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“THE DEAD RISE THE DEAD AND WALK AMONG THE LIVING”:
AN EXAMINATION OF THE HAUNTING SOUTH, QUEERNESS, AND GROTESQUERIES
IN TRUMAN CAPOTE’S *OTHER VOICES*, *OTHER ROOMS* AND *LOCAL COLOR*

A Thesis
presented in partial fulfillment of requirements
for the degree of Master of Arts
in the Department of English
The University of Mississippi

By

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May 2015

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ABSTRACT

This project is conceptualized through a multitude of intersecting and overlapping theories that work together to allow an examination of circulations and intersections of queerness, grotesqueries, and the haunting South. Throughout this reading of Truman Capote's *Other Voices, Other Rooms* and *Local Color* I want to think through the ways in which images and moments in the text can be queer and grotesque while also lending themselves to the images and eruptions that make up the haunting South. My reading of grotesqueries and the haunting South purposefully moves away from the Southern Gothic, rooting itself instead in a space that is much less nostalgic for the Old South, and much less interested in the narrative surrounding the fall of the South/rehashing of the Civil War, but rather is informed by critical theory that deals with ideas of hauntings, eruptions, and ghosts. My work intends to delineate the ways in which the racial violence, inequality, and unrest surrounding the South's past refuses to ever be fully a part of the past – rather images and ideas surrounding these horrors return at the least expected moment in unexpected guises to haunt and remind the living that they will never truly die – the past is a part of and is imprinted on the present and refuses vehemently to be buried. My work is trying to let these ghosts and hauntings guide us through the works of Capote.

DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this thesis to my family: Tammy Savage, Chris Savage, Jillian Savage (my partner in crime), Natalie Rice, and Naomi Martine. Without your constant support, encouragement, and love I could not have gotten nearly as far as I have. I'll love you forever and always.

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I would also like to thank the “clambake collective”: Rebecca Albright, Allison Combs, Rachel Cason, and Kaitlyn Voigt; only with their friendship, love, and commiseration have I remained sane and successful throughout my graduate school career. I will always cherish our many long nights filled with music and wine.

Finally I would like to thank my partner, James Brassell, for putting up with me throughout this project and continuing to believe in me, even when I didn’t always believe in myself (and for getting out of my hair when I needed time to write). And of course, my passel of cats: Etienne, Willow, and Paolo for providing never ending entertainment and always trying to help me write by walking across the keyboard.

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INTRODUCTION

I grew up in a very small Southern town – a town commemorated nationally purely because it was the first in the state to integrate its public school system. I am not disputing the significance of this historical fact – but growing up there I always sensed that there were layers to the reality of life in this small town. Many old graveyards in the state remain segregated – not because of any law in place segregating the graveyards but because it was previously law to segregate graveyards and now, because families are buried in or near family plots, these graveyards remain primarily (if not wholly) segregated. Along with this physical eruption of the past into the present day, the ideas of the past still held sway as well. The insistence on normativity encompassed specific performance of race as well as expectations concerning gender performance and sexuality. My experiences living in this small town – not unlike many other small southern towns – not only taught me well where the boundaries of normativity were but also the extent to which transgression is acceptable. These memories and realizations have lived with me throughout the writing of this thesis – most of all realizing the extent to which my scholarly work is rooting out the layers and boundaries still firmly in place in so many spaces we live in today. With that said, this thesis will explore transgression and boundaries, along with the eruptions – like the still segregated graveyards – into the reality of two of Truman Capote’s earliest works: *Other Voices Other Rooms* and *Local Color*.

Before leaping straight into the ways in which I have theorized this multifaceted reading of these works, I believe it is important to understand the personal and spatial relationships Capote had to the South throughout his own life. As a child Truman Capote was alternately

forced to move from place to place upon his mother's whims and abandoned by his mother as she left to find other careers or have spontaneous affairs with men. His mother would often leave him locked in hotel rooms, "instructing the staff not to let him out even if he screamed, which, in his fright he would often do" (Clark 14). Capote was also left sporadically with his aunts in Monroeville, Alabama (as well as with other relatives occasionally), but "[i]n the summer of 1930, a few months before his sixth birthday, they left him there for good" (Clarke 14).¹ In 1932, Truman Capote traveled to New York for the first time to be with his mother, yet continued to go back to Monroeville for the summers until 1934 when a custody hearing began that ended with Joe Capote officially adopting Truman (Clarke 34-36).² During the years while Capote lived in Monroeville, his mother divorced Arch Persons (Capote's father), remarried to Joe Capote, and found restaurant work in New York (Clarke and Long). Throughout these years Capote discovered his knack for writing, befriended Harper Lee, and began to develop the troubled relationship with the South that would continue throughout the rest of his life.

Around the age of ten, he moved North permanently to live with his mother and his stepfather Joe Capote where he would be shuffled around between schools and homes throughout his young adulthood. He went to several schools in New York and Connecticut³ where he often had troubled school experiences that included bullies, an inability to fit in, and a disinterest in the subjects he was required to learn, as well as a continuation of the troubled relationship with his mother: "Nina⁴ took him to psychiatrists in an attempt to have him remade as a 'normal boy'" (Long 5). After graduating high school, Capote vowed to never set foot inside

¹ Having been left with relatives repeatedly by his mother, this "left him with a lifelong sense of abandonment..." and further complicating his relationship with his mother, she found herself "repelled by his effeminacy" (Long, 3).

² Capote's real name is Truman Streckfus Persons Capote but he took his stepfather's name in 1935 after the official verdict of the custody hearing (Clarke, 30).

³ Trinity School, St. John's Military Academy, Greenwich High School, and The Franklin School (Long 5-6).

⁴ Around the time of her marriage to Joe Capote, Lillie Mae changed her name to Nina (Long, 4).

a college classroom and successfully developed and built his literary career without any further education. Soon after the start of his writing career he did spend time at Yaddo⁵, where he met many other writers that he would have lasting friendships (and occasional enmities) with throughout the rest of his life.⁶

Capote's life as a traveler began as soon as he was out of school and had the means to travel, beginning of course with Yaddo and the writing/publication of *Other Voices, Other Rooms* and continued throughout his life. From 1946-1950 Capote spent the majority of his time outside the United States, travelling throughout Europe, the Mediterranean, Haiti, and Tangier. These travels would become the basis for *Local Color* and include, according to letters both from Capote and about Capote, both true and exaggerated stories of his experiences in "exotic" locations.

Other Voices, Other Rooms was Capote's first published novel and scandalously begins the persona Capote will continue to develop throughout his literary career. The Harold Halma photograph not only was printed on the back of the dust jackets for *Other Voices, Other Rooms* but was also blown up to poster size and placed in book store windows to advertise the book. Needless to say, with his very first publication and his very first venture into the public eye, Capote immediately made an impression. *Other Voices, Other Rooms* "almost immediately jumped onto the *New York Times* best-seller list, where it remained for nine weeks ... sold more than 26,000 copies", and was largely popular globally (Clarke 158). When Capote left America to travel in 1948 "copies of the American edition [of *Other Voices, Other Rooms*] ... had made their way across the Atlantic, and many people in Britain and France were eager to meet the

⁵ Yaddo is an artist's retreat in New York.

⁶ Carson McCullers and Capote were fast friends during the time they were at Yaddo together; however, over the years their friendship turned in to enmity, especially on McCullers end as she accused Capote of using material from her fiction (Long, 12).

seductive young genius on the Victorian sofa” (Clarke 164). *Local Color*, on the other hand, was published in a rather small number at first and unlike *Other Voices*, *Other Rooms* never took off. Truman Capote’s *Local Color* sold approximately 4,500 copies⁷. *Local Color* is a series of travel sketches, containing previously published material⁸ as well as several unpublished travel sketches, in which Capote chronicles many of the places he lived and visited between the years 1946 and 1950. Along with being difficult to find, Capote’s *Local Color* remains, with few and far too brief exceptions, nothing more than a footnote or brief nod to its existence in much of the scholarly work on Capote most often mentioned simply as a precursor to the journalistic style employed in *In Cold Blood*.

This project is conceptualized through a multitude of intersecting and overlapping theories that work together to allow an examination of circulations and intersections of queerness, grotesqueries, and the haunting South. To elaborate individually, first, my conception of queerness relies heavily on Judith Butler’s *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. Judith Butler’s theorization of the performativity and construction of gender posits that the “acts and gestures, articulated and enacted desires create the illusion of an interior and organizing gender core, an illusion discursively maintained for the purposes of regulation of sexuality within the obligatory frame of reproductive heterosexuality” (Butler 136). This inherent lack of any “interior and organizing gender core” creates a tension between the expected performance of “masculinity” or “femininity” and the reality that neither of those categories are inherently tied to any –interior or exterior – organizing reality.

⁷ This estimate comes from Gerald Clarke’s biography of Truman Capote in which he cites that for *The Grass Harp* “sales totaled 13,500, almost double those of *A Tree of Night* and triple those of *Local Color*” (Clarke, 224).

⁸ Many of the travel sketches in *Local Color* were previously published in *Mademoiselle*, *Vogue*, *The New Yorker*, and *Harper’s Bazaar* (Capote).

The attempt to create a structure or exterior organizing reality where gender is concerned directly connects to Michel Foucault's *History of Sexuality, Vol. 1: An Introduction* in which Foucault delineates the trajectory of the simultaneous creation and surveillance of sexuality. Foucault links this surveillance and control of sexuality directly to power and law, making the production and creation of "sexuality" purely about control over the ability to choose or control not only the existence of descendants through the "obligatory frame of reproductive heterosexuality" Butler discusses, but also to control the genetic makeup of their descendants – prohibiting the mixing of blood lines, classes, and races.

John Howard's reading of queerness in *Men Like That: A Southern Queer History*, an oral history/critical reading of queerness in the South between 1945-1985 (Howard xiv) allows me to further use the ideas of gender performance, construction, and surveillance by allowing a specification concerning the term "queer." Howard reads queerness as "beyond homosex to encompass all thoughts and expressions of sexuality and gender that are nonnormative or oppositional" (xix). Ultimately this allows a reading of queerness that is not predicated upon explicit acts of homosex, but rather transgressions of heteronormative expressions of sexuality, gender, or allusions to such transgressions can also be read as inherently queered. Throughout Capote's works there are moments of overt queerness as well as moments that are less explicitly queer, but nevertheless transcribe non-normativity upon bodies, queered bodies that consistently perform their non-normativity for everyone to see and are subsequently punished, ostracized, or acted upon in violent ways.

This performativity of queerness merges and overlaps with the performative nature surrounding death and the rituals associated with dying that Joseph Roach explores in *Cities of the Dead*. Performance becomes the link between the haunting eruptions of the South and the

queered bodies throughout the texts. Joseph Roach reads “performances in general and funerals in particular...[as] rich in revealing contradictions: because they make publicly visible through symbolic action both the tangible existence of social boundaries and, at the same time, the contingency of those boundaries on fictions of identity, their shoddy construction out of inchoate otherness, and, consequently, their anxiety-inducing instability” (Roach 39). This concern not only with the ability of performances concerning death and the ceremonies surrounding death to make visible as well as break societal boundaries aligns with the performance of gender – with the expected types of performances comes a reification of the boundaries in place, whereas performances of transgression serve to show the flimsy nature of the bounds of society. Transgressive performances are almost always met with surveillance, punishment, etc. except in the case of the carnivalesque, which Roach also discusses. Not only does the carnivalesque seem to offer momentary reprieve from societal expectations, but it can also work to reify the boundaries as well, as in the example Roach discusses about Mardi Gras; ultimately those actions that New Orleans deemed not worthy of prosecution simply end up being written into law as acceptable under certain conditions (244).

In connection with the consideration of the effects the performance of the dead and the carnivalesque have on the stability of societal boundaries, Sharon Patricia Holland also considers the effect the not-so-static categorization of “the dead” has on the society of the living. Considering multiple ways in which to read death, Holland writes: “as a cultural and natural phenomenon or discourse, as a figurative silencing or process of erasure, and as an embodied entity or subject capable of transgression” (Holland 5) Holland establishes death as the ultimate boundary where all other boundaries cease to exist – claiming that death functions even as a “genderless space” (6). The conception of death as being that which defines and undoes all other

boundaries creates an interesting reading of the eruptions and spectral racialized figures found throughout Capote's works.

In order to fully consider the ways in which these spectral racialized figures function, I am also concerned with Toni Morrison's *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination*. Throughout this small tome, Morrison effectively argues not only for the importance of the marginal and often times ignored black characters found throughout Early American literature, but argues that rather than being marginal, these ghostly black figures are used specifically in the creation of whiteness. "The ways in which artists – and the society that bred them – transferred internal conflicts to a 'blank darkness' to conveniently bound and violently silenced black bodies, is a major theme in American literature. ...Nothing highlighted freedom – if it did not in fact create it – like slavery" (Morrison 37-8). Toni Morrison's discusses a "shadow text" created by Africanist presences within early American literature, claiming "[e]ven, and especially, when American texts are not 'about' Africanist presences or characters or narrative or idiom, the shadow hovers in implication, in sign, in line of demarcation." (46-7). The apparent lack of importance denoted by the relegation of these black figures to hovering at the margins or behind the scenes – explicitly, in Morrison's opinion – establishes their importance, because why would these figures be there to hover in the margins at all if not for a reason?

My reading of the haunting South is further conceptualized through Jay Watson's *Reading for the Body: The Recalcitrant Materiality of Southern Fiction, 1893-1985*. Watson discusses the ways in which the South is embodied while placing it within the context of being a region which is seen as oppositional to the societal and cultural norms of the rest of the country: "At the dawn of the twentieth century, visions of southern bodily alterity continued to haunt the

nation and its progressivist social and political discourses. The lynching atrocities reported by Ida B. Wells in 1892 as specifically ‘Southern Horrors’ linked regional distinctiveness to racial trauma, extralegal violence, and spectacular bodily damage” (Watson 16). This consideration of not only the South as regionally distinguished often by its supposed backwardness in relation to the rest of the nation, but also in connection explicitly to lynching and forms of extralegal violence often performed upon black bodies is further explored in Amy Louise Wood’s *Lynching and Spectacle: Witnessing Racial Violence in America, 1890-1940*. Lynchings occurred both before trials were even possible and after trials had already come to a verdict with the victims being pulled from their very jail cells to be publically and brutally murdered by mobs. Lynchings became events for entire towns or communities to participate in and observe, creating a carnivalesque atmosphere in which the illegality of the murderous intentions and acts of the mob were seen as (and ultimately proved to be) beyond the reach of the law. Participants and observers not only would gather for these brutal murders, but also take photos to send to relatives through the postal services and take souvenirs of the materials used to lynch the victim as well as pieces of the victim’s body. Understanding the spectacle and celebratory atmosphere surrounding lynching and other types of extralegal violence and punishment inflicted on black bodies throughout the South helps to contextualize the ways in which this violently racialized space influences what I read as the haunting South throughout Capote’s works.

Also helping to contextualize the racialized aspect of the haunting South is Siobhan B. Somerville’s book *Queering the Color Line: Race and the Invention of Homosexuality in American Culture*. Somerville considers the ways race and homosexuality are conflated within the medical field, the law, and the national ideology:

...it was not merely a historical coincidence that the classification of bodies as either “homosexual” or “heterosexual” emerged at the same time that the United States was aggressively constructing and policing the boundary between “black” and “white” bodies ... instead ...the simultaneous efforts to shore up and bifurcate categories of race and sexuality in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were deeply intertwined. (Somerville, 3)

This simultaneous construction and policing of both sexuality and race not only exposes the similar ways in which these two categories of otherness were perceived by the nation, but also inherently links these two forms of otherness, marking racialized bodies as queered, and queer bodies as non-white.

Throughout this reading of *Other Voices*, *Other Rooms* and *Local Color* I want to think through the ways in which images and moments in the text can be queer and grotesque while also lending themselves to these images and eruptions that make up the Haunting South. These hauntings and spectral moments in the text can influence, intersect, and circulate around these moments that are also queer and grotesque. Sharon Patricia Holland also provides insight into the grotesque: “The power of the grotesque is its ability to present the intangible as real and to provide alternative constructions of the self that have no explanation in the language of rational thought” (71). This formulation of the grotesque allows my readings of the disturbing and alternative mirrored figures throughout Capote’s work to effectively other these characters and figures as grotesqueries much in the way that queerness and race others these characters as well.

My reading of grotesqueries and the haunting South purposefully moves away from the Southern Gothic, rooting itself instead in a space that is much less nostalgic for the Old South, and much less interested in the narrative surrounding the fall of the South/rehashing of the Civil

War, but rather is informed by critical theory that deals with ideas of hauntings, eruptions, and ghosts. My work intends to delineate the ways in which the racial violence, inequality, and unrest surrounding the South's past refuses to ever be fully a part of the past – rather images and ideas surrounding these horrors return at the least expected moment in unexpected guises to haunt and remind the living that they will never truly die – the past is a part of and is imprinted on the present and refuses vehemently to be buried. My work is trying to let these ghosts and hauntings guide us through the works of Capote, to perform a reading of Capote's works that allows a way out of the depressing and overwhelmingly negative readings that have been done when looking at Capote's work strictly as part of the Southern Gothic genre.

The South in this work figures not as a discrete geographical space, but rather a space that is informed by the cultural imaginary and the heavily laden racialized history of the South. This South can erupt from anywhere and in any geographical location, bringing the South to the forefront of the conversation as well as effectively racializing the space in which the eruption occurs. The South becomes then this fluid and porous space in which racialization, queerness, and the grotesque can be navigated in the in-between spaces or erupt from the seams to haunt the present. These hauntings informed by the past and speaking to the history of the racialized South also speak to the present moment and the ways in which the South exists everywhere and is always already relevant and in conversation with the present.

Throughout my thesis I am arguing that a theory of the haunting South emerges and I propose that Capote's work can be read as exhibiting the eruptions and disruptions associated with the it, but that the haunting South is by no means an idea that exists only within Capote's work. This idea can be found in many other works throughout region and time. I am focusing particularly on Capote's work because *Other Voices*, *Other Rooms* and *Local Color* provide an

exceptional look into the far reaching possibilities wrapped up in the idea of the haunting South as well as providing moments that exhibit exquisitely the many ways in which images of the haunting South can erupt into a text – perhaps without even the author realizing the shadow narrative that is written into the margins. From what Capote’s biographers and the author himself have divulged concerning his opinions and experiences – there is no reason to believe that Capote explicitly portrayed these disruptive moments in these texts or that he had some sort of social agenda in the writing of these spectral images/moments found throughout his work. I am arguing that these moments must erupt from the margins – not because of some choice or decision of the author himself – but rather that this is a part of the narrative because this shadow text is a part of the history of this country.

In chapter one, I look explicitly at *Other Voices, Other Rooms* and explore the ways the novel depicts queer surveillance and violence as well as racialized surveillance and violence – exploring the ways in which these two modes of othering function as inextricably linked, often in complicated and intricate ways. This chapter will also explore the geographical layout of Noon City and Skully’s Landing – looking at the ways that geography specifically continues to replicate modes of surveillance and violence that specifically target those that are queered or racialized. Ultimately, this chapter hopes to achieve a reading of this text that allows it not to remain rooted solely in the violence, policing, and ostracism that inevitably erupt from the pages, but to read it as a critique of society as a whole.

Chapter two will explore *Local Color* considering the ways in which the haunting South, and the queer and racialized policing and violence associated with specifically Southern modes of extralegal and often murderous reactions to sexual or racial transgressions, follow Capote

throughout his travels both within the United States and abroad. This chapter considers the specters of the haunting South and its connections to queerness and the grotesqueries created by the eruptions of queered, racialized, and mutilated bodies into the narrative of the text.

Ultimately, throughout this chapter, I want to consider the ways in which the ideologies and societal expectations connected to the South are not geographically rooted to Southern spaces, but instead are linked to the cultural imaginary itself.

CHAPTER ONE

“ARE THE DEAD AS LONESOME AS THE LIVING?”:

QUEERNESS, GROTESQUERIES, AND THE HAUNTING SOUTH

IN CAPOTE’S *OTHER VOICES, OTHER ROOMS*

Promoted by the risqué Harold Halma photograph in which a young, attractive, waif-like Capote lounges looking directly through the camera, his come-hither look meeting the gaze of everyone who dares to meet his eyes, *Other Voices, Other Rooms* was Capote’s first published novel and quickly became a stunning sensation. The sensational and at times scandalous novel quickly became the site of much contest, with critics polarized concerning its merit or lack thereof and those in literary circles hotly debating Capote’s debut novel. Somehow, however, Capote has since lost the attention and sensationalism that first brought him fame and recognition. Much critical work on Capote reads this novel simply as Southern Gothicism at its most titillating perhaps, but still simply Southern Gothic, and many readings of this novel seem to find only the worst in *Other Voices, Other Rooms*.

Throughout this chapter I explore the circulations and occasional intersections between the Haunting South, queerness, and grotesqueries that lend themselves to a reading of Capote’s first text that is unlike others. The Haunting South, which in this text is rooted firmly in the geographical South, erupts not only from place and space, but also in the haunting similarities of life at Skully’s Landing to the plantation-life of the Old South. The nearest town, Noon City, also enacts and replicates many of the racialized inequalities/violence that characterize the antebellum South. Beyond the circulations and replications of the racialized violence and eruptions of the

haunting South, queerness also circulates and is alternately and repetitively embraced and rejected, performed and denied, seen as part of one's identity and as lacking identity entirely. The grotesqueries that circulate throughout this novel are often distortions and fantasy found in the unreal/surreal reality of timelessness both Noon City and Skully's Landing seem to inhabit. These grotesqueries also accompany Joel's struggles with his own identity and homosexuality – distorting and making into fantasy the uncanny and strange world in which he is forced to come to terms with his own identity and the realization of who he is.

To mediate the extreme excess found within this novel, I am moving from a reading of the more obvious policing, violence, and uncanniness that circulates around queerness to a reading of the eruptions and haunting policing, violence, and uncanniness that circulates around racialized images and characters. To do this I first consider the queered performances of gender transgression thoroughly exploring Joel and Idabel's characters as well as the attempts at forcing them into more normative roles by complete strangers, Noon City, and even members of their own families. The move from queered to racialized readings of this text occurs within my consideration of Randolph – who reveals not only his own experiences with violence and condemnation surrounding his performance of queerness but also how racialized violence and the hierarchized racial stratifications impacted his desire for Pepe – a man who was at least mixed race, if not wholly African American. I will then continue to explore the racialized violence and policing through an examination of Zoo's attempt to leave Skully's Landing to travel North only to be met with violence and trauma at the hands of men whom she believed stopped to give her a ride. This divide in my readings, however, does not mean that these two modes of otherness that are policed and met with violence are separate – rather they often overlap, intersect, and at times even help to construct each other as transgression.

From the very beginning of the novel, through Joel's interactions with other people, we quickly discover that he is viewed as strange and immediately other. Joel is staying at an inn in a town not far outside Noon City until he can get a ride into town because "there are no buses or trains heading in that direction" (3). The proprietor of this inn asks a man who drives a delivery truck to Noon City to take Joel with him. This man, Sam Radcliffe, immediately identifies Joel as different and the novel opens on a description of the boy who is not only the protagonist, but also the object of much of the movement throughout the book. This description identifies Joel immediately as effeminate, queered, transgressive, and other. It is important that the first physical description of Joel in the novel is through the eyes of a man who is severely judgmental of Joel's appearance and instantly identifies Joel as transgressive from the very opening of the novel. Joel is different and for Sam Radcliffe, not completely real – in the way "real boys" should be:

Radcliffe eyed the boy over the rim of his beer glass, not caring much for the looks of him. He had his notions of what a 'real' boy should look like, and this kid somehow offended them. He was too pretty, too delicate and fair-skinned; each of his features was shaped with a sensitive accuracy, and a girlish tenderness softened his eyes, which were brown and very large. His brown hair, cut short, was streaked with pure yellow strands. A kind of tired, imploring expression masked his thin face, and there was an unyouthful sag about his shoulders. He wore long, wrinkled white linen breeches, a limp blue shirt, the collar of which was open at the throat, and rather scuffed tan shoes. (4)

Throughout this description, Radcliffe's opinion of the boy is told to us, not through Radcliffe's own voice, but rather through the narrator's voice – inside Radcliffe's head and his sizing up of

Joel begins with the assertion that he offends Radcliffe's "notions of what a 'real' boy should look like" and then goes on to actually describe Joel as Radcliffe sees him. In short, as far as Radcliffe is concerned, Joel is too effeminate, too delicate.

Immediately after being appraised, Joel announces that he's going to live with his father and produces the letter that began his journey from New Orleans to Skully's Landing – Radcliffe considers this as well and "[t]here were two things about this letter that bothered him; first of all, the handwriting: penned in ink the rusty color of dried blood, it was a maze of curlicues and dainty i's dotted with daintier o's. What the hell kind of a man would write like that? And secondly: 'If your Pa's name is Sansom, how come you call yourself Knox?'" (7). Radcliffe functions as a stand in for the general population in many ways here, he insists on normative gender performances – even from those who are not present (the writer of the letter) – and maintains the patriarchal value system – asking Joel why his last name is different from his father's last name. Learning that Joel has his mother's last name, he laments this undoing of this lineage saying "Remember, your Pa's your Pa no matter what" (7). This insistence on patriarchal lineage and normative gender performance places Radcliffe in a position of policing others which at times creates a need for him to over-perform his own masculinity in the face of this gender transgressiveness – this over-performance leads to Radcliffe exaggerating his masculinity in such a way that his masculinity itself becomes queered: "Yessir, if I was your Pa I'd take down your britches and muss you up a bit" (8). This attempt at excessive masculinity reads as a sort of double-speak that is at once both threatening violence and same-sex rape. This moment leaves us wondering if Radcliffe knows of the sexual overtones or if he is simply unaware of the implications of his attempt at excessive masculinity.

In spite of his issues with both Joel and the letter writer's gender performance, Radcliffe takes Joel into Noon City. Along the ride, Joel asks Radcliffe to tell him about his family at Skully's Landing – the family that Joel doesn't know but is going to live with. Radcliffe claims to know who Mister Sansom is but then says "...the real fact is, I never laid eyes on him" (13). Joel continues to question Radcliffe, learning who lives out at Skully's Landing and getting a preview of others' reactions to Randolph's otherness with Radcliffe exclaiming "And the cousin ... yes, by God, the cousin!" before "smil[ing] a curious smile, as if amused by a private joke too secret for sharing" (13). This as we later learn is Radcliffe's way of acknowledging the general opinion of the transgressiveness of Randolph's homosexuality. These few details are all the information Joel is given before arriving at Skully's Landing. Radcliffe also performs the normative functions that will later be performed by townspeople at Noon City – marking Mister Sansom as an oddity and Randolph as transgressive, Joel having been othered upon the opening of the novel should fit in with the group of people isolated, queered, and transgressive that live at Skully's Landing.

Upon arrival into Noon City, Radcliffe refuses to take Joel all the way out to Skully's Landing – instead leaving Joel to figure out how to traverse the last leg of his journey alone and "[t]oting the sticker-covered suitcase, he cautiously commenced his first walk in the town" (14). Noon City has a number of buildings on one side of the street that house the businesses in the town – "across the road in isolation stand two other structures: a jail, and a tall queer tottering ginger-colored house. The jail has not housed a white criminal in over four years..." (14). Even the town is organized in such a way as to separate the buildings seen as normal and those viewed as transgressive. The jail is not only separate from all other buildings and set aside in this isolated space that is not considered a real part of the town, but rather the jail explicitly has

housed only black bodies for at least “the last four years.” The jail is viewed and used as a space to contain only black bodies and as we will later see, those that enter the jail here often get sent away to work on chain gangs elsewhere. This replication of the violence and forced labor of slavery found within the excessively biased legal system of Noon City begins the echoes and eruptions of the racialized power dynamics of the antebellum South that this isolated and timeless space replicates and alludes to throughout the novel.

Significantly, the jail is beside this “tall queer tottering ginger-colored house” where “no one has lived ... for God knows how long, and it is said that once three exquisite sisters were raped and murdered here...” (14). This house figures as a space of death – creating a divide in this town between life and death – the shops, stores, and offices as a space in which life thrives and the jail and this house as the side of the street that only the dead inhabit. I read death here to consider both literal death as well as the social death created by the jail and the prisoners’ subsequent work on the chain gangs. The story about the house continues to claim that these sisters were “raped and murdered here in a gruesome manner by a fiendish Yankee bandit...” creating distinction between the murdered but exquisite Southern sisters and the “fiendish Yankee bandit.” These distinctions lend themselves to implicit value judgments that become even more obvious as the story continues. The “Yankee bandit ... rode a silver-grey horse and wore a velvet cloak stained scarlet with the blood of Southern womanhood...” (15). At this moment when the Yankee bandit not only begins to look like a villain out of either a western (“silver-grey horse”) or an opera (“velvet cloak”) the tale exposes itself not only as an exaggeration of the actual events that happened in the house (becoming exaggerated through the myth making that happens in small southern towns) but also as a story filtered through the culturally imagined version of what the South is and how it is embodied by these women whose

deaths become the death of “southern womanhood” itself. Then the text exposes this as a story told in the same vein as other stylized and limiting versions of the South because “when told by antiquated ladies claiming one-time acquaintance with the beautiful victims, it is a tale of Gothic splendor” (15). Older women in Noon City tell the tale continuously replicating not only its inherent almost-allegorical North-South divide, but also causing the house to remain haunted and viewed as a place of death.

The only part of this house that does not remain death-like is the porch, where visiting farm-families sit and talk during their Saturday visits to town. These Saturday visits in Noon City are divided by gender – the women sit on the porch of the old house and the men gather in the livery stable: “Sickness and weddings and courting and funerals and God are the favorite topics on the porch. Over at the stable the men joke and drink whiskey, talk crops and play jackknife: once in a while there are terrible fights...” (16). Before Joel speaks to or meets a single person in this town, we as readers know that this town performs gender in exuberantly normative fashions and see ritual and tradition not only as important but as simply the way things are.

Quickly, however, a barber asks Joel to “look up the road yonder” to see “a girl with fiery dutchboy hair ... about his height, and w[earing] a pair of brown shorts and a yellow polo shirt ... prancing back and forth in front of the tall, curious old house, thumbing her nose at the barber and twisting her face into evil shapes” (16-17). He propositions Joel to “collar that nasty youngun” who “whooping like a wildwest Indian ... whipped down the road, a yelling throng of young admirers racing in her wake” (17). We later learn that this is Idabel and she is well known and disliked uniformly in Noon City because of her transgressive performance of gender. From within the barbershop, Joel hears women discussing a conversation the barber’s wife had with the schoolteacher about Idabel – recounting the teacher’s words, Idabel ““oughta be in the

penitentiary” and the barber’s wife claims to have replied, “Well, it wasn’t no revelation to me cause I always knew she was a freak, no ma’am, never saw that Idabel Thompkins in a dress yet” (17). Not only is Idabel othered and viewed as transgressive – the barber asks a strange boy (Joel) to perform violence on her, the school teacher believes she should be in the penitentiary, and the barber’s wife labels her a “freak” simply because of Idabel’s lack of feminine clothing. From all sides, Idabel’s gender performance is policed and her transgressiveness marks her as other and outside of the accepted norms of this town.

As Joel moves on, he enters the diner, R.V. Lacey’s Princely Place and soon Idabel’s gendered transgressions are policed and punished again. Idabel enters, claiming to be looking for her sister – but seems to be much more interested in Joel – staring intently at Joel the entire time she is inside. When left without an answer as to who Joel is, she asks: “Hey, hows about a dope on credit, Roberta?” (21). Roberta replies quickly, “I don’t need to tell you you have a right smart tongue, Idabel Thompkins, and always did have. And till such time as you learn a few *ladylike* manners, I’d be obliged if you’d keep outa my place, hear? ... and don’t come back till you put on some *decent female clothes*” (21, emphasis mine). The townspeople make it abundantly clear that Idabel’s refusal to perform gender and physically resemble their version of femininity is unacceptable and results in expulsion, hostility, and threats. Exiled from much of the town, Idabel has no choice but to run about outside the stores or to assume the place expected of her on the porch with her mother and the other ladies who live outside town.

Joel is finally led to the stable where a mule drawn wagon driven by Jesus Fever awaits him as his transportation to Skully’s Landing – as he draws nearer to Skully’s Landing, it is as if he is travelling back in time, or at least to a place where the past and present remain much closer together. Jesus Fever is described as “the oldest ol buzzard you ever put eyes on” (23). Joel

approaches the wagon and “with the staccato movements of a mechanical doll, he [Jesus Fever] turned sideways till his eyes, yellow feeble eyes dotted with milky specks, looked down on them with dreamy detachment” (23). Jesus Fever is characterized as a magical, wizard-like figure – playing into the tropes of African Americans being more in tune with the supernatural as well as being characterized as doll-like which paints him as explicitly non-human. Jesus Fever “impressed Joel’s imagination, there was a touch of the wizard in his yellow, spotted eyes: it was a tricky quality that suggested, well, magic and things read in books” (23). Jesus Fever is the first inhabitant of Skully’s Landing that Joel meets and his appearance and Joel’s assumption that he is somehow magic both foreshadow the layered and surreal atmosphere to be found when they actually arrive at the landing. Skully’s Landing is consistently characterized as outside of time and fantastic in ways that other places are not – inhabited by odd, eccentric characters, filled with mirrors that distort reflections, full of secrets known and unknown that affect day to day life, and wrought with eruptions of hauntings and violence that refuse to stay buried.

As Joel relaxes in the back looking at the stars and imagining images in them “[t]here was a vivid, slightly red three-quarter moon; the evening wind eerily stirred shawls of Spanish moss which draped the branches of passing trees” (25). As Joel travels closer to Skully’s Landing, the landscape becomes more remote, more reminiscent of time before modernization. And, as if conjured from the mysterious southern scenery, Idabel and her much more feminine twin, Florabel, appear and Joel immediately views them as specter-like. Offering them a ride to their home, Florabel climbs aboard the wagon, but Idabel refuses to ride. Instead she is “running, running like a pale animal through the lake of weeds lining the wayside” (28). Florabel in her attempt to be constantly proper, not only sees herself as the better twin, but says to Joel “[i]t don’t pay to treat Idabel like she was a human being” (27). Idabel, because of her transgressive

gender performance in both dress and behavior, is labeled not simply as queer but rather non-human and animalistic. As Somerville discusses in reference to race in *Queering the Color Line*, Idabel, because she does not fit the appropriate model of appearance or behavior seems to be seen as behind evolutionarily and thus coded not only as animalistic, but also coded as non-white, non-human, and queer. As we have already seen with the other townspeople's reactions to Idabel and now hearing her twin say it plainly – Idabel is viewed as other throughout the town which Florabel seems to believe justifies the hostility, violence, and ostracism Idabel experiences when interacting with both the people of Noon City and her own family.

Later in the novel, Idabel's mistreatment, this time at the hands of her own twin, continues because of her gender transgression. Florabel convinces their father that Idabel's dog, Henry, has some kind of disease and should be shot. Throughout the novel, Henry proves to be Idabel's only constant companion and the only character within the novel that completely and without judgement of any kind accepts Idabel and treats her decently. This fact should say more about the town's people and Idabel's family than it does about Idabel herself. With Henry's life in danger, she convinces Joel to run away with her one night. Suddenly disappearing out the door when Idabel arrives at Skully's Landing, Joel needs their escape to be momentous: "'Run!' he cried, reaching Idabel, for to stop before the Landing stood forever out of sight was an idea unendurable" (150). Leaving the Landing, Joel imagines a life for Idabel and himself, a future that he cannot imagine within the claustrophobic and paper-thin reality found at Skully's Landing.

When they begin to enter Noon City they see a carnival: the "whirl of ferris-wheel lights revolved in the distance; rockets rose, burst, fell over Noon City like showering rainbows" (152). The carnival atmosphere here, however, does not inspire a Bakhtinian carnivalesque in which the

celebration “offer[s] release from the oppression of official culture, a suspension of its laws, an exhilarating inversion of its authority, a momentary state of topsy-turveydom, in which the common people become powerful and the powerful people become ridiculous” (Roach 243). Instead, the status quo and official laws remain steadfastly in place, with Joel and Idabel immediately encountering “a young Negro [who] watched sadly from the isolation of the jail” (152). Somehow, they seem to believe that the gender policing and normativity will be suspended even though the actual law of the city remained – they are quickly reminded however as they attempt to eat at R.V. Lacey’s Princely Place that Idabel’s lack of appropriate gender performance is not tolerated. Miss Roberta turns Idabel away again, telling her that “she oughta be home learning to fix a man his vittles” (153). Joel and Idabel both leave the diner, heading in the direction of the actual carnival, it seems in the hopes of finding a space less interested in policing normativity than the town itself.

Surprisingly within the actual boundaries of the carnival, they find a space where their gender non-conformity is much more welcome. After playing a few games, they soon garner the attention of one of the performers in the “freak show” and talk her into having cokes with them, even though “they did not quite believe she was a midget” (154). The space of the “freak show” does allow their transgressiveness to either remain unnoticed or to be mild enough to not be seen as worth policing, however, the very fact that the only safe space in which Joel and Idabel can exist within Noon City is at the “freak show” effectively still labels them as “freaks” and “outcasts” from the rest of the town. Miss Wisteria, the woman who plays the role of “the midget” in the “freak show” visits with them after her performance and surprisingly her gender performance is – at least at first – squarely in line with her gender and even inspires some attempts at gender conformity in Idabel: “Draining her coke, [Miss Wisteria] took out a lipstick

and reshaped her kewpie-bow; then a queer thing happened: Idabel, borrowing the lipstick, painted an awkward clownish line across her mouth ... Idabel was in love” (155). Only here in this carnival space where gender and normality are all but completely suspended, does Idabel fall in love with Miss Wisteria and attempt to show that by putting on her lipstick, by being willing to momentarily conform to gendered expectations of femininity.

Now I would like to turn my attention to Skully’s Landing and the ways in which queerness and the surveillance/violence associated with non-conforming gender performance, merges with the the racialized surveillance and violence that erupts and reveals the lack of distance between the antebellum South and the time in which this takes place. Upon waking the first morning in Skully’s Landing, Joel is introduced to, according to Miss Amy, the grand history of the former plantation as well as its continued removal from the modernization elsewhere. Miss Amy tells Joel that there is no indoor plumbing, but a chamber pot, no electricity, but candles and lamps from which Joel can choose his preference (36). Joel, attempting to gain favor with this strange woman, compliments her hair, and getting no response, compliments the room. This compliment to the room has the desired effect:

‘I’ve always considered it the finest room in the house, Cousin Randolph was born here: in that very bed. And Angela Lee ... Randolph’s mother: a beautiful woman, originally from Memphis ... died here, oh, not many years ago. We’ve never used it since.’ She perked her head suddenly, as if to hear some distant sound; her eyes squinted, then closed altogether. But presently she relaxed and eased back into the chair. ‘I suppose you’ve noticed the view?’” (37)

Miss Amy’s nostalgia and desire for the past both concerning herself and the “glory” of the Landing before parts of it burned/fell apart colors her ability to interact with the present. Miss

Amy barely exists if not concerned with the past, and throughout the novel, most of the history of Skully's Landing comes directly from Miss Amy. She is not haunted by eruptions of the past; she is haunted continuously by the ghost of the Landing and the social life it provided that she no longer has.

At breakfast Joel learns Randolph is not feeling well, Zoo cooks the breakfast at Miss Amy's bidding, and Joel's father is nowhere to be found. Joel will learn much later in the novel that his father is paralyzed and has extensive brain damage. After breakfast, Joel's next destination is the garden where he plays amongst the pillars – the only things left of an entire wing of Skully's Landing after a fire – and discovers the bell: “It was a bell like those used in slave-days to summon fieldhands from work; the metal had turned a mildewed green, and the platform on which it rested was rotten” (52). After hearing nothing but Miss Amy's glowing memories of the Landing, Joel discovers the darker side of this plantation space in the form of a slave bell fallen into disrepair. This reminder of this space as a functioning plantation paints Jesus Fever and Zoo in a completely different light – it may not be “slave-days” any longer, but Jesus Fever and Zoo perform the same functions and have the same lack of agency as slaves (probably on this very plantation and Jesus Fever seems old enough to have been a slave himself). This foreshadows both the route of Zoo's attempted journey away from the Landing later in the novel and its inevitable failure.

Tied to this eruption of the past and the merging of that racialized past with the present lives of Jesus Fever and Zoo is the queer lady. Turning away from the bell to look at the house, Joel sees the queer lady:

She was holding aside the curtains of the left corner window, and smiling and nodding at him, as if in greeting or approval; but she was no one Joel had ever

known: the hazy substance of her face, the suffused marshmallow features, brought to mind his own vaporish reflection in the wavy chamber mirror. And her white hair was like the wig of a character from history: a towering pale pompadour with fat dribbling curls. Whoever she was, Joel could not imagine, her sudden appearance seemed to throw a trance across the garden: a butterfly, poised on a dahlia stem, ceased winking its wings, and the rasping F of the bumblebees droned into nothing. (52-3)

The queer lady erupts into Joel's exploration of the garden, haunting both because of the queerness of her gender performance, and because of her anachronistic historically linked appearance. The queer lady mirrors the grandeur associated with the mistress of a plantation, historically linked to the time of slavery. This figure appears to Joel from nowhere, fitting not within the gender norms he has seen thus far in his life nor within the current time period. A trance is thrown upon the garden and all movement seems to stop because this eruptive appearance of the queer lady disturbs the expectations of both Joel and the reader, leaping from a space that is unknowable into the visible and the real, but leaving both Joel and readers with the feeling they might have just seen a ghost. This is the second time that Joel has been confronted with the unexpected appearances and disappearances of others and left feeling as if he has just witnessed an apparition.

Though Joel has been in Randolph's company several times throughout the early part of the novel, Joel does not truly begin to understand Randolph's past or his odd gender performance until being invited into Randolph's room to have his portrait painted. Upon entering this previously unknown space, Joel is overwhelmed by the excess and the ghosts to be found here. Randolph's room is filled to the brim with things: his collection of exotic pornographic pictures,

broken dolls, and mirrors. The first thing Joel notices is that there is very little open space, almost all the empty space has been filled with objects or decorations, "...it was so unlike anything he'd ever known before: faded gold and tarnished silk reflecting in ornate mirrors, it all made him feel as though he'd eaten too much candy... as if the objects in a flood had floated through the windows and sunk here" (111). He also notes the dolls specifically, laid out on a table "some with missing arms, legs, some without heads, other whose bead-eyes stared glass-blank through their innards, straw and sawdust, showed through open wounds; all, however, were costumed, and exquisitely, in a variety of velvet, lace, linen" (111).

This high intensity decadence as well as the grotesqueries at home in Randolph's room reveal the many layers and apparitions at home in the space Randolph calls his own. These dolls function as imitations of life but torn apart in ways that no living thing would survive – but the dolls have survived their destruction and "live on" in their costumes on the display table. Alongside "living on" in spite of their destruction, they also portray death, an uncanny imitation of a corpse though lacking any bodily fluid and organs, these dolls present a visceral display that though it contains no blood, leads one to much more grotesque images because of their human likeness. These dolls are a symbolic representation of the nature of the haunting of Skully's Landing, existing between life and death though never truly either. These dolls also mirror the gruesome and grotesque displays of the lynched corpses of (primarily) African American men. This link between Randolph's queered and excessive performance/space and racialized violence does not end with the dolls. In the center of this table filled with the destructions of human-like doll bodies is a "little photograph in a silver frame so elaborate as to be absurd" (111). This photograph is Randolph's picture of Pepe, Dolores, Ed Sansom, and himself taken during the brief period that the four of them were together. Randolph had a relationship with Dolores before

Ed Sansom and Pepe became part of their group – after the quartet began spending time together, Pepe fell in love with Dolores and Randolph fell in love with Pepe.

Along with the complications to their loves lives, Ed Sansom and Pepe also bring along with them the complications of the racialized South. Randolph describes Ed Sansom to Joel as “very sporting, and, if your standards are not too distinguished, handsome, ... but to be truthful, I never much liked him, quite the contrary; for one thing, his owning Pepe, or being, that is, his manager, complicated our relations” (114). Pepe is described as being “very dark, almost Negroid” (111) and was a prizefighter. Erupting into this love triangle is the entire history of slavery in the South, connected ultimately to Randolph’s returning to Skully’s Landing – a plantation house – with the injured and ultimately vegetative Ed Sansom.

The love triangle/friendship of sorts fell apart when Dolores and Pepe ran away together and Randolph shot Ed Sansom. To position this picture in the center of the destructed dolls connects those in the picture to the between life and death state the dolls perpetually exist in. We already know Ed Sansom is between life and death, existing in a constant vegetative state in which “a list of prices recited from a Sears Roebuck interested him ... as much as any wild-west story” (113). Pepe and Dolores had run away together, leaving Randolph, not only sad at their loss but also positive that Dolores would destroy and discard Pepe much like she did Randolph. Randolph notices that Joel is looking at the picture and says “do not take it seriously, what you see here. It is only a joke played on myself by myself ... it amuses and horrifies ... a rather gaudy grave, you might say” (112). Acknowledging this as a sort of “grave” heightens the haunting surrounding this photograph; as Randolph later explains it was taken two days before Dolores and Pepe ran way and Randolph shot Ed Sansom. As a sort of memento of a time when

he truly lived, Randolph keeps this moment of life in his room in the midst of broken dolls and calls it a grave.

Soon after this moment Randolph also proclaims himself unsure as to whether or not he is even still alive – or maybe ever were – claiming ““when I die, if indeed I haven’t already, then let me be dead drunk and curled, as in my mother’s womb, in the warm blood of darkness. ... Inasmuch as I was born dead, how ironic that I should die at all; yes, born dead, literally: the midwife was perverse enough to slap me into life”” (112). This identification with being in between life and death not only links Randolph to the haunting nature of Skully’s Landing itself, but also links him to the dolls on the table – making them make sense in a way that they would not otherwise. These dolls wear the destruction of their lives, much like Randolph, and carry the haunting specters of their past upon their bodies, but are dressed immaculately because for Randolph, on the outside he cannot wear the destruction and ghosts that he carries with him – though the specters of the past that these dolls conjure up refuse to be hidden behind garish displays of decadence.

Later, while imagining elaborate scenarios in which he is fatherless, Joel is hit in the leg by a bouncing red tennis ball. This is the moment, almost 100 pages into the novel that Joel learns that the father he travelled to live with actually exists. Until this moment everyone at the landing refused to acknowledge Joel’s questions about his father, at best giving non-answers, sometimes ignoring his questions altogether. This moment, this red ball interrupting Joel’s inner turmoil, becomes the catalyst that allows Joel to be invited in to his father’s room to finally meet Mister Sansom, but not before creating more confusion for Joel:

It struck his knee, and all that happened quickly: a brief blur of light flashed as a door banged in the hall above, and then he felt something hit him, go past, go

bumping down the steps, and it was suddenly as though all his bones had unjoined, as though all the vital parts of him had unraveled like the springs of a sprung watch. A little red ball, it was rolling and knocking on the chamber floor, and he thought of Idabel: he wished he were as brave as Idabel; he wished he had a brother, sister, somebody; he wished he were dead. (96)

Suddenly with the appearance of this little red ball, the entire house changes. Joel had come to the point of giving up ever seeing his father, thinking that he was ready for them to give up the game and just tell him that his father wasn't there. The last thing he expected was for a little red ball to make his entire view of reality come crashing down. Even in considering the relative enormity of this house, Joel suddenly learns that after staying here for weeks, the very geography of the house has changed; a room that he possibly didn't realize existed and most certainly didn't think was hiding his father – has appeared. Much like a magician's trick, this room seems to have materialized from nowhere. Allowed to know of the room only because he has seen the red ball, Joel is invited in and told to bring water. Another ghost erupts from nowhere, in the form of this ball, leading Joel to the ghost of the man who was once his father and is the victim of Randolph's doomed and haunted desire for Pepe, the man Ed Sansom "owned."

Once inside, the haunting scene continues. Layers of the past, of the secrets, of the appearance of this room from nowhere continue to circulate around this very odd scene:

Amy and Randolph, though some distance apart, were fused like Siamese twins: they seemed a kind of freak animal, half-man half-woman... Joel felt as though they interpreted his presence here as somehow indecent, but it was impossible to withdraw, impossible to advance." (97)

This double-figure that Amy and Randolph create only intensifies the queerness inherent in this moment. They have become one being, a “freak animal, half-man half-woman” queered and merged in their connection to the secret of Ed Sansom. Joel reads this moment as “somehow indecent” but after having been summoned by the specter-like eruption of the little red ball, there really is no longer any option for Joel but to follow this to its inevitable conclusion: seeing his coma-like father. As he neared the bed “[r]eflected in th[e] mirror were a pair of eyes ... a teary grey; they watched Joel with a kind of dumb glitter, and soon, as if to acknowledge him, they closed in a solemn double wink, and turned ... so that he saw them only as part of a head, a shaved head lying with invalid looseness on unsanitary pillows” (98). Joel views his father not as a whole person, but rather parts: eyes and a head. His father still in this moment does not become wholly real, remaining throughout the novel a spectral presence that exists firmly in between the spaces of life and death. Ed Sansom is also inevitably queered; this piece-meal observation of him not only invokes the broken and twisted dolls, but also creates his broken body as non-human. Much like queerness or race can mark one as non-human, this intense destruction of Ed Sansom’s physical and mental faculties also marks him as less than human.

Even now, seeing his father, Joel turns to Amy and Randolph to ask ““Is that him?”” (98) and when told that this is indeed his father, Joel says simply ““But you never told me”” (98). Astonished and stunned, not only by the grave and awkward ways that Miss Amy and Randolph behave, but also by the changed and apparition-like geography of Skully’s Landing, it takes Ed Sansom’s dropping of another little red tennis ball to snap Joel out of this trance and take the water to his father. This scene in which Joel not only learns of a space within the house that remained unknown for quite a period of time, but also of his father who is not at all like Joel expected but rather only barely alive, solidifies Skully’s Landing as a space between life and

death. A space where life and death exist simultaneously and are consistently interchangeable leads to frequent eruptions and endless apparitions, Joel's father being only one of many. In spite of his physical and mental injuries, Ed Sansom continues to live throughout the novel in his almost vegetative state. Jesus Fever, however, succumbs to a lengthy illness and eventually dies.

Jesus Fever's funeral highlights the stark contrast between the relatively well-off white inhabitants of Skully's Landing and Jesus Fever's poverty and almost slave status. After he dies he is placed in a cedar chest, and "there he remained for two days while Amy, with Randolph's aid, decided the location of his grave" (131). Jesus Fever was buried on the property, pulled to the grave by the mule John Brown where Amy, Zoo, and Joel held a funeral of sorts though "[t]he cedar chest capsized as they lowered it into the grave" (132) concretizing the cheapness of this ceremony. Jesus Fever's funeral is not the mourning and grief filled ceremony that one expects from funerals, rather it reads as more of an obligation – he must be buried but they all quickly move on from this event, with Zoo the only real mourner, singing Jesus Fever a requiem: only as it "became stillness ... [was] Jesus ... really dead" (132). This moment holds layers of meaning and foreshadowing for Zoo as only after Jesus Fever died could she leave to head North as she has always wanted to do. The last words before Zoo leaves are "Jesus was really dead." Although in the context of the novel, the Jesus is obviously Jesus Fever, it cannot go without saying that this moment also alludes to Jesus Christ and ultimately Christianity as a whole. Zoo's attempt to go North ends violently and is foreshadowed by this allusion to the death of Christ.

When Joel awakes the next morning, Zoo has packed all her belongings and dressed in her best clothes to go North, to Washington D. C.: "[h]er face was powdered with flour, a sort of reddish oil inflamed her cheeks, she'd scented herself with vanilla flavoring, and greased her hair shiny" (133). This journey is not only a journey North for Zoo, but mirrors the journey escaped

slaves took, heading from the South into the New England area, to freedom and autonomy. Joel meets this realization that Zoo is actually leaving with anger, contradicting Zoo's allusion to their friendship with "[y]ou were never my friend. But after all why should anyone such as me have anything in common with such as you?" (133). In his anger, he retreats into the stereotyped and racialized version of reality in which a young white male would not have anything to connect him to a young black woman. By invoking these racialized stereotypes, Joel re-establishes the hierarchized relationship expected between them, informed by the historical master/slave relationship that their generation is not far removed from. Zoo, however, is not a slave and is not owned by Joel or any of the other inhabitants of Skully's Landing and is free to leave if she chooses. She ultimately attempts to placate Joel by promising to send for him and take care of him after she establishes herself somewhere up North – performing a role very near that of the loyal slave who refuses to leave her master's side.

She finally gives Joel a sword that was Jesus Fever's "proudest thing" (134) after questioning if Joel was "man enough to own it" (134). At this invocation of Joel's potential effeminacy, he immediately changes the way his outward performance (whether this is out of shame at not performing masculinity or simply out of the desire to get the sword cannot be known). However, when given the sword Joel "strapped it to his waist. It was a weapon against the world, and he tensed with the old grandeur of its sheath along his leg: suddenly he was most powerful, and unafraid" (134). Obviously a sword as a weapon does come along with certain connotations of power, but there are also very explicit phallic connotations to this sword as well. In connection to the previous questioning of Joel's masculinity, this sword then seems to solidify –for a moment at least – his performance of masculinity, giving him a visible and much larger than biologically possible phallus with which to affirm his masculinity and support his

performance of masculinity with “its sheath along his leg.” Joel’s performance of masculinity cannot be sustained however and is undone not much later in the novel, when Joel and Idabel are wandering through the woods planning their attempt at running away and come upon a snake. Joel is unable to kill the snake with the sword, leaving Idabel to take the sword – the phallic object solidifying Joel’s masculinity – and kill the snake for him. After giving Joel the sword and once again affirming that she was heading for snow, the North, and specifically Washington D. C., Zoo leaves and Joel is left to watch her disappear down the road.

The novel then skips directly to Miss Amy and Randolph’s reactions to Zoo’s disappearance. Miss Amy describes Zoo as having “no gratitude,” quickly connecting this to her own disdain at having been “le[ft] with a houseful of sick people” to care for on her own. Not only does Zoo’s having left upset Miss Amy, but she is offended that Zoo is not in fact the “loyal slave” role she is expected to perform. Miss Amy then goes on: “I am a lady. . . .And if Randolph thinks I’m going to play nursemaid to orphans and idiots . . . damn Missouri!” (135). Miss Amy’s claim that she is a lady directly contrasts her perception of Zoo – because of this contrast it becomes clear that though Miss Amy thinks cooking, cleaning, and “playing nursemaid” is below her, it is perfectly fitting for Zoo to perform those functions because of her status as almost slave. She goes on to confirm this view of Zoo as lesser and occupying slave-like status claiming: ““Niggers! Angela Lee warned me time and again, said never trust a nigger: their minds and hair are full of kinks in equal measure”” (135). Not only does she switch from talking specifically about Zoo as a person to generalizing about “niggers” but begins to rely on stereotypical traits like the lack of trustworthiness and connecting the appearance of African American hair with that of their minds. Joel is asked to take Randolph his breakfast (because Zoo

is gone) and Randolph's reaction only solidifies the still firmly in place stratification of race on this old plantation.

Joel arrives in Randolph's room while he is gluing feathers to a cardboard cut-out to create a bird figure. While Joel expects a dramatic reaction to Zoo's leaving from Randolph, instead he is met with Randolph describing this as "tiresome" and "absurd ... [b]ecause she can't come back, one never can" (136). Randolph at first simply reaffirms the stereotype – it simply must be absurd that Zoo would act independently of their wishes and attempt to find her own freedom and autonomy. Now acting as Zoo's defender in the face of both Miss Amy and Randolph's reactions to her leaving, Joel proposes that "[s]he wouldn't want to anyway ... [s]he wasn't happy here" (136). This attempt to regain dignity and purpose for Zoo (though she is not present) is quickly forced aside however, as Randolph confirms the hierarchized and racialized expectations still maintained in this postbellum South:

"Darling child," said Randolph, dipping a bluejay feather in the past, "happiness is relative, and" he continued, fitting the feather on the cardboard, "Missouri Fever will discover that all she has deserted is her *proper place* in a rather general puzzle. Like this." He held up the cardboard in order that Joel could see: there feathers were arranged so the effect was of a living bird transfixed. "Each feather has, according to size and color, a particular position, and if one were the slightest awry, why, it would not look at all real." (136, emphasis mine)

According to Randolph, not only does everyone have a "proper place" in life, but "reality" requires everyone to be in their "proper place" – this not only reaffirms the racialized hierarchy and its expectations but also questions "reality" itself. This also complicates the novel because though Randolph espouses these ideas concerning race, he obviously does not believe the same

way concerning gender and sexuality as we already know he dresses in drag and is known to be queer. It perhaps speaks more to Randolph's own personal perceptions – considering it would be difficult for him to believe he was lesser than heterosexuals, but it also connects to the ways Howard discusses the views surrounding queerness in the South. Howard claims that queerness was often more acceptable in Southern spaces given that the queer(s) in question remained quiet about their sexuality and did not publicly perform queerness. Race, however, is a much more difficult categorization to hide or keep quiet about.

After Zoo leaves, the static sort of stability of Joel's experiences at Skully's Landing begin to break down: Idabel and Joel attempt to run away and fail rather miserably, Joel ends up violently ill from this adventure and has several surreal dreams before becoming well again, and – as Joel finds out after he has come back to reality and is recuperating – Zoo has returned to Skully's Landing. Joel's first words to her are: ““Randolph told me you couldn't come back ... I'm glad he was wrong”” (173), but truthfully the Zoo that left did not come back. She doesn't respond except to sigh and Joel assesses her appearance: “How small she seemed, cramped, as if some reduction of the spirit had taken double toll and made demands upon the flesh: with that illusion of height was gone the animal grace, arrow-like dignity, defiant emblem of her separate heart” (173). Zoo has changed, has lost all of the characteristics that made her more than the slave-like servant she was supposed to be; everything that allowed Zoo not only to believe she could go North, but to actually leave and plan to never come back, has gone – leaving only a shell of the independent and determined person she was – relegating her to her “proper place” as a servant who is almost a slave. Joel then asks if she made it to Washington D. C. only to find out that she didn't make it very far at all.

Zoo stopped on the side of the road to rest and quickly thereafter a truck stops on the side of the road beside her and the men in the truck get out:

...go on, gal, get down in the ditch; never mind why, says the man, and shoved her so she rolled over the embankment, landing on her back helpless as a Junebug. ...two boys, answering the driver's whistle, jumped down in the ditch and cut her off at either end; both these boys wore Panama hats, and one had on a pair of sailor pants and a soldier's shirt: it was he who caught her and called for the Negro to bring a rifle. "That mean nigger ... put that rifle up side my ear, an the man, he done tore my pretty dress straight down the front, an tells them Panama boys to set to..." (174)

When Zoo sees the truck stop, at first she believes they might give her a ride; instead she is thrown into a ditch and gang raped, held at gunpoint by a black man who performs his function as faithful slave-like servant even while the men he works for violently brutalize Zoo. This reinforces Randolph's invocation of "proper place[s]" and works to violently return Zoo to her "proper place" as less than human and to be used as white men see fit. She is immediately sexualized by these men because African American women were distinctly differentiated from white women: "the [opposing] characterizations [of these groups] literalized the sexual and racial ideologies of the nineteenth-century 'Cult of True Womanhood,' which explicitly privileged white women's sexual 'purity' while implicitly suggesting African American women's sexual accessibility" (Somerville 27-8). Zoo is ultimately seen as sexually accessible, non-human (or at least not deserving of the respect and consideration given to "pure" white women, and as a non-threat because unlike white women whose rapists would be put on trial (or if they were African

American probably lynched before the trial could take place), Zoo has no legal recourse because her status as African American marks her as legally disenfranchised.

Zoo continues the story of her gang-rape, placing us inside her head for the first time, forcing us, as readers, to not only consider the horror she experienced, but to face the trauma and violence she experienced as well as the horrifying way she constructed the experience:

“I hear the Lord’s voice talkin down that gun barrel, and the Lord said Zoo, you done took the wrong road and come the wrong way, you et of the apple, he said, an hits pure rotten, an outa the sky my Lord look down and brung comfort, an whilst them devils went jerkin like billygoats right then and there in all my shameful sufferin I said holy words: Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I’ll fear no evil, for you is with me Lord, yea verily, I say, an them fools laughed, but my Lord took that sailor boy’s shape, an us, me an the Lord, us loved.” (174-5)

Zoo believes “the Lord” came down to talk to her, to reprimand her for taking “the wrong road” and “e[a]t[ing] of the apple.” Zoo’s status as disenfranchised, slave-like, non-human does not allow her a way to blame the white men for her rape in the same way she blamed Keg for attempting to murder her; instead she “hears the Lord” placing the blame on her for taking “the wrong road” which can easily be read as not being in her “proper place” as an African American woman. She describes the rape as her “*shameful* sufferin” (emphasis mine) as though she is responsible for being impure, for being gang-raped and her response to this is to say “holy words” attempting to remove herself from the situation with the words of the Christian bible. These “holy words” come from the same text used to justify slavery and the ideology that marks non-white races as non-human. Ultimately, Zoo believes “the Lord took that sailor boy’s shape”

and “me an the Lord, us loved.” Zoo paints “the Lord[‘s]” participation in this as a comfort, as helping her through this violent and brutal gang-rape, however, the presence or lack thereof of “the Lord” in the “sailor boy’s shape” does not negate that Zoo is being raped – and though she construes it as love, there is no denying that this is a brutal and violent attack – not love. This conflation of Zoo’s gang-rape with Christianity reinforces the ways in which white men used Christianity to justify slavery and to feel righteous while forcing non-white peoples into a lesser and non-human status.

Joel refuses to listen to more of Zoo’s story and plugs his ears with his fingers, leaving her silenced both for Joel and for readers whose ears are plugged as well, but the fact that Zoo’s words are silenced does not mean she cannot be seen. Though Joel attempts to silence the retelling of the violent destruction of Zoo’s body and spirit, her physical appearance continues to retell the experience in disturbing ways:

Zoo’s lips quivered, her eyes blindly twisted toward the inner vision; and in the roar of silence she was a pantomime: the joy of Jesus demented her face and glittered like a sweat, like a preacher her finger shook the air, agonies of joy jerked her breast, her lips bared for a lowdown shout: in sucked her guts, wide swung her arms embracing the eternal: she was a cross, she was crucified. (175)

After this moment Zoo leaves the room and is not seen nor heard until the very end of the novel and even then it is as if nothing happened – the retelling of Zoo’s gang-rape ends with Zoo pantomiming what seems to be an orgasm. The violence and brutality of the gang-rape combined with Zoo’s perception that “the Lord” participated in it leaves us with the violent and disturbing miming of an orgasm in which “the joy of Jesus *demented* her face”, “*agonies of joy jerked* her breast”, and “she was *crucified*” (emphasis mine). Zoo’s attempts at going North not only end

terribly, but end in a retelling of a gang-rape that effectively deconstructs for the reader all hierarchies; ripping apart the ideologies of Christianity, of heteronormativity, of racialization, leaving us with but one thing left: “Jesus was really dead.”

CHAPTER TWO

“ALL THAT IS LEFT IS THE GHOSTLY ECHO OF HAUNTING WONDER”:

A QUEER, GROTESQUE SOUTH HAUNTS CAPOTE’S *LOCAL COLOR*

Throughout my discussion of *Other Voices*, *Other Rooms* queerness, grotesqueries, and the haunting South circulate and often connect in intricate ways predicated upon spatial relationships and movement (or lack thereof) throughout Skully’s Landing and the surrounding geographical space. *Local Color*, on the other hand, as a collection of travel sketches, ironically does not predicate the connections between queerness, the grotesque and the haunting South on movement and spatial relationships. Instead the distinctions between these categories begin to merge and if any distance remains between them, these ideas are always close enough to be spanned by Capote’s “bridge to childhood” (56) that plays such an important role in this collection of travel sketches. The “bridge to childhood” connects Capote with the childhood and the South that he feels intense nostalgia for as well as consistent disavowal. This duality of nostalgia and disavowal concerning the South creates a fluidity in which eruptions of the violence and legacy of a racialized South haunt Capote no matter where he travels. *Local Color*, read as a travel narrative, makes clear that regardless of the distance Capote travels or how glamorous, cosmopolitan, or anti-Southern these spaces seem, the hauntings and ghosts of the South always find a way into the in-between spaces in this text.

Consistently throughout *Local Color* the bodies he encounters, especially non-white bodies, are either dead or involved in some orgy-like ritualistic performance in which Capote

always attempts to involve himself. Rather than distancing himself from these bodies that are always either dead or writhing in ways unidentifiable as either pleasure or pain, Capote merges himself with them, attempting to outrun the past and become part of these non-white bodies at the same moment. The dead or writhing bodies present themselves immediately as grotesqueries, intended to inspire both repulsion and attraction, though always shifting between the two, always between, in the seams, ready to disappear into or erupt from the darkness of a past buried but not dead. For Capote, the past seems to hold a certain nostalgia, connected to his childhood while at the same time the past also reeks of decay and erupts at the most unexpected moments with images and encounters that bring the ghosts of the South back to haunt these texts. Eruptions of violence perpetrated upon black bodies confront readers at every turn; in every place he visits in *Local Color* and within Skully's Landing in *Other Voices, Other Rooms*, the dead seem to be following. There is not a single place in *Local Color* that Capote travels to that he is not confronted with or contemplating dead bodies: dissected, mutilated, lynched, carried through town, but never buried. Capote never follows the bodies long enough for these dead bodies to leave the collective sight of the living and enter the earth, the realm of the dead. These dead bodies always appear and then disappear, but without any closure or ritualistic removal from the land of the living. So for Capote, these bodies just continue to pile up, maybe out of sight, perhaps only for the moment, but somewhere, just out of the frame of reference for the reader, these bodies multiply in a massive heap waiting to be buried, to be heard, refusing to simply be dead as they continue to thrust their skeletal and grasping fingers out of the darkness of the past.

Local Color begins in New Orleans, the place Capote was born and lived briefly before being left to live with his aunts in Monroeville, Alabama. Beginning this semi-autobiographical⁹

⁹ I refer to this text as semi-autobiographical because not all of the events described within can be verified as true events and many letters catalogued in *Too Brief A Treat: The Letters of Truman Capote* were written between

collection of travel sketches in the place he was born, Capote foregrounds the South as both origin as well as a space from which one leaves (and within the text, there is no return to New Orleans¹⁰). Constructing the movement throughout the text in this way, Capote creates a structure in which both readers and Capote himself begin in the South and always travel away—readers, however, are never quite allowed to leave regardless of having left the South behind geographically. *Local Color* continuously navigates the reality that the South is not simply a geographical space, but rather a space that exists in the cultural imaginary as a space of transgression, otherness, and porousness through which queerness and the violent past of the racialized South can erupt and haunt both other geographies as well as the present time.

In this chapter, I explore connections between the haunting South, queerness, and grotesqueries, focusing on the spectral eruptions into the text of transgressive, othered, and racialized bodies and histories. The haunting South is exceptionally prevalent throughout *Local Color* and often leads the way into moments of queerness and grotesquerie. The performative nature of gender (Butler) merges completely with the performative nature of funerals and rituals surrounding death and the dying (Roach) allowing all boundaries to become the boundaries between life and death. I am also concerned with the ways in which the merging of these performances and boundaries changes the idea of boundaries themselves. The eruptions into the text of a transgressive, queered, and grotesque haunting South spew from the in-between spaces and the ghosts of this haunting South begin to define the transgressiveness of the present while continuously redefining the boundaries as non-existent. In connection with this redefinition and erasure of boundaries, I am using Sharon Patricia Holland's discussion of the dichotomy between

Capote's friends that claim some of the stories he tells to be excessive exaggerations or made up entirely. However, it is verifiable that Capote did travel to and spend time in all the places he discusses within the text.

¹⁰ However according to Gerald Clarke's biography, Capote often returned to New Orleans and Monroeville throughout his life.

the living and the dead as defining all other dichotomies: “speaking from the site of familiarity, from the place reserved for the dead, disturbs the static categories of black/white, oppressor/oppressed” (4). The eruptions of the dead and the racialized history of the South begin to define other transgressive moments in the text and speak to the present moment as well as commenting on the violent history of the South.

Throughout this chapter, I propose the separate though intersectional ideas of queerness, grotesqueries, and the haunting South merge to create a haunting South that is already queered and grotesque. Throughout this chapter I am arguing that through Capote’s works, the theory of the haunting South fully emerges as a singular and inclusive force, encompassing all that the culturally imagined South is represented as in the minds of the culture at large. Jay Watson in *Reading for the Body: The Recalcitrant Materiality of Southern Fiction, 1893-1985*, claims that the “U. S. South [is] a region that has functioned in the national imagination for over two centuries as the basis for idiosyncratic modes of American identity (psychic forms), as a problematic topography within the geographical space of the nation, and as a specific social formation bearing an uneasy inside-outside relation to U.S. society more broadly considered” (9). The South figures in multiple ways throughout this text and my reading tends to allow multiple versions to blend and overlap as all are still a part of the culturally imagined “South.” These different versions include the South as: rural, backward, anti-modern, racialized, queered, transgressive, and othered. Thus, it becomes exceptionally appropriate that both I, in my reading, and the text begins in New Orleans.

In *Local Color* Truman Capote details experiences of his travels over an expanse of 4-5 years, though throughout the actual text there is no sense whatsoever of time passing or even any specific time in which Capote visits any one place or any sense of how long he stays. New Orleans is the subject of the very first travel sketch in this text, which is significant on a number of levels.

Capote was born in New Orleans and this space figures in both his life and his work as the initial place from which one travels. It is also central in that it foregrounds the Southern-ness of this text, placing the reader firmly in the same space Capote consistently finds himself: always travelling away from the South in some capacity while, at the same time, the South refuses to be left out or to go away – this functions as a permanent marker of Southern origin and influence. The New Orleans sketch also centers the complicated relationship to the South that Capote experienced in his own life along with the haunting presence of the South that follows the trajectory of this text: “New Orleans streets have long, lonesome perspectives; in empty hours ... this innocent, ordinarily ... acquire qualities of violence” (4). This upfront and immediate merging of innocence and violence within the space of New Orleans instantly creates a shadow text that speaks of the past, the layers of history, and the spectral nature of this space of Southern origin. This moment directly precedes the sighting of a dead body:

He was hanging from a willow, a bandit-faced man with kinky platinum hair; he hung so limply, like the willow itself. There was terror in that silent suffocated garden. ...Nothing moved except his shadow. It swung a little, back and forth, yet there was no wind. (4)

Along with the specter-like nature of this solitary encounter with a dead man hanging from a tree that supposedly no one else has noticed – except for Capote, of course – this body also echoes the innocent things turned into violence of the passage that precedes this encounter. This man is hanging in a quiet, still garden, a place that would otherwise seem to be a peaceful space, marred only by this spectral hanging body. Capote describes the dead man as “bandit-faced” implying a sort of automatic criminalization, simply because of his being hanged in this public space, his very appearance becomes criminal. Further, he is described as having “kinky platinum hair”

which implies a duality: the descriptor “kinky” is a common racialized descriptor used for the hair of African Americans while the color is described as platinum – a hair color so light that it usually only appears in Caucasians. This creates an air of miscegenation and queerness – the in-between-ness of the description of this body mirroring the language and perception of both mixed-race and homosexual bodies. According to Somerville in *Queering the Color Line: Race and the Invention of Homosexuality in American Culture* “[t]he beginnings of sexology, then, circulated within and perhaps depended on a pervasive climate of eugenicist and antimiscegenation sentiment and legislation” (Somerville 31). Directly following this is the presumption that somehow this man’s very face looks like that of a “bandit.” The description goes on: the man’s body “hung so limply, like the willow itself” this comparison to an inanimate object seems to dehumanize this dead man comparing his body in death to the natural state of the willow he is hung upon. This passage goes on to say that “[t]here was terror in that silent suffocated garden.” Not only has no one noticed this man hanging from this willow tree, but the description of the garden as silent and suffocated displaces the dead man’s experience as hanged onto the garden itself. The man is silent and suffocated – not the garden – however his very humanity becomes merged with the garden. He quickly becomes spectral as “[n]othing moved except his shadow. It swung ... there was no wind.” The dead man’s shadow is described as moving independently of the body – this moment becomes more ghostly calling up the shadows of many other hanged men throughout the history of the South. Put into perspective within the sketch – the final piece of New Orleans portrayed is a jazz show where Capote laments: “A shame, though ... Hardly any white folks ever see Shotgun, for this is a Negro café” (11). This nod to segregation and the racialized violence that at this time is not entirely in the past, places the initial image of the hanged man in the lineage of extra-legal violence perpetrated on bodies of

color throughout the South. The image of this hanged man inverts but mirrors the legacy of lynching that haunts and erupts in the cultural image of the South. Part of this haunting, beyond the spectral and other-worldly nature of the encounter itself, is the ways in which this moment ties itself to the presence and memory of the ways black bodies have been constructed as criminal and had violence enacted upon them throughout the history of the South.

Though these haunting encounters continue to erupt, Capote does not consistently run from or avoid encounters with black bodies, but rather, at times seems to undermine the racialized power dynamic that characterizes Southern race relations in his attempt to absorb himself into these spaces and bodies. These moments alternately are voyeuristic and communal, both upholding and breaking down power dynamics and stereotypes of othered and colored bodies. Watching “Shotgun! The biggest show in town!” (11) and lamenting the lack of an appreciative white audience creates an image in which Capote places himself within a space that is primarily if not solely made up of a clientele of African Americans. This moment can be read both as an attempt to commune and appreciate the jazz show so exclamationarily advertised, but also can be seen as Capote recounting a sort of hipster slumming for an audience that would be engrossed in viewing the taboo goings-on within a space they would never be seen in their own lives. Shotgun’s performance becomes something more than simply a performer and audience, instead “...for a moment the world is this room, this dark, jazzy, terrible room; our heartbeat is Shotgun’s stamping foot, every joyous element of our lives is focused in the shine of his malicious eyes” (12). This moment can be read both as a reversal of traditional racialized power dynamics, privileging the aesthetics and experiences of the mostly African American audience, though it can also be read as Capote appropriating the experiences and communal nature of this –before Capote- all black space. This space becomes a haven either way, whether or not Capote is there – and whether or not he is

attempting to appropriate black culture for the shock/entertainment value – this space is one in which the performances and experiences of the African American clientele can be valued and experienced without the intrusion of the white population.

Within this space removed from the mainstream of society, the racialized power dynamic of the South is erased and the audience (Capote and his whiteness included) become part of this collective black body that corresponds to Shotgun's body, merges with Shotgun's performance, creating a subversive and sexualized queered space in which movements and heartbeats correspond and multitudes of people become wrapped up into one breathing, writhing black body. This merging of bodies, heartbeats, lives creates a space that reexamines the boundaries previously implied by the hanged body; the violence is reimagined as this "jazzy terrible room" instead. The violence here is symbolic at best, violence in response to and in connection with the violence perpetrated and erupting from the racialized violence found outside the confines of this momentary haven.

This observation of Shotgun performing in a jazz club ends the New Orleans sketch, moving on seamlessly and without explanation to Capote's sketch of New York. This move away from the geographical South in the text goes completely unremarked upon by Capote or a potential audience, as this move seems to be the same as the transition between all other sketches, simply movement from one place to another. The difference here however is the removal of the boundary between the South and other places. This could be read as simply reading New Orleans (and the South) as no more than any other geographical place visited throughout this collection of travel sketches. I believe this can also be read as a removal of the boundary between the South and any other space – allowing the South as culturally imagined to leave the geographical space of the South and travel with Capote – it creates all other spaces as both Southern and not Southern just

as the South itself encompasses the duality of being both real geographical space and culturally imagined space. The shift to New York quickly reveals the culturally imagined South with its queerness, grotesqueries and eruptions of the haunting South refused to be left behind.

After leaving the geographical South behind, Capote frames his New York sketch with stories that reveal the cultural conceptions of New York – immediately placing New York as a space both real and imagined, existing geographically and in the cultural imagination. The first lines of this travel sketch reveal that New York, for most people is not a real place, but rather:

It is a myth, this city, the rooms and windows, the steam-spitting streets; for anyone, everyone, a different myth, an idol-head with traffic-light eyes winking a tender green, a cynical red. This island, floating in river water like a diamond iceberg, call it New York, name it whatever you like; the name hardly matters because, entering from the greater reality of elsewhere, one is only in search of a city... (13)

In the first few lines of this sketch, Capote identifies New York as existing more in the realm of fantasy and the cultural imagination than in reality – claiming that “from the greater reality of elsewhere, one is only in search of a city.” This identification of elsewhere as reality and the place one is actually in as fantastic or imagined quickly becomes a trope throughout this collection. Capote’s descriptions of all the places he travels to quickly set up a dichotomy between real and fantastic: the expectations versus the reality versus the lack of reality actually found in any place – along with the eruptions of specters found on almost every page in this text. The opening to this sketch acknowledges the in-between-ness of any sort of travel, the duality held in expectations and reality and the balancing of the two when travelling to a place. This in-between-ness not only creates a sort of boundary-less-ness but also allows the haunting South convenient avenues for eruption, into these places that are in-between fantasy and reality.

At the end of Capote's New York sketch, he tells a story about the time before his first trip to New York – “that was fourteen years ago” (21) – and recounts his conversations with his aunts' cook, Selma, previous to this trip. “For eighty-three years [Selma] has lived in the same small Alabama town; a hooked little woman with parched cinder-dark skin and spicy hooded eyes” (21). As they talk about where young Truman Capote is about to travel, it becomes quickly apparent that Selma's conceptions of New York are stained by the culturally imagined mythology of New York:

..there were no trees there, nor flowers, and she'd heard it said that most of the people lived underground or, if not underground, in the sky. Furthermore, there were ‘no nourishin’ vittles,’ no good butterbeans, blackeyes, okra, yams, sausage – like we had at home. And it's cold, she said, yessireebobtail, go on up in that cold country, time we see you again your nose will have freeze and fall off. (21)

The rural landscapes, comfort food, and warmth of the South so intensely occupy the space of reality in Selma's ideology that her belief in the mythology of New York become fantastic and unreal (a figuration very similar to Capote's own reactions to the reality – or lack thereof – to be found in New York). There is no room for the reality of a large metropolitan space having spent her whole life in “the same small Alabama town”. Much like the fantasy city Capote claims people go to New York searching for, Selma (and young Capote as well) buy into the fantastic mythology surrounding this space – opening reality up for contradiction and allowing space for ghosts to burst forth. This centralizes both the space the South occupies and the culturally imagined mythology of the South – with its foods, warmth, wide-open spaces, ties to nature and agriculture – and as Capote continues to travel to distant lands the South maintains this centrality – as the only truly

“real” space, the place the ghosts and specters originate, and the culturally imagined mythology that haunts his every move.

Capote furthers this concentration of the mythic or fantastic in the beginning of his sketch “To Europe.” It begins with Capote climbing over a castle wall to witness a young man playing a harp and sitting with three old men. Capote reads this scene as both mythological and as hearkening back to imaginings in his childhood:

...suddenly it was true ... And what was this truth? Only the truth of justification: a castle, swans, a boy with a harp, for all the world out of a childhood storybook – before the prince has entered or the witch has cast her spell. ... Past certain ages or certain wisdoms it is very difficult to look with wonder ... if you are lucky, you will find a bridge to childhood ... going to Europe was like that. It was a bridge of childhood, one that led over the seas and through the forests straight into my imagination’s earliest landscapes ... to think I had to go all the way to Europe to go back to my home town, my fire and room where stories and legends seemed always to live beyond the limits of our town. (56)

This scene is Capote’s introduction to Europe, but also a hearkening back to the South where both Capote’s life and this collection began. This moment concretizes all of the mythology of the culturally imaged fairy-tale place that Europe is constructed as and Capote connects this directly to “childhood storybook[s]” and the fantastic mythology created in those stories has momentarily come to life. While describing the “bridge of childhood” Capote writes that this bridge “led over the seas and through the forests” a construction that closely mirrors “over the river and through the woods” creating a linguistic connection for the reader with the language and stories of childhood. The phrase connected to this “into my imagination’s earliest landscapes” implies not

only a collapse of the imaginary onto the reality of Europe, but also directly acknowledges the eruption of Capote's childhood, his home town, and the fantasies and legends that allowed him access to other spaces and other mythologies. The South continues to haunt Capote, even as far away as Europe, claiming that this space is made up of the legends that always "live[d] outside the limits of our town" (56). This eruption of the spectral becomes tightly linked to Capote's own personal experience of the South as a space where the legends and fantastic spaces he has now found in Europe could not be accessed except through books and the belief that these spaces were always somewhere else.

This image also foregrounds the queer nature of Capote's travels and of the 'queer' fantasies that also, along with the fantastic, were placed always already outside of the small Southern town he grew up in. This scene is described as one out of a childhood storybook, a fairytale, but unlike actual fairytales there is no princess to be rescued by climbing over this wall; instead there is this group of older men sitting around "a boy playing a harp." This image, though fantastic and mythic in ways, also portrays a sort of queered romanticism: music, a harp, swans, figs "those Italian figs so fat the juice ran out of their mouths" (56). These images relay not only the fantasy Capote ascribes to them, nor the memory of the myths or fairytales that he could never access in reality in the South, but also the transgressive nature of this moment. Instead of what one might expect to encounter when told this is like a fairytale out of a childhood storybook, this fairytale reads as significantly different: reminiscent of cruising scenes described in Howard's *Men Like That*, Capote climbs a wall to witness a secret and forbidden exchange. These older men are eating figs with juice running down their faces, creating a rather explicit sexual scene while watching a boy perform for them. Considering the sensual and sexual nature of the rest of this scene, this performance is likely far from innocent (and even if it actually is – that is not the way

Capote reads it when he stumbles upon this scene). This moment transgresses not only because of the queered sensuality performed here, but also because it takes Capote back to the childhood where the performance or reality of queer identities and relationships were as fantastic and mythological as the stories of princesses and castles. John Howard traces some of the silences of homosexuality in Mississippi claiming that “silences and silencing seem as much a part of the shaping of anxieties around homosexuality...as expressive or repressive languages and vocabularies” (30). The lack of discussion or reality ascribed to homosexuality in the South during Capote’s youth could easily lend this queer scene an air of fantasy and myth that otherwise might not be read into this moment. This space links Capote’s childhood, his travels, and the haunting South together in a queer transgressive inversion of the classical fairytale/romantic plot by placing the youth and beauty on the body of a young boy being fawned over by three older men eating figs behind a castle wall.

To return momentarily to the New York sketch, in the central portion Capote depicts the reality of this mythical, fantasy city in ways that highlight the haunting nature of the grotesqueries these fantasies become when forced to merge with reality: “the city is like a monumental machine restlessly devised for wasting time, devouring illusions ... Where is what you were looking for? And by the way, what *are* you looking for?” (20). The grotesque, as I read it here, is much less linked to the gothic – but rather occurs at the intersections of real and unreal – when moments of myth or fantasy or even ghosts collide with and shatter the perception of reality or the present time. These grotesqueries occur at the sites of the eruptions of the haunting South as well as moments when fantasy and reality coexist.

A man named Hilary is one of the few who seem capable of holding onto their fantasies: “Hilary so wants everyone to be glamorous, to be a storybook creature, somehow he persuades

himself that the grayest folk are coated with legend-making glitter ...” (18). In spite of the illness Hilary has at the time, he hosts a party (and Capote is invited of course) and decides to conduct this party from his place in bed, placing Capote, the party guests, and the readers within the innermost private space of this man whose fantasies are only held onto because of his desire to create everyone as “glamorous ... storybook creature[s] ... coated with legend-making glitter”. Hilary surrounds himself with the spectral souvenirs of the past:

The walls of this room are papered with photographs, almost everyone he has ever known: maiden ladies, debutantes, somebody’s secretary, film stars, college professors, chorus girls, circus freaks, Westchester couples, businessmen: they may part with him, but he cannot bear to lose anyone; or anything. Books are piled in the corners, are sagging on shelves, among them his old school texts, and ancient theatre programs, mounds of sea shells, broken records, dead flowers, amusement-park souvenirs, turn the apartment into a wonderland attic. ...A time may come when there is no Hilary; it would be easy to destroy him... (18-19)

This “wonderland attic,” this fantasy space in which Hilary lives reads much more as a queer, grotesque mausoleum of broken and dead things and people who are no more than memories – ghosts. Hilary has fashioned himself as no more than a part of this fantasy, no more than a ghost haunting the halls of his “wonderland” mausoleum.

The sketch continues breaking down the fantasies associated with this mythical city replacing myths and fantasies with grotesqueries and spectral eruptions into the bleak and disillusioning “reality” Capote observes as what seems to be an oppressive heat wave violently overtakes New York:

...as the heat closed in like a hand over a murder victim's mouth, the city thrashed and twisted but, with its outcry muffled, its hurry hampered, its ambitions hindered, it was like a dry fountain, some useless monument, and so sank into a coma. ...At night, hot weather opens the skull of a city, exposing its white brain and its central nerves, which sizzle like the inside of an electric-light bulb. (19-20)

Thus, the imaginary, mythical city is fallen. Becoming a murdered body, New York sinks under the oppressive reality of a heat wave. Capote turns this city into a body, murders it, and then dismembers it as the city's skull is opened, its "white brain" exposed and sizzling. This grotesque image of the city creates an uncanny moment in which this place figures as a dead body that must be confronted by Capote himself as well as his readers, but also reads as an eruption of the haunting South reiterating the violent lynching imagery found repeatedly throughout this collection. The oppression of this heat is a violent mimicry of Selma's impressions of the north as cold in comparison to the warmth of her native South. The South is consistently characterized as a space of almost tropical warmth and its connection to the tropical spaces of the Caribbean both in climate and in the slave trade haunt this moment. Joseph Roach's *Cities of the Dead* focuses particularly on the circum-Atlantic which he describes as "resembling a vortex in which commodities and cultural practices changed hands many times. The most revolutionary commodity...was human flesh" (Roach 4). It is this circum-Atlantic space and legacy that connects so strongly the New Orleans sketch with the Haiti sketch at the end of this chapter. As Capote's sketch about New Orleans acknowledges, segregation and the legacy of slavery still inform the oppressive racialized power dynamics at play in Southern spaces.

In the sketch following New York, though still removed from the physical realm of the South, Capote's contradictory depictions of Manhattan and Brooklyn set up a "north-south"

dichotomy in which Brooklyn figures as the “south” characterized in terms similar to the space the south is often relegated to in the cultural imaginary. Jay Watson, in a discussion of the construction of the South, mentions the attempt by the colonies to distance themselves from colony status and instead point to the South as colonial – this trend continues, with Northern spaces consistently relegating Southern spaces to queerness, drunkenness, moral depravity, etc. (Watson 11-13). In this construction Manhattan is closely associated with the cosmopolitan and glamorous imaginings of New York and figures as progressive and inclusive in comparison to the depictions of Brooklyn throughout this sketch. Brooklyn is characterized as regressive, racist, and backward space and later claims that Brooklyn is one of the places that can “project a comparable sense of the past” (32). This positioning of Brooklyn as the opposite of the progressiveness of Manhattan also disturbs the tensions between the cultural perceptions of the north as industrialized and embodying progress and the south as rural, backward, and resisting modernity. By setting Brooklyn up as this space that mimics the south in relation to other spaces in the north, this invites a reading of Southernness and the history of the south overlaid on the actions and physical spaces of Brooklyn.

Capote begins this sketch with a description of an abandoned church; inside “all manner of stray beasts have found a hoe ... and neighborhood children ... dare each other to enter there [and] come forth toting bones they claim as human” (23). At the very beginning of this sketch, where this is depicted, this image seems common and relatively removed from much of the rest of the text – it reads as commonplace, a dare that children would perform anywhere in the country and without deeper meaning – however in connection with the later actions of these same neighborhood children their actions read as another moment in this text overlaid with implications of lynchings. The dichotomy set up between Brooklyn and Manhattan is inserted as well into

Capote's observations of not only the physical space of Brooklyn, but these neighborhood children:

Brooklyn, or the chain of cities so-called, has, unlike Manhattan, no interest in architectural change. Nor is it lenient toward the individual: in despair one views the quite endless stretches of look alike bungalows, gingerbread and brownstones, the inevitable empty, ashy lot where the sad, sweet, violent children, gathering leaves and tenement wood, make October bonfires, the sad sweet children chasing down these glass August streets to Kill the Kike! Kill the Wop! Kill the Dingo! – a custom of this country where the mental architecture, like the houses is changeless.”

(23-4)

Wrapped up in this depiction of Brooklyn as backward, we are also confronted with “sad, sweet, violent children” who are first mentioned as those collecting “bones they claim as human” from the derelict old church. The actions of the children, though in reverse order, mimic many of the rituals enacted by lynch mobs in the south. According to Amy Louise Wood, not only was lynching a push back against modernity and the intrusion of changes and technologies that modernity brought with it, but was also seen by those outside the South as proof of the backwardness of Southern spaces: “[liberals] saw evangelical worship and lynching as twinned expressions of the South's utter backwardness – as cannibalistic and primal rituals placed the South far outside the purview of modern civilization” (Wood 52). These Brooklyn children race the streets shouting for the killing of people referred to only by the racial slurs forced upon their othered bodies projecting a grotesquerie of innocence and violence that echoes the New Orleans sketch and the hanged man. This also concretizes the changelessness Capote describes as being part of Brooklyn. If Brooklyn, here, represents the south and the stagnation of the south, these “sad, sweet, violent children” are

replicating the push back against modernity and the urbanized and mixed-race spaces that helped create the atmosphere of fear and the need to re-establish ideas of white supremacy that created for the south the rationale that lynchings were acceptable modes of justice.

In describing a lynching that took place in Georgia, Wood describes the attitudes and actions of the mob following the death of the two men accused of murder: “A local photographer snapped pictures, and afterward, the spectators scrambled for souvenirs. The chains that held the men were broken and distributed, as were pieces of the burned tree stump and charred bones” (Wood, 21). Lynch mobs would often leave the scene with souvenirs, in this case even the burned bones of these men. In another particularly gruesome moment an “NAACP investigator ... reported that one white townsman was carrying [the victim’s] penis as a souvenir” (Wood 99). As already mentioned, lynchings were often intimately connected to religion and the rituals surrounding religion, but also encapsulated a carnivalesque atmosphere which led to the taking of grotesque souvenirs after the death of the victim(s). The first time we see the Brooklyn children, the souvenirs “they claimed as human bones” come directly from a derelict and obsolete church, tying together these two aspects of the lynching spectacle: the church (outdated and falling apart, much as the evangelical religions of the south were viewed at this time) and “human” souvenirs brought back from a space that also embodies the carnivalesque and taboo. Roach discusses the ways the carnival becomes law in *Cities of the Dead*: “Carnival, an occasion for festive transgression, limited only by human imagination or stamina ... apparently flourishes beyond the law, above the law, and even against the law” (Roach 343). However, using Mardi Gras as a specific example of the carnival, Roach claims that “Louisiana law relating to Mardi Gras tends to annex the ludic space at its margins simply by legalizing the offenses it declines to prosecute. Carnival becomes law. This is a historical process: in earlier times, especially under slavery, many

carnavalesque practices were unpunished illegalities; today, they have entered into law” (Roach 344). These children also are described as violent directly before we learn they are building bonfires and shouting racial slurs and threats of murder through the streets. These images are not simply ones of childlike innocence but rather also a place where the haunting South erupts and is mirrored in this neighborhood in Brooklyn. The actions and attitudes described here are not so different from the words, attitudes, and actions that occurred at lynchings, the image and ideas surrounding lynchings become superimposed over this moment of supposedly childlike innocence, turning these children into angry men and their October bonfire into torches to hunt down or a pyre to burn a black man in order to restore an imagined traditional order. This directly connects to the carnivalesque atmosphere that functioned as an integral part of lynchings – these were extra-legal violent acts of murder, but carried out without the fear that this murderous transgression would be legally punished.

Removing from the carnivalesque and terrifying children and their bonfires and “human bones”, we move inside a home in the neighborhood where we learn that Capote rents a room from a mother and daughter– Mrs. And Miss Q – who run a telephone answering service after Mr. Q suddenly died. One night Mrs. Q appears at Capote’s door: “Mrs. Q. comes heaving up the stairs, presently to present herself at my door, standing there, shrouded in a sleazy sateen kimono, her sunset colored hair falling Viking-fashion” (26). This depiction of Mrs. Q. paints her as almost a doppelganger of Cousin Randolph in *Other Voices, Other Rooms*; she appears flamboyant and excessive “*heaving* herself up the stairs” in a “*sleazy sateen kimono*” (emphasis mine). This excess causes her to be read as sexualized in specific ways – her performance of femininity over-sexualizes her. This immediately becomes disturbing in connection with the children making bonfires in the streets and the overt sexualization she is performing. She reaches the top of the

stairs and begins discussing her overabundant panic concerning African American (and previously Jewish) families moving into the area where she lives.

she regards me with a baleful glitter: ‘Two more,’ she says, her hairy baritone voice suggesting fire and brimstone. ‘We saw them from the window, two whole families riding by in moving vans.’

When she has squeezed dry the lemon of her sourness, I ask: ‘Families of what, Mrs. Q.?’

‘Africans,’ she announces with a righteous owl-like blink, ‘the whole neighborhoods turning into a black nightmare; first Jews, now this; robbers and thieves, all of them – makes my blood run cold.’ (26)

This overflow of concern at the influx of people she sees as “a black nightmare” addresses concerns of borders and boundaries revealing the inherent transgressiveness she views these newcomers as containing. It only matters that the bounds of her neighborhood can be broached when those broaching the boundaries are viewed as transgressive or othered. Also, in describing them, she claims they (the Jews and now the “Africans”) are “robbers and thieves” and that the influx of these groups of people into “her” space “makes her blood run cold.” This intense reaction not only creates a disturbing allusion to the construction of black males as rapists of white women (considering her already overt sexualization this image appears almost at will) but also conjures up the Jim Crow South – with its intense specifications about where and how African Americans could live. According to Somerville, “all black men [were demonized] as a sexual threat to white women. ...The assumptions driving this reasoning reveals a racial fantasy inextricably tied to the logic of compulsory heterosexuality. Both legalized and de facto racial segregation served not only to demand constant adherence to the fictions of racial identity but also to police sexual mobility”

(35). The neighborhood reactions to the influx of transgressive, queered, and othered bodies is heavily negative and it becomes quickly obvious that whether or not these racialized others are actually broaching the bounds of the neighborhood to stay or simply passing through, they will not be welcome and they will not be accepted into society in productive ways in this space. In the next sketch, we will see again the ways in which black bodies are immediately stereotyped in Hollywood – the place of glamour and cosmopolitan aesthetics is often driven in specific ways by the same expectations and fears concerning black bodies and sexuality.

In the Hollywood sketch it becomes more important than elsewhere to know that Capote was excessively involved in the production, layout, and appearance of *Local Color*. According to Gerald Clarke: “[Capote] made all the major decisions, doing everything but don a printer’s green eyeshade and set the type. ‘Maybe it seems strange that anyone should put such stress on the ‘physical’ appearance of a book,’ Clarke later wrote to Linscott¹¹ ... Linscott was enormously impressed ... ‘Truman won’t listen to anybody but himself, and he knows exactly what he wants. And we do it.’” (Clarke 209) Knowing Capote’s exacting involvement in the production of this text becomes so important because in this sketch, the photograph at the beginning becomes as intriguing as the words on the page. The sketch begins with an image of a Hollywood billboard depicting a smiling, beautiful starlet, the epitome of what Hollywood is. This billboard encompasses all the glamour and beauty of Hollywood mythology and all the larger than life qualities wrapped up in Hollywood’s association with cinema. At first glance, this billboard is only a repetition of the glamour and beauty and stardom that Hollywood represents within the cultural imaginary, looking slightly closer however, we can see that the billboard is ripped. The forehead and one cheek of this Hollywood beauty are ripped open to reveal darkness beneath – undermining

¹¹ Robert Linscott was a senior editor with Random House who signed Capote’s contract for *Other Voices, Other Rooms* and then continued to work with him throughout his career. (Clarke, 98)

the perceptions of Hollywood as a city made only of gold and fame. The façade of splendor is a shallow one that hides not only darkness, but when looking closer even, the top right hand corner of the photograph is not simply a tear that reveals darkness – there is another image here, erupting literally from the seam of the book showing in stark contrast to the Hollywood starlet’s smiling face – a tenement building stands surrounded by rubble with the figures of two black males standing handcuffed in front of the building. They stand beside what looks like a wagon-style police vehicle with a white police man, who looks like he is shouting, in the background of the photo. Encapsulated in this photograph the glamour and magnificence of Hollywood are torn away to reveal the poverty, inequality, and violence inflicted upon less fortunate non-white bodies even inside this famed golden city.

Throughout this sketch, Capote’s descriptions heighten the sense of peeling back the layers of the culturally imagined golden city of Hollywood and revealing often dark scenes and specters beneath. The first person Capote meets in this sketch is on the plane with him flying into Los Angeles: “Thelma had boarded the plane in Chicago, she was a young Negro girl, rather pretty, beautifully dressed, and it was the most wonderful thing that would ever happen to her, this trip to California” (34). She has come to Hollywood on the promise of her “Auntie [who] tells the cards [that] there’s a job as a private secretary to a movie actress just waiting for [her]” (34). Thelma has come to Hollywood much in the same way Capote describes people travelling to New York – wrapped up in the culturally imagined images and perceptions of this place; upon arrival it is no longer real because it cannot possibly measure up to the imaginary city inside the minds of travelers.

Thelma quickly befriends Capote, though her arrival in Hollywood is marred and queered by this unreal space much like the image of the billboard at the beginning of this sketch. Having

gotten off the plane, she shares a taxi with Capote, but having nowhere to go and no knowledge of this place that did not come from representations of this city of gold, “she simply wanted the driver to let her off in the ‘middle’ of Hollywood” (34). This young girl who has come looking for the idea of Hollywood, has found instead the torn and tattered billboard with a queer and unusual darkness beneath – “there was not so much to see as she’d imagined. ‘It don’t look correct’” (34). Thelma’s perception of this place as not only incorrect but as deceptive, transgressive, and queered does not solely dictate her actions, she does continue on her journey and proclaim that she will soon be established as a private secretary; however when they arrived in the “middle” of Hollywood “Thelma had no place to go, except into the street, so we left her standing there, rain pulling her costume apart” (35). Upon first meeting Thelma, Capote describes her as “beautifully dressed” but now the rain has exposed her outfit for what it is, a costume. Much like the city of Hollywood itself, Thelma wore clothes that were based on a culturally imagined mythos.

The idea of performativity associated with Thelma’s donning a costume and going out to Hollywood in search of something better, pretending to be the kind of person who could make it in Hollywood, is essential to being able to make this trip and have a chance at success here. It becomes quickly obvious however, that the layers peeled back by the rain are synonymous with the ripped and torn billboard: that there is a glamour, a larger than life quality about what Thelma is trying to find and the way Thelma at first appears. The rain tearing her costume apart upon her arrival in the “middle” of Hollywood takes a moment that seems normal and creates in its place transgression: revealing Thelma’s body to the cold Hollywood streets, revealing the reality that Thelma most likely will not make it in Hollywood, the tenement house and the rubble, and the violence of the black men and the police vehicle becomes superimposed on this moment – and unlike her “Auntie [who] tells the cards” we know the fate that awaits Thelma because the photo

in the beginning of this sketch reveals the coldness and ghostliness of the dream Thelma holds better than any cards ever could.

After leaving Thelma in the rain, the sketch continues to break down the cultural conceptions of this glamorous city and consistently the reality of the picture of the African American men being arrested in front of a run-down tenement building either erupts from beneath the surface or at least cannot help but be remembered as Capote attempts to find the culturally imagined Hollywood. Capote is invited to lunch with “the fabled Miss C” – a Hollywood star – and upon arriving notes: “There is a fortress wall surrounding her place, at the entrance we were more or less frisked by a guard who then telephoned ahead to announce our arrival. All this was very satisfying: it was nice to know that at least someone was living the way a famous actress should” (35). Greeted at the door by a little girl who informs them that “Mummy thinks I should entertain you,” Capote is shown every expensive item in the room: “Her first exhibit was an illuminated bibelot cabinet. ‘This,’ she said, pointing to a bit of Chinese porcelain, ‘is Mummy’s ancient vase she paid Gump’s three thousand dollars for.’” (36). This little girl enacts the image that Capote expects and even embraces upon entering the gated home where “at least someone was living the way a famous actress should” but also presents this queered and eruptive version of a child. She not only takes them on a tour through the most expensive items she can, quoting sellers and prices, but also performs what she believes she should like and what should interest her, because of her preoccupation with wealth and the conceptions she has of her famous actress mother and what she knows about Hollywood. When asked what her favorite flowers are she replies “Orchids.” When questioned further she reveals “Well as a matter of fact they [orchids] aren’t [my favorite flowers]. But Mummy says they are the most expensive” (36). This little girl transgresses the bounds of childhood, performing an excessive and queered version of what Capote

expects Miss C – the object of this visit – to be like. However, when the famed actress finally does appear, “Miss C, skipped like a schoolgirl across the room: her famous face was without makeup, hairpins dangled loosely. She was wearing a very ordinary flannel housecoat. ... ‘do forgive my being so long: I’ve been upstairs making beds’” (36). It is obvious that Capote expected actions from Miss C that were far closer to those exhibited by her daughter, and that the ideas an outsider has about “living the way a famed actress should” are simply another part of that splendor and glamour portrayed on the billboard, waiting to be torn away to reveal that beneath “It don’t look correct” (34).

From here, the sketch continues to investigate how appearances and expectations differ from reality and the eruptions of the disparity between the few who “liv[e] like famed actresses should” and the rest of the population who live in this city. Visiting a fruit market seen earlier Capote “remembered ravishing displays of fruit outside a large emporium ... [and] reached for one of these extraordinary apples, but it seemed to be glued into its case. A salesgirl giggled: ‘Plaster,’ she said” (37). These fruits epitomize the rest of this sketch, delineating the difference between the fake, larger than life qualities embraced both by Hollywood and by the imaginations of the general population and the disparities contained within this city that is trying so hard to live up to its glamorous reputation while being haunted by the darkness beneath the gold veneer. At the beginning of this sketch while riding in the taxi with Thelma, she says “it don’t look correct” but Capote describes this place as:

...the surface of the moon, the noplac[e] of everywhere, but how very correct, after all, that here at continent’s end we should find only a dumping ground for all that is most exploitedly American: oil pumps pounding like the heart-beat of demons, avenues of used-car lots, supermarkets, motels, the gee dad I never knew a

Chevrolet gee dad gee mom gee whiz wham of publicity, the biggest, broadest, best, sprawled and helplessly etherized by immaculate sunshine and sound of sea and unearthly sweetness of flowers blooming in December (34-35).

Contradicting Thelma's opinion that this isn't correct, Capote claims that instead it is perfectly correct, that this place should be epitomized by the queer but "exploitedly American" need and desire for excesses of material possessions and experiences that replicate fantasies instead of the real places – the problem with this is that the reality, the disparities of lives and experiences, the eruptions of voices living and dead that disrupt this narrative cannot be silenced, but instead eke up through the gilded facades.

Capote then simultaneously experiences Christmas in Hollywood and meets a man who says "of course you know this is the childless city" (38). When Capote hears this place described as "the childless city" he begins to notice that this observation is true. The shadowy presence of death and doom begins to hover over the narrative and the eeriness builds until it creates a hush of death:

There is an air of Sunday vacancy ... my shadow, moving down the stark white street, is like one living element of a Chirico. It is not the comfortable silence felt in small American towns ... here, where all seems transient, ephemeral, there is no general pattern to the population, and nothing is intended – this street, that house, mushrooms of accident, and a crack in the wall, which might somewhere else have charm, only strikes an ugly note prophesying doom. (38-39).

Here the façade begins to break down and the hauntings and eruptions begin to become the surface layer rather than hiding just behind shadows. The aura of death and the ghosts surrounding this golden city of splendor and fame, hiding just out of sight and only for a moment is the same

darkness found in the torn billboard and the picture erupting from behind. This is the same spectrality and the same haunting that has followed Capote everywhere, the grotesquerie of the collision of fantastic and real – the surface and the shadows. The few children to be found in this city are acknowledged in this sketch as well; “[a] teacher here recently gave a vocabulary test in which she asked her students to provide the antonym of *youth*. Over half the class answered *death*” (39). Here, beyond youth, lies only death, bringing the ghosts and the haunting that much closer to reality and the present moment, allowing their speech to lie not so far from the surface and needing only a bit of an eruption to intrude into the narrative. In the sketch following this, Capote travels to Haiti and the hauntings and ghosts have little difficulty making themselves known, no longer hidden deep beneath the surface, but rather almost always already part of the present moment.

The sketch about Capote’s visit to Haiti opens on a description of Hyppolite, a famous Haitian painter, whose eight-month-old daughter has just died. Immediately a funeral, death, and specters become part of the very fabric of Haiti. Haitian funerary practices are related in detail and Capote believes they are primarily grand performances:

No one has told me, I wonder if there is a wake; in Haiti they are extravagant, these wakes, and excessively stylized: the mourners, strangers in large part, claw air, drum their heads on the ground, in unison moan a low doglike grief: heard at night or seen suddenly on a country road, it seems so alien the heart shivers, and then one realizes that in essence these are mimes. (41-42)

This description complicates Capote’s relationship to the people/places he is visiting as well as his relationship to his perceived reader. On one hand, this description posits not only that specifically *Haitian* funerals are performances – rather than funerals as a whole being

performative—and even goes so far as to describe the grief of the mourners as “doglike” placing animalistic qualities upon the black bodies of the Haitians. This sort of reading of the bodies of Haitians not only replicates what much comparative anatomy did in the early twentieth-century but also creates a specific image for Capote’s imagined audience, who no doubt already hold certain attitudes and assumptions about the people who live in Haiti:

Evolutionary theory also tended to reinforce the notion of racial hierarchies through the method of ranking and ordering bodies according to stages of evolutionary ‘progress.’ ...Importantly, analogies between gender and race structured the logic of hierarchal rankings of bodies. (Somerville 24)

On the other hand, this description allows a reading of the performance of grief that begins to break down boundaries between the living and the dead. The intensity of this funerary grief contrasts with the idea that the mourners are strangers, mimes performing a necessary cultural/social role. This idea of the centrality of performance in connection to religion and/or funerals in this space not only heightens the symbolic nature of performance but continues throughout the sketch to end at a Voodoo ritual, “the ceremony of a young *houngan*, that is to say, Voodoo priest” (50).

At first Capote delineates a clear boundary: the Haitians who are participatory in the performance of the ceremony and “us” the visitors, travelers, audience, who are there to see a Voodoo ceremony – to watch a performance. The boundaries soon begin to blur however. Capote’s travelling companion asks for a cigarette which Capote refuses: “who smokes in church? And Voodoo after all is a real, very complex religion, one which is nevertheless frowned on by the Haitian bourgeoisie, who, when they are anything, are Catholics, and that is why, as a compromise you might think, so much Catholicism has seeped into Voodoo...” (52). This moment complicates

the voyeuristic gaze of one who is watching (from outside the religion/belief system) a religious ritual – Voodoo is related to and even merged with Catholicism – a much more mainstream religious practice. While at this moment Capote is obviously there not to join the belief system that makes up Voodoo but rather to watch this exotic performance of another type of religion – he still insists on the same level of respectability for this Voodoo performance that he would for a Christian church. Capote also interestingly speculates on the mixing of Voodoo and Catholicism, which speaks directly to Roach’s examination of circum-Atlantic performance in which Africanized religions seep into and mix with Christianized religions, creating a creolized version of belief systems and blurring all boundaries associated with the two different belief systems.

After discussing how Voodoo is a religion based upon the same concepts as any other religion, Capote continues to identify the boundary crossing involved in performances: “[i]n Voodoo, however, there is no boundary between the countries of the living and the dead; the dead rise the dead and walk among the living” (52). The complete removal of the boundary between the living and the dead brings the hauntings to the surface in this sketch; no longer are the spectral voices hiding in the shadows and erupting from the seams but they have reached directly out of the grave to walk among the living. The space of this Voodoo ritual blurs all boundaries and removes the dichotomies that the hauntings and eruptions throughout this text have consistently undermined – the living and the dead, hetero and homo sexuality, animal and human – all these separations blur and the ritual merges everyone, similarly to the moment in the jazz café in New Orleans.

Having identified the boundary crossing abilities of performances connected to Voodoo, Capote’s description of the *houngan* is that of an individual resisting all categorization, an individual who is inevitably queered, transgressive, beautiful:

The *houngan* glided airy as a bird ... around the room, his feet, the ankles tinkling with silver bracelets, seemed not at all to touch the floor, and his loose silk scarlet robes rustling winglike. There was a caul of red velvet draped around his head, a pearl gleamed in his ear. Here and there he paused, like a hummingbird, and clasped the hands of a worshipper: he took mine, and I looked into his face, an amazing androgynous face, beautiful, really, a troubling combination of blue-black skin and Caucasian features ... (52-53).

This queered, sensual image of the *houngan* is both transfixing and haunting, transgressive and desirable. Capote describes his movements as that of a hummingbird, emphasizing his difference, his disconnection with the groundedness of reality – even the *houngan*'s feet don't seem to touch the ground. Furthermore, he clasps Capote's hands, even though moments ago Capote described this action as that of clasping only worshippers' hands, Capote is welcomed into the ritual. Capote himself is swept up into this ritual and becomes no longer outsider, observer, audience, but a part of this moment that is beautiful and haunting. The *houngan*'s troubling combination of "blue-black and Caucasian features" return back to the racialized power dynamics of a segregated South in which the idea of miscegenation still held great sway over the white population. This moment, this man's very face, reminisces the fears, the lynchings, the laws (i.e. Jim Crow), and the boundaries that were created in order to keep miscegenation from happening in the South. This man's face is transgressive and haunting, blurring the boundaries between white and black, between male and female, between alive and dead. This man embodies the eruptions that threaten boundaries, because he exists in a space of in-between.

The ritual ends in a wild fury of black and white bodies, merging much like Capote describes during Shotgun's performance but this time with more fury and physicality:

...his [the *houngan*'s] eyes rolled into his skull, the spirit (god and demon) opened like a seed and flowered in his flesh: unsexed, unidentifiable, he gathered in his arms man and woman: whoever his partner, they whirled over the snakes and eyes of the *verver*,¹² mysteriously never quite disturbing them, and when he changed to another the castoff partner flung himself, as it were, into infinity, tore his breast, screamed. (54)

This wild passionate fury is not only another moment in which black bodies merge, mix, and become unidentifiable from the white bodies in this space mimicking the “troubling combination” of race that Capote reads on the *houngan*'s face; although the androgyny of the *houngan* is the catalyst for the genderlessness that this performance begins to create. As the *houngan* dances with the worshippers, both men and women, the Voodoo ritual becomes a performance not only of Voodoo or religion, not even simply a performance of Voodoo power, but rather a performance that removes all boundaries from this space and this moment: this becomes an celebration of the living and the dead where gender is removed and all are consumed into this furious orgy-like merging of bodies where the only lines drawn are those of the *verver*.

To conclude, I want to look at one last moment from the sketch “To Europe” in which the haunting and pain of the South are explained through the mouth of a young European artist when talking about Europe. This idea that to be from a place means carrying the pain of the place with you cements the haunting South that follows Capote from place to place erupting from the shadows and interrupting the simple narrative of travel that it seems Capote set out to construct when writing *Local Color*. The mixing, merging, and immersion of bodies that Capote conveys throughout much

¹²Earlier Capote explains a *verver* in this way: “taking a handful of cornmeal and ashes, he started drawing on the ground a *verver*; there are in Voodoo hundreds of *ververs*, which are intricate, somewhat surrealist designs whose every detail has implications...” (53).

of this work seems to be altered a bit in the sketch “To Europe.” In London, the ability to merge completely into a place seems to be the only way in which the boundaries are not crossed or rendered invisible. This moment cements the haunting South as a place that follows Capote, regardless of the many places he travels to or immerses himself in: “... a young artist said to me, ‘How wonderful it must be for an American travelling in Europe the first time: you can never be a part of it, so none of the pain is yours, you will never have to endure it; yes, for you there is only the beauty’” (59). Much like this young artist seems to feel the pain of belonging to Europe, a pain that Capote as a traveler can never claim, feel, or take back with him, Capote carries the pain and haunting of the South with him wherever he goes. This portrayal of Europe as a place he can leave when he chooses directly opposes Capote’s relationship to the South as the place he cannot choose to leave:

...gradually I realized I did not have to be a part of it: rather, it could be a part of me. The sudden garden, opera night, wild children snatching flowers and running up a darkening street, a wreath for the dead and nuns in noon light, music from the piazza, a Paris pianola and fireworks on La Grande Nuit, the heart-shaking surprise of mountain visions and water views (lakes like green wine in the chalice of volcanoes, the Mediterranean flickering at the bottoms of cliffs), forsaken far-off towers falling in twilight and candles igniting the jeweled corpse of St. Zeno of Verona – all a part of me, elements for the making of my own perspective. (60)

The South as the place whose pains and past must follow everywhere, cannot be replaced by finding a way to belong to Europe, but taking parts of Europe into himself to make his “own perspective” enables him to create a place inside himself that can remain connected to Europe and the time he spends there. The ever shifting sketches of *Local Color* portray Capote’s lack of ability

to remain in any one place; rather he is always travelling and carrying the haunting South with him in his luggage.

AFTERWORD

The haunting South with all of its attendant queerness and grotesqueries has become – at least for me – a force to be reckoned with. The haunting South is not limited to or contained within only Capote’s works, only Southern literature, or only a certain time period – American literature has always struggled with otherness and has always struggled with the need for a scapegoat upon which to place the country’s fears about sex, race, gender, etc. The African, then African American population, became the embodiment of that fear and in an attempt to eradicate that fear, the population of black bodies suffered: “Disallowed access to all culture, but representative of it, black bodies became the literal containers of the power of state ideology and simultaneously live in a constant state of existential torment” (Holland 46). I would argue that modern American literature is haunted by the racialized, queered, and violent South in much the same way Toni Morrison explores the marginalized and spectral black bodies in early American literature throughout *Playing in the Dark*. I have found myself, throughout the writing of this project, haunted by these spectral eruptions into otherwise unassuming texts – texts that are not making any attempts to actually discuss the racialized power dynamics of the South. The specters are a product of American culture and history, erupting from the seams and refusing to lie dead and buried in our past; instead these ghosts appear in the places they are least expected, whispering their lives, torments, and secrets to anyone who will listen.

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