of subsequent novels. Thus, to answer the question of what happens to Kitty we need to somehow look beyond Dunbar's text and toward the Harlem Renaissance--for Kitty is a symbolic precursor and inchoate embodiment of the possibilities explored during this later period.

In reevaluating spatial hierarchies and discrediting the creative and interpretive strategies of an economically elite South and an artistically elite Europe, Dunbar positions New York City as an alternative field which, regardless of its numerous contradictions and limitations, remains responsive to the particular needs--artistic as well as social--of the

black community. Therefore, even before Harlem captures the literary imagination and becomes, as James DeJonge observes, "an original twentieth-century topos, [and] a modern motif created by African-American writers . . .," Dunbar's depiction of a predominantly black Manhattan subculture begins to shape this instrumental relationship between place and aesthetic considerations (209).

While Dunbar repudiates high art in favor of the potentialities of what are traditionally considered low or popular forms, Henry Roth, influenced by Joyce and Eliot, thematically inscribes proletarian interests--such as those explored in Michael Gold's Jews Without Money--within a modernist experimental framework. Call It Sleep shifts unsteadily between private and communal concerns as well as between enclosed (domestic) and public (Lower East Side neighborhood) spaces. These spatial transitions are in part depicted in phenomenological terms (i.e., cellar [confining] and roof [liberating]). Eventually, the boundaries separating individual spaces slip, creating a transformative landscape that embodies the melding of psychological and social forces.

In the novel's first section, David's fear of the building's cellar indicates an emerging tension between the safety of home (represented by his mother) and the danger of the streets below (represented by his father). In one of his earliest experiences away from both home and his mother,

David goes to retrieve his father's pay and belongings from a former employer. Even before having suspicions about his father confirmed by the workers' description of him, David worries that his father might abandon him on the street. Home, by contrast, is described in positive terms—at least during the periods of his father's absence. However, the fact that his father may return at any point keeps the cherished domestic world David associates with his mother in constant danger. David, for instance, "often dreamed of his father's footsteps booming on the stairs, of the glistening doorknob turning . . ." (Roth 22).

This fear of violation oddly foreshadows the incident in the closet with the lame girl, an occurrence that initiates David into a world of adult concerns. Thus the tidy interior-exterior dichotomy begins to give way to more complicated representations of public and private spaces. David thinks that his mother "didn't know as he knew how the whole world could break into a thousand little pieces . . ." (Roth 55). The naivete he ascribes to his mother stands against the disruptive realm that lies just beyond their door. The fragmented world he describes is linguistically inscribed in the interpellated narrative mode of the street scenes in the novel.

Shortly after Annie's failed seduction, David stands in the street entranced by the scene of a local funeral, an image that carries the private nature of grief into a public format and, in turn, fashions a spectacle of personal sorrow.

The series of interrelated moments--the seduction, his father's rage, and the funeral procession--lead to David's running away from home. He gets lost following the telegraph poles that "stretched away, the wires on their crosses swinging to the side" (Roth 92). Not only do the telegraph poles signal the possibility of escape, but the image of "crosses" is the first in a series of religious symbolic markers that create an index to an alternative realm of identification.

The initial sequence of events that culminates in an act of escape comes to be replayed in various forms in the novel. For example, the image of the cellar as an illicit and dangerous place reappears later in the text when David brings Leo to see his cousins, Esther and Polly. This episode, in turn, foreshadows the instance of climactic rupture in the novel--the moment when his father questions his mother about David's paternity. By bringing the Polish-American Christian boy to meet his Jewish cousins, David subconsciously reenacts the story he hears his mother tell her sister, Bertha, about the Christian organ player she fell in love with before she married David's father.

Roth's most significant stylistic achievement in Call It Sleep is his ability to cast these psycho-sexual tensions against a proletarian backdrop. For example, David's discovery that the neighborhood boys had seen his mother naked as she emerged from the tub points to the lack of privacy that is the result of overcrowded living conditions

in their Lower East Side tenement. While the novel actively dramatizes spatial anxieties in its aesthetic form of representation—with street scenes that shift to a first-person stream-of-consciousness narrative mode—it also inscribes the social consequences of these circumstances in naturalistic terms. The last pages of the novel best exemplify Roth's mastery of a heterogeneous form that incorporates David's interior monologue, individual voices and dialects, religious imagery, and experiential conditions and transforms these disparate elements into an amplified aesthetic terrain.

In Shifting Landscape, Roth states that "In America the Jew is not at home. He's always the outsider Even the East Side was not a world created by the Jews, but a world left to the Jews" (228). Roth reclaims and transforms this world "left to the Jews," into an imaginative, subjective field of self-expression. The resulting narrative construction resists the nature of ownership and authority. In this sense, Call It Sleep sets the stage for later immigrant novels that similarly modify or refashion the American urban landscape to reflect specific ethnic interests and concerns. These texts include: Piri Thomas' Down These Mean Streets, Esmeralda Santiago's When I Was Puerto Rican, Nicholasa Mohr's Nilda, and Sandra Cisneros' The House On Mango Street.

Like Roth's Call It Sleep, Anzia Yezierska's coming of age novel dramatizes the integral role of the immigrant neighborhood in mediating the conflicting forces of old world versus new, past versus present, and childhood versus adulthood. However, Yezierska goes a step beyond these traditional tensions by positing gender as a decisive factor in the broader private and public forces at work in these motifs. As Edith C. Weinthal observes, "The portrayal of the city in Anzia Yezierska's Bread Givers demonstrates her response to the culture as perceived by a female Jewish immigrant at the beginning of" the twentieth century (10). Sara Smolinsky's quest for freedom, depicted in terms of a search for a place of her own, represents a violation of old world values embodied in the figure of her father. Thus, the novel charts a spatial transition--from father's home, to street, to an autonomous space of identification--that has far reaching gender, class, and cultural implications.

Bread Givers opens with the Smolinsky family's fears of being evicted. This practical concern leads to the initiation of Sara's enterprising, feminist spirit--since, as a result of the pending eviction, she goes in search of a job. Ironically, domestic demands force her out of the home and into an alternative area in which she discovers new options and possibilities. When she makes a profit selling herring on the street, her sense of personal pride manifests itself in a celebration of her new surroundings:

It began singing in my heart, the music of the whole Hester Street. The pushcart peddlers yelling their goods, the noisy playing of children in the gutter, the women pushing and shoving . . . all that was only hollering noise before melted over me like a new beautiful song. (Yeziarska 22)

Not only does this incident set the stage for Sara's transgressive move beyond her father's domination, it poses an imaginative vision of New York as a sensate, aesthetic domain fashioned out of noisy crowds and urban squalor.

This spatial transformation complements Sara's own metamorphosis. The novel depicts several examples of women's creative resourcefulness and strategies for modifying their surroundings and conditions. Sara's sister Mashah, for instance, has a knack for making their humble apartment look beautiful. However, Unlike Sara's entrepreneurial drive, Mashah's endeavors merely result in superficial changes. Sara's subjective evolution, on the other hand, is the direct consequence of her resilience and rebellious nature.

Unlike Mashah's longing to emulate American wealth, Sara's objectives ironically parallel her father's devotion to learning. For instance, Bessie compares Sara's interest in educating herself to their father's commitment to his religious texts: "'She's worse than father with his Holy Torah'" (Yeziarska 178). Oddly enough, her father also makes this association, telling his wife's doctor that Sara "'Takes after her father, even though she's only a girl'" (Yeziarska

249). Thus, the juxtaposition of characters that drives the narrative forward ultimately results in the father's admission that his willful daughter resembles him.

In Bread Givers, Yeziarska not only thwarts the domestic form, she also reevaluates assumptions about gender by providing the daughter with the father's intelligence--an attribute Mr. Smolinsky perceives as distinctly masculine--and, in turn, by having Sara use this intellectual resource to subvert the traditional male-dominated family structure. Sara boldly states: "I can't respect a man who lives on the blood of his wife and children. If you [her mother] had any sense, you'd arrest him for not supporting you" (Yeziarska 130). Like Mashah's frivolity, the mother's "lack of sense" represents the condition of women under patriarchal strictures. In order to break out of this mode of victimization, Sara appropriates the tools of the oppressor and uses them in ways that conform to her own needs.

However, Yeziarska's rendering of the conflict between the father's old world values and Sara's resourceful "American" spirit does not result in a facile example of an assimilation narrative--as several early critics of the novel suggest. On the contrary, Sara's rebellion against her father eventually leads to an interrogation of American patriarchal social structure as well. For instance, Sara challenges one of her instructors by asking: "Who are the bosses of education who made us study so much dead stuff?" (Yeziarska 181). The impertinent question marks a pivotal

shift away from familial concerns and toward broader social interests.

Bread Givers provides a rich narrative legacy to later generations of Jewish-American women writers, including Adrienne Rich, Grace Paley, and Cynthia Ozick. Yezierska's ability to carefully balance gender, class, and ethnicity makes Bread Givers an early example of an emerging feminist-ethnic tradition in American fiction. For instance, her manipulative rendering of the trope of the "self-made man"—depicted in Sara's exclamation that she "felt like Carnegie and Rockefeller"—not only illustrates the narrative strategy of refashioning male tropes (which appears in a range of women's writings), it also suggests an added interest in undoing a classic American myth (Yezierska 281). This motif reappears in Ann Petry's The Street when Lutie Johnson sees herself as Benjamin Franklin walking through the streets of Harlem.

In The Street, Ann Petry provides a glimpse of nineteen forties Harlem refracted through a range of subjective positions. At the center of this chaotic world we find Lutie Johnson, a single mother who longs to move out of the neighborhood she sees as a disabling and corruptive force. As the author herself states in an often-quoted passage, the novel depicts how "'simply and easily the environment can change the course of a person's life'" (cited in Robert Bone, The Negro Novel in America 180). However, The Street does

more than demonstrate the effects of social conditions on the individual. As You-Me Park and Gayle Wald argue, "'The Street' of the novel's title refers not to a particular geographical location but to a single determining environment that makes obsolete conventional distinctions between outside and inside, street and home, sacred and profane" (618-619). Through a series of figurative juxtapositions, Petry illustrates this slipperiness of meaning and, in doing so, she produces an ever-shifting vision of Harlem as a landscape where oppositional forces--such as private and public and high and low--intersect.

Lutie Johnson functions as the principal interpreter of Harlem's multiple meanings, reading space through a filter of conditional forces. For instance, when she reads a sign advertising the apartment she eventually moves into, she deciphers the coded message behind the word "Reasonable":

Reasonable--now that could mean almost anything.

On Eighth Avenue it meant tenements--ghastly places not fit for humans. On St. Nicholas Avenue it meant high rents for small apartments; and on Seventh Avenue it meant great big apartments where you had to take in roomers in order to pay the rent. On this street it could mean almost anything. (Petry 4)

Translating the advertisement into a social document, Lutie produces a list of manifold definitions that underscores the range of conditional factors represented by the indicated

spaces; the result is a portrait of Harlem as a multilayered cultural infrastructure.

Similarly, Lutie functions as an interpretive force through which the reader can assess the changeable connotations of the events that take place in the city. For instance, after witnessing a crowd gathered around a dead man, Lutie notes how the meaning of the man's death alternates, depending on the interpreter. In the original scene, the man appears to be a helpless victim, but when she reads a newspaper account of the incident the following day, Lutie discovers a strikingly different description: "She held the paper in her hand for a long time, trying to follow the reasoning by which that thin ragged boy had become in the eyes of a reporter a 'burly Negro'" (Petry 198-199). By placing Lutie's perceptual account of this event against the newspaper's biased rendition, Petry invalidates the culturally-sanctioned version and tacitly points to the racist forces that modulate the definitions of such circumstances.

Indeed, earlier in the novel Lutie herself becomes an agent of this type of interpretive modification. When Mrs. Chandler gives her expensive outfits she never wears, Lutie sends them to her father's girlfriend, "taking an ironic pleasure in the thought that Mrs. Chandler's beautiful clothes Designed For Country Living would be showing up nightly in the gin mill, at the corner of Seventh Avenue and 110 Street" (Petry 50). The transgressive act of

refiguration—a revision of the “rags to riches” trope—makes a mockery of class barriers. Ironically, while Lutie credits the ability to alter meaning to having financial resources, she accomplishes a similar objective through a simple devious exploit.

In the novel’s closing scene, Lutie recalls learning to draw circles as a child and her exasperated school teacher saying “‘I don’t know why they have us bother to teach your people to write’” (Petry 435). If the image of the circle (writing) represents the precise renderings of a white educational model, then the series of vertiginous, deviating lines Lutie draws throughout the novel (interpreting) embodies a counter-hegemonic impulse. While the circle implies closure, Lutie’s interpretive moves chart a series of analytical challenges. Thus, Lutie’s ability to accurately read the signs of a white world, illustrated in advertisements, newspaper articles, and films, undermines their position in the text and, in turn, postulates alternative renditions of these images. For instance, when Lutie sees an advertisement depicting a Caucasian family standing in a sleek, modern kitchen, she immediately remembers her own stifling domestic space and proceeds to read both images as contrasting narratives.

Although Lutie’s interpretive abilities do not result in an alteration of her individual circumstances, they point to the possibility of such transformations. If writing functions as an act of self-assertion, then reading—its

natural correlative--poses a similar opportunity, but one that involves an added challenge--the capacity to construct an image of the self against an existing referential body. In his concept of the "writerly text," Roland Barthes argues that the reader's subjective position adds to the overall meaning of a text. He states: "This 'I' which approaches the text is already itself a plurality of other texts, of codes which are infinite . . ." (10). A text, in this sense, acquires additional significance via the reader's quest to decipher its meaning.

By allowing her audience to view Harlem through Lutie's interpretive lens, Petry shakes the cultural foundations of racism and sexism. While the novel ends in irresolution, with Lutie abandoning Bub and fleeing to Chicago--another site of limited resources and possibilities--Petry positions the trope of interpretation as a strategy of resistance. This narrative model is adopted by a range of writers--including, for example, Gloria Naylor, Toni Morrison, Jessica Hagedorn, and Sherley Anne Williams. Williams, for instance, brilliantly portrays the tension between opposing versions of African-American history in Dessa Rose, moving from Nehemiah's writing of The Roots of Rebellion in the Slave Population and Some Means of Eradicating Them to Dessa's personal narrative.

In their respective quests for ideal spaces of identification, these writers provide varying depictions of

New York City through distinct yet overlapping creative tactics. Dunbar's Great Migration narrative charts tensions between North and South and rural and urban spaces by constructing a contrasting framework of high and low modes of representation. In his naturalistic/stream-of-consciousness narrative, Roth uses the sounds and textures of urban space as a means of depicting the psychological perceptions of a young immigrant boy. Yeziarska, on the other hand, produces an image of the city as a space responsive to the particular needs of women. And Petry inscribes interpretation as a deconstructive force that allows for a critical assessment of the impact of New York City on black women.

Therefore, unlike Edith Wharton's elite Manhattan in The Age of Innocence or Stephen Crane's "gloomy districts near the river, where the tall black factories shut in the street . . ." in Maggie: A Girl of the Streets, these texts assemble an image of the city--through conflicting themes of obstacles and possibilities--as a space informed by race, class, and gender considerations (81). In Sister Carrie, Theodore Dreiser depicts Chicago as a "walled city" whose denizens "were so merry inside there that all those outside were forgotten . . ." (306). By contrast, Dunbar, Roth, Yeziarska, and Petry represent the city in terms of a double sense of being simultaneously "inside" and "outside." For example, while Lutie Johnson feels alienated in Harlem, she also recognizes that "she never felt really human until she reached Harlem . . ." (Petry 57). Both lauded and rejected,

the city often reveals a spatially delineated type of "double consciousness" (Du Bois) or the sense of being both within and outside of a place of identification, a feature that functions as a defining characteristic of the particular novels examined above and of other ethnic novels of this period--up to the publication of Invisible Man, which, as I argue in the following chapter, marks a turning point in this tradition, since it revises the juxtaposition of inside and outside by adopting an alternative space that embodies aspects of both realms.

These novels provide a framework for reading a range of spatial tropes in more recent texts. In the subsequent chapters, I chart the following formal transformations: John Edgar Wideman and the urban novel, Toni Morrison and sentimental/domestic fiction, Jessica Hagedorn and postmodern interstitiality, and Cristina Garcia and the journey narrative. In each instance, I focus on what specific textual permutations represent, particularly in relation to their larger contributions to the form and texture of the American novel.

Thus, the pattern traced throughout this dissertation provides a broader contextual frame of reference that takes into account previously neglected similarities between recent multicultural fiction and earlier ethnic literature, as well as between ethnic writing more generally and the ever-evolving American novel--since, in creating a space for themselves within this literary tradition, multicultural

writers have invariably challenged, enriched, and expanded the parameters of this form through an engaging reappraisal of its themes, tropes, and narrative styles.

¹. I am thinking of seminal critical works such as Gloria Anzaldua's Borderlands: La Frontera, Asuncion Horno-Delgado et al.'s Breaking Boundaries: Latina Writing and Critical Reading, and Elaine Kim's Asian American Literature: An Introduction to the Writings and Their Social Context.

². Said similarly sets up this type of spatial-critical framework in The World, the Text, and the Critic. He argues, for instance, that "To be for and in culture is to be in and for a State in a compellingly loyal way. . . . Outside this range of meanings--for it is the outside that partially defines the inside in this case--stand anarchy, the culturally disenfranchised . . . the homeless, in short" (11).

Chapter Two

Homewood's "Music of Invisibility": John Edgar Wideman's Sent For You Yesterday and the Black Urban Novel

"I wanted to try to build a bridge of words between me and that world outside, that world which was so distant and elusive that it seemed unreal." (Richard Wright)

"I see myself as an inheritor of an African American cultural tradition, and I'm very proud of that." (John Edgar Wideman)

Following my discussion about the integral role the cityscape plays in the development of an ethnic aesthetics in American literature, I will now focus on John Edgar Wideman's reevaluation of the black urban novel in the third book of the Homewood Trilogy, Sent For You Yesterday, in which Wideman addresses both the stylistic and sociopolitical underpinnings of this form. By investigating the way these two distinct yet overlapping considerations reveal themselves in the novel, I document the role of music (artistic representation) and invisibility (social ramification), charting how Wideman's manipulation of these tropes leads to an innovative expression of the African-American urban experience.

Wideman's dialogue with antecedent texts of this tradition--most notably with James Weldon Johnson's The

Autobiography of an Excoloured man, Richard Wright's Native Son, and Ralph Ellison's Invisible Man--illustrates a relationship between music, invisibility, and changes in the urban environment. His attention to the interconnectedness of these tropes and his ability to reconcile them to the representation of communal life leads to a new stage in the development of this tradition. According to Henry Louis Gates, "Afro-American literary history is often characterized by tertiary revision, . . . mean[ing] that three elements tend to be involved in the relationship of ancestry" (Figures in Black 121-22). The three tropological components developed in the texts under consideration and altered most significantly in Sent For You Yesterday are: the metropolitan landscape (i.e., New York, Chicago, and Pittsburgh), music (i.e., blues, jazz, but also by extension issues of silence and voice), and invisibility (i.e., passing, hiding, masking, and albinism). As I will argue, Sent For You Yesterday marks a decisive shift in the progression and expansion of the urban novel and, furthermore, provides a new framework for an analysis of a range of concerns related to race and city life, including the limitations of urban renewal programs, uneven development, and poverty.

Wideman first discovered the African-American tradition in literature when he was asked to teach a course on black writers at the University of Pennsylvania, sometime around 1968. In a 1972 interview with John O'Brien, he discusses this discovery:

This whole exposure has been crucial in my development as a writer. It awakened in me a different sense of self-image and the whole notion of a third world. The slave narratives, folklore, and the novels of Richard Wright and Ralph Ellison have been most important to me. And these things are just beginning to become embodied in the things that I write. (8)

The first major example of this creative embodiment comes in the form of the Homewood Trilogy, which pulls the various artistic strands he discusses in the O'Brien interview (i.e., slave narrative, folklore and storytelling, the protest convention, and modernist techniques) and weaves them into a coherent piece that dramatically transforms each individual thread and, in the process, produces a new eclectic, polyphonic form. Furthermore, in an interview with Wilfred D. Samuels, Wideman states that "Reading writers like Albert Murray, Leon Forest, and, of course, Zora Neale Hurston and Ellison and Richard Wright, I was reminded of things I had forgotten, books were also a way of returning" (26). This issue of returning plays a crucial role in Sent for You Yesterday, particularly since the novel evokes two overlapping returns, the reconstruction of the Homewood neighborhood of Wideman's youth and the reevaluation of the themes and tropes of black urban fiction.

II

In his depiction of homes inhabited by African Americans in the rural South, W.E.B. Du Bois states that "The size and arrangement of a people's homes are no unfair index of their condition" (166). Drawing on this passage, Houston Baker concludes that the dimensions and placement "of black dwellings allow them . . . to stand as signs for the continuing impoverishment of blacks in the United States. The places where Africans in America have lived (and continue to live) signify the economics of slavery" (Blues, Ideology, and Afro-American Literature 30). The city stands as the quintessential example of the hegemonic structuring of space, of place as a metaphorical representation of a range of social considerations, such as racism. Even though the Great Migration involved a movement away from the South and, by extension, from slavery--which, as Leroi Jones puts it, is "the scene of the crime"--poor living conditions in the North extended the restrictions imposed on blacks (95). Urban fiction has consistently characterized these issues in varying ways, charting relationships between North and South (e.g., James Baldwin's Go Tell It on the Mountain) as well as between local and foreign metropolitan spaces (e.g., Baldwin's Another Country), pointing out the inherent limitations of African-Americans' experiences in northern cities (e.g., Ann Petry's The Street), and finally celebrating the creative possibilities of urban centers--particularly in relation to music (e.g., Ishmael Reed's Mumbo Jumbo).

Therefore, in this evolving tradition, the metropolitan landscape becomes a regulating trope of cultural identity. Ironically, urban space centers the inherent fragmentation of the African-American experience. As Henri Lefebvre notes, "To say 'urban space' is to say centre and centrality, and it does not matter whether these are actual or merely possible, saturated, broken up or under fire, for we are speaking here of a dialectical centrality" (101). This dichotomy between a central conceptual space of identification and the experience of social dislocation provides a resource for the development of a black literary expressive mode.

In the early part of the twentieth century, thousands of African Americans arrived in metropolitan areas in search of jobs, homes, and a greater degree of freedom. As one scholar notes, "Of the 60,534 blacks who lived in Manhattan in 1910, only 14,300 had been born in the city. Between 1920 and 1930, the black population of New York City increased nearly three hundred percent" (Donald B. Gibson 40). During the teens and twenties, Harlem--the northern city par excellence--became, in the words of Roi Ottley, a "symbol of opportunity." However, for many city life presented its own obstacles--related to a large degree to continued racism in the North. John Jeffries observes that "The architecture of density and urban sprawl . . . dictated that the living conditions most residents were forced into were also tenuous and life-threatening" (161). Thus, stories of available

jobs, higher wages, and pleasant living conditions were often overblown.¹

The literature of this period reflects various responses to the North, and an analysis of a range of texts reveals how these reactions alter over time—from celebration, to confusion, to disappointment. For instance, in The Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, Douglass depicts the South as a site of exploitation and degradation and the North as the place in which African-Americans can finally achieve social, psychological, and intellectual freedom. As Valerie Smith argues, "Douglass' first stay in Baltimore is the culmination of this initial movement from slavehood to manhood, for in the city he learns to read and write" (Self-Discovery and Authority in Afro-American Narrative 23). By contrast, in Black Boy, Richard Wright expresses apprehension upon his arrival in Chicago. He recalls: "I knew that this machine-city was governed by strange laws and I wondered if I would ever learn them" (Wright 262). Ellison, on the other hand, describes Harlem as a "ruin," stating that "To live in Harlem is to dwell in the very bowels of the city" (Shadow and Act 295). These various representations and reactions to urban centers thus become embodied in literature, providing a way not merely of documenting city life but of fundamentally reconceptualizing it.

As Robert Bone argues, "Slavery, the folk culture of the rural South, the Great Migration, the black ghettos of the industrial North--these are the central aspects of the

African-American tradition" (118-119). He claims that this developing tradition finds "its final flowering on the city pavement" (Bone 64). Urban fiction, in this sense, inherits the legacy of earlier black writing and of its oral folk and blues roots and becomes the central form of twentieth-century black aesthetic expression. The development of this form can be traced, for instance, from the novels of the Harlem Renaissance to contemporary works like Paule Marshal's Brown Girl Brownstones, Toni Morrison's Jazz, Ishmael Reed's Mumbo Jumbo, and Wideman's Homewood Trilogy. The relationship of these authors and their respective contributions formulate an over-arching literary design.

In the following section, I will look at three touchstones in this framework, Johnson's The Autobiography of an Ex-Coloured Man, Wright's Native Son, and Ellison's Invisible Man--before turning to an analysis of Sent for You Yesterday that posits Wideman's novel as a signifying response to these earlier works and as an expansion of the parameters of this genre. My choice of these texts is mainly illustrative--since other texts raise similar issues and utilize the three salient tropes charted in my analysis.²

III

As Jean Fagen Yellin argues in her introduction to The Intricate Knot, "The major Afro-American writers have said that the black man in America is unnamed and unseen" (1). However, if visually invisible, the characters in the novels

under consideration make their presence felt in alternative ways, mainly through music, but also through other forms of self-expression, such as public speaking (Invisible Man) and writing/storytelling (Native Son).

These performative endeavors undermine images of cultural erasure by enacting a validation of self and, furthermore, by creating an alternative space of representation. The connection between music and invisibility can thus be read in relation to spatial terms--since social obstacles (invisibility) are often countered through subversive forms of creative expression. As Leroi Jones argues, "There was always a border beyond which the Negro could not go whether musically or socially. And it was always this boundary, this no man's land, that provided the logic and beauty of his music" (80). In other words, music functions as a way of circumventing social restrictions, of making oneself heard and known in places or situations of invisibility and exclusion.

In The Autobiography of an Ex-Coloured Man, James Weldon Johnson maps a topographical pattern that illustrates the social restrictions imposed on the main character, particularly during his travels in the South, as well as the liberating possibilities represented by cities like Paris, London, and New York. For instance, The Ex-Coloured Man describes Atlanta as

a big, dull, red town. This dull red colour of that part of the South I was then seeing had much, I think, to do with the extreme depression of my spirit--no public square, no fountains, dingy streetcars, and . . . unpaved streets. (Johnson 52)

The repetition of red, along with depictions of "cottages of unpainted pine boards, and the clay-daubed huts" echo Du Bois' description of Georgia in The Souls of Black Folk in that they similarly point to substandard living conditions and conjure an image of cultural disenfranchisement (Johnson 52).

This landscape embodies the social impediments the Ex-Coloured Man faces during his travels. For instance, the wheels of his car sink in the "red mire," and some of the streets are described as "absolutely impassible." The contours and texture of this terrain soon become suffocating for the Ex-Coloured Man, who begins to long for the North. Furthermore, this section of the novel, laden with images of physical obstacles, foreshadows the protagonist's eventual decision to pass for white. During a conversation with his traveling companion, he is told most African-Americans eat at home, since they often cannot find places where they are accepted, but the companion adds that "'of course, you [the protagonist] could go in any place in the city they wouldn't know you from white'" (Johnson 57). Thus the color of his skin provides him a certain degree of mobility and agency denied to other blacks in the South.

In contrast to this depiction of the South, the Ex-coloured Man enthusiastically describes New York City, upon his arrival, as a place of great promise:

The last efforts of the sun were being put forth in turning the waters of the bay to glistening gold; the green islands on either side, in spite of their warlike mountings, looked calm and peaceful; the buildings of the town shone out in a reflected light which gave the city an air of enchantment; and, truly, it is an enchanted spot. (Johnson 89)

The distinction between North and South is, of course, that between freedom and slavery. However, in what follows, the tone of the description alters slightly, opening the possibility for alternative interpretations of New York. For instance, he calls the city "fatally fascinating" and adds that "She sits like a great witch at the gate of the country, showing her alluring white face . . ." (emphasis added, Johnson 89). It is no coincidence that this suggestive shift in perspective is accompanied by the characterization of the city as "white." While New York stands at a safe distance from the South, the same racial hierarchy applies--although perhaps to a lesser degree.

While the Ex-Coloured Man first describes New York as an expansive field of opportunity, his experience in the city is delimited by a series of spatial restrictions: "My New York was limited to ten blocks; the boundaries were Sixth Avenue from Twenty-Third to Thirty-Third Streets. . . . Central

Park was a distant forest and the lower part of the city a foreign land" (Johnson 113). However, his musical abilities ultimately provide him the mobility and social leverage he longs for. As a musician, he meets a wealthy man who pays him to play at his home and eventually offers to take him on a trip to Europe. This encounter thus leads to another series of journeys in the novel, both through much of Europe and then finally back through the United States, including the South.

These travels reveal an entirely new world of possibilities and lead to the development of the Ex-Coloured Man's creativity. For instance, he recalls:

all this while I was gathering material for work, getting down in my notebook themes and melodies, and trying to catch the spirit of the Negro in his relatively primitive state. I began to feel the necessity of hurrying so that I might get back to some city like Nashville to begin my compositions . . . (Johnson 178)

Thus, the city relates directly to his artistic interests in two significant ways: first, since in New York he meets the man who later takes him to Europe, and, second, since this trip abroad results in the evolution of his creative interests. In other words, his ability to play the piano gains him access to a world of wealth and luxury in the first place, and these material benefits make it possible for him to travel and further consider his place in society which, in

turn, leads to a renewed interest in his music—but now specifically to how this music relates to his experience as an African-American man.

During a stop at a railroad station town, he encounters a religious camp meeting that functions as a gathering place for blacks from miles around. The central attraction at this particular religious event is the presence of a renowned preacher, John Brown, and a famous singer, *Singing Johnson*.³ These two figures evoke the African-American oral tradition, and their position in the narrative represents a turning point in the Ex-Coloured Man's relationship to his own craft. He states that "They caused [him] to reflect upon how great an influence their types have been in the development of the Negro in America" (Johnson 175).

Furthermore, it is worth noting that this event takes place at a geographical crossroad, an area of overlap and transition. As Houston Baker argues, "The singer's product, like the railway juncture itself, constitutes a . . . robust matrix, where endless antinomies are mediated and understanding and explanation find conditions of possibility" (Blues, Ideology, and Afro-American Literature 7). In other words, these mediative sites provide a context for an assessment of the disparate social factors and contradictions embodied in the blues tradition. In the case of Johnson's novel, this spatial framework echoes the cultural significance of the Ex-Colored Man's realization of the historical importance and impact of the oral tradition.

This incident is particularly crucial since, prior to it, the protagonist's experience with music is mainly determined by the accolades he receives from his white audience. For example, when his father hears him play the piano for the first time, the Ex-Coloured Man, then a young boy, recalls that he is "certain that for that moment he was proud to be [his] father" (Johnson 35). Shortly after this performance, his father sends him a piano. Later, after arriving in New York, he meets his patron and again finds acceptance through his musical talents. The experience at the camp meeting, on the other hand, reveals to him that artistic expression can be used for other purposes, mainly to celebrate African-American culture and to acknowledge its historical roots.

Yet this moment of recognition does not necessarily indicate a dramatic transformation of character, since the Ex-Coloured man still decides to pass. After all, even though he now has a greater sense of this artistic legacy, he remains conscious of the fact that the lightness of his skin continues to provide him a greater degree of social mobility. In the end, he states: "my appearance was always good and my ability to play on the piano . . . made me a welcome guest" (Johnson 197). Read in terms of the spatial layout of the novel, this access to the clubs and homes of whites marks a distinct advantage. He also purchases New York real estate and becomes the owner of several houses. His first real estate acquisition is a piece of land upon which stands an

old tenement building. By buying this property, he essentially overcomes a central image of oppression in the African-American urban tradition, the tenement slum, and he is able to do this with the money he earns as a musician. Thus, by initially attaining entry into the homes and establishments of whites, he eventually comes to acquire property of his own.

According to Robert Stepto:

If The Autobiography is a modern Afro-American text, it is so because tropes such as the club revoice tropes such as the black belt, and because new territories, including the ambiguous domain between America's black and white world, are finally explored. (127)

This exploration comes to life particularly through the intersecting tropes of music (artistic representation) and passing (social invisibility)--both of which suggest that, for African-Americans, access to a range of areas depends on a series of creative and transgressive maneuverings. The Ex-Coloured man finally procures real estate property, but this ownership comes at a high price--the disavowal of his full identity.

While music does not occupy a central place in Wright's Native Son--as it does in Johnson's The Autobiography or the other novels under consideration--issues of voice and self-expression similarly play a crucial role in the narrative's

unfolding and, particularly, in Bigger Thomas' psychological development. In the earlier part of the text, Bigger is defined by his silence. Everyone around him speaks for him, interpreting his thoughts and actions. This struggle over voice is most notably portrayed in the section of the novel where Bigger drives Mary and Jan around town and takes them to a local restaurant. Mary, who is supposed to spend the evening studying at the university, slyly asks Bigger, "'You're not a tattletale are you?'" (Wright 64). Her question problematizes the issue of voice--since it links speaking to a form of transgression. Throughout the evening, Bigger finds it difficult to respond to Mary's and Jan's incessant questions and relies on a series of terse, one-word replies. When Jan asks him not to call him "sir," imposing an awkward and false sense of equality between them, Bigger mumbles in agreement, "hoping that they d[o] not hear the choke in his voice" (Wright 70).

This series of stifling silences is finally challenged when Bigger takes Mary to her room and tries to quiet her in the presence of her blind mother. In doing so, he kills her, thereby symbolically reversing their roles. Ironically, Mary's death precipitates Bigger's need to construct his own narrative, in order to avoid being blamed for her murder. This quest results in the emergence of his individual voice. The story that begins to materialize runs counter to the facts of the incident and comes to be increasingly embellished with details. When the event first appears in

the local newspapers, Bigger identifies it as "his story" (Wright 208).

This moment marks a symbolic conflation of the private development of Bigger's account and its public manifestation. Thus, through his story, Bigger negotiates the boundaries separating the private from the public spheres and begins to feel empowered by his ability to do so. The newspaper articles reveal the community's vulnerability and document their fears of having their homes, schools, and places of business violated by a black man. One article reports that children were kept home from schools and that a family fired their African-American maid. Bigger's actions and, in turn, his falsified account of these actions make the boundaries separating the black belt from the adjoining white neighborhoods permeable, thus providing him a greater degree of access to the world he has always been denied entry into--ironically, with the exception of his invitation to the Dalton residence.

The fact that Bigger does not leave the Dalton home after Mary's death further illustrates this point. He realizes that

he could go now, run off if he wanted to and leave it all behind, he felt a certain sense of power He was conscious of this quiet, warm, clean, rich house . . . the wealthy white people moving in luxury to all sides of him, whites living in a smugness, a security a certainty that he had never

known. The knowledge that he had killed a white girl they loved . . . made him feel the equal of them. (Wright 155)

The novel shifts from the privacy of Bigger's thoughts, to his room in the Dalton house, the basement where Bigger leaves Mary's body, and finally to the chaos unleashed on the streets of Chicago. By sending the ransom note to the Dalton's house, Bigger further forges a link between his private world, the privacy of the Dalton home, and the public evolution of the account of Mary's death.

The note functions as a kind of story within a story, positing a version of events that stands against what actually transpires. The various accounts and interpretations that emerge, including the newspaper reports, subvert the original story of a diffident, young black man's arrival at the residence of a prominent white family. This series of unexpected turns dramatically undermines the original storyline and positions Bigger as an active participant in the narrative's progression.

Not only does Bigger rewrite Mary's death, he also turns to the newspapers' chronicle of "his story" in charting his next move. In other words, his freedom ultimately depends on both a revision of the actual events and on an assessment of the developing story as portrayed in various reports. By reading the paper, he is able to determine where the police are searching for him, and thus he begins to "map out a careful plan of action . . ." (Wright 227). This well-

crafted strategy complements and further expands the parameters of Bigger's evolving narrative.

Just as The Ex-Coloured man's creative development can be traced in relation to his travels, Bigger's story connects directly to the places he inhabits. As St. Clair Drake and Horace R. Clayton argue in their seminal study, Black Metropolis, "the history of the Negro in Midwest Metropolis . . . is the story of conflict between the principles of American democracy and the existence of a color-line" (97). Bigger's escape plan, for instance, involves a series of movements through abandoned apartments and rooftops of buildings, the range of spaces that signal the disenfranchisement of Chicago's African-American citizens. At one point, his girlfriend, Bessie, warns him about the dangers of traveling outside the black belt: "'If they start after us, where could we hide, Bigger? You know we's black. We can't go just anywhere'" (Wright 140). However, just as Bigger initially escapes being blamed for Mary's death by constructing a story, he similarly finds a way to move about the city and maintain his freedom—at least temporarily.

In this sense, the ransom note (discursive space) and his cautiously plotted movement through the black belt under the cover of night (social space) inform one another. Bigger's mobility is linked, in part, to the trope of invisibility, for only by making himself unseen can he escape. He hides in abandoned buildings which themselves function as emblems of cultural invisibility—since they

represent the forgotten city streets, those areas kept safely apart from the surrounding white neighborhoods. Bigger's story charts a gradual movement towards invisibility, even as it signals a seemingly counter trajectory in his acquisition of voice. The novel moves from the Dalton's' sprawling white mansion to the darkest recesses of the black belt, and from Bigger's attainment of "A room all to himself," to his appropriation of empty apartments (Wright 60). However, the snowstorm subverts Bigger's efforts to make himself imperceptible—since the whiteness of the snow contrasts sharply against his dark figure, increasing his need to locate an enclosed hiding place.

This concern over space plays a central role throughout the novel. For instance, early in the novel, Bigger's mother blames him for their poor living conditions: "'We wouldn't have to live in this garbage dump if you had any manhood in you'" (Wright 12). However, Mary's death and the trial that follows eventually lead to a reassessment of this blame. The newspaper reports reveal that "'the apartment building in which the Negro killer lived is owned and managed by a sub-firm of the Dalton Real Estate Company'" (Wright 340). During the trial, Bigger's lawyer, Max, asks Mr. Dalton if he feels that "'the terrible living conditions under which the Thomas family lived . . . may in some way be related to the death of [his] daughter?'" (Wright 304). The question functions as a culminating point in the text, leaving the

entire narrative drama to rest on a single query about substandard living conditions in the black belt. It is even more ironic since, shortly before her death, Mary asks Bigger to take her into one of those buildings to "'just see how [his] people live'" (Wright 70). While Mary never sees these apartments, her death causes their condition to be brought to light during the trial.

The two primary narrative strands, Bigger's story and the actual circumstances surrounding Mary's death, finally fuse in the courtroom scene--since the principal objective of a court of law is to assess both sides. Here evidence and Bigger's rendering of events stand counterpoised. The items brought forward as evidence--including the brick Bigger uses to strike Bessie, communist pamphlets, the gun, the signed confession, the kidnap note, and Mary's bones--create their own subtext. This macabre grouping can be read in multiple ways. For instance, if the bones represent Mary's pain, they equally embody Bigger's, for they foreshadow his death--just as much as they visibly portray hers.

The prison in which Bigger ultimately finds himself further carries echoes of the black belt and functions as the final symbol of social barriers in the text. Unlike the Ex-Coloured Man, Bigger's creative endeavors, tied as they are to Mary's death, do not lead him to a prosperous life. On the contrary, his story ends, as it began, with silence. However, Bigger's growing sense of self suggests a significant transformation. In his last conversation with

Max, Bigger discusses Mary's death and, in the process, begins to come to terms with his actions. This final discussion functions as the last part of his evolving narrative, a probing, compelling finale that draws a connection between the event and his life experience.

Richard Wright's ability to pose existential concerns within a naturalistic framework makes Native Son, in the words of Arthur P. Davis, "A modern novel in the fullest sense of the phrase" (147). Wright realigns the tropes of artistic expression (Bigger's story), invisibility (hiding), and space (Bigger's cramped apartment, the Dalton's home, the black belt, and finally prison) as part of a larger effort to graphically illustrate the social and psychological complications of black urban life. While Johnson's protagonist achieves success through his music, Bigger, although transformed by his experiences, eventually finds himself in the imposed silence of a prison cell--a space that echoes the series of social obstacles that fated his life in the first place.

In Invisible Man, Ralph Ellison carries the black urban novel away from Johnson's traditional bildungsroman and Wright's naturalistic representation to a modernist evocation in which, as Ihab Hassan notes, "realism and surrealism . . . are seamless" ("Cities of Mind, Urban words" 99). Ellison charts the dimensions of artistic expression through the oral forms of public speaking, story telling, and music, and in

relation to issues of space and mobility. Two events invoking the centrality of the oral tradition guide the first part of the novel, the protagonist's school speech and Jim Trueblood's story. In the first instance, the protagonist, who has been hurt during the battle royal, has difficulty speaking, since his mouth continuously fills with blood. In the second, Trueblood's linguistic performance shocks the college's benefactor, Mr. Norton, and sets into motion a series of events that leads to the Invisible Man's voyage north.

These two incidents inform one another in significant ways. Trueblood's story undermines the Invisible Man's school speech--since, while the protagonist tries to impress his white audience, Trueblood makes no excuses and tells his tale without concern for Mr. Norton's reaction. The blood associated with both suggests the anguish of self-expression; however, only Jim sheds "true blood." Jim Trueblood subverts the position of the white patriarch twice in his narrative: first, in the description of his dream, and, second, in his disregard for Mr. Norton's position as listener. The protagonist, on the other hand, suppresses the impulse of self-expression and instead gives an acquiescent speech that reflects his awareness of what his white audience wants to hear. The blood that interrupts the flow of his performance illustrates the imposition of the oppositional desire to tell his own story in his own way--something he can only do much later in life.

Furthermore, both narratives indicate a relationship between place and the act of narration. While the protagonist is keenly conscious of his audience and surroundings, Trueblood's story, told from his modest home, details a transgression of spatial order. In his account of how his daughter becomes pregnant by him, Trueblood begins with a description of a dream in which he enters a house belonging to a white family through the front door. He proceeds up the stairs and into a white bedroom, where he finds a white woman wearing a negligee. Ironically, this spatial and suggested sexual violation is depicted as an even greater infraction than the incest that stands at the crux of his narrative.

If, as suggested, the Trueblood episode subverts the protagonist's position as speaker in the text, it further, in a roundabout way, leads to his dismissal from the university. This event throws the Invisible Man's life and purpose into question: "Here within this quiet greenness I possessed the only identity I had ever known, and I was losing it" (Ellison 99). Again, Ellison establishes a link between space and identity, in this case suggesting how the protagonist's connection to the bucolic setting of the black university—a place that stands in sharp contrast to the dilapidated homes of African-American families he and Mr. Norton see during their drive—leads to a crisis of individuation. The Invisible Man wonders where he should go and whether or not he can return home.

Ultimately, he decides to go North, and, ironically, it is here that Trueblood's indirect lesson about the potentially transgressive properties of self-expression eventually comes into play. Voice and space again coincide when the Invisible Man comes across an eviction in progress and attempts to stop it by expressing his outrage. While his first speech is meant to appease his audience, the purpose of this one is to motivate the gathering crowd into action. He is spotted by members of the brotherhood who, impressed with his oratory abilities, invite him to join the party. As a member, he becomes known for his eloquent speeches, only to later discover that this same skill has made him the brotherhood's political pawn.

Ironically, his ability to promote his cause on a public level coincides with the diminishing sense of his private self. For instance, in one of his speeches he states that "These are days of dispossession, the season of homelessness, the time of eviction" (Ellison 343). Read against his position in the novel, the concept of social "dispossession" or "homelessness" takes on new meaning, as it reflects the Invisible Man's psychological displacement. These imbricated images of uprootedness ultimately resonate in Brother Clifton's statement that "'sometimes a man has to plunge outside of history'" (Ellison 377). And it is to this liminal area "outside of history" that the protagonist finally retreats, relinquishing his speeches for jazz music and his public personae for invisibility.

The Invisible Man's hole functions as an encompassing representation of manifold places in the text--from Trueblood's shack and The Golden Day, to the basement of the Liberty Paint Company and the glass box he wakes up in after the explosion. It also serves as an extension of the cityscape, since its proximity to the Harlem streets above keeps him partially connected to the world he rejects. While throughout the novel the protagonist describes himself as "homesick," in the hole he realizes he has "found a home--or a hole in the ground, as you will" (Ellison 6). This slippage from "home" to "hole" suggests the ambiguous nature of the Invisible Man's retreat.

The protagonist describes his hole as a "border area," further ascribing to it a suggestive "inbetweenness" that coincides with his acceptance of invisibility. He notes: "Perhaps to lose a sense of where you are implies the danger of losing a sense of who you are. That must be it . . . to lose your sense of direction is to lose your face" (Ellison 577). However, this loss of an identity and the concomitant plunge "outside of history" are not negatively portrayed in the novel--particularly since both the identity and space the Invisible Man abandons do not reflect his true self. Rather, this movement reveals a rejection of cultural hierarchy and a transgression of the rules and regulations of white society. As Marcus Klein argues, the Invisible Man "finds a place in the world by finding another world" (After Alienation 107). In a similar vein, Robert Butler notes that the hole

functions as a parallel space that "provid[es] him with the kind of new life which traditional American heroes have found in the West" (124). Thus, unlike the Ex-Coloured Man and Bigger, the Invisible Man creates an autonomous space and no longer needs to abide by the law or conform to social conventions.

Yet what is perhaps most significant about the Invisible Man's construction of this unusual living space is its fundamental relationship to the very world he has moved away from. In fact, this new home is carved out of the remnant space of a building rented only to whites. As Henri Lefebvre notes: "The diversion and reappropriation of space are of great significance, for they teach us much about the production of new spaces" (47). In this instance, the appropriated space reveals not only a rejection of the outside world but a violation of it. Like Trueblood who in his dream enters a white man's house through the front door, the Invisible Man subverts spatial hierarchy by "living rent free in a building rented strictly to whites" (Ellison 5).

This transgression also recalls Bigger's use of the Dalton home, discussed in the previous section. However, the Invisible Man's underground world ultimately differs from the spaces represented in Native Son. While the basement in Native Son functions as a disruptive field (the place where Bigger deposits Mary's body), in Invisible Man the underground world stands as a site of healing and

rejuvenation. Mainly, the difference between these locals depends on the nature of ownership or possession. Bigger never interprets the Dalton's residence as home, but the Invisible Man obtains a sense of ownership and autonomy in his alternative living quarters.

While initially his invisibility functions as an impediment, this newly adopted, self-willed form of invisibility derives from a desire to undermine the very forces that contribute to his social erasure in the first place. Thus, it stands as a form of concealment or masking, rather than as the suppression of a distinct identity. In Figures in Black, Henry Louis Gates discusses the importance of masking in the African-American tradition, noting, for instance, that the use of dialect itself is a form of masking, "a verbal descent underground to the Great Dis" (172). Gates forges a connection between privacy or masking and the flexible properties of language. Privacy, according to Gates, "makes it possible for a culture to use language to mask its meaning from all but its own initiates" (emphasis added, 173). The Invisible Man's linguistic endeavors--from his series of public speeches to the intimate expression of his underground narrative (the story that frames the text)--reveal this connection between language and dissent.

Furthermore, like dialect, the African-American tradition in music evokes a private, veiled discourse. The Invisible Man notes that "perhaps [he] like[s] Louis

Armstrong because he's made poetry out of being invisible" (Ellison 8). Jazz, in this sense, intersects with the Invisible Man's newly discovered subversive voice. The "music of invisibility" he refers to ultimately becomes his own method of self-expression. Thus, unlike the Ex-Coloured Man, whose association with a white audience leads to a form of symbolic silencing, The Invisible Man's alternative voice and space of articulation represent a clear violation of social order. "The music of invisibility" provides a means of voicing the black experience by using an African-American performative tradition that--like the hole itself--allows the protagonist to step outside the constraints of Western culture.

While I have focused on only three salient texts in the African-American urban tradition, it is worth briefly noting the ancestral role The Souls of Black Folk plays, particularly in relation to Ellison's Invisible Man. In The Souls of Black Folk, W.E.B. Du Bois takes his reader on a journey through the South, from its rural to urban landscapes. In the process, he maps out the experience of African-Americans through music. Du Bois weaves in the spirituals, which perform a binding function in the text, connecting intimate moments in Du Bois' private world to the public aspects of black life, including lack of employment and impoverished living conditions.⁴

Du Bois' image of the veil is perhaps one of the most recognizable representations of "otherness" or invisibility in the African-American tradition. Du Bois establishes a connection between life behind the veil and the sorrow songs. Eric Sundquist notes that "Hidden within the veil of black life, the music and words of the sorrow songs form a hidden, coded language . . . one that recapitulates the original cultural function of the spirituals themselves" (470). In other words, the spirituals operate as the strains of those who live behind the veil or as the language of invisibility. In this sense, the Invisible Man's "music of invisibility" performs a revoicing of the spirituals in The Souls, for, like the spirituals, it not only depicts but functions as a fully vocalized expression of the black experience.

IV

Even with only the cursory analysis provided above, we see that a distinct pattern emerges in black urban fiction, one that weaves issues of voice (music, stories, and speeches) with those of identity (passing, hiding, and retreating). This reading delineates a vital transition from music as a means of access to a white world (The AutoBiography of an Ex-Coloured Man) to voice as a means of undermining the rules and regulations of that world (Native Son), and finally to music as a way of creating an alternative space of self-expression (Invisible Man). John Edgar Wideman's Homewood Trilogy (particularly the final book

in the series, Sent for You Yesterday) maintains an ongoing dialogue with these earlier texts, establishing what Gates refers to as a relationship of "rhetorical self-definition."

The transformation delineated in my reading of these novels not only reveals a variation in aesthetic choices, it also signals a series of ideological changes. As Richard Lehan notes in "Urban Signs and Urban Literature: Literary Forms and Historical Process," "the literary text codifies ideas and attitudes about the city and . . . as the city itself changes under historical influence, so do these codes, exhausting traditional modes as they call for new meaning" (230). In other words, historical changes alter our perception of urban space and eventually lead to a reevaluation of these areas through their literary representation. Wideman's reassessment of the black urban novel takes into account a range of sociopolitical considerations, particularly the decline of African-American urban communities over time and the possible causes and issues that contribute to this deterioration--such as the counter-effects of urban renewal programs.

Charles Scruggs states that "Ellison . . . create[s] a character who by the novel's end will be an answer to Bigger" (101). Similarly, I will argue that Sent For You Yesterday is one of the most significant recent contributions to the black urban tradition--particularly since it brings the Invisible Man out of hibernation, via the character of

Brother, reintroduces him to the community, and, thereby, provides "an answer" to Ellison's protagonist.

Brother relates to the Invisible Man in two ways: first, by way of Wideman's parodic gesture--since, while Ellison's protagonist claims that his invisibility is not "exactly a matter of a biochemical accident to my epidermis," Brother's, in part, is, and, secondly, since both characters function as carriers of an African-American cultural tradition (Ellison 3). Yet, while the Invisible Man asks, "Who knows but that, on the lower frequencies, I speak for you?," his hibernation keeps him in a state of suspension (Ellison 581). Brother, on the other hand, uses his position as musician--a role that Geneva Smitherman argues in African-American culture "elevate[es]" one to "the position of cultural hero"--to bring the community together (52).

Invisible Man closes with the protagonist's confession that he has "overstayed [his] hibernation, since there's a possibility that even an invisible man has a socially responsible role to play" (Ellison 58). Since the novel ends with this striking image of the Invisible Man poised between two worlds and ways of life, the reader cannot assess what this social role might be or even whether or not it exists. However, Wideman, returning to this place of narrative ambiguity, asserts that indeed an invisible man has a significant contribution to make to society. According to Ellison: "The phrase 'I'm nowhere' expresses the feeling borne in upon many Negroes that they have no stable,

recognized place in society" (Shadow and Act 300). The "nowhere" the Invisible Man retreats to similarly marks a movement away from society and social responsibility and thus toward a kind of solipsism. Wideman, on the other hand, transforms the "nowhere" of Homewood—a place that initially stands as a historical absence—into a site of meaningful communal interaction. This "nowhere," unlike Ellison's abstract configuration, is the result of urban renewal, which often leads to the large-scale displacement of the poorer members of a community. As a response to this socially imposed "nowhere," Wideman creates a place of healing. He thereby revises Ellison's image of the elusive "hole" by creating a "whole" in its place.⁵

However, this ideal space of representation is not immediately present in the text. In fact, the Homewood Trilogy as a whole charts a movement towards a reconceptualization of Homewood, both as place and as source of memories and tradition. In Hiding Place, for instance, Tommy withdraws into a space that repeats the Invisible Man's hole, a "deep, dark, warm cave. A cave as black and secret as his blood" (Wideman 72). Throughout the trilogy, the question becomes how to keep memories intact in a place that, due to political disenfranchisement, has fallen into ruin. For Wideman, the answer lies in one's ability to remain "grounded." In an interview with Kay Bonetti, he states:

the forefathers entered this land and it was
dangerous and nobody ever lived here before and

those spirits gave them information and knowledge that they needed to start a village. The village could grow and would be sustained because the people kept alive that knowledge of the original contract, a knowledge of rootedness, everything flows from that ancestral bargain. And I believe that in order for my art . . . to flourish it has to be rooted, it has to be grounded, in that sense, yes, particularly, yes, the very unique ground that you fought for and bled in and created as a people. In my case that's Homewood. (52)

Thus, the concept of being grounded is expressed through his writing but also, quite literally, via the ground he walks on (i.e., Homewood). Accordingly, this quest for rootedness, both in the sense of a tradition and of a physical landscape, propels the narrative through the three individual texts, as well as from aunt May's stories, to Brother's music, and finally to Doot's encompassing portrayal of Homewood and its legacy.

In his discussion of ethnic trilogies, William Q. Boelhower claims that "Contrary to the 'nativist' trilogy . . . the ethnic trilogy interprets the crisis of foundations within a different and broader order of historical facts" ("Ethnic Trilogies: A Genealogical and Generational Poetics" 159). The genealogical structure of the ethnic trilogy, he argues, allows ethnic writers to document their experience of

displacement and social fracture, while it ultimately provides a means of portraying resilience and unification. Boelhower breaks down the ethnic trilogy's over-arching design into three distinct parts, each connected to specific spatial patterns: construction, deconstruction, and reconstruction. Although Boelhower describes these paradigms in relation to immigrant fiction, a similar framework applies to an African-American trilogy like Wideman's. While the Homewood Trilogy does not strictly conform to the specific structure Boelhower proposes, the search for cultural unity and the spatial dramatization that couples this quest play a central role in his work and can thus be read, at least loosely, in relation to the general stages delineated in Boelhower's model.

According to Boelhower, under "construction" the journey motif and the movement from one country to another play a salient role. The principle spatial organization of this first paradigm "is that of a homogeneous (because as yet undiscovered) ideal habitat" (165). An example of such a space appears in the first book of The Homewood Trilogy, Damballah, as the house on Bruston Hill and Homewood itself: "Children and grandchildren coming down off that hill and settling here because the life was good and everybody welcome" (Wideman 204). The journey motif outlined in Boelhower's model also emerges in the first book, particularly in the epistolary last chapter, in which John writes to his brother, Tommy, detailing their ancestor's,

Sybela Owens', daring escape from slavery and arrival in Pittsburgh.

In the second model, the presence of the dominant culture causes dissent in the family, which itself, according to Boelhower, functions as a "chronotopic space" of conflict. Similar generational tensions appear throughout the Homewood Trilogy and most significantly in Hiding Place, the second book. In the novel, Bess, representative of the older Homewood generation, and her sister's great-grandson Tommy, an example of the new, are at odds with one another, and the house on Bruston Hill becomes the symbolic embodiment of this generational discord. While Bess interprets the house as a safe haven, Tommy sees it as a slave shack and thus reads it in relation to an entire history of racial oppression: "could be one of those huts in slave row, one of those niggertown shacks clustered around massa's big white house" (Hiding Place 78).

Under Boelhower's final paradigm, "reconstruction," coherence is restored and an ideal space is recreated. This represents the most significant conceptual transformation in the Homewood Trilogy, particularly when examined in relation to the other novels under consideration in this chapter--since, by introducing community as a creative, binding force in Homewood, Wideman opens the scope of black urban fiction, emphasizing communal ties rather than social alienation. In Sent for You Yesterday, Doot becomes the source of reunification, bridging the gap between the three generations

represented in the novel and bringing renewed hope to the Homewood streets of Wideman's youth.

Like the house on Bruston Hill in Hiding Place, which for Tommy preserves the image of slavery, the Homewood streets in Sent For You Yesterday bear traces of the history of slavery. For instance, Doot muses:

That's the way it must have been on Cassina Way.
Rows of wooden shanties built to hold the flood of
black migrants up from the South. Teeming's the
word I think of. A narrow, cobbled alley teeming
with life. Like a wooden-walled up ship in the
middle of the city, like the ark on which Noah
packed two of everything and prayed for land. . . .
I see islands, arks, life teeming but enclosed or
surrounded or exiled to arbitrary boundaries.

(Wideman 21)

Under the reference to Noah's ark, lies the more oblique allusion to the middle passage, a historical emblem that marks Homewood as a place of suffering. The narrow streets recall the confined blocks the Ex-coloured Man travels through in Georgia. And the repetition of "teeming" echoes images of urban squalor in immigrant and African-American fiction.

Yet, ironically, despite its crowdedness, the depicted landscape stands as a place of isolation: "The life on Cassina way was a world apart from Pittsburgh and Pittsburgh

was the North, a world apart from the South . . ." (Wideman 21). Similarly, Doot recalls that Freeda and John French's house had a partition that divided it into two parts, one which opened onto Tioga Street and the other onto Cassina Way. He states that "You knew the people across the alley but you seldom went around the block to Tioga. . . . Even if you lived in the end house . . . you seldom had business which carried you around . . ." (Wideman 20). Represented in this image of the divided house (i.e., quite literally a house divided) is a form of fragmentation that, in turn, carries traces of the legacy of slavery and further of the Great Migration—for, just as Pittsburgh stands apart from the South, the two sides of the house and their inhabitants remain isolated from one another.

This image of separation is further inscribed in Albert Wilkes explanation of the picture of a rack he discovers in his lover's book. He tells John French "They got us on a rack They gon keep turning till ain't nothing connected where it's supposed to be." (Wideman 62). Although the only direct reference to slavery in the text, the evoked image is grafted onto other representations of fragmentation. For instance, Wilkes later reflects that "if Homewood is falling apart they were all falling apart too" (Wideman 68). Thus, the depiction of slavery's resulting fragmentation can be traced from the visceral image of physical dismemberment, to Homewood's decline, and finally to the individual deterioration of characters.

If Homewood takes a turn for the worse during Albert's absence, symbolically it does so because of it. Albert Wilkes' seven-year absence functions in relation to other forms of discontinuity in the text, including Brother's white skin and silence. Albert confesses to John French that he feels "Like [he] was invisible" (Wideman 78). Albert's invisibility is determined by necessity, since, like Bigger Thomas, he is hiding from the police. However, Albert compensates for his physical invisibility through music, which allows him an alternative means of asserting his presence in the community. His last performance plays with the suggestive boundaries separating presence from absence and silence from voice:

when he sat down at the Tate's piano and played those last few licks Somebody had named the notes, but nobody had named the silence between them The emptiness, the space waiting for him that night seven years ago. Nobody ever would name it because it was emptiness and silence and the notes they named, the notes he played were just a way of tripping across it, of pretending you knew where you were, where you were going. (Wideman 55)

This emptiness and silence are physically echoed in the character of Brother, who is described as having "No name. No color. No nothing," and is, in turn, linked to Homewood via his invisibility: "His strange color and silence were a part of Homewood, like the names of the streets and the night

trains and hills" (Wideman 15). Thus, Wideman forges a connection between Albert's music, Brother, and the Homewood streets through the related images of absence and silence. By finding a creative voice and a means of affirming their roles in the community, Albert, Brother, and later Doot discover a way of representing Homewood, thereby endowing it with a sense of coherence and bringing it out of its socially imposed silence and invisibility.

Wideman posits creative self-expression as a source of healing earlier in the Homewood Trilogy, in Damballah. The first story relates the experience of a slave, Orion, who prefigures the characters of Albert Wilkes, Brother, and Doot. Orion is decapitated by his overseers, and his body is later discovered by a young slave boy. Orion's ability to relate the legacy of his African past--via the story of the god Damballah--to the boy leads to coherence and transformation: the boy sees "Orion's eyes rise up through the back of the severed skull and lips rise up through the skull and the wings of the ghost measure out the rhythm of one last word" (25). Orion's story allows him to transcend pain and overcome physical fragmentation (decapitation).

The specific image of wings is further echoed at the end of Sent for You Yesterday, in Brother's series of drawings of members of the Homewood community with wings. Like Orion's, Brother's story, constructed out of music and paintings, continues to speak to the living. Upon discovering the drawings, Lucy notes that they "Had to be Brother's. Who

else but Brother would put wings on all the people in his pictures?" (Wideman 193). Brother, like his symbolic precursor, understands the transcending force of artistic representation and records this quality in the image of flight. He first undermines silence through music and later invisibility through painting. The image of the paintings unrolled on the Tate's piano performs an intertextual circling back to the first illustration of creative expression in Damballah.

While Carl leaves art school after an instructor warns him that his work will be rejected by a white audience, Brother's creative endeavors speak directly to the Homewood community out of which his music and paintings are crafted in the first place. Just as Brother is described as Carl's "shadow," his music and, in particular, his paintings reflect Carl's own desire to create. Like the paintings themselves, Brother's commitment to his community leads to a vocalization of others' need to express themselves and to pass along their individual stories. Carl, for instance, tells Doot, "Old cream-of-wheat Brother. I know I'm supposed to be telling you his story. But how Ima tell his without telling mine" (Wideman 154).

Brother's ability to overcome subjugation by creatively appropriating his life experience through song and, in turn, by sharing that sensate expression with the members of his community relates to what Ashraf H. A. Rushdy calls the

"blues mind." Drawing particularly on Baker's analysis of the blues, Rushdy defines this concept as:

a structure premised on the blues sense of lyrical attempts at transcending oppressions . . . the jazz sense of intersubjective possibilities between self and other, and the gospel sense of the shared community of experience and a political agenda.

("Fraternal Blues" 320)⁶

In this sense, Brother's creative self-expression does more than incorporate elements of the community; his music and later his paintings become ways of reflecting back to the community their collective experience.

In his description of the rack, discussed earlier in this section, Albert ends by telling John that eventually they "Ain't even gon recognize [their] own selves in the mirror" (Wideman 62). Thus, in Albert's narrative, fragmentation, depicted here on a literal level, leads to a psychological disintegration of the self. However, like Orion, who speaks through physical dismemberment in order to articulate cultural cohesion, Brother gathers and synthesizes the fragments of Homewood and reflects coherence back to the community. In other words, as artist, Brother becomes the symbolic mirror of the community, reflecting their collective experience and making sure they continue to "recognize [their] own selves."

Wideman emphasizes Brother's role as cultural mirror at various points throughout the novel. For instance, as mentioned earlier, Brother is described as Carl's "shadow." Similarly, John French tells Albert Wilkes that "Him [Carl] and Brother like we was Albert in the old days. See one, see the other" (Wideman 79). This example represents a form of double mirroring, since Brother and Carl both repeat the image of each other as well as that of John and Albert. Similarly, when Brother plays the piano for the first time, the audience thinks they are listening to Albert, and they address brother by his predecessor's name.

Finally, in perhaps the most significant episode of mirroring, Brother actually becomes Albert: "He was Albert Wilkes all right and caught somewhere in the middle. Maybe he is the window glass. Hot on one side cold on the other because he is Brother, too. Shuffling his feet and listening to Wilkes playing" (Wideman 162). This moment of identification takes place shortly before Brother dies and functions as a replaying of Wilkes' own death. Just as Brother takes up Wilkes' role as Homewood's musician, he returns to the figure of Wilkes before dying and relinquishing his place in the community, leaving Doot to carry his and Albert's legacy forth.

Doot, in turn, transforms Albert's and Brother's music into his narrative through the process of mirroring--rather than appropriation. In other words, Doot does not merely

tell Albert's and Brother's stories; he incorporates their "music of invisibility" into the texture of his developing account of Homewood. The emerging chronicle weaves together the narrative fragments that Carl and Lucy contribute and a range of other individual voices from the community. As James Coleman notes, "Like Wideman, Doot has come home to the community and is ready to improvise intellectually while carrying on the community tradition as Albert Wilkes and Brother have done in the past" (Blackness and Modernism 114).

This ability to convey the community's stories plays a central role in the narrative. Wideman, like his textual counterpart, Doot, incorporates these voices without denying each its individual character.⁷ Wideman integrates these voices—including, by way of a tropological association, the voices of the black urban tradition—in ways that sustain their equivocal, complex nature. Similarly, Doot's continued dialogue with Albert and Brother allows him to preserve their particular contribution to Homewood, while he simultaneously extends this exchange to include his own perceptions.

As storyteller and mirror to the community, Doot draws on the process of "marking," which, as Thomas Kochman observes, is "a common black narrative tactic in the folktale genre and in accounts of actual events" that leads to "the individuation of character through the use of direct quotation" (333). Kochman further notes:

When a narrator . . . affects the voice and mannerisms of the speaker, he is using the style

referred to as marking. . . . The marker attempts to report not only what was said but the way it was said, in order to offer implicit comment on the speaker's background, personality, or intent (333).

While this style usually relates to the oral tradition in storytelling and music, it appears here in narrative form. As a "marker," Doot draws on the experience of life in Homewood in order to vocalize and reflect the image of that experience back to the community. Doot captures this essence of character in his narrative by adopting a blues voice, a form he inherits directly from Albert and Brother. Instead of constricting his story into a rigid, linear narrative, Doot engages various interpretations of events and characters, allowing them to disengage and converge at various points.

The image of dancing with which the novel closes functions as a final representation of Doot's commitment to the voices of Homewood: "I'm on my feet and Lucy says, Go boy and Carl says, Get it on, Doot. Everybody joining in now. All the voices. I'm reaching for them and letting them go. . . . I'm on my own feet. Learning to stand, to walk, learning to dance" (Wideman 208). Dancing, like storytelling, illustrates Doot's interaction with music and with the entire history embodied therein. Like the mirror image referred to above, dancing provides a physical, visual extension of music. As James A. Snead notes "Repetition in

black culture finds its most characteristic shape in performance rhythm in music, dance and language" (68).

The last scene in the novel repeats (i.e., reflects) the image of Homewood through all three of these elements, since each carries traces of the community. The records themselves, for instance, are from John French's collection and come from "'down South somewhere'" (Wideman 203). Music thus bridges the boundaries depicted in Doot's earlier description of Homewood as a place of isolation.

By reconciling Homewood to the South, Wideman allows the repressed past to intersect with the present and, in the process, reenvisions the urban landscape. It is important to note that Wideman captures this connection through the blues, since this form originated in the South. In a Walter Pater-like comment made during an interview with James Coleman, Wideman claims that "Language aspires to the condition of music" ("Interview With John Edgar Wideman" 72). The final image in the text of Doot, Lucy, and Carl dancing to John French's record suggests the fulfillment of this condition. Like the wings that allow Orion to escape his physical circumstances, music permits Doot to transcend the boundaries of North and South, and past and present.

In Modern Epic, Franco Moretti establishes a connection between stream of consciousness and the urban landscape, arguing that this narrative form allows James Joyce, in Ulysses, to fully vocalize the experience of contemporary

European city life, in all its inherent complexity. He states that stream of consciousness "provides the metropolis with a form, and its inhabitants with a perspective" (Moretti 124). This narrative mode is particularly applicable to the condition of urban existence because it represents a character's flow of thoughts and emotions in relation to exterior stimuli, such as advertising and consumer products. However, in a city like Homewood, where such tantalizing commodities do not exist and where one instead finds "pieces of buildings standing here and there and fire scars and places ripped and kicked down . . .," the search for a narrative form capable of not only depicting but ultimately of transcending these conditions leads Wideman to adopt a blues voice (Damballah 162). In "The Architectonics of Fiction," Wideman states:

Black music is a moveable feast, fluid in time, space, modality, exhibiting in theme and variations multiple relationships with the politically, socially, aesthetically dominant order, the fullest possible range of relationships, including the power and independence, to change places, reverse the hierarchy, be the dominant order (45).

Thus while the style of his "informal literary mentor, James Joyce," fails to provide a voice for the specific form of fragmentation and alienation present in the black urban experience, through the integration of a blues expressive form, Wideman ultimately captures the distinct elements of

this social field in a way that transforms limitations into opportunities for self-expression and political agency (Patricia R. Ramsey 8). This aesthetic orientation, embodied in the characters of Albert Wilkes, Brother, and Doot, clearly articulates the sociopolitical fragmentation of *Homewood*, while it simultaneously provides formal coherence through rhythmic patterns.

In Understanding The New Black Poetry, Stephen Henderson states that there are "important ways in which . . . Black music lies at the basis of much of black poetry, either consciously or covertly" (46). A similar argument can be made for the role of music in African-American fiction. While Henderson gives ten main examples of the role of music in writing, I will list only those that play a salient role in Sent For You Yesterday. They are: allusion to song titles (in this case, in the title of the text), quotations from a song, the adaptation of song forms (e.g., "call and response"), the use of the musician as subject, and the incorporation of the language of jazz--as in the name "Doot," which is what Brother calls Carl's nephew.

Furthermore, the incorporation of blues elements is thematically inscribed in the novel, for, just as characters function as vectors of this cultural tradition, certain spaces in the text evince the historical significance of it as well. The images of trains, the station, and tracks echoed throughout the novel represent the fluid, transformative quality of the blues form. Like the Invisible

Man whose voice is, in part, determined by the places he occupies, a correlation exists between characters and specific areas in Sent For You Yesterday. Brother's association with the train tracks, for instance, reinforces his position as cultural mediator. As Houston Baker notes, "The 'placeless' . . . are translators of the nontraditional. Rather than the fixed order of cunning Grecian urns, their lineage is fluid, nomadic, transitional. Their appropriate mark is a crossing sign at the junction" (Blues, Ideology, and Afro-American Literature 202). Brother's invisibility, music, and, as an orphan, his lack of clear ancestry function in relation to the transforming properties Baker delineates.

Like Brother, Carl understands the power of the railroad and muses that "the tracks could take him somewhere else Somewhere shimmering like the steel rails just before they curve out of sight." (Wideman 27). Yet shortly after having this thought, he and Brother arrive at the station, which now stands an empty, timeworn shack--since trains no longer run through Homewood. This image reinforces Homewood's isolation. Just as flight evokes transformation in Damballah, the train's movement signals a host of possibilities, including escape, connection, and change; however, the denial of such mobility, inscribed in Wideman's depiction of the "ghost station," functions as a central obstacle needing to be overcome in the text.

Brother not only conquers silence and invisibility through music, he finally transcends the physical boundaries

represented in the image of the train tracks. His death by the tracks reinscribes Orion's flight and, therefore, signals his metamorphosis: "Homewood spreads out below, a patchwork of tiny streets and houses. But as he rises, as the string gets thinner and thinner . . . his shoulders . . . become skinny and powerful as wings . . ." (Wideman 178). During this scene, Brother is conscious of the music emanating from a religious tent revival in Homewood. This image reinvoles the religious revivals in both Du Bois' The Souls of Black Folk and Johnson's The Autobiography of an Ex-Coloured Man, and it establishes Brother's link not only to his community--represented in the alluring voices--but also to the African-American tradition evoked in the passage.

By creating this extendable framework, Wideman records both the importance of his childhood community and the aesthetic legacy that awakened in him a sense of "rootedness"--in terms of the discursive space of a tradition. Listening to the music of the revival, Brother realizes that "it sounded good to him Almost good enough to make him leave his hiding place and follow them through the darkness to the shiny tent where . . . all the voices get caught up in the old songs whether they knew the words or not" (Wideman 174). While Brother does not go to the revival, his death awakens a sense of responsibility in Carl and Lucy, and later in Doot, to retell his story. In the process, the voices merge (i.e., "get caught up"), and this interplay of stories results in the construction of

Doot's multifaceted narrative. Similarly, Wideman's own authorial voice "get[s] caught up" with the voices of his literary ancestors.

By bringing Ellison's protagonist out of hibernation, Wideman reinvokes the legacy of invisibility, particularly in relation to the way this image has been documented in urban fiction. In doing so, he revises the urban novel and makes more clearly evident the relationship between art and society, between how perceptions of our environments influence our creative forms and, conversely, how artistic endeavors inform our surroundings. While The Autobiography of an Ex-Coloured Man, Native Son, and Invisible Man ultimately end with images of isolation, in Sent For You Yesterday Wideman returns the invisible man and his music to the community, stressing the resilient nature of black urban communities and their significance as the social foundation of creative self-expression.

The Autobiography of an Excoloured Man, Native Son, and Invisible Man anticipate the communal sensibility represented in Sent For You Yesterday--since each strives towards this possibility. By realigning the tropes of music, invisibility, and the city, Wideman points to a new direction in urban fiction and extends the boundaries of this form. Texts like Toni Morrison's Jazz and Junot Diaz's Drown further evince how these tropes, resurrected in a postmodern cultural context, provide new ways of viewing the

relationship between cultural identity and the American urban landscape.

In Diaz's collection, for instance, invisibility comes in the form of the absent father and in the character of Israel, whose mask and deformity register as a grotesque representation of loss and absence. The opening quotation from the Cuban-American scholar Gustavo Perez Firmat, "'I don't belong to English, though I belong nowhere else,'" introduces Diaz's structuring of invisibility in relation to place (the Dominican Republic and the United States) and to self-expression. Like the central image of drowning, the series of fissures and openings in the text creates an alternative space, a site reminiscent of the Invisible Man's underground domicile. However, distinguishing Diaz's project from Ellison's and even Wideman's is the more ambiguous, suggestive nature of his use of invisibility, absence, and the figure that embodies both--the hole. Thus while Wideman offers an image of cohesion, Diaz's narrative reinvokes cultural marginalization and isolation.

¹. Differences in attitudes toward northern cities can, to a certain degree, be measured in relation to an individual's level of contact with these urban centers. In the case of Harlem, for instance, Jervis Anderson notes that "No set of people was more enchanted by nineteen-twenties Harlem than the blacks who were still strangers to it--those who were just arriving there, and those in distant places who were then getting ready to leave for New York" (This Was Harlem 1900-1950 141). The evolving perception of the city documented in literary works often explores these experiential transitions--from expectation to disillusionment.

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2. The Sport of the Gods, for instance, would allow us to trace this tradition farther back, to the turn of the century. Similarly, Fauset's Plum Bum, which focuses on gender considerations and passing as a form of invisibility, would extend this creative framework to include feminist concerns.
 3. Johnson here posits a connection between himself and "Singing Johnson," thereby suggesting the relationship between the blues tradition and his own narrative.
 4. See Robert Stepto's From Behind the Veil for an excellent analysis of the relationship between geographical space and music in The Souls of Black Folk.
 5. I am here borrowing this play on "hole/whole" from Baker's reading of Invisible Man in Blues, Ideology, and Afro-American Literature, in which he uses these terms but in a different critical context.
 6. See Rushdy's "Fraternal Blues" for an analysis of the role of music in Sent for you Yesterday.
 7. While in his discussion of the novel as a dialogic form, Bakhtin argues that the novel is "an ideological translation of another's language and an overcoming of its otherness . . .," I would argue that Wideman does not "overcome" the otherness of the individual voices incorporated into his narrative; rather, he permits each to resonate in all its inherent complexity (The Dialogic Imagination 365).

Chapter Three

"This the Place I am": The Reinscription of Domestic Discourse in Toni Morrison's Beloved

Though I've no home to call my own,
My heart shall not repine;
The saint may live on earth unknown,
And yet in glory shine.

(Harriet Wilson)¹

Turning from Wideman's emphasis on the urban landscape, I will now discuss the role of intimate and enclosed spaces in Toni Morrison's Beloved. This chapter provides an analysis of Morrison's novel that posits a relationship between two major elements in the text: the use and organization of private and public spaces, and the reconstruction of slavery. In proposing this connection, I will point to the way in which the domestic tradition in fiction informs Morrison's project, suggesting that, in revising antecedent tropes and themes, Morrison reconsiders earlier works written in the vein of sentimental literature as part of a larger effort to extrapolate what these texts reveal about slavery and, in turn, what they suggest about slavery's articulation as a literary subject.

Beloved represents a turning point in the legacy of African-American literature because of its direct confrontation with slavery. While none of her novels is set

in the immediate present, only in Beloved does Morrison position her characters, themes, and concerns directly in relation to the historical time frame of slavery and its aftermath. Henry Louis Gates discusses the ways in which African-American authors "write themselves out of the imposed silence of slavery" ("Writing 'Race' and the Difference it Makes" 12). It is within this framework of reclaiming what Zora Neale Hurston once referred to as slavery's "muteness" that we can locate both what defines and what differentiates Morrison's project, since instead of "writing herself out" of a space historically marked by silence, Morrison delves into that liminal arena, disturbing its prolonged quiet and inarticulate echoes and ultimately weaving those absences into the texture of a narrative that challenges the past directly and unflinchingly.

In this sense, Morrison's project is fundamentally recuperative but also transformative--particularly in its effort to challenge a limited understanding of history by replacing the concept of a unified or unequivocal historical reality with the notion of multiple and interrelated histories. In fact, it may be useful to consider this enterprise in relation to Michel Foucault's concept of genealogy, as opposed to history in the traditional sense, since the former term suggests a more encompassing understanding of issues and events that acknowledges the various "gaps" of information, the sources and predicaments often overlooked, dismissed, or left unchallenged by

conventional historical interpretation. In "Black to Front and Black Again: Racialization Through Contested Times and Spaces," Barnor Hesse cites a passage from an interview in which Morrison emphasizes the usefulness of "'the kind of literary archaeology which uses the basis of some information and a little bit of guesswork [in] a journey to a site to see what remains were left behind and to reconstruct the world that these remains imply'" (166). Thus, for Morrison, as for Foucault, subtle incidents, places, and objects that go unnoticed play a charged role in our understanding of periods and events.² A meaningful interpretation of an occurrence of historical consequence and magnitude demands an analysis of large-scale social and political factors, as well as an investigation of the events that take place in the recesses of our cultural reality.

In the case of Beloved, Morrison accomplishes this mediative act by constructing a narrative that weaves the personal life of a runaway slave with the larger issues of slavery and its repercussions. Morrison constructs her novel out of a single incident, the murder of a child at the hands of her mother, a run-away slave. The initial story, detailed in an article Morrison came across, eventually plays itself out in relation to the broader factors that defined a milieu (e.g., the underground railroad, Fugitive Slave Act, Civil War, Reconstruction, etc.). Thus, Beloved chronicles personal events via the broader social and political dynamics

that characterized the historical period in which they transpired.

Furthermore, in dislodging slavery from its position as a historically repressed event, Morrison establishes a link between tradition and what may be perceived as its logical counterpoint, transformation or discontinuity. In other words, while incorporating the form and tropes of domestic fiction, Morrison undermines, displaces, and reevaluates these conventions; this endeavor ultimately leads to a critical departure in which we are able to detect the emergence of a new narrative, one that ideologically positions itself against traditional interpretations of slavery, race, and gender. In this sense, Morrison does not move from one closed or all-encompassing definition of slavery to another, but instead posits her narrative beyond the constrictions of a singular definition of this historical period, toward a more ambiguous and personal interpretation that never requires full synthesis or closure.

Houston Baker reminds us that "slaves, of course, have no voice in deciding their new location; they are transportable property" (Blues, Ideology, and Afro-American Literature 51). With this in mind, it seems almost paradoxical that authors writing in the abolitionist framework often dramatized domestic events and situated their narratives in the intimate field of the home. For African-American authors of the period in particular, the

inconsistent nature of this tradition posed critical problems, as Houston Baker, Valerie Smith, and others suggest. However, through her evocation of domestic rhetoric, Morrison breaks through the veneer of antislavery polemics and locates the home as a place of potential violence and instability.

In his 1987 review of Beloved, Stanley Crouch claims that Morrison "cannot resist the temptation of the trite or the sentimental" (209). The central problem with Crouch's evaluation lies in his use of "sentimental" as a pejorative term and thus in his inability to perceive Morrison's specific use of "sentimentality" as a potential source of transformation. While many critics have denounced Crouch's reading of the novel, only a few have considered the place of sentimentality in Morrison's work to a significant degree. By reading Beloved as a novel that maintains an on-going dialogue with nineteenth-century sentimental fiction and the tropes of the domestic novel, I will illustrate how Morrison transforms slavery from object to subject, from an event closed off from the present to one whose consequences filter through and continue to play an integral role in the way we understand the related issues of race and gender.

II

In order to fully expose the complexity inherent in Morrison's adaptation of domestic tropes, it is helpful first to locate the pattern of their emergence and development in

the works of other African-American women writers.³ In Domestic Allegories of Political Desire--a work that guides my reading of these earlier novels--Claudia Tate claims that the use of sentimentality and the emphasis on the domestic sphere in the works of African-American women during the nineteenth century relates to the borrowing of the ideological standards of a white middle-class culture that allowed black women to envision their own social and personal advancement. Tate states:

The equation between the nurturing household and a morally productive national polity was not only pervasive in mid-nineteenth-century writings of white and black women but also repeatedly empowered the link between the domestic and political discourse in the post-reconstruction domestic novels of black women. (24)

According to Tate, the relationship of such writers as Harriet Jacobs, Harriet Wilson, and Frances Harper to the cult of domesticity and the conventions of domestic fiction implies an underlying "desire" for a greater degree of agency, on both public and private levels.

In Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl, for instance, Harriet Jacobs suggestively appropriates the rhetoric of sentimentality in order to appeal to white middle-class women, her primary audience. However, Jacobs' autobiography playfully subverts the very conventions it utilizes. As Valerie Smith argues, Jacobs' emphasis on "loopholes of

retreat" suggests an ambiguous definition of private space that simultaneously advocates and displaces domestic ideals crucial to the nineteenth-century's cult of true womanhood.

Smith states:

Jacobs borrows heavily from the rhetoric of the sentimental novel. This . . . form imposed upon her restrictions of its own. Yet she seized authority over her literary restraint . . . from within her ellipses and ironies--linguistic narrow spaces--she expresses the complexity of her experience as a black woman. (28)

Thus, even in this early work, the tradition is not so much adopted from an emerging white women's culture as it is adapted to fit the specific needs, concerns, and position of African-American women.

Similarly, in his introduction to Harriet Wilson's Our Nig, Henry Louis Gates argues that "Wilson used the plot structure of her contemporary white female novelists, yet abandoned that structure when it failed to satisfy the needs of her well crafted tale" (xvi). Gates suggests that Wilson "inverts" this tradition at critical junctures in the text--further proof of the underlying, subversive principle that guides and informs such rewritings of nineteenth-century white women's novels. The significance of Wilson's and Jacobs' critical maneuvers can be more fully apprehended when looked at in relation to the domestic writings of their white counterparts, since the rhetoric of domesticity in the works

of these authors often appropriates the experience of slavery for the purpose of advancing the goals and objectives of white middle-class women. In other words, by denouncing the institution of slavery, writers like Harriet Beecher Stowe and Lydia Marie Childs simultaneously find a means of articulating or representing their personal sense of oppression.

The subversive force present in a work like Incidents has only recently received the type of critical attention it merits. As Mary Helen Washington points out, "Linda Brent's slave narrative was judged by male historians to be inauthentic because her story was 'too melodramatic'" (34). This dismissal resembles Crouch's critique of Morrison's Beloved, in which, as suggested above, he points to her use of "sentimentality" as a central flaw in the novel. Both instances illustrate a rejection of "sentimentality" based on an inability to acknowledge the cultural function and critical potential of this aesthetic form. In Homefronts, Lora Romeo discusses the limitation inherent in this critical tendency:

regard[ing] domesticity as the quintessential marker of mindless capitulation rather than as a symbolic system compatible with a range of political positions has prevented them [critics] from reading the relation between black women's domestic fiction and black activism. (67)

What Incidents and Beloved ultimately illustrate is a complex and at times disruptive engagement with a traditional form, an endeavor that allows Jacobs and Morrison to carve out a critical space, formulate their own ideals, and finally write themselves out of the very conventions from which both texts are crafted.⁴

Cathy Davidson suggests that "the sentimental novel . . . was generically suited to addressing . . . the maze of ideological assessments of the family and the implications for women of different visions of what the family should be" (123). In a similar vein, Nancy Armstrong argues that "domestic fiction mapped out a new domain of discourse as it invested common forms of social behavior with the emotional values of women" (29).⁵ Therefore, it seems logical that black women of the period would turn to this tradition, since--in addition to the limited creative possibilities imposed on them by a restrictive society--they were also, at the time, actively engaged in redefining their own sense of self and family, and of envisioning a new way of life outside of the confines of the institution of slavery. Domestic discourse offered a type of blueprint of what it meant to be a wife and mother in middle-class American culture.

For African-American women writers in particular, the domestic novel created a framework for working through or reevaluating the contradictions and inconsistencies of slavery, since this form allowed them to draw on the idealized roles of mother and homemaker and, therefore, to

move beyond the institution that disregarded and diminished these functions. One of the most obvious of these contradictions has to do with the status of female slaves in their own home versus in the plantation house and under the slave owner's command. Slave families, as Deborah G. White argues, followed a "matrifocal" organizational structure, which means they positioned women as invaluable centers of the household.⁶ However, the exploitation and degradation of slave women under the master's watchful eye represents a devaluing of those attributes for which they were respected in their families and community.

Furthermore, the monetary value placed on the bodies of mothers and children exploited the maternal role crucial to women's valorized position in slave society. During slavery, as Hortense Spillers argues, a child "does not 'belong' to the mother, nor is she 'related' to the 'owner,' though the latter 'possesses' it . . . and often fathered it" ("Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book," 76). Thus the cult of domesticity's glorification of the role of motherhood coincides with slave culture's emphasis on the mother-child relationship and has a distinct purpose in legitimizing the bond that the institution of slavery had reduced to a base economic function.

III

Yet the patterns and structures of sentimental fiction, including the emphasis on the domestic arena and the

glorification of motherhood, did not, in any practical sense, necessarily afford African-American women a greater sense of agency or autonomy. On the contrary, even transgressive appropriations of this form faced the same overwhelming limitation—an inability to confront directly the reality of slavery. The sentimental novel by both black and white women writers often simultaneously centered and displaced the discourse of slavery by couching its historical impact in domestic terms. Thus, even an analysis of the manipulation of these tropes by black writers must take into account the ultimate failure of such endeavors to fully acknowledge the personal and social repercussions of slavery. As Harriet Beecher Stowe--whose novel Uncle Tom's Cabin is perhaps the best known of the nineteenth-century sentimental novels--wrote, "'slavery, in some of its workings, is too dreadful for the purposes of art'" (cited in Karen Sanchez-Eppler, "Bodily Bonds: The Intersecting Rhetorics of Feminism and Abolition" 99)

The set of historical circumstances that promoted the development of nineteenth-century domestic discourse also implicitly contained its political potential and impact. As Ann Douglas argues, "sentimentalism provides a way to protest a power to which one has already in part capitulated" (12). The dialogue between the domestic arena and the broader cultural factors that defined the concept of "home" led to a dramatic power struggle that was often portrayed through images of slavery. Domestic fiction, Jane Tompkins states,

"is preoccupied, even obsessed with the nature of power" (160). For white women who may have, on at least a subconscious level, identified with slaves--as part of an attempt to work out their own feelings of exploitation and vulnerability at the hands of patriarchal culture through their engagement with the abolitionist project--the image of the slave becomes synonymous with powerlessness. Their relationship to this charged figure thus demands a certain degree of distance, granted to them by their emphasis on domestic elements and, ultimately, by their ability to frame the image of slavery within the more accommodating and innocuous one of familial/home life.

Stowe, for instance, tempers her vision of slavery with sentimental details, glimpses of domestic harmony, and the poignant description of the death of a child--an event that Ann Douglas claims plays a central role in this genre. As this example suggests, the pertinent issues of slavery are sublimated, and, in the process, succumb to the rhetoric of domesticity. Herbert Ross Brown observes in his seminal study, The Sentimental Novel in America 1789-1860, that "The sentimental generation could not pretend successfully to ignore slavery, but it preferred to handle it with velvet gloves" (265). Thus, the constraint suggested by the Stowe example represents an inability to engage in a prolonged confrontation with slavery and its consequences based on a distinct fear of the sense of "powerlessness" the vision of slavery evokes.

In turn, African-American women writers who appropriated elements of the sentimental novel in constructing their own narratives similarly faced the problem of slavery. In this case, however, the fear of helplessness, which comes to define the sentimentalist's characterization of slavery, suggests consequences of a more immediate nature, for here the image confronted can never be reinscribed as other. Encountering slavery, in this sense, entails facing one's personal history or connecting intimately with the very past one actively seeks to escape.

As time passed, however, black women writers became increasingly conscious of the restrictions imposed by the tradition of sentimentality; and, in an effort to chart their own field of experience and expression, these writers began to slowly move away from the constraints of the domestic form, giving their characters increased autonomy--a freedom first denied to them by slavery itself and later by the social and sexual politics that confined a woman's sense of identity to the limited arena of the home. Claudia Tate states:

When these earlier writers persistently encountered more and more racist legislation and intimidation during the last decade of the nineteenth century and the first years of the next . . . they seem to have stopped writing idealized domestic fiction altogether. (210)

In their efforts to adopt the standards of the dominant culture, these writers were unable to grapple directly with slavery, but they also eventually came to realize that a failure to interrogate more directly the problematics of racism and slavery's aftermath would similarly lead to a social and political impasse.

A rejection of the standard domestic plot not only suggests a denouncement of the prefabricated roles imposed on these writers; it also marks a critical movement toward a closer analysis of slavery and racism. Thus, earlier efforts to mediate the complex terrain between a desire to express individual concerns and a need to comply with social conventions give way to more complicated engagements with the themes of domestic fiction, to representations that openly problematize the standard tropes of this tradition and provide more engaging and politicized examples of black womanhood. The resulting "generational shift"—to borrow Houston Baker's term—will be the subject of the next section and will eventually lead to a positioning of Morrison's novel in relation to the development and expansion of this aesthetic framework.

IV

By briefly examining the role of domestic discourse in the works of several twentieth-century African-American women writers, I hope to explore the changing topography of this form and discuss what these developments represent. Nella

Larsen's Quicksand presents an ideal starting point, since, as Kimberly Drake notes, this "critique of marriage and domesticity is one of the first in the African-American literary tradition" (66). In the text, the domestic arena remains repressed until the end, when the narrative drama shifts abruptly from an urban center, with its interesting circle of intellectuals, to a disturbing rural setting, where Helga Crane, the novel's urbane protagonist, eventually finds herself languishing in bed after the birth of her fourth child.⁷ This same woman initially rejects both marriage and motherhood: "'Marriage--that means children, to me. And why add more suffering to the world? Why add any more unwanted, tortured Negroes to America? Why do Negroes have Children? Surely it must be sinful?'" (Larsen 103). Helga's questions specifically relate racial politics to the seemingly benign discourse of domesticity, a move that illustrates Larsen's awareness of the tendency of this tradition to turn its back on the problematics of race.

The dramatic alteration in position and the related transformation of character in the novel function as an undermining of the domestic narrative and further point to an epistemological rupture in the development of this tradition. While Helga becomes the wife and mother she never expected she would be, she does not value either role, and her passivity and reticence can be read as a tacit rejection--different from her original outward dismissal of both but, at the same time, reflective of her initial, enraged stance.

The quintessential scene of domestic felicity, the birth of a child, becomes a source of imprisonment and isolation: "She immediately closed her eyes, mutely shutting out the sickly infant, its smiling father, the soiled midwife, the curious neighbors, and the tousled room" (Larsen 127). Helga's obvious disapproval of this environment provides a limited but functional means of subverting the traditional domestic plot.

While Helga's position at the end of Quicksand implies submission—confined as she is to a small room—her weakness represents a rejection of traditional responsibilities and suggests Larsen's attempt to circumvent the limitations imposed by the domestic form. However unsuccessful Helga's quest may be, the rejection of the roles of wife and mother creates new narrative possibilities. Unlike the nineteenth-century sentimentalists, Larsen does not rely on the trope of domesticity as a way of containing the discourse of black womanhood. On the contrary, her transgressive realignment of these elements provides a means of directly probing issues of race and sexuality.

The portrayal of a woman's more successful search for autonomy, written nine years after Quicksand, is Zora Neale Hurston's Their Eyes Were Watching God. Three fundamental choices distinguish Hurston's use of domestic tropology. First, Janie Crawford eventually comes to own her own home, after the death of her second husband, Joe Starks. Secondly,

after the death of Tea Cake, her lover, Janie returns home and reestablishes her intimate connection to her friend Phoebe, who symbolically takes the place of Tea Cake in the narrative. And finally, Janie's experience differs dramatically from Helga's in that she has no children to care for. In fact, upon Janie's return, Phoebe exclaims "'You [Janie] looks like youse yo' own daughter'" (Hurston 4). This image of self-validation symbolically casts Janie into the roles of both mother and daughter, which suggests that Janie receives the nurturance and care usually expended on a child.

Hurston thus reconfigures the family plot by placing Janie and Phoebe in the space traditionally defined as heterosexual and patriarchal and, further, by displacing the responsibility of motherhood. The novel's closing image of the horizon pulled in "like a great fish-net" signals a euphoric retreat that stands in sharp contrast to Helga's imposed withdrawal into her husband's house and to similar images of domestic confinement in a range of other novels (Hurston 184). While Their Eyes Were Watching God was highly criticized by male reviewers at the time of its publication and eventually went out of print, a resurgence of interest in Hurston's work in the seventies leads to another reconfiguration of the domestic terminology central to the project of many African-American women novelists.

Alice Walker, writing in direct dialogue with her literary foremother, Zora Neale Hurston, ultimately provides her protagonist, Celie, with a space and family of her own, one that echoes the familial construction in Their Eyes but which carries a more distinct political intention. Henry Louis Gates discusses the relationship between both texts, specifically in terms of their use of domestic space: "houses confine in The Color Purple just as they do in Their Eyes . . . but Celie, Nettie, Shug, and Janie all find a form of freedom in houses in which there are no men" (The Signifying Monkey 253)

Walker's interpretation of domestic felicity is constructed through images of friendship and sisterhood. The reconstitution of Celie's household at the end of the novel represents a maneuvering and eventual reinscription of various elements of sentimental fiction. Firstly, unlike Janie, Celie has two children, but they are absent and in her sister's care throughout most of the novel. The return of both children and the family's reunion at the end of the novel provide a vision of closure that draws on the sentimental tradition without falling victim to its inherent paradox. The children are now adults and thus require no extended care. The individual who helps raise and nurture them, Nettie, fulfills both the role of sister to Celie and of surrogate parent to her sister's children--an act that undermines the standard mother-father model by eliminating the patriarchal figure altogether.

Secondly, Celie discovers that the house she lives in actually belongs to her, which, along with her developing business venture, provides her with a sense of financial autonomy. Walker's interest in the image of home as a creative and emancipatory space is also explored in her essay "In Search of Our Mother's Gardens." Here she revisits A Room of One's Own and echoes Woolf's feminist concerns—but from the distinct position of an African-American woman. In both works, Walker initiates an understanding of the need for black women to conceive of and cultivate their own living spaces.

The final element of Walker's revision of Hurston's novel specifically and of the domestic novel more generally is represented in the relationship between Celie and Shug, a rewriting of the Janie-Phoebe connection that moves beyond the strictly platonic terms of the latter to the depiction of a more explicitly intimate, sexual bond in the former. In this portrayal of familial life, two women function in the roles traditionally inhabited by husband and wife; both literally "wear the pants in the family," and neither depends on a male provider. This illustrates options not available to Helga Crane or even Janie and Phoebe, whose relationship remains inscribed under the terms of heterosexual convention. Furthermore, the overtly lesbian organization of the household provides a means for Walker to grant both characters control over the physical world they inhabit but also over the more intimate space of the body, since the

threat of unwanted pregnancy is also safely elided. Thus with two grown children and a satisfying intimate relationship that safeguards Celie against the possibility of having more, Walker provides Celie with both the physical and psychological space and freedom necessary to achieve greater self awareness.

However, I do not wish to suggest that either Walker or Hurston see children as an impediment or burden, merely that the absence of children plays a role as part of the deconstruction of the traditional domestic plot that often defines women almost exclusively via their reproductive capacity and denies women the right to envision themselves outside of this rigid paradigm. This revision plays a particularly crucial role in the case of African-American women, since, for instance, the same system that denied a mother rights to her own children also produced the stereotypical image of "mammy," the nurturing, self-effacing black woman who reflects white Southern culture's need to create a desexualized vision of racialized femininity. For African-American women who, during slavery, had their reproductive capabilities, as well as their children, valued in strict economic terms, the freedom to make personal decisions over their own bodies and over their children's lives suggests a tacit response to these former indignities--a matter Walker subtly inscribes in her novel.

The innovations and shifts revealed in the development of this form, as well as changes in the utilization of

domestic topography--informed as they are by an ideological undercurrent--help us to construct a critical pattern and structure from which we can extrapolate an understanding of the political repercussions and aesthetic concerns that shape this evolving tradition. While I have only pointed to three major texts in this continuum, there are others, including Jessie Fauset's Plum Bun, Anne Petry's The Street, Gwendolyn Brook's Maud Martha, and Gloria Naylor's The Women of Brewster Place--to name a few--that also use domestic discourse in suggestive and transgressive ways, and which, therefore, play an important role in the transformation of this form. None of these novels is representatively "domestic" in a traditional sense; rather each, in its own way, posits home as a place of cultural signification--a site where broader social problems are inscribed in the details of daily life and where the political and quotidian intersect. Barbara Christian notes that

Perhaps African-American writers have been particularly interested in setting, because displacement, first from Africa and then through migration from South to North, has been so much a part of our history. Because of the consistency of forced displacement in our collective experience, we know how critical our location is to the character of our social creation, of how place helps to tell us a great deal about who we are, and who we can become. (348)

The displacement that Christian argues characterizes the role of African-Americans is further linked to the centrality of home, particularly for black women, who, since the time of slavery, when a "matrifocal" system was in place, have played a crucial role as the nucleus of family life. In other words, the experience and trauma of migration pose a need to organize and evaluate the home as an extended expression of the self and as a celebration of cultural heritage—a process for which women have generally been responsible.

However, this arrangement has come under attack, as illustrated by Daniel Patrick Moynihan's 1965 report which points to "problems" in black families related to the assertive role African-American women play in all aspects of familial life. As Hortense Spillers argues, the report illustrates an effort to impose "dominant" values on the cultural ordering of the African-American community.⁸ The novels under consideration here offer a response to this type of critical assessment and to any effort to reduce the complexity of black women's roles by claiming an inherent pathology at the core of mother-centered familial and communal patterns. Therefore, the image of home in these works—like the related figure of the mother—operates as a source of intimacy, agency, and transformation.

Recognizing that home functions as an ideologically determined reference point and that repetition and revision of domestic tropes are similarly bound to social and

political factors, I would now like to position Toni Morrison's Beloved as a work responsible for one of the most significant transitions in the development of this aesthetic tradition. As suggested earlier, the incorporation of domestic elements originally implied a "desire" to move away from the stifling image of slavery and later developed into a means for African-American women writers to create characters and environments reflective of their own subjective experiences. In Beloved, Morrison evokes this literary legacy by returning to the absent referent that to varying degrees regulates the trope of domesticity in a range of texts--slavery and its consequences.

Morrison's historical gesture articulates a period in American history through the voices and motifs that were shaped and now, in turn, retrospectively shape that milieu. In other words, her incorporation of domestic rhetoric carries echoes of a range of earlier works--while the conditioning or manipulation of these elements allows Morrison to posit her own objectives and intentions. As Bakhtin argues:

Any word exists for the speaker in three aspects: as a neutral word of a language, belonging to nobody, as an other's word, which belongs to another person and is filled with echoes of the other's utterance; and finally, as my word, for since I am dealing with it in a particular situation, with a particular speech plan, it is

already imbued with my expression. (Speech Genres and Other Late Essays 88)

In this sense, Morrison constructs a dialogue that asserts a connection between past and present, between the concerns of African-American women today and those of their foremothers-- a dialogue that directly tackles the issue of slavery by taking into account the cumulative voices that have to varying degrees either moved away from or toward an assessment of slavery via the tropological framework of domestic/sentimental fiction. The spatial organization of this dialogic project points to a salient element in and focus of this on-going discourse and, for the purpose of my argument, permits a critical reading of the way domestic conventions are reordered--thus allowing for an interpretation of what these alterations represent within the larger context of the ethnic novel in the United States.

In Beloved, the domestic arena is fraught with political significance and has far reaching implications, both within and outside of the home. Race and cultural position are integral to one's understanding of the social and domestic spheres and of the way relationships take shape inside of as well as beyond the family. Morrison herself makes this distinction when, during an interview with Claudia Tate, she states that "there's a special kind of domestic perception that has its own violence in writings by black women--not bloody violence, but violence nonetheless" (162). In this instance, Morrison posits a direct correlation between the

activities of daily life and an attitude toward those activities constructed out of specific racial dynamics. Similarly, in Beloved, she locates subversive potential in the figure of the mother, Sethe, who, unlike more traditional models, directly transgresses social boundaries imposed by a patriarchal and racist ideology. Sethe's mediation of home and community and the "violence" that determines and characterizes her position throughout the novel complicates the related roles of mother, wife, and homemaker as part of a larger effort to reconsider each in relation to broader issues of race and gender. Thus, Morrison abandons the image of mothers as passive or powerless by locating radical potential in the figure of a woman who emerges out of slavery's shadows.

Yet, even though the novel is informed by and simultaneously informs the historical and political factors that frame it, some critics have attempted to strip away its cultural texture in order to discuss universal themes. Susan Babbit, for instance, suggests that "It is in terms of a story about a human being who loves and is connected to her children, not a story about someone defined in terms of slave conditions that the act with the handsaw is indeed odd and in need of an explanation" (6). However, we cannot divorce Beloved's violent death from the institution of slavery, just as we cannot merely interpret Sethe as a mother who kills her own daughter--since the same Sethe who murders Beloved saves

her son Buglar from falling into a well and carries Denver to freedom.

Another problematic reading is offered by Karen E. Fields, who proposes that Beloved functions as "a profound meditation on the nature of love," and goes on to argue the following:

Because Beloved is set among slave owners, slaves, and exslaves a decade before and after the Civil War, it can appear to be about a subject of . . . less than universal scope. But the details about slavery and reconstruction serve as resources with which to create human beings, alive in real circumstances. They are not the story itself. Without the specifics of place and time we cannot tell a love story, for we cannot say who loved.
(emphasis added 163)

In Fields' interpretation, the novel's historical positioning functions as a background or scenery. However, without denying that Beloved is a novel about the nature of love, it is impossible to discuss the emotional connection between characters without addressing the complicated role slavery plays in shaping these relationships. For instance, the way Paul D defines Sethe's love as "'too thick'" remains intrinsically tied to his notion that slaves should never love anything too deeply, in case the object of affection is suddenly taken away (Morrison 164). Similarly, Sethe's love for her children lies embedded in her desire for freedom.

The historical framework of slavery and its aftermath as well as Morrison's specific choices in spatial patterning do much more than function as a backdrop for the novel's action—as Fields suggests. On the contrary, these choices reveal a conscious and theoretically-determined effort to evoke distinct historical incidents and to assess and reinscribe these moments from the perspective of an African-American woman. Therefore, the novel's spatial patterning, related as it is to the rhetorical strategies of domestic fiction, plays an indispensable role in the way Morrison shapes her textual exploration of the social and political forces that define slavery.

124 stands as the embodiment of a specific historical milieu, while the periods of slavery and Reconstruction similarly manifest themselves in the physical environment portrayed in the novel. For instance, Baby Suggs comments that “‘not a house in the country ain’t packed to its rafters with some dead Negroes’ grief’”—an image that bears a striking resemblance to Jacobs’ “loopholes of retreat” (Morrison 5). This spatial/temporal framework reveals Morrison’s interest in not only the historical era the novel directly contemplates but also the works that come out of it, for, as argued earlier, Morrison does not just return to this historical period; she also draws upon the novelistic tropes and themes that developed during and were concurrent with the events and issues of this generation. She thus revisits

slavery in two related ways: first, through an analysis of it as a historical event, and, secondly, through a suggestive utilization of the literary conventions (i.e., slave narrative and domestic fiction) that played a crucial role in the way slavery was depicted, either in its absence as subject or through its sentimental construction.

The interplay of stock elements of sentimental fiction with the harsh reality of slavery appears throughout Beloved. Those traditional components and images central to the text include: the figure of the mother and the concomitant role of mothering as a narrative focal point, an emphasis on domestic chores and activities, the valorization of the virtues of private life, and "the domestication of death."⁹ However, none of these elements functions in transparent terms; rather, each plays a crucial role in the narrative's interrogation of the historical dynamics that gave rise to these characterizations in the first place. For instance, the traditional dying scene, crucial to the sentimental novel, comes to be replayed in a distorted form in Beloved's murder and return.¹⁰ While, in this case, death comes suddenly and unexpectedly--and therefore stands against the prolonged death scene typical of sentimental fiction--its ramifications become the source of the narrative's unfolding.

Similarly, the arena that centers sentimental/domestic fiction, the home and its related field, becomes a contested site and a location "for history's most intricate invasions" (Bhabha 9).¹¹ Before School Teacher's arrival and Beloved's

murder, "124 had been a cheerful, buzzing house where Baby Suggs, holy, loved, cautioned, fed, chastised, and soothed. Where not one but two pots simmered on the stove; where the lamp burned all night long" (Morrison 86). However, with the disruption of domestic harmony, the house becomes a place of isolation that carries traces of the other structure looming ominously in the narrative's background, Sweet Home. Beloved opens with the statement "124 was spiteful," an image that draws the reader into the novel's immediate setting, while it simultaneously problematizes that space (Morrison 3). The site of entry into the text--the first page, first sentence, but also the door and the hall with its pulsing red light--both entices and repels the reader, just as, later in the novel, the house draws Stamp Paid to the door but keeps him suspended in a liminal space outside.

It is important to note that Stamp Paid functions throughout the novel as a mediator of various places and as the reader's textual counterpart: "Before the war all he did was sneak: runaways into hidden places, secret information to public places" (Morrison, 169). From his limited position by the door, Stamp Paid attempts to decipher the meaning of 124, as he listens to the "occasional mutter--like the interior sounds a woman makes when she believes she is alone and unobserved at her work" (Morrison 72). Similarly, from the initial encounter at 124's door, the reader struggles to make sense of the house by reading space as text, by positing a connection between the structural and geographical foreground

of the novel and the social, political, and historical dynamics that lie embedded in this spatial layout. Stamp Paid reads the seemingly innocuous sounds of domestic activity, just as the reader interprets the novel through an investigation of the various spaces that build off of, overlap, and at times replace one another.

In an interview with Claudia Tate, Morrison states that her "language has to have holes and spaces so the reader can come into it" (164). 124 represents the physical manifestation of such a space, the embodiment of "unspeakable things unspoken."¹² The house that centers all the other related spaces in the text is constructed as a gap in the narrative, as a textual hole the reader literally enters at the beginning along with Paul D, and is later kept out of along with Stamp Paid, who keeps his vigil by the door. It thus functions as the narrative's elusive "desolated center where the self that had no self made its home" (Morrison 140).

Inside and outside form a dialectical tension in the novel, opening a space between home and community, past and present, and pain and healing. While Paul D, the wanderer, eventually thinks he is "having house fits," Sethe, after Beloved's arrival, decides that "whatever is going on outside my door ain't for me" (Morrison 183). Denver, on the other hand, plays the role of mediator, for, like Stamp Paid, she comes to be associated with border areas or the intricate places that delineate changes in the novel. As Terry Otten

argues, "It is not inconsequential that the child delivered on the boundary of freedom is the agent of Sethe's release from deleterious love" (649). Denver thus stands in contrast to the other central border figure in the novel, Beloved, who is described as "homeless" and associated with the bridge and middle passage--both related to symbolic "in-betweens," one physical, the other historical. Yet while Denver's border touches on freedom and the future, as represented by her birth, Beloved's remains intrinsically tied to Sweet Home and the past.

Thus, the novel is organized around a series of figures who relate in various ways to different spaces. For instance, Denver's movement beyond the confines of 124 represents her reintegration into the community and presents a reordering of the domestic field: "As Denver's outside life improved, her home life deteriorated" (Morrison 250). Similarly, these areas and the characters that come to be associated with each often remain in juxtaposition. While Paul D claims that "If a Negro got legs he ought to use them," Baby Suggs immures herself in the keeping room until she dies, and Sethe constructs a life out of a myriad of domestic activities (Morrison 10). Although Sethe confesses to Paul D that she doesn't "'go inside,'" the psychological "inside" she refers to stands in contrast to the physical "inside" of 124, which occupies her time and energy and keeps her from delving into her thoughts about the past (Morrison 46). Paul D's arrival reconfigures 124 by forcing the "inside" of the past to

intersect with the interior of daily life: "There was no room for any other thing or body until Paul D arrived and broke up the place, making room, shifting it, moving it over to someplace else, then standing in the place he had made" (Morrison 39). Paul D's actions represent a violation of the psychological boundaries Sethe erects to keep the past at bay, a transgression that, in turn, stirs up the ghost of the past who returns in the shape of Sethe's dead daughter.

Beloved's initial phantom-like presence in the house serves as a constant reminder of the reality that haunts all slaves. This grief remains bearable so long as it continues to be articulated in an indirect form. However, after Paul D's arrival, Beloved returns as the physical incarnation of Sethe's past, forcing the family to undergo a dramatic transformation. Paul D's arrival intersects with Beloved's, which exposes a major tension in the novel, a desire to construct a family (represented by Paul D) and an oppositional, destructive force (embodied in the figure of Beloved). This overlap in arrivals points to the inevitable connection between fashioning a new life and coming to terms with the past.

The narrative of familial life thus comes to incorporate pernicious elements of the broader social and historical events that shape it. The institution of slavery ironically returns in the guise of the daughter, since Beloved eventually personifies the very system Sethe seeks to protect her daughter from. As Marianne Hirsh aptly states, in

Beloved "we can perhaps unmask the master narrative of families, as no more than the master's narrative" (97). This act of unveiling leads to a reshaping of families and to the emergence of a new narrative, one consciously informed by the historical factors that determine its form. Thus, home in the novel provides an axis upon which elements of social and historical significance revolve.

The visit from one of "The Sweet Home Men" disrupts the daily activity of the household and forces the repressed past to surface abruptly. The image of Sethe "down on all fours, as though she were holding her house down on the ground" indicates her resistance and inability to face the past, while it also reveals her emotional response to the place that contains and exposes this resistance (Morrison 18). Sethe, keenly aware of the role place plays in the human experience, tells Denver that

 Somethings you forget. Other things you never do .
 . . . Places . . . are still there. Where I come
 before I was here. That place is real
 It's never going away. . . . The picture is still
 there and what's more, if you go there--you who was
 never there--if you go there and stand in the place
 where it was, it will happen again It will
 be there . . . waiting for you. So, Denver, you
 must never go there (Morrison, 36).

However, Denver does not need to visit Sweet Home to understand its implications--for, as Gaston Bachelard argues,

"an entire past comes to dwell in a new house" (5). In this sense, the ghost that torments 124 embodies the past, carrying traces of Sethe's history into the present and into a house that physically stands beyond the parameters of slavery.

Upon Beloved's arrival, both Sethe and Denver turn to the domestic, maternal ordering of the home in an effort to exert control over the newly introduced, foreign element. By mothering Beloved, Sethe hopes to incorporate her into the family, to "domesticate" her presence. However, when their roles change, and Sethe finds herself in the position of a needy child, while Beloved stands as a diabolical maternal figure, the concept of home alters to a significant degree. Under this new familial organization, sadistic rituals replace daily activities. The bare cupboards, garish costumes, and general disorder indicate the dismantling of 124, which, in turn, suggests Sethe's inability to promote and sustain domestic harmony in a place indelibly marked by the memory of slavery.

The house's deterioration reveals itself in relation to Sethe's own decline, for, since characters relate directly to various spaces in the text, elements of these areas are similarly inscribed in the moods, voices and, as in the case of Sethe and Beloved, bodies of characters. Denver, for instance, makes this connection, when she tells Sethe "'It's not the house. It's us! And it's you!'" (Morrison 14). The "wide" Sethe, who has "milk enough for all" and functions as

the physical embodiment of home, is eventually replaced by the image of a frail, powerless woman subject to her daughter's whims and demands (Morrison 100). Just as the novel must be read spatially, in terms of related and often intersecting geographical sites, it also requires a reading of the slippery maternal figure, whose body posits an equally enigmatic space that stands parallel to the arena of 124.

While Stamp Paid guides our efforts to interpret 124, both Denver and Paul D attempt to decipher the meaning of Sethe's body and thus function as the reader's textual counterparts in this activity. Paul D's struggle, for instance, appears in three related incidents: first, in his discovery of the scars on Sethe's back that form an incoherent psychological map of Sweet Home, secondly, in his effort to reinsert himself into the family after Beloved draws him out, and, finally, in his struggle to understand the newspaper article Stamp Paid gives him, which, since he cannot read, he attempts to interpret by analyzing the picture. For Paul D, the attempt to connect with Sethe forms a physical/spatial continuum. For example, when Beloved lures him out of the house, Paul D tries to reinsert himself by suggesting to Sethe that they have a baby--so that by entering her body he may, in turn, reenter the house.

In Denver's case, the act of interpreting the maternal figure or of "reading . . . Sethe's stifling mother-love" is more elaborately constructed (Carol Boyce Davis 146). Within the framework of the dialectical spatial organization of the

novel, inside and outside pose a relationship between the mother's body and the child's desire, between Sethe's past and Denver's quest—an act inherently guided and informed by her interest in the future. Denver's first step outside of the home, which also represents a movement away from the limitations of her experience with Sethe, involves going to the bower which is "first a play room, then a refuge . . ." (Morrison 29). The bower becomes a womb-like space of nurturance, where "Denver's imagination produce(s) its own hunger and its own food . . ." (Morrison 28). This episode illustrates an attempt to vicariously claim possession of the mother's body, but, ironically, it simultaneously suggests a means of circumventing the maternal figure, since the self-sustaining quality of the bower implies the attainment of a greater degree of autonomy and self awareness.

The movement that eventually leads to her reintegration into the community also connects her to her mother on another level, since her actions represent a retracing of Sethe's own heroic effort to carry Denver to freedom. The story Denver loves to hear, the one detailing the events of her birth, comes to be symbolically replayed when she "step[s] off the edge of the world," and turns to the community for help (Morrison 243). This quest enables Denver to reformulate her relationship with Sethe—something Beloved cannot do. Denver's development marks a shift from child-like dependency to a deeper understanding of her mother's needs. By getting Sethe help, she comes to stand along with the other women who

arrive at 124, as a member of the community and part of a sisterhood.

Denver's efforts to locate Sethe in the physical world around her parallel Sethe's own longing for a connection with her mother, illustrated in her visit to the Clearing where Baby Suggs invited the community to gather. Sethe recalls that "in the Clearing . . . she had claimed herself. Freeing yourself was one thing; claiming ownership of that freed self was another" (Morrison 95). The interrelated areas of home, bower, and Clearing also reveal themselves on Sethe's body. Baby Suggs' Clearing, described as the "green blessed place," and Denver's bower, which stands "veiled and protected by . . . live, green walls," are symbolically etched on Sethe's back in the form of the chokecherry tree; this image carries the memory of slavery but also intersects with the narrative of Denver's birth, since Amy transforms the wound into an emblem of courage and resilience by renaming it (Morrison 89, 29). Thus, the respective spaces identified in relation to grandmother, granddaughter, and mother form an intervening narrative of endurance. While Sethe asked her mother to "mark the mark" on her without understanding the absurdity of her request, and while Beloved carries the sign of her violent death on her flesh, the scars that mar Sethe's back transcend the pain of slavery by intersecting with the two central sites of healing in the text, the bower and Clearing.

Finally, by entering the yard into the novel's developing spatial dialogue, Morrison posits a link between family and community and, according to Bhabha, opens an "interstitial" area for Sethe's reintegration into communal life. The yard connects to both the bower and Clearing, since the former plays a role in Denver's developing sense of self and her related movement toward the community, and the latter stands as the original site of communal gathering. Just as Denver's actions replay her mother's escape from Sweet Home, they reintroduce her to the community that embraced Sethe upon her arrival at 124 years earlier. In leaving both her home and the bower, Denver discovers communal mothering and nurturance. Asharaf Rushdy claims that "Two things happen when Denver finally follows Baby Suggs' advice and steps out of 124--one leads to personal healing and another . . . to communal healing" (583). Denver initially turns to Mrs. Jones who calls her "baby," except, in this instance, the word allows her to transcend the boundaries of childhood, making her aware of her new status as a woman: "She did not know it then, but it was the word 'baby' said so softly and with such kindness, that inaugurated her life in the world as a woman" (Morrison 248).

The group of women who come to gather at the yard of 124 are brought there by their growing concern for Sethe's safety but, more importantly, by their commitment to Baby Suggs. The moment of climactic rupture in the text--the scene in the yard--replays two related incidents in the text: the

gatherings at the clearing and the final communal event before Beloved's murder. While the celebration at 124 functions as an acknowledgement of freedom, its unexpected lavishness triggers resentment in the community. Baby Suggs realizes that "she had . . . given too much, offended them by excess" (Morrison 138). The extreme pleasure associated with the feast stands against the suffering of slavery--the memory of which manifests itself in the form of School Teacher's arrival. Therefore, in shunning Baby Suggs, the community becomes a silent accomplice in Beloved's murder: "not Ella, not John, not anybody came down . . . to say some new with folks with the look just road in" (Morrison, 157).

Although the celebration causes resentment in the guests, it is Sethe's pride that finally leads to her isolation from the community. In other words, Sethe's relationship with her neighbors disintegrates after she kills her daughter, but not exactly because of it. The yard therefore functions as a recuperative field both for the community that abandoned Baby Suggs and her family and for Sethe who stubbornly rejected her neighbors. Furthermore, in order to fully assess the personal/communal dynamics and their revision at this narrative juncture, Morrison casts these elements against the backdrop of slavery, shifting between personal incident and factors of broader, historical magnitude, between present and past, and North and South.

The yard functions as a stage upon which to reenact the events and conditions that lead to Beloved's murder and,

subsequently, to the community's disintegration. Baby Suggs can never accept School Teacher's threat to the sanctity of her home. She repeatedly tells Stamp Paid, "'I'm saying they came into my yard'" (Morrison 179). The violation Baby Suggs describes in spatial terms is similarly revealed in a conversation Sethe has with Paul D, in which she details the murder of Beloved as an attempt to "'put my babies where they'd be safe'" (Morrison 164). In having the meaning of home devalued by School Teacher's invasion, Sethe searches for a place beyond the limits of logic where her children might be free from the threat of slavery. As one critic argues, "124 is dangerous because it promises what it cannot provide: refuge for its inhabitants. As a free standing American house, it promises protection, as a home to African-American slaves, . . . it cannot possibly deliver" (Michael Hogan 174). By entering the yard, School Teacher does more than violate the boundaries of the domestic arena; he reminds Sethe and Baby Suggs of how permeable these borders actually are.

In Beloved, the image of the "magical North" is quickly dismissed as a false promise when the space separating slavery from freedom collapses, first with School Teacher's visit and later with Beloved's return. Sethe's encounter with School Teacher functions in relation to Beloved's place in the novel, since both figures represent a transgression of familial boundaries. Beloved is a "divided subject," a term Julia Kristeva uses to define a figure who inhabits multiple

sites of representation. Beloved's fear of breaking up into incoherent fragments reflects this condition. Furthermore, this psychological splintering reveals itself in the spatial dynamics of the novel, since, although she claims to belong to 124, Beloved's protean and shifting position indicates the historical fracture intrinsic to her slave past. Her association with the bridge, for instance, forges a connection with this repressed past--identified as Sweet Home and, furthermore, the middle passage. The bridge, like the road School Teacher travels to arrive at 124, embodies a sense of irresolution. Henri Lefebvre claims that "Paths are . . . what endure in the reticular patterns left . . . by people. Always distinct and clearly indicated, such traces embody the values assigned to particular routes: danger, safety, waiting, promise" (118). Thus, Beloved's connection to this intermediary site of anxiety reinforces her alienation from the structure and cohesion ideally represented in the image of home.

Furthermore, Beloved's fragmentation stands in contrast to the image of the "wide" Sethe who can fit all of her children in her arms (Morrison 162). Like the idealized vision of 124, Sethe's body represents a place of unification, but, upon Beloved's arrival, it becomes a contested site. The struggle over space in the novel thus comes to be enacted upon the most personal of all places, the mother's body. 124, in turn, functions as the maternal body

writ large, so that by entering the house, Beloved seeks to assert her position in the family.

This attempt parallels School Teacher's arrival and therefore functions as an invasion. The final scene in the yard suggests how these two figures coincide and inform one another's role in the novel. While Beloved stands on the porch of the house, the image of School Teacher returns in the character of Mr. Bodwin. The final confrontation in the yard retraces School Teacher's journey, for the appearance of the "white folk" who "rode in" emerges in the shape of Mr. Bodwin, who drives up the road at the exact moment the women begin to gather (Morrison 157).

While Bodwin is an abolitionist, several references in the text tacitly link him to the very system he outwardly denounces. For instance, when Denver leaves the Bodwin home, she comes across a black figurine kneeling on a pedestal with the words "At Yo Service" inscribed on the base. This figurine stands by the back door of the house and can thus be read in relation to the novel's spatial hierarchy. Furthermore, Bodwin's reflection on the toys and trinkets, "the precious things" he once buried by the house contrasts with the more significant "precious things" buried at 124 (i.e., slavery's legacy) (Morrison 259).

Thus, Bodwin, who "hates slavery more than he hates slaves," evokes the sinister cultural ordering embodied in the character of School Teacher (Morrison 137). However, unlike School Teacher, Bodwin's actions are the product of a

certain naivete--illustrated in the fact that he never notices Sethe approaching to attack him. In striking Bodwin, Sethe again attempts to protect her child through violence. However, this time, the community's intervention replaces Sethe's act of rage with one that gestures toward healing. The narrative drama shifts from the baby's body, to Sethe's, to Bodwin's, and ultimately back to Sethe's, but, in this final case, it functions as a communal embrace. This process is reinforced spatially, since the novel enacts a movement from Sweet Home, to 124, the shed where Beloved is murdered, the yard where the women are reunited, and finally back to 124, which "unloaded . . . is just another weathered house" (Morrison 264).

The novel closes by returning to the domestic field. Along with Paul D, the reader retraces his or her steps, walking in through the yard, door, and into 124. However, this space and the aesthetic tradition it evokes now represent new possibilities. When Paul D tells Sethe "'you the best thing You are,'" he encourages her to become aware of her own position as subject (Morrison 273). Sethe's response marks a crucial recognition of self ("'Me?, Me?'"), although one punctuated with an inquisitive rather than assertive tone. The question allows Sethe to move from the position of "defined" to that of "definer"--to borrow School Teacher's terms.

This moment in the novel correlates with the reunification scene in the yard, for it similarly enacts a

connection between characters and opens a new, interstitial place of dialogue. The word "me" that stands suspended between Paul D and Sethe and between assertion and question creates a linguistic field of healing that parallels the encounter in the yard and echoes the image of the "story" Paul D "wants to put next to hers" (Morrison 273). Like the image of the shadow family that holds hands on the way to the fair or Sixo's description of the Thirty-Mile woman who "'gathers the pieces I am,'" the various images of coherence and unification finally resonate in the structure that contains and orders the lives, memories, and hopes of its inhabitants (Morrison 272).

When Paul D first feels the presence of the ghost, he tells Sethe to abandon 124. Sethe's response reflects the importance of home, specifically in relation to her experience as a slave:

This house he told her to leave as though a house were a little thing--a shirtwaist or a sewing basket you could walk off from She who had never had one but this one; she who had left a dirt floor to come to this one; she who had to bring a fistful of salsify into Mrs. Garner's kitchen every day just to be able to work in it, feel like some part of it was hers. (Morrison 22)

This commitment to place that anchors the narrative evokes the sentimental tradition in literature. However, by

incorporating into the domestic field the repercussions of slavery, Morrison points to new critical possibilities.

Morrison's reordering of domestic topology amplifies the critical terrain charted in earlier novels. Revealed in this textual mapping is an understanding of the intricate ways in which topography echoes history and geographical space embodies social and political conflict. The home becomes a charged arena whose continued relation to outside forces triggers a redefinition of private space, vis-à-vis public conditions. Morrison eventually defines home as communal, by constructing mediating areas that bind the domestic field to the external world. Unlike Wilson's "two-story white house, North" and Brent's "loopholes of retreat" the spaces revealed in Beloved allow for a more powerful analysis of slavery and its consequences.

According to Dominick LaCapra, in History, Politics and the Novel, "reading classical texts with a sensitivity to the way they negotiate relations among symptomatic critical and transformative effects may itself be one way to reopen the canon and to counteract the hegemonic function it may serve" (5). Morrison's extended dialogue with domestic/sentimental fiction illustrates how an appropriation of the topological construction crucial to classical texts, coupled with an acute awareness of the ideological framework that guides and structures these aesthetic choices, also provides an opportunity for a reassessment of our literary values. Beloved cannot be dismissed as "sentimental" any more than

the novels that make up the individual parts of this evolving tradition can be simply disregarded as limited representations of black women's experiences. On the contrary, by evoking the legacy of a range of earlier works, Morrison casts these novels into a politically motivated field of interpretation. She thus sheds light not only on the history of slavery, but also on slavery's history as a literary source and subject.

¹. Cited in Henry Louis Gates' introduction to Wilson's Our Nig.

². See Foucault's The Archaeology of Knowledge: and the Discourse on Language for an analysis of the concept of archaeology which, unlike traditional historical assessment, points to "discontinuities, ruptures, gaps, [. . .]" and complements Morrison's project of reading history through the silences (i.e., gaps) of slavery (169).

³. This, in part, is a response to critics of the novel who recognize its connection to domestic fiction but who do not refer to earlier domestic novels by black women in their analyses. For instance, in "Remodeling the Model Home in Uncle Tom's Cabin and Beloved," Lori Askeland reads Beloved in relationship to Stowe's classic novel, positing a dialogue between Morrison's text and certain elements of domestic discourse. However, Askeland does not mention other novels of the period written by African-American women. Without acknowledging Morrison's debt to this tradition, specifically as it relates to African-American women, Askeland's reading and others like it (including Marilyn Chandler's "Housekeeping and Beloved: When Women Come Home" and Arnold Weinstein's "Dis-remembering and Re-membering in Toni Morrison's Beloved") cannot fully assess the scope and function of Morrison's project. Weinstein, for example, argues that "Beloved has unmistakable echoes of Stowe's great book on slavery, and it is possible to read the modern text as a continued meditation on Stowe's two major themes: the mother-child connection . . . and the piecing apart of the human family" (265). However, variations of these themes similarly appear in Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl and

subsequent novels in the emerging African-American sentimental tradition discussed in this chapter.

4. Jacobs, for instance, undermines the traditional marriage plot at the end of her autobiography: "Reader, my story ends with freedom; not in the usual way, with marriage" (201).

5. While Armstrong's discussion in Desire and Domestic Fiction centers around British texts, a similar argument can be made about the role of domesticity in nineteenth-century American women's fiction.

6. See White's "Female Slaves: Sex Roles and Status in the Antebellum Plantation South," which revisits E. Franklin Frazier's 1939 study, The Negro Family in the United States, and suggests that women played a central role in family and communal life.

7. For an analysis of the tension between rural and urban forces in the novel, see Hazel Carby's Reconstructing Womanhood. Carby argues that "Helga's movement within the text, the direction of her journey reproduces the tensions of migration into a structure of opposition between country and city" (172). Furthermore, these migratory patterns evoke the history of slavery and its aftermath.

8. See Hortense J. Spiller's "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book."

9. See Ann Douglas' The Feminization of American Culture, in which Douglas devotes an entire chapter to the phenomenon of dying children in the sentimental novel

10. For an excellent interpretation of this aspect of the novel, See Nancy Armstrong's "Why Daughters Die" (1994).

11. In his introduction to The Location of Culture, Homi Bhabha interprets Morrison's use of space in social, political terms, by discussing what he refers to as "houses of racial memory" (13). However, he does not clearly link these issues to formal aesthetic concerns—a connection crucial to my own reading of the novel's spatial patterning.

12. I am borrowing the phrase used by Morrison in her essay "Unspeakable things Unspoken: The Afro-American Presence in American Literature."

Chapter Four

"What Better Place To Be On the Edge Than the Edge":

Spatialized History in Dogeaters

"With a sudden surge of joy, I knew that I must find a home in this new land." (Carlos Bulson)

"Though I've been living in America for 30 years now, my roots remain elsewhere" (Jessica Hagedorn)

This chapter delineates a significant transition or "generational shift" in the migrant aesthetic and expanding field of ethnic literature traced in this dissertation. As the two contrasting opening quotations suggest, immigrant writers' identification with the homeland and, by extension, with the adopted country has altered through the years. While for Filipino writer Carlos Bulson, America offered the possibility of creating a home in the broader sense of locating a place of belonging, for Jessica Hagedorn this site of cultural association exists mainly in the homeland. Hagedorn's expression of cultural displacement illustrates a recent trend in the way immigrant writers formulate an image of home and establish a more ambivalent and fluctuating relationship to the United States.

As N.V.M Gonzalez and Oscar V. Campomanes argue: "in the generation of Villa and Bulson, the Filipino discovered the United States both as an actual and a virtual cultural space"

(72). The social possibilities envisioned by these earlier writers come to be replaced by a growing sense of doubt and distrust--the outcome of political factors and discriminatory practices discussed later in this chapter and further by the development of images of more flexible or extendable national boundaries. The resulting diasporic conceptualization of space disturbs the categories of inside and outside, public and private, and local and national.

In this chapter, the scope of my interest in spatial tropes widens on two levels. First, both Sent For You Yesterday and Beloved deal with spatial and migratory patterns limited to the confines of United States, since such configurations reflect the specific interests and concerns of the African-American community (i.e., the various forms of dislocation which were the result of slavery and the Great Migration and which often continue to be the outcome of the black urban experience). Secondly, both of these novels portray communities that are separate from but stand in direct relation to the broader culture, a pattern reminiscent of the fiction of the first half of the century, like the novels discussed in the first chapter of this dissertation. Jessica Hagedorn's Dogeaters, on the other hand, represents a more ambiguous and fluid relationship to American society. While the novel illustrates a similar interest in the relationship between place and belonging and between one's sense of community and the development of a personal

identity--issues central to the texts discussed so far--in this instance, the field opens dramatically, as these issues are played out both within and beyond the landscape of the United States. Like the slippery boundaries that separate North from South and white neighborhoods from black ones in Wideman's and Morrison's fiction, the lines that divide the homeland (the Philippines) from the adopted "home" (the United States) play a charged role in Dogeaters--not only in terms of their social and political consequences, but also of the novel's aesthetic texture and its relationship to the tradition outlined in this dissertation.

Hagedorn interrogates the connection between historical consciousness and geographical space, moving away from the more obvious correlation between time and history. In the novel, for instance, Rio cannot remember dates, even though she can describe the places of her youth in exact detail. This spatial recomposition is part of a larger critical movement toward an assessment of geographical locations that engages these elements by relating them directly to historical events, and, in turn, to a reassessment of these incidents. For example, Fredric Jameson argues that

It is at least empirically arguable that our daily life, our psychic experience, our cultural languages, are today dominated by categories of space rather than by categories of time, as in the preceding period of high modernism" (16).

This redistribution of spatial boundaries has particularly suggestive implications for marginal groups. As Cindi Katz and Neil Smith argue, "most recently, space has provided an attractive lexicon for many feminist, postmodernist, and postcolonial inquiries" (67). And space, in these instances, is no longer envisioned as static or apolitical; rather, the way bell hooks, Homi Bhabha or Edward Said, for example, employ spatial constructs suggests a counter-hegemonic engagement in which geographical sites embody ideological and historical forces. Accordingly, the type of spatial assessment central to Hagedorn's project represents a critical shift away from the conventional time (history) and space (geography) dichotomy. Thus, the purpose of this chapter is twofold: first, I am interested in laying out certain critical aspects of the milieu responsible for this transition--delineating direct implications for the ethnic American novel--and, secondly, I will illustrate how Dogeaters fits into this dialogue.

While Morrison's commitment to unveiling slavery leads to a reassessment of sentimental fiction and specifically to the role African-Americans play within this tradition, both as authors and subjects, Hagedorn's revision of the traditional immigrant narrative involves a complex engagement with various contemporary factors--particularly the theoretical frameworks of postcolonial and postmodern theories--and thus it seems to maintain a more tenuous

connection to the writers and works of the earlier generation discussed in the first chapter of this dissertation. Yet Hagedorn's reassessment of the standard themes and tropes of American immigrant novels does not represent a conscious dismissal or rejection of these earlier works; on the contrary, it merely indicates the sociopolitical demands that continue to problematize issues of migration and concomitantly of what it means to be an American. The rise in the number of immigrants from non-Western cultures, the rapid growth and spread of technology on an international scale, the broadening effects of television and American popular culture, and, more generally, the effects of globalization are only a few crucial factors involved in this transition away from depictions of isolated immigrant communities to more subversive productions of "in-between" or "interstitial" spaces, a deviation that, in turn, alters the character of ethnic American fiction.

Unlike the communities depicted in, for instance, Call It Sleep, Jews Without Money, The Studs Lonigan Trilogy and, more recently, The House on Mango Street and What the Hell for You Left Your Heart in San Francisco (another recent Filipino-American novel), the "imagined community" of Hagedorn's Dogeaters posits a representational variation of the way immigrants relate to the American landscape. Dogeaters, however, is not unique in this sense; on the contrary, it can be read as part of a growing list of texts, including The Joy Luck Club, Family Installments, Dreaming in

Cuban, Drown, How the Garcia Girls Lost their Accent, and Breath, Eyes, Memory--works that deal with cultural identity on an international scale and that mediate the contested boundaries that separate the homeland and native culture from the adopted society. Yet what distinguishes Dogeaters from these other texts is the degree to which it not only revises the American immigrant novel but, in many ways, reverses its social and spatial patterns.

By reverse, I mean that Hagedorn appropriates the spatial themes associated with traditional immigrant narratives—for instance, community, home, and the role of a parent as a metonymic representation of the homeland—and she repositions them within the landscape of Philippines, redirecting and altering the character of this tradition. Lisa Lowe states that, in Dogeaters, “Rio’s ‘recollections’ from her standpoint as an immigrant to the United States both mediate and defamiliarize the ‘homeland’” (111). This act of “defamiliarization” appears in a wide range of immigrant texts, where the homeland is often reconstructed out of memories and stories. However, I would argue that Hagedorn goes a step beyond this paradigm by similarly “defamiliarizing” the United States, which in the novel becomes tangible only through the various imported commodities associated with it. For instance, Hagedorn’s manipulation of scenes from American films results in a visual reverse of the immigration process.

In this sense, Hagedorn's project not only draws on but also expands the social and aesthetic terrain charted in earlier immigrant fiction. The texts mentioned above, including those of the earlier generation of writers, maintain a recognizable connection to the image of a homeland--whether ambiguously, as in the case of the earlier texts, or concretely, as in the case of the latter. On the other hand, the action in Dogeaters takes place almost entirely and exclusively in the Philippines--even though it is a Philippines infused with images and objects from American popular culture, one that bears the indelible mark of colonial influence, and thus a space onto which Hagedorn superimposes an American presence.

In order to more fully elucidate this part of my argument, I will briefly point to several examples, juxtaposing Hagedorn's reversals of specific intersecting tropes to the way these elements traditionally appear in a range of immigrant novels. First, in terms of community, many immigrant narratives depict small, tight-knit enclaves that function as metropolitan microcosms, as, for instance, the Jewish-American communities in The Promised Land, Jews without Money and Call It Sleep, the Latino-American community in The House on Mango Street, and the Filipino-American community in What the Hell For You Left Your Heart in San Francisco. Each of these works tacitly maintains an ongoing dialogue with the homeland, since the new

neighborhood integrates elements of the native country by preserving the customs, traditions, and, in a few instances, languages of these places of origin. Benedict Anderson, in a slightly different context, refers to a group's ability to "imagine themselves as communities parallel and comparable" to the homeland (192).¹ The communities depicted in the aforementioned texts remain tied to the notion of a homeland in this way—an association which tends to isolate characters from American society, even while they often strive to integrate into and embrace their adopted culture. In stark contrast, the community Hagedorn envisions—fragmented, indeterminate, and made up of individuals from vastly different walks of life—is, firstly, located in the homeland, rather than in the adopted nation and, secondly, exists in constant relation to an "Americaness" that seeps in through its permeable boundaries.

A brief look at the related image of home further reveals differences. In Jews Without Money, Bread Givers, The House On Mango Street, and What the Hell For . . ., houses function as the physical embodiment of the American dream. For instance, In Jews Without Money, Zechariah Cohen's house in Borough Park stands as the quintessential representation of success for Michael's father: "'Hardwood floors . . .! A first class kitchen range free! Electric lights! A modern water closet! Only America has such water closets!'" (Gold 220). While the payments on the house are lost after Michael's father becomes ill, the "dreams of

success" embodied in the image of the house live on for the father in the hope that his son will become a doctor. Ironically, shortly before discovering the worker's revolution, Michael drifts aimlessly from job to job and describes himself as "nothing, bound for nowhere" (Gold 308). The novel moves between the father's conception of success and Michael and his mother's commitment to their Lower East Side neighborhood, the streets and buildings that formulate the opposing version of home in the text.

Sandra Cisneros' The House on Mango Street similarly shifts between depictions of an imagined, ideal home and the stark realities of the barrio Esperanza grows up in. In this case, the child, rather than the parent, envisions a space representative of the American dream, a house she describes as "Only a house quiet as snow, a space for myself to go, clean as paper before the poem" (108). Like Yezierska's Sara Smolinsky, who longs for "'a place for everything and everything in its place,'" Esperanza envisions an ideal location that not only echoes Woolf's call for a "room" of one's own, but one that further connects issues of gender to those of class and ethnicity (241). In both instances, these creative spaces represent alternatives to patriarchal definitions of home and simultaneously portray life beyond the restraints of poverty and discrimination.

In Dogeaters, on the other hand, this depiction of a model space is drastically undermined. Rio, for instance, reveals that she feels "at home in airports," a statement

that suggests her willingness to abide in the interstices of culture (Hagedorn 247). The characters in the novel move in and out of a wide range of intersecting places, including the country club, the disco (Coco Rico), movie theaters, SPORTEX, and obscure border areas, like La Sultana's Mercedes Benz, which is visited by a host of characters, ranging from the president's wife to the activist Santos Tirador.

Thus, Hagedorn moves beyond the constrictions of an ideal, envisioned space set against the reality of closed off immigrant communities by constructing a series of mediating areas. In this sense, she is part of what Shirley Geok-Lin Lim calls a new movement in immigrant fiction which "reflect[s], address[es], express[es], and reconstruct[s] the late twentieth-century preoccupation with and interrogation of concepts of 'identity,' 'home,' and 'nation' . . ." (294). While these do not necessarily indicate new concerns for immigrant writers, the ways in which such issues are currently being reconfigured lead to alternative possibilities and interpretations—such as more fluid depictions of national boundaries. In his compelling discussion of Filipino-American literature, Oscar V. Campomanes makes a distinction between "a literature of exile and emergence" and one "of immigration and settlement" (51); Dogeaters exemplifies the creative possibilities of the former narrative mode, through a transgressive engagement with the motifs and themes of the latter.

Finally, by looking at how parents relate to the homeland, we can again point to a place of reversal and departure in Hagedorn's revision. In the novels mentioned above, parents function as the carriers of tradition. For instance, in Henry Roth's Call It Sleep, David's mother brings home a picture of corn that reminds her of "Austria and [her] home" (172). For David, the picture creates a small window into this other world, just as his mother becomes the physical embodiment of the homeland, which comes to exist, in a confined sense, both through the stories she tells him and the ones he overhears her telling his aunt Bertha. Similarly, David's search for his father in What the Hell For . . . parallels his quest to reconnect with his native country.

On the other hand, Rio's "Rita Hayworth mother" embodies a distinctly American essence even before she reaches American soil and is lost to her daughter who sees through her facade. This portrait of the mother as an American cultural icon reflects the United States' colonial influence on the Philippines, a factor that cannot be dismissed when analyzing Hagedorn's suggestive play on the more traditional interpretation of the parent as the personification of the native culture, since this American presence (i.e., the presence of the "parent" culture) permeates Philippine society and becomes intricately woven into its cultural fabric.

In unraveling all three of these thematic patterns, Dogeaters poses innovative ways of reading cultural identity. Thus, having briefly illustrated some of the pertinent differences that characterize and distinguish Hagedorn's novel from other immigrant texts, I will now turn my attention to the cultural and theoretical challenges, features, and implications that give rise to these changes and that in various ways occasion transformations in the pattern charted in this dissertation. While there obviously exist a great many social, political, and epistemological factors that constantly provoke changes in the way individuals define themselves in relation to a nation or homeland and thus to the ways in which such relationships are portrayed in literature, I will, for the purposes of clarity and contextualization, limit my analysis to the recent reassessment of history and geography, two central and overlapping issues directly related to the discourse of postmodernism.

II

Most critics generally agree that postmodernism delineates a paradigm shift, altering the way culture is mediated and challenged. Such an exploration expands the parameters of cultural discourse, introducing evocative ways of articulating a range of social and political interests. However, women and ethnic minorities are often missing from this discussion—even though, in many ways, they seem most

crucial to a project that involves probing social institutions and reevaluating power relations. The thought-provoking work feminists and multiculturalists have cultivated produces an enriched understanding of hegemonic structures. Their endeavors, in turn, parallel and echo various postmodern concerns and provide a critical structure for investigating issues of voice, alterity, and indeterminacy.

In his 1987 essay "Ethnic Identity and Post-structuralist Difference," R. Radhakrishnan refers to what he terms the "postmodern paradox," a valorization of marginality that simultaneously dismisses the empowerment of marginal groups. Cornel West echoed this concern in 1989, when he asked whether "the postmodernism debate highlights notions of difference, marginalization, and otherness in such a way that it further marginalizes actual people of difference and otherness" ("Black Culture and Postmodernism" 394). Now, more than ten years later, this and similar questions persist. In part, the problem stems from an inability to move beyond merely calling attention to the limitations of the postmodern project and toward renegotiating the terms and imperatives central to this discourse in ways that expand its framework to include the voices and interests of marginal groups.

Aside from pointing to the problem itself, little has been done to reconsider postmodernism's theoretical terrain and to map out specific sites of agency. One way to

reconcile more abstract epistemological considerations to an assessment of sociopolitical factors entails an evaluation of the various ways in which specific postmodern tropes surface in the art, literature, and architecture of this era. For instance, Fredric Jameson's analysis of John Portman's Bonaventure Hotel posits a relationship between postmodern architectural form and class issues.² This endeavor more prominently displays the social factors that continue to problematize the way individuals see themselves in relation to their cultural surroundings.

Similarly, the lexicon of postmodernism deserves reevaluation. One productive approach involves a reassessment of the term "decentered," which implicitly signifies a condition of pervasive marginality. The use of this popular term has often allowed critics to underhandedly sweep the concerns of marginal groups under the broader terms of postmodern discourse. However, as Philip Brian Harper argues in Framing the Margins, "marginalized groups' experience of 'decenteredness' is itself a largely unacknowledged factor in the 'general' postmodern condition" (4). In his critique, Harper notes that the term "decentered" often produces another traceable hierarchy because it automatically excludes groups who never held a position at the center to begin with. More important, this gravitation toward margins, unlike actual forms of forced displacement and cultural estrangement, represents a critical choice.

Alienating responses to "otherness" often remain veiled under a discourse that seemingly celebrates diversity and multiplicity, without fully addressing the limitations implicit in the way these terms are often applied. For instance, Jean-Francois Lyotard's pronouncement of "the death of grand narratives" in The Postmodern Condition may have us breathing a collective sigh of relief--since it suggests the breakdown of hegemonic structures and seems to open a new space for dialogue; however, what Lyotard proposes as a theoretical replacement proves equally problematic in many ways. For instance, Lyotard's emphasis on "language games" tacitly dismisses the fact that actual forms of social interaction are gender, race, and class inflected. As one scholar notes, "In Lyotard's work, problems of power are put to one side, and his views have led him to a form of relativism" (Madan Sarup 154). In other words, merely evoking the breakdown of a foundational structure, such as history, that produces a distinct version of events and epistemes does not necessary result in an enhanced understanding of those areas generally overlooked by culturally validated accounts. On the contrary, it may, in fact, further detract attention from a range of social concerns.

However, as noted above, I do not wish to suggest that postmodernism is completely irreconcilable with postcolonial,

feminist, and American multicultural theoretical practices. On the contrary, locating specific sites of intersection between the broader discourse of postmodernism and the specific objectives of these other critical orientations may produce more productive engagements. For instance, grounding the terms generally associated with postmodern discourse--such as fragmentation and decentering--in socially conscious ways allows for the insertion of an entire range of concerns, such as racism and sexism.

III

Edward Said's "contrapuntal" readings, Gloria Anzaldua's concept of "borderlands," Homi Bhabha's reference to landscape as a metaphor for national identity, Guillermo Gomez-Pena's emphasis on "transitional identities," and bell hooks' construction of "a community of resistance" represent a range of empowering ways of reading marginal space--ways that take into account the illusion of pervasive "decenteredness" and seek to redress the critical elision of minority groups in postmodern discourse. hooks, for instance, states:

for me this space of radical openness is a margin--a profound edge. Locating oneself there is difficult yet necessary. It is not a 'safe' place. One is always at risk. One needs a community of resistance. (Yearning: Race, Gender and Cultural Politics 149)

The call for a sense of community located in a border area challenges the notion of the breakdown of communication and reinscribes the margin as a site of agency. By evoking this image of cultural affiliation, hooks reconciles an abstract geography to actual places of unification and healing.

Gloria Anzaldua similarly redirects the discussion of marginal space toward locating and defining sites of identification, specifically for Mexican immigrants, although this paradigm can be expanded and adapted to include others. Drawing on images of margins and borders, Anzaldua opens these areas to create a wider field of identification--what she calls a "borderland":

A border is a dividing line, a narrow strip along a steep edge. A borderland is a vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary. It is in a constant state of transition. The prohibited and forbidden are its inhabitants. (3)

This interstitial site provides a new "location of discourse" and produces an intersection between the postmodern trope of "decenteredness" and the actual, physical displacement that is the result of immigration.³

These examples suggest ways in which the terminology of postmodernism is drawn on to reveal sociopolitical exigencies. However, attention to spatial forms and the use of space as an organizing tropological structure are not

simply adopted from the discourse of postmodernism. On the contrary, this critical tendency represents an effort to modulate and redirect the concerns of immigrant and other marginal groups, so that the salient concern with locating a site of identification continues to be articulated—but in a new cultural context. As Edward Soja argues:

Neo-conservative postmodernism is using deconstruction to draw even more obfuscating veils over the instrumentality of restructuring and spatialization, reducing both history and geography to meaningless whimsy and pastiche (74)

On the other hand, the above-mentioned scholars belong to a countermovement that deploys deconstructive terms, such as “decentered,” in ways that refine their focus.

Therefore, the reevaluation of space represents one of the most useful critical resources in postmodern discourse—since analyses of geographical locations reveal various social and ideological concerns, such as the process of uneven development and the cultural isolation of certain communities. Investigations of geographical areas provide a unique opportunity for discussing the interrelated issues of gender, class, and ethnicity, since space is gendered (e.g., domestic versus public spaces), class divided (e.g., poor versus affluent neighborhoods), and often constructed in ways that maintain and reinforce racial and ethnic boundaries (e.g., the black belt and subculture communities, such as Spanish Harlem or China Town). In “Beyond Culture: Space,

Identity and the Politics of Difference," Akhil Gupta and James Ferguson argue that "by always foregrounding the spatial distribution of hierarchical power relations, we can better understand the process whereby space achieves a distinctive identity as a place" (8). I would add that such an investigation also reveals how the inhabitants of a particular place identify themselves or develop a sense of identity in relation to that place.

This reassertion of spatial concerns in critical theory offers distinct possibilities for immigrant writers—for whom issues of national boundaries, allegiances, and adopted communities have always played a vexed role in relation to those of identity. Spaces, in this sense, cannot be interpreted as fixed bodies of land, but rather as complex sources of political dissonance and historical consequence. As Henri Lefebvre notes: "What is an ideology without a space to which it refers, a space which it describes, whose vocabulary and links it makes use of, and whose codes it embodies?" (44). Lefebvre's realignment of geography with ideology illustrates how space provides a fruitful trope of cultural resistance. In what follows, I draw a connection between recent evaluations of geographical space and the assessment of history, arguing that the interfacing of these critical tendencies displaces traditional historical representation and provides a creative resource for immigrant writers.

III

Traditionally space and history have been treated as seemingly opposed concepts, since history is often discussed in relation to time, the counterpoint to space. However, as Doreen Massey notes, "Space is not static, nor time spaceless. Of course, spatiality and temporality are different from each other, but neither can be conceptualized as the absence of the other" (155). Geographical space, in fact, can be read in relation to history, especially if we consider the way David Harvey, Fredric Jameson, Henri Lefebvre, Edward Soja, and others directly associate space with a range of social positions and consequences. Soja, for instances, states:

This emerging postmodern critical human geography must continue to be built upon a radical deconstruction, a deeper exploration of those critical silences in the texts, narratives, and intellectual landscapes of the past, an attempt to reinscribe and resituate the meaning and significance of space in history and in historical materialism. (73)

For marginal groups whose accounts of historical incidents have yet to be articulated, the deconstructive impulse described by Soja provides a critical instrument for the reevaluation of history. In Dogeaters, for instance, Rio worries about having to "invent [her] own history" (Hagedorn 239). Yet her effort to construct an account of her past

becomes a means for articulating the broader historical and political dimensions of Philippine-U.S. cultural relations.

When trying to figure out the sequence of the events that frame her life in the years before she emigrates to the United States, Rio asks herself: "Why is it so difficult to recall? Why didn't I write it all down, keep diaries and journals, photos arranged in chronological order . . .?" (Hagedorn 238). Yet what emerges in the text is a record of events constructed out of inconsistent memories and shifting perspectives, a narrative that runs counter to the traditional formulaic representation of history as a series of chronological events. Her commitment to place, rather than time, grounds Rio's perception of the past, for places, not dates, offer her continuity and connect her to her homeland.

In one of the most constructive interpretations of postmodernism, Linda Hutcheon argues that postmodernism does not mark a retreat from history but rather offers an opportunity for a reassessment of how we acquire a sense of the past. She attributes this recent interest in and refocusing of historical representation to feminist and African-American critical practices. Just as spatial reevaluations in postmodern discourse relate to the projects of postcolonial, feminist, and multicultural theory, the reinsertion of history further illustrates the impact of an anti-conservative strain of postmodern thought. These emerging narratives engage myths, folklore, and stories

passed down through generations and comprise a movement toward a fluid interpretation of historical events and conditions.

Hutcheon applies the term "historiographic metafiction" to "novels that are intensely self-reflexive but that also both re-introduce historical context . . . and problematize the entire question of historical knowledge" (54-55). The concept of "historiographic metafiction" echoes Soja's contextualizing of history in what he calls "postmodern geographies." Soja's reading of space as a means of acquiring a sense of history reflects Hutcheon's own emphasis on how historical issues are reinscribed in postmodern texts. For instance, if history is no longer to be read in strict chronological terms, we can alternatively investigate historical factors via geographical space—highlighting such related issues as boundaries, allegiances, and nationhood.

With this type of historical assessment, the temporal does not necessarily succumb to the spatial. On the contrary, time is embodied in space or, more specifically, an analysis of geographical sites reveals the effects of time—as, for instance, in the image of Rio's family home at the end of Dogeaters. Like Toni Morrison's 124 or William Faulkner's Sutpen's Hundred, the house comes to bear the indelible mark of social conflict.

Ironically, Alacran's company, Intercoco, buys the property and the adjoining land with plans to tear the structure down and replace it with an office complex. Via

its connection to Alacran, the house becomes the embodiment of a range of interpenetrating spaces, including SPORTEX and Mahbuhay Studios, all of which represent the commodification of American goods and, in turn, the demise of the native culture. While Rio leaves the United States, the return to her country of origin continues to expose elements of the adopted culture—which have now left their impression on the most personal of all spaces, her family home. Moreover, the liminal area that surrounds the house and which is described as “squatters’ land” further animates the social and political consequences of the historical fracture that centers the narrative. The area echoes Uncle’s makeshift hovel, which Joey refers to as “the edge.” While Rio and Joey stand apart from each other throughout most of the novel, their paths and histories finally intersect on this spatial plane. This overlap suggests that, like Joey, Rio is symbolically “homeless.”

Space, in this sense, does not run counter to time; rather, as in Bakhtin’s concept of the “chronotope” (space-time), “time . . . takes on flesh, becomes artistically visible; likewise, space becomes charged and responsive to the movements of time, plot and history” (The Dialogic Imagination 84). Bakhtin argues that the interconnectedness of time and space is represented in literature and that permutations in this intrinsic relationship over historical periods reflect broader social, political, and epistemological changes.

IV

As argued throughout this dissertation, related images of home, movement, and geographical boundaries proliferate in American literature. However, as one scholar observes, "The absence of Asian Americans in the literary scholarship on American mobility must be deemed a serious, if historically explainable omission" (Wong 119). The role of Filipinos in relation to images of American mobility and landscape posits a useful starting point for an evaluation of the specific factors and conditions that shape one Asian immigrant community's experience of the United States as cultural space. In what follows, I will briefly discuss some of the historical considerations that frame Hagedorn's project and then move to a closer analysis of the spatial-historical mapping central to her text.

The Philippines was acquired by the United States from Spain in 1898, at the end of the Spanish American War. At this time, classified as "American Nationals," Filipinos were allowed entry into the United States and often worked as cheap field laborers. However, driven by the economic conditions of the Great Depression, the United States government eventually revised its policy on Philippine immigration. Under the 1934 Tydings-McDuffie Act, three major changes were implemented: the Philippines was to be granted independence within a ten year period, Filipinos were

reclassified as aliens, and the number of Filipinos allowed entry into the U.S. was severely restricted to only fifty per year. The 1937 Relief Appropriation act similarly disenfranchised Filipinos in the United States by restricting their access to government assistance. As Ronald Takaki states:

The Relief Appropriation Act . . . gave preference first to American citizens in need of relief and next to needy aliens who had declared their intention to become citizens. But Filipinos had been informed by the Supreme Court that they could not even apply for naturalized citizenship because they were not "White." (332)

Filipinos were given the opportunity and encouraged to return to their homeland. It was only years later, after the enactment of the amendment to the Immigration Nationality Act in 1965, that a new wave of Filipino immigrants arrived in the United States.

Their role as colonial subjects, the reclassification and process of exclusion that altered their position in the United States from American nationals to aliens, and, more recently, their classification under the "model minority" rubric together suggest the range of social tensions and transformations affecting how Filipinos identify themselves in relation to American society. For instance, Takaki states that first wave Filipino immigrants "saw themselves as sojourners to a greater extent than did their counterparts

from China and Japan, for they were from an American territory and thought they could come and go as they pleased" (337). On the other hand, with this illusion shattered, those immigrants who arrived after the 1965 amendment often viewed their relationship to the United States in more complicated terms. The history of the United States' exclusionary practices, the influence of the civil rights movement, and the process of globalization represent a few crucial factors that impact the Filipino-Americans' evolving conception of home, belonging, and national identity.

Motivated by the above-mentioned considerations, Hagedorn creates a narrative that highlights displacement in its spatial ordering. In Dogeaters, the U.S. no longer offers a productive site of identification. Instead, Hagedorn constructs alternative spaces that form a destabilizing "postmodern geography" and reflect broader historical conditions--such as the role of the United State's colonial and (neo)colonial influence on the Philippines. As Rachel Lee observes:

Dogeaters' postrealist style is not 'post' because it avoids limning social relations but because it defies conventions of objective recording. Rather than conveying the upheaval of the Marcos' rule through a panoptic, godlike vision, Hagedorn steeps her narrative in questionable recordings and skewed looks. (78)

Thus, like traditional American immigrant writers, Hagedorn draws on the trope of memory, but she expands the parameters of this subjective mode of representation by including a broader range of shifting perspectives. And, while earlier immigrant narratives evoke memory as a means of constructing familial or personal histories, in Dogeaters these individual recollections provide a critical resource for depicting overarching political conditions.

As a narrative collage that shifts unsteadily between the 1950s and 1980s and accommodates a range of subjective positions, Dogeaters contains two first-person narrators, Rio, the daughter of upper-middle class parents, and Joey, son of a dead prostitute and an African-American service man and adopted son of Uncle, a man with ties to Manila's underworld of sex, drugs, and violence. These two main characters provide distinct perceptual accounts of the historical conditions and events shaping their respective generations (Rio the 1950s, Joey the 1980s) via popular expressive forms—film, radio melodramas, television shows, disco music, and gossip.

The novel opens with the scene of a quaint, snow-covered cottage from the film "All that Heaven Allows," which Rio sarcastically describes as the "perfect picture-book American tableau" (Hagedorn 3). This portrait of the American dream eventually stands against the image of the Gonzaga's family home. The two versions of home frame the narrative, with the

Gonzaga residence ultimately functioning as a commodification of the film representation. However, the attempt to capture the elusive "American" quality of the idealized movie image proves futile, since the former space is, after all, just an illusion. The effort to absorb elements of American culture and to replicate the sense of style, sophistication, and comfort commonly associated with these images is intricately tied to the pernicious capitalist preoccupation with power and self-promotion embodied in the figure of Severo Alacran, who, as stated earlier, comes into possession of the house.

In an interview with Cora Camacho, Alacran admits: "'My enemies claim . . . that I can no longer tell what's authentic from what's fake . . .'" (Hagedorn 21). The two houses that provide a framework for the range of other intersecting spaces encountered in the narrative reflect this difficulty with determining authenticity. Rio's family home is as much a vacuous, commodified fragment as the portrait of the cottage with which the novel opens. By superimposing the cinematic depiction of home onto other images of domestic space in the novel, and particularly onto the Gonzaga family estate, Hagedorn forges a connection between the private and local nature of the latter spaces and the foreign cultural essence of the former.

Scenes from "All that Heaven Allows" and "A Place in the Sun" are similarly replayed in the novel when Rio's grandfather dies, providing another glimpse at the way imported and native elements and spaces intersect. In this

fragmented scene, the narrative shifts between the portrait of Jane Wyman nursing a frail Rock Hudson to Lola Narcisa wiping drool from her husband's mouth, as he lies dying in the American hospital. Rio recalls:

I am confused by the thought of Elizabeth Taylor's one violet eye luminous in black and white, the pristine illusion of elegant deer peacefully grazing outside of Rock Hudson's picture window. In this hospital room there is only our sense of foreboding, heightened by the grayness of bedsheets and medical uniforms, the dim florescent lights, the lizards watching from the corners of the ceiling. (Hagedorn 17)

Elizabeth Taylor is at once an objectified portrait of American beauty and a disembodied and objectifying eye whose gaze transforms the hospital setting into a theater, reconfiguring the private nature of death into a public spectacle. Taylor's voyeuristic glance repeats itself in the lizards watching from the corners of the room—so that the eyes, Taylor's and the lizards', and Rock Hudson's cottage window open a series of related visual spaces that ultimately defamiliarize the hospital scene. The eye, dislodged from its original cinematic frame, peers out onto a foreign cultural context, altering and challenging the nature of the event. For Rio, the experience of death is profoundly disconcerting; however, combined with these incorporated cinematic fragments, the scene creates an expansion and

dramatization of her mounting tension and sense of alienation.

Drawing on a psychoanalytic framework, Laura Mulvey divides the experience of viewing a film into two interrelated concepts, "Recognition" and "Misrecognition." In the former, the viewer identifies with the image on the screen the way a child, in the Lacanian model, first recognizes his or her own reflection in a mirror. This stage leads to the second, "misrecognition," where "the image recognized is conceived as the reflected body of the self, but its misrecognition as superior projects this body outside itself as an ideal ego, the alienated subject" (749). In other words, the connection forged in the original stage of "recognition" is problematized by the realization that the object of the gaze stands as a separate and idealized entity.

In Dogeaters, this process is compounded by the degree of "misrecognition" or alienation that occurs, since the cinematic image poses specific identification problems due to prevailing social and cultural differences. Elizabeth Taylor's eye, for instance, is grafted from a scene in "A Place In the Sun," which Rio claims "is probably too American" for her and her cousin Pucha to fully understand (Hagedorn 15). While Rio and Pucha identify with Taylor's image projected on the screen, the film's unfamiliar context accentuates or magnifies the process of misrecognition. Therefore, these foreign images are positioned in such a way that they do not create a seamless whole with the death scene

onto which they are woven; on the contrary, these depictions are juxtaposed to highlight the scene's central tension, moving beyond the private concerns of the family and toward over-arching social and historical considerations.

In an interview, Hagedorn notes that the American film industry in the Philippines was "a great colonial tool" ("Jessica Hagedorn" 229). She states:

"In our notions of beauty These gods and goddesses of the West were constantly being fed to us. . . . We thought they were exotic. . . . And even in our own movie industry, the big stars of the time were people with more refined features. You weren't going to get the pure Filipino look on screen. A lot of cultural shame is reinforced by these movies. (230)

Thus, by employing these cinematic representations in ways that subtly reveal their produced cultural anxieties, Hagedorn usurps their colonial authority. A film like "All That Heaven Allows" takes on an entirely new meaning when viewed through Hagedorn's interpretive lens. For instance, Jane Wyman was married to former president Ronald Reagan, and Reagan's presidency coincides with a particularly turbulent period in the Philippines that included such transformative events as Benigno Acquinós' assassination, the 1986 People Power Revolution uprising, and Ferdinand Marcos' downfall.

Similarly, Rock Hudson, an American sexual icon, died of AIDS, and since disease plays a crucial thematic role in the

novel--often representing a form of cultural contamination--the image of Rock Hudson sick in bed provides a play on the slippery boundaries separating reality from fictitious representation, past from present, and life from death. Consequently, the connection between film images and the death scene illustrates how the role of American culture in the Philippines often leads to corruption. Thus, Hagedorn does not transparently valorize the seductive trappings of American mass culture, as several critics have argued, but instead incorporates them in manipulative ways that thwart their traditional reception and prescriptive meanings by pointing to irreducible cultural differences.⁴ In After the Great Divide, Andreas Huyssen argues that "It is . . . the recent self-assertion of minority cultures and their emergence into public consciousness which has undermined the modernist belief that high and low cultures have to be . . . kept apart" (194).

Hagedorn's use of popular elements illustrates this critical shift toward an incorporation of these cultural components in ways that dramatize their social and aesthetic import. By collapsing high and low, she reveals how these creative tendencies relate to one another--at times in almost parasitic ways. As Huyssen notes, for minority groups in particular, this interplay has specific political consequences, since their access to "high" or elite culture is limited almost exclusively to corrupted versions of these elements depicted in a range of popular forms. In *Dogeaters*,

American films (low) and historical representation (high) converge on a postmodernist plane of celluloid images and events of sociopolitical consequence. Hagedorn's use of movies and other foreign commodities in the novel reveals how the desire for direct access to American society is often substituted with cinematic depictions that represent an idealized impression of the culture.

The resulting intersections may be classified as part of what Homi Bhabha terms "borderline engagements of cultural difference," which, as he argues, "may confound our definitions of traditions and modernity; [and] realign the customary boundaries between high and low" (2). This endeavor illustrates a critical preoccupation with ways of reading space—since, in part, concepts of high and low reinforce the fixed hierarchies of insider and outsider. By unsettling the established class, race, and gender stratification traditionally represented by these terms, Hagedorn posits a way of challenging these boundaries. The juxtaposition of film segments with the death bed scene is only one example of the novel's preoccupation with the binary opposition of foreign and native elements—as well as national and local interests—and with ways of charting or redrawing the lines of demarcation that shape these conflictual relationships.

For instance, Lola Narcisa claims "that her husband is the first white man stricken with *bangungot*," while Dr. Leary, who represents Western culture, "dismisses the

tropical malady as native superstition, a figment of the overwrought Filipino imagination" (Hagedorn 14). Yet it can never be determined which, if either, diagnosis is accurate--since Rio's grandfather dies in his sleep shortly thereafter. Similarly, the weekly radio series, "Love Letters," which "even the president boasts" watching, draws on native traditions and superstitions and stands in direct contrast to social and political factors in the text (Hagedorn 11). Scenes from "Love Letters" most notably appear during Daisy Avila's interrogation, where the voice of Daisy's captor weaves into and merges with the actors' dialogue. Hagedorn thus dismisses hierarchies and blurs cultural boundaries by contrasting scenes from American films with Rio's recollection of the events of her childhood, indigenous myth with Western ideals, and segments from a local radio show with an insidious backdrop of underground political activities.

In a related example of this type of narrative slippage, a part of the art center--constructed to promote and celebrate foreign culture--collapses, burying workers in the rubble.⁵ The center, described as erected on "a foundation of flesh and blood," functions as a symbol for the novel's overall portrayal of Filipino culture, a place inhabited by both the ghosts of underpaid workers and the elite who glorify foreign films and anything imported (Hagedorn 135). The commodified object, foreign films, provides visual

pleasure, while the exploitative conditions upon which the center is built remain an undermining presence in the text. The local culture, represented in the figure of the workers, ultimately functions as a physical sacrifice to foreign popular culture.

Before the opening of the center, the president's wife orders that the streets be cleaned, houses painted, and plastic flowers planted along every block. Joey recalls that even Uncle's shack—described as "the edge" and thus the spatial antithesis to the cultural "center"—receives a fresh coat of paint. He states: "Funny thing is, it all looks fake. Painted scenery in a slum no one's going to bother visiting" (Hagedorn 130). The first lady's efforts to reconfigure the space surrounding the newly-constructed edifice suggests a desire to accommodate foreign culture and to bridge the gap between local space and foreign commodities. However, the collapse of part of the cultural center illustrates the inherent fragility of this forged connection. While the center functions as a place where people go to view scenes of other areas projected on a screen, the effort to transform the appearance of the local space similarly embodies a drive to escape reality by creating an illusion. However, this endeavor ultimately fails, since the building's collapse disrupts the creation of the desired facade.

Chitiquin describes the first lady's project as an "edifice complex," a longing for capitalist expansion linked

to feelings of inferiority which are, in turn, ultimately connected to the Philippines' charged relationship to the United States and to an effort to emulate American culture (emphasis added, Hagedorn 134). This word play bridges the gap between personal fixations and the inherent social and political impulses that shape them. In this sense, the first lady's obsession provides an expanded and more overtly politicized version of Alacran's enterprise. These two textual strands form an imbricated narrative about the nature of public space and create a symbolic index for a series of other spatial concerns in the novel.

Rio's father claims that "Alacran built his empire on shit: bullshit" (Hagedorn 65). His comment tacitly points to a range of underlying issues, such as the process of uneven development, the exploitation of workers, and, more generally, the greed that lies at the core of Alacran's initiatives. Furthermore, the statement suggests the intrinsic fragility of the project's foundation. Like the first lady's cultural center, "built on a foundation of flesh and blood," Alacran's empire, metaphorically constructed on excrement, is also likely to collapse. The pattern charted in both instances can be further read in relation to other overlapping spatial tropes.

Like the cultural center, various other places in the novel are described as either haunted, contaminated, or somehow reconfigured. Such locations serve multiple purposes

and function as "heterotopias." Michel Foucault defines these types of spaces as follows:

There are also, probably in every culture, in every civilization real places--places that do exist and that are formed in the very founding of society--which are something like counter-sites, a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which the real sites, all the other real sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted. ("Of Other Spaces" 24)

Foucault goes on to say that these locations may contain or represent opposing places in a single site. For Foucault, the ship is the quintessential example of a heterotopic space, since it provides structure in an ambiguous and alternating field. Following this model, airports similarly function as prime examples of heterotopic space--particularly in our present era of globalization--since they represent a specific place through which to read and engage a range of other related cultural areas. In Dogeaters, Rio claims that she feels most at home in airports, in a liminal and suspended space between the United States and the Philippines. In turn, her recurring dream of failed flight reveals her fear of not ever locating an actual place of identification.⁶ Instead of choosing one place over the other, she finally comes to embrace the site that connects and provides her access to both.

Other places in the novel similarly function as "heterotopias," revealing the historical, political, and ideological forces that structure specific areas and, furthermore, suggesting how the intention or culturally sanctioned design of certain sites can be altered or challenged. For example, Severo Alacran's house is described as "not a home but a museum" (Hagedorn 18). Here the private sphere comes to be reinterpreted as a public institution. In the case of the supper club, on the other hand, the character of the site changes from ostentatious and public to covert and semi-private. Both instances reveal how a single location can contain two conflicting impulses.

The abandoned supper club, described as "a white building with fake marble columns . . . [and] statues of half-naked nymphs and satyrs," is turned into a place used for exotic dancing (Hagedorn 74). The naked statues represent a kitsch appropriation of traditional Western aesthetics and contrast sharply against the actual bare bodies of the dancers. Thus the local erotic scene posits a direct violation of the pseudo-elite culture embodied in the physical structure. The dust that covers everything in the building further suggests how the original purpose of the space has been undermined.

In a related sense, for Romeo Rosales, Alacran's department store, SPORTEX, goes from being a place that "promise[es] air-conditioning, escalators, seductive displays of imported merchandise, and innocuous piped muzak" to the

site of political chaos (Hagedorn 159). The same culture that provides Romeo a glimpse of fame and fortune also embodies the insidious political instruments that lead to his destruction when he is wrongly accused of killing Senator Avila. By having the scene of Romeo's demise played out before the looming backdrop of the SPORTEX building, Hagedorn again contrasts politics and historical consequences with the seemingly benign portrait of mass culture and coveted American goods. Romeo ultimately functions as a sacrifice to capitalism and, by extension, to the political corruption that lies at its core.

As with the image of the sign which reads "'You are now entering the Monte Vista Golf and Country Club Please deposit all firearms here,'" reflections of wealth, refinement, and comfort conflict with symbols of war and political unrest (Hagedorn 184). This contrasting framework serves to hinder these spaces by revealing their inherent flaws and contradictions. For instance, Rio's father is a stockholder and member of a country club "where the magnificent greens are rumored to be infested with cobras, and . . . the ceilings of the . . . dining pavilions are a nesting-place for bats" (Hagedorn, 59). In this instance, contamination represents a subversive force that challenges opulence and privilege. Furthermore, since this location is linked to Severo Alacran, it can also be read in relation to a series of other areas in the text, including SPORTEX, Mabuhay Movie Studios, Apollo Records, and, on a more

personal level, Baby's body--which moves the reader away from the public realm and toward the private and intimate field of the human form.

Severo and Isabel Alacran's daughter, Baby, represents the cultural and political contamination that lies at the core of her parents' activities.⁷ A doctor tells the parents: "think of your daughter's body as a landscape, a tropical jungle whose moistness breeds this fungus'" (Hagedorn 29). As Michel Foucault argues, "the phenomenon of the social body is the effect . . . of the materiality of power operating on the very bodies of individuals" (Power/Knowledge 55). By spatializing the body in these terms, Hagedorn draws a connection between the manifestation of disease and broader sociopolitical contamination. Thus, this example adds human dimensions to the more abstract sociopolitical factors that shape the spatial trajectory charted in the novel.

The interplay of this range of spaces, bodily and architectural, private and public, and local and national, in turn, reveals a broader impulse to thwart the original intention and function of these sites by constructing alternative areas of identification and resistance. In this sense, the overlap in spaces illustrates the emergence of an imagined community, since all characters in the text connect to these areas in different yet related ways. For instance, while Alacran owns SPORTEX, Dolores and Tita Florence visit the store every weekend; Trini works there; Romeo is attacked

in front of it; and even the janitor at Coco Rico owns one of their tee shirts.

However, this symbolic field is not exclusively defined in terms of physical locations; on the contrary, the correlation between linguistic and actual spaces--revealed, for instance, in the gossip that circulates through the different areas and classes in Manila--plays a crucial role in the development of these interstitial sites of identification. While Hagedorn subverts the standard uses and interpretations of space, she similarly devalues coordinating forms of authorized discourse by using gossip as an organizing linguistic model. As Benedict Anderson argues, "Much the most important thing about language is its capacity for generating imagined communities, building in effect particular solidarities" (133). Thus, just as the creation of alternative areas provides a means for envisioning new locations of affiliation, the use of specific forms of language--in particular gossip--helps build an over-arching, connective framework.

In the novel, gossip opens a space that allows characters to move between public and private areas and to enter those places that seem socially impenetrable. In other words, gossip about the president and his wife and about movie stars creates a sense of access into the lives and activities of those who seem most removed from the local culture. Furthermore, gossip undermines culturally validated

accounts of historical significance, such as William McKinley's speech and Jean Mallet's The Philippines--since, in both instances, excerpts from these works appear couched in local rumors and small talk. For instance, a brief excerpt from Jean Mallet's 1846 historical narrative and Joey's account of his mother's death form contiguous narratives.

The Mallet section begins with a description of "the most inaccessible lairs of . . . wild mounts," inhabited by "small Negroes" who are "chased out of their homes . . . [or] taken prisoners" (Hagedorn 41). This emphasis on an ambiguous place of identification, race, and homelessness intersects with Joey's narrative, since he too is described as coming from a mixed cultural background and finds an alternative site outside the parameters of acceptable society to call home. Similarly, Mallet describes one of these "Negritoes" named Panchote as "not lacking in intelligence" and "very mischievous" (Hagedorn 41). Again, the description applies to Joey who uses these very traits in manipulative ways to disrupt the hierarchical social structure inscribed in Mallet's account.

Furthermore, while Mallet's narrative seems to rely entirely on empirical data, Joey fashions his out of gossip and local legends. He states: "This is what they tell me, this is what I've chosen to believe. They say Zenaida's ghost still haunts that section of the river Boy-Boy claim's he's seen her more than once, but I don't believe

him" (Hagedorn 42). Joey sifts through the gossip and chooses those aspects of the story he wishes to appropriate in the construction of his own account. The resulting fragmented narrative stands against Mallet's straightforward, yet obviously constricted account of Philippine culture. The two textual strands play against each other, until the deconstructive impulse of Joey's tale finally undermines the integrity of Mallet's report.

By discrediting Mallet's text, Hagedorn suggests that gossip and myths are useful and valid resources for the creation of an expanded historical narrative. The resulting account moves beyond the restrictions of traditional historical modes of assessment toward an engagement of a range of cultural materials, including gossip, newspaper articles, and segments from talk shows. This subjective rendering, in turn, accommodates various voices, positions, and locations in the text, since it provides a means for moving through different areas—from private to public—and allows for the insertion of a range of issues and causes. For instance, Cora Camacho's show, "Girl Talk," displaces the personal concerns of individuals' lives and displays them in a public format, creating an alternative version and rearranging or inverting the nature of such matters by forging a connection between private issues and public interests.

As Lisa Lowe argues, in Dogeaters, gossip "is parasitic upon the details of 'private life' It derides the separation of 'public' and 'private' spheres, transgressing these separations symbolic of bourgeois order" (115). While Lowe compellingly relates gossip to postcolonial interpretations of "rumors" as a means of constructing an oppositional public discourse, I would add that, in Dogeaters, gossip plays a part in the overall conceptualization of alternative spaces that functions as an integral part of the novel's general emphasis on cultural mapping. Coco Rico, for example, plays such a role in the text--since here characters from all walks of life meet and exchange stories that range from gossip to local myths, and they, in turn, form a community that transgresses traditional spatial and cultural boundaries.

For Andres and Joey, Coco Rico functions as a "counter-habitational" site (Said, Virilio), since both identify the nightclub as their home. Joey describes Coco Rico as "a safe place, cool and dark and easy on the eyes" (Hagedorn 32). In this sense, Coco Rico physically embodies the private, covert, and illicit nature of gossip. Thus, gossip is the primary discourse of this "imagined community," while the dance hall functions as its structuring locale. Furthermore, gossip serves a binding function, since it allows spaces to intersect in various ways. For instance, after the collapse of part of the cultural center, the crowd gathered at the club discusses the matter openly in a conversation that moves

from bare facts to superstition--when Andres suggests the center is haunted by the ghosts of dead workers.

In City of Words, Tony Tanner argues that "There has always been a highly developed awareness of space in American writing, and the compulsion to erect a verbal world, map out a lexical playfield, to triumph over vertigo, diffusion, and victimization" (39). Hagedorn employs "tsismis" (gossip) as a subversive discursive form, connecting the American preoccupation with spatial-linguistic mapping to the specific concerns of the Filipino and Filipino-American communities.⁸ Rio, for instance, refers to "the juicy gossip that is the center of our lives" (Hagedorn 66). By spatializing gossip in these terms, Hagedorn moves away from traditional hierarchies and constructs an oscillating center capable of traversing private and public, as well as local and international boundaries.

The numerous letters Rio receives from Pucha in the years following her arrival in the United States illustrate the way in which gossip and, by extension, Rio's and Pucha's memories provide such an intervening space in the text. Pucha states, "'Rio, you've got it all wrong,'" and proceeds to include her interpretation of events (Hagedorn 249). This exchange narrows the space separating both countries and, on a more personal level, isolating individual characters. For both Rio and Pucha, gossip intersects with memories and, in turn, memories take the place of history. Frustrated with Rio's account of her past, Pucha writes: "'I just want you to

get my damn history straight, Rio--puwede ba, it matters to me'" (Hagedorn 249). Thus, constructed in part out of a series of rumors and dinner time gossip sessions, the evolving narrative comes to embody a historical drive; and it is ultimately through the insertion of this unregulated and seemingly inconsequential form of discourse that an oppositional account of social and political incidents and their effects emerges.

As Foucault argues, "the present epoch will perhaps be above all the epoch of space . . . of simultaneity . . . of juxtaposition . . . of the near and far . . . the side-by-side, of the dispersed" (22). Hagedorn's spatial mapping of the historical incidents that shape U.S.-Philippine relations represents this drive to reenvision space and our relationship to specific geographical locations. Part of a new group of writers who seek to inhabit those in-between areas that paradoxically both separate and unite the homeland and the United States, Hagedorn draws on the postmodern tropes of margins, borders, and decentering to respatialize the ethnic American novel. The range of spatial tensions depicted in Dogeaters function as emblems for the larger transformation of the Philippines that occurs as a result of colonial and (neo)colonial pressures.

In this sense, Dogeaters charts a site of cultural resistance and challenges notions of isolated and insular communities, assimilation, and cultural identity by providing

an alternative terrain of identification. Between the Philippines and the United States, Tagalog and English, myth and pop culture, gossip and history, and past and present, Hagedorn creates a symbolic field that promotes a reevaluation of national and aesthetic boundaries.

1. While Anderson refers specifically to Creole communities in the New World, a similar cultural framework applies to twentieth-century immigrant communities in the United States.

2. See Jameson's Postmodernism or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism.

3. For an interpretation of Foucault's concept of the "locations of culture," see The Archaeology of Knowledge.

4. For an example of such a critical evaluation of the novel see Leonard Casper's "Bangungot and the Philippine Dream in Hagedorn" (1990). And for a closer analysis of these types of critical responses of the novel, see Rachel Lee's The Americas of Asian American Literature.

5. This incident is based on actual events.

6. It would be interesting to read this image of falling in relation to positive representations of flight in Morrison's Song of Solomon and Paule Marshall's Praise Song for the Widow, and also in connection to another instance of failed flight in Ng's Bone. In Bone, for instance, Ona's suicide echo's Rio's Dream: "I saw Ona Flying. Somewhere, I was circling after her, but . . . couldn't follow . . . suddenly, the news about Ona's death came rushing back . . . another word came: Escape" (Ng 150). In both instances, flight is associated with issues of ethnicity, cultural identification, and a desire for escape.

7. As Susan Evangelista notes: "There are a number of strange illnesses in the book, in 'good' families, in which there is so much corruption beneath the surface that one would expect it to manifest itself in odd ways" (49).

8. Gossip also plays a central role in Bienvenido Santos' What the Hell For You Left Your Heart in San Francisco and Ninotochka Rosca's State of War (1988). In What the Hell For . . ., for instance, "chismis" is referred to as "the international Filipino pastime" (Santos 81). Thus, in Santos' novel, as in Dogeaters, gossip creates a linguistic/spatial nexus between the United States and the Philippines.

Chapter Five

"And the Continents Pulled Away Slowly": Memory and Migration in Cristina Garcia's Dreaming in Cuban

"The exile is someone who thinks imagination is a place."

(Gustavo Pérez Firmat)

"The space of the foreigner is a moving train, a plane in flight, the very transition that precludes stopping." (Julia Kristeva)

In her first novel, Dreaming in Cuban, Cristina Garcia maps the familial and political tensions that create a geography of loss for Cuban-Americans. Writing on the fault lines of exile, Garcia, like Jessica Hagedorn, blends native rituals and motifs with an American postmodern sensibility, producing a text that reappropriates non-Western traditions within an American cultural context. By drawing on the trope of the journey, which--as I will argue--has played a salient role in American literature from its inception, Garcia charts the space between Cuba and the United States, Spanish and English, past and present, and ultimately family and self.

Several readings of Dreaming in Cuban specifically and of contemporary Cuban-American literature more generally stress the importance of creative negotiations between native (Cuban) and adopted (American) creative resources. For instance, in her seminal study, Cuban-American Literature of

Exile, Isabel Alvarez Borland states that "the Cuban-American production at its best is a mix of Latin American and North American literary traditions, a production that borrows from both, a writing of Cuban culture in English" (155). Alvarez Borland provides a rich interpretation of the social and historical factors shaping this emerging body of literature, but--while she stresses the importance of the English language--her analysis falls short when it comes to exploring how these writers utilize American formal practices in their works and, in turn, how they expand the parameters of American fiction through their reappraisals.

Similarly, in his essay "Cuban-American Literature," Ricardo L. Ortiz argues that the 1992 publication of Garcia's novel ushered in a new era of Cuban-American writing--as a result of its broader appeal to a "mainstream" American audience. He claims that the novel's popularity is due in part to Garcia's ability to position herself in a more general tradition of writing in the United States by immigrant women and women of color. While in content, Dreaming in Cuban is profoundly "Cuban," in general form and in more local aesthetic strategies, it owes a great deal to a set of non-Cuban literary foremothers, from Toni Morrison to Amy Tan. (Ortiz 192)

Ortiz rightly detects an emerging creative dialogue between Garcia, Morrison, and Tan, although he does not define what he means by "more local aesthetic strategies." Perhaps he

is, in part, referring to what he later calls "The intense lyricism of [Garcia's] prose" which "invites, rather than alienates her reader . . ." (Ortiz 193). However, this lyrical quality, which he also associates with Tan and Morrison and thus, more generally, with a feminist, multicultural American expressive form, also appears in a range of Cuban works--such as Guillermo Cabrera Infante's Tres Tristes Tigres, a novel that, like Dreaming in Cuban, contains multiple perspectives and voices. Furthermore, by offering only two contemporary examples of the multicultural aesthetic tradition he sets up in his discussion, Ortiz fails to take into account commensurable thematic and stylistic features--such as nostalgia, memory, and fragmentation--in earlier ethnic American literature. While it makes sense to situate Dreaming in Cuban in contextual relation to other recent multicultural American novels--especially since there are striking similarities worth noting--it might also be extremely useful to refer further back to the broader legacy of ethnic writing in the United States.

The difficulty with tracing a tradition of ethnic American fiction that underlies Ortiz's otherwise insightful reading of Garcia's novel points to a larger problem in making distinctions between what is fundamentally "Cuban," "American," or even "multicultural" about the text. Ortiz ultimately notes that "It would be wrong . . . to lump Garcia exclusively with Tan or Morrison or with the Latin American magical realists whose work her writing might also recall"

(193). Indeed, it would be inappropriate to force any writer into a restrictive ethnic classification or to codify works of fiction based on general aesthetic categories, such as magic realist--especially since literary texts often resist or work toward unsettling these generic terms in the first place.

Nonetheless, in an effort to chart a tradition, it is important to discern points of cultural intersection or confluence--as I've done throughout this study. Thus, rather than simply jettisoning any project that seeks to trace a stylistic lineage to a set of literary texts--American and/or Cuban--in a work like Dreaming in Cuban, we need to begin with the premise that such an endeavor will, by its very nature, lead in multiple directions. In other words, rooted in international concerns, ethnic writing often oscillates between disparate creative and cultural orientations, producing multidimensional narrative styles. For instance, Dreaming in Cuban incorporates magical realist elements, then suppresses their utopian thrust, and moves instead toward a postmodern, depthless vision where the marvelous functions as a commodity.

William Luis' metaphor for this type of cultural/aesthetic interaction is dancing. He states:

The coming together of Latino-Caribbean and Anglo-American people is a . . . dance between two cultures. For some, the dominant culture leads and the other follows; for others, the recessive one

becomes assertive. However, both listen and dance to the same tune in the same geographical space. Although critics may argue about which culture has the greater impact at any given historical moment, there is no question that one affects the other and that neither remains the same. (189)

To extend and somewhat complicate Luis' approach, I would argue that the music (i.e., a text's formal direction) can change at any point--altering the mood and form of this exchange--as it does several times in Dreaming in Cuban, both literally and figuratively (from Debussy to Bene More to The Ramons). By positioning oneself within these pivotal transitions, one gains a better understanding of the multiple forces--aesthetic, ideological, and historical--shaping Cuban-American literature specifically and ethnic writing in general. This critical posture not only provides an occasion for a sustained consideration of ethnic fiction; it also allows for a fuller analysis of how these works redefine American literature.

As argued throughout this dissertation, multicultural texts are often treated in reductive ways. According to Eliana Ortega and Nancy Saporta Sternbach, this is especially the case for Latina writers, whose works have "been the object of more ethnological studies than literary ones" (5). Similarly, Thomas D. Boswell and James R. Curtis note that, until recently, Cuban-American "works were interpreted more as political harangues than examples of serious literature"

(152). This tendency to focus unilaterally on extra-literary concerns both delimits the overall significance of these narratives and precludes an account of how social and political factors are embedded in a work's form and texture.

Werner Sollors offers one corrective approach, reading the tensions between foreign and local cultures in terms of a "consent" and "descent" model. Through his use of this dialectal strategy, Sollors rejects strict sociological analyses or ones that treat aesthetic concerns as ancillary and instead develops a more encompassing interpretation of ethnic literature in the United States. Sollors notes that "The tension between consent and descent sometimes expresses itself as an uneasiness about the incongruity of putting new world content into old-world forms or minority writing into majority forms" (237). Cristina Garcia partly resolves this issue in her novel by conspicuously revealing these tensions and inconsistencies, rather than concealing them under the veneer of a unified narrative form. Dreaming in Cuban, therefore, offers a unique opportunity for observing the broad spectrum of influences--both political and formal--that shape ethnic American fiction.

Garcia, for instance, limns a magical journey, a trope that allows her to thematize the exile's relationship to Cuba and the United States as a struggle between margins and centers. A variation of the enduring tradition of journey narratives in the United States--which includes James Fenimore Cooper's The Pioneers, Mark Twain's The Adventures

of Huckleberry Finn, Herman Melville's Moby Dick, Henry James' Wings of the Dove, and Jack Kerouac's On the Road—Garcia's motif allows her to incorporate Cuban cultural elements within the broader framework of American writing. In the following section, I will provide a general overview of the journey narrative, in order to offer a more precise interpretation of Garcia's playful and at times subversive appropriation of this genre.

II

While the previous chapters have dealt, to varying degrees, with distinct spaces (the city, the domestic sphere, and even the more abstract, conceptual sites of Hagedorn's Dogeaters), this chapter focuses primarily on the "non-space" of the journey—the quintessential trope of interstitiality. In its fluid form and its depictions of border-crossings, the journey narrative is perhaps the ethnic genre par excellence. The form of the journey recalls the actual dislocations and transmigrations that shape the immigrant experience. Much of immigrant fiction traces or at least mentions one journey, the migration from the country of origin to the United States; and, even in those instances where migration is not directly treated, it still informs the text. Recently, however, ethnic writers have begun to chart multiple journeys in their novels, creating more supple and amorphous environs from which to explore culturally relevant issues, such as nostalgia, separation, and loss. Some contemporary works

that incorporate these types of journeys include: Bone, Family Installments, The Marks of Birth, Praise Song for the Widow, and three texts that I will look at more closely in the following section--Crossings, Song of Solomon, and Breath, Eyes, Memory.

In her seminal study, The Journey Narrative in American Literature, Janis P. Stout discusses several types of journeys, including the escape and quest, and a wide range of texts, from western novels to the works of the Beat Generation. However, outside of a few brief remarks, she consciously excludes ethnic literature, arguing that "American minority cultures have their own directional values, and an analysis of journey patterns by a scholar having specialized knowledge of Chicano and other minority literatures is much to be desired" (emphasis added, Stout 10). This methodological premise results in a type of "separate but equal" critical approach responsible for the continued marginalization of multicultural literature. Stout's statement belies the fact that, as residents of the United States, these writers are influenced significantly by similar cultural and experiential considerations as those explored in her study--granted that their specific circumstances present added challenges. The absence of these texts from Stout's overall project produces an incomplete representation of the workings of this genre, since ethnic

fiction enriches its general character, reinvigorates its tropes, and affects its development.

Thus, my analysis of the journey in ethnic American literature and particularly in Garcia's Dreaming In Cuban is, in part, an effort to redress this critical omission. Some prevalent variations of this trope, as they appear in multicultural fiction, include: slave narratives (such as Jacobs' Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl), great migration narratives (such as Paul Lawrence Dunbar's The Sport of the Gods), novels of immigration (such as Roth's Call It Sleep--specifically the prologue), narratives of dislocation (such as M. Scott Momaday's The Way to Rainy Mountain) and, more recently, novels of multiple journeys and of the return to the homeland (such as those mentioned earlier in this section). If spatial concerns play a crucial role in ethnic literature, then movement through and beyond the American landscape posits a distinct way of negotiating or redefining place. For immigrant authors, this type of mobility traditionally denotes liberation from familial as well as cultural constraints and signals possibilities for personal advancement.

In New York Jew, for instance, Alfred Kazin recalls how he "idolized" his father for

the connection with America-at-large that he had made as a partner on the Union Pacific Railroad. He had gone West with the railroad, had been offered a homestead, had seen the great country

that my illiterate, housebound mother would never know. (10-11)

Kazin revises the westward journey, a master trope in American fiction, to reflect an immigrant perspective. Although not a conqueror of space in the traditional sense, the father here stands apart from the mother, whose status as "housebound" makes her a tragic figure in her son's eyes. This example accrues further significance when read in relation to other immigrant narratives that portray dwellings and ghettos as oppressive spaces and markers of intense racism.

In mimicking the directional pattern of American conquest, Kazin's father achieves a sense of freedom not afforded to those who remain trapped in tight-knit, immigrant communities. According to Leslie A. Fiedler, "All flights, the Jewish experience teaches, are from one exile to another Fleeing exclusion in the Old World, the immigrant discovers loneliness in the New World . . ." (83). If the journey has come to represent a series of painful dislocations for Jews, as Fiedler notes, Kazin's appropriative play on the trope of westward movement points to new possibilities.

This notion of escape--which often operates as a subtext of the journey narrative--deserves further attention, especially since it simultaneously hints at liberation (i.e., what the individual moves toward) while inevitably remaining tied to images of oppression and conquest (i.e., what the

individual moves away from). This underlying dialectical tension plays a particularly charged role in ethnic fiction, where various sociopolitical factors determine the desire or need for escape. For instance, Dreaming in Cuban has as its backdrop the Cuban Revolution, while Julia Alvarez deals with the affects of the Trujillo dictatorship in How the Garcia Girls Lost Their Accents by tracing the impact of emigration from the Dominican Republic on four sisters; and in African-American great migration novels—including The Sport of the Gods, The Autobiography of an Ex-Coloured Man, and, more recently, Jazz—the promise of the North stands against extreme racism in the South.

However, to further complicate this matter, tremendous pain and regret very often accompany escape. After all, homes, families, and entire histories are sometimes abandoned in this act, and these losses figure prominently in the ethnic journey narrative. In other words, for every individual who leaves, there is a "housebound" (i.e., "nation-bound" and/or "allegiance-bound") friend or relative who stays behind. Therefore, through the journey motif, ethnic writers often seek to actively mediate the charged terrain of separation and loss. In Dreaming in Cuban, Garcia does this through various formal and thematic devices—including the incorporation of magical episodes and epistolary sections and through an emphasis on memory as a historical resource. Thus, while often built upon the escape motif, which, as Sam Bluefarb notes "runs broad and deep" in

American literature, ethnic journeys document additional sociopolitical considerations (155). The characters of these works do not "light out" in Huck Finn's youthful, adventurous manner, nor do their journeys revolve around an obsessive quest for an untenable goal, like Melville's Captain Ahab, and, finally, unlike their expatriate counterparts, their decision to flee the homeland is generally determined by necessity rather than by whim or desire.

In his essay "Black Literature and the American Mainstream," J. Lee Greene traces the role of the journey trope in black fiction, arguing that northern migration functions as a transgressive counterstrain to the westward errand. He states:

As the prototypical American traveled West in search of his New Eden, the prototypical black sought the same principles of Americanism (individual freedom and opportunity) in the North, his symbolic New Eden, the Promised Land. Thus, for the black American writer the North embodies the thematic, mythic, and symbolic concerns used to represent black experiences and aspirations in America. (23)

By setting up this parallel framework, Greene suggests that the novels of northern migration, beginning with the slave narratives, echo and amplify this tradition, particularly through the introduction of additional pressing factors--such as those mentioned above. For example, as one great

migration scholar notes, "as long as offspring, relatives, and friends remained in the South, psychologically and emotionally relocation was much more convoluted and, perhaps, more complicated" (Darlene Hines-Clark 134). The introduction of this type of convolution creates an alternative to the straightforward trajectory outlined in the traditional journey narrative (i.e., the move westward). One of the most significant contributions to this revised form is Toni Morrison's Song of Solomon, which, by retracing the journey north through a symbolic return to the landscape of the South, marks a crucial departure from the uni-directional propensity delineated in a range of travel narratives, both by "mainstream" and "marginal" authors.

Thus by laying claim to this tradition, multicultural writers have both expanded its general form and further affirmed their role in American culture. The latter is of particular relevance here, since, from the earliest examples of this form, the acquisition of space has corresponded with the attainment of power. For instance, early American journey narratives dealt with the over-arching theme of possession through the trope of the errand. As Sacvan Bercovitch notes in The Rites of Assent, "As migration, then, the errand rationalized the expansive and acquisitive aspects of settlement. As pilgrimage, the errand provided for internal control by rooting personal identity in social enterprise" (33-34). In other words, the errand functioned

as a valorization of the self through an act of geographical mapping. The reinscription of this motif and the related reconceptualization of space in ethnic literature operates as a similar form of self-assertion through a "remapping" of the landscape.

In his study of "ethnic semiosis," William Boelhower stresses the importance of the map and the act of mapping in defining the American character. The map, according to Boelhower, was a semiotic system used by the early European settlers that resulted in a type of symbolic arrogation. For instance, he notes that, by removing Native Americans from their maps, these settlers created a geographical fiction, which, in turn, imposed a new order. Boelhower states that "In the blank spaces of the map, where the map is silent, the ethnic factor lurks . . ." (Through a Glass Darkly 56). And it is to those critical lacunae that multicultural fiction continuously returns in efforts to examine the broader social, political, and economic factors embodied in these spatial motifs.

Furthermore, Boelhower stresses the importance of the errand into the wilderness in relation to this processes of mapping, arguing that "According to the dynamics of the map, there was only one verb to express the process of building a homeland and it was an imperative: EXPAND!" (74). Map and journey are bound to one another in a reciprocal manner. The map, as a document of conquest, empowers the errand, and the errand, in turn, further validates the map. In other words,

the map represents a reification of the early European settlers' objectives. In this sense, the journey motif--which ultimately echoes and modifies this initial historical example--provides an ideal resources for the complementary acts of remapping and rewriting the United States.

It is through this dual process (i.e., remapping/rewriting) that the journey narrative provides a sense of the cultural exigencies that undergird notions of place and belonging. If, as Michel Foucault observes, "the geographical discourse which justifies frontiers is that of nationalism," then narratives that question, challenge, or rearrange frontiers are propelled by a desire to probe nationalist interests and tendencies (Power/Knowledge 73). Thus, by unfixing the trope of the American frontier, such narratives, including the examples I will discuss in the following section, stake out new conceptual territories and set the stage for a more extensive reconsideration of national and international confines.

III

In her 1968 autobiographical novel, Crossings, Chuang Hua charts the multiple journeys undertaken by her protagonist, referred to only as Fourth Jane. Most striking about Hua's meditation on the nature of geographical and emotional dislocation is her ability to reveal the resulting loss and confusion to the reader through her minimalist, restrained prose. The narrative, for instance, rarely

indicates temporal changes or shifts in voice, so that different events, places, and characters blend seamlessly into one another, forming an amorphous chronicle of exile.

There are two main types of movement depicted in the novel: the active journey, portrayed in Fourth Jane's travels, and its textual counterpoint, the static sojourn--meaning dislocation achieved through stream-of-consciousness narrative transitions. The novel charts Fourth Jane's travels from China to England--as a result of the Japanese invasion in China--then to the United States, and finally to France where she falls in love with a married man. As Amy Ling notes in her forward: "There are seven ocean crossings and four major cultural transitions and the effect of these numerous dislocations is a rich experience of cultural diversity . . ." (3). Mediating these temporal and spatial passages is the story of Fourth Jane's relationship with her father, whom she loves but ultimately needs to move away from in order to achieve a greater sense of autonomy. Thus, Hua intersperses details about Fourth Jane's family--deaths, disagreements, celebrations, etc.--within the larger framework of Jane's multiple journeys.

For the purpose of brevity, I will focus mainly on the trope of the static journey in the text--since it represents Hua's greatest contribution to the overall development of the journey narrative form. One of the earliest examples of this motif appears in the image of Ngmah, Fourth Jane's mother, sewing: "She threaded the needle and continued to stitch at

the point where she had left off. Days, weeks, months, years, the pains of birth, absences, voyages, wars, losses, solitude, storms at sea . . ." (Hua 16). In this instance, the act of sewing, like that of writing, stitches together the disparate pieces of family history, taking into account the various journeys that play a prominent role in the text. Similarly, when the nameless, Parisian lover visits Fourth Jane's apartment for the first time, she discovers him staring at a map she has left open on her typewriter. Again, the concept of movement emerges through the map of roads connecting major European cities as well as in the image of the typewriter--the instrument through which Hua retraces her own migrations. Another example appears later in the novel, when Fourth Jane tells her lover a story about a time when she picked up one of her father's Chinese magazines: "with a shock she recognized the landscape, could smell the tilled soil, felt the embrace of the house, climbed the mountains" (Hua 124).

While her lover tells her that she should return to China to live, Fourth Jane realizes that the places rediscovered in her father's magazine have "fused, [have] become one with the American landscape" (Hua 125). Hua captures this sense of multiple vistas becoming one through the trope of the static journey, a technique that allows her to collapse time and space, to pull together (i.e., to sew, map, read, and write) multifarious influences into a composite representational field. In essence, Hua's novel

resembles the carpet Fourth Jane stands at the center of towards the end of the novel, a "square carpet of faded greens and blues and whites in which she discerned oases and deserts, scorpions and camels, departures, wanderings and homecomings woven inextricably there" (Hua 187). The carpet weaves the memory of different places and journeys into a single, coherent form, and Jane's position at its center suggests a psychological and emotional victory achieved neither in her escape to Europe nor her return to the United States.

In Song of Solomon, Toni Morrison further imbues the journey narrative with new meaning by reversing the traditional directional pattern of black migration.¹ What Hua achieves through an emphasis on static journeys Morrison accomplishes through the trope of the journey as genealogical quest. Morrison actively addresses the contradictions and losses that are often the result of northern migration by exploring connections between past (i.e., the South) and present (i.e., the North).

In this sense, Morrison modifies the standard themes and tropes of this aesthetic tradition. For instance, like Huck Finn, Pilate recalls how she "'just took my geography book and a rock I picked up for a souvenir and lit out'" (emphasis added, Morrison 142). However, unlike her literary precursor, Pilate must work against prevailing social restraints and inequities. When Pilate asks "'How do colored

people get where they want to go?," she is told that they
"Ain't supposed to go nowhere . . ." (Morrison, 146).

Thus, her voyage across the country, following the colorful shapes depicted in her geography book, represents a major transgression (Morrison 148).

Early in the novel, Guitar tells his best friend, Milkman, that he believes his "whole life's geography" (Morrison 114). Guitar's comment can be read in either of two ways: first, that he believes in his geography or the geography of his life, and, secondly, that he believes that his whole life is geography--and thus that his existence can be measured vis-à-vis a series of meaningful spaces. Both readings are relevant to Morrison's overall project, since the notion of place figures prominently in her novel--from Pilate's geography book, to Macon Dead's role as a harsh landlord, to Milkman Dead's journey south, and ultimately to Solomon's magical departure. Similarly, each voyage in the novel delineates a distinct spatial trajectory: Pilate moves north; Milkman returns to the South; and the ancestral Solomon, whose symbolic expedition centers the narrative, flies back to Africa.

Milkman's quest both recalls and mediates the other two central voyages in the text, Pilate's and Solomon's, forging an over-arching genealogical framework. Furthermore, unlike Emmett Till's visit to the South, which results in his brutal murder--an event that becomes the ultimate symbol of intense racism for the members of the Seven Days--Milkman's trip

south ends in cultural affirmation and with renewed optimism, a sense of hopefulness lacking in the Days' calculated system of retribution. While ostensibly looking for gold, Milkman actively seeks the fragments of his heritage, tracing the story of his great-grandfather's magical flight back to Africa through his own travels across Pennsylvania and into Virginia.

His adventure eventually leads him in search of the town of Shalimar, which he cannot find on the map. However, by finally locating the town, he places Shalimar and its legacy back on the map of his unfolding family history, and while "all he had started out with on his journey was gone," by the time he completes his voyage, he discovers a truth more valuable than gold (Morrison, 281). In this sense, Milkman's expedition functions as a journey in search of a journey, a double quest fraught with the desire to make sense of the present by coming to terms with the past.

However, while—at least on the surface—the final symbolic departure depicted in the novel, the moment when Milkman "surrender[s] [himself] to the air," is as an atavistic gesture that seems to offer closure in the midst of personal and political uncertainties, it actually represents a disruption of the legacy traced in the novel—particularly since it is precipitated by violence and betrayal (Morrison 341). This moment of irresolution undermines the trajectory Milkman traces through his voyage and, in turn, thwarts the

more cohesive pattern of traditional American journey narratives.

Similarly, in Breath, Eyes, Memory, Edwidge Danticat connects familial and larger sociopolitical factors in a narrative of multiple voyages between the United States and Haiti. There are two, intersecting journey patterns charted in the novel: Sophie's movement between homeland and adopted nation and Louise's escape from Haiti by boat. While the latter does not occupy a salient role in the novel, it informs its general spatial orientation by providing a counterpoint to Sophie's nostalgia for her homeland.² Thus, while Sophie's travels bring her back to Haiti, Louise's lead her away from it.

Both Sophie's travels and Louise's exodus are determined by specific motives, Sophie's by a longing to reconnect with her aunt and grandmother and Louise's by a desire to escape political turmoil. Furthermore, although they represent differing objectives, both quests stand against the concept of "wandering," which, according to Sophie, is an American phenomenon. In a conversation with her lover, Joseph, Sophie makes this distinction. Joseph tells her that "'It is okay not to have your future on a map" because then "'you can flow wherever life takes you'" (Danticat 72). To this, Sophie replies: "'That [being a wanderer] is not Haitian That's very American'" (Danticat 72). In other words, Sophie's future, as well as her past, are already inscribed

on the figurative map of exile, and her trips between the United States and Haiti reinforce this point. Similarly, Louise's effort to flee the reign of terror enforced by the Tonton Macoutes involves a singular, clear objective--the attainment of political asylum.

Thus, Danticat carves out a space for the Haitian-American experience within the broader journey-narrative tradition by defining the difference between American, free-form excursions, in which the traveler is driven by wanderlust, and the exile's voyages of loss and reconciliation. The image of the daffodils repeated throughout the novel functions as a symbol for this creative interaction between native and adopted cultural forms and motifs. Sophie recalls Tante Atie telling her that her mother "loved daffodils because they grew in a place that they were not supposed to. They were really European flowers. French buds and stems, meant for colder climates" (Danticat 21). In adapting to a foreign environment, the flowers turn a darker, golden color, reflecting the tones of the Haitian landscape and vegetation. Similarly, Danticat's blend of native and American creative resources results in a type of bicultural narrative evolution and points to the resilience of her individual voice.

IV

In Dreaming in Cuban, Cristina Garcia portrays the displacement of her characters through a prism of multiple

journeys. Garcia's novel is unique in that it contains a range of journey types, including variations of the tropological strains briefly discussed above: the static journey, the journey as genealogical quest, and the magical journey. Garcia's ability to rearrange and expand these tropes so that they illuminate the series of emotional, political, as well as creative connections and disconnections that shape the Cuban-American experience results in a major contribution to the overall contour of the journey-narrative tradition in American literature.

Considering the strained relationship between Cuba and the United States that has resulted in the imposition of a series of travel restrictions both to and from Cuba, and which has made Cuba a prohibitive space for Cuban exiles, it is not surprising that Cuban-American authors are intensely interested in issues of migrancy and that they often record international journeys in their works. Some Cuban-American texts that deal explicitly with variations on this theme include: J. Joaquín Fraxedas' The Lonely Crossing of Juan Cabrera, Pablo Medina's Exiled Memories and The Marks of Birth, and Margarita Engle's Skywriting. The excursions portrayed in these works display an effort to come to terms with the social, political, and ideological schisms that are the result of the Cuban revolution and increased U.S.-Cuban hostilities.

In his study of recent Cuban-American literature, Gustavo Pérez Firmat provides "a cultural map" of "that

hybrid 'nowhere'" that defines the Cuban exile experience (Life on the Hyphen 12). Important to this project are the various ways authors write in relation to the homeland. For instance, according to Pérez Firmat, "If [Oscar] Hijuelos writes from Cuba but 'toward' the United States, [Jose] Koser writes 'from' the United States but 'toward' Cuba" (156).³ I would argue that Cristina Garcia, availing herself of a range of cultural materials--both Cuban and American--writes 'between' these charged terrains, limning an intervening form through a series of thematic excursions. Furthermore, her nuanced inscription of the journey as migration evokes a range of sociopolitical considerations--such as waves of migration to the U.S. (from the initial exodus between 1959 to 1962 to the Mariel boatlift in 1980) and frustration with the restrictive policies that continue to make it difficult for Cuban exiles to return to the homeland to visit family and friends.

Just as travel provides a means of negotiating spatial boundaries, the trope of the journey allows for a mediation of familial and political borders. The double bind of family and politics reflects the personal and public aspects of the exile's condition. Garcia, for instance, does not depict familial rifts simply as an epiphenomenon of political discord or vice versa. Rather, these pressures function as interlocking forces in the novel, and the spatial transitions delineated throughout represent an effort to simultaneously come to terms with both.

The novel portrays a series of movements and migrations and contains three major voyages: George's visit to his wife, Celia, with which the novel opens; Pilar and her mother's return to Cuba; and Ivanito's escape in April 1980, during the opening of the Peruvian embassy. The first two instances are imbued with magic, while in the last the magical recedes in the face of broader sociopolitical considerations. These aesthetic and thematic shifts reveal the multiple tensions at work in the text. Both George's and Pilar and Lourdes' voyages primarily reflect personal and familial commitments, but Ivanito's escape, during a dramatic turning point in Cuban-American relations, reveals larger political pressures--although it certainly results in personal loss as well, particularly for Celia.

Moreover, while George, Pilar, and Lourdes arrive in Cuba, Ivanito stands poised for departure. This directional transition further influences Garcia's aesthetic choices--an issue taken up in fuller detail later in this chapter. In what follows, I examine all three journey patterns through the novel's over-arching, triparte generational structure, noting what similarities and differences between individual routes reveal about Garcia's project of remapping the distance between Cuba and the United States.

George arrives to tell his wife of his death on the eleventh anniversary of the Bay of Pigs--a fact that does not escape Celia, who, geared with binoculars, is standing guard

against another invasion. Yet instead of spotting a military attack, Celia finds herself face to face with the husband she has not seen in four years. Separated, in part, by their allegiances--Celia supports, while George vehemently denounces the communist project--the couple's reunion marks the first in a series of symbolic reconnections in the novel. Not only does George cross the borders between Cuba and the United States, he also transcends the boundaries separating life from death and past from present.

The figure of three boats in the distance that Celia refers to as the Nina, the Pinta, and the Santa Maria foreshadows George's arrival. The sense of mobility and agency evoked in both the reference to Columbus' voyage and George's appearance stands against the static quality of the Cuban landscape in this opening scene. For instance, while the ocean traditionally represents movement, it stands as an inert body: "She [Celia] wades deeper into the ocean. It pulls her housedress like weights on her hem. Her hands float on the surface of the sea, still clutching her shoes, as if they could lead her to a new place" (Garcia 70). The image of the shoes poised for travel contrasts with the stillness of the water. George's ability to walk effortlessly over the ocean's surface counteracts Celia's immobility and results not only in their reunion but in an overall spatial transformation.

Throughout the novel, Celia stands in relation to images of immobility. In one of her many letters to her former

lover, Gustavo, a Spanish lawyer from Grenada, she writes:

"'I'm a prisoner on this island, Gustavo, and I cannot sleep'" (Garcia 49). This sense of imprisonment is reinforced through various references to static journeys. For example, in another letter she writes: "'If I was born to live on an island, then I'm grateful for one thing: that the tides rearrange the borders. At least I have the illusion of change, of possibility'" (Garcia 99). Celia's appreciation for the ocean's illusory transformation of the landscape reflects her underlying fears of abandonment and isolation.

Celia recalls George reading to her once that:

long ago, the New World was attached to Africa . .
. . and the continents pulled away slowly, painfully
after millions of years. The Americas are still
moving westward and will eventually collide with
Japan. (Garcia 48)

This subtle, unconscious movement functions as an emblem for the broader disconnections that shape Celia's life. As David T. Mitchell notes, "For Celia the ocean acts as a boundary and buffer for her now dispersed family" (53). She returns to this intermediary, protean space throughout the novel, and each visit reflects irresolution and doubt. For instance, Celia "wonders whether Cuba will be left behind, alone in the Caribbean," for, just as the continents slip away, so do the members of her family when they migrate to the United States (Garcia 48). Celia's relationship to the

sea reveals a desire to mediate these absences--since the ocean opens an interstitial space between both countries.

When she surrenders her body to the sea, after Ivanito's escape and her daughter and granddaughter's return to the United States, Celia recalls that she has never traveled farther than a hundred yards off the coast of Cuba. While pregnant with Lourdes, she writes to Gustavo to tell him that, if her child is a boy, she will abandon him and sail to Spain. Thus, she initially stays on the island to protect her daughter from the misogyny that runs rampant in Cuban culture. It is therefore ironic that this daughter--whom, in the long run, Celia is unable to protect from the ills of their society--eventually abandons her, when she flees to the United States with her husband and daughter.

To counteract Celia's feelings of loss and rejection, Garcia incorporates a series of magical alliances throughout the novel. George, for instance, becomes a fluid, intervening figure capable of realigning boundaries. If America is still "moving westward," then George counterbalances this spatial orientation by heading south after he dies. Sister Federica tells Lourdes that her father "'put on his hat, passed through the window, and headed south, leaving a trail of phosphorous along the East River'" (Garcia 19). Similarly, on one of her morning walks to the bakery, Lourdes notes: "Everything, it seems, is going south. The smoke from the leaning chimneys in New Jersey. A reverse

formation of sparrows. The pockmarked ship headed for Panama. The torpid river itself" (Garcia 24). Pilar also recognizes this gravitational force, when she traces the sound of ships on the East River as "They travel south past the Wall Street skyscrapers, past Ellis Island and the Statue of Liberty, past Bayonne, New Jersey, and the Bay Ridge Channel and under the Verrazano Bridge" (Garcia 31). Pilar longs to follow the whistle out into the Atlantic, and again this directional pull offsets the countermovement depicted both in the figure of "the continents strain[ing] to unloose themselves" and in the family's actual migration north (Garcia 17).

Furthermore, these images of southward movement foreshadow Lourdes and Pilar's return to Cuba later in the text and contrast with Lourdes' search for a colder climate that might obliterate the memory of Cuba's tropical warmth when she first arrives in the United States: "They began to drive. 'Colder,' she said . . . as if the word were a whip driving them north" (Garcia 69). As Rocio Davis notes:

Section and story titles like "Imagining Winter" and "Going South" are paradigmatic of the journeys many of the characters have to take away from and back to their original home, emphasizing the search for connection which will be completed in the final section. (62)

Accordingly, all of the motion in the text points to the culminating reunion between mother, daughter, and

granddaughter. For instance, Lourdes' expedition echoes, both in direction and purpose, her father's magical quest, with which the novel opens. George reappears at intervals to speak with his daughter and to impart a significant piece of their family history. These intimate conversations help Lourdes come to terms with her past and eventually lead her to undertake a long-overdue trip to Cuba.

Lourdes' bond with George mimics Pilar's relationship with her grandmother Celia, whom she has not seen since she emigrated to the United States when she was only two years old. Pilar thrives on her ability to communicate through a series of telepathic exchanges that help narrow the gap separating Cuba and the United States, past and present, and Spanish and English. For years, Celia speaks to Pilar at night, and, when their mystical correspondence suddenly ends, she realizes that a new bond will soon emerge between them. This cycle of renewal begins when Pilar goes to a santero, who tells her: "'You must finish what you began'" (Garcia 200). Pilar quickly realizes that he is referring to her failed trip to Cuba and that she needs to visit her grandmother, in order to reestablish familial and cultural ties.

During her visit, Pilar listens to Celia's stories and claims "as I listen, I feel my grandmother's life passing to me through her hands," a symbolic gesture that yields a symbolic generational bond (Garcia 231). Like the letters

Celia bequeaths to her granddaughter, this moment of physical connection revitalizes a relationship complicated by years of absence. In this sense, the intuitive union Pilar and her grandmother share--which in itself functions as a type of telepathic journey--has a mystical foundation.

In his discussion of magical realism, Alejo Carpentier states that "the phenomena of the marvelous presupposes faith" (86). While Dreaming in Cuban does not strictly adhere to this notion of faith--suggesting instead that the image of coherence evoked by the magical cannot adequately reflect sociopolitical incongruities and ruptures--it, at the very least, enacts a desire for such conviction. Pilar's relationship to her grandmother, for instance, represents this need for the sense of clarity and resolution that faith affords. In the midst of social and political uncertainties, this bond functions as a transcending force.

As various recent studies point out, magical tropes often play a dynamic role in texts defined as postmodern. One scholar notes that "the notion of the eccentric, in the sense of speaking from the margin, from a place 'other' than 'the' or 'a' center . . . seems . . . an essential feature of the strain of postmodernism we call magic realism" (Theo L. D'Haen 194). Similarly, another writes that "Magic realism serves an essential binding function in the larger context of postmodern writing, a binding that links the dailiness of realism and the risks of experimentation" (Lori Chamberlain 17-18). While I prefer to avoid such tidy categorizations, I

agree that, for instance, the way Garcia suffuses her novel with magical elements reveals a broader, postmodern preoccupation with destabilizing the center-margin hierarchy. In Dreaming in Cuban, the center-periphery dichotomy comes into focus through the trope of the magical journey, which, as suggested earlier, evokes a rearrangement of personal and national boundaries.

Like postmodernism, magical realism marks a probing of social structures; however, it is unique in that it acquires its themes and imagery from the customs and traditions of non-Western cultures. In other words, if, as Ihab Hassan argues, "postmodernism . . . appears as a significant revision of twentieth-century Western societies," it generally remains one that arises from a place within Western culture, and thus functions as a type of self-critique ("Postface 1982: Toward a Concept of Postmodernism" 81). Yet by drawing on traditions that privilege "mystery over empiricism," multicultural writers are able to tailor the project of postmodernism to reflect their own heritage and conditions (Lois Parkinson Zamora, Wendy Faris 3). In her study of Cuban women writers in the United States, Eliana Rivero poses a somewhat problematic distinction between the earlier generation of Cuban writers in exile, who, in addition to writing in Spanish, draw heavily on Latin American traditions, and recent Cuban-American writers, whom she argues "tend to identify with the establishment and reject the Third World stance of many native Hispanic writers

. . .” (197). In Cristina Garcia’s case, however, the use of magic realist tropes indicates a commitment to her native culture’s creative resources. Furthermore, her complex treatment of the magical in her novel reveals a larger effort to negotiate the range of influences that are the result of her bicultural experience.

Garcia’s specific use of magical imagery does not conform with the type of utopian synthesis or “hopeful vision of life . . .” traditionally associated with magic realism (David K. Danow 9). On the contrary, in Dreaming in Cuban, magical elements--such as the instinctive bonds between George and Lourdes, Celia and Felicia, Celia and Pilar, and Felicia and Ivanito--ultimately recede, and their failure points to broader cultural forces at work in the novel. For instance, if Pilar’s return to Cuba functions as an act guided by faith, the realization that she cannot stay there, that the Cuba of her memories no longer exists, results in a counter-movement away from an ideal vision of her homeland and eventually points to her return to the United States.

Pilar and Lourdes’ arrival in Cuba coincides with the Peruvian embassy incident. During their visit, Lourdes takes her nephew, Ivanito, to the embassy and helps him flee to the United States. Ironically, this event also results in Pilar’s betrayal of her grandmother and thus in an alteration of allegiances--since, by not getting Ivanito back after she spots him in the crowd, she tacitly becomes her mother’s accomplice. Pilar finally realizes that “sooner or later I’d

have to return to New York. I know now its where I belong-- not *instead* of here, but *more* than here" (Garcia 236).

Pilar's painting of the Statue of Liberty encapsulates her sense of frustration about determining where she belongs. The painting, commissioned by her mother in an ostensible gesture of approval, depicts a "perfect replica of her [the Statue of Liberty] a bit left of center . . ." (Garcia 141). Pilar initially alters only two details: she places the torch slightly out of reach, so that it hovers above the statue's hand, and she places Liberty's right hand over her left breast, "as if she's reciting the National Anthem or some other slogan" (141). Not happy with the end result, she later adds stick figures that "look like barbed wire," scribbles her favorite punk expression, "I'm a Mess," and finally paints a safety pin through the statue's nose (141).

The various stages the painting undergoes, from traditional representation to subversive transformation, correspond with Pilar's mounting tension about her position as an exile. In a novel preoccupied with migrations and journeys, it is not surprising that the central figure invoked in the artist protagonist's work is the Statue of Liberty, the quintessential symbol of welcome for the American immigrant. However, by reconfiguring this monument, Pilar suggests that, rather than hope and reassurance, it represents confusion and disorder (i.e., "I'm a Mess"). Pilar's revision of the Statue of liberty is an example of

"choteo," a distinctly Cuban hyperbolic form of humor that results in the undermining of any culturally valorized object or action. In this sense, choteo is a variant of a range of other ethnic-specific tropes that work against the status quo by toppling mainstream values. The concept of signifying in the African-American tradition and "tsismis" (gossip) in the Philippine one both play a similar role--as noted in the previous chapters of this dissertation.

According to Gustavo Pérez Firmat, "choteo is a flank attack on society's structures and strictures, a subversion of the social order . . ." (Literature and Liminality 53). This type of transgressive, vernacular shift complements and reinforces the broader transitions depicted in the novel. As Pérez Firmat notes, "Cuban mockery moves--both in its theoretical elusiveness and in its concrete manifestations" (Literature and Liminality 58). Pilar's painting--which illustrates the intersection of a Cuban form (choteo) and an American symbol (the Statue of Liberty)--points to the type of critical departure Perez Firmat discusses.

If the Statue of Liberty stands as the central symbol of a central space, the United States, then Pilar's act of disfiguration presents a type of double decentering. First, the painting stands literally off center (i.e., "left of center"), and, secondly, Pilar's approach results in a visual vernacular, a move from high to low, from pure to impure, and from center to margin. The double displacement of the Statue of Liberty parallels Pilar's own sense of cultural

uprootedness--since she is both "off center" as an artist and as an exile.

In addition to the portrait of the Statue of Liberty, there are several other examples of this motif at work in the novel. For instance, when Celia tells her daughter Felicia that her father has returned to inform her of his death, Felicia's response completely thwarts the significance of this inexplicable event. She complains, "'You mean he was in the neighborhood and didn't even stop by?'" (Garcia 9). Through the process of choteo, George's ghostly presence comes to be defined, not merely in terms of its implausibility, but also by its humorous, ineffectual place in the text--since, as Felicia recognizes, regardless of his new status, her father cannot alter her position in a country plagued by revolutionary tensions.

Similarly, after Felicia dies, the intuitive bond she shares with her son, Ivanito, wanes. Ivanito states: "My mother never speaks to me, but sometimes . . . I pick up radio stations in Key West" (Garcia 191). The dissolving of their magical connection results in an egregious replacement when, in lieu of this mystical, transcending union, Ivanito finds solace in the disembodied voice of radio personality Wolfman Jack. Thus the novel delineates a transition from the spiritual to the commercial, the magical to the popular, and, ultimately, from Cuba to the United States.

This progression indicates a reversal of the directional trajectory depicted earlier in the novel and discussed above

(i.e., George's appearance and Lourdes and Pilar's visit). And it is particularly crucial in that it foreshadows Ivanito's escape—an event that involves a reverse movement towards the United States. Ivanito's flight informs the other transitions and journeys leading up to it in the text, in part because it marks overlapping political, historical, and personal turning points.

The Peruvian embassy situation precipitated the opening of the port of Mariel, on April 21, 1980, an event that had far-reaching repercussions both for Cuba and the United States. The five-month flood of immigrants resulted in increased tensions between both countries, particularly following the disclosure that many of the refugees had either criminal records or were members of other "undesirable" groups (i.e., the mentally ill, prostitutes, the disabled, and homosexuals). Furthermore, as Boswell and Curtis argue, another

reason for the cool reception given the marielitoes is that by 1980 public opinion was in favor of reducing immigration, as a result of attention given by the news media to the problems encountered during the migration of Vietnamese, Mexicans, and Haitians to the United States. (55)

It is significant that a novel examining political and familial discord via geographical space ends on the cusp of even greater international animosities and with an image of migration as chaos (public) and loss (personal). In Exile

and the Narrative Imagination, Michael Seidel states that "The task for the exile . . . is to transform the figure of rupture back into a figure of connection" (x). Garcia's depiction of national and international tensions and of characters' failed attempts to fully achieve a sense of closure in the face of ineradicable social, personal, and political differences breaks with the more traditional search for cohesion Seidel discusses in his study.

Garcia's departure, in this sense, forwards a more accurate representation of the politics of exile through the various migrations, both to and away from the homeland, that shape one family's experience of this condition. For instance, Lourdes' return to Cuba and reunion with her mother do not result in an alteration of her ideological perspective. On the contrary, her visit fortifies her agonistic stance. As David Harvey notes, "Travel . . . is supposed to broaden the mind, but it just as frequently ends up confirming prejudices" (351). By reinforcing and heightening Lourdes' prejudices, the voyage ultimately results in frustration rather than in renewal.

In this sense, Garcia's project reflects a commitment to interpreting the history of exile through the various perils, contingencies, and ruptures that are often glossed over but which inform this experience in striking ways. As Hayden White notes, "We require a history that will educate us to discontinuity more than ever before; for discontinuity,

disruption, and chaos is our lot" (50). Garcia, like her textual counterpart, Pilar, fulfills the objectives of the type of historical rendering White describes. Early in the novel, Pilar questions how history is transmitted: "It's always one damn battle after another If it were up to me, I'd record other things. Like the time there was a freak hailstorm in the Congo and the women took it as a sign that they should rule" (Garcia 28). This statement has a resonating quality, especially since Pilar becomes the heir to the del Pino family's history. Celia stops writing letters to her lover, Gustavo, on the day her granddaughter is born. In her last letter, she tells him that "'She [Pilar] will remember everything'" (Garcia 245). Not only will Pilar be responsible for the family legacy her grandmother bestows upon her, she will also need to make sense of the cultural events that complicate their relationship.

Guided by political and personal determinants, Pilar's project promotes familial healing as well as an opportunity to come to terms with the historical incidents that shaped their lives. Her ability to construct such a narrative, however fractured, stands in contrast to her aunt Felicia's inability to come to terms with her own past: "Felicia's mind floods with thoughts, thoughts from the past, from the future, other people's thoughts . . ." (Garcia 76). Nor does Pilar's endeavor result in a facile rewriting of history—something her mother is prone to do. For instance, when

Lourdes sees a sign advertising the communist party, she wants to alter it so that it reads "Socialismo es Muerte," instead of "Socialismo o Muerte." The result is a type of one-sided recording of events that dismisses the complexity inherent in political turmoil.

Even for Celia, the process of creating a comprehensive historical narrative proves similarly futile. Like Lourdes, her strict allegiance to one side obscures her understanding of broader considerations. Celia, for instance, claims that "her past . . . is eclipsing her present" (Garcia 92). Thus, she cannot make the necessary leap between or reconcile the period of her life poetically captured in her numerous letters to Gustavo and the events of the present. Garcia sets up a series of textual symmetries through which she maps out her characters' contrasting positions. For instance, while Lourdes discards a book about the communist revolution that Pilar gives her for Christmas, Celia keeps a picture of "el lider" on her night stand; and while Lourdes walks the streets of Brooklyn as a member of the citizens patrol unit, Celia relishes her contribution to the communist party through her participation in the Committee for the Defence of the Revolution.

Pilar, on the other hand, whose very name represents an emphasis on strength and structure (Pilar-pillar, Puente-bridge), must form a bridge through her mediative journey and construct a historical account that accommodates the many elusive and often conflicting versions of events that define

her experience. In other words, in an effort to salvage her family's legacy, she has to situate herself between her mother's obstinate rejection of Castro's Cuba and her grandmother's commitment to the communist project, and ultimately between her own nostalgia for Cuba and her growing awareness that she belongs in the United States. Moreover, Pilar's evaluation of the political maelstrom that shaped her formative years privileges the stories of and incidents in the lives of her mother and grandmother and is thus informed by a feminist perspective. In this sense, like Morrison, Garcia explores the historical through the personal, incorporating the rituals of domestic life--such as cooking and eating--in ways that reflect broader factors--such as food rations and hunger.

Like Pilar, Garcia gained a fuller sense of the historical fracture that defines the Cuban-American experience when she returned to Cuba in 1984--an event that inspired the writing of Dreaming in Cuban. Only after she arrives in Cuba does Pilar realize that it "is a peculiar exile We can reach it by a thirty-minute charter flight from Miami, yet never reach it at all" (Garcia 219). Pilar's frustration with Cuba's inaccessibility reflects Garcia's own efforts to reclaim a past complicated by years of political discord between Cuba and the United States. Yet, like Pilar, Garcia finally realizes that the distance between both countries is best assessed through creative

excursions (i.e., Pilar/painting, Garcia/writing). After all, fiction, as a mutable, polyphonic genre, is ideal for producing an encompassing, bicultural recording of the series of seemingly unrelated social and political incidents—including the Bay of Pigs, the opening of the Peruvian Embassy, the Vietnam War, and Watergate—that shaped the Cuban-exile experience during a specific historical moment.

Both Dreaming in Cuban and Garcia's second novel, The Aquero Sisters, depict characters that embark on these types of creative journeys. In The Aquero Sisters, for instance, Garcia returns to the themes of sexism, cultural fracture, and loss. The novel, which incorporates multiple narrative voices and shifting perspectives, follows the story of two half sisters separated by their mother's murder and a history of political pressures. Like in Dreaming in Cuban, in The Aquero Sisters, topography becomes a conduit for assessing social as well as personal history. The shifts in perspectives coordinate with over-arching alterations in location and culminate with Constancia's return to the homeland. In both instances, Garcia explores the relationship between Cuba and the United States in ways that resonate with and incorporate the themes, forms, and textures of both cultures.

According to R. Radhakrishnan, the concept of location--while traditionally considered in relation to a fixed perspective--is actually informed by a form of critical

fluidity. Location's "very meaning is the function of its travel and mobility" (Radhakrishnan 136). In other words, all locations stand in relation to other places that help define each through the process of differentiation. For Cuban-Americans, for instance, the United States and Cuba function as moveable, interpenetrating fields of signification. In Dreaming in Cuban, the overall symbol of these spatial negotiations is the journey, which provides a creative framework for the multiple transitions and dislocations that mark the exile experience. This emphasis on travel (i.e., between Spanish and English, past and present, and native and adopted cultures) functions as an interceding gesture that, in turn, signals, both literally and metaphorically, new voyages to embark upon.

¹. See William Boelhower's Through a Glass Darkly for an excellent analysis of geographical space in Morrison's Song of Solomon.

². For a fuller exploration of this motif, see Danticat's short story "Children of the Sea," in her 1995 collection, Krick? Krack!.

³. The novelist Oscar Hijuelos is the author of Our House in the Last World (1983) and The Mambo Kings Play Songs of Love (1989), and the poet Jose Kozer is the author of Padres y Otras Profesiones (1972).

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