

THE UNLOCKED ROOM PROBLEM: EVIDENCE AND INTERPRETATION IN
TWENTIETH-CENTURY INVESTIGATION NARRATIVES

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ABSTRACT

ERIN BARTELS BULLER: *The Unlocked Room Problem: Evidence and Interpretation in Twentieth-Century Investigation Narratives*
(Under the direction of Minrose Gwin)

This project examines how a range of 20th-century fictions and memoirs use tropes borrowed from detective fiction to understand the past. It considers the way the historiographical endeavor and the idea of evidence and interpretation are presented in William Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom!*, *Go Down Moses*, *Intruder in the Dust*, and the stories in *Knight's Gambit*; Robert Penn Warren's *All the King's Men*; Louis Owens's *The Sharpest Sight* and *Bone Game*; and Lillian Hellman's memoirs (*An Unfinished Woman*, *Pentimento*, *Scoundrel Time*, and *Maybe*). The historical novel and sometimes even memoir, in the 20th century, often closely resembled the detective novel, and this project attempts to account for why. Long before Hayden White and other late 20th-century theorists of historical practice demonstrated how much historical writing owes to narrative conventions, writers such as Faulkner and Warren had anticipated those scholars' claims. By foregrounding the interpretation necessary to any historical narrative, these works suggest that the way investigators identify evidence and decide what it means is controlled by the rhetorical demands of the stories they are planning to tell about what has happened and by the prior loyalties and training of the investigators. The narratives investigators ultimately tell about what has happened in the past are already taking shape as the investigation proceeds, and it is the need to develop a persuasive account that determines what investigators are able to see and therefore what

counts as evidence. In its final chapter, this study moves beyond the historical novel to explore, in memoir, the tension between the interpretation of documentary evidence and the narrative form of what James Olney calls the “voice of memory.” The project concludes by considering the versions of justice that persist once these 20th-century novels and memoirs have severed the direct link between the reconstruction of the past (specifically the crime) and justice that predominates in genre detective fiction.

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INTRODUCTION

“There is nothing like first-hand evidence . . . as a matter of fact, my mind is entirely made up upon the case, but still we may as well learn all that is to be learned.”

Sherlock Holmes speaking, in Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, A Study in Scarlet, 1887

“He knew what he was going to find before he found it.”

William Faulkner, Go Down, Moses, 1942

As sixteen-year-old Isaac (Ike) McCaslin, in William Faulkner’s novel *Go Down, Moses*, pages through the ledger books in which his father and uncle recorded the buyings, sellings, freeings, births, and deaths of the McCaslin slaves, we are told that “he knew what he was going to find before he found it” (257). What he knows he will find, however, is not a specific entry or an already-known detail, but a particular type of answer to a question: why his uncle Buddy believed that a slave woman named Eunice drowned herself on Christmas Day of 1832. Ike both knows and does not know, the text suggests, what he is looking for. The text describes his reading experience in terms that might be familiar to any researcher who has gone to a source knowing what it should contain, may contain, yet might not reveal as straightforwardly as the researcher hopes: “finding, beginning to find on the next succeeding page what he knew he would find, only this was still not it because he already knew this” (257). What Ike knows he will find is a reference to the pregnancy of Eunice’s daughter Tomasina, presumably pregnant by Ike’s grandfather (and her master) Carothers McCaslin. The entry that he refers to as

“still not it” (because he knows it already) states that Tomasina, called Tomey, died giving birth in 1833, along with a reference to “*Fathers will*” that Ike understands to explain the paternity of Tomey’s son Terrel (Turl), to whom the elder McCaslin bequeathed a thousand dollars (257, italics original). But Ike anticipates that there is something more, something he does not yet know, something that exceeds the explanatory power of the story he has known since childhood. What he expects to find is a turn of events beyond expectation—he does not already know the actual content of whatever evidence that he is going to find, only that he will know it when he sees it because it will explain; it will be unspeakably horrible to have caused Eunice to kill herself. Ike knows the nature of the fact he will discover without actually knowing what it is; he has construed it as crucial evidence prior to knowing its content.

A corollary to this search scene can be found in Faulkner’s short detective story “Hand Upon the Waters,” published in 1939 and reprinted in *Knight’s Gambit* in 1949. Lawyer-detective Gavin Stevens goes to a neighboring county while trying to determine who might have murdered a local man, and “although he would not know until he found it just what he was looking for, he found it before dark—the agent for the company which, eleven years ago, had issued to Lonnie Grinnup [the murdered man] a five-thousand-dollar policy, with double indemnity for accidental death, on his life, with Tyler Ballenbaugh as beneficiary” (72). Like Ike, Gavin does not quite know what he is looking for, but he knows enough to know where to look and the shape, the type, the outlines of the evidence he will need to find. He knows enough to realize when he has found what he is looking for.

When Ike McCaslin does recognize the unspeakable fact that fits the gap in the narrative that he has held open as a blank space whose outlines and thus whose meaning already appears clear to him, he is not at that moment reading the ledger book that is open in front of him. Instead, having lifted off in his thoughts from the text of the ledgers themselves, he has been telling himself a story about Toney and her parents: Toney, he muses, is “the only child of a couple who were not field hands and who held themselves something above the other slaves not alone for that reason but because the husband and his father and mother too had been inherited by the white man from his father, and the white man himself had travelled three hundred miles and better to New Orleans in a day when men travelled by horseback or steamboat, and bought the girl’s mother as a wife for” (258-59). The line breaks off as Ike suddenly realizes that part of the story he is telling himself does not measure up. The incongruence is located in the story he is telling himself, not in the document he is holding. As he realizes, however, that Toney must have been the daughter of Carothers McCaslin, as well as the mother of his child, the “old frail pages seemed to turn of their own accord even while he [Ike] thought *His own daughter His own daughter. No No Not even him* back to that one [page] where the white man (not even a widower then) who never went anywhere . . . and who did not need another slave, had gone all the way to New Orleans and bought one” for \$650 (259, italics original). The ledger reasserts itself as a source of evidence for the new story. Ike returns to it, almost frantically, to verify the story he has just produced, to see if the evidence *does* fit this terrible explanation—if the prices, the dates, the journey mentioned indeed correspond with the new meaning his revised narrative has assigned them.

There is no proof in the ledgers that Carothers McCaslin committed incest other than two story elements that reinforce each other and thus become evidence for each other: McCaslin traveled to New Orleans to purchase an expensive slave (Eunice) of whom he had no need, and years later, the daughter (Tomey), whom the woman bore three years after she came from New Orleans and a year after she was married to her husband, became pregnant and the baby's grandmother (Eunice) killed herself. Indeed, there is almost nothing in those pages, as presented, that particularly suggests it—not the timing of Eunice's arrival, marriage, or pregnancy—nothing but these two mutually reinforcing story components. Yet they compel belief because together they make the story work.

The story elements recorded so briefly by Ike's father and his uncle Buddy are secondhand and written down years after they have taken place. When Ike's father starts the ledger after his own father's death, it is 1837. The information about Carothers McCaslin's purchase of Eunice in New Orleans is thus recorded in at least 1837, if not later, but goes back to 1807. How do Ike's father and uncle know the year, the place, the price of her sale? The story is embedded already in a history of the way things become evidence, yet Ike accepts it as evidence because it supports the story he has hit upon. Then, in the context of the new explanatory narrative, something else that Ike has known all his life suddenly begins to figure as evidence as well: "he knew from his own observation and memory that there had already been some white in Tomey's Terrel's blood before his father gave him the rest of it" (259). His observations have been a lifelong fact. Only now, however, does what he has seen come to have an evidentiary value, a meaning in a story.

Narrative, Evidence, and Detection in 20th-Century American Literature

It is the situation of a fact in a narrative, as Ike's encounter with the ledgers suggests, that makes it evidence in a literary or historical sense.¹ Narrative is primary; evidence becomes evidence because of its relationship to that narrative. Historian Lionel Gossman writes that "evidence only counts as evidence and is only recognized as such in relation to a potential narrative, so that the narrative can be said to determine the evidence as much as the evidence determines the narrative" (26). Mark Bevir, writing in 2011, pushes this claim further, to encompass even the term "fact," arguing that "the content of facts necessarily reflects the narratives in which they are located," that "there cannot be facts outside narratives" (32). Julian Lethbridge provides a literary angle on the same issue: "How can we know what the evidence is that will lead us to the solution until we know what has been done and how, until we are possessed of the solution?", Lethbridge asks in an essay on Edgar Allan Poe's short story "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" (1841), which is usually recognized as the first example of detective fiction (89).² The direction of an investigation, understood as Lethbridge describes it, is thus unexpected—it moves from the solution (the expected or proposed solution) to the evidence, considering whether a given fact or object constitutes evidence on the basis of its congruence with the proposed story, with the proposed solution.³ A consideration of the

¹ In other contexts it might make more sense to say that it is a fact's situation in an argument that makes it evidence, but historical narratives, like their literary (fictional and non-fictional) corollaries, argue for themselves as the most persuasive version of a story, the most persuasive explanation of events.

² See for instance Howard Haycraft, *Murder for Pleasure: The Life and Times of the Detective Story* (1941), 4, and Julian Symons, *Bloody Murder: From the Detective Story to the Crime Novel* (1993), 28.

³ As Tzvetan Todorov, Peter Brooks, and Franco Moretti stress, detective fiction represents the search for the *fabula*, for the imagined order of events operating behind their presentation in narrative (which the Russian Formalists—*fabula* is also their term—called the *sjuzhet*). See page 15 for further discussion.

concept of evidence in these terms, particularly of its relationship to narrative, has significant ramifications for the practice of history, specifically the relationship between historical research and history writing.

Since its earliest days, detective fiction has been a genre with great promise for exploring epistemological questions. Lethbridge argues that Poe was addressing a philosophical problem endemic to historical practice: how we come to know that which we do not know (89-90). Detective fiction and historical practice share not only epistemological concerns but also rhetorical concerns; historical work consists not just in knowing but also in explaining and convincing. Robin Winks argues that the “historian must collect, interpret, and then explain his evidence by methods which are not greatly different from those techniques employed by the detective, or at least the detective of fiction” (xiii). Like the detective, the historian is responsible not just for attempting to determine what has happened in the past, but also for producing a persuasive and meaningful account of it. In detective fiction, the stakes of the persuasiveness of this account are more immediate, concrete, and visible than those of historical work: freedom or incarceration, life or death. Each piece of evidence in an investigation, criminal or historical, has two lives: the first when it is sought and found, and the second when it is presented as support for the investigator’s story or argument. It is the expectation of that second instance, as in Ike McCaslin’s story, that enables the first and determines what will count as evidence.

This dissertation examines four groups of texts, from a range of periods and more than one genre, that examine, from four different angles, the way that evidence emerges in narrative and is in fact determined by the requirements of narrative. Each group of

texts likewise engages with the idea of investigation, of how the past might be apprehended, or at least glimpsed, and how it might be represented—and especially pertinently for this project, how the apprehension of the past is often fully subsumed into its representation. In many cases the texts studied go so far as to suggest that evidence is a rhetorical flourish, a part of the story of investigation that emerges not as a thread leading through the investigation of the past and toward the truth, but instead recognized and included as evidence first at the moment when it becomes clear that it will make the story told about the past more convincing.⁴ The idea that evidence becomes evidence only in relation to a narrative brings into play an obvious circularity, a circularity which the texts examined in this dissertation submit to scrutiny and ultimately suggest is the case in *all* dealings with evidence. These texts explore the consequences for historiography of the circular nature of evidence, indeed of its tendency to appear as a result of the demands of narrative. In the pursuit of their exploration of the idea of evidence and its implications for historiography, all four sets of texts either make direct

⁴ We often think of evidence and clues as related concepts. However, the two concepts seem to have arisen in very different ways. The *Oxford English Dictionary* indicates that “clue” once meant a ball of thread or yarn (“Clue,” Def. 1a). One use of this word was in the context of myths such as Theseus in the Cretan labyrinth and Chaucer’s reworking of it (the “Ariadne” section of *The Legend of Good Women*, dating from around 1386, which used the word *clew(e)* or *clue* (which were just variations in spelling) to describe the thread that helped Theseus find his way in the labyrinth) (“Clue,” Def. 2a.). Later, its literal sense more deeply obscured, *clue* came to mean “that which points the way, indicates a solution, or puts one on the track of a discovery” (“Clue,” Def. 2b). Evidence as a concept, on the other hand, has its origins in rhetoric rather than the way-finding of the labyrinth. *Evidentia*, the Greek word most similar in sound to the English *evidence*, meant the ability “to make a topic not only evident, but palpable”—in other words, seemingly even beyond evident, due to the rhetorician’s skill—to make it come to life (Ginzburg 29). Thomas Cole defines it as the “re-creation of a scene with such vividness *as to compel belief* on the part of the hearer” (39, emphasis added). “Both our notion of evidence and the Latin *evidentia*,” Carlo Ginzburg explains, “emerge in the sphere of rhetoric, especially judicial rhetoric” (29). As a word in English, “evidence” has from its earliest recorded history meant an indication, a mark, an “appearance from which inferences may be drawn” (“Evidence,” Def. 3a), or similarly a “ground for belief; testimony or facts tending to prove or disprove any conclusion” (“Evidence,” Def. 5a). Its legal meanings in English grew directly out of these commonplace ones. Whereas a clue leads, evidence supports a conclusion or an argument. Yet in detective fiction, what masquerades as a clue turns out more often than not to be determined by the argument it will be used to make, the argument about what happened at the time of the crime.

use of the structures of detective fiction or frame the approach to the past as an endeavor that resembles the solving of crimes in detective fiction. They furthermore ask what happens to the idea of justice when the direct link between reconstruction of the crime and justice that predominates in genre fiction is broken. The texts considered include Faulkner's novels *Absalom, Absalom!* (1936) and *Go Down, Moses* (1942) and his detective fiction, primarily the novel *Intruder in the Dust* (1948) and the stories written between 1931 and 1940 that were reprinted, together with a novella completed in 1949, under the title *Knight's Gambit* in 1949; Robert Penn Warren's novel *All the King's Men* (1946); Lillian Hellman's memoirs, published between the late 1960s and mid 1980s; and the mystery novels written by Louis Owens in the early 1990s.

The dissertation argues that many of the 20th-century American writers who borrow structures and imagery from detective fiction to use in texts about various kinds of investigation (historical, criminal, and even the exploration of the personal past in memoir) make use of those borrowings to examine the gap between evidence and conclusions in attempts to know the past. Detective fiction itself, especially the Golden Age detective fiction that immediately preceded (and in the work of many detective fiction writers continued into) the period studied in this dissertation, and of which several of the writers studied here were readers, tends to represent the movement from clue to conclusion as a smooth process made possible by the masterful interpretation of the available evidence by what Howard Haycraft calls a "transcendent and eccentric" detective (12).⁵ It can even be argued that more recent versions of detective and crime

⁵ The Golden Age of detective fiction spans the decades of the 1920s and 30s; Symons argues that it began with the publication of Agatha Christie's first novel, *The Mysterious Affair at Styles*, in 1920 (102-03). Many of the writers of this period, however, continued to write into the 50s, 60s, and even 70s.

stories intensify the directness of the link between evidence and conclusions: according to Scott Campbell, in the popular television series *CSI*, “the characters [professional “crime scene investigators”] finish each other’s sentences, providing a single interpretive avenue available to anyone who has done the training.” The texts examined in this dissertation, on the other hand, react against detective fiction proper and instead represent investigation as a site of conflict. These conflicts generally arise from one of two causes. The first is a circularity in the investigative process, whereby either the way a preliminary narrative about what has happened is being constructed, or the investigator’s desire for a particular outcome, determines what is construed as evidence. The second is the way the situatedness of the investigator figure affects the identification and interpretation of evidence. In many of these texts, the conflict arises from both causes.

In Faulkner’s work, it is the need to create a persuasive narrative, for instance in one of lawyer-detective Gavin Stevens’s end narratives in the *Knight’s Gambit* stories or in the inventive historical reconstructions carried out by Quentin Compson and Shreve McCannon in their dormitory in *Absalom, Absalom!*, that affects what is identified as evidence and how that evidence is used in support of a conclusion about what must have happened in the past. The story the investigator wants to tell about the past, in other words, determines the evidence, just as much or more than the evidence determines the shape of the reconstruction of past events.

Robert Penn Warren draws together three stories of investigation in *All the King’s Men*: Jack Burden’s study of the life of Cass Mastern, his search for politically-damning activity in Judge Irwin’s past in “The Case of the Upright Judge,” and his attempt to discover who prompted his friend Adam Stanton to kill his employer, Willie Stark.

Warren draws heavily on the imagery and structures of detective fiction, especially American hardboiled detective fiction, in the investigation scenes, but he subverts the work that hardboiled detective fiction usually does by burdening his detective with multiple and contradictory commitments that influence his investigative method and also by having Jack (the detective-narrator) tell his story from a position removed more than a year from the events and having him reject several possible detective fiction endings.

Even more clearly than Warren's book, Louis Owens's novels *The Sharpest Sight* and *Bone Game* borrow heavily from detective fiction structures and tropes but resist full identification with the genre. Working partially within this genre so deeply indebted to rationalism and European ways of knowing, Owens, a Native American writer, challenges detective fiction's traditional frameworks of investigation, evidence-gathering, and detective-style deduction by showing interpretation and even the identification of evidence taking place in the context of the tension between legal and academic ways of knowing and Indigenous epistemologies. The investigators in Owens's novels make use of dream knowledge and spiritual and supernatural experiences as evidence in the reconstruction of both crimes and historical events.

Like Owens's novels, Lillian Hellman's life writing foregrounds a potential conflict among multiple types of evidence and multiple ways of knowing. Hellman's memoirs are punctuated by investigation scenes in which her memoirist persona investigates her past life as would a detective or a historian, sifting through documents and comparing them to the narrative of the past that she has tentatively created. Her writing is animated by a tension between her fidelity to her memories of her past and another, just as strong, commitment to the truth of her previous writings about those same

past events—her diaries and journals, her notes, her letters, even her previously-published writing. The tension is made more dramatic by the heightened attention to the status of truth claims in memoir in the last several decades and by the repeated public accusations in the last few years before Hellman’s death that her memoirs were full of lies. Her inclusion of documents from her past and of her own earlier writing ultimately serves to lend greater authority to the voice of memory in her life writing, as the evidence of the diaries, letters, and other documents included is interpreted and framed (sometimes even re-written) in light of the present concerns of the narrating consciousness of the memoirs.

In the place of the smooth movement from evidence to conclusion portrayed so often in genre detective fiction, and indeed in the writing of history, in which as Susan Stanford Friedman notes, “the notion of history writing as the best possible reconstruction of the past—in a seamless narrative by an omniscient, invisible narrator . . . continues to underwrite many projects” undertaken by historians despite theorists’ insistence in the last forty years on the situatedness of the observer, the texts examined in this dissertation offer both a critique of the idea of evidence and a series of examples of the kinds of truth claims that literature can offer in its stead (201). These particularly literary takes on evidence consider the possibility of justice (or sometimes instead of empathy) when knowledge is contingent and make a bid for the staking of truth claims outside narrow and sometimes arbitrary institutional rules (whether legal or historical) about what constitutes evidence.

Detective fiction itself is an ideal place to study story, and certainly an ideal place to study the relationship of evidence to narrative; the texts examined here partake of that relationship as well, even as they call attention to the way detective fiction operates. The

detective's end narrative, which can be traced back to Poe and had a strong presence in the detective fiction that followed, is key in Faulkner's fiction in particular but also resonates in Hellman's work, as the memoirist's voice describes the search through old papers, and in Jack Burden's narration in *All the King's Men*, which might be considered one long end narrative. Poe's "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" was, as critics have noted, remarkably powerful in the influence it had on the subsequent development of the genre of detective fiction.⁶ The convention of ending with the narrativization of the initial event, the crime itself, in order to reveal both the criminal and the details of the crime, goes back to "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" and informs the subsequent development of the detective fiction genre. At the end of Poe's story, Dupin (the detective figure) tells the story of his investigation, presenting the clues and his interpretation of them one by one to the narrator and ultimately reconstructing for him the events of the murders. Poe's technique is to allow the inset story, narrated in quotation marks by Dupin to the narrator of the rest of the story, to argue for itself as the most likely explanatory narrative for the facts, as the most likely reconstruction of a series of past events that have not been observed by any available witness. The story is a locked room problem, in which the action has taken place "behind the shut doors of the impenetrable past," in the words of David Lehman (76). The detective's role is to recover that past and solve the crime with the help of only the evidence remaining in the room. Dupin tells the story of the investigation first, but even as he relates the story of the investigation, it becomes clear that the evidence he seeks in that investigation is

⁶ David Lehman, for instance, remarks that "[n]early all the conventions of the classic whodunit—from locked rooms to least likely culprits, eccentric sleuths and their admiring companions, dullard cops, and wrongly accused bystanders—originate with Poe" (71).

already part of a potential explanatory narrative for the crime. He goes to the scene of the crime, in other words, specifically in order to find a means by which an extremely agile, non-human creature could have entered the room through the window and then left it after murdering the women while still shutting the window behind him. He brings his explanatory narrative with him into the locked room, and everything he sees there, he sees in light of it.

Since Poe, the detective story has largely been about the detective's story. Lehman argues that the two narratives of the detective story, the story of the murder and the story of the investigation, "meet at the point where the sleuth reveals his solution to the case" (xiii). The revelation of that solution almost always takes the form of an account of the investigation and its conclusion as narrated by the detective.⁷ Because of their end narratives, detective stories are story-arguments; end narratives argue for their own veracity. In the end narrative, as in historical writing, each piece of found evidence functions as rhetorical evidence, so that the storytelling phase of investigation becomes a persuasive act. The impact of this storytelling phase filters backward in time, as well, meaning that the identification and interpretation of evidence throughout the investigation narrative is argumentative in form. As an aid in discovery, evidence cannot get free of its primary, future position—to persuade.

Much has been made, in narratology and detective fiction studies alike, of the detective story's "double plot." Greg Forster summarizes John Cawelti's description of the double plot by explaining that the crime "takes place once in the actual happening,

⁷ This trend persists from Poe through the Golden Age. In most hardboiled detective fiction, the detective narrates throughout but still delivers an end narrative. More recent detective fiction uses a mixture of strategies but seldom eliminates some sort of revelation of the details of the crime by the detective.

then a second time in its gradual reconstruction and retelling by the detective,” allowing the reconstruction “to be judged on the basis of its fidelity to an initial, unrepresented event” (“Freud, Faulkner” 273). One of the two plots of the detective story is mapped onto the other, so that as plot two (the investigation) reveals plot one (the crime), plot one structures plot two. The narration of the crime seems to structure the events of the investigation because it is a retracing. In the end narratives with which fictional detectives draw their cases to a close, the two levels of the plot, the story of the crime and the story of its investigation, meet. The revelation of what has been found and what it means—the incorporation of the found evidence into the narrative and its deployment as rhetorical evidence—also reveals the criminal.

Lehman makes an attempt to extend the significance of the detective story’s double plot by claiming that “the detective story is unique among literary forms in that the narrative line flows backward, from effect to cause, causing the reader to become a participant or co-conspirator, since one is continually asked to guess at the meaning of events and to extrapolate an entire scenario from a handful of clues” (xviii). Jonathan Culler, however, extends this reversal of direction to all narratives: “One could argue that every narrative operates according to this double logic, presenting its plot as a sequence of events which is prior to and independent of the given perspective on these events, and, at the same time, suggesting by its implicit claims to significance that these events are justified by their appropriateness to a thematic structure” (198). In other words, says Peter Brooks (paraphrasing Culler), narrative “proceeds through a ‘double logic,’ in that at certain narrative moments story events seem to be produced by the requirements of the narrative discourse, its need of meaning, rather than vice versa” (*Reading* 28). Detective

fiction makes this unexpected reversal of direction, which Culler and Brooks argue is a feature of all narrative, very apparent. Tzvetan Todorov, according to Brooks, by identifying “the two orders of story, inquest and crime, as *sjuzhet* and *fabula*,”—a distinction developed by the Russian Formalists in which *fabula* is “defined as the order of events referred to by the narrative” and *sjuzhet* is “the order of events presented in the narrative discourse”—makes “the detective story the narrative of narratives” (Brooks, *Reading* 24-25, 12). Working through a Sherlock Holmes story as an example, Brooks draws on Todorov’s work to argue that a “condition of all classic detective fiction” is “that the detective repeat, go over again, the ground that has been covered by his predecessor, the criminal” (*Reading* 24). The detective produces the *fabula*—the complete array of imagined events on which the narrative presented (the *sjuzhet*) is based—from the *sjuzhet*, essentially reading and interpreting the narrative constructed by the criminal and then presenting literature’s closest approximation of the *fabula* itself in the end narrative at the close of the story, in which he reveals his solution to the case.⁸

The writers studied in this dissertation who wrote before these critics (Faulkner, Warren, and Hellman) anticipate, to varying degrees, their claims about the way detective fiction structures illuminate the nature of all narrative. Owens, writing afterward, takes on some of their ideas as he challenges the relationship of conclusion to justice that operates in genre fiction. These writers sever detective fiction’s structures from their ends in genre fiction—closure, complete knowledge, and uncomplicated notions of justice—and yet by

⁸ “In the terms of the Russian formalists,” Moretti says, “the criminal produces the *sjuzhet*, the detective the *fabula* . . . the former embodies the literary pole, the latter the scientific” (146). Moretti goes on to argue that the “*fabula* narrated by the detective in his reconstruction of the facts brings us back to the beginning; that is, it abolishes narration . . . declares narration a mere deviation, a masking of that univocal meaning which is its *raison d’être*” (148).

inhabiting the forms of detective fiction, they are nevertheless able to participate in the investigations of the nature of narrative that these forms enable.

Narration, Authority, and the Writing of History

The texts discussed in this dissertation use the structures of detective fiction not only to think about narrative in general terms but to think through a central problem in historiography in the past forty years: the effect that the need to produce a persuasive narrative has on judgments about what constitutes evidence and on the interpretation of what is judged to be evidence. As previously discussed, the historian, like the detective, has a double responsibility—to investigate and to narrate his findings. Charles Rzepka links the figures of detective and historian (and the historian’s counterparts in the other historical sciences) historically, arguing that “the story of the development of the detective genre largely coincides with the history of narrative practice in these reconstructive sciences [paleontology, geology, and antiquarianism], and with its popular dissemination” (33). Concurrent with the emergence and subsequent surge in popularity of detective fiction between 1841 and the early 20th century,⁹ the theory of history writing in the European and American tradition shifted from the positivist “*wie es eigentlich gewesen*” of Leopold von Ranke and his predecessors, who advocated the representation of the past “as it actually was,” as it actually happened, toward an increasingly prominent recognition of the role of narrative structures in shaping history writing (57). In the 1940s, R.G. Collingwood identified a shift in the popular understanding of historical work that he read as linked to changes in popular detective fiction. In the late 19th and

⁹ Symons (citing Haycraft) says that “no more than a dozen” crime stories were reviewed in the *American Book Review Digest* in 1914, “a figure which had grown to 97 in 1925 and to 217 in 1939” (123).

early 20th-century world of Sherlock Holmes, whom Collingwood accuses of running about like a human bloodhound rather than first formulating a theory, scientific history (the method of historical research that Collingwood promoted and that according to him “puts the question” to the past rather than relying on ready-made statements from primary sources) was not popularly accepted (218). On the other hand, by Agatha Christie’s “Monseieur Poirot’s time,¹⁰ to judge by his sales, the general [public] cannot have too much of [the idea of formulating a question or theory first and then looking for evidence of it]. The revolution which dethroned the principles of scissors-and-paste history, and replaced them by those of scientific history, had become common property” (282).

This historian-as-detective model described by Collingwood is surprisingly narrative in nature. Collingwood advocates bringing a question to what one finds in the archives, indeed putting sources “to the torture, twisting a passage ostensibly about something quite different into an answer to the question [one] has decided to ask” (270). The potential narratives proposed in answer to these questions brought to the material found in archives are the narratives according to which evidence is sorted and identified, and in light of which it is interpreted. “Every time a historian asks a question,” Collingwood contends, “he asks it because he thinks he can answer it: that is to say, he has already in his mind a preliminary and tentative idea of the evidence he will be able to use” (281). Collingwood’s ideas, though they are of course not accepted in their entirety by more recent scholars, have maintained some currency and have gone on to influence other scholars. In 1991, the editors of *Critical Inquiry* (James Chandler, Arnold Davidson, and Harry Harootunian) named Collingwood as the best-known exception to

¹⁰ Hercule Poirot appeared first in *The Mysterious Affair at Styles* (1920) and last in *Curtain* (1975). Collingwood is clearly not speaking of these later Poirot appearances.

the “rule of neglect” of the topic of evidence in the humanities, calling his case for the notion of the “historian’s constitutive dialogue with the human past” “compelling” (738).¹¹ Writing a half-century later, they contended that though Collingwood’s analysis “did not register how complicated the questions of evidence prove to be,” it “helped scholars to see that evidence always responds to questions” (739).

Hayden White, who since the 1970s has been engaged in examining the literary structures of historical writing and thinking, argues in a much more direct way that historians use narrative conventions to organize their accounts of the past. The language that historians use (like any language) is not transparent; it adds meaning. White argues that making a narrative out of research findings “entails an aesthetic regulation,” a “disciplined historical style” (*Content* 68). He suggests that the “stylistic exclusions” necessary to aspire to the style canonized by academic historians are more powerful in setting limits on what counts as appropriate evidence in historical writing than are the actual “‘rules of evidence’ that a researcher is supposed to adhere to in any examination of the historical record” (*Content* 66). White’s argument, in other words, is that what counts as evidence is largely determined by narrative requirements and expectations for structure that historians anticipate will arise during the writing stage. Narrative and argument are so interdependent as to be inextricable in historical writing. In the story told, each piece of found evidence functions as rhetorical evidence, making the storytelling phase of historical investigation a persuasive act.

¹¹ The limitations to his theory a half-century later, in the editors’ opinion, were two: first, his theory of historical reenactment, derived from the German hermeneutic tradition, had come under attack “from positions as diverse as those of the logical positivists and the post-structuralists”; and second, his theories “did not respect distinctions among disciplines and thus could not attend to differences among the ways in which evidence figures in various humanistic practices of inquiry and argument” (739).

Plots, according to White, are not to be found in events themselves; they are instead put there by historians, who are involved in “essentially a literary, that is to say fiction-making, operation” (*Tropics* 85). White observes that historical narrative is by its nature interpretive, is by its nature linked to a process of meaning-making and to notions of justice, without which past happenings could not be told within a structure of beginning, middle, and end. For a historical account to have a beginning, a middle, and most importantly an end, since real events clearly never do, what is required is a “moral principle” in light of which a historian might judge the resolution of the story as either just or unjust (White, *Content* 19). “The demand for closure in the historical story,” White suggests, is “a demand . . . for moral meaning, a demand that sequences of real events be assessed as to their significance as elements of a moral drama” (*Content* 21). The desire for an ending is a desire for an apparatus to be built into the story to enable justice to be distinguished from injustice, and then justice either done or refused. This link between the end of the story and justice in historical writing evokes, too, the similar equation of the two in detective fiction.

While historical research is certainly often undertaken with the primary goal of representing the experience of people who lived in the past, it also always bears the possibility that it will have an impact on the present and the future. Certain types of investigations, especially in governmental or legal contexts, are undertaken explicitly in order to make a decision about how to proceed in the future. Especially in this second version of history work, reconstruction takes on a particular weight; actions taken in response to a given historical narrative, be they legal or political, are presumably as just as possible only when the reconstruction is as accurate as possible. The idea that

evidence, found only because it is sought, not coming into being until a narrative calls for it, is called upon to provide authority in decision-making about the future, means that in every case there is the risk of an inappropriately-assumed authority on the part of the investigator.

To return to *Go Down, Moses*, the authority underlying Ike's judgment about the story he uncovers is the relationship he claims not only to the white McCaslins but to the black ones—he believes that the ledgers contain a record “not alone of his own flesh and blood but of all his people, not only the whites but the black one[s] too, who were as much a part of his ancestry as his white progenitors, and of the land which they had all held and used in common and fed from and on” (256). Ike has known Tomey's Turl all his life and presumes to be able to judge that his skin color is more than half white, and thus to be able to reconstruct his ancestry. From there he moves to try to imagine Eunice's motivations and emotions as she walks into the creek. The people whose stories are buried in the traces left in the McCaslin ledger books take “substance and even a sort of shadowy life with their passions and complexities too as page followed page and year year,” but only through the structuring logic of Ike's expectations, and with the addition of the stories he remembers (254).¹² Ike desires to redress the wrongs instigated by his grandfather, but as Thadious Davis argues, his actions nevertheless reinforce his grandfather's will.¹³ What Ike is doing may be a “challenge to his grandfather's cultural

¹² Minrose Gwin argues that the ledger books “are too small a space to contain, in all their cultural and historical implications, the outrageousness of old Carothers McCaslin's crimes and the tragic stories of Eunice and Tomasina, whose lives are squeezed into cryptic phrases in the ledger book” (77).

¹³ Davis's argument considers the slippage between will as legal document and will as bidding: “The strength of the will as testament links *will* in *Go Down, Moses* to narration as human desire” (150). The words “father's will” in *Go Down, Moses*, she says, carry “the weight of obligation, interpretation, and law” (Davis 149).

authority and his social identity,” Davis says; he “may well discursively expose Carothers’s wrongdoing and dissect his power; however, Ike also capitulates to the ‘will’ of old Carothers when he attempts to disperse to Tomey’s Turl’s children their monetary legacies” (159).¹⁴ Ike cannot interpret the actions of his black relatives without assuming an inappropriate authority that resembles his grandfather’s. Wherever there are questions of evidence, there are questions of authority. “When advertisers flourish a clean glove as proof of the miracles their detergent can work,” Heather Dubrow argues in the introduction to a 1996 PMLA issue that focused on the status of evidence in literary studies, “they assert the Adamic power to name, linking signifier and signified. Alternative meanings and interpretations are banished. Turning an object into evidence is like gift-wrapping it: the agent performing the action defines and delimits the significance of the object” (16).

One of the questions addressed in this project is how texts that interrogate the act of investigation in a particularly *literary* manner help us to think about the role of authority in the process of designating what counts as evidence for whatever it is that “has happened.” Texts that are self-conscious about their strategies of narration and about the category of character, in particular fiction and memoir, allow a particular insight into the relationship between authority and persuasion. If we use Barbara Herrnstein Smith’s much-cited definition of narrative as “verbal acts consisting of *someone telling someone else that something happened*,” then literary texts tend to open

¹⁴ Gwin argues, in a similar vein, that in the Fonsiba story, also in “The Bear,” upon hearing Fonsiba say “I’m free,” Ike “rapidly retreats from Fonsiba’s material space which he has trespassed upon [and] re-enters the space of the ledger, the world of commerce in which debts of all kinds can be paid in money, the space owned by white men” (88). “*That* space,” Gwin contends, “is what Ike cannot retreat from, though he tries, for he himself has become its ideological producer and production” (88, emphasis original).

up the question of who the “someone” and the “someone else” are and of how the “someone” achieves his or her authority with respect to the “someone else,” in a way that narrative history tends not to (228, emphasis original). These texts make the figure who carries out a historical investigation into a character and the investigation itself into part of the plot, in contrast to historical writing, in which the work of gathering and interpreting evidence and the very position of the writer traditionally strive to make themselves disappear into the recounting of events.

There have of course been movements in historiography, particularly in feminist historiography, that have attempted to recover the historian’s presence as author of the historical account. As provocative as these attempts are, however, particularly literary means of exploring the investigator’s situatedness offer a different perspective. History writing itself, as well as theory on historical practice, has in the past few decades opened up the question of how the historian is situated and of subjectivist epistemologies in general, in provocative and useful ways.¹⁵ Joan Scott, for instance, calls for “examining the relationships between discourse, cognition, and reality, the relevance of the position or situatedness of subjects to the knowledge they produce, and the effects of difference on knowledge”; indeed she criticizes historians for not asking “whether it matters for the history they write that historians are men, women, white, black, straight, or gay” and for

¹⁵ This project has succeeded in many ways but has also encountered challenges at the level of technique: *how* does one actually write a history that takes the historian into account? Susan Stanford Friedman summarizes the situation (as of 1995) in this way (in a fuller version of an argument I have previously quoted): “The positivist belief in history writing as the production of objective truth may no longer be very prevalent in its purest form, although it once served as the philosophical bas[i]s for the formation of history as a discipline in the nineteenth century and early twentieth centuries. However, the notion of history writing as the best possible reconstruction of the past—in a seamless narrative by an omniscient, invisible narrator—nonetheless continues to underwrite many projects, including feminist ones” (201).

measuring authority, in the words of Michel de Certeau, “by the elimination of everything concerning the speaker” (Scott 373).

Detective activity in fiction and memoir provides a useful backdrop against which to read texts that represent historical investigation as a complicated and messy process. Detective characters have been fleshed out and quirky from the beginning (for example Eugène François Vidocq’s persona in his *Memoires* (1828),¹⁶ Poe’s Dupin, Arthur Conan Doyle’s Sherlock Holmes). They both embody the coldest and most rational of logics and serve as some of the most memorable and warmly eccentric characters in popular literature. (Sherlock Holmes, especially, is arguably more memorable than the mysteries he solves.) Haycraft argues that Poe’s “The Murders in the Rue Morgue” created the structure and “minutiæ, time-hallowed today,” of detective fiction “virtually with a single stroke of the pen,” including the “transcendent and eccentric detective,” the combination of aloofness, amateur status, and precise method on the part of the investigator that has largely persisted in detective fiction (12). Despite the detective’s quirks, factors external to the investigation such as his relationships, his family, or other demands on his time have no bearing on his interpretation of evidence, in genre fiction.

The literature of investigation of the last eighty years draws on the eccentric investigator convention of detective fiction but, rather than preserving the tension between that eccentricity and the supposedly smooth logic of detective-style deduction,¹⁷ opens up the question of the situated historian. Gavin Stevens and Chick Mallison are

¹⁶ One of Poe’s alleged influences. See Haycraft 24.

¹⁷ My discussion of “The Murders in the Rue Morgue” in chapter 2 suggests that in some detective fiction, at least Poe’s, the movement from clue to conclusion is not as unimpeded as the story seems at first glance to present it.

decidedly from Yoknapatawpha County and see the world and the problems they are investigating in its terms. Jack Burden attempts to uncover evidence against one good friend in conversations with other good friends because he is employed by a political rival of the friend and father figure. Cole McCurtain and Alex Yazzie believe in ghosts and dreams and try to reconcile the knowledge they receive from those sources with their academic training. Hellman questions the stability of memories as their emotional valences change: “What didn’t I see during the time of work that I now see more clearly? . . . Or what did I see in the past that I could not now duplicate? Perhaps because the emotions that made it possible are over and are not recoverable . . . or perhaps because the years blank out even passions” (*Three* 4). Novels and memoir are ideal sites for working out the shifts in the ways evidence is identified, sorted, discarded, and interpreted when the ways of knowing proper to expert methodologies run up against the quite different but quite real circumstance of knowing one’s way around a place or a person. These literary texts also ask us to notice—in a way that most historical narrative does not—the way narrators direct attention toward and away from scenes and traces that might function as evidence. They ask us to notice what is determined to count as evidence and what is not and why. Memoir, the genre with which I conclude this project by considering Lillian Hellman’s life writing, is a particularly productive site for exploring issues of authority because it both calls attention to its narration and the authority of its narrator and makes truth claims that fiction does not. In my examination of memoir in my last chapter, I shift to a broader discussion of authority and evidence in an attempt to extend the implications of these arguments.

Chapter Summaries

My first chapter, “The Detective’s Story: Narration, Persuasion, and Justice in William Faulkner’s Fiction,” discusses Faulkner’s engagement with the centrality of narrative conventions in the representation of the past in both major novels like *Absalom, Absalom!* and *Go Down, Moses* and his detective fiction. I contend that Faulkner’s fiction shows not only that law is narrative and rhetorical in nature, as Jay Watson has previously argued, but that investigation itself—the search for and interpretation of evidence—is narrative and rhetorical, as well. The readings in the chapter demonstrate that Faulkner’s work anticipates the claims that scholars such as White later made about style and narrative conventions determining the shape of historical writing. Additionally, they suggest that Faulkner’s understanding of the nature of historical research and writing is even more radical than White’s: where White sees imagination at work “at the last stage of [the historian’s] labors, when it becomes necessary to compose a discourse or narrative in which to represent his findings, that is, his notion of ‘what really happened’ in the past,” Faulkner, in *Intruder in the Dust* and his short detective fiction, represents the investigation of crimes or other past happenings as inflected, from the moment the investigation begins, by the shaping force of the end narrative that the detective figure knows he will eventually have to tell about what has happened (*Content* 67-68). The presence of this end narrative is so strong during the course of the investigation that it causes the detective to identify some facts and objects, but not others, as evidence for the emerging story, even as those facts and objects are first encountered. Narrative formations drive and structure the investigation.

Gavin Stevens, Chick Mallison, and other investigator figures in Faulkner decide their next step on the basis of stories they have in mind—for instance the conclusion that Jake Montgomery must have been the buyer of the stolen timber in *Intruder in the Dust*, and must have known that it was stolen, in order for his killing to make sense. It is on the basis of this story that Stevens and the sheriff decide to call the timber's "ultimate consignee" to verify Montgomery's role (223). They find the evidence they go looking for. These story-form investigations gesture toward the literary and rhetorical nature of investigation, not only in detection, but in all fields that begin with the identification and interpretation of evidence: history, the physical sciences, medicine, archaeology, and many others. In Faulkner's detective fiction, evidence is produced by the conclusion—in other words, the just ending anticipated by the detective figure enables the identification of a set of facts and objects as evidence. The chapter does not suggest that this relationship of evidence to conclusion is unique to Faulkner's work; indeed, it argues that the genre itself subordinates the idea of evidence to the tidiness of the just conclusion and does so not only in the Golden Age detective fiction Faulkner was known to have read and enjoyed, but going all the way back to Poe, in whose detective stories, as Patricia Creswell argues, detection "is more a mastery of rhetoric than of reasoning" (49). Faulkner's detective fiction calls attention to the relationship of evidence to conclusion in all detective fiction, and indeed in historical writing as well. More than the other writers studied here, however, Faulkner attempts to preserve the use value of the concepts of truth and justice, even when evidence's inescapably rhetorical nature is recognized.

The chapter goes on to argue that there is a strong link between Faulkner's engagement with narrative and evidence in the representation of the past in his detective

fiction and the same concerns in *Absalom, Absalom!* and *Go Down, Moses*; it thus re-evaluates the place of his detective fiction, which has often been considered a distinct project from his major novels and to have been written mostly for money, in his body of work. I argue that the focus on evidence in Faulkner's detective fiction, especially in *Intruder in the Dust*, which many critics have argued is closely linked to *Go Down, Moses*, Faulkner's previous novel, enables a reading of certainly *Go Down, Moses*, but also *Absalom, Absalom!*, as concerned with the nature of evidence and interpretation.

In my second chapter, "Hardboiled Sleuthing and Historiography in Robert Penn Warren's *All the King's Men*," I use the hardboiled detective fiction content from *All the King's Men*, which has been documented in great detail by Henry Cuningham, as a lens for examining the novel's historiographical vision. A paid private investigator for the "Boss," (Willie Stark, called Willie Talos in the 2001 "restored" version of *All the King's Men* compiled by Noel Polk¹⁸), Jack searches for politically damning evidence against his employer's rivals, keeping "out of sight" so that his work cannot be traced back to the Boss (20). This work, as well as his searches for people the Boss needs to find, closely resembles the work of a private investigator in hardboiled detective fiction, as does the tough language Jack uses both in dialogue and in his role as narrator. I argue that the novel both revises the conventions of the detective story and fictionalizes the historiographical endeavor, such that the commitments of the investigator determine the shape of the investigation and what he is able to perceive as evidence in his three major investigations into the past—his dissertation research using the letters and journals of a 19th-century ancestor, what he calls "The Case of the Upright Judge" (the search for

¹⁸ Except where otherwise noted, all citations from the novel are to the 1996 Second Harvest Edition of *All the King's Men*, which follows the originally-published 1946 text.

evidence of scandal in the past of the Boss's political rival and Jack's childhood friend and father figure Judge Irwin), and his attempt to determine who is ultimately responsible for the Boss's assassination. *All the King's Men* considers the investigator's own history, particularly what his commitments allow him to perceive as evidence, in precisely the ways that academic writing does not. My analysis considers two angles of the relationship between Jack's research methods and the narratives he produces from that research in the novel: first, Jack as a detective who is (more decidedly than in any form of genre detective fiction, whether Golden Age or hardboiled) torn between several commitments, and second, Jack as a detective who also narrates his own investigation.

Part of the work of chapter 2 is to trace what Jack calls his "technique" as a historian-detective (193). I look at the way his method in "The Case of the Upright Judge" divides into two parts, the first inflected by his personal relationships and the second attempting to set them aside as he leaves his home state and searches in professionalized zones like newspaper archives and stock record rooms, carrying out his detection in accord with what he conceives of as a set of rules for historical practice. The personal does not stay sidelined for long, however, and returns to condition what he does with the evidence. Throughout the search, his loyalties determine what he can ask, how he can ask it, and what he can hear in response. The private investigator of hardboiled detective fiction is, like Jack, usually committed to the person who has hired him, and his investigation proceeds in the direction it does because of that commitment; *All the King's Men* complicates the idea of commitment further than most hardboiled detective novels, however, because the political commitment he is paid for is in constant contention with Jack's other loyalties.

The chapter also addresses the fact that Jack acts as both investigator and narrator. Jack's position as a narrator removed in time by more than a year from the cases he is chronicling disrupts the normal operation of hardboiled detective fiction and by doing so engages with a second historiographical problem: the way the end point chosen by the teller helps to determine what is told. Jack flirts briefly with detective fiction endings several times in the second half of the novel—when he discovers the clinching piece of evidence against Judge Irwin, when he experiences a “clean and pure” feeling upon deciding that it is Tiny Duffy who is ultimately responsible for Willie Stark's assassination, and when he thinks to himself, “It was as though I were caught in a more monstrous conspiracy whose meaning I could not fathom” (417). This last is an ending particular to hardboiled detective fiction, but although Jack has been using the idiom and moves of that tradition throughout his story, he rejects this type of ending, too. Guilt for him is ultimately neither particular nor universal; he decides not to take revenge on Duffy or otherwise pursue the question of who is guilty, perhaps because too thorough an investigation would reveal Jack, not Duffy, as the villain. He turns against the idea that knowledge can be certain—declining to even try to verify, for instance, his mother's claim that Judge Irwin is his father, as James Perkins has pointed out (“Human Genetics”). Because he presents his search for evidence against the Judge as from the beginning directed by reasons more complicated than an idea of justice, Jack's narrative does not behave like genre fiction; when the evidence has been found and interpreted, it does not mean that the story is over. Jack rejects the premise that decisions about how to proceed in the present and future should be based in knowledge of what has happened in the past. By imposing another ending on the story, one in which he lives in Judge Irwin's

house, cares for the Scholarly Attorney, and marries Anne, he chooses to proceed in the future based on his feelings and his philosophies rather than his knowledge about what has happened in the past. He chooses to no longer be a detective.

My third chapter, “Ghosts in the Locked Room: Spiritual Forms of Evidence and the Emergence of the Undisciplined Academic in Louis Owens’s Mystery Novels,” shifts into the later part of the 20th century, when the arguments made by figures like White had become commonplace and Owens and other writers were consciously using the strategies of postmodernism to think through the problems of narrative history. I argue that Owens, himself an academic and a literary theorist and critic, uses the detective fiction genre to address the difficulty of reconciling the forms of evidence accepted in the academy and knowledge acquired from dreams, spiritual experiences, and encounters with beings such as ghosts. The direct intrusion of the past into the present, in the form of a ghost or a revelation, disrupts the idea of reconstruction of the past on the basis of remaining traces only that has dominated detective fiction going back to Poe. Dupin rejects supernatural causes outright in “The Murders in the Rue Morgue” when he tells his friend the narrator that “it is not too much to say that neither of us believe in praeternatural events . . . Madame and Mademoiselle L’Espanaye [the victims] were not destroyed by spirits. The doers of the deed were material, and escaped materially. Then how?” (139). Detective fiction relies on the past (or the crime scene) being a closed system, accessible only through traces left behind. Owens harnesses the power of the disruption introduced by the presence of ghosts (and likewise knowledge that comes directly from dreams or from revelation in religious ceremonies) and uses it to challenge detective fiction’s usual

models for investigation and evidence-gathering, de-emphasizing solving in favor of a more expansive notion of learning and justice in favor of empathy.

The investigators in these novels also reject the procedures of legal evidence-gathering for other reasons. In *The Sharpest Sight* (1992), the investigators refuse to consider much of the available physical evidence, partly because examining the murdered man's body would probably lead them to the nineteen-year-old woman who most likely committed the murder, but who they by the end of the investigation consider "just part of" the web of injustices that has been committed (223). The murderer, whose sister had previously been killed by the man she later murdered (but during a hallucination after he returned from Vietnam), begins to desire an end to the violence as well. Because the investigators destroy the physical evidence, she is able to go on with her life and her healing. The investigators' choices undercut the idea of an individual perpetrator and of the tidy notions of justice that often appear at the end of detective novels. Whereas a double apprehension—a final understanding of the crime and the physical entrapment of the criminal—is the expected resolution in detective fiction, in both *The Sharpest Sight* and *Bone Game* (1994), the cause of the crimes is never entirely apprehended—neither entirely understood nor entirely caught and stopped.

Bone Game, which takes place in a university setting and whose two main characters are professors and Native Americans, also attempts to negotiate between the systems of inquiry prized in academic disciplines and ways of evaluating and interpreting knowledge that operate outside those academic systems, particularly within Indigenous communities. The physical and archival evidence for the lives and events that the investigators in both *Bone Game* and *The Sharpest Sight* are trying to understand is too

tenuous to support conclusions about those lives and those events on its own; the novels suggest that dreams and ghosts are necessarily the primary sources of evidence about them and offer deeper knowledge about what has happened. The professor characters in *Bone Game* rely on evidence from academic sources, as well, and integrate that evidence with what they learn through dreams, spiritual experiences, and encounters with ghosts in order to understand the lives of the native Californians from almost two centuries prior who are demanding their attention. They succeed at reconciling these two forms of evidence within their circle of close friends and family, and also in the fiction that Cole plans to return to writing. The novel does not argue for forcing the university to acknowledge Indigenous ways of knowing, however; instead it indicates that Cole and Alex's need to negotiate (rather than be at home in) the primarily Western frameworks of the academy puts them at an advantage as scholars. The novel suggests that while the university is a productive position from which to write and speak, its insularity is potentially dangerous. (The two murderers in the novel turn out to be Cole's most serious students.) As undisciplined academics, taking Indigenous ways of knowing seriously, spending much of their time off campus with family members, and forming cross-disciplinary friendships and work partnerships, Cole and Alex are able to make use of academic discourse and academic forms of evidence without having them condition their ways of thinking, a problem Owens takes up in his critical writing, as well. *Bone Game* attempts to enlarge notions of evidence beyond what is usually accepted in the university and the law in order to try to take seriously all the ways that the world and the past can be known.

The final chapter, “Vouching for Evidence: The New Life of Old Writing in Lillian Hellman’s Memoirs,” shifts away from a direct consideration of detective fiction elements and instead attempts to ask much broader questions about evidence and authority. Although the detective metaphor is certainly present in the investigation scenes in Hellman’s memoirs—one could argue that after years of living alongside detective novelist Dashiell Hammett, Hellman would quite easily have made recourse to that imagery—her engagement with the idea of evidence resides primarily in the friction created when her memory of the past encounters her previous writings about it or other documentary evidence. The arguments made in chapter 4 rely heavily on my work with Hellman’s personal papers and the drafts of her memoirs located in the Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center at the University of Texas.

In the 1980s, after the publication of her first three memoirs, Hellman began to be widely accused not only of inventing incidents in her life writing, but also of appropriating other people’s stories, particularly that of American psychoanalyst Muriel Gardiner, who had worked in the anti-fascist underground in Vienna during the 1930s, much like the title character of Hellman’s portrait “Julia” (part of her 1973 *Pentimento: A Book of Portraits*). But Hellman’s memoirs themselves (like her plays) focus insistently on truth and lying, and also on the related concepts of memory, evidence, and access to the past. Hellman’s inclusion of both retrospective narrative, based on her memories, and documentary evidence (such as old diaries and letters) in her memoirs prompts her readers to reconsider the relationship between these two major forms of evidence for the past. Hellman’s references to sources are embedded within her testimony as to their origin, accuracy, and importance, which is true of the use of sources as evidence not only

in memoir, but in history-writing, biography, or any other form of writing about the past. In her writing, the use of sources to document experience becomes, however, a way of exploring present consciousness. She asks repeatedly what the documents she is using mean *now*.

The “voice of memory,” which in traditional understandings of autobiography, in the words of James Olney, is seen as “the guarantor of identity and continuity of being across time, the only liaison—but an unbroken and fully capable liaison all the same—between past experience and present consciousness,” comes into conflict in Hellman’s life writing with earlier writing she has done about her past—her letters, diaries, and previously-published magazine pieces (861). Memory, in story form, supplies the organizing logic for both her half-remembered, glimpsed memories and the old papers she digs out of her files. She examines her previous writings and additionally contacts old friends and business associates, as well as paid researchers, in order to track down names, dates, and other details, but ultimately none of this documentation or research is the exclusive determinant of her conclusions about her past; she even re-writes old diary entries while presenting them as excerpted from her original diaries. She reads these documents into evidence precisely in order to show how embedded they are in the rhetorical structure of her memoirs, her current writing. The voice of memory claims the right to write over the top of what the diarist has previously written. The evidence she uncovers has a second life as rhetorical evidence—selected, interpreted, and positioned in order to support what memoir suggests is the more real truth of memory. While the primary implications of this chapter are for memoir, Hellman’s moves point to the

rhetoricity of evidence and the ultimate authority of the teller in any form of writing about the past, including history writing.

I begin this study with an examination of the circularity of evidence—of its tendency to be determined by as well as determine narratives about what has taken place—in Faulkner’s detective fiction, which, while somewhat unusual, is nevertheless detective fiction. I go on to discuss the relationship of the idea of evidence in Faulkner’s detective fiction to the same concern in some of his major novels. From there, I broaden my scope to look at the way narrative needs and investigators’ attachments define the evidence in another major American novel, *All the King’s Men*, which is not itself detective fiction but does borrow heavily from the language, imagery, and plot elements of hardboiled detective fiction. I then zoom in a bit to focus on what seems at first to be a specific problem in Louis Owens’s fiction—the interplay between institutional and Indigenous epistemologies—but proves to have wider consequences. I conclude by bringing questions of authority to the forefront in my discussion of Hellman’s memoirs and considering what it means to see documentary evidence made quite clearly into a rhetorical device, what it means for the selection and interpretation of evidence to be directly dependent on the will of the narrator. In all of these chapters, I consider what happens to notions of truth and justice when what constitutes evidence is so closely linked to the authority of the accounts proposed, revised, and finally promulgated by the investigator. I attempt throughout to illuminate the implications of these texts’ unlocking of the locked room of detective-style investigation and likewise their opening up of the role of the historian into a field of prior loyalties and expectations.

The investigator encounters the mystery of what happened “behind the shut doors of the impenetrable past” accompanied by much more than what is lying in front of him, by what one might call the scene of the crime, whether it is a locked room strewn with bodies or the unreachable childhood of Lillian Hellman’s persona in her memoirs (Lehman 76). Whether what the detective brings to the scene are prior commitments, prior assumptions about what the end narrative will look like, prior beliefs, or prior professional training—and these categories certainly overlap—the evidence is never all in the room. The detective makes certain categories of what is there in his or her present moment into evidence for what happened in the past, enabled to identify and interpret it because of his relationships, his professional formation—the learning of a professional language, a professional method, a professional way of viewing the world—and what he already knows, believes, and feels. Questions of epistemology, contained in “The Murders in the Rue Morgue” in the single problem of making the intuitive leap from clue to explanation, open up in these texts to questions of alternate epistemologies: local ways of knowing, disciplinary ways of knowing, Indigenous ways of knowing. To the extent that historical investigation is imagined as taking place in a locked room, uninhibited by professionalization, personal ties, beliefs, or feelings, these four writers unlock that locked room to complicate the representation of investigation, showing how expected conclusions and attachments may, often, determine what the investigator sees.

CHAPTER 1

THE DETECTIVE'S STORY: NARRATION, PERSUASION, AND JUSTICE IN WILLIAM FAULKNER'S FICTION

Peter Brooks has observed that the law “adjudicates narratives of reality, and sends people to prison, even to execution, because of the well-formedness and force of the winning story” (“Narrativity” 2). Conviction “in the legal sense,” he says, “results from the conviction created in those who judge the story” (Brooks, “Narrativity” 2). It is not the accumulation of evidence but the situation of that evidence as part of a story that determines judicial outcomes. Brooks’s statement, of course, is a condensation of the branch of law and literature scholarship that has convincingly argued the intersections of law, narrative, and rhetoric. William Faulkner’s crime and detective fiction, most of which, as Michael Grimwood puts it, he “wrote for cash during respites in the composition of *The Hamlet* and *Go Down, Moses*,” anticipates and elaborates on precisely Brooks’s point, and likewise the work of Hayden White in historiography (Grimwood 187). Faulkner was not a historian and was almost certainly not interested in the finer points of historiographical theory as pursued by academic historians, but he was certainly interested in the centrality of narrative conventions in the representation of the past. While one might argue that since he was engaged in writing fiction, after all, his anticipation of the claims of scholars like White and Brooks, in their construal of historical and legal discourse, respectively, as modes of communication that are essentially literary and rhetorical in nature, relying on literary tropes and familiar

narrative and argumentative structures, was to be expected, it is nevertheless clear that his treatment of justice and historical narrative has implications beyond the realm of fiction.

It is more than a piece of trivia that Faulkner wrote detective fiction. By its very nature as a genre, detective fiction poses problems that are completely continuous with some of the most dominant problems of Faulkner's entire body of work: what can be known about the past, how it can be not only known but represented, and the relationship of the knowledge and representation of the past to justice in the present. I argue that Faulkner's fiction shows that it is not only *law* that is "inescapably narrative" and rhetorical, "at the most fundamental level a matter of rhetorical persuasiveness and narrative reconstruction" as Jay Watson has argued so well, but that investigation itself—the very search for and interpretation of evidence—is narrative and rhetorical as well (5).

The shape of the story the investigators in this fiction have to tell to apprehend or convict the person they think is guilty (or to publicly exonerate the wrongly suspected) determines not only how they interpret and narrativize the evidence they find in order to produce a convincing, indeed a *convicting*, account of how and why the crime occurred, but in fact determines where they look for evidence and what they judge to be evidence. Faulkner's detective fiction emphasizes that evidence is, indeed, always a verbal construct, always a piece in a rhetorical structure. As the detective's story advances, one figure out of many circulating in the text emerges in the narrative slot of the murderer. It is in fact often the narrative structure of the investigation itself, the sense that it will have an end that will coincide with the initial story of the crime, that convinces the murderer to act and reveal himself. This trope is by no means unique to Faulkner's detective fiction. Indeed, I argue that Faulkner's detective fiction draws attention to the way the genre

itself—particularly the Golden Age fiction of which he was a known reader—privileges justice above evidence, requiring structurally that evidence be that which supports the “convicting” story. Among other indications that Faulkner read and enjoyed detective fiction is his 1943 recommendation to his stepdaughter and her husband of Dorothy Sayers’ *The Nine Tailors*, in Faulkner’s opinion “right up there with [Agatha Christie’s] ABC [Murders] and [Rex Stout’s] FER DE LANCE” (Faulkner, *Selected Letters* 170). Books by these three detective fiction writers and many others were present in Faulkner’s library at its cataloging, as well (Blotner, *William Faulkner’s Library* 53, 63, 71). I also contend that there is a strong link between the attention to evidence, reconstruction of past events, and persuasion in the detective fiction and those same preoccupations in the historical fiction, thereby re-evaluating the place of Faulkner’s detective fiction in his body of work.

Often considered to be a project distinct from what critics consider his more serious fiction and undertaken almost exclusively for financial reasons,¹⁹ Faulkner’s crime and detective fiction ranges from *Sanctuary* (1931) to the story “Hog Pawn,” written in the early 1950s²⁰ and later revised and incorporated into *The Mansion* (1959). Most of these works feature Gavin Stevens, the loquacious Jefferson lawyer, and his Watson-like nephew Chick Mallison, who effectively supersedes his uncle as a detective by the time of *Intruder in the Dust* (1948) and the novella “Knight’s Gambit,” the only extensively reworked text in the 1949 collection by the same name. Ticien Marie

¹⁹ Faulkner said in his introduction to the Modern Library Edition that *Sanctuary* was “a cheap idea” and “deliberately conceived to make money” (Faulkner, *Essays* 176), although Thomas McHaney argues that these claims were parodies of parts of Hemingway’s *The Torrents of Spring* and “must be taken as tongue-in-cheek” (334). Faulkner suggested in his letters that the Gavin Stevens stories were to be moneymakers as well. See Van Dover and Jebb (104-05) and Cowley.

²⁰ See Jebb and Van Dover 106.

Sassoubre has pointed out that conviction and justice are almost always extralegal in Faulkner's fiction, offering historical evidence to demonstrate persuasively that in both *Go Down, Moses* and *Intruder in the Dust*, "the preservation of something Southerners recognize as justice involves resisting federally imposed law by employing extralegal norms and practices in the place of official adjudication" (185). Just as significantly, however, *Intruder* and Faulkner's short detective fiction end without legal adjudication because they are suggesting that fundamentally it is what Peter Hühn calls "the power and efficacy of the verbal construct of a story" that convicts. In place of legal conviction, they substitute the just outcome that is supposed to result from the certainty—the conviction—in the minds of Stevens' listeners (456).

In much of the short Gavin Stevens detective fiction, Stevens' approach to his investigation, and indeed what he recognizes to be evidence, is pre-structured by the kind of end narrative he will have to produce in order to apprehend or punish the criminal. In *Intruder in the Dust*, an awareness of the public power and indeed the life or death consequences of the interpretation of any clue in the Gowrie murder case permeates the atmosphere of the two investigation scenes at Caledonia Chapel cemetery. The pressure to find evidence against someone else immediately is intense: Lucas may otherwise be lynched. In the search scene that takes place in the morning, the investigating party begins reconstructing the murderer's movements the night before in order to know where they will find the two bodies even before they arrive—the first body concealed in a quicksand pit, the best hiding place for miles, and the second body, unexpectedly disinterred by Chick and Aleck Sander, shoved into the most easily-accessed hiding place

with the loosest dirt. Evidence, in the search scenes in Faulkner's detective fiction, is anticipated even when its specific content is not yet known.

Intruder in the Dust and the Gavin Stevens short fiction suggest that the investigator himself is the primary rhetorician, as opposed to a lawyer who later prepares a case from the investigator's findings. In these narratives, the investigator assesses the believability of any given fact or object as part of an explanatory narrative and therefore determines whether it is evidence. Indeed, a fact becomes evidence only if there is a hypothetical explanation *for* which it can serve as evidence. Additionally, in these stories, narrativizing is shown to actually produce justice. In Faulkner's first detective story, "Smoke" (1932), for example, the foreman of the grand jury interrupts lawyer-detective Gavin Stevens' extensive tale about a family involved in a murder to say, "You should have done all this investigating before you called us together . . . Even if this be evidence, what good will it do without the body of the murderer be apprehended? Conjecture is all well enough . . ." (26). The line plays an ironic function in the story: Gavin's investigation by means of storytelling *does* both produce the body of the murderer and enable his apprehension. It further sets in motion a theme for Faulkner's subsequent detective fiction: story does something. It not only convicts; it produces the criminal. Being himself convinced by the structure of the investigation that he has been discovered, the criminal in Faulkner's detective fiction often gives himself away, most clearly in "Smoke" and *Intruder in the Dust*. One of the most common generic markers of detective fiction, as noted in the Introduction to this dissertation, is the detective's end narrative, which goes back to the first detective story, "The Murders in the Rue Morgue." That story concludes with a long end narrative in which Dupin explains his thinking and

his investigation of the locked room where the killings occurred and ends with a reconstruction that solves the mystery. Particularly in *Intruder in the Dust* and his short story “Smoke,” Faulkner follows this tradition.

As I argued earlier, the detective story is about the detective’s story, and this, in particular, is the convention of detective fiction that makes it a productive site for thinking about history work. Like the detective, the historian tells the story as well as investigates. The nature of evidence and investigation is of course a problem that becomes weightier when it extends beyond the realm of genre fiction and into theories about historical narrative and the ability of that narrative (whether purporting to be fictional or to have actual historical referents) to produce justice. An understanding of the relationship in Faulkner’s detective fiction of evidence to persuasion through storytelling and ultimately to justice deepens our readings of many of his more ambitious novels—*Absalom, Absalom!* and *Go Down, Moses*, in particular—and at the same time it demonstrates Faulkner’s anticipation of the claims of scholars like Brooks and additionally of theorists of history writing, who have made the same point about the relationship between evidence and narrative requirements in historical writing. As outlined in the Introduction, White argues that the narrative conventions historians use to organize their accounts of the past, as well as the language they rely on, help to determine what counts as historical evidence. The “‘rules of evidence’ that a researcher is supposed to adhere to in any examination of the historical record” are not actually as powerful in making these determinations as are stylistic concerns (White, *Content* 66). A story offered as evidence in a courtroom arranges and explicates an archive of raw material in order to argue that it is the most plausible story; historical narrative does much the same

thing. Raw materials become evidence when accompanied by a persuasive interpretation of their meaning and, simultaneously, a story framework that accounts for them. As White observes, historical narrative is by its nature interpretive, is by its nature linked to a process of meaning-making and to notions of justice, without which, as I outlined in the Introduction, past happenings could not be told within a structure of beginning, middle, and end. White calls the demand for closure “a demand . . . for moral meaning” (*Content* 21).

The process of historical inquiry and representation is a fundamental concern of major Faulkner novels such as *Absalom, Absalom!* and *Go Down, Moses*. Although the detective fiction is concerned with the histories of crimes that have just occurred rather than a more distant past, it supplements and extends Faulkner’s engagement with the process of historical inquiry and representation in his larger body of work. Like *Absalom, Absalom!* the detective story consists of history and historical inquiry woven together, of the murder plot and the investigation plot, both explicated in the detective’s final narrative, which puts the crime into story form in the same breath as it sets the criminal up to be convicted. Like *Absalom* and *Go Down, Moses* (and indeed almost all of Faulkner’s work), Faulkner’s detective fiction is in part a metacritical project: his detective stories are about story. Further, in *Go Down, Moses* and *Intruder*, especially, knowledge is almost without exception tantamount to knowledge of injustice motivated by racial difference. Faulkner’s engagement with evidence and knowledge is crucial to the larger project of what Linda Wagner-Martin calls his “new start,” in which he “begins to express what it feels like to be the heir of white patriarchal power in a slave state” (7) by moving from the “impossibility of ‘knowing’” in *Absalom, Absalom!* to (in *Go Down,*

Moses) “forc[ing] the reader to know”—imposing an “awareness” that “penetrates” (6). Jay Watson argues that “*Intruder* could not iterate more clearly that, in a social climate dominated and indeed terrorized by white hegemony, the call to detection assumes a distinct moral valence,” the “epistemological quest” mirroring the “ethical one” (141).

It has long been recognized that *Absalom, Absalom!* is a kind of detective novel. C. Hugh Holman argues that the novel is “a study in kinds of knowledge, in ways of knowing” but that despite its concern with historical issues, it “cannot be considered a historical novel in the classic sense of Scott’s works,” and instead “is closer to the standard detective story” (168-69). Greg Forter elaborates, pointing out that “the proliferating narrators and, especially, the figures of Quentin and Shreve function in part as historical sleuths who comb through the meager documentary evidence while projecting themselves into the problem of why Henry Sutpen shot Charles Bon . . . and how this murder follows from the South’s historical crimes” (“Faulkner, Trauma” 373-74).²¹ John Cawelti moves beyond just that one book, claiming that “the concept of the detective story with its curiously duplicitous and double structure” not only provides a framework for *Absalom, Absalom!* and of course *Intruder in the Dust*, but “informs many of [Faulkner’s] major novels” (265). *Absalom*, then, and perhaps other major Faulkner novels as well, draws upon the conventions of detective fiction. My question is what Faulkner’s own detective fiction helps us to understand about his body of work as a whole. Mick Gidley has argued that “the overt detective tales amongst Faulkner’s work—such as the stories in *Knight’s Gambit* (1949)—may illuminate the *structure* and

²¹ John Irwin makes much the same point: “*Absalom, Absalom!*, with its two young narrators puzzling over the facts of a very old murder trying to understand the motive, represents in some sense the culmination of the gothic detective form” (95).

meaning of some of his major novels,” particularly with respect to Faulkner’s tendency to “deliberately *withhold meaning*” in his major novels, much as a detective author withholds the meaning of clues until the story’s denouement (102, emphasis original). Forter says that while in *Intruder in the Dust* and the short Gavin Stevens fiction, Faulkner “subordinates his characteristic thematic and formal concerns to the conventions of the detective story,” in *Light in August* and *Absalom, Absalom!*, much of what is compelling “resides precisely *within* [the] tension . . . between the moral and epistemological clarity promised by the generic ‘kernel’ of detective fiction and the relentless subversion of that promise in the kernel’s narrative elaboration” (“Faulkner, Trauma” 374, emphasis original).

Watson’s book *Forensic Fictions: The Lawyer Figure in Faulkner*, the most sustained treatment of law in Faulkner’s writing, brings law and literature scholarship to Faulkner’s work and discusses the role of storytelling in legal practice and the way lawyers in Faulkner proceed by listening and telling. Alongside Watson’s extensive discussion of the lawyer-as-citizen trope in Faulkner’s work, he addresses the connections between legal practice and narrative in Faulkner’s fiction. Watson calls attention to the prominence of storytelling in the professional practice of Faulkner’s lawyers, especially Gavin Stevens. As have many scholars of law and literature, Watson argues that litigation is “inescapably narrative” and points out the connection between narrative and persuasion by arguing that “[p]rosecutors and defense attorneys typically put the same narrative raw material to very different uses in the construction of their cases, and they frequently endorse very different interpretations of a story offered as evidence” (17). The story components that Watson calls “narrative raw material” are not

persuasive—and cannot even be assigned a meaning—until they have their place in a narrative. The interpretation of evidence is determined in part by its future redeployment as evidence in an argument, or a story that is arguing for its own veracity. My argument that the attention to evidence, the reconstruction of past events, and persuasion in the detective fiction is a continuation of those same preoccupations in the historical fiction extends Watson’s work and emphasizes that Faulkner’s detective fiction is deeply connected to his historical fiction in its treatment of evidence as a piece in the rhetorical structure of the story or investigation. This chapter demonstrates that in both Faulkner’s detective fiction and several examples of his major fiction, the moment of the movement from clue to explanation, indeed from fact to narrative, is the point at which investigation threatens to fail but instead takes off. A tendency toward persuasiveness *in the investigation itself* determines the course of the investigation and the identification and interpretation of evidence.

This emphasis in Faulkner pushes the work of Hayden White a step further: now the *researcher* is a rhetorician, not merely the writer who sits down to write about what he has found. White has called attention to the work of imagination in the historian’s endeavor, locating the work of imagination “at the last stage of [the historian’s] labors, when it becomes necessary to compose a discourse or narrative in which to represent his findings, that is, his notion of ‘what really happened’ in the past” (*Content* 67-68). Faulkner’s detective fiction dramatizes this process to an extent, and yet it removes a level of innocence that even White lets remain by calling into question the neatness of the stages that White describes. White focuses on a final stage of historical work in which events resolve into narrative form, whereas in Faulkner’s detective fiction, narrative

formations begin stirring at the first moment of the investigation itself; they are in fact what drives and structures the investigation. In Faulkner's short story "Monk," for instance, Gavin Stevens, lacking any clue, any thread to lead him to a conclusion about why the title character killed a man he adored, generates instead an explanatory narrative with only the name of the villain missing. The inexplicable speech given by Monk as he is about to be hanged surely came originally from the mouth of the person who convinced him to kill his friend, Gavin determines. Any man who speaks that way will be the man who is really responsible for the murder.

Faulkner's detectives investigate in story form. This premise is important because investigation is a pervasive concept, and one generally assumed to precede interpretation. Stevens, Chick, and his other investigators make decisions about how to proceed in their investigations on the basis of stories that they are in the process of imagining. Stevens and Hope Hampton conclude, for instance, that in order for Jake Montgomery's death in *Intruder* to fit in with the narrative of the crime, he must have been the person buying the stolen timber from Crawford Gowrie and must have known that it was stolen. Stevens and Hampton therefore call the timber's "ultimate consignee" to verify Montgomery's role (223). Such story-form investigations underscore the literary and rhetorical nature of investigation, not only in detection, not only in law, not only in history, but in medicine, archaeology, the physical sciences, and all fields of work that begin with the identification and interpretation of evidence.

Carlo Ginzburg points out a continuity between the present notion of evidence and the classical concept of *evidentia*, which refers to the ability "to make a topic not only evident, but palpable"—in other words, seemingly even beyond evident, due to the

rhetorician's skill (29). "Both our notion of evidence and the Latin *evidentia*," Ginzburg says, "emerge in the sphere of rhetoric, especially judicial rhetoric" (29). The resulting continuity of these two ideas in the legal profession has significant ramifications for the practice of doing history work, as well. Historians are likewise not only investigators but also narrators of the events they study. Evidence appears twice in an investigation—once when it is identified and again when the investigator presents it as support for the story he is telling.

We can turn to another Faulkner novel, in fact, for a demonstration of the importance of the situation in narrative of any physical artifact. *Sanctuary*'s infamous corn cob, a notable failure of physical evidence to produce justice on its own, is offered as evidence by the district attorney. It emerges for the first time in the courtroom scene near the end of the novel, appearing "to have been dipped in dark brownish paint," and it is an object the reading audience has been looking for: the means by which an impotent man could have raped Temple and made her bleed so insistently (Faulkner, *Sanctuary* 376). It functions in Faulkner's narrative as evidence of what exactly Popeye has done to Temple. To the court audience (and the jury), on the other hand, "its bearing on the case" has according to the district attorney been "made clear [in] the testimony of the defendant's wife" in conjunction with the testimony of the chemist and the gynecologist, whom the district attorney calls "an authority on the most sacred affairs of that most sacred thing in life: womanhood" (Faulkner, *Sanctuary* 376). In the trial the corn cob functions as evidence, in other words, that Lee Goodwin, rather than Popeye, has not only raped Temple but has done it in a manner that the court audience and jury might find especially

unnatural and difficult to understand.²² The district attorney, in his speech, demonstrates how an object becomes evidence—certainly on the basis of testimony, both witness and expert, that helps situate it in a narrative, but more pertinently the fact that it is an object that the audience has been waiting to find. Expert testimony serves merely to confirm that the object could indeed be the evidence expected. Again, by no means is this expectation/confirmation relationship unique to Faulkner’s detective fiction. Instead, his intense focus on it and magnification of it serves to emphasize how nearly universal this relationship is in investigation narratives.

Evidence is so closely coupled with explanation because a story is a story, rather than another kind of discourse, indeed because, as White argues, its logic already contains and is structured by a particular kind of justice (*Content* 21). Evidence does not produce the conclusion in much of Faulkner’s detective fiction. It is produced *by* it—in other words, the anticipated just ending makes possible the identification of a set of facts and objects as evidence. This reversal is problematic with respect to justice in the detective fiction because it means Gavin Stevens calls the shots, even in his moments of bigotry and self-congratulation. He can turn from his Sambo diatribe in the car on the way to Caledonia Chapel to go find the body where he knows it will be and then send it home with Mr. Gowrie to keep Crawford from being exposed as his brother’s murderer. The circular relationship of story and evidence demands a responsible teller. Chick, who never stops evaluating the moral consequences of any of his choices, therefore effectively

²² If Temple is a woman everyone seems to want to possess sexually, then Goodwin has turned down or misused his opportunity, in the eyes of the court audience and jury. As a man in the mob crudely complains, “‘Jeez. I wouldn’t have used no cob’” (383).

takes over as detective in the last two pieces of detective fiction Faulkner wrote (*Intruder in the Dust* and the novella “Knight’s Gambit”), as Gavin’s credibility declines.

As a step along the way to showing that the detective is the primary rhetorician in Faulkner’s detective fiction, I also consider the situatedness of Faulkner’s investigators: Stevens most often solves mysteries on the basis of intimate knowledge of the habits of the victims and criminals, and Chick Mallison, the original investigator in *Intruder*, begins his search at the direct request of the suspect, Lucas Beauchamp, whom he owes for saving his life. Both Stevens and Chick are investigators on the inside of the white community, determining what constitutes evidence on the basis of assumptions about what their neighbors will do and generating possible accounts of the crime that originate in known local histories. Faulkner, as Grimwood has noted, has no use for the unattached detective so popular in the decades leading up to his entry into the genre: Gavin solves crimes “precisely through his intimate familiarity with his neighbors and his county” (202). Like *Absalom, Absalom!*, Faulkner’s detective fiction represents the endeavor of reconstructing events as something that happens in the context of a relationship to a place and a community. Faulkner’s investigators, speculators, and storytellers, be they detectives, lawyers, or college boys in frigid dormitories, are situated observers; their positions and affiliations determine the way they move between evidence and explanations, and indeed what counts as evidence in the first place. Their local ties show yet again that what constitutes evidence depends on who the detective is. Fundamental to their situatedness is race. Lucas approaches Gavin and then Chick seeking an authority for his investigation that in the community represented in *Intruder* is underwritten by their whiteness. Just as Chick interprets Lucas’s actions at the beginning of *Intruder* on

the basis of his racial biases, he and Gavin will evaluate the relationship among Lucas, Crawford, and Vinson on the basis of these same biases and will allow their interpretations and conclusions to be decided by them, except where those conclusions are refused by Lucas. Like all investigators, Stevens, Chick, Sheriff Hope Hampton, and other Faulkner detectives are working inside a circle of interpretation, identifying clues as clues because of the relationship of those clues to the stories they already know, or the gossip that starts their investigations, or their knowledge of the habits and histories of their neighbors—and then taking those clues and interpreting them to produce additions or contradictions to the existing narratives.

Faulkner's Crime and Detective Fiction

While detective fiction may seem like a cheap imitation of history work rather than a form in which Faulkner could have developed his thoughts about access to and narration of the past, it is an ideal form for studying *story*. “At a basic level,” Scott McCracken writes in an examination of the detective story form, “the process of discovery might be said to be a universal function of narrative: all narratives proceed by way of revelation and explanation” (51). As explained in the Introduction, the detective story can be thought of as the “narrative of narratives” because it shows the interaction between the *fabula* and the *sjuzhet*, the two levels of story that the Russian Formalists argued structure all narratives—the order of imagined events referred to, and their order as represented in narrative discourse (Brooks 25). Franco Moretti imagines this split as the detective producing the *sjuzhet* and the criminal the *fabula*, which must be unraveled (and thus established) by means of the *sjuzhet*, the presentation of the events in narrative

discourse (146). Again, as discussed in the Introduction, this relationship has been referred to as the “double plot” of the detective story²³: at the same time as plot two (the investigation) reveals plot one (the crime), plot one provides the structure for plot two. The story of the crime and the story of the investigation meet in the end narrative. The revelation in the end narrative of the evidence that has been discovered and its interpretation, which we can also think of as the re-deployment of the found evidence as rhetorical evidence, is what produces the solution and reveals whodunit.

Faulkner’s engagement with law and detection extended from almost the beginning of his career to almost the end and was surprisingly persistent: Watson notes instances of lawyers and lawyering in at least seventeen of the novels, stories, and screenplays Faulkner authored (4). Not all of this legal activity is explicitly investigation-oriented, but a good deal of it is. In addition to the sheer quantity of detective material in his work, there is also evidence that Faulkner enjoyed the genre as a reader. Joseph Blotner explains that Faulkner was, “like his mother, a frequent reader of detective fiction” and that the “germ of *Intruder in the Dust* [sic] first appeared, he once said, as an idea of the detective story kind” (*William Faulkner’s Library* 9). In Faulkner’s library, Blotner says, “[t]he classic cases and sleuths are there in hardcover and paperback” (9). John Jebb and J.K. Van Dover add that there are about thirty detective novels in Blotner’s catalog of Faulkner’s library (101-02). Perhaps even more prominent than detection and lawyering in Faulkner’s writing is simply crime itself. Gidley generates a long and not even exhaustive list of Faulkner works with “crime,

²³ David Lehman, for instance, argues that the “plot is bi-level, as it must be: The story of the murders is framed within the story of the detective’s investigation. The two narratives meet at the point where the sleuth reveals his solution to the case” (xiii).

frequently violent crime, at their core”: *Sanctuary*, *Light in August*, *Absalom, Absalom!*, *The Wild Palms*, *The Hamlet*, *The Mansion*, *Requiem for a Nun*; “a similar mosaic of crime could be put together from the central events of many of Faulkner’s most memorable short stories,” Gidley adds (100).

Most of Faulkner’s detective fiction was written in his middle and later career, but his interest in not only crime but also evidence was already apparent in *Sanctuary*, the novel of sensation, the bestselling crime story thick with violence, underworld activity, sex, and liquor, that Faulkner began writing in January 1929. He would finish it within a few months and publish it in 1931 (Kerr 52). Although André Malraux, in his preface to the novel, famously called it “the intrusion of Greek tragedy into the detective story,” it includes almost no detection (qtd. in Cowley). However, as previously noted, *Sanctuary*’s action culminates in a courtroom scene in which the problem of what can be known becomes central as the notorious corncob appears, its evidential value and ability to substantiate a just conclusion to the case perverted by Temple’s false testimony. Faulkner appears to have been already interested in the relationship between narrative accounts of past events and the traces, testimonies, and interpretations on which they are based.

Soon after he completed *Sanctuary*, Faulkner began writing what was much more straightforwardly a detective story, intending to publish it in one of the periodicals that printed so much popular detective fiction of the 1930s. “Smoke” begins with a corpse and ends with an explanatory narrative offered by Gavin Stevens—a lawyer by profession—to the grand jury sitting to determine whether there is sufficient evidence for a trial. These features seem to situate it squarely in the detective genre, which is so often

distinguished by what Lehman calls the “corpse on page one” (1). Faulkner submitted “Smoke” to the *Saturday Evening Post* in the early part of 1930, and it was rejected (Cawelti 266). He eventually published it in *Harper’s Monthly* in 1932.

After “Smoke” Faulkner did not publish another detective story until 1937, when a piece titled “Monk” appeared in *Scribner’s*.²⁴ Following “Monk,” however, he wrote three stories around 1940 (one of which was not published until 1946) and then a full-length detective novel, *Intruder in the Dust*, written and published in 1948. In 1949, perhaps in response to *Intruder’s* popularity, Faulkner gathered the Gavin Stevens detective stories into a single volume called *Knight’s Gambit*. He made substantial changes only to the title story and did not revise the others in order to achieve a unity among them, as he had done to the previously-published stories that reappeared in *Go Down, Moses* and *The Unvanquished*. Many critics have intuited a lack of emotional or intellectual commitment to the detective fiction because Faulkner was so willing to republish the stories quickly on the heels of a financial success.²⁵ However, despite his hurry with them, and though he dismissed his detective fiction in his letters, often remarking to agents and publishers that he needed to write “trash” in order to sell²⁶ or that

²⁴ “Monk” was sold in January 1937 and was likely written not long before. See Blotner, *William Faulkner* 952.

²⁵ Grimwood argues, on the other hand, that the sale of the motion picture rights for *Intruder in the Dust* had lessened the financial pressures on him and that instead he chose to leave the first five stories in their original magazine form as “a way of publicly acknowledging his illegitimate issue” (195). Through the final, thoroughly revised story, however, the volume also “comments on them, rejects them, and moves beyond” the five original stories (Grimwood 195).

²⁶ Faulkner made the “trash” comment about the novel that would become *Intruder in the Dust* (Faulkner, *Selected Letters* 119, 122; reprinted in Van Dover and Jebb 104).

he did not even recognize some of the stories when he read them later,²⁷ he persisted in writing detective fiction even after the *Saturday Evening Post* rejected “Smoke” three times. In the spring of 1948 he repeatedly extended his time frame for writing *Intruder*, calling it a “little more of a book than I thought at first,” (Faulkner, *Selected Letters* 262) and then went almost immediately into revising “Knight’s Gambit” and collecting the Gavin Stevens stories into a volume, commenting to Random House chief editor Saxe Commins, “This is the story I seem to be hottest to write now” (Faulkner, *Selected Letters* 280). He pressed his publishers regarding that volume, and not the other way around. Cawelti points out that, although Faulkner stopped writing mysteries after the financial success of *Intruder in the Dust* made selling books less urgent, he “continued to use the character of Gavin Stevens and the characteristic patterns of mystery, clues, and solutions throughout the Snopes Trilogy” (267). Those patterns were more than just a moneymaker to him.

Evidence and Interpretation in the *Knight’s Gambit* Stories

When Faulkner decided to gather certain pieces of his short fiction into the volume *Knight’s Gambit* as he was working on the organization of *Collected Stories* in 1948, he called it “a ‘Gavin Stevens’ volume, more or less detective stories” (*Selected Letters* 280). There are six stories in the finished volume, five of which were written before 1940 and published before 1946. These five are “Smoke” (1932), “Monk” (1937), “Hand Upon the Waters” (1939), “Tomorrow” (1940), and “An Error in Chemistry”

²⁷ He claimed not to recognize “An Error in Chemistry” (1946) when he read it in *Ellery Queen’s Mystery Magazine* (he had first sent it off several years before) and to have later forgotten the title and content of “Monk” (1937) (Van Dover and Jebb 105). [Original source: Faulkner, *Selected Letters* 206, 283, 287, and 143]

(written in 1940 but not published until 1946). The sixth was the novella “Knight’s Gambit,” an unpublished earlier story which he substantially reworked and lengthened to over a hundred pages between November 1948 and May 1949, after *Intruder in the Dust* was finished. The last piece is thus more easily discussed in connection to *Intruder* and not to the other stories in the volume. Most of the stories involve the direct righting of a wrong, which is usually a greedy and sometimes murderous position assumed by an outsider to the community.²⁸ Each involves a mystery, four about the circumstances of a murder and one about why a juror refuses to side with his peers in a murder trial. These mysteries are largely solved with little direct investigation; Gavin instead spends his time talking with other members of the community, happening upon potential evidence in conversation.

In these five stories Faulkner began to work out the conception of the relationship of evidence to justice that would later flower in *Intruder*. Faulkner’s straight detective fiction is somewhat formulaic and has a simplistic vision of right and wrong; it was written, after all, for a magazine audience. Nevertheless, it draws attention to the fact that in stories about crime and detection, justice is accomplished in and through narrative, and what is considered to be evidence is identified based on its contribution to the anticipated end narrative. The notion of justice that dominates the stories is Gavin’s own: justice is a different thing from truth, and is preferable to it. “I am more interested in justice and human beings [than in truth],” Gavin tells the sheriff in “An Error in Chemistry” (111). There is such a thing, Gavin says, as “truth that [is] anything under the sun but just” (111).

²⁸ See Klinkowitz 81-82.

Chick Mallison narrates all of the *Knight's Gambit* stories but "Smoke," which is related by a choric voice of the community.²⁹ Gavin, however, is the clear detective-protagonist. Chick serves only in a Watson role, except perhaps in "Tomorrow," where we see some of his moral education, although in a much more limited fashion than in *Intruder*. Gavin in "Tomorrow" is also clearly the teacher, whereas in *Intruder* he teaches instead by alternating positive and negative examples. Watson has argued compellingly, for instance, that in *Intruder* most of Gavin's remarks to Chick over his lifetime have become "part and parcel of his own thought and experience," "forming a background against which the boy struggles to make sense of his world and to act responsibly in it," (120) whereas the "problematic trio of set speeches" in *Intruder* that "has garnered Stevens such infamy among critics over the years" (114)—one is the "Sambo" speech—are "suspended—indeed, stranded—in the text" (118). They are highlighted orthographically rather than embedded in Chick's consciousness because of Chick's reservations about them, which "literally prefigure our own" (Watson 118). The Gavin of the short fiction, on the other hand, is a much more straightforward character.

Citing complaints from readers that Gavin Stevens in Faulkner's short detective fiction does not do any legwork and instead discovers the keys to the mysteries facing him by stumbling upon them, Watson stresses that Stevens instead engages in "colloquial detection," meaning "the sophisticated ability on Gavin's part to make sometimes fragmentary and often unmemorable moments of casual discourse signify as clues" (144). Colloquial detection, according to Watson, "emerges both as a mode and as a product of conscientious involvement in community life," and Gavin's talking, listening, and

²⁹ In "Knight's Gambit," as in *Intruder*, Chick is the central consciousness but not the narrator.

storytelling within Jefferson and its outlying areas make him not only a good lawyer but also a good detective (145). While this is true, I would add that it is a mind engaged in continually producing narratives to account for the facts and objects he encounters that makes Gavin a good detective. He often makes his discoveries by means of a circular process in which his narrativizing enables him to construe previously-made comments as evidence, and that evidence helps him amend his explanatory narratives. It is the back and forth involved in this process, not just the immersion in the community that Watson stresses, that allows him to be in the right place to have the next piece of evidence “drop . . . into his lap” (Watson 141). In one of the many teaching moments he directs toward his narrator nephew, Gavin stresses that the odd circumstances of the “moron” Monk Odlethrop’s murder of a man he had adored, and the strange words he speaks from the scaffold in the moments before he is hanged, “add . . . up, all right . . . We just haven’t got the right ciphers yet” (39). While the discovery of the cipher in that story, which I will discuss below, occurs some time later and by chance, it indicates that Gavin’s practice as a detective is linguistic, code-driven. What Faulkner primarily develops here that will become central in *Intruder* is a plotline in which the shape of the narrative told about the crime, and its expected ending, more often than not corners the criminal and prompts him to reveal himself—as opposed to that work being done by physical evidence. The status of what physical evidence there is is strongly subordinated to the narrative form that expresses it and makes it signify as evidence.

In “Smoke,” a farmer, Anselm Holland, has been found apparently dragged to death by his horse, but when the local judge delays the validation of his will for an extended period, a second corpse appears: the judge is found in his office dead of a bullet

wound, bewildering to the community because they know that no one can ever slip past the janitor, who was sitting outside the judge's door.³⁰ Gavin Stevens gathers the grand jury and the interested parties at the scene of the crime in order to tell an extensive explanatory narrative reminiscent of those of Poe's Dupin or Doyle's Sherlock Holmes except that it is saturated with the personal and family histories of the victims and suspects. By persuading the previously unsuspected murderer, who is of course present in the room, that the most damning evidence against him is the tobacco smoke contained in a brass box on the desk, he provokes the murderer to fling the box to the floor and wave the smoke away. In fact, there had been no substantial material evidence. Stevens had filled the box with smoke himself, effectively creating rather than finding his most persuasive piece of evidence, a maneuver not unheard of in Golden Age genre fiction.

Gavin's entire account of the crime (and the family past that precedes it) is constructed for Dodge's benefit, to convince him that Gavin has full knowledge of the situation and sufficient evidence to convict him in court. As I mentioned previously, the ability of this narrative to provoke and thus produce the criminal renders ironic the foreman's request that Gavin stop talking and instead apprehend the "body of the murderer" (26). The completion of the story produces the body of the criminal in several of the Gavin Stevens stories, and in fact a trick much like the smoke-filled box catches the murderer in *Intruder in the Dust*, although there the murderer's apprehension is only a subplot.

In the story "An Error in Chemistry" (published in *Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine* in 1946), Gavin and the sheriff are stumped by the facts before them because

³⁰ The story is narrated, like "A Rose For Emily," by what Theresa Towner and James Carothers call "the choric voice of Jefferson" (Towner, *Reading Faulkner* 85).

the story those facts suggest does not make sense: Joel Flint, “the outlander, the Yankee,” has killed his wife rather than his father-in-law, from whose death he could have benefitted materially by inheriting the older man’s farm and selling it to a group of Northern businessmen who want to pay a high price to extract the clay from a pit on the land (109). Gavin first poses the standard generic question about motive in spousal killings, whether there was an insurance policy on Flint’s wife. Then he tries to revise the explanatory narrative that the sheriff is promoting, suggesting that possibly “what has already happened is not finished yet,” rather than that “something went wrong in what has already happened” (116). Flint is in jail, but Gavin suspects that he wanted to be there, and begins to try to imagine why. The direction of his inquiry relies on his assumption that (no matter how) Flint is a charlatan. He suspects future harm to Flint’s father-in-law Pritchel and repeatedly asks “Are you sure Old Man Pritchel—[is still locked in his room unharmed?]” even after the sheriff assures him the father-in-law is safe (118). By the end of the story, when Pritchel has abruptly changed his mind and decided to sell the farm and clay pit, all three investigators (Chick, Gavin, and the sheriff) stand still when ordered out of Pritchel’s house; it is as though they know that at this moment whatever is causing their feeling that something is not finished yet will come to light: “But the sheriff didn’t move, nor did we” (126). Flint, disguised as Pritchel, whom he has killed, makes the error in chemistry for which the story is named (somewhat obediently to the investigators’ need for a clue), but attuned as they are to the idea that this man who looks like Pritchel does not seem quite right, they immediately recognize the error and leap to stop him from escaping. They have been looking for some deviation that will make the narrative work, after all.

Although Gavin, Chick, and the sheriff appear to be surprised to realize that Joel Flint has killed and then impersonated his father-in-law, Gavin nevertheless seems to have constructed an explanation of Flint's activities that is specific enough to give him a sense of the kind of thing that is wrong—something about Pritchel, the father-in-law, just is not right since his daughter was killed and Flint imprisoned. Pritchel is suddenly willing to sell his farm, which he has up to this point steadfastly refused to consider. He is thus different, and while Gavin does not grasp that he is literally not himself (but instead being impersonated by his murderer), he is attentive enough that when the clue comes along (the error in chemistry, Flint-as-Pritchel trying to mix sugar into raw whiskey rather than into water), he realizes immediately what it means and leaps to catch the impostor. Gavin remains preoccupied with the Pritchel case even when there is seemingly nothing left to be learned, and he therefore responds to Flint's summons to the farm. Although he does not know what the explanation will be, he recognizes that there is something left to be explained, and he is thus in a position to spot the error.

In "Monk," a man the text refers to as a "moron" goes to prison for a murder he did not commit, and is later pardoned but chooses to remain in prison because of his affection for the warden and his wife (39). A week later, he shoots and kills the same warden. Before he is hanged, he makes a nonsensical speech from the scaffold about "going out into the free world" to farm (49). Gavin's imaginative narrativizing is less explicit in this story, but when the needed evidence appears (an inmate named Terrel, who has persuaded Monk to kill the warden, repeats the exact words Monk has proclaimed from the scaffold), Chick reports that "Uncle Gavin was on the platform almost before Terrel quit speaking" (52). The immediacy with which he puts the story

together suggests he had already formulated a story in which an unidentified person had been repeating those lines to Monk, and in which that person had told him to kill the warden. The only missing information is who, which becomes immediately apparent, and why, which Gavin goes on to discover. Gavin has already identified, as his comment to Chick about having the right ciphers shows, exactly what sort of evidence he will need to be attentive to, in order to discover who manipulated Monk.

In “Hand Upon the Waters,” Gavin attends an inquest for “a sentimental reason” (65). Having noticed that one detail in the case presented for accidental death by drowning is not quite right—what that detail is is withheld from the reader until the end of the story—he decides to linger after the inquest and question the youth who found the body about the details of his discovery. Told by the young man who retrieved the boat from where the murder victim had been fishing that he had rowed the boat back from the middle of the stream, Gavin presses: ““You mean you swam the boat back,”” and then, ““What with? . . . What did you row it back with?”” (69). The urgency in his questions suggest that the first potential explanatory narrative is already that there has been a murder, although he will not explain until his brief end narrative that the presence of an oar in the dead man’s boat prompted him to suspect murder because of insider knowledge he had, both local and personal: someone using a trotline does not row but rather pulls the boat, and the victim, whom Gavin knew, thus kept his oar in his house and had no need to bring it to his boat.

Upon leaving the inquest, Gavin pushes his story further, guessing that the murderer likely has a close association with the victim, and goes to see who claims the body. When he finds that Tyler Ballenbaugh, a shrewd businessman, and Tyler’s brother

Boyd have claimed it, his potential explanatory narrative fixes on life insurance as a motive, which sends Gavin in search of an agent who has sold such a policy. His search in a neighboring county is both structured and open-ended: “although he would not know until he found it just what he was looking for, he found it before dark—the agent for the company which, eleven years ago, had issued to Lonnie Grinnup a five-thousand-dollar policy, with double indemnity for accidental death, on his life, with Tyler Ballenbaugh as beneficiary” (72). He sets up a trap for the two suspects based on the idea that Tyler has masterminded the killing with his brother as a helper and that “*when there are two [murderers], neither one is going to be satisfied that the other has left no ravelings*” when they realize they are suspected (74, emphasis original). (Gavin is actually wrong in his assumptions; Tyler has apparently bought the policy only as a gamble that he will outlive Lonnie, but his brother Boyd has murdered Lonnie and tried to convince his brother to file the claim and share the insurance money.) He is able to convince them that he knows what they have done. Gavin convinces the life insurance adjustor to stall on settling the life insurance claim on the murdered man and demand a meeting with Tyler Ballenbaugh. When the brothers are convinced that Gavin knows the story, they go out to the scene of the crime to make sure there is no incriminating evidence. Instead, their presence there, which shows that they know what a delay on the insurance claim means and are therefore indeed guilty, becomes the evidence. Gavin’s conviction (in the sense of persuasion) of the criminals has a direct and immediate effect. Their responses verify that his account of the crime corresponds sufficiently with what they have done.³¹

³¹ Justice is actually done, however, by the “deaf and dumb” orphan, Joe, who had lived with the murdered man (“Hand” 65). Joe jumps on Boyd Ballenbaugh when he shoots Gavin and then hangs him on the same trotline Boyd had previously drowned his caregiver on.

Though Gavin's account is somewhat flawed, it is nevertheless accurate enough that he does find the brothers at the crime scene on the night he expects. Boyd admits what he has done, shoots Gavin (who is only injured), and then is killed by Lonnie's friend Joe.

To be convincing during the course of an investigation, evidence has to support the imagined story only at a few crucial points; later those same few crucial details, in the context of a solid argument for what they mean and what narrative they therefore substantiate, are able to convince the audience who will convict or exonerate—be it jury, mob, or public opinion. In "Smoke," Granby Dodge is convinced that Gavin's story will be enough to convict him with the aid of not much more than Gavin's testimony that he saw the Memphis criminal's car parked at Granby's house and the presence of a box from the victim's desk, along with a story that turns it into purported evidence. Gavin reveals other points of confirmation to Virginius Holland later—that Granby had bought rat poison and had asked a telling question about the probate of a will. But these points of circumstantial evidence, which might have overshadowed the effect of the story about the smoke-filled box, are left until after Granby has given himself away. To draw out the murderer, evidence has to convince only the murderer. Gavin will grimly joke about this idea in *Intruder*, saying of Hope Hampton's merely good-enough plan to catch Crawford Gowrie, "'We're after just a murderer, not a lawyer'" (216). The false Old Man Pritchel in "Error" purports to tell the insurance adjustor "the truth about his daughter's death: the facts of it which the physical evidence—the truck and the three dead squirrels and the blood on the steps and on the ground—supported" (122). Instead he re-deploys those facts as evidence for a different story to misdirect him. Faulkner has effectively circumscribed the role of evidence in his detective fiction so that it is not the clue that is

important—the oar, Terrel’s speech—but instead the reason that Gavin knows it is important. Clearly, Faulkner’s approach to detective fiction writing is not much different from that of most Golden Age writers, and indeed those of other eras: as usual, the evidence appears, but only the detective knows that it is evidence and why. The variation in Faulkner is that rather than esoteric knowledge allowing the detective to identify the evidence as evidence, it is his in-progress story-spinning about the people who make up his community. Evidence is shown to be a piece in a narrative and dependent on that narrative’s structure.

The lawyer-as-detective’s method is to find (or create) that item which will eventually convince and produce the proper result. Gavin Stevens’ law is about justice, not about truth, and its procedures are oriented toward being just convincing enough to achieve the just ending that he is aiming for. “But isn’t justice always unfair?” Stevens asks the grand jury members in “Smoke” who are concerned about the ethics of his ploy to cause Granby Dodge to reveal himself as the murderer (24). Jebb has argued that the detective genre “may have attracted Faulkner because the detective hero unites practical abilities with idealism about justice and thus provides a model of the socially-useful intellectual” (99). These stories are perhaps a precursor to *Intruder* and *Go Down, Moses* in more ways than one, following immediately, as most of them do (most having been written between 1937 and 1940) what Wagner-Martin in *New Essays on Go Down, Moses* (1996) identifies as the “definite end to Faulkner’s use of narrative form to interrogate, expand, and finally confound whatever ostensible ‘story’ he is telling,” in particular the “blockage” of Quentin’s narrative in *Absalom, Absalom!* (7). Despair about

the inability to ultimately know is set aside in favor of a vision of justice that, when it doesn't have evidence of what has happened, produces a convincing story instead.

Narrative Investigation in *Intruder in the Dust*

Intruder in the Dust, written and published in 1948, is not strictly speaking a Gavin Stevens detective story, though it represents the flowering of Faulkner's ideas about evidence in detective fiction. Gavin enters into the investigation of the murder of Vinson Gowrie rather late in the novel. In fact, the original detective, according to Faulkner, was Lucas Beauchamp, the man who is nearly lynched because it is assumed he has killed Vinson. Faulkner gave a plot summary to Harold Ober on February 1, 1948, when he had sixty pages written: "a Negro in jail accused of murder and waiting for the white folks to drag him out and pour gasoline over him and set him on fire, is the detective, solves the crime because he goddamn has to to keep from being lynched, by asking people to go somewhere and look at something and then come back and tell him what they found" (Faulkner, *Selected Letters* 261). In Lucas's stead, a community of investigators takes up the case: Gavin's nephew Chick Mallison, Chick's young African-American companion Aleck Sander, and Miss Habersham, a 70-year old white woman who grew up with Lucas's now-deceased wife Molly. Eventually Gavin and Sheriff Hope Hampton do become involved. In the final quarter of the novel Gavin provides an extensive explanatory narrative, similar not only to that of "Smoke" but also to those of Poe's Dupin (and of Doyle's Sherlock Holmes, and a host of other tales of detection, though most of those narratives are more subordinate to the investigative action), which does put *Intruder* into a close relationship with the detective story tradition in general and

specifically the shorter Gavin Stevens stories. This end narrative in particular demonstrates how both Chick and Miss Habersham and Aleck Sander's investigation and Gavin and the sheriff's are driven by rhetorical needs and narrative expectations rather than by clues in the sense of threads leading to a solution. Reading *Intruder in the Dust* together with the shorter Gavin Stevens fiction makes more apparent the pervasive concern in all of these texts with rhetoric, evidence, and justice, as well as the degree to which the past can be known. Such a paired reading also makes the detective content of *Intruder* more visible. I will look first at Gavin's role and then at his nephew's.

In *Intruder in the Dust*, Lucas has been taken to jail on suspicion (or something more like near-certain culpability) of Vinson Gowrie's murder. (Chick comes back from a ballgame through the Square and hears "that Lucas had killed Vinson Gowrie out at Fraser's store" (27). Lucas has been found standing over the body seconds after the shot is heard, holding a pistol that has just been fired.) Gavin arrives in Lucas's cell already producing the kind of potential explanatory narratives recognizable from the short fiction. We see his method at work as soon as he arrives at the jail. But this time, Gavin will fail in his guesswork. The only other story in which he does not solve the mystery alone is "Knight's Gambit," substantially revised after Faulkner had written *Intruder in the Dust*.

Once he has talked at Lucas, Gavin demands that Lucas begin telling "exactly what happened out there yesterday" (60). Prompted for the fourth time, Lucas does begin to tell, but goes back instead to the cause of the incident, a theft of lumber that had been taking place over the last several weeks. When he pauses after this back story, Gavin intervenes and begins offering the most plausible end to the story, telling it to Lucas in the second person: "So you took your pistol and went to straighten it out . . . you

happened to find Vinson Gowrie first and followed him into the woods and told him his partner was robbing him . . .” (62). Gavin generates not just one but several possible narratives; his practice as a lawyer and detective thrives on narrative-generation, on producing possible stories, possible explanations for the known facts. It is also deeply marked by what he considers “natural”: “You . . . told him his partner was robbing him and naturally he cursed you and called you a liar whether it was true or not, naturally he would have to do that,” Gavin says to Lucas (62).

Gavin’s fluency in narrative-generation is remarkable. As in the short fiction, for him to investigate and solve is for him to tell and explain. Already here at the beginning of the investigation, his eye is on the end narrative, on what he will need to discover in Lucas’s testimony and other sources to be able to make a compelling case about what has happened. Presented, later, with confirmation that Lucas is not the killer (since the corpse has been moved while he is in jail) and finally motivated to join Chick, Aleck Sander, and Miss Habersham in their search, Gavin begins to generate a new set of narratives that will structure the subsequent investigation process. His investigative techniques do not become fruitful, however, until later in the novel, when he has let go of what he is so eager to believe Lucas has done, even though he does not want the old man lynched. Instead, Chick, the central consciousness of the story, pursues the first part of the investigation (a midnight dig in the cemetery to excavate Vinson’s body) after his uncle’s model. Watson argues that Gavin’s thoughts and stories, told over many years, have worked themselves “so deeply into Chick Mallison’s consciousness as to be almost inseparable from his own” (115). His investigative method, too, seems to have been shaped by Gavin’s. The sheriff’s method is also similar: at one pivotal moment the

sheriff asks all the investigators to begin imagining what they would have done in the murderer's place: 'We're going to find out right now where to start . . . It's say around eleven o'clock at night. You got a mule or maybe it's a horse . . . And you aint got much time . . . All right. What would you do?'" (164-65).³²

Toward the end of the novel, shut in his office with Chick and Miss Habersham while the sheriff and Lucas go out to catch Crawford Gowrie, the murderer, Gavin re-establishes himself as the detective: he reconstructs the circumstances of the murder in an extensive end narrative that relies on a sort of character investigation of the Gowrie brothers and the other man involved, the timber-buyer Jake Montgomery, whose body Chick has found in Vinson's grave. As in the short fiction, Gavin substantiates his claims with the few facts Chick and his companions have uncovered, embedding those facts deeply in his explanatory narrative. Gavin and the sheriff place a call to a lumber buyer in Memphis in order to verify that Jake, the middleman, had bought Crawford's stolen lumber. The reason for the call, Gavin's speech suggests, was that he already knew Jake had to have been the buyer; the call's purpose was to confirm a point already almost certain, because no other story fit. The piece of evidence is sought because it would work well with the story the investigators are producing, and in fact relies for its persuasiveness as evidence on the way it fits into this story that explains so well. Gavin

³² This "what would you do," the alignment of the criminal and the detective, is a classic detective story move. G.K. Chesterton's Father Brown explains it to an admirer: "'You see, I had murdered them all myself,' explained Father Brown patiently. 'So, of course, I knew how it was done . . . I had planned out each of the crimes very carefully . . . I had thought out exactly how a thing like that could be done, and in what style or state of mind a man could really do it. And when I was quite sure that I felt exactly like the murderer myself, of course I knew who he was'" (6). Poe similarly compares the art of what he calls "analysis" to a scenario in which a schoolboy wins all his compatriots' marbles by imitating the expression on his opponent's face in an effort to begin to think like him, in "The Purloined Letter."

works this detail about Jake being the buyer into an explanation of Crawford's motive in killing Jake as well as Jake's motive for digging up Vinson's body:

this part we dont really know either and with Jake Montgomery in his present condition we probably never will though that doesn't really matter either since the fact remains, *why else was he in Vinson's grave* except that in buying the lumber from Crawford (we found that out by a telephone call to the lumber's ultimate consignee in Memphis this afternoon) *Jake Montgomery knew where it came from too since knowing that would have been Jake's nature and character too* and indeed a factor in his middleman's profit. (223, emphasis added)

The single "factual" detail is deeply embedded in a series of speculations on motive and the "nature" of the people involved: that Jake Montgomery bought the lumber would hardly be a reason for killing him, unless he, too, knew that the lumber had been obtained by illegal means. The text suggests, by putting the one verified detail in parentheses, breaking up a long sentence about Jake's knowledge of the situation, that the corroborated fact that he did buy it is subordinate to his reasons for needing to know where it came from, which Gavin extrapolates from what is known of his character and his position in the community. And for the force of Gavin's narrative, it is indeed subordinate. The narrative is about motive, and to state simply that Jake bought the lumber without making an argument for why that fact is significant is unpersuasive. Watson's point that in legal argumentation "[e]ven tangible or 'material' artifacts such as weapons, damaged goods, personal belongings, and written documents are irrelevant unless incorporated into larger oral narratives" is significant here (18). *Intruder* turns the a-ha moment, the moment of discovery of the crucial piece of evidence, into the afterthought that it actually is: the reasoning, the argument about who would have needed to kill whom and why, receives greater emphasis because it is the argument that makes the discovery into evidence.

We are asked to assume that Gavin Stevens' reconstruction of Crawford's and Jake's behavior is mostly true primarily because Gavin's story is convincing on the basis of the motives described, but also because it incorporates several pieces of more concrete evidence into its structure and uses them effectively as rhetorical evidence. At certain moments in his explanatory narrative, Gavin even forgoes offering evidence because the strength of his narrative and its appeal to psychological motivations, filtered through an understanding of local practice, render more concrete evidence unnecessary for his audience. He deliberately does not ask around in order to verify that Vinson and Crawford argued at Fraser's store that morning: "And at least you can finish that," he tells Chick and Miss Habersham; "no need to prove any quarrel between Vinson and Crawford nor rack your brains very deep to imagine what Crawford said and did" (221). Gavin brushes aside questions that do not affect the overall persuasiveness of the narrative. What exactly Crawford Gowrie said to get his brother Vinson out to the store is guessed at, then dismissed: "because that doesn't really matter either" (222). The evidence that Gavin acquires is the evidence he goes looking for, and he goes looking for the details he knows will be most convincing, that will have strong connotations for his audience—ultimately the mob that might or might not lynch Lucas—who also knows about Lucas, the Gowries, and Jake.

Gavin is blunt about both the origin and the force of his conclusions about Jake's knowledge: "if this be surmise then make the most of it or give Mr Hampton and me a better and we'll swap" (223). Making the most of surmise when he knows that his audience will accept it and that it will be sufficient to achieve justice is Gavin's normal mode of argumentation. He admits his biases as well, and the effect that they have

probably had on his conclusions: “I like to think for Crawford’s sake,” he says, “that maybe Jake named the price of his silence and even collected it” (223). The rest of his narrative depends on this conclusion that Jake has been blackmailing Crawford Gowrie, which Gavin admits has arisen from a desire to redeem Crawford’s character somewhat.

Gavin relies largely on a plot imagined on the basis of motive—Crawford’s likely motive for not only killing his brother but framing Lucas. Lucas’s testimony alone does not suffice; he wants to study Crawford’s actions by imagining what might have prompted them: “But even when Hope told me how he had finally got that much out of Lucas . . . it explained only part of it because I was still saying what I had been saying ever since you all woke me this morning and Chick told me what Lucas had told him about the pistol: But why Vinson? Why did Crawford have to kill Vinson in order to obliterate the witness to his thieving?” (219). Later he judges that Crawford will try to kill Lucas. Even if “he already knew he was lost and nothing Lucas could testify . . . could harm him further,” Gavin reasons, he would still attack Lucas. “[W]hat would you want to do first [before fleeing or being captured or killed], one last act and statement of your deathless principles before you left your native land for good and maybe even the world for good, if your name was Gowrie and your blood and thinking and acting had been Gowrie all your life,” he asks Miss Habersham (226). Crawford still sees Lucas as the cause of all his shame and frustration, for having observed him stealing and threatened to tell, and for being a black man who would dare to tell, and Gavin judges (correctly) that he will feel compelled to take it out on him.

The demand for motive is a rhetorical demand; it is a demand for plot and meaning. It requires the field of evidence to be those findings which can be construed to

support the set of possible meanings, possible reasons for the crime. Gavin's perception of what motives are possible governs the process, and for him, both a set of professional, canonical possibilities (freedom from blackmail, revenge, monetary gain) and local gossip about the Gowries' and Jake Montgomery's character determines the set of possibilities. While Gavin eventually succeeds as an interpreter late in *Intruder*, the novel suggests that he fails at the beginning because he is a grown man and a professional. The approachability that Faulkner builds up as part of Gavin's character in the short fiction and *Intruder* too—Chick says Lucas appreciates “that quality in his uncle which brought people to tell him things they would tell nobody else”—has its limits because of his age and professionalization (68). He knows the patterns well but is no longer able to see anything that is outside of them. Chick remembers “Old Ephraim” telling him when he was younger that “Young folks and womens, they aint cluttered. They can listen. But a middle-year man like your paw and your uncle, they cant listen They aint got time They're too busy with facks” (70). Gavin is too busy reciting the stories he already knows.

Although Gavin Stevens assigns the final meaning to events and gives the account of the crime in *Intruder in the Dust*, it is Chick Mallison whose role as interpreter is staged for the reader, since readers are forced to interpret alongside him. Chick's consciousness is central to the narration although the novel is narrated in the third person. The present action of a detective story moves through what is encountered, what is coming at the investigator in need of interpretation. The way Chick sorts through sensory input, by drawing conclusions about how to read it based on the history of Yoknapatawpha County that his uncle has instilled in him, is established in the first

chapter. A young Chick goes hunting on Carothers Edmonds' land, falls beneath the ice in a creek, and is commanded (by Lucas) to follow home a man whom he identifies as Lucas Beauchamp based on a correspondence between his uncle's stories and the location of Lucas's house and hearing his first name spoken. Watson argues that this scene documents "a process that is genuinely epistemological. We witness the coalescence of discrete perceptual stimuli into a cognitive whole" (122). There is already, in this first chapter, an attention to how Chick knows what he knows. Without knowing "how he knew it since there were no signs, traces, soiled plates to show it," Chick is sure that "Edmonds' boy" and Aleck Sander have eaten before he enters the kitchen (13). The conclusion is based not on the interpretation of traces, as Chick realizes, but on the confirmation of expectations. The subsequent story, too, will be based on expectations and imagined narratives that, when they are contradicted by material evidence that Chick, Aleck Sander, Miss Habersham, or Gavin Stevens interpret as contrary to the currently favored narrative, will be revised to accommodate the new evidence without completely displacing the expectations.

Once the detective story plot begins, Chick encounters Lucas's incomplete testimony, and then the body in the grave that he has not expected to find: the world comes at him in need of interpretation, and he attempts to find an adequate account of what might have produced these elements. White, speaking of the historical operation, argues that a historian "must bring to his consideration of the record . . . general notions of the *kinds of stories* that might be found there . . . In other words, the historian must draw upon a fund of culturally provided *mythoi*" (*Tropics* 60). Chick, following his uncle, whose opinions largely structure his way of thinking about the world, pursues his

interpretation through two related frameworks, a sort of psychological analysis of the individuals he is dealing with, which is dominated by a focus on motive, and a knowledge of the county, its families, and its customs. Often this second rubric plays into the first, informing his understanding of the actors' motivations. The scene in which Chick helps his uncle, the sheriff, and Vinson and Crawford Gowrie's father to locate Vinson's body shows Chick's investigative method at work. While the sheriff directs the actual search, we watch Chick think through how it should be conducted, anticipating the sheriff's and Mr. Gowrie's movements. Chick reasons that when disposing of his brother's body, Crawford had time to consider what best to do with it, and thus would have put it into the patch of quicksand under the highway bridge. Again, this is a "What would you do?" moment, pairing murderer and detective. The murderer's urgency to get the body out of sight is thus actually repeated in the investigation: Chick, looking down at the corpse on the bank beside the highway bridge, listens "harder than ever now with something of the murderer's own frantic urgency" for a car coming, wanting to shield Mr. Gowrie's grief from exposure and likewise Vinson's body from a misinterpreting public who he fears might lynch Lucas after all (173-74).

When Chick first looks at the quicksand, with Vinson's body hidden below it, it appears to be free of traces, "an expanse of wet sand as smooth and innocent and markless of surface as so much milk" (172). Yet he knows that the body will, indeed, be under that markless surface. When Vinson's body has been hoisted out of "the sand with a faint smacking plop like the sound of lips perhaps in sleep," there remains "in the bland surface nothing: a faint wimple wrinkle already fading then gone like the end of a faint secret fading smile" (173). In retrospect there is, after all, material evidence that the body

is hidden there—a “long willow pole lying above the bank edge and coated for three or four feet up its length with a thin patina of dried sand like when you thrust a stick into a bucket or vat of paint,” but when he first observes the stick which Crawford has apparently used to thrust his brother beneath the surface, Chick notes the pole just as an obstacle that Mr. Gowrie leaps on his way to the sand and the body (172). While tracking prints has previously led the investigators to Jake Montgomery’s body, hastily buried under some dirt hacked off from a creek bank, tracking does not lead them to Vinson. That better-plotted hiding place has to be discovered by a consideration of how Crawford might have plotted: he was not a fool, Gavin thinks, presumably trying to imagine an untraceable hiding place within reach.³³ The experienced reader of detective fiction might notice the momentary attention the text gives to the quicksand when Chick, Aleck Sander, and Miss Habersham go to disinter Vinson’s body from his grave, might suspect that it will eventually be found there.

Chick’s education in how to solve a crime is not only a professional education in uncovering murderers’ motives and movements in general, but much more an education in the psychology of the community. It is conducted in part by his Uncle Gavin but is in fact furthered by Gavin’s failures to fully understand that community, as well as by Chick’s direct encounters with Lucas Beauchamp, Miss Habersham, and Mr. Gowrie.

Intruder is a coming-of-age narrative because Chick is discovering not just bodies and murderers but adult motivations; he is coming to understanding, growing up. In *Intruder*,

³³ The Gowries, on the other hand, cannot imagine it—“What?” one of the twins asks—“Sonabitch, Lawyer. Put a man in quicksand? my boy in quicksand?” adds Mr. Gowrie (171). Miss Habersham, who has likewise noticed the quicksand the night before without imagining that one of the bodies might be there, also experiences a horror beyond words. Chick says that “Miss Habersham had done something he didn’t know what, no sound and she hadn’t moved and it wasn’t even that she had got any stiller but something had occurred” (222). The “something” occurs again at almost every mention of fratricide or quicksand (Faulkner, *Intruder* 224, 225).

Miss Worsham from “Go Down, Moses” becomes Miss Habersham (both characters have grown up like sisters with Mollie/Molly Beauchamp and live on the edge of town subsisting off the sale of produce and eggs). The name change recalls *Great Expectations* and Miss Havisham,³⁴ and although Miss Havisham and Miss Habersham have little in common as characters, the similarity of their names reinforces *Intruder’s* coming-of-age novel structure.

Chick is engaged in discovering not only who has murdered Vinson Gowrie, but in trying to figure out, for instance, why the Gowries never lynch Lucas. He proceeds through several answers to that question as his understanding deepens, each time thinking to himself that he now “knows” the answer. The first, “obvious,” reason that Lucas has ever reached town alive is that “there happened to be no Gowrie present at the moment but the dead one” (158). Later he concludes—“he knew now,” the text says—that Lucas is not immediately lynched because “the Gowries themselves had known he hadn’t done it so they were just marking time waiting for somebody else” to do it to further the alternative narrative masking the fratricide (214). But then a memory of Mr. Gowrie interrupts Chick’s conclusion, and he imputes the decision not to lynch Lucas instead to grief: “he [Mr. Gowrie] held nothing against Lucas then because there was no room for anything but his son” (214). In no sense does Gavin teach Chick about method. He teaches him about people and their motivations; to study and apply that knowledge is Gavin’s method and becomes Chick’s as well. As Gavin instructs Chick, he attempts to pass on some of his blindnesses as well, for instance the type of expectations that keep him from being able to hear Lucas’s claims to innocence in the first place, by trying to

³⁴ See Joseph Gold, “Dickens and Faulkner: The Uses of Influence,” 76.

turn Chick into a lawyer. Rob Atkinson has argued that Gavin fails to see what is really going on, “not despite his legal training and practical wisdom, but precisely because of them. His lawyerly professionalism, the skills and habits formed in years of law practice, are not only not the solution; they are as much a part of the problem as the more obvious racism of his redneck compatriots” (608). Chick’s close contact with Lucas, Aleck Sander, and Miss Habersham keeps him from becoming overly professionalized.

Watson argues that after *Sanctuary*, the ineffectual Horace Benbow “must yield his place in the Yoknapatawpha fiction to a man at law whose rhetorical, narrative, and theatrical skills exceed his own”—Gavin Stevens (75). In *Intruder* and also the novella “Knight’s Gambit” (1949), where Chick solves the mystery by being on the spot and listening while Gavin is shut up with his translation of the Old Testament back into ancient Greek, Chick succeeds Gavin as detective, leaving him to his lawyering and his marriage in *The Mansion*, although he will do what might be called detective work in *Requiem for a Nun*. As Lorie Watkins Fulton argues, “Chick seems far more sensitive than Stevens to the intrinsic humanity of all people, especially African Americans. In stark contrast to his uncle’s inability to understand Molly’s grief in the final pages of *Go Down, Moses*, Chick recognizes as a child that ‘You dont have to not be a nigger in order to grieve’ after seeing Lucas just after Molly’s death (*Intruder* 302)” (70).

One final element that *Intruder in the Dust* borrows and develops from the short fiction, though it is a less-central plot point in *Intruder* than in “Smoke” and “Hand Upon the Waters,” is the idea that a convincing story produces the criminal bodily and leads to justice. Crawford attempts to murder Lucas when Sheriff Hampton’s car has to go into low gear to cross the unfinished fill on the trip he is widely known to be taking to the

next county, supposedly to testify at Jake Montgomery's inquest. Crawford does not know that Lucas does not need to be taken to another county since Jake was killed in Yoknapatawpha County; the piece of false information fed to him through a story whispered around the county is persuasive enough to Crawford to produce the intended (and just, in Hampton's and Gavin's view) outcome. He drives down to the fill believing that Lucas will be coming past in a slow-moving car, and his attempt to kill Lucas is the clinching piece of evidence for the account of the murder that Gavin, the Sheriff, and Chick and his fellow investigators have produced. Granted, there is probably sufficient legal evidence to convict Crawford because of the bullet. But it is unjust in the eyes of the people concerned to make more of a spectacle of the fratricide; instead they return the evidence (Vinson's body and the bullet lodged in it) to the family. Believing that it is also unjust to let him escape, however, they tell a story and stage its supporting details to persuade Crawford to come out to the fill and then to commit suicide. Gavin Stevens' enormous extralegal power, his role as puppeteer or engineer of the future (although in *Intruder* the sheriff also has a major role in this puppeteering) works here on the basis of persuasiveness to a particular audience. Gavin and Hope Hampton know that the origin of the story (the gossip Willy Ingrim) and its context will seem plausible to Crawford even if they are not correct (because he is just a murderer, not a lawyer). The story again produces the body of the criminal, rendering material evidence extraneous.

Local Detection

Crimes and their solutions in Faulkner's fiction are not isolated incidents in the history of the town, capped off by the departure of the visiting detective figure. Gavin's

end narratives constitute a continuing chapter in the stories about local families and local practices that Gavin and the citizens of Jefferson recite. Genre detective fiction instead often has a detective who sees more clearly than others—usually than the local police—because he is able to set aside his expectations about how the crime probably occurred and see the unexpected explanation. By seeing events and suspects out of context, the detective, usually an outsider, structures his investigation in a mythically complete open-mindedness. (On the other hand, a thorough examination of these stories suggests that their detectives, too, run through a list of possible stories that ultimately depend on acquiring local knowledge and necessarily depend on experience with previous crimes, in spite of the generic preference for the abilities of non-professionals.) This description of detective fiction is of course an oversimplification. John Irwin in fact points out that Faulkner resurrects a device that originated with Poe himself on the occasions when Faulkner gives his investigators “a personal motive for becoming involved in the solution or prevention of a crime”³⁵ (104). Chick agrees to go out to Caledonia Chapel cemetery and disinter Lucas’s supposed victim because Lucas years ago saved him from drowning, gave him shelter, warmth, and a good meal, and then repeatedly refused payment. The entire opening section of *Intruder* shows Chick struggling with his perceived debt to a black man and then, once Lucas has been accused of killing Vinson, torn between a desire to get on his horse and ride away or stay. As he goes back to the jail once his uncle has left, Chick muses, “*Maybe he will remind me of that goddamn plate of collards*

³⁵ Poe’s Dupin takes on the case in “The Murders in the Rue Morgue” because the accused man once did him a good turn, and in “The Purloined Letter,” he “has an old score to settle with the Minister D—” (Irwin 113).

and sidemeat, or maybe he'll even tell me I'm all he's got, all that's left and that will be enough" (Intruder 66).

Faulkner's investigators not only solve crimes because of personal motives, but are able to identify and interpret evidence because they are locals. Grimwood argues that "Gavin Stevens uncovers their [the criminal outsiders'] misdeeds not like Sherlock Holmes through esoteric knowledge of arcane disciplines, but precisely through his intimate familiarity with his neighbors and his county. The clues he detects have significance within a local, rural context" (201-02). In fact, "horsemanship, woodcraft, and familiarity with purely local customs often provide the detectives with their clues," and a corresponding ignorance of these local customs (how to make a cold toddy, how to move a boat along a trotline) causes the murderers to reveal themselves (Grimwood 198). Watson shows that Chick, in *Intruder*, grows into this kind of "mastery of Yoknapatawpha lore . . . through the accretion of interwoven stories and anecdotes" told by Gavin (124). They are what allow "a sixteen-year-old town boy, who spends most of his spare time at his uncle's law office, [to] recognize, at a moment's notice, in the dark of night, and in the most incongruous situation imaginable, the dead face of an obscure, itinerant working man who is not even from Yoknapatawpha but from a neighboring county" (Watson 124). It is indeed almost unfathomable that Chick would recognize Jake's body in the grave without having known a good deal about the man and his propensity to being mixed up in a crime like the one Chick is investigating for Lucas.

Gavin, in his final explanatory monologue in *Intruder in the Dust*, directly names his method of coming to knowledge about a crime. However, he identifies it not as his own method but as that of the murderer whose motivations and actions he is trying to

reconstruct narratively, underscoring Brooks's point that one of the requirements of detective fiction is "that the detective repeat, go over again, the ground that has been covered by his predecessor, the criminal" (*Reading* 24). Gavin calls Crawford Gowrie's plan to frame Lucas for his murder of his brother "a scheme so simple and water-tight in its biological and geographical psychology as to be what Chick here would call a natural" (223). It is indeed biological (if the term is expanded to include the understanding of race in the biological metaphors that Gavin seems to espouse³⁶) and geographical psychology that Gavin pursues in order to reconstruct Crawford's scheme, and that of all the characters involved in this case and the cases in other Faulkner stories. Gavin follows the same set of assumptions that Crawford has followed: Lucas will come to see the receipt, will accept his challenge to hit a half dollar on a stump fifteen feet away with his pistol, and will wait in the woods until Vinson Gowrie approaches him. The crowd at Fraser's store will rush out at the sound of the shot to apprehend him, will verify that his gun has been fired, and will assume that he is contrary enough to have shot a white man in the back. It is ultimately by imagining the plot Crawford, as they know him, would have constructed under the circumstances that Gavin and the sheriff figure out what did happen.

Sassoubre stresses the "community-based legal authority" in *Intruder*: the sheriff and Gavin find the bodies "based on their specific local knowledge," for instance where the quicksand is located, and determine who has done the killing because they know what

³⁶ See, for instance, Chapter 19 of *Light in August* (1932), in which Stevens, appearing for the first time in the novel, explains Joe Christmas's final moments in terms of a struggle between his "black blood" and his "white blood": "It would not be either one or the other and let his body save itself. Because the black blood drove him first to the negro cabin. And then the white blood drove him out of there, as it was the black blood which snatched up the pistol and the white blood which would not let him fire it" (449).

kind of guns Lucas and Crawford own (203). I would add that, while they mention a Memphis expert who can be called in to identify the murder weapon from the shape of the wound, they never call him. They return the body and any physical evidence: “not even Vinson Gowrie for somebody from the Memphis police to come and look at and say what bullet killed him because the sheriff had already let old Gowrie take him back home and wash the quicksand off and bury him” (Faulkner, *Intruder* 188). The evidence they rely on instead, as I have argued, is the strength of their story based on knowledge of the parties involved and the way that a few details—Jake’s having been the buyer of the stolen timber, Vinson’s body being where they expect it to be, and finally Lucas’s testimony about who was stealing the lumber—corroborate that story. They accept Lucas’s testimony not simply because he claims to be an eyewitness to the theft (Gavin is certainly not willing to listen to him early on) but because what he says does indeed fit in with the story they have constructed.

Evidence and Interpretation in *Go Down, Moses* and *Absalom, Absalom!*

Go Down, Moses and *Intruder in the Dust*, the novels on either side of Faulkner’s more or less fallow period from 1942 to 1948 (he wrote only short stories, most of which he struggled to publish, and part of *A Fable*, and spent much of the interval under contract in Hollywood) exist in a particular relationship to one another. Michael Millgate argues that “there is a strong sense of continuity between the two books: both are largely concerned with the problem of White-Negro relationships; both have Lucas Beauchamp as a major character; and the final chapter of *Go Down, Moses* seems directly to anticipate the principal emphases and even something of the action of the later novel,

with the figure of Gavin Stevens serving as an active and thematic link between the two” (215). Sassoubre likewise notes that the final chapter of *Go Down, Moses* (also titled “Go Down, Moses”), in which the execution of Lucas and Mollie Beauchamp’s grandson Samuel “is figured as a Northern lynching . . . sets the stage for *Intruder in the Dust*, in which Gavin Stevens and Sheriff Hampton save Lucas by preventing both a lynching and a trial” (197-98). Both novels have a good deal to do with Lucas and Mollie/Molly Beauchamp. Each also throws a certain light on the other. The centrality of knowledge in *Go Down, Moses* suggests a reading of *Intruder* in which the knowledge component, the a-ha moment, of the detective story plot is readable in primarily racial terms. To know whodunit is to know Crawford’s exploitation of Lucas, as well as Gavin’s infantilization of him. Inversely, *Intruder*’s explicit focus on evidence suggests a re-reading of *Go Down, Moses* as a text also concerned with the identification and interpretation of evidence, particularly in the McCaslin ledgers.

While *Go Down, Moses* and *Intruder* have a more definite chronological relationship, even *Absalom, Absalom!* can benefit from a re-reading in light of the focus on evidence and the nature of investigation in the detective fiction. That novel’s chronological relationship to the detective fiction is not entirely absent, either. Faulkner had written “Smoke” years before *Absalom*, and he wrote “Monk” in the year following.

Chick resembles young Ike McCaslin, and indeed also Quentin Compson, although the comparison should not be pushed too far. It is just noticeable enough to call attention to the related activity of searching and interpreting in all three texts. Quentin,

Ike, and Chick, all in their late teens, all after midnight,³⁷ engage in unearthing, either narratively or literally in the cemetery, in order to explain. Watson calls Chick “a southern adolescent struggling against the inertia of his elders to translate moral awareness into moral action . . . a direct literary descendant of Isaac McCaslin, the protagonist of *Go Down, Moses*, who also tries, though less successfully, to expiate the sins he discovers in his southern heritage” (110). Indeed, Watson says, “[t]he consonance between ‘Mallison’ and ‘McCaslin,’ ‘Chick’ and ‘Ike,’ only underscores the basic resemblance” (110).

At some point in their search, all three begin to look for what they know they will find—Henry in the shell of the Sutpen house, evidence of some crime so terrible it caused a woman to drown herself in a creek, a body buried in quicksand. In “The Bear,” Ike, locked in the commissary after midnight to open the ledgers with whose “scarred and cracked backs” he has been familiar since he was a child, “but with no particular desire to open them” (256), is now sixteen and goes looking for traces of a story he has begun to piece together: “He knew what he was going to find before he found it,” and finds “what he knew he would find, only this was still not it because he already knew this” (257). As I argue in my Introduction, he knows he is looking for evidence of something more than miscegenation, something more than a sexual encounter between an old man and a young slave woman; he knows he will find evidence of that but knows he will find more, too, because it would have taken more to drive the young woman’s mother to drown herself.

³⁷ Isaac McCaslin gets the key to the commissary “after midnight” (Faulkner, *Go Down* 257), Quentin and Shreve are almost done revising their story when the chimes ring “for one oclock,” (Faulkner, *Absalom* 299) and Chick and his fellow gravediggers return home “well before daylight” and are at Hope Hampton’s by four o’clock in the morning (Faulkner, *Intruder* 107).

Recognition, in *Go Down, Moses* as in *Intruder in the Dust*, is embedded in stories already known.

Unwanted knowledge comes upon these adolescents suddenly, in both “The Bear” and *Intruder*. Ike McCaslin finds evidence of incest between the lines of the ledger even as he spins a different tale: that Carothers McCaslin had held Thucydus, Tomey’s father, apart from his other slaves, and Thucydus and his wife (Eunice) and daughter had experienced themselves as distinctive not only because the husband and his parents were not field hands, but because he “and his father and mother too had been inherited by the white man from his father, and the white man himself had travelled three hundred miles and better to New Orleans in a day when men travelled by horseback or steamboat, and bought the girl’s mother as a wife for”—and suddenly the line breaks off; Ike realizes the first story does not explain, does not account for such a journey (258-59). In the next line, knowledge breaks in upon him even as he denies it: “The old frail pages seemed to turn of their own accord even while he thought *His own daughter His own daughter. No No Not even him*” (259). What he is realizing is, as I have previously argued, what Isaac “knew . . . he was going to find before he found it”—some act so egregious that it makes the story of Eunice’s suicide make sense (257). He follows with a piece of logic made possible by a knowledge of family history: men who do not travel and do not need slaves do not make long journeys to buy them for any ordinary reason. And then something he has known all his life suddenly becomes evidence, in the context of this new narrative that explains it: “he knew from his own observation and memory that there had already been some white in Tomey’s Terrel’s blood before his father gave him the rest of it”

(259). He has made these observations all his life, but only now, in the context of a story, do they begin to have a value as evidence.

There is a scene in *Intruder* that echoes this one, although without the same level of personal involvement on the part of the central consciousness of the novel. Watching Mr. Gowrie pursue the question of who shot his son, Chick puts up a mental resistance similar to Isaac's: "And watching he thought *No! No! Dont say it! Dont ask!*" even when Mr. Gowrie has certainly already begun to know that the murderer was someone much closer to home than Lucas (175). Watson calls Crawford Gowrie's act of fratricide the "literally *unspeakable* . . . crime at the core of the novel" (131). Chick suggests that the mob has dispersed quickly and in silence to keep from having to lynch Crawford Gowrie or indeed even admit to themselves that he killed his brother; Miss Habersham, as previously mentioned, "does something he didn't know what, no sound and she hadn't moved and it wasn't even that she had got any stiller but something had occurred" every time the subject of fratricide is broached and repeats unbelievably that Crawford put his brother in quicksand (222). Gavin proposes that fratricide puts the *whom* into the accusative-less precept "Thou shalt not kill," changes the weight of the commandment: "But *thou shall not kill thy mother's child*. It came right down into the street that time to walk in broad daylight at your elbow, didn't it?" (Faulkner, *Intruder* 195, emphasis original). Both Isaac and Chick go through the process of realizing that a fact one has known in innocence can function as evidence that unspeakable crimes like fratricide and incest have taken place. Quentin and Shreve in *Absalom, Absalom!*, of course, realize or at least imagine the same crimes.

The concern with epistemological processes that Faulkner imports from his detective fiction reading points toward the broader theme of knowability in his other work. Lucas can be recognized by Chick but can never really be known; Chick, as he grows into adolescence in Lucas's shadow in chapter 2 of *Intruder in the Dust*, is forever chasing knowledge of him, forever looking for evidence of Lucas's grief over his wife's death, all without really understanding him. The closest he comes is to realize, in "a kind of amazement," "*You dont have to not be a nigger in order to grieve*" (25, emphasis original). Likewise, Isaac McCaslin can realize what has happened to the slaves, the barest traces of whose lives are represented in the ledgers, but he cannot begin to enter their thoughts.³⁸ Like Chick, Isaac has the evidence only of the existence of the grief (and likewise the suicide and the incest) but not of who these people are. The people whose stories are buried in the traces left in the McCaslin ledger books take "substance and even a sort of shadowy life with their passions and complexities too as page followed page and year year," but only with the addition of Ike's expectations, and with the stories he remembers (254). Ike sees them come off the page almost as specters, as Quentin Compson does Henry, Judith, and Charles Bon—what he experiences is certainly the imaginative moment in a historian's endeavors that White writes of, brought into the investigation itself: "and looking down at the yellowed page spread beneath the yellow glow of the lantern smoking and stinking in that rank chill midnight room fifty years later, he seemed to see her actually walking into the icy creek on that Christmas day six months before her daughter's and her lover's . . . child was born, solitary, inflexible,

³⁸ Minrose Gwin argues that the ledger books "are too small a space to contain, in all their cultural and historical implications, the outrageousness of old Carothers McCaslin's crimes and the tragic stories of Eunice and Tomasina, whose lives are squeezed into cryptic phrases in the ledger book" (77).

griefless, ceremonial” (Faulkner, *Go Down* 259). How so griefless? His imaginings underscore their own failures of knowledge and understanding, perhaps Faulkner’s as well. The focus in *Intruder* on evidence (and even the word “evidence” surfaces repeatedly in that novel, whereas it does not in *Go Down, Moses*) helps us understand how much *Go Down, Moses*, too, really is about trying to know. In the final episode in *Go Down, Moses*, Gavin can discover that Mollie Beauchamp’s grandson is being executed, but that grandson’s history, and what he means to Mollie, remain hidden from him. *Intruder*, conversely, practically begins with a recognition scene, and it continues with a Bildungsroman structure.

Linda Wagner-Martin, as mentioned previously, stresses the importance of knowledge in *Go Down, Moses*. Through the novel’s difficult structure, which compels “the reader literally to put together glimpses of information—often as indecipherable as the cryptic writing in the commissary books—Faulkner’s novel replicates the process of a mind coming to understanding” rather than the “endless repetition” and “blockage” performed in *Absalom*, which allows Quentin to avoid facing “the truth about either the South or himself” (Wagner-Martin 7). Wagner-Martin extends the argument by saying that *Go Down, Moses* suggests action, “instead of forcing the reader to a willed passivity . . . as it did Ike,” (6) and is in fact “the beginning of Faulkner’s mature statement about responsibility” (7). She declares bluntly that “Isaac McCaslin, often read as the protagonist of *Go Down, Moses*, is not another Quentin Compson,” and to read him as such ignores “crucial changes” between *Absalom, Absalom!* (and previously *The Sound and the Fury*) and *Go Down, Moses* (5). Yet certainly there is a reason the two adolescents resemble each other so closely in many incidentals. Their similarity in fact

highlights the call for an end to despair that Wagner-Martin argues that *Go Down, Moses* is.

David Krause argues that *Absalom, Absalom!* is a novel about reading—“Reading . . . emerges not as just another detachable thematic strand in the novel’s dense tapestry but as the very stuff that makes up the book” (228). If reading is inevitably an act of interpretation, the critical commonplace that *Absalom* is part detective story remains true. It seeks to explain “what happened here,” not in order to answer the question of who did it, but in order to answer the question of why, for which seeking to establish certain details is necessary—most critically what the basis was for Henry’s demand that Bon not marry his sister. But what, for Quentin in 1909, remains to be read, to be interpreted, unraveled? What remains to demand explanation? Certainly everything that Miss Rosa tells Quentin, certainly the fact that she is still obsessed by it all, certainly what he sees at the Sutpen house the night he goes out there with her. But also the unsigned, undated letter, and also the gravestones, which immediately for Quentin raise the question of who would have erected them, and why, and with what funds.

Quentin, as a listener, reader, and interpreter within the narrative in *Absalom, Absalom!*, encounters two forms of evidence for the lives of Sutpen, Judith, Bon, and Henry—of how they lived and what they did, indeed that they ever lived at all. Some of the persistent objects in the text exist only in narrative, worried over by Rosa, by Compson, by Quentin and Shreve, but only described told, retold—the case, for instance, with the photograph in it varying depending on the teller, or the shot that killed Charles Bon, famously “heard only by its echo,” as Miss Rosa says (123). Even Bon’s body leaves no trace, not even “the imprint of a body on a mattress” (123), and the women of

the Sutpen house “obliterate” the shot, in “a retroactive severance of the stream of event,” rob “the murderer of a victim for his very bullet,” simply by never speaking it (127). But just a few objects remain for Quentin to see himself: the letter that Mr. Compson says Judith brought to his mother, the markers in the graveyard at Sutpen’s Hundred, the shell of the house, and the living bodies of Rosa, Clytie, and Henry themselves. The text is insistent, however, that even these exist in the story only by means of the testimony that situates them there. Wade Newhouse argues that when Quentin “actually sees and speaks with the elusive subject [Henry] that has been at the heart of the multilayered tellings and retellings that have so defined his community’s memory and his sense of himself as a Southerner,” the meeting “does less to legitimize their identity through narrative than to frustrate such a search for authority, since the reality that they discover is not material enough (it is merely ‘wasted’) to carry the ideological and cultural weight of the stories in which they have invested themselves” (145). The (mere) physical presence of Henry Sutpen “does not substantiate anyone’s particular version of the past or provide any new information” (Newhouse 145). As Krause has argued, the letter can be seen as “just about the only scrap of documentary evidence (other than a gravestone) that a man named Charles Bon ever existed and intruded on the lives of the Sutpens,” and yet Faulkner “refuses to authorize any assumptions about who wrote the letter to whom” (225). It persists instead as merely a “faint spidery script not like something impressed upon the paper by a once-living hand but like a shadow cast upon it . . . without date or salutation or signature,” shedding in Quentin’s hands all the narrative baggage Mr. Compson has laid upon it (102). In the scene in which Quentin encounters five Sutpen gravestones, Krause adds, the “emphasis . . . falls insistently on the problematic legibility of the ‘faint

lettering, the graved words” (233). Mr. Compson urges a Quentin in his early teens to determine who might have purchased each of the five stones in the Sutpen family cemetery. The words engraved into the stones have to be coaxed into revealing even their literal content: Quentin smooths “with his hand into legibility . . . the faint lettering, the graved words,” (155) shrouded beneath composting leaves, with from a distance only “here and there a carved letter or even an entire word momentary and legible in the faint light” (153). “‘Who would have paid for them?’ Mr. Compson asks; ‘Think.’” (155). Both letter and stones, despite their belonging to a class of objects whose purpose is to tell, to pass on information, function as evidence to be interpreted rather than objects whose meaning is unproblematic.

Even the living bodies of the three characters from the Sutpen legend who remain for Quentin to see tell him almost nothing, leaving the story still open to his endless revisions with Shreve that winter. It is in fact when Mr. Compson’s letter arrives with the news that the last of those bodies (Rosa’s) is dead and buried that their resurrection in narrative really begins, that the young men by means of their reasoning and imagination from the few pieces of evidence Quentin has beheld begin to create meaningful lives in the place of the inscrutable flesh Quentin has seen and touched. In Shreve’s telling of the first visit to the house, Clytie remains silent: “she didn’t tell you in the actual words because even in the terror she kept the secret; nevertheless she told you, or at least all of a sudden you knew” (280). In Quentin’s remembrance a few pages later, she speaks briefly, but when he picks her up after Rosa has hit her, she is insubstantial: “it was like picking up a handful of sticks concealed in a rag bundle” (295). Clytie, as the house burns, has receded back into stories Quentin and Shreve are telling: she “*maybe* . . .

appeared in that window from which she *must* have been watching the gates constantly day and night for three months”—her very presence depends on the story (300, emphasis added).

Even when all the storytelling finally produces Henry in the flesh, there is no sense of justice or finality attached to it. Quentin thinks to himself, when he mounts the stairs during his trip out to Sutpen’s Hundred with Rosa, ““But I must see [Henry] too now. I will have to. Maybe I shall be sorry tomorrow, but I must see’” (296). (There is no description of Henry for the reader here, incidentally. Quentin next comes back down the stairs.) Who Henry is, what he did, are not there to read in the flesh of the man he sees there; even for Rosa, Henry at this point is more story than man. Quentin has spoken to Henry, though, a fact which emerges later in the narrative. He poses three questions, each asked and answered twice—Henry testifies to being Henry Sutpen, having been there four years, having come home to die. Quentin’s repetition of the questions suggests the unreality of the scene for him, suggests the fact that the answers themselves do not answer his questions, do not further situate Henry—and indeed, though this scene is presented toward the end of *Absalom, Absalom!*, most of the *action* of the book takes place after this moment, as Quentin tries still to determine what the right story might be. Having seen the living, breathing man who should be the linchpin of the tale does not render its meanings any clearer. It is the telling of the story itself that does that.

Chick’s digging in the graveyard is the last of all the adolescent midnight excavation in Faulkner’s writing. It brings the question of accountability and action into play, in a period in which Faulkner was shifting into an “aesthetic of engagement” and a belief in “authorial responsibility” (Dmitri 14). Chick needs to know in a hurry. He gets

dirt on his hands; he risks his life; but if he can learn and prove what to the rest of the community is unspeakable, he can see that Lucas is saved and Crawford punished. The optimism of detective fiction, the sense that investigation and knowledge do something concrete in the world, is closely linked to the just-get-something-close-to-justice mentality of law. Faulkner, who didn't want to be a lawyer with a literary avocation,³⁹ turned often in his later fiction to the practicality of law and its ability to do something in the world even in the absence of the possibility of knowing the truth. Knowledge becomes a tool in the production of justice, even as it remains always dependent on the narratives in which it is couched, even as evidence remains a rhetorical device.

Conclusion: Investigation, Endings, and Justice

Tony Bennett, in the chapter "Literature/History" in *Outside Literature*, sets aside the "widespread and endemic problem of a hermeneutic kind concerning how the horizons of past and present might be merged so as to recover the meanings lived and experienced by subjects in epochs remote from our own" (47) and stresses that the problem at the heart of historical inquiry is *not* this general epistemological problem of how the past might be accessed and known but is instead a disciplinary question, having to do with a "specific set of rules and precepts governing the discursive moves which may be made in relation to" the historical record (50). Bennett suggests that "history (as a discipline) constitutes the locus through which the representations of the past circulated by the institutions comprising the public historical sphere are brought into contact with the historical record in order to be either corrected by it or allowed to change with it"

³⁹ See Susan Snell, "Phil Stone and William Faulkner: The Lawyer and 'The Poet.'"

(50). The discipline is thus “most appropriately regarded as a specific discursive regime, governed by distinctive procedures, through which the maintenance/transformation of the past as a set of currently existing realities is regulated” (Bennett 50). These realities are what the past does now—the set of statements and beliefs that have actual daily political effect. The procedures Bennett cites give history a particular “social productivity” that allows it to avoid becoming paralyzed by the question of its relation to the “real past” or the truth of the archives (51). Historians approach the archive not “in the sense of an extra-discursive real, but *as if it were* such a referent in the sense that it constitutes the last court of appeal for historical disputes” (Bennett 50, emphasis original). In Bennett’s view material and documentary evidence serves as a corrective. When approached according to the rules and procedures established by the disciplinary structures of history, such evidence can be a productive tool for regulating the “public past,” the set of beliefs and statements that circulates in the present, regardless of its relation to the “real past,” but that serves as an incitement and as evidence in policy-making. Historical rules and procedures, in other words, reign in the process by which “the past as a set of currently existing realities” is used to support decisions that will influence future actions (Bennett 50).

In a way this understanding affords the historian an enormous amount of power, since appeals to a public past corrected by the historian’s work often are voiced as support for future action. However, the rules of evidence de-personalize and moderate the way the archive can be brought to bear on the public past. Lawyer and detective fiction dramatizes in miniature this process of bringing the set of circulating beliefs about the past into a corrective relationship with the archive. The set of clues that are to be

interpreted and eventually become legal evidence as part of a legal narrative functions as a corrective to beliefs circulating publicly, but that set of clues must be interpreted according to the procedures of a discipline, in which the meaning of an object is controlled by a set of rules. Yet ultimately, and this hovers at the edges of Bennett's argument but is not stated, the historian's relationship to the audience that must accept the version of correction brought to the public past by way of interpretations of evidence in the archive is rhetorical. Professional standards establish what is admissible as evidence, but what is convincing is the most important determinant of policy. Watson makes the point, in a general discussion of forensic practice in the introduction to *Forensic Fictions*, that in the courtroom, too, inadmissible evidence may be struck from the record but still have a bearing on the case: "leading, inappropriate, or even scabrous comments may be stricken from the record, but no juror instructed to disregard such comments can ever do so with the total and ideal amnesia of the stenographer" (18-19). Anything spoken in a courtroom narrative, then, "can secure a rhetorical effect even in its 'official' graphological absence" (Watson 19). The district attorney's comment in *Sanctuary* that the gynecologist, "an authority on the most sacred affairs of that most sacred thing in life: womanhood," has said that the case "is no longer a matter for the hangman, but for a bonfire of gasoline," has just such a non-recordable, invisible effect. (376). (Horace objects, and the judge sustains the objection, striking the comment from the record but not from the minds of either jury or audience.)

Gidley argues that the entire structure of *Absalom* operates in this way with respect to the notion of historical truth: "it ultimately becomes well-nigh impossible for the reader of *Absalom* to distinguish *between* facts and assertions. Quentin and/or

Shreve, to advance the metaphor slightly, are like lawyers advocating points to a jury: a particular point may be disallowed, or cancelled by more concrete evidence, but each member of the jury has already heard it; it has registered and, to differing degrees for each member, becomes for the jury part of the case, part of the version of the case which each juror believes and upon which he will base his final verdict” (112). The action of historical expertise on the “public past” Bennett speaks of is similarly only partially moderated by professional historians’ rules of evidence, which take their concrete form primarily in peer review, and have a powerful effect there but cannot restrict every utterance of the historian.

The relationship between what, in legal practice, is public and what is bound by the procedures of a discipline and between the rules of evidence and rhetorical and narrative skill makes a compelling analogy to historical work. Here Bennett cites Mark Cousins, who likens history, which he calls a “definite technique of discovery,” to law (55). Cousins limits both “truth” and “past” in order to redeem them as usable concepts: the “truth is the most certain representation of the past,” and the “‘past’ is not the past in general, but only the past as it concerned the event and the questions of responsibility” (132). Law is the arena in which audiences are used to seeing and accepting provisional truth, truth good enough for conviction, good enough for justice, despite the notion of reasonable doubt. In historical work, truth established in an acceptable manner according to practices upheld by the training, authority, and professionalism of the discipline, becomes good enough for underwriting political action, which, like legal conviction, is a way of acting on the future. Bennett describes establishing provisional truth as

“determining that [certain propositions] meet conditions which justify our regarding them as true and so as capable of serving as a basis for both further thought and action” (55).

In the wake of post-structuralist explosions of notions of truth, ideas of provisional, procedural, and audience-bound truths have emerged and have been applied to historiography. Martin Jay, for instance, responds to some of Hayden White’s concerns about the ways in which the past can be adequately represented by bringing in the notion of communicative rationality as articulated by Jürgen Habermas. Jay stresses the “professional institutionalization” of truth in discursive communities that base judgment on *procedures* “that satisfy the conditions of rationality” (106). Faulkner’s literary vision of detection and lawyering anticipates some of the concerns on both sides of this problem, both the unknowable nature of the past and its management through procedural, institutionalized truths, suggesting that these questions belong, of course, not only to the last forty or fifty years. Faulkner’s work also gestures toward the risks of too-conclusive judgments about the past and on the other hand the despair of ever understanding it, represented on the one hand by Gavin Stevens and/or Chick Mallison in *Intruder in the Dust* and the *Knight’s Gambit* stories, and on the other by Ike McCaslin in *Go Down, Moses* and Quentin Compson in *Absalom, Absalom!* and *The Sound and the Fury*.

In the detective stories, Gavin’s major preoccupation is that the outcome be just, and his investigation is structured so as to make justice happen. (His notion of justice is, however, largely undermined by his diatribes in *Intruder*.) An orientation toward justice is about shaping the future in a particular way. It is unconcerned with the reality or the truth of the past except insofar as, first, it is true enough to indicate *what* is just; and

second, the story told about the past is persuasive enough, to the audience that matters and at the moment at which it matters, to shape the future *justly*. There is of course a circularity here, indeed a frightening instability of the relationship of evidence to justice. Someone must assume authority about what has happened in order to determine what is just. “Smoke,” “Hand Upon the Waters,” and *Intruder in the Dust* each have a scene in which Gavin (and also the sheriff, in *Intruder*) tries to force a certain future action by demonstrating to the appropriate audience (primarily the criminal, in each case) that he can produce a persuasive and damning account of the past. Although Gavin admits to uncertainty at the end of “Smoke,” (after his purpose has been successfully accomplished), answering Virginius Holland’s query about how he knew the smoke would be in the box by saying in the course of explaining his trick, “I didn’t know. I was a lot scarerder than Granby Dodge,” his actions in all of these stories suggest a high degree of confidence in his own interpretive work, though it is often partially incorrect (36). In “Hand Upon the Waters” he is confident enough in his plan, including his predictions of the Ballenbaughs’ response to being caught, that he goes out to the fish camp alone and without his gun. Yet he has completely misunderstood the nature of the brothers’ cooperation in the crime. In the *Knight’s Gambit* stories, the point is that his work is good enough for justice. In *Intruder*, on the other hand, part of the point is that his work has its flaws. Although he achieves the end result of freeing and saving Lucas and trapping Crawford Gowrie, not only would he never have accomplished either end alone (indeed he may never have recognized Lucas’s innocence), but he often teaches Chick by negative example. Says Atkinson, “Scholars are finding [in Gavin’s politically incorrect monologues] the foils for his nephew’s maturer vision of race and gender”

(606). It is these failures of Gavin as a lawyer, Atkinson suggests, that makes *Intruder in the Dust* such a good comment on the limitations of the “lawyerly mindset” (607).

Gavin Stevens sets himself up as the arbiter of justice, so that the investigation is done when he decides that it is, and then he encourages the criminal to reveal himself. His system of checks is persistent; he always requires the person to act to corroborate his guilt. It is tested against experience, needs to be verified by the person who knows it and could testify to it, were it not against the criminal’s self-interest. Because detective fiction’s time frame is more condensed than that of the historical novel, the initial event, the crime, is closer in time. Although as an event the crime is as irretrievably past as the life of Thomas Sutpen or Charles Bon, the detective’s explanatory narrative can be measured against the criminal’s reaction to it, and its ability to present a convincing account of the crime contributes directly to the success or failure of justice, which means that the detective story can engage in a unique way with the question of the extent to which the past can be known and the extent to which truthful representation matters. In Faulkner’s detective fiction in particular, this verification takes the form of the detective prompting self-revelatory action on the part of the criminal, indicating that the criminal has found the detective’s narrative convincing enough (or believes it would be convincing enough to a jury) that he must risk exposing himself to prevent it from being heard.

But it is verified as true enough rather than as absolutely true: Granby Dodge is not going to quibble about details. He is simply going to knock the box off the table if he believes Stevens’ story is close enough and persuasive enough to convict him. Tyler Ballenbaugh may not have killed Lonnie Grinnup himself, but Gavin nevertheless finds

him late at night at the fishing camp. Gavin still imparts the final meaning to the story, in his final telling. This pattern from the detective fiction is mirrored in *Light in August*, in which readers walk away with Gavin's final explanation even though he knows so little of the story. When Gavin appears in chapter 19 to tell the story of Joe Christmas's capture to a college friend, Christmas's story is suddenly much more prominently about race, which had been a subtler theme prior to that moment in the story. A significant portion of *Light in August* scholarship focuses on race, which perhaps attests to the power of Gavin's pronouncement. His authority is rhetorical, primarily, in that what he provides is a striking representation of the final events, but his authority is also situated in a professional context, lawyer to professor, both Harvard graduates, as though they have the distance that allows them to judge and to endow an account of the past with moral significance, to put the conclusion on the Joe Christmas story in a way that even his death was not able to do, his death alone having left things ambiguous.

Whereas Gavin's summary of the story at the end of *Light in August* is reductive in its tidiness and its attempt to close a case that the novel has left ambiguous, and his judgments in *Intruder* are ambiguous, in at least the short detective fiction, particularly "Smoke" and "Hand Upon the Waters," Gavin's concluding narratives are spun as real and productive closure. Stevens saves Virginius Holland's life in "Smoke" and sets the stage for a murderer to be brought to justice in "Hand Upon the Waters." His drive for closure, from the very first moments of his investigation, both leads to practical accomplishments and is dangerously at risk of creating false closure, as it does in *Light in August* and the "Go Down, Moses" chapter of the novel of the same name; in both, Gavin imposes an ending and a meaning on the events of other people's lives. Faulkner's

detective stories reveal the machinery and the moral stance of the genre, and likewise of the law. It would be presumptuous to suggest that Faulkner comes down on either side of this question of the value of practical professional activity, but by approaching history work in two distinct ways, his writing is able to gesture both at the unknowable nature of the past and at useful accounts of it, even when Gavin Stevens' notions of justice sit a little uneasily, sometimes, at the end of the story.

The function of the investigation in Faulkner's work is not to know everything. It is to know those things which matter and to know enough of the truth to have convinced yourself that you are aiming at the right kind of justice. In Faulkner's historical fiction, the function of the end is less concrete than in the Gavin Stevens stories. Quentin and Shreve aim to understand and explain the motivations of the Sutpen family members, but the effects of their final re-hashing of the material are less clear than in Faulkner's detective fiction. Whereas the story Gavin Stevens tells about the past achieves its end in every case, Quentin Compson's desire to know all, not only to answer the pertinent questions and make the pertinent judgments about what to do in the future, is destructive; he refuses to believe in the possibility of justice to the past. We could read this split the way so many people read Poe's, that Faulkner, like Poe, had moments in which he wanted to nail down ambiguity,⁴⁰ or likewise that finality sells better than open-endedness. Or we could read it as a morally undecidable presentation of law's encounter with the past, driven by particular questions and set on a particular result, and able to

⁴⁰ Howard Haycraft, for instance, in his still much-respected 1941 study of the origins of detective fiction, cites Joseph Wood Krutch's "brilliant oversimplification," that "'Poe invented the detective story that he might not go mad'" (9).

make the future happen in a particular way—as an alternative, though with its own weaknesses, to Quentin Compson’s impasse.

CHAPTER 2

HARDBOILED SLEUTHING AND HISTORIOGRAPHY IN ROBERT PENN WARREN'S *ALL THE KING'S MEN*

While many scholars have examined the role of history and even of historiographical theories in Robert Penn Warren's *All the King's Men* (1946), which Glen Johnson calls a novel "of and about history" (554), and while Henry Cuningham has presented a detailed comparison of Jack Burden's investigations in the novel to those of private investigators in the hardboiled detective fiction of Dashiell Hammett and Raymond Chandler,⁴¹ those two branches of criticism have not yet been drawn together in any substantial way.⁴² Cuningham's essay, which is exhaustive in its catalog of ways that Warren's novel resembles those of Hammett and Chandler, and to which my work in this chapter is greatly indebted, does not make a connection between the novel's reliance on detective fiction and its engagement with historiography. Yet I would argue that it is the method of Jack's detective work in the three major investigations he completes in the novel, and the attention afforded to him as both investigator and narrator of the investigations, that most sheds light on how historians identify and interpret evidence. (The three major investigations Jack pursues in the novel are the research for his Ph.D.

⁴¹ Norton Girault and Kenneth Bruffee have also written briefly about Jack as "the Boss's private detective" (Girault 33) and the novel being "a sort of detective story" (Bruffee 151).

⁴² Larry Gray does compare Jack Burden to Chandler's Philip Marlowe in an essay subtitled "Jack Burden and History in *All the King's Men*," arguing that the novel "breaks newest ground not as a political saga but as a genre-transcending work of noir fiction" and connecting this observation to his arguments about Jack Burden's failures as a historian (79). However, Gray's focus is on the "noir world of the existential present, where . . . history provides no help," rather than on historiography (87). Gray also focuses on the aesthetics of noir fiction rather than on the detective fiction content of Chandler's work.

dissertation on the life of Cass Mastern; the “Case of the Upright Judge,” in which he looks for “dirt” from Judge Irwin’s past in an attempt to bring him politically to heel for the Boss (Willie Stark, called Willie Talos in the 2001 “restored” version of *All the King’s Men* compiled by Noel Polk⁴³); and his investigation into who tipped off Adam Stanton that his sister Anne was having an affair with Stark and incited Adam to assassinate the Boss.) This chapter traces two ways in which *All the King’s Men* inhabits and yet revises the hardboiled detective tradition. In each, the novel uses the trappings of hardboiled detective fiction to examine a critical problem in historiography. My analysis considers the relationship between research method and the story that is produced by that research, specifically considering Jack as, first, a detective who is torn between several different types of commitments, and, second, a detective who also narrates his own investigation.

History—by which critics have meant a number of different things—has been a major focus of critical work on *All the King’s Men* from soon after its publication to the present. Early critics, for instance Hamilton Basso (1946) and Ladell Payne (1968), approached the idea of history in *All the King’s Men* quite directly, comparing the historical details of the novel to those of the life of Louisiana governor Huey Long, on whom *All the King’s Men*’s Willie Stark is modeled to a degree.⁴⁴ Richard Gray (1972)

⁴³ Except where otherwise noted, all citations from the novel are to the 1996 Second Harvest Edition of *All the King’s Men*, which follows the originally-published 1946 text.

⁴⁴ Though he sometimes “ma[de] the disclaimer” that “Willie Stark was not Huey Long,” Warren wrote in the preface to the 1953 Modern Library edition of *All the King’s Men* (also published in *The Sewanee Review*, cited here), he did “not mean to imply that there was no connection between Governor Stark and Senator Long. Certainly, it was the career of Long and the atmosphere of Louisiana that suggested the play that was to become the novel” (480). When Warren made these disclaimers, he wanted instead to stress that Stark was not merely “a projection of Long” but rather “one of the figures that stood in the shadows of imagination behind Willie Stark” (Warren, “A Note” 480).

instead examines “what made Warren change history [the congruence of the novel with the Huey Long story] the way he did and whether his motives . . . are an adequate justification for his changes” (299). Another set of critics in the first few decades after the book’s publication focused less on the Huey Long story and instead attempted to diagnose historian-narrator Jack Burden’s attitude toward the past. In *Robert Penn Warren and History: The Big Myth We Live* (1970), for instance, L. Hugh Moore argues that Jack’s conclusion that history is blind but man is not—that “man faced with overwhelmingly complex and blank forces must make human, moral sense of them”—is one of the linchpins of Warren’s philosophy of history, established in his poetry, non-fiction, and other novels as well as in *All the King’s Men* (16). For Warren, Moore argues, “history requires a myth to accommodate it to man,” to enable people to make moral sense of those blank forces (18).

Most recent critics working with the idea of history in the novel have continued to focus on Jack, placing a new emphasis on not just his theories of history but his actual work as a historian. Larry Gray (2012) has argued that Jack fails as a historian and “remains devoted to the inescapable present that has dominated all of his narrative” (79). Jack, Gray says, “hesitates to the end rather than attempt a full explanation of how Cousin Willie and the Boss could be the same person” (83). James Perkins (2012) has argued that Jack is a successful historian in the three major investigations described above but that he does fail as a historian when he accepts his mother’s claim that Judge Irwin is his father “at face value and does no research into the issue” (“Jack Burden”

95).⁴⁵ Perkins has argued elsewhere (2005) for the centrality of the Cass Mastern story (the account of Jack Burden’s dissertation research, for the Ph.D. in history, into the life of a 19th-century ancestor) to the work performed by *All the King’s Men* (*Cass Mastern Material*). Andrew Hakim (2012) attempts to locate Jack—and Warren—“within the historiographical discourse of the novel’s era: namely, the scholarly debates between traditional, conservative historians and their Progressive counterparts during the early decades of the twentieth century over the proper vision of American history” (121). Hakim’s essay, very importantly but in a different way from what I hope to accomplish in this chapter, focuses on the dimension of historiographical debates that affect the *content* of the histories produced, particularly the choice of many early and mid-20th-century historians to exclude women and minorities from their narratives in order to “valoriz[e] a limited” but unified “vision of the national story” (123).

Like these recent critics, I think here about Jack as a historian and about the historiographical concerns of the novel. As I said previously, I consider the effect of Jack’s commitments not only to Stark but to the Stantons, his mother, and Judge Irwin, as he conducts the “Case of the Upright Judge,” and likewise of the specter of his own involvement in Stark’s death, as well as his loyalty to both Stark and Adam Stanton, as he investigates the circumstances that led to the Boss’s murder. I also consider the implications for Warren’s historiographical vision that Jack narrates his own investigations and does so from a point over a year removed from the action. Like Jack’s multiple commitments, his position as a narrator removed from the history of the case(s)

⁴⁵ Perkins is famous for arguing on the grounds of the genetic principles behind eye and hair coloring that Jack’s mother is mistaken about Jack’s paternity and that the Scholarly Attorney (her husband), rather than Judge Irwin, is Jack’s father after all, as he believes for most of his life until his mother claims upon the Judge’s death that Jack has killed his father (“Human Genetics”).

he is narrating and his rejection of a conclusive detective fiction ending disrupts the normal operation of hardboiled detective fiction, and it sheds light on a second historiographical problem: the way the end point chosen for the story helps to determine the way it is told and the moral meaning it is given.

As I have argued in the Introduction, literary texts that represent investigation are able to disrupt “the notion of history writing as the best possible reconstruction of the past—in a seamless narrative by an omniscient, invisible narrator” that Susan Stanford Friedman claims “continues to underwrite many [history] projects” despite theorists’ arguments over the last forty years about the situatedness of the observer (201). That notion of history writing also continues to underwrite projects despite the emergence of the idea, which originated primarily with Hayden White, that the narrative forms in which past happenings are presented in history writing necessarily add content to those histories—in particular moral judgments. The historian, in academic history writing, is (despite all theorizing to the contrary) still generally expected to disappear.

As a literary text, on the other hand, *All the King’s Men* attends to the history of the investigator himself, probing what his memories allow him to perceive and what his commitments allow him to articulate in the course of his investigations, in precisely those ways which academic writing overwhelmingly does not. In addition, the stakes of investigation in the novel are high: in the world Jack Burden describes, knowledge is currency; what Jack discovers builds up the Boss’s career and diminishes the careers of his opponents, and the discoveries Jack makes are responsible for at least one death. Although detective fiction and historical investigation in the academy both produce fantastic spaces of investigation supposedly freed from constraints, investigation usually

has real effects. Judgments about the persuasiveness of interpretations have very real, sometimes life-changing, outcomes in legal battles, for instance. *All the King's Men*, I argue, both revises the conventions of the detective story and fictionalizes the historiographical endeavor, with the result that the stakes of the investigations and the commitments of the investigator determine the shape of the investigation, thus permitting a reconsideration of what counts as evidence, in an investigation into the past, and why.

Traditionally in detective fiction, particularly from Doyle through the Golden Age, the detective comes to the scene free to consider the problem without interference, as if it were a logic puzzle. The locked room, one could say, not only reduces the set of possible explanations for who could have committed a crime and how; it also locks out any concerns that might compete with the puzzle. Genre fiction detectives, particularly early ones, are emotionally aloof from the problem to be solved, not under any sort of legal or institutional timelines, not under any obligation to consider the impact of their findings on human lives, and not bound by any professional methodologies of investigation or standards of evidence. The archetypal detective story is not only outside the realm of the professional but indeed determined to outwit professionalism by means of an ingenuity freed from the ways that expertise conditions thought—Sherlock Holmes stories are an excellent example of this trend, for instance, although it also goes back to Poe's work and appears throughout more recent detective fiction.⁴⁶

Commitments, however, have been part of detective fiction from the beginning, though detectives in genre fiction typically try to minimize them. Dupin's investigation

⁴⁶ ““The Parisian police,”” Dupin says, ““are exceedingly able in their way. They are persevering, ingenious, cunning, and thoroughly versed in the knowledge which their duties seem chiefly to demand”” (Poe 166). The trouble, he says, is that often their measures are ““inapplicable to the case”” (Poe 166).

into the murders in the Rue Morgue is inspired in the first place by his fidelity to a man named Le Bon, who has been falsely imprisoned for the murders, and his desire to clear him from suspicion. (In “The Purloined Letter,” Poe’s third and most famous detective story, Dupin is similarly committed—he is a partisan of the “royal personage” who has been threatened with exposure [159, 176].) It is at least plausible that in “The Murders in the Rue Morgue” his desire to find someone who is decidedly *not* Le Bon responsible for the murders directs Dupin’s attention to the persistent foreignness of the voice described in the newspaper report and then to the likelihood that the sounds described are not even human, which in turn leads to his solution of the mystery. Dupin’s claim that his deductions from the reports of the voice are “the *sole* proper ones” and that “the suspicion arises *inevitably* from them as a single result” appears to be an exaggeration fueled by hope (138, emphasis original). Dupin repeatedly closes off avenues of investigation. Almost in one breath, he dismisses the chimneys as a possible means of escape for the murderer:

Let us turn to the chimneys. These, although of ordinary width for some eight or ten feet above the hearths, will not admit, throughout their extent, the body of a large cat. The impossibility of egress, by means already stated, being thus absolute, we are reduced to the windows. (139)

Dupin’s insistence in his end narrative on the evidential status of a spring-loaded, self-closing window and a broken nail head that appears to prevent it from opening is a rhetorical flourish meant to hasten the movement toward the end of the story and close off the infinite avenues of inquiry that cannot really be disproven.

When it comes to all other possible avenues of escape other than the windows through which he believes the orangutan entered and escaped, Dupin does almost exactly what he accuses the police of doing in their shortsightedness: “having once satisfied

themselves that no egress could have been made in this quarter,” Dupin says about the rear windows, the police “would naturally bestow here a very cursory examination” (142). His claim that his deductions “are the *sole* proper ones” is part of his argument for the innocence of Le Bon and the guilt of the orangutan (138). However, the way such commitments are framed in genre fiction from its beginnings through the Golden Age glosses over their relation to the way evidence is sought and interpreted.

The private investigator of hardboiled detective fiction,⁴⁷ on the other hand, is most often committed to the person who has hired him, and his investigation proceeds in the direction it does because of that commitment—Jack’s determination to discover the “truth” about the Judge is of course initially not a quest for truth in the idyllic sense of the whodunit (and also how-dunit) of a locked-room mystery, but instead a quest for politically-damning dirt that he and the Boss think will force the Judge to withdraw his support for the Boss’s rival MacMurfee (228). *All the King’s Men* complicates the idea of commitment further than most of Hammett’s or Chandler’s novels, however, because the political commitment Jack is paid for is by no means the totality of his fidelities. He is loyal to the Boss, the person who sends him seeking, but he also has prior, if conflicted, loyalties to several of the people from whom he initially seeks evidence: the Scholarly Attorney, who he thinks is his father; Anne Stanton, the woman he has loved

⁴⁷ A distinctly American tradition, hardboiled detective fiction did overlap somewhat with what was called the Golden Age (the 1920s and 1930s). It grew out of the dime detective story tradition of “action-hero detectives” but came into its own with the work of Dashiell Hammett, who published the first installment of his first major novel, *Red Harvest*, in the pulp magazine *Black Mask* in 1927 (Rzepka 181). Rzepka writes that in *Red Harvest* and the short stories that preceded it, the Continental Op “is meant to contrast specifically with the unthinking, trigger-happy vigilante figure” of one of the examples of action-hero detective fiction that preceded it (187-88). Hammett had written all of his most famous novels by 1934. Other contributors to the hardboiled tradition in *Black Mask* included Carroll John Daly, Raoul Whitfield, and Erle Stanley Gardner (Rzepka 184). Chandler wrote somewhat later; he published most of his work in the genre between 1939 and 1953.

for almost twenty years; and Adam Stanton, his childhood friend. All of those loyalties impinge on what he can ask, how he can ask it, and what he can hear in response.

The second section of this chapter, which looks at the status of Jack Burden as both investigator and narrator, also considers the novel's relationship to both Golden Age and hardboiled detective fiction. Whereas detective fiction from Poe through Doyle through most of the Golden Age relied upon an observer-narrator who was often a friend of the detective but very seldom the detective himself,⁴⁸ most hardboiled detective fiction and likewise Warren's novel are narrated in the first person by the investigator.⁴⁹ When the early or Golden Age detective does tell the story of his own investigation, it is in the type of end narrative that I have described in this dissertation's Introduction—enclosed in quotation marks, presented either immediately after the moment of the revelation of the criminal or *at* that moment, indeed often functioning to prompt the criminal to reveal himself. Jack narrates instead from a point of further remove, past the revelation of the last criminal in the novel, Tiny Duffy, who has incited Stark's murder, but unlike the other culpable parties has done it "cold," for reasons of gain (411). The moved-back vantage point affects Jack's description of his search for and interpretation of evidence because he has a more complete sense of the long-term stakes of what he describes himself finding. (While hardboiled detective fiction is usually narrated by the detective from the end of the story and does not have the dramatic, revelatory end narrative of so much early and Golden Age detective fiction, there is seldom any evidence of a

⁴⁸ As discussed in the previous chapter, Faulkner used the observer-narrator technique in most of the *Knight's Gambit* stories, having Chick Mallison narrate his uncle's investigations. His use of the technique becomes slightly more complicated in *Intruder in the Dust* when Chick steps in as detective for most of the story and in addition is no longer the narrator but instead the central consciousness of a story told in the third person.

⁴⁹ A notable exception is Hammett's *The Maltese Falcon* (1930), narrated in the third person.

significant remove from the events narrated; the detective's experiences in the interim do not intrude into the story.)

Jack attempts to describe what could have been almost a traditional detective fiction ending to his final investigation (the question of who “had killed Willie Stark as surely as though his own hand had held the revolver”), and the potential of the pure, contained feeling of the wrapped-up investigation and the caught criminal of early detective fiction is captured for a moment in his retelling: “And that left Duffy. Duffy had done it. And strangely, there was a great joy and relief in that knowledge. Duffy had done it, and that made everything clear and bright as in frosty sunshine” (411). But Jack sets aside that first potential ending to tell the story—ending it in the present—just over a year later, in the early months of 1939, at a remove from the revelation of the criminal and the pure, free feeling of discovery and of not being the culprit. In the meantime, he has rejected the idea of the poetic justice of indirectly killing Duffy by telling the Boss's gunman Sugar Boy what Duffy has done. Jack knows that there are many possible answers to the question of who has killed Willie “as surely as though his own hand had held the revolver,” and one of those answers is Jack Burden (411). As Cuningham argues, Jack's recognition of his own culpability in the deaths of his friends, his “vision of the universality of guilt,” which he reaches after setting aside his initial satisfaction in having identified Duffy as a scapegoat, “ends Jack's career as a detective” (42). I extend Cuningham's claims by arguing in the final section of this chapter that Jack then substitutes another conclusion to the narrative, one that is decidedly not out of detective fiction, one that is instead committed to not knowing. In telling his story the way he does, Jack demonstrates a commitment to a historiography of self-determination that is

based on philosophies, emotions, and choices rather than on knowledge. Recognizing that he chooses the end, and thus the moral meaning, of his own story, Jack nevertheless refuses to impose endings or interpretations on the stories of others: his mother, Cass Mastern, Willie Stark's wife Lucy, and even Stark himself.

Loyalty and “Technique”: Jack's Commitments and His Investigative Method

It is important to realize how similar Jack is to a hardboiled sleuth before considering the degree to which Warren's novel operates differently from those of Hammett and Chandler. Cuningham notes that Jack Burden “not only talks like a private eye, he acts like one too” and compares Jack to Ned Beaumont in Hammett's *The Glass Key*: “a special investigator who does the dirty work of a mayor” (35). Not only does Jack investigate Judge Irwin's past crimes and discover who set up Adam Stanton to kill Willie Stark, Cuningham reminds us, but in the first chapter, Stark also orders him to “find out something about Malaciah's boy and the killing” but “keep out of sight,” thus introducing the reader to the kind of work Jack does (qtd. in Cuningham 36). At the Boss's orders he also uncovers the link between Marvin Frey, the father of the woman who is purportedly carrying the Boss's son Tom's child, and MacMurfee, the Boss's political opponent. He later conducts a search for Tom Stark and then (though unsuccessfully) for Adam Stanton. Any of these maneuvers would be appropriate in a hardboiled detective novel.

Cunningham argues that “all of chapter 5, with its focus on the investigation of Judge Irwin, could have come straight from a private-eye novel” (38).⁵⁰ In this chapter Jack, who is telling his story from a vantage point set back from the events themselves, gives a sardonic (since he knows the consequences) and yet somehow still enthusiastic account of his “technique” as what he calls a “student of history,” but which in fact is much more like that of a detective, focused as it is on motivations for crime (193). Jack begins with no evidence at all that the Judge has “stepped over the line”—in fact, he doesn’t believe it himself; he has just been hired to proceed on the assumption that there is dirt in the Judge’s past (193). (““There may not be anything,”” Jack tells the Boss several times [192].) He begins his search by looking where what he calls his “technique” as a historian (really the fruit of his journalism experience) tells him that there *would* be evidence, if there were a crime in the Judge’s past. In this respect, Jack’s investigations are much like those of Gavin Stevens in Faulkner’s detective fiction. Jack’s eye, like Gavin’s, is on the end narrative that he would have to tell to the Boss and the Judge in order to convict—in this case to convict, or convince, the Judge that he had better switch his loyalties or else face exposure. (When, at the end of the successful search, the Judge tells Jack that his evidence wouldn’t “stick in a court,” Jack replies, ““But you don’t live in a court. You aren’t dead, and you live in the world and people think you are a certain kind of man. You aren’t the kind of man who could bear for them to think different, Judge” [346-47].) Convinced by what he sees in the envelope of evidence Jack hands him, as well as the way that Jack frames it, the Judge kills himself to avoid either his exposure or cooperating with the Boss. While from his position after the

⁵⁰ In the revised edition, chapter 5 from the 1946 version is instead the second half of chapter 4, combined with the Cass Mastern material into a single chapter.

end of the search, Jack proclaims that “There is always the clue, the canceled check, the smear of lipstick, the footprint in the canna bed, the condom on the park path, the twitch in the old wound, the baby shoes dipped in bronze, the taint in the blood stream,” it is not that logic that structures his search at the outset, but instead the logic of the question and the anticipation of the end (228).

Beginning without clues and with only a proposed end in mind, Jack starts his inquiry into the Judge’s past much like an armchair detective (though more like a hardboiled detective the chair he does his thinking in is in “a beer parlor in the city”) (193). He sits, drinks, and poses a question to himself: “For what reason, barring Original Sin, is a man most likely to step over the line?”, then answers it: “Ambition, love, fear, money” (193). Yet Jack has a level of intimacy with the material he is examining that is far beyond that of the Golden Age detective, who is almost always an outsider, and quite different from the usual commitment of the Hammett or Chandler detective, which is at least initially to his employer (even if sexual attraction or competing plotlines do sometimes complicate that commitment in hardboiled detective fiction). If Jack could be said to have any clue at all to pursue at the beginning of the investigation, it would be the “voice out of [his] childhood” whispering something that he cannot catch: “I had the vague sense, rising from a depth of time . . . of entering the room where the grown people were, of knowing that they had just that instant stopped talking” (193). He had been present himself as the Judge’s financial crisis, which he goes on to uncover, had occurred, and an echo of it is embedded in his childhood memories. When he looks for confirmation of his “vague sense,” he turns to his two most intimate friends, Anne and Adam. Adam, not knowing that the information is for the Boss, is able to

“dredge up” a memory from the appropriate era of an argument between Irwin and Governor Stanton about money (211). The Scholarly Attorney, Jack’s supposed father, confirms the report just by means of his body language, though he refuses to speak about it: “He seemed about to say something, his lips opening. Then they closed” (202).

Leaving the old man’s apartment, Jack says, “But I got one thing. I was sure that he had known something. Which meant that there was something to know” (203). Jack is able not only to prompt but also to recognize these leads, especially what the Scholarly Attorney gives away, because of his familiarity with the people connected to the case.

When Anne undermines Jack’s initial lead with a report from her Cousin Mathilde that the Judge fixed his money problem by marrying a rich wife, Jack decides to reject Cousin Mathilde’s testimony and continue the search by focusing more insistently on the Boss’s desired ending—that there nevertheless be something “hollow” in the story (216). At this point his search moves farther away from home and from his own past and becomes more singularly focused on the Boss’s needs. Jack outlines a general method and then applies it to his own search: “When you are looking for the lost will in the old mansion, you tap, inch by inch, along the beautiful mahogany wainscoting, or along the massive stonework of the cellarage, and listen for the hollow sound. Then upon hearing it, you seek the secret button or insert the crowbar” (215). He puts in the crowbar. This idea of a general method continues to guide this second phase of his search: even if there is testimony to the contrary, you tap for the hollow sound. Even if there is evidence that the “rich” woman did inherit money, you look in the docket book in the courthouse to see if she has been brought to judgment for money owed to creditors. You tap for the hollow sound or look in the docket book not because you have a reason to suspect, but because

you have been hired to suspect and hired to use your method. Jack refers repeatedly to what “us historical researchers” believe and do, but the novel’s previous section, Jack’s account of his doctoral research in a history department, belies that comparison (228). In his Cass Mastern research, which I will discuss in more detail at the end of this chapter, Jack does very little tapping. (The exception is when he discovers the names of Cass’s lover and her husband in an old newspaper.) He has since augmented his historian’s skills with those of the investigative journalist and private detective.

A major part of Jack’s method is posing questions and making arguments to himself about what he discovers in newspaper files, company records, and conversation with locals in Savannah, where the Judge’s wife had originally lived. When a piece of information doesn’t “prove anything,” Jack asks a question: “Now, I argued, if this amiable failing [not paying creditors] had been merely the result of temperament and not of necessity, why did it come on her [Irwin’s future wife] all at once?” (217), or “What had [the Judge] been doing in 1914 to get money?” (219). He looks for possible alternate sources of income since he knows Irwin would not have been able to pay off his mortgage with either his Attorney General’s salary or the income from his plantation, and then, locating a record of the Judge’s sale of five hundred shares of stock, tries to put together into a single story any possible scandal and the acquisition of that stock. Jack’s clinching piece of evidence against the Judge, the “it” that he acquires “after all the months”—“So I had it after all the months,” he says (228)—is a letter in which former American Electric Power counsel Mortimer Littlepaugh denounces the Judge for having “let up on the suit against the Southern Belle Fuel people” as attorney general and then being made “vice-president for taking a bribe” (227). Broke and humiliated, Littlepaugh

jumps to his death, and the letter condemning the Judge is the suicide note he addressed to his sister.

According to Jack's own account, he gets that letter by a stroke of luck, having reached the stage in his problem "where there was nothing to do but pray"—at which point Littlepaugh's name, which he has previously seen in a newspaper account of a coroner's report ruling his death an accident, comes to him "just as I fell asleep one night" (221). But what Jack suggests is intuition has almost certainly been enabled by the fact that he has been on the lookout for any of the elements of scandal—deaths that would require autopsies because they may have been suicides, for instance—in any of the corporations with which the Judge had been associated at the time of his financial crisis. (He first sees Littlepaugh's name in a news item in which his death is ruled an accident.) Even if he does not identify the report of Littlepaugh's death as evidence the first time he sees it, Jack has read it as belonging to the category of potential evidence—something that might show the Judge to be involved in a scandal. The fact that he has mentally filed it as potential evidence, as something that could produce the desired outcome, allows him to hear it drifting around in his head later.

In the sections of his investigation narrative in which he is far from home and interviewing strangers, Jack, by shutting out competing claims for his loyalty, is able to locate and see how to use the needed evidence on the basis of his professional commitment and what has become, during his years working for the Boss, a professional method. But with the close of the chapter and its hollow concluding boast—"And all times are one time, and all those dead in the past never lived before our definition gives them life, and out of the shadow of the past their eyes implore us. That is what all of us

historical researchers believe. And we love truth”—his commitments again become more complicated (228). He delays giving the information to the Boss until the Boss has basically demanded it, and he shows Littlepaugh’s suicide note to the Judge, at Anne’s request, before giving it to the Boss⁵¹ (which he never does because the Judge commits suicide first). The structure of chapter 5 (the increasing emphasis on professionalization and technique, after Jack has started out by having conversations with his friends, the subsequent physical removal from his home state to do research in professional places like newspaper archives and stock record rooms, the encounter with a fortune teller, which as Cuningham points out “has been a part of the hardboiled tradition from the beginning”— part of the realm of the private, professional investigator—and then the complete closure of the investigation and the chapter with the discovery of the clinching piece of evidence, followed by a new chapter that recounts a different part of the Governor’s story) suggests Jack as narrator is supremely aware of the artificiality of his attempt to limit his interest in the Judge’s affairs to the perspective of only one of the people to whom he is loyal (40).

Knowledge, Narration, and the Ending(s) of *All the King’s Men*

In his preface to a volume of essays on *All the King’s Men*, Michael Meyer quotes Jack Burden saying, “the end of man is knowledge . . . the end of man is to know,” and goes on to ask (following Maurice Beebe and Leslie Field’s preface in *Critical Handbook to All the King’s Men*, he says), “Does [the phrase] suggest a human goal or end, or does

⁵¹ “Boss,” Jack says, “I’m going to give Irwin a break. If he can prove to me it isn’t true, I won’t spill it . . . I promised two people I would do it” (337). Asked if the information “will stick,” Jack replies, “I’m afraid it will” (337). Willie repeats Jack’s “afraid,” emphasizing it.

it intimate that when he attains knowledge or discovers the ultimate truth, man reaches his end, his destruction as the Adam/Eve myth suggests”? (ix). The idea of the end looms large in Warren’s novel, especially its relationship to knowledge.

There are several flirtations with detective fiction endings in *All the King’s Men*, all of which Jack ultimately rejects. The first is the mild exultation Jack experiences when he connects Mortimer Littlepaugh’s suicide to Judge Irwin’s bribe taking, near the end of his search for evidence against the Judge—“That was it,” he says, after the newspaper page with the coroner’s report on Littlepaugh’s death “waver[s] up slowly, like a chunk of waterlogged wood stirred loose from the depth,” in his mind (221). The search, extended over several months, is close to complete, and Jack’s pleasure in finding the connection hints that the end of the case and the end of the story is approaching. As noted previously, however, Jack presents the end of the “Case of the Upright Judge” as broken into two parts: his realization of what happened and securing of the letter from Littlepaugh’s sister, and then, much delayed, his presentation of the evidence to the Judge. The trouble that registers in Jack’s narrative—that causes the delay, that is behind the sardonic tone of the last paragraphs of chapter 5, in which Jack asserts that “There is always the clue” and that “all of us historical researchers . . . love truth”—is that, removed from the generic frame of detective fiction, knowledge of what has happened does not automatically imply the end of the story (228). Jack, connected not only to the man he is working for but to the man he is investigating and to a community that values that man, cannot just exult, end with the knowledge he has achieved of what happened so many years back (and of what is indeed the Judge’s one-time villainy, if only in

desperation), and have the audience presume that he is going to nail the Judge and that there will be a happy, tidy ending.

It is important to note that while hardboiled detective fiction concludes much more pessimistically than Golden Age puzzle stories that expunge the criminal and show a society returned to its happy order, hardboiled detective fiction does end with the facts of the case established.⁵² Those facts just have a different effect—to show how wide, rather than how contained, the circle of guilt and corruption is. In this sense, chapter 5 does end like hardboiled detective fiction: the Judge is guilty of taking a bribe and hurting another man's career to the extent that the other man kills himself, and the supposedly saintly Governor Stanton is guilty of covering up the Judge's offense and refusing to help Littlepaugh. The implication is that the whole of the state government, even before Stark's time, has been involved in bribes and cover-ups. The end of chapter 5 ("The Case of the Upright Judge") or even the scene in chapter 8 in which Jack presents his evidence and the Judge kills himself, is significantly not the end of the story Jack tells in the novel.

From the beginning of his telling of the story of the Case of the Upright Judge, Jack has presented the story of his investigation as connected to the question of why someone would want to know what happened in the past in the first place, why someone would want, in Jack's phrase, "to dig up the dead cat, to excavate the maggot from the cheese, to locate the canker in the rose, to find the deceased fly among the raisins in the

⁵² Rzepka points out that "At the end of *The Maltese Falcon* we get a complete analeptic account of events, just as we do at the end of a story by [Agatha] Christie or [Dorothy] Sayers. Recited at length by Spade to Brigid O'Shaughnessy, this recapitulation sets out the complete array of the novel, including both what has transpired in the course of the narrative and what has led up to the opening scene . . . In fact, no Hammett story ends with uncertainty regarding the material facts of the case" (186-87).

rice pudding” (192). And the reason to seek this knowledge is not the reason so often implied in genre fiction—that, as W. H. Auden says, “society has to take the place of the victim and on his behalf demand atonement or grant forgiveness” (17). Jack shows himself, in one of his periods of soul-searching before he finally chooses an end point for the story, flirting for a moment with telling himself a story where his discovery makes things right: “I . . . thought how by killing my father I had saved my mother’s soul. Then I thought how maybe I had saved my father’s soul, too. Both of them had found out what they needed to know to be saved” (429). The fact that we know why the evidence has been wanted, have known all along what it would mean if it were found, means that the story is not over when the evidence has been found and determined by Jack to clinch the case. When Jack returns to the city after the Judge’s death, he says, he “felt that a story was over, that what had been begun a long time back had been played out, that the lemon had been squeezed dry. But if anything is certain it is that no story is ever over, for the story which we think is over is only a chapter in a story which will not be over” (355). The fact that we know the evidence is wanted for reasons much more complicated than an idea of atonement or justice keeps Jack’s narrative from behaving like genre fiction and means that the story is not over when the evidence has been found and interpreted.

The second moment in *All the King’s Men* that is akin to the big moment of clarity at the end of a detective novel, and which I have mentioned already, occurs when Jack concludes that it is Tiny Duffy who is ultimately responsible for the Boss’s murder (along with Sadie, whom Jack has already forgiven). “Duffy had done it, and that made everything clear and bright as in frosty sunshine,” Jack says, and goes on to say: “There, over yonder, was Tiny Duffy with his diamond ring, and over here was Jack Burden. I

felt free and clean, as when you suddenly see that, after being paralyzed by ignorance or indecision, you can act” (411). Later Jack says, “When I found out about Duffy’s killing the Boss and Adam I had felt clean and pure, and when I kicked Duffy around I felt like a million because I thought it let me out. Duffy was the villain and I was the avenging hero” (417). But then “all at once something happened and the yellow taste was in the back of my mouth” (417). Jack attempts to establish his own innocence by means of knowledge of Tiny’s guilt. As critics of detective fiction have mentioned, this doubling of criminal and detective and their eventual opposition is central to the ending of detective fiction.⁵³ Jack, however, goes on to realize “that I had tried to make Duffy into a scapegoat for me and to set myself off from Duffy” and directly refuses the early and Golden Age detective fiction ending (417).

He then tries on another hardboiled detective fiction ending: “It was as though I were caught in a more monstrous conspiracy whose meaning I could not fathom,” he says (417). In this phase he sees himself as guilty, Anne as guilty, guilt and corruption as completely pervasive. Rzepka explains that hardboiled detective fiction portrayed “an America in which no one could be trusted . . . and where society itself, especially in the big bad city, seemed to be so thoroughly steeped in graft and self-interest that it was hardly worth rescuing” (186). “That was the way it was for quite a while,” Jack says about this phase (417). But ultimately he refuses the ending of this alternative form of detective fiction as well. Relating the story from a vantage point that is set back more than a year from his attempt to name Duffy as the guilty party and remove blame from himself, Anne, and Sadie, for whom he feels sorry because she has done what she has

⁵³ The detective, Lehman says, “may be seen as the new hero, who arrives to replace the fallen hero (the victim) and to confront his double (the culprit)” (xviii).

done “hot,” Jack imposes yet another ending on the story, and his imposition of this new ending broadens the consequences of the case (411). When the story ends with Jack looking back on what has happened, living in Judge Irwin’s house, writing a book on Cass Mastern, married to Anne and taking care of the dying Scholarly Attorney, it is no longer detective fiction. Although Jack makes comments about his increased knowledge—that he now understands that Adam Stanton and Willie Stark were doomed to kill each other, “to yearn toward and try to become the other, because each was incomplete with the terrible division of their age,” for example—he has in a number of ways refused the idea that knowledge can be certain and that judgments about how to proceed in the present should be based in knowledge of what has happened in the past (436).

When Jack refuses the detective fiction ending and imposes another, he exposes the artificiality of what imposing any given ending does to what is seen as evidence. As much as James Perkins’ conclusions about Jack’s paternity⁵⁴ might be framed a bit too certainly and might rely a bit much on pinning down Warren’s intentions and what Perkins calls the “dramatic irony” of the close reader supposedly knowing more than Jack does at the end of the novel, Perkins does make an important point: why does Jack, who is relentless in pursuit of the truth throughout the rest of the novel, who “inserts the crowbar” even when Cousin Mathilde has claimed the Judge married a rich wife and

⁵⁴ See all three cited Perkins sources, all of which include Perkins’s arguments, outlined previously, that a mother who has been married to one man for only about a year and is having sex with another man probably does not “know” who the father of her child is; her opinions are likely influenced by who she would like the father of the child to be, especially when they contradict basic genetic principles. Perkins claims that Jack’s dark hair and eyes are genetically very unlikely to have come from his mother’s blond hair and blue eyes and the Judge’s red hair and yellow eyes, and thus that Jack’s father is really the (dark-haired) Scholarly Attorney, and that Jack fails as a historian by refusing to investigate this particular mystery. Regardless of whether it matters that Warren’s characters’ genetics do or do not behave according to scientific principles, Perkins’ point about Jack’s refusal to question his mother’s statement is strong.

saved himself in a legal way from his financial crisis, not stick in the crowbar when his mother asserts that Judge Irwin is his father? (“Human Genetics” 74; Warren, *All the King’s Men* 215). The closest Jack comes to questioning the truth of what his mother has said is to consider whether he “feels bad” about having “swapped the good, weak father for the evil, strong one” and then to conclude:

So I quit trying to decide. There was no use trying to probe my feelings about them, for I had lost both of them. Most people lose one father, but I was peculiarly situated, I had lost two at the same instant. I had dug up the truth and the truth always kills the father, the good and weak one or the bad and strong one, and you are left alone with yourself and the truth, and can never ask Dad, *who didn’t know anyway* and who is deader than a mackerel. (354, emphasis added)

This paragraph begs the question of *what* Dad “didn’t know anyway”—whether Jack feels bad about swapping fathers? The truth about the bribe Judge Irwin took? Irwin certainly knows that. Neither reading makes sense. I argue that the phrase raises the possibility that Jack might indeed think that neither his mother nor the two candidates for father could have known who his father was. But Jack lets the question sit unanswered and goes back to the city. While he shows what is possibly some uncertainty about who his father is, he decidedly does not want to know, even if he thinks that he could ever know; the most recent truth that he has dug up has been painful to him, to the Judge, and to his mother. Instead he goes into his future committed to not knowing. (Even when he tracks down Sadie and Tiny as the inciters of Adam Stanton, he quickly dismisses the consequences of his knowing and the idea that it should guide his actions in the present or cause him to try to get revenge for the Boss. He acknowledges the idea of universal guilt instead and turns down the opportunity to tell Sugar Boy what Tiny did, knowing that the Boss’s gunman would shoot Tiny.) From this position of unknowing, Jack can take care

of one dying father while living on the inheritance of the other father. He can write about the ancestor of the one while living in the house of the other. He can talk about “each of us” being “the son of a million fathers” (436). He can make his choices on the basis of his feelings and his philosophies, rather than on what he has discovered. Jack makes a definite commitment to not knowing, to being at the end of the story rather than continuing his investigations.

When Jack tries at the end of his narrative to sum up what he calls “my story, too . . . the story of a man who lived in the world and to him the world looked one way for a long time and then it looked another and very different way,” he walks his listener through some of the stages of his life: belief in the “Great Twitch,” whereby no one has “any responsibility for anything” (435), then the application of that belief to himself “because it meant that he could not be called guilty of anything, not even of having squandered happiness or of having killed his father, or of having delivered his friends into each other’s hands and death” (436). He then goes on to define himself twice with respect to his no longer believing in the Great Twitch. First: “As a student of history, Jack Burden could see that Adam Stanton, whom he came to call the man of idea, and Willie Stark, whom he came to call the man of fact, were doomed to destroy each other” (436). But then: “So now I, Jack Burden, live in my father’s house” (436). He opposes Jack Burden, student of history, to “I, Jack Burden,” in the present, who lives in his father’s house and is married to Anne Stanton. He may be writing his book on the life of Cass Mastern, but if his contemporaneous presentation of that material in chapter 4 is any indication, Jack Burden the historian may in this new book—he says that he is “writ[ing]” it, not that he is finishing it—do two things that historians generally do not

do: first, establish his own relationship to the material, and second, quote large, uninterrupted sections of Cass's journals (438).

The novel ties the story of Jack's search for evidence against Judge Irwin directly into the account that precedes it and that in Warren's typescripts (and in the revised edition, the most widely available edition today) was part of the same chapter: the account of Jack's study of the life of Cass Mastern. Both are stories of historical research (though the investigation of Judge Irwin has more direct implications in the present), and they seem clearly meant to be read in light of one another, jointed together as they are by the following sentences: "That was the end of my first journey into the enchantments of the past, my first job of historical research. It was, as I have indicated, not a success. But the second job was a sensational success. It was the 'Case of the Upright Judge' and I had every reason to congratulate myself on a job well done. It was a perfect research job, marred in its technical perfection by only one thing: it meant something" (191). Yet the two investigations are largely unlike. Whereas in his pursuit of the Judge's past Jack comes to the archive with questions, in his work on Cass Mastern, at least as presented from his vantage point in 1939, he appears to try to allow Cass's journals, rather than his own questions and methods, to structure the narrative.

I would like to suggest that Jack's heavy reliance on directly-quoted journal entries and letters in the Cass Mastern chapter is a function of his retrospect as a narrator and hints at his method in the book he is writing at the end of the novel. Jack's professor's recommendation during his graduate school days is that he not only "edit the journal and letters of Cass Mastern" but also that he "write a biographical essay, a social study based on those and other materials" (163). Such a study would likely have

included quotations from the journals, but not quotations of several pages at a time. It would instead have been Jack's assembly of the material into what he and his professor considered a coherent narrative that could be construed as having a larger, "social" meaning (163). The version of the Cass Mastern material that Jack presents as a chapter of his own story, on the other hand, makes very few gestures toward larger social meanings; it seems to hesitate to apply meanings even to Cass's choices themselves. There is relatively little investigation and relatively little interpretation. The major research work that Jack carries out, as he presents it, is to read Cass's writings—which appear themselves to attempt to narrativize Cass's life, and which constitute not just a thread leading through Jack's investigation but instead such a burden of potential evidence as to make it difficult for Jack to tell the story from any perspective but Cass's, even when he claims not to be able to understand Cass—and then to discover the names of the players in Cass's tale. Annabelle is referred to as "she" and "her" in the source materials, but Jack discovers "the name by going back to the files of the Lexington newspapers for the middle 1850's to locate the story of a death" (164). This is the only significant investigative maneuver he describes, however. From his vantage point years later, he tells very little of the story of himself naming and categorizing Cass's world, as opposed to his insistent focus on method in "The Case of the Upright Judge," and instead to at least a moderate degree allows Cass to present the elements that were important to Cass. This choice represents a more severe demurral than the tendency of the historian to try to disappear from his account of the past. Instead, Jack puts himself as historian and his personal relationship to the material front and center by framing Cass's story within a story about his own experience as a student researcher, and then, after an introduction to

Cass's story that Jack does tell in his own words, he quotes increasingly longer sections of source material. He refuses historical interpretation.

There is one section of the Cass Mastern narrative where Jack behaves more like a historian and quotes little other than dialogue, composing the rest of the narrative himself: the account of Cass's search for the enslaved woman Phebe, whom Annabelle has sold to a trader. As Hakim has pointed out, Jack shows, in this section, a "troubling view of women, race, and U.S. history" because of his "restrictive . . . historical outlook" (132). Hakim diagnoses Jack as "afraid, maybe, of how Cass's tale illuminates Jack's own ignoring and marginalizing of African-Americans, and draws attention to the ways Jack depicts women, too, past and present, as 'Other'" (133). In the parts of the story of Cass's search for Phebe in which Jack does reproduce the journal entries and letters rather than paraphrasing them, however, he manages to allow some of that pain—or at the very least Cass's worries about having caused that pain—to register. We as readers are most aware of the trauma Phebe endures not when Jack is summarizing her story but when the quotations from Cass's journals—which are fewer and more isolated, in the Phebe section of the narrative, than in the rest—appear. Jack's presentation of the story in chapter 4, with its focus on how he could not know who Cass Mastern was, is already reductive when he tries to tell it rather than to quote it; indeed, one can only assume that Cass, too, despite his attempts to redeem Phebe, reduces her story when he tries to interpret it and tell it in his journals and letters. It is therefore troubling when Jack at the end of the novel says that he is writing "the life of Cass Mastern, whom once I could not understand but whom, perhaps, I now may come to understand" (438). If he does decide that he understands Cass, will he also move further toward putting his own narrative arc

on the portions of the story that focus more on Cass himself, put his technique to work on it, insert the crowbar? Or by “understand,” does he mean something other than the idea of acquiring knowledge about a past life and trying to organize it in a narrative?

Hayden White has argued that endings are possible only in light of a notion of “moral meaning” (*Content* 21). A concluding point for a story is imaginable because it is a point of triumph or failure. Jack’s failure to conclude Cass’s story in chapter 4—he ends abruptly with a short quotation from Cass’s final, dictated letter and then returns to his own story—is perhaps the most honest conclusion he can give it. For his own story, however, he experiences a need for a conclusion in order to be able to assign it a meaning and move forward. It is perhaps for this reason that he refuses to put in the crowbar on the question of his paternity and decides to let go the question of who is most guilty of Adam’s and the Boss’s deaths. Whereas, immediately before handing the envelope of evidence to the Judge, Jack thinks of how he could destroy “the stuff from Miss Littlepaugh” but then instead thinks, “But I had to know. Even as the thought of going away without knowing came through my head, I knew that I had to know the truth,” he decides after all the violence to refuse being a detective and trying to know (343). Jack acknowledges universal guilt, but then, unlike in hardboiled detective fiction, he does not let this acknowledgement, paired with and enabled by a full account of the events of the crimes, become the ending of the narrative. Instead, having recognized his guilt and Anne’s, he chooses to stop detecting, to stop acting as a historian, and to stop trying to know. His retrospective account of his research on Cass Mastern suggests that, as opposed to in his research during graduate school, he no longer wants to solve the mystery of Cass Mastern; instead he wants to imagine that Cass is going to tell about

himself. Jack is refusing historical interpretation, and his choice represents—certainly for a historian or a detective—a radical acceptance of other people’s interpretations.

Toward the end of the story he is telling, Jack goes on to accept, serially, a great number of other people’s interpretations of events. He accepts his mother’s claim that Irwin is his father. Then, effectively concurring with Sugar Boy’s assessment that Sugar Boy has done something great with his life by serving as the Boss’s driver and gunman, Jack agrees with him that the Boss ““was a great talker,”” after Sugar Boy has declared his admiration for the Boss—““When a m-m-made a speech and ev-ev-everybody y-y-yelled, it looked l-l-like something was gonna b-b-burst instead y-y-you”” (421). Jack then visits the Boss’s wife Lucy Stark and accepts her decision to claim Sibyl Frey’s baby as her son Tom’s and adopt him, in spite of a lack of evidence that Tom is the baby’s father. Lucy bases her conclusion on the fact that, when she goes to see the baby wanting him to look like Tom, he does: ‘I know it’s Tom’s,’ she declared fiercely to me, ‘it’s got to be Tom’s, it looks like him’” (425). Lucy goes on to tell Jack that her husband ““was a great man,”” and Jack approves of her decision to choose a conclusion she can live with: “Yes, Lucy, you have to believe that. You have to believe that to live . . . And I would not have you believe otherwise” (427). He then sees his mother off on a train as she leaves her husband because she has come to the conclusion that ““it was always Monty [Judge Irwin]”” that she loved; ““I knew it when he was dead,”” even though her actions when they were both alive suggest that her final interpretation is perhaps a bit too strong (429). Jack lets his mother believe, too, that he had not found out anything damning about the Judge’s past. He accepts Cass Mastern’s beliefs about having redeemed himself by marching in the Civil War and not firing at the enemy,

allowing his story in chapter 4 to end, as I said previously, with an excerpt from Cass's last letter and then four simple sentences about Cass's death, rather than with any significant interpretations put onto the final letter by Jack. He even forgoes putting a conclusion on Willie Stark's story, allowing it to end relatively unconcluded, with an uninterpreted quotation of some of the Boss's final words ("It might have been all different, Jack. You got to believe that" [436].)

All of these acceptances constitute, perhaps, Jack's reparation for having tried to rewrite Adam Stanton's interpretation of his family's past and his belief in the possibility of good in the world. For his own story, however—"This has been the story of Willie Stark, but it is my story, too," he says—the end Jack chooses and his decision to make his commitments (to Anne and to the Scholarly Attorney) in the realm of feelings, rather than knowledge and investigation, provide the kind of freeze frame necessary in order to make the past a past and make it mean something, to make it accessible to the moral decisions that need to be made in the present (435). The "end" of knowledge, the assigning of moral meanings, whether that end is the revelation of who has done wrong and the promise of justice in detective fiction or the position Jack chooses from which he can conclude, for instance, that the Boss "was a great man," appears, by the end of *All the King's Men*, as arbitrary as it is necessary (427). To make his story mean something, Jack needs to put a period on it so he is not still in the middle of it. Jack's choice to put an ending on one part of his story enables, first of all, his narration of the story of the previous part of his life, and, second, his making a new start. But he rejects all possible detective fiction endings and likewise the certainty of a conclusion for Cass's story. He decides to base his decisions in the present on his feelings, his philosophies, and his

present needs, rather than on what he has discovered and thinks he can know about the past. Jack is advocating a historiography of self-determination as opposed to the pretension to objective, detective-like presentations of past events that dominated the historiography of his time.

CHAPTER 3

GHOSTS IN THE LOCKED ROOM: SPIRITUAL FORMS OF EVIDENCE AND THE EMERGENCE OF THE UNDISCIPLINED ACADEMIC IN LOUIS OWENS'S MYSTERY NOVELS

James Kincaid, who reviewed Louis Owens's second novel, *The Sharpest Sight* (1992), for the *New York Times*, called himself "bamboozled" by what in the first fifty pages had seemed to be "an intriguing but rather easily handled whodunit" but became more: though the mystery story persists to the end of the novel, Kincaid says, it becomes entwined with "[a]n artfully interfolded story of how knowledge is reached, constructed, approximated, or just plain faked." Its major question is how "we arrive at what we are finally willing to take as 'knowing'" (Kincaid). *The Sharpest Sight*, as well as Owens's next novel, *Bone Game* (1994), makes heavy use of elements from the detective fiction genre. However, like *All the King's Men*, though for different reasons, it goes on to refuse the ending of genre fiction. It overturns the set of expectations in detective fiction which suggest that complete knowledge is possible and that knowledge leads to justice.

A brief introduction to each of these novels will facilitate the more detailed explanation of my argument in this chapter that follows. Prior to the beginning of *The Sharpest Sight*, Attis McCurtain, newly back from Vietnam, has killed his girlfriend during a flashback and is taken to a California mental hospital. One rainy night, he escapes and disappears. Attis's best friend Mundo Morales, now a police deputy, sees his body spinning beneath a bridge over the river that runs alongside the town and the mental hospital. Attis's father, Hoey, and his Choctaw great-uncle Luther, who lives back in

Mississippi where Attis grew up, dream that he has been murdered. His younger brother Cole receives word around the time of his brother's death that he has been drafted to fight in Vietnam. At his father's advice, he goes to Mississippi to hide with his great-uncle Luther and learns there that he must find his brother's bones and return them to Mississippi. The search in *The Sharpest Sight* is ultimately less for the solution to what happened to Attis than for his bones and peace for him, and the information Mundo and Cole piece together as they search comes largely from rumor and false testimony. The most reliable information, the evidence that keeps the search going despite cease and desist orders from Mundo's chief of police and the FBI (who would rather Attis stay missing and the truth about him stay hidden), comes from ghosts and dreams.

Bone Game, Owens's next book (1994), continues Cole and his family's story twenty years later, when he has become (much like Owens) an English professor, specializing in Modernism and Native American literature. *Bone Game*, also a sort of murder mystery, adds scholarly knowledge as yet another area in which knowledge, in Kincaid's words, is achieved, constructed, and faked. The "mixedblood" Choctaw-Cherokee-Irish professor McCurtain teams up with the cross-dressing, card-carrying Navajo anthropology professor Alex Yazzie to try to investigate a series of dreams Cole has had about a painted Native gambler, an Ohlone man who had lived trapped in the Santa Cruz mission in the early nineteenth century under the supervision of a cruel Spanish priest, and later about a present-day series of murders on and around the Santa Cruz campus (46-47). Chris LaLonde argues that the juxtapositions of nineteenth and twentieth-century events "put us in the same position as Cole McCurtain . . . as readers and protagonist try to see and understand the connections between past and present,

between the Ohlone and other Native peoples, and between an individual's story and a story of the People" (101).

This chapter will consider the tension, in these two Owens novels, between institutional means of evaluating evidence (legal, in *The Sharpest Sight*, and academic, in *Bone Game*) and the value the investigators place on Indigenous epistemologies, in particular the consideration of dream knowledge and spiritual and supernatural events as evidence. *The Sharpest Sight* and *Bone Game*'s final positions on the reconcilability of institutional and Indigenous forms of evidence take shape in two related areas: the generic and the epistemological. While the novels' epistemological concerns are certainly connected to their use of detective fiction forms, *Bone Game* also goes on to consider the tension between Indigenous and specifically academic epistemologies in ways that exceed the novel's play with the genre.

With respect to detective fiction, both novels end up de-emphasizing solving in favor of a broader notion of learning and justice in favor of empathy. They cease to be detective fiction by the end. The solving of the crimes is multiple, leads to a deeper understanding of the causes of evil in the world, and must continue even after the circumstances of the murders have been reconstructed. The reconstruction of the crimes not only does not lead to justice; it does not lead squarely to a single culprit. A young woman named Diana in *The Sharpest Sight* is probably Attis's murderer, but the novel is never completely clear about whether she is and if so whether she acted alone. Even if she is the murderer, the novel locates her guilt not in her, individually, but in the cycles of hurt and violence that drove her to kill Attis. In *Bone Game*, there are two separate murderers, each of whom is fueled in a different way by colonial legacies of violence that

remain tied to the land the university is built on and that are to some degree perpetuated by the intellectual work of the university. The killing of these two murderers (which is done in self-defense) does stop the crimes, but it does not resolve the painted gambler's restlessness. Not even when Cole says his name, as the gambler has wanted all the time, is the ranging nature of his hurt solved or ended. At the end of the novel, the gambler's "shadow falls across the town and bay, undulating with the slow waves" (243). "*Eran muy crueles*," the novel concludes, as though the gambler, whose Catholic name is Venancio, is once again repeating the words about the cruelty of the Spanish priests that his son spoke to an interviewer years after his death, and which have appeared in Cole's dreams (243). Cole's "solution" to the gambler mystery is instead a recognition of who the gambler is, what he endured, and why he participated in the Spanish priest's murder. Cole's solution leads to empathy rather than justice, the end result of the hyper-rational Western genre of detective fiction, and one which is in genre fiction mapped unproblematically onto the reconstruction of the crime and the identification of the criminal, as though perfected knowledge always produces a just ending. In place of detective fiction endings, Owens's novels open up into wider notions of experience rather than collapsing down into a solution.

In addition to its detective fiction content, *Bone Game* is also about being located in the university and about two Native academics, Cole, a professor of literature, and Alex, an anthropologist, and it is an ideal text for thinking about the ways of knowing and of gathering evidence and reaching conclusions that belong to academic work, too. *Bone Game* (*The Sharpest Sight* does not weigh in on this issue) does not ultimately argue for forcing the university to contend with Indigenous ways of knowing. It does, however,

force *Cole*, the initially struggling and displaced “mixedblood” professor, to contend with and reconcile multiple ways of knowing and recognize that Indigenous ways of knowing offer him a powerful supplement to the limitations and blindnesses of professional, academic ways of knowing. In concert with Owens’s later critical arguments in *Mixedblood Messages: Literature, Film, Family, Place* (1998), Cole “does not have the luxury of simply opting out” of the dominant, Western discourse; he is already long since implicated in it (52). Neither, however, can he be at home in it; to do so would impoverish his way of understanding the world and reduce his contribution to academic knowledge. The novel shows Cole and Alex, in their healthiest moments, *making use of* academic forms of evidence, which throughout the novel have been intertwined with Indigenous and spiritual forms—Cole dreams about an interview recorded by an anthropologist, for instance—without letting those forms completely determine the way they think. However, in the context of the university at least, the two professors still need to communicate what they learn using academic language and academic evidence, and they therefore must perform the difficult work of translating spiritual forms of evidence into academic discourse, with the result that some ideas inevitably will be left out, but that their research will be better informed. The two major areas in which the novel ends up claiming that academic and Indigenous knowledge are not only actually but also *functionally* reconcilable, however, are, first, in the world beyond the university, specifically the circle of home, friendship, and family; and, second and crucially, in fiction, which Cole’s Great-Uncle Luther and Luther’s friend and lover Onatima, figures of wisdom in his life, encourage Cole to return to writing.

When Cole and Alex are able to use a wider circle of forms of evidence, in the research they do together in their time at home, off campus, and which the novel suggests Cole will also rely on in his fiction writing, they have a clearer sense of what is happening and has happened, both historically and in the present-day crimes, and of who the gambler is. Owens, in *Mixedblood Messages*, calls the “act of appropriating the colonizer’s discourse and making it one’s own . . . collaborative and conjunctural” (52). Cole and Alex have to negotiate intellectualism in the academy, which is framed in primarily Western terms, and struggle to integrate it with their belief in dreams and evidence from spiritual experiences, a challenge for both of them, one that leaves Alex “lonesome” and initially drives Cole into drinking and a loss of professional discipline, as he deals with his dreams of the gambler on his own, without the support of friends and family (151). However, this negotiation, which Owens in his critical writing links to his idea of frontier, eventually puts them at an advantage rather than a disadvantage: as undisciplined academics, who form extra- and cross-disciplinary friendships and take Indigenous ways of knowing seriously, they have more practice than other scholars in negotiating multiple ways of understanding the world. The term undisciplined could apply to them throughout the novel, but for Cole in particular the term is revalued as he moves from lecturing drunk and skipping faculty meetings to re-imagining his intellectual work in less disciplinarily-bounded ways. For Cole and Alex, the university is what Owens in his critical writing calls the frontier—“an appropriation and transvaluation of this deadly cliché of colonialism”—a “transcultural zone of contact . . . the zone of the trickster, a shimmering, always changing zone of multifaceted contact within which every utterance is challenged and interrogated, all referents put into

question” (*Mixedblood Messages* 26). They thus have a wider vision of the real and the knowable than academics who cannot escape from the limitations of professional discourse. They have insights into postmodernism in particular, of which Owens’s concept of frontier is a more expansive version. Their more comprehensive, undisciplined knowledge shows Western/European ways of knowing to be particular—an operation along the lines of what Dipesh Chakrabarty calls “provincializing Europe.” The novel suggests that all ways of knowing are committed, dependent upon the values and beliefs of the investigator, but that academic and Western ways of knowing masquerade as universal. Yet Cole and Alex choose to maintain a strategic position in the university, one that gives them access to power, even in circles beyond the university. “If I had a Ph.D., I’d be in Washington, D.C., giving everybody hell,” Onatima tells Cole (144). *Bone Game* suggests, ultimately (in an extension and illustration of Owens’s arguments in his critical work), that while Western ways of knowing may be provincial, it is crucial to be able to *use* them to be heard in the university (and, as Onatima suggests, in government). The trick is for Cole and Alex not to get swept up in them, conditioned by them, until they can no longer make arguments (within the circle of friends and family and also in fiction) using all the forms of evidence available to them—and additionally letting all these forms of evidence inform the arguments they make even in the academy, until it comes time to translate them into Western discourse. Without these two professors’ commitment to being undisciplined academics and open to multiple ways of knowing, no one would have recognized who the gambler was and given him the empathy he desired. Because Cole and Alex’s research in the novel is historical in nature, not only the novel’s overturning of detective fiction’s promises but also its

engagement with academic research in the frontier zone of the university has historiographical implications. *Bone Game* ends up privileging the academic as fiction writer over the academic as investigator, but Cole and Alex also remain researchers and teachers. *Bone Game* and *The Sharpest Sight* attempt to broaden notions of evidence beyond what is accepted in the university and the law, respectively, in order to take seriously all the ways things can be known.

Ghosts in the Locked Room

The detective fiction genre relies on the past being done and closed, accessible only through the traces it leaves behind, so that the past structures the present investigation, but *only by means of a notion of interpretation and reconstruction*, not by other forms of mediation, revelation, or the intrusion of the past into the present in the form of a ghost. Working within the genre of detective fiction, a genre deeply indebted to rationalism and European ways of knowing, Owens challenges detective fiction's traditional frameworks of investigation, evidence-gathering, and detective-style deduction. The consideration of evidence that does not abide by the laws of nature effectively unlocks the locked room and makes pinning down a solution based on rationalist methods impossible.

In neither detective stories nor historical research is the supernatural traditionally allowed to count as evidence or explanation for what may have occurred in the past. In Poe's "The Murders in the Rue Morgue," the supernatural is ruled out as a premise, so that the investigation can proceed neatly: "It is not too much to say that neither of us believe in praeternatural events," says C. Auguste Dupin to his companion (139).

“Madame and Mademoiselle L’Espanaye [the victims] were not destroyed by spirits. The doers of the deed were material, and escaped materially. Then how?” (139). Julian Lethbridge argues that without the central assumption that Poe’s detective figure, Dupin, chooses to make—“that the world is rational and rationally explicable, that action is performed in the world by the world”—any mystery is unsolvable (93). This championing of mind, reason, and logic has dominated later detective fiction, as well. The second item of Msgr. Ronald Knox’s 1928 “Ten Commandments of Detective Fiction” stipulates that “all supernatural or preternatural agencies are ruled out as a matter of course.” In Tony Hillerman’s Navajo mysteries, which Owens’s mystery novels were often measured against in the press when they first appeared, witches and other religious or supernatural phenomena appear but are repeatedly explained away.⁵⁵ The crimes prove to be material, the invocation of supernatural elements a deliberate cover-up by the criminals.

The initial critical reception of *Bone Game* and *The Sharpest Sight* tended to view them strictly as mystery fiction. *Bone Game*, as well as *Nightland*, another Owens novel involving search and discovery, “got no more than brief notices in the weekly ‘Crime’ or ‘Mysteries’ columns of major newspapers” (Helstern 15). This “pigeonholing,” (15) Linda Lizut Helstern argues, limits readers’ ability to see how Owens has appropriated genre fiction structures “for his own ends” (16).⁵⁶ Helstern writes that Kincaid, the reviewer who noted that *The Sharpest Sight* was multilayered and dealt in part with the

⁵⁵ In the first of Hillerman’s Navajo mysteries, *The Blessing Way* (1970), for instance, a criminal from Los Angeles simulates witchcraft in an area of the Navajo Nation where he and his fellow criminals want to be unobserved for their spy work. All of the people occupying the area flee for fear that he is a witch, leaving the criminals to work in privacy.

⁵⁶ Robert Gish argues, in addition, that *The Sharpest Sight* mixes “realism and magic realism, the Western and mystery genres” (433).

achievement and construction of knowledge, “saw a great deal more that spring than the reviewers for either the *Washington Post* [or] the *Los Angeles Times*,” who both “read *The Sharpest Sight* as a local color mystery in the [Tony] Hillerman tradition, making explicit comparisons between the two writers” (15). Hillerman’s Navajo mysteries, detective fiction with an anthropological bent, belong much more clearly to the detective fiction genre than Owens’s work. In addition to the novels’ rejection of detective fiction endings, Mundo functions as a detective in *The Sharpest Sight* but is not the person who discovers Attis’s body, and there is no detective in *Bone Game*, though murder and discovery are involved.

Owens’s work, contrary to the claims of scholars of detective fiction, indicates that to let go of dream knowledge and evidence from spiritual experiences, such as Cole’s encounter with a bear after the Native American Church service, would in many cases be to lose any access to solving the mystery or narrating the past. The physical and archival evidence about, for instance, a discredited and mentally unstable veteran like Attis or the lives of the Native Californians who appear in Cole’s dreams in *Bone Game* is considered too thin by the parties in power to support conclusions about what may have happened in these lives. Dreams and ghosts are necessarily the primary sources of knowledge about lives like these. As Esther Fritsch and Marion Gymnich argue in their study of *Bone Game*’s detective fiction elements, dreams and ghosts turn out to be essential to solving the crimes, despite the fact that “[g]hosts and the supernatural have traditionally been regarded as inimical to the genre of the detective novel” because they establish a direct connection between past and present (204).

In 1998 Kathleen Brogan, in *Cultural Haunting: Ghosts and Ethnicity in Recent American Literature*, pointed out how pervasive ghosts are in contemporary American literature, especially minority, immigrant, and Native literature. Brogan argues that these contemporary ghost stories do not, for the most part, partake of the Gothic tradition, in which “at the most basic level . . . ghosts function as plot device—providing crucial information, setting in motion the machinery of revenge or atonement” and “on a more sophisticated level . . . serve to illuminate the more shadowy or repressed aspects of characters” (2). Instead, the “pan-ethnic phenomenon” of the contemporary American ghost story functions “to re-create ethnic identity through an imaginative recuperation of the past and to press this new version of the past into the service of the present” (Brogan 4). In so doing, Brogan claims, these texts register “a widespread concern with questions of ethnic identity and cultural transmission” (4). Brogan highlights texts such as Louise Erdrich’s *Tracks*, Toni Morrison’s *Beloved*, Gloria Naylor’s *Mama Day*, and Cristina García’s *Dreaming in Cuban*.

Owens’s work, while certainly part of the phenomenon that Brogan identifies, is nevertheless a bit different from the rest of this body of work precisely because of its detective story elements. Ghosts, just as physically present in Owens’s novels as in many of the texts Brogan analyzes, are even more emphatically not metaphorical. They function as sources of not just information about identity, but of evidence about the past that has to be used in the making of life or death decisions in the present. Ghosts are always about knowing. Brogan argues, in fact, that “the turn to the supernatural in the process of recovering history emphasizes the difficulty of gaining access to a lost or denied past, as well as the degree to which any such historical reconstruction is

essentially an imaginative act” (6). Owens’s novels appeal to more than what Brogan calls “imagination” in their scenes of historical reconstruction. Detective fiction, as I have argued elsewhere in this study, renders more concrete the concept of access to a lost past and reconstruction of it. The ability to determine and then make a convincing case about what happened is often the deciding factor in whether or not justice is done. Owens’s placement of his ghosts in texts that borrow formal and thematic elements from detective fiction means that their importance to the question of how the past can be known is more concrete than in other contemporary American ghost stories.

Knowledge founded on material evidence is often undercut in Owens’s work, especially in *The Sharpest Sight*, where it is shown to be unreliable even as institutional authority figures privilege it over intuition and ghostly encounters. In *The Sharpest Sight*, Mundo Morales, who has been in Vietnam with Attis before becoming a deputy in Amarga, the little California town where the first part of the story takes place, tells the sheriff, a psychiatrist from the hospital Attis has been held in, and a federal investigator that he has seen Attis dead in the river (probably in a vision, though the novel lets this point remain unclear). The sheriff and the federal investigator “exchange a quick look,” and the psychiatrist “emit[s] a heavy sigh” and asks, ““Are you sure that’s what you saw? . . . It couldn’t have been something you imagined because of . . . fatigue?”” and goes on to say, ““You and the escapee were in Vietnam together, I understand?”” (41). Mundo’s thoughts transition immediately into a story told to him by his grandfather, called “the viejo” in the novel, in which the grandfather of current town bigwig Dan Nemi gets his cattle onto Mundo’s family’s large land holding “for a quart of whiskey” and then within ten years seizes it all (42). “Back when it was illegal for a Mexican or an Indian to testify

against a white person in court,” Mundo’s grandmother adds, these things could happen easily (42-43). But the juxtaposition of the old story with the current situation, in Mundo’s thoughts, shows that he feels that the kind of injustice that arises when one party’s testimony is invalidated persists into the present—not only did he have to endure Vietnam, but having been there has left him an invalid witness. Dan and Helen Nemi, the parents of the girl Attis has killed, act guilty of the murder when Mundo comes to question him and yet mock Mundo for his inability to do anything about it. They sigh as well when he tells them he knows he has seen Attis dead, and Dan says, ““In my war some of the boys got hit pretty hard, too. We called it shell shock then, or battle fatigue”” (51-52).

It later becomes clear that the official investigators have actually been instructed not to be able to hear testimony like Mundo’s. Lee Scott, the federal investigator, says to Cole, ““Know why I’m here? They sent me to make sure that your brother never surfaced again. They want him controlled and invisible. He’s too fucking embarrassing to them. You see, they were afraid he was loose and was going to dance the ghost dance some more and remind people”” (254). Despite all this undercutting of testimony, there is a certainty in the novel that Attis has been murdered. All knowledge of Attis’s death comes from dreams and intuition, unless the reader accepts that Mundo may have had the perfect timing to physically see Attis float by under the bridge rather than in a vision. Hoey drops in on Mundo in his office late at night, just after Mundo has seen Attis in the river, to say, ““Something happened to my son. That’s why I came . . . I dreamed it—part of it”” (33). Told that the mental hospital says Attis has escaped, Hoey says, ““No . . . No . . . He didn’t escape”” (33). Uncle Luther, back in Mississippi, dreams of Attis as well

and takes an active part in the story from a distance by intervening in the movement of Attis's *shilup* and *shilombish*, his inside and outside shadows (7). In Mundo's case, there is also knowledge imparted by ghosts—the *viejo* (his grandfather) and the Mondragon sisters. Onatima calls these three characters "Catholic ghosts," saying, "I went to the university and read up on Catholic ghosts . . . They're sort of allowed to come back to try to fix things that are wrong, to balance things you might say" (224-25). Mundo's grandfather and the Mondragon sisters interfere actively in his investigation, and though their contributions sometimes turn out to be inaccurate, the *viejo* gets wiser and more helpful as the story goes on. Attis's Choctaw ghost, on the other hand, is silent and passive. Attis's family is guided by dreams, but the only conclusion they are able to draw based on the dark form of Attis's shadow in the corner of Luther's house is that he is definitely dead. Ghosts in *The Sharpest Sight* are not a vague or culturally unspecific source of information. Instead they suggest an opening up toward the various ways that each of the investigators in the novel is able to know the world.

Attempts to secure material evidence and testimony from the living, on the other hand, fail in *The Sharpest Sight*. Mundo tries to conduct a systematic search for both Attis's body, which he regards as evidence in the case (planning to match the bullet to Dan Nemi's gun because he is convinced Nemi is the murderer), and for evidence that Nemi's alibi is false. All he finds, however, is a swirling mass of statements from people trying to mislead him, and he cannot locate Attis's body. Dan Nemi and his wife taunt Mundo, saying, "Maybe they just lost him, you know, misplaced him out there in that great big hospital" (49). When Mundo goes to the tavern in town to verify Nemi's alibi, the tavernkeeper Jessard Deal minimizes both Attis's and Mundo's importance, telling

him, ““That guy out there playing with his pecker at the funny farm wasn’t . . . your buddy, Mundo. Your buddy didn’t come back from Nam, Mundo. He ain’t out at that hospital and he ain’t never been out there, get it?”” (82). Deal follows up by saying, ““Hell, you hardly exist yourself anymore. You walked through that door, I thought I’d just made you up”” (82). Most of the town seems to be trying to undercut Mundo’s ability to make meaning out of Attis’s disappearance. The FBI agent tells Mundo that Mundo himself is a suspect: ““It’s logical. The missing man’s last known visitor, best friend”” (84). Later Dan Nemi whispers to Mundo, ““It was me, Mundo. I did it”” (106). That supposed admission directs the rest of Mundo’s search, but evidence that appears at the end of the novel embedded in threats made by Jessard Deal to Dan’s daughter Diana Nemi suggests that most probably she did the killing.

Fritsch and Gymnich argue that “it is indicative of the importance assigned to an intuitive rather than a predominantly rational approach in *The Sharpest Sight* that Cole is successful while Mundo, systematically searching the riverbanks, fails” (206). Cole has initially “tried to penetrate the leaping darkness” as he begins his nighttime search for his brother’s body, but he quickly admits that he cannot see (251). He feels “something pulling him toward the heart of the river, and he moved in that direction . . . After an hour he broke through a tangle of brush into a small clearing, and he knew he was there” (251). Giving up on the idea that he might be able to see his way clear to the solution seems to be what allows him to find Attis.

Bone Game’s use of detective fiction structures invokes historical practice more directly, as the novel takes on the idea of discovery. The novel’s epigraph, which consists of two dates and descriptions of events in Santa Cruz over 180 years apart,

immediately compares history work to the detection of crime. As Rochelle Venuto has noted, both notices are in the terse language of a police blotter (26). They begin the story with what has been discovered. “October 15, 1812,” begins the first one: “Government Surgeon Manuel Quijano, accompanied by six armed men, is dispatched from the presidio in Monterey with orders to exhume the body of Padre Andrés Quintana at the mission of Santa Cruz . . . The priest is found to have been murdered, tortured *in pudendis*, and hanged.” “November 1, 1993,” begins the second: “The dismembered body of a young woman begins washing ashore on the beaches of Santa Cruz, California.” LaLonde has made the point that the epigraph, by fixing “in chronological time not the murder . . . but the government act of dispatch that leads to its discovery,” not only “accentuat[es] the trope of discovery that will be carried through the novel,” but makes it clear that it is the activities of the Spanish authorities—“their ability to discover what has been concealed,” rather than the actions and motivations of the Indians who did the killing—that have been entered into the historical record (103). History work, here, oversimplifies, privileges power, and is potentially dangerous. When Alex is explaining the history of the Ohlone people and the Franciscan Mission at Santa Cruz to Cole, he argues that because the Ohlone destroyed everything connected to the dead, there was not any history until the Spanish “came and taught them history and death in a single moment” (*Bone Game* 54).

Much as *The Sharpest Sight* opens with familiar detective fiction tropes—a policeman driving through town and spotting a body, resistance by local officials to the idea that the man he saw could be dead—*Bone Game* opens with a woman’s body washing ashore in Santa Cruz. By a few pages in, we have heard of the present-day

crimes, have seen the murderers, blended in with the rest of the introductions to characters but marked by clues that will eventually lead us to suspect them, and have seen warnings, in dreams and on campus alert posters, of the dangers that will emerge in the story. Cole, however, despite his search twenty years earlier for his brother's body, is no detective, and he initially considers the events of the murder to be quite separate from his own life. He feels a connection, viscerally, but resists it. He is maintaining a general distance at this point in the story—away from his home in New Mexico following a divorce, he has been experiencing a malaise and a confusion regarding his dreams about the gambler and whether he is cut out to be a professor. Hearing students talking about the death, he feels “as if he should know, as though it were something just at the edge of his memory, ready to come into focus” (14). When his teaching assistant explains that several women are missing and one has washed up on the beach, saying, “It’s terrible, isn’t it?”, Cole stares at the student, thinking, “Was it terrible that a young woman, perhaps one of his students, had been murdered and strewn in pieces upon the sea?” (18). But later that morning he opens a beer in his office and sits back, “thinking of the girl they’d found in the sea, imagining a story that could end that way. Somewhere in that story was a moment of shrieking horror so great it struck at his soul. And again, he felt the strange sense of responsibility, a terrible weight” (21). Alex, Cole’s Uncle Luther, and Luther’s companion Onatima will later convince Cole that confronting these deaths is in fact his responsibility: his dreams have already signaled that it is.

In *Bone Game*, Owens directly invokes not only the detective story tradition in general, but Hillerman specifically, with two separate Hillerman jokes: Cole tells Alex he knows about ghost sickness because he has “read Silko and Hillerman. He is Navajo,

isn't he?" (96). (He is not, and Cole of course knows it.) Later Alex, having captured one of Santa Cruz's killers after an accidental encounter, jokes to Cole that he learned his trade in "Jim Chee tribal investigator correspondence school" (223). (Chee is a Hillerman detective.) The idea that Alex is the detective-hero is a misinterpretation by the media: as the television screen shows "a profile the world knew well: the Indian warrior come to rescue the white world from its nether self," the reporter, "in a voice edged with awe and what Cole suspected to be lust, explained that Alex Yazzie, a Native American professor and martial arts expert, had taken it upon himself to trap the killer, dressing as a woman and hitchhiking with the daughter of another Native American faculty member" (222). In fact Alex has not searched for the murderers at all; he has even let down his usual caution and caught a ride with a stranger, dressed in his normal female attire, with Cole's daughter Abby along.⁵⁷ He catches the murderer only when the murderer tries to kill the two of them. Since becoming involved, Alex has attended only to the religious aspects of the problem in Santa Cruz. He has tried to identify the painted gambler, has ascertained that Cole is in need of something spiritually, and has set up a sweat and then a Native American Church service, both of which bring Cole into a greater understanding of why he keeps dreaming of the gambler.

Very little of the knowledge Alex and Cole attain can be attributed to any searching. Alex makes a comment when he first meets Cole, out in front of his faculty apartment field-dressing a deer, wearing a skirt and heels, that "This fine animal just gave himself to me. I was driving up the hill over there, just going along you know like I

⁵⁷ Alex enjoys cross-dressing but refuses to allow Cole to label him as gay. "Call me a creature of boundless interests," he says (31). At the end of the novel, he falls in love with Cole's daughter Abby. (Alex is a new faculty member and much younger than Cole.)

always do, when he jumped in front of my truck’” (26). Alex is in high parody mode in this moment, and yet there is often a strain of seriousness beneath his jokes. The one thing Alex does seem to be serious about, in this encounter, is that he needs deer sinew for a reason that has arisen in a dream, and it has been provided for him (26). Similarly, he and Cole and Abby are later provided what they need to stop the violence. Both Alex and Cole wait for and then accept the help of the various great-uncles and aunts who arrive on their doorstep unsolicited.

When clues do appear in *Bone Game*, they are presented in language that makes them feel like dreams. Several times short chapters punctuate the longer ones (which describe Cole, Alex, and Abby’s experiences). Some of the shorter sections are from the perspective of one of the murderers. Early in the novel, a short chapter with no clear pronoun reference acquaints us with a character who will turn out to be responsible for some of the murders. The man, who it seems has painted himself like the gambler in Cole’s dreams, thinks about voices giving him commands and imagines himself to be “like Jonah, who couldn’t get away even in the belly of the ocean but had to come back and do what he was told” (13). At this point so early in the novel, many different images and characters are being presented in succession, and only very limited recognition is possible. The painted man resembles the gambler in the dream—the rest must be stored away to make sense of later. There is a tone of potential evil or violence to this section, but it is not yet really evidence for anything. When, thirty pages later, after the first killings have been discovered, Alex has been introduced, Cole has given two lectures, and more of Cole’s background has been presented, we hear Cole’s teaching assistant tell him, “We can’t hide. Just like Black Elk could not hide from the Thunder Beings, and

Jonah couldn't hide even in the belly of a whale," the effect of what could be considered a clue is actually more like a memory—the mention of Jonah just feels familiar, part of the weave of complicated imagery in the novel (42).

Bone Game draws together these dreamlike experiences and Cole's experience of the Native gambler in his dreams. After the peyote ceremony he participates in, he seeks historical evidence for some of the same events he has glimpsed, rather than disqualifying historical and legal evidence outright as *The Sharpest Sight* does. In an interview with John Purdy in 1998, Owens explained how *Bone Game* got its start. He had spent time in Santa Cruz in the 1970s and then again in the 90s, and "the place had a feel to it, a—I don't know—a dark presence" (9). Owens followed up on that feeling by doing some reading about the area: "Santa Cruz had a definite, haunted feeling for me, and I began researching the history of the place. What really stood out for me was what seemed like a pattern of almost ritualistic violence spanning almost two centuries. I came across a reference to the killing of a Spanish priest at the Santa Cruz mission in 1812, and I found an interview conducted with the son of one of the Ohlone Indian men who killed the priest. That became the genesis of *Bone Game*" (9). There is a similarity here to the way Cole's encounter with Santa Cruz's violent past begins. He first experiences the Ohlone painted gambler in his dreams, and feels an unease around his house and in the woods, and then in conversation with his anthropologist friend Alex learns about the interview that Owens mentions, and about the priest's cruelty and assassination.

Bone Game directly engages and incorporates parts of two real historical texts. The first is what might be called a primary source, an 1879 interview that recounted the assassination of Padre Andres Quintana at the Santa Cruz mission in 1812, an event

witnessed by the father of the informant. (The other, which I won't deal with here, is a 1941 historical monograph that demonizes the natives of the California coast.) The interview, conducted in Spanish, was translated and edited by Edward Castillo, a Luiseño anthropologist, and published in English in 1989. While the interview's status as evidence is complicated—it is testimony produced by Venancio Asisara's child, not Venancio himself, more than sixty years after the event, and both a transcriber and a translator are involved in its transmission to Cole and Alex—it is still upheld as a useful, though not comprehensive, source of information. Alex is familiar with the document and says Castillo is a friend of his; he also knows the general outlines of the story just from living in Santa Cruz. The old priest, he says, is “somewhat famous around here” (52). Alex's account is professional, academic, based on sources.

While Alex is able to track down Venancio in the historical record, Cole has already come to know the gambler's name through a dream. ““The name was in my head when I woke up this morning,” Cole tells Alex. ““In fact, it woke me up. I don't know why, but I think he's an Indian from around here, from the old days. You know how dreams are”” (*Bone Game* 53). Oddly, however, one of the phrases from his dream, “The padres were very cruel toward the Indians,” comes directly from the interview with the son of the man Cole is dreaming about (*Bone Game* 6, Castillo 124). It is not a quotation from Venancio Asisara in the interview, but the son's summation of the circumstances of mission life. Cole is actually dreaming of the document as well as the event itself, suggesting that evidence from dreams and from documents are closely intertwined methods for coming to understand the past in *Bone Game*.

The evidence that enables the interpretation of the interview as important to the current-day situation in Santa Cruz is located only in Cole's dream. Owens's novel inverts the usual scheme of the detective story, the one in which supernatural explanations are ruled out and the investigators proceed on the evidence that remains. Instead, it is spiritual and dream experiences that enable the interpretation of academic forms of evidence for the historical situation and the material evidence from the present-day murders. LaLonde asserts that *Bone Game* "both turns on the idea of discovery and turns the idea of discovery around" (101). At the end of *Bone Game*, after the natural mysteries have been solved and the natural murderers apprehended, Cole, the most central of what we might call the community of investigators, must still deal with the spiritual forces and with what he has come to understand only through dreams.

Just as the idea of the primacy of material and documentary evidence is supplanted by spiritual and dream evidence in Owens's fiction, his novels replace detective fiction's reliance on closure and a just ending with a turn to empathy. In *The Sharpest Sight*, justice is presented as not just a questionable Western goal, but also as a supposedly traditional Choctaw goal that may be more problematic in the 20th century than it was previously, indicating the novel's stake in the idea that tribal values are part of the negotiations every generation engages in, rather than something static. At Uncle Luther's prompting, Cole convinces Hoey to give up on the idea of justice. Hoey, who has been trying to be a good man by getting as close as he can to being an old-time Choctaw, thinks that he needs to kill Attis's killer because, as Luther says, "'Us Choctaws, you know, have always believed in blood revenge. Somebody kills your relative, you got to kill that person or one of his relatives'" (96). But according to Luther,

it has become complicated in the present day: ““You see, Hoey’s son killed that girl and so her folks killed him. They was acting like Choctaws. Now Hoey thinks he’s got to revenge their killing. So it won’t end. But my nephew [Hoey] is wrong” (96). Luther has been dreaming about ““something loose in the world now . . . What your brother was doing in that war, that was part of it”” (97). In the war, ““they put a terrible medicine in Hoey’s other son, and then he done a terrible thing. And now somebody else has done a terrible thing, and it’s got to end”” (97). Luther convinces Cole to talk Hoey out of his idea of justice. Diana Nemi, the likely killer, is a nineteen-year-old young woman who was deeply hurt by Attis’s killing of her sister. The *viejo* originally calls Diana a witch, a *bruja*. Later, however, when Mundo says to him about Diana, ““It was her, wasn’t it, grandfather? She did it,”” the *viejo* replies that it was necessary for Mundo to go talk to her because ““one must know what one is looking for,”” but that ““this girl is just part of it . . . I am sorry for her now”” (223). The idea of an individual perpetrator is being undercut. Onatima calls Diana ““poor little thing,”” and Luther wishes he could help her, but it is too late for him to stop Jessard Deal from raping her. Deal thinks he can rape Diana with impunity by threatening to turn over evidence that she murdered Attis, specifically evidence of a withdrawal from her bank account of the money that was used to pay the orderly who let Attis escape through the fence to the place near the river where Diana was waiting (225). This potential evidence is called somewhat into question when Diana is willing to tell people about the rape, but her motivation to stop protecting herself from a murder charge seems more to parallel Luther’s thoughts—that the cycle of violence must stop now.

Hoey not only agrees to end the search for evidence against the Nemi family, but he also takes care of Diana, guiding her through a healing ritual after she has been raped. Cole defends his brother's bones from the FBI agent at gunpoint and then picks them clean as Luther has told him to do, gladly destroying any evidence in the process, in order to take the bones back to Mississippi as quickly as possible. By reducing Attis's body to clean bones as Luther says Choctaw people do, he keeps him from being a legal object, to be fought over, hidden, or used as evidence according to the whims of the government. Cole destroys one half of the physical evidence by stripping his brother's bones of flesh to prepare them for a Choctaw burial; he forgoes a conclusion to the case in order to let his brother rest. Lee Scott absconds with the other half of the potential evidence, Dan Nemi's gun, and Hoey lets him get away with the gun. Breaking the cycle of violence requires letting go of the search: knowing and revenge turn out to be too closely tied together.

Mundo initially does not agree that the search for Attis's killer should end. "I'll find Attis . . . And I'll find out," he says. "What was done and who did it" (52). Even at the end of the novel, Cole uses Mundo as a threat of an unsatisfied need for justice. "If you don't leave," Cole tells Scott while he has him at gunpoint, "I may not kill you, but I'll have to turn my brother's remains over to Mundo then. And Mundo won't let things rest" (254). When Scott steals away with Dan Nemi's gun after Nemi's death, Mundo is incensed: "What the hell? . . . He's tampering with evidence. Why didn't you tell me?" Hoey, however, believes that Jessard and Nemi have "canceled everything out" with their deaths and that proving who killed Attis "don't matter no more" (258). Mundo has originally conceived of his job as a policeman as something out of detective

fiction. His boss tells him that instead he is supposed “to keep punks from stealing chickens . . . Your job don’t have to do with solving jack shit” (199). While Mundo does resist his boss’s minimalization of his abilities and responsibilities and helps Cole find Attis’s bones, at the end of the novel he, too, has to accept a lack of knowledge and the falseness of the detective fiction ending: “There were so many things no one would ever know . . . there was no body, only a cedar box full of bones . . . And now there was no gun” (262). Attis is left entirely out of the “official story” that the police and FBI will record (262). Hoey tells Mundo, ““You’d better start making up your story,”” to which Mundo replies, ““What do you mean, “making up my story”? . . . There isn’t any story, just the facts, just what happened”” (258). ““It just depends on how you put things together,”” (258) Hoey replies, thinking of how the versions from all the players (Hoey, Mundo, Diana, Helen Nemi, and the dead bodies of Jessard Deal and Dan Nemi, which are ““already telling more’n anybody wants to hear”” [259]) will not simply reconcile themselves; anyone who wants to be heard had better give a convincing account. Fritsch and Gymnich argue that *The Sharpest Sight* “deviates from traditional crime fiction, where law and order are reestablished in the end” (209). Instead, the story “reaches only partial closure . . . a rejection of the binary opposition of justice versus injustice that traditional crime fiction is based on” (209). Whether it is known that Diana killed Attis or not, Hoey, Cole, and eventually Mundo decide to proceed on the assumption that more than enough punishing has been done. Jessard and Dan Nemi, who consistently abuse the power they have over others, are dead (Jessard having killed Nemi and Hoey having shot Jessard to save Mundo). Diana has shown a desire to escape the cycle of violence.

Owens uses the happy ending and the wrapped-up feel typical to Golden Age detective fiction, showing all of the characters back to their normal lives or on to better ones, even in the absence of a notion of justice—and the happy ending of empathy and reconciliation seems perhaps fuller than the one where the criminal is expunged. Hoey and Cole go “home” to Luther and Onatima in Mississippi (263). Mundo bounces his daughter on his knee, dances happily with his wife, and welcomes the three “Catholic ghosts” into his home. He also, the *viejo* says, ““knows at last who he is,”” part of which involves the discovery that he, too, is a mixedblood (262). Diana watches fish swim in a pool of water and thinks ahead to when she will leave for Berkeley in a month (260-61). Peace and order have been restored, even in the absence of standards of justice being met.

At the end of *Bone Game*, the solving is multiple: first the serial killer of local females, Paul Kantner, is killed when he tries to abduct Abby and Alex; later Cole’s teaching assistant Robert, who thinks he is preventing a cataclysmic earthquake by making thirteen human sacrifices, is shot in self-defense by Abby. But Cole and his daughter Abby still have to face the painted gambler, who is no longer just a dream but rather a physical presence who confronts Abby in the woods at the end of the novel. Yet even after Cole acknowledges Venancio Asisara, the gambler, by saying his name and listening to him tell that the priests were cruel, and after the gambler has walked into the trees and transformed into a bear, Asisara’s consciousness seems to be responsible for the closing line of the novel: “It is a world so like his own, of black streams and changeless skies. His shadow falls across the town and bay, undulating with the slow waves. *Eran muy crueles*” (243). There is no complete solution, no complete closure. Fritsch and Gymnich argue that Cole’s recognition that saying the gambler’s name ““was what he

wanted all the time’” (*Bone Game* 243) explains “both Cole’s recurring dreams and the previous apparitions of the gambler as an appeal to recover the memory of events and persons that have been forgotten . . . an expression of an imperative to remember a people who had been wiped out” (Fritsch and Gymnich 211). That imperative remains even after Cole has said the gambler’s name.

The cause of the crimes is not entirely apprehended—not entirely understood or entirely caught and stopped—though that double apprehension, missing here, is the resolution typical to detective fiction. Paul and Robert die, and the immediate problem is fixed, but as in *The Sharpest Sight*, it is not entirely certain where the ultimate blame for the violence should be directed. Paul has been in the military in Special Forces, has been trained in violence, and Robert hears voices whose origin is in the colonial evils left over in the land and talks about his killings in terms of responsibility and what he must do to save the world. There is a solution of sorts, but very much a multiple one. Fritsch and Gymnich point out that the fact that there end up being two killers suggests that “violence cannot simply be explained as the result of the doings of an individual” (213). Likewise, in *Bone Game* “evil can be contained only by communal effort rather than by the activities of a single detective figure” (Fritsch and Gymnich 213). *Bone Game* also sets aside the idea of justice, replacing it with Cole’s empathy for Venancio. There is no clear sense of whether Venancio’s revenge is good or bad, or of to what extent Robert and Paul have been culpable and to what extent influenced by forces in the world and philosophies in the university. The mystery is still a mystery at the end.

Indigenous Epistemologies and the Undisciplined Academic

Bone Game ultimately de-emphasizes solving in favor of emphasizing a broader notion of learning. Onatima, Uncle Luther's friend and lover, represents a nuanced conception of learning and knowledge. She has learned largely from college and from books and yet has remained critical of what books tell her. "We read their books and find out we're supposed to die," Onatima tells Cole, explaining that his malaise at the beginning of the story is a kind of survivor's guilt (165). Cole, trying to prepare for a lecture, sees "an image of Onatima in Uncle Luther's cabin as she had been when he met her, pulling a paperback from the pocket of her apron . . . 'That's how they make the world,' she had said that day, and for twenty years he'd tried to make his own world with words, like they did, always remembering Onatima" (20). She reads books (and gives them to Luther and others) with an eye to understanding where other people are coming from, but also with an eye to realizing where they are wrong. In *Huckleberry Finn*, for instance, she locates a non-Indigenous American romance with death: "Remember how that boy kept making up stories and they were always about death? They have a romance going with death, they love it, and they want Indians to die for them" (*Sharpest Sight* 216).

Onatima also learned in childhood from her Choctaw grandmother, who died before she was born but would often visit her at night to sit on the edge of her bed, eat pecans out of a paper sack, and "brush the hair from my face and tell me stories about the way it had been" (140). "Many years later I told Luther," she says, "and he said I'd learned too many stories in school and from books to learn properly from a ghost with a mouth full of nuts. Luther Cole never did have enough respect for either school or

ghosts” (140). Onatima has a clear fidelity to both. When Onatima arrives in Santa Cruz, she refocuses Cole and Abby by bringing this kind of grandmotherly wisdom and stories from her childhood (now that she is an old woman whom Abby calls “grandmother”) and also stressing the importance of Cole’s work as a writer and teacher, asking to see him “function as an elder” in the classroom and wondering when he is going to start writing fiction again (144).

Cole and Alex’s style of doing history, like the detection in the novel, is not closure-oriented. They are academics, opening up questions that were once thought to be closed, being skeptical of what can be known. If there is a postmodern pretension to disliking the coherent tie-up narrative, the kind of thing the detective story finishes up with, where we know who did it and justice is about to be done, it is the same value system that operates in historiography to call any search for truth (including revisionist or alternative truths) into question, thus, as many people have complained, undermining the basis for political action. Craig Womack has argued passionately that it is “way too premature for Native scholars to deconstruct history when we haven’t constructed it yet” (3). *Bone Game*’s refusal of the detective fiction conclusion runs alongside its fun with academic indeterminacy. The novel plays with the possibilities of the Native American academic speaking from a frontier location that makes it, as Owens says in an essay on postcolonial theory and criticism, “difficult . . . to assume any kind of essential stance” (*I Hear* 208).

In his 2001 essay “As If an Indian Were Really an Indian: Native American Voices and Postcolonial Theory,” Owens restated and expanded his earlier, rather devastating critique of several major critics who deal with ethnic difference in American

writing and of many of the major postcolonial theorists. These critics and theorists, Owens argues in both this essay and his 1998 book *Mixedblood Messages*, fail to acknowledge both the literature and the critical work of the descendants of the Indigenous populations of the Americas. Although the U.S. never became postcolonial, since the colonizers stayed and changed their names to Americans, Owens argues, the perspectives of Native American writers are crucial in global conversations about speaking from the margins and taking Indigenous ways of knowing into account, and the theorists who make a profession “of challenging the orthodoxy and monologic authority of the imperial powers” cannot “be excused for the same ignorance” and deafness as the rest of the world (*I Hear* 212). They are, he concludes, “[q]uite ironically . . . products of the imperial crucible of the Western university, speaking the languages of Cambridge, Oxford, Harvard, Yale, Princeton, the language of the imperial center” (*I Hear* 213).

“As If an Indian Were Really an Indian” is not only a critique, however; Owens takes up certain ideas of critics such as Gayatri Spivak and Edward Said and develops them with respect to his own work. One of these is Said’s notion of “strategic location,” the clearly stated position of the author with respect to the material he writes about. Owens defines his own strategic location as that of the “frontier zone,” the unstable and hybridized space he identified in *Mixedblood Messages* that comes not from the heart of a traditional culture but from a zone of displacement; here he makes a comparison to what postcolonial theorists have called “‘diasporic’ writing,” pointing out that “urban centers and academic institutions have come to constitute a kind of diaspora for Native Americans who through many generations of displacement and orchestrated ethnocide are often far from their traditional homelands and cultural communities” (*I Hear* 208).

The value of this frontier or diasporic location, he says, is that it is “an inherently unstable position, and one from which it is difficult and undoubtedly erroneous to assume any kind of essential stance or strategy” (Owens, *I Hear* 208).

Margaret Dwyer has argued, in an essay on *The Sharpest Sight*, that Owens’s autobiographical inclusions are “one tool for maintaining his cultural identity, through which he presents the experiences of ‘we’ (his family) and not just ‘I’ (the educated author)” (45). In other words, including autobiographical details is a strategy for being Indian enough without essentializing. Cole McCurtain is, like Owens, of Choctaw, Cherokee, Cajun, and Irish descent, has spent some time in Mississippi and some in California growing up, and has had a brother go to Vietnam and come back psychologically devastated. Those “I” experiences, the experiences of the highly educated author, were also very much a part of Owens’s background, however, and so it is significant that in *Bone Game*, Cole resurfaces twenty years later as a literature professor who also writes fiction.

Much of Owens’s critical work deals with the possibilities of criticism in the frontier zone. Even when his essays do not deal directly with his own position as a writer and literary critic of mixed Choctaw-Cherokee-Irish descent who wrote on the work of both Native American and European American writers, questions about the responsibilities, risks, and possibilities of such a writer and critic seemed to be there implicitly. Although “As If an Indian Were Really an Indian” is a criticism primarily of what Owens refers to as the “real ‘Indians’—with such names as Chakrabarty, Chakravorty, Gandhi, Bhabha, Mohanty, and so on” and goes on to celebrate the possibilities of the frontier space (read: city and university) inhabited by so many Native

American writers, its underlying worry is that the Native academic, too, risks being conditioned by university training until even in the process of trying to voice his perspective, he speaks only the language of the university (*I Hear* 207). Owens cautions that “what we are calling Native American literature is represented largely, if not exclusively, by . . . those migrant or diasporic Natives who live lives of relatively privileged mobility” and have obtained an “impressively high rate of education” (*I Hear* 224). At the end of the essay, he implies that precisely the set of conditions—in particular the reliance on academic language—that has made critics such as Said incapable of taking Native American writing and criticism seriously is a risk for Native academics. In “giving voice to the silent,” Owens worries, “we unavoidably give voice to the forces that conspire to effect that silence” (*I Hear* 226). It is an old problem but one that for Owens, clearly, remains unresolved.

In a chapter on literary theory in *Mixedblood Messages*, Owens responds to calls for autonomous Native intellectual traditions, for instance by Robert Warrior, who calls for Native “intellectual sovereignty,” by arguing that Native intellectuals “do not have the luxury of simply opting out” of the theoretical discourse that “originates from the very center of colonial authority,” despite all the reasons to distrust it, because they “already function within the dominant discourse” (Warrior xxiii; Owens 52). To think that one can opt out, Owens says, “is naïve at best, for the choice was made for all of us generations ago” (52). If it is the language of the university that has led postcolonial theorists astray, even as they must communicate in it in order to be heard, then the Native academic, or the “mixedblood” whose possibilities Owens celebrates, can certainly not be at home in the university and its language. Owens draws on Gerald Vizenor’s work to

discuss this concern: “Vizenor, the most aggressively intellectual of Native American writers, has illuminated Native Americans’ problematic but unavoidable participation in this dialogically agitated discourse, writing that ‘The English language has been the linear tongue of colonial discoveries, racial cruelties, invented names . . . at the same time, this mother tongue of paracolonialism has been a language of invincible imagination and liberation for many tribal people in the postindian world’” (*Mixedblood Messages* 52). Owens thus calls for the “liberation” of English itself but warns that “a very real danger faced by the Native American, or any marginalized writer who would assume the role of scholar-critic-theorist, is that of consciously or unconsciously using Eurocentric theory merely as a way of legitimizing his or her voice” (53). Such a pose can lead, Owens argues, to “a split that will not heal” (53).

Drawing on the work of Arnold Krupat, Owens warns readers of *Mixedblood Messages* that there is a tendency in postmodern thought to divide modes of thought into two sharply-defined models, Western-scientific-rational-historical, and non-Western-religious-vaguely “Indian” (49). *Bone Game* brings knowledge from dreams and religious occurrences together with not just the scientific/academic, but also the classically European-American, hyper-rational genre of detective fiction. It jumps into the middle of the divide Owens and Krupat are so concerned about. It shows a community of investigators making sense of a mystery without excluding forms of knowledge that would be excluded in traditional detective fiction, and it gives us two academics making use of academic forms of evidence without letting those forms completely determine the way they think about their fields of inquiry.

A direct exclusion of supernatural forms of evidence exists in historiography, as in detective fiction. Hayden White argues in *The Content of the Form* that the exclusion of “the kinds of events traditionally conceived to be the stuff of religious belief and ritual (miracles, magical events, godly events)” from representation in a historical narrative is a matter of style that is made to appear “to be solely a function of the rigorous application of ‘rules of evidence’ to the examination of the ‘historical record’” (66). This stylistic exclusion effects “a disciplining of the imagination” and sets “limits on what constitutes a specifically historical event” (66).

Owens’s use of ghosts thus points toward an actual problem in the historical sciences. Colleen Boyd and Coll Thrush, in the introduction to *Phantom Past, Indigenous Presence: Native Ghosts in North American Culture and History* (2011), raise the question, “What do we as academics *do* with ghosts[?]” (xxx). (Boyd is an anthropologist, Thrush a historian, both non-Native though Boyd is married to a member of the Lower Elwha Klallam, a Coast Salish tribe [xxvii].) “What does a contract anthropologist do, for example,” they add, “when faced with an elder’s ‘powerful feelings’ about the presence of ancestors in a place not documented through archival records or oral tradition?” (xxix). And should the anthropologist decide to take the elder seriously, how can she account for her decision when she seeks further funding? Most scholars “writing on ghosts and the supernatural generally dismiss specters as little more than anti-colonial metaphors and psychological manifestations of the repressed,” Boyd and Thrush say, but argue, “This demurrer regarding the dead, when considered in the context of Indian ghosts and hauntings, is squarely at odds with the increasingly compelling consensus regarding the need for academic scholarship to take Indigenous

epistemologies and ways of knowing and being seriously” (xxxii-xxxiii). According to Boyd and Thrush, ghosts are always political, bringing the demands of the past to the present, whether we believe they are real or metaphorical.

At the beginning of *Bone Game*, Cole, whose thoughts are largely occupied by the dreams of the gambler that he has been having and who is going through what Onatima later calls “Indian male menopause,” is in a period of crisis regarding his vocation as a teacher (145). He feels ill-equipped for his role and like an imposter as he tries to explain texts and ideas to his students, with whom he fails to connect. Someday, he thinks, “the university would find him out, would recognize him as an imposter and have him removed. The ones who really belonged there, by birthright and Yale, would know they’d been correct all along. Indians, even mixedbloods or especially mixedbloods, did not belong” (22). Trying to discuss a poem with a student in his office, he says ““Yes, that’s a powerful sonnet,”” and “heard his own words as though on stage, the absurdity of them striking him with such force that he almost laughed. He imagined how his own father or Uncle Luther would hear such words” (22). As *The Sharpest Sight* presents his childhood and young adult life, it is quite different from the academic world he is trying to live in now as a middle-aged man. Cole considers himself “a mixedblood clown playing the role of college professor” (193). Playing into what Onatima later calls “the worst Indian cliché of all,” he drinks too much and sometimes lectures drunk (145). His students admire him but are often a little scared of him.

The positive side to Cole’s feeling that he is an outsider is that he is able to look at the university critically. Despite the fact that he has clearly been at universities as a professor or student for years, his position on the edge means that he continues to see the

university as a strange place with strange customs. This perception is emphasized by some of the other outsiders to the university in the novel, for instance Alex's friend Emil Redbull, who comes to construct a sweat lodge for Cole at Alex's request. Emil asks Cole (Dr. McCurtain), "What kind of doctoring do you do?" and Alex explains, "Cole's a teacher, like me" (161). Cole himself knows how the university and academia work, but he also knows it well enough to parody it. Looking over his cluttered desk, he thinks:

Someday . . . a Santa Cruz anthropologist could chart the collapse of his personal microculture by conducting a stratigraphic dig of his desk. *As you can see, coincidental with this October level is a rather obvious decline in the mixedblood's socially acceptable behavioral characteristics. Notice the Mexican beer stains on the unopened envelopes, indicative of low survival quotient, intense liminality, possible homophobia.*" (17, emphasis original)

LaLonde explains this passage by saying, "The anthropologist's language obfuscates rather than illuminates, and its incorporation here stands as a tacit critique by Owens of anthropology, or at least 'bad' anthropology, and the social sciences in general" (111). When Cole is called in, because he is part Native American, to help when Alex (whom he does not yet know) is found field-dressing the deer on the front lawn of faculty housing, Cole is able to anticipate the nature of the administration's concerns. The administrators are afraid of Alex, the full-blood Navajo whom they see as definitely other, as evidenced by their repeated attempts to use Cole as an intermediary and their willingness to believe that what Alex is doing is traditional. On the other hand, they do not want to upset what Cole facetiously calls "the cultural traditions of an indigenous person of color, a real Indian" (27). Venuto points out that "Cole is brought in as a kind of mediator, to translate for the distraught Vice Chancellor Spanner who cannot seem to imagine the

possibility of direct communication with an Indian, or that a Professor of Anthropology at UCSC just might speak English” (31).

Cole, understanding how the university works but having some insight into Alex’s trickster persona once he has exchanged a few words with him, is able to work out a compromise that keeps Alex from being fined or even fired. (Alex of course also has a pretty thorough understanding of how the university works, but in his desire to open eyes by joking, as he continues to play up the role of Indian once he has been sighted with the deer, he has perhaps gotten himself in a bit too deep in this particular situation. Cole calls him back to reality by asking if he has tenure yet; Alex sighs and puts his knife down [28].) While Cole has the requisite knowledge to smooth out the situation, however, he refuses to interpret in the ways he is asked and expected to. Given subtle hints about the delicate nature of what is repeatedly called a “situation”—for instance the voice of the woman who calls from the Vice Chancellor’s office “sounded delicate, and he had an image of an animal stepping through shards of glass”—he insists on seeing the fact that the administration would come to him, the only other Native American faculty member, as a joke at their expense (23). He first calls the situation “some kind of Indian emergency” (23) and then, when asked by the vice chancellor to talk to Alex, responds, ““Skin to Skin?”” (24). He takes pleasure in making the administration uncomfortable.

In more ways than one, Cole and Alex are what I have described at the beginning of this chapter as undisciplined academics. Cole has never attended a faculty meeting, and Alex loves to create scenes. They get distracted from their research interests by the question of who the painted gambler is. But in a more important sense than what appears to be a lack of discipline in their professional lives, they are undisciplined academics

because they cultivate a friendship and academic partnership across disciplinary lines, one which enables them to think about the historical problem in non-disciplinary ways. They do research about the Santa Cruz mission but also take part in a sweat and a Native American Church service, during which Cole learns just as much in a vision as he has from his reading. Their modes of investigation into the actual problems of their lives demonstrate a blend of academic and non-academic strategies. Cole and Alex, in many ways, inhabit the space that Owens calls the frontier. They allow authority figures from each other's lives (Emil Redbull, Uncle Emmett, Uncle Luther, and Onatima) to become sources of not only general wisdom about life, career, and family, but also sources of specific knowledge about the gambler, for instance, as dreamed about by Luther and Onatima. Venuto calls the group of people who help Cole a "dynamic, syncretic community, crossing boundaries usually delineated by tribe, geography, and blood" (32). In this description she includes a character named Robert Jim who "remains on the Navajo Reservation and never actually sets foot near Cole's house" because "he is keeping track of the story, and he gives Luther and Hoey pollen to add to Cole's medicine pouch" (Venuto 32).

Alex and Cole make a point to get off campus, meeting primarily at Cole's rental house in the woods, and to interact whenever they are not working with family members, non-university friends, even the dog Alex brings home, keeping them grounded and free from the kind of delusions that Robert encounters in his solitary, bookish life, lived in "the cell of a scholarly monk"—delusions that Cole is also tempted by in the beginning of the novel before he meets Alex and before Abby comes to live with him (213). The two professors make jokes about their fields and distance themselves from what is

normally taught and thought—and yet they take their academic work and the historical questions seriously in a way that can coexist with their jokes about it and their critical view of it. Cole approaches the Modernists, for instance, like a sort of anthropologist, comparing them to “some of the old men and women he’d met on reservations,” who “knew they had lost something precious and indispensable” and “lived in a world bereft and haunted” (39). He zooms out broadly from his period of specialization during a lecture, comparing the Modernists’ “*violent and bloody and holy and wonderful insistence that death is not an end but a beginning*” and that “*we accept responsibility for our place on earth*” to that of the Egyptians, the Jews, the Christians, the Pueblo, and the dancers of the Ghost Dance (40, emphasis original).

Perhaps the most prominent strategy of *Bone Game*’s two professors is to call attention to their locatedness before they speak, the most amusing and literal version of which is Alex the cross dresser adjusting his breasts just before almost all of his informed and otherwise thoroughly professional pronouncements on anthropological and historical topics. Laughter is important here. In what is perhaps one of Owens’s own examples of getting rid of the distance between commitments to various intellectual traditions, Owens writes in *Mixedblood Messages*, drawing on both Mikhail Bakhtin and Gerald Vizenor, that “Gerald Vizenor, writing from a professorship within the University of California, is still exploring . . . the zone of the Native American trickster, s/he who brings the world close and directs this ‘comical operation of dismemberment’ [the quotations are from Bakhtin], laying bare the hypocrisies, false fears, and pieties and clearing the ground ‘for an absolutely free investigation’ of worldly fact” (39). It is laughter, according to

Bakhtin, that clears the way for investigation in this manner. *Bone Game* fleshes out these comments from *Mixedblood Messages*.

Alex creates an NSF proposal “for a team of Indian anthropologists to do a dig in the cemetery at the Old North Church in Boston,” citing as his “basic argument” that “it’s imperative we Indians learn more about Puritan culture. Puritans had a significant impact on us” (180). He proposes documenting “burial customs, diet, nutrition, and social status” and doing “cranial measurements to figure out how intelligent the Puritans were, compared to us” (180). Cole comments that “Harvard should have stuck with Oliver LaFarge types. They made a big mistake taking an actual Navajo” (180). Alex is a bit dangerous because he draws attention not just to past academic attitudes toward Native property and bodies, but also toward the tendency of the fictional UC Santa Cruz administration in the novel to try to freeze him in time: “They’re not going to give me tenure,” Alex worries to Cole. “They don’t want an Indian in their department unless he’s in a museum, like Ishi. It makes them uncomfortable to have a live Indian around when they want to go dig up Chumash bones” (51). Alex worries that he is on the faculty to be a representative of a group and cannot really be part of the university. Despite his levity in most situations, he is not entirely secure in his method of dealing with the pressures of the university before he becomes a part of Cole’s family circle. It is clear that despite his outgoing personality, he spends most of his time alone in his apartment before he meets Cole. He tells Abby, “without a trace of laughter” in his face, “I’m so lonesome I could cry” (151).

Alex and Cole’s participation in the work of the university is upheld at the end of the novel, with the stipulation that it must be balanced out by interaction with a wider

community and, for Cole, fiction writing. At the end of the novel, both Alex and Cole leave the university, but only temporarily. Alex goes home for a nine-day ceremony as he heals from being shot in a confrontation with the second murderer. Cole and Abby return to New Mexico to their old home, and both plan to both return to the University of New Mexico in the fall rather than to Santa Cruz, he as a professor (since he has just taken a leave of absence), she as a student. There is a suggestion that Alex, who has fallen in love with Abby, will come to live with them. While land and knowledge have been separated while the two are in California, which is not the case in Indigenous ways of knowing, Cole's home in New Mexico is interestingly not any sort of traditional homeland; rather, it is the place he has chosen to make his home as a mixedblood, a place where he can be with his family while he works in the frontier zone of the university there.

Cole plans to return to writing fiction as well. Luther and Onatima have both chided him for not writing recently. "They got too many stories about us," Luther says. "We need to write books about them now. Get even" (226). The novel closes with the idea that while the university is a productive position from which to write and speak, its insularity is corrupting, potentially dangerous. It is a struggle to remain attentive to both academic and spiritual forms of evidence. Only in the context of a broader community that can keep their ways of thinking and speaking healthy and understandable to people outside the university can Cole and Alex maintain the effectiveness of their location in the frontier zone of the university. This broader community includes the community reached by means of Cole's fiction writing. Instead of denying the value of the university or forcing it to acknowledge Indigenous ways of knowing, *Bone Game* sets out a task for

Cole and Alex of negotiating between academic and Indigenous notions of evidence, moving beyond professional blindnesses, unlocking narrow conceptions of what is reasonable and shaking up some of the systems of order that have been imposed on the world, in order to try to take seriously all the ways that things can be known.

CHAPTER 4

VOUCHING FOR EVIDENCE: THE NEW LIFE OF OLD WRITING IN LILLIAN HELLMAN'S MEMOIRS

In the wake of Mary McCarthy's famous attack on Lillian Hellman, made on the Dick Cavett Show in 1980 (that every word she wrote was a lie, including "and" and "the"), and of Hellman's response—indignation and a libel suit—other Hellman detractors proceeded to accuse her of inaccurate research, faulty memory, and outright lying in her memoirs. Martha Gellhorn, calling Hellman an "apocryphiar," suggested for instance that rather than having experienced an air raid in Spain in 1937, as she describes in her first memoir, *An Unfinished Woman*, Hellman most likely had heard accounts of the raid a week before she arrived in Valencia, and "her imagination then took over, placing her a bit off key at the center of the apocryphal action" (294). American psychoanalyst Muriel Gardiner, who had worked in the anti-fascist underground in Vienna during the 1930s, as had the title character of Hellman's portrait "Julia," published her autobiography in 1983 and said in the introduction that her friends had insisted since the publication of the portrait in *Pentimento* in 1973 that she must be Julia (xv). Gardiner explained that she had consulted the director of the Documentation Archives of the Austrian Resistance, and neither he nor the former resistance workers he was in contact with had heard of another American woman deeply involved in the resistance (xv-xvi).⁵⁸ In 1984 Samuel McCracken built on Gardiner's comments and

⁵⁸ According to William Wright, Gardiner had written Hellman a polite private letter when she first read *Pentimento* a decade earlier and had asked "if Julia might be a composite of several of her friends in

catalogued the contradictions within the “Julia” portrait itself, using train and boat schedules from the late 1930s to uncover discrepancies in geography and timelines.

Hellman was not merely caught up in accusations about lies. She herself focused insistently on truth and lying—in her plays, in her memoirs, in her life. She rose to fame in 1934 with the premiere of *The Children’s Hour*, a play about a lie and a libel suit. She died fifty years later in the thick of a legal battle in which she had accused another woman of defaming her by calling her a liar. In her “memoir books” (Hellman used that term in 1980 to describe her autobiographical and semi-autobiographical writing), she displayed a fascination not only with truth and lying, but also with a cluster of related ideas that destabilize those initial two terms: memory, evidence, and access to the past. The memoirs struggle with but also seem to revel in discordances between Hellman’s remembered versions of her life and friendships, on the one hand, and the documentary evidence that remains from those events and relationships, on the other. She draws frequently on old letters and her own previous writing as sources and yet undermines their authority as sources by commenting, for instance, that the notes in her diaries “make no pattern” when she reads them now (Hellman, *Pentimento* 16). Hellman’s memoirs are a particularly strong example of the tension in life writing between the authority of memory and the authority of evidence—of traces left on paper—documents, diaries, old scribbled notes.

Hellman’s inclusion of both memory-driven retrospective narrative and documentary evidence (such as old diaries and letters) in her memoir books enables her readers to reconsider the relationship between these two forms, which serve as the

addition to people she had merely heard about,” but Hellman never replied and Gardiner never pursued the matter (Wright 404).

primary means of access to the past not only in memoir-writing but also in historical research and even in law. My study of Hellman's use of documents relies largely on her drafts of the memoirs, which show the extent to which she revised the material that she claims comes from diaries, and how, exactly, she put that older material in conversation with her memory of the events from a perspective decades later. I was also able to examine some of the documents she draws from, most notably a diary from her 1944-45 trip to Russia that figures prominently in *An Unfinished Woman*.⁵⁹

Like any memoirist who references sources, Hellman couches them in her own testimony. She situates them and vouches for them. Wherever truth claims are made—including history-writing, biography, and literary non-fiction—material evidence and testimony form a sometimes uncomfortable partnership in order to substantiate the claims made in the narrative. Each form of support for a claim sometimes calls the other form into question. Hellman's memoirs mirror biography's convention of documenting events by way of sources, but in her writing that strategy becomes instead another way of exploring present consciousness: what does the document mean now, or how is a missing document remembered now? Paul John Eakin has argued that biography "offers a misleading analogue" for the way autobiography approaches the past. In autobiography, he says, "the past exists only as a function of the autobiographer's present consciousness" ("Reference and the Representative" 37).

⁵⁹ Hellman's manuscripts and the selection of personal papers that she did not destroy are located in the Hellman Collection at the Harry Ransom Center at the University of Texas. The collection was unavailable to early Hellman scholars because for a time she restricted its use to allow access only to William Abrahams, her official biographer (Adams 142-43, Kessler-Harris 6). (Abrahams died without having produced the biography.) Recent Hellman biographers Deborah Martinson and Alice Kessler-Harris were able to use her papers and manuscripts but because of the nature of their projects used the documents and the memoirs as complementary forms of information about Hellman's life rather than focusing on the correspondences and divergences between them.

In many moments of her memoirs, Hellman the narrator approaches the traces left on paper of the life of the figure she is developing—Lillian the child, Lillian the playwright, Lillian the world traveler, Lillian the non-political woman who gets swept up in political affairs—as a historian or a detective might. Lillian the memoirist amasses evidence for the life of her persona, considering the implications of each document, the ways it might correct her memory, the means by which all the pieces might fit with what she remembers. This chapter will investigate Hellman’s choice to approach the written remainders of her own life as would a historian or a detective, amassing evidence for events she lived through and bringing that evidence into contact with the narrative sweep of her memory, allowing it to supplement, challenge, and be challenged by what she recalls. But to say that Hellman the memoirist resembles a detective or a historian in her methodology is not to say she is an aloof, impartial investigator. There are instead a number of competing fidelities in Hellman’s work: fidelity to friends’ recollections and yet also to her own, fidelity to artistic expression and the forms that had been available to her as a dramatist and yet to generic demands for factuality and verifiability in memoir of the late 1960s and early 1970s, but above all fidelity to memory and yet also to her own past writing.

Evidence in Autobiography

Hellman’s first memoir, *An Unfinished Woman*, appeared in 1969. It won the National Book Award, was read by large audiences, and was received by many as an authoritative account of the respective situations in Spain in 1937 and Russia in 1945. A second book followed in 1973. Called *Pentimento*, it was subtitled “a book of portraits”;

the first had been called simply “a memoir by Lillian Hellman.” *Pentimento* focuses not on Hellman herself, though she is one of the characters in the book’s seven sections, but on various seemingly minor players in her life. In addition to painting a portrait of each of these lives surrounding Hellman’s, it explores the memoirist’s feelings regarding the strengths of and gaps in her memory. “The paint has aged now,” she says in the opening section of the book, “and I wanted to see what was there for me once, what is there for me now” (3). *Scoundrel Time*, published in 1976, deals with Hellman’s hearing before the House Committee on Un-American Activities and the years of hardship that followed for her. It too, however, is more concerned with the nature of memory than with what Hellman calls “historical conclusions” (*Scoundrel Time* 41). Hellman calls it her “own history of the time,” saying she will stick to what she knows, to what happened to her (41). Like *An Unfinished Woman*, and to a lesser degree *Pentimento*, *Scoundrel Time* appeals to both the memoirist’s recollections and documentation such as diaries and letters to authorize the scenes it paints and the stories it tells. A fourth volume, *Maybe*, published in 1980, is subtitled “a story,” and though the narrator seems to be Hellman (she refers, for instance, to the three memoirs she has previously written), *Maybe*’s account of Hellman’s life is much looser, much less rooted in world events and other historical detail. The encounter with documentary evidence is replaced in this final book by a portrait of the memoirist remembering and turning only to another layer of memories to explain the first layer. *Maybe* reads almost like a detective story in which the only evidence is remembered scenes and clues dislodged from their contexts, and it concludes with the memoirist’s even deeper frustration with the endeavor of making sense of the past than had the previous three books.

In his chapter on Hellman in *Telling Lies in Modern American Autobiography*, the most thorough investigation that exists of Hellman's engagement with the ideas of truth and lying in her memoirs, Timothy Dow Adams obliquely poses the question of whether the diary sections that begin in chapter 8 of *An Unfinished Woman* are unedited or only apparently so, and by extension whether the diary sections in her memoirs are actually excerpted in the sense that a reader would usually understand the term. Adams' study of Hellman's memoirs took place during a period when her personal papers were closed to the public (Adams 142-43). A survey of Hellman's drafts of these chapters reveals that they were in fact heavily revised. A diary from a trip to Russia in 1944 and 1945, the basis of chapters ten and eleven of *An Unfinished Woman*, is present among Hellman's papers, allowing a direct comparison with the version published in *An Unfinished Woman* and offering a new perspective on the way Hellman made use of documentary evidence in the memoir: she has filled out the diary, changed the order of scenes, and given it a rhetorical force in *An Unfinished Woman* that was lacking in the diary itself. Not having had access to Hellman's drafts, Adams chooses to assume that her diaries are unedited,⁶⁰ as she indeed presents them when she uses brackets and footnotes to indicate additions made during the composition of *An Unfinished Woman* (Hellman, *Unfinished Woman* 87, 116, 123). My access to these materials offered the opportunity for a much greater understanding of how Hellman used her earlier writing in her memoirs.

Critics have argued that in autobiographical writing, memory trumps or simply replaces the role that textual sources play in biographies written by others. Whereas

⁶⁰ "These words, from a diary entry written thirty-two years before publication of *An Unfinished Woman*, are included both to show her candor and to amplify the author's general presentation of herself," Adams says about one diary section in *An Unfinished Woman* (136).

biography usually relies upon letters, telegrams, interview transcripts, texts authored by the person in question, and public records, the rhetorical power of autobiography and memoir is located not in its use of documentary evidence but in the authority of the *I*, of the voice that states: I have been there, I remember, and I know. While biographical, historical, and legal practice do afford some credence to testimony, the particular rhetorical demands of those fields put a premium on documentary and physical evidence as measures against which the claims and memories of witnesses are tested. In the traditional understanding of autobiography, in contrast, memory is usually considered the source of authority; James Olney has suggested that in that conception, the “voice of memory” is understood to “be the guarantor of identity and continuity of being across time, the only liaison—but an unbroken and fully capable liaison all the same—between past experience and present consciousness” (861). A need to refer to documentation would, according to such an understanding of the genre, undermine the claims of memory to represent the self fully.

In his study of lying in autobiography and memoir, Adams suggests that “even when [the autobiographer is] aided by such written documents as diaries, letters, or newspaper accounts,” the use of documents in autobiography should not be confused with “mnemonic activity—checking a written document for literal accuracy” (169). Memory, in this understanding of the genre, is primary. And yet veracity has traditionally been given the same weight. In “Le pacte autobiographique” (1973), usually translated as “The Autobiographical Pact,” Philippe Lejeune distinguishes autobiography from fiction on the basis of the “identity of the proper name shared by author, narrator, and protagonist,” which depends not on “the extratextual state of authorial intention,” but

on “*the sign of that intention* present in the text [italics original],” in other words what is signaled on the title page of the book (Eakin, Foreword ix).⁶¹ And not only, in Lejeune’s formulation, must the author be identical to the narrator and protagonist, but autobiography, “as opposed to all forms of fiction,” must operate under a “referential pact,” an oath to “tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth . . . making allowances for lapses of memory, errors, involuntary distortions, etc.” (Lejeune 22). Because memory is primary, failures of memory or perception are acceptable departures from a strict fidelity to extratextual fact.

Eakin is famous for his comment that in autobiographical writing “the materials of the past are shaped by memory to serve the needs of present consciousness” (*Fictions* 56). In a less-often quoted moment earlier in the same sentence, though, he talks about audience expectations, surmising that “[w]hen we settle into the theater of autobiography, what we are ready to believe—and what most autobiographers encourage us to expect—is that the play we witness is a historical one, a largely faithful and unmediated reconstruction of events that took place long ago” (56). It is the word “faithful” that I find most interesting here. The word implies a responsibility on the part of the autobiographer to interpret and represent his or her past in a particular way—a fidelity to the past “as it was,” wherein the “as it was” is established and guaranteed by memory rather than historical method. Eakin’s own argument, of course, common enough in the last 30 or 40 years of autobiographical criticism, is that faithfulness to the past as such is impossible. In the realm of historical work, this impossibility has been attributed to the inability of sources to have any stable or transparent meaning, to signify in a present

⁶¹ “What defines autobiography for the one who is reading,” Lejeune argues, “is above all a contract of identity that is sealed by the proper name” (*On Autobiography* 19).

context what they would have in a past context. In the realm of autobiography, however, not only the idea of access to the past self of the autobiographer but the entire notion of an autonomous subject able to know itself or to exist outside of discourse has fallen out of critical favor, replaced by the idea that “the interiority or self that is said to be prior to the autobiographical expression” is instead, as Sidonie Smith explains, “an *effect* of autobiographical storytelling” (qtd. in Smith 125). This belief of course resonates not only in autobiography studies but with major late twentieth-century currents of thought on the subject as an effect of language and power, spearheaded by Foucault in the 1970s. Smith and co-author Julia Watson, following Olney and William Spengemann, identify a shift in autobiography criticism, around the year 1970, from a preoccupation with the “*bios*,” the life, to an interest in the problematic nature of the “*autos*”: critics began to understand the text as an act of self-creation (123). Olney, writing in 1993, noted a growing doubt about “memory’s capacity to establish a relationship to our past and hence a relationship to ourselves grown out of the past” (863).

Yet the entire power and appeal of autobiography relies on a faith in memory to access and narrate an authentic past, *whatever that means*. And most readers still clearly expect that autobiography and memoir should distinguish themselves from fiction, as the outraged response to the autobiographical fictionalizations of the last decade, most notably the fabrications of James Frey’s *A Million Little Pieces* (2003), show. For those who still insist on verifiability and those who are more interested in memory and self-creation alike, memory’s status in memoir has become only more important. It is the writers of autobiography, more than the readers, perhaps, who inhabit the second category alongside the critics. Memoirist Mark Doty comments in a 2008 essay how

deeply allegiant his books are to memory, explaining that he instinctually resists corroboration. An act such as looking at a map to verify street names, he says, would undermine his interest “in how it felt to be that boy [the child Mark Doty], in the world as he understood it” (12). “[W]hat happened,” Doty says—meaning the past happenings that autobiographers try to narrate—“turns out to be nothing stable, but a scribbled-over field of revisions,” since over the course of a life, “we keep moving into different relationships with the past” (11-12). It is his fascination with this scribbled-over space called memory, more than with the historically verifiable facts of his early life, that animates Doty’s memoirs, and he is of course only one of many writers today who conceive of memory this way. Hellman’s memoirs were decades ahead of their time in their conviction that memory’s appeal is in the way it is shaped by the present.

Her notorious disregard for the accuracy of dates, names, and other markers that signal a fidelity to the real, the true, or the historical demonstrated a strong impulse to loosen the relationship between author and protagonist and celebrate the way that memory and storytelling produce a self.⁶² But her conception of memory was perhaps even more nuanced than the understandings of these later theorists. A comparison of Hellman’s published memoirs and her personal papers and drafts indicates a split fidelity to documentation and to memory, and the power of her work resides precisely in the tension of that split. Her writing teems with references to and quotations from her previous writings. The very quantity of quoted material in her work seems to indicate a fidelity to her old writing, to the past as she saw it then. At the same time, however, her papers in the Hellman Collection include detailed lists of names, dates, and other facts

⁶² The idea that identity is grounded in narrative would become common more than two decades later. See Eakin, *Living Autobiographically: How We Create Identity in Narrative* (2008).

she wanted to track down prior to publishing, as well as numerous letters to paid researchers, old friends, and legal and business contacts seeking information.

The notion of faithful representation of the past is essentially an analogy to translation or literary adaptation: it imagines a referent, an authentic and accessible original, and transmission to an audience that otherwise could not know it. To speak of faithfulness to the past as it was in a historical or autobiographical representation is to assume that the referent is available for comparison, that we can access and know the past, that we can check to see if our account of it is true. We speak of translations as faithful, likewise adaptations from page to screen, when we believe in an authenticity of the original that can be approached if the translation is executed well. Hellman enters this conversation about access, faithfulness, and the authentic original as an artist who has adapted and has been adapted.⁶³ Her method is to bring a text or object into view, in her memoirs—usually a primary document, sometimes a glimpsed memory—and then proceed immediately to translate unfaithfully, to let the original almost disappear beneath its re-presentation as her readers look on. Memory in story form provides the organizing logic for the meaning and placement of both her isolated, non-narrative, glimpsed memories and the old papers she finds in her files. Even as she studies the documents in front of her, what they disclose does not steer her conclusions. Even as she reads them into evidence, she undermines their reliability. She presents documentary traces in order to demonstrate exactly how embedded they are in the rhetorical structure of her current

⁶³ Hellman adapted *The Children's Hour* for a film called *These Three* and later adapted most of her other plays for the screen. She additionally reworked Emmanuel Robles' play *Montserrat* for the American stage. She declined to write the screenplay for the 1976 film *Julia* (based on a portrait from her memoir *Pentimento*), entrusting the film to screenwriter Alvin Sargeant and director Fred Zinneman, though she attempted to influence their choices throughout the production of the film (Martinson 10).

writing: the artifact disappears beneath its interpretation, and the voice of memory claims the right, if not to erase, then to write over the top of what the diarist has previously written.

Hellman positions herself in her memoirs as not only narrator but also investigator of her life. She began the composition of two of her memoir books with a research phase, and she directly references that research in the books. Her other two memoirs are metaphorically about investigation and interpretation. But as is the case with any researcher, her method for seeking out evidence, the sources she seeks out, and her ways of reading what she finds—and judging whether it is evidence at all, and if so for what—are conditioned by the stories and forms she is already accustomed to, already loyal to. Fidelities necessarily determine how one construes the traces one encounters: Is it evidence? What is it evidence of? For Hellman those loyalties and familiar forms are multiple, and they overlap and undermine each other in ways that generate a complicated vantage point for what she can see and how she makes sense of what she sees. Her fidelity to her own memories inflects the process by which she gathers and examines texts created during the period she is writing about. Hellman dismisses certain observations and conclusions of her early writing on the basis of what has become more important in the years between then and now. A past self, as that past self appears in the traces of her earlier years, and a present self, who has moved into a different relationship with the past, are in competition in her memoirs. Eakin writes that the “allegiance to truth that is the central, defining characteristic of memoir is less an allegiance to a factual record that biographers and historians could check than an allegiance to remembered consciousness and its unending succession of identity states, an allegiance to the history

of one's self" ("What We Are Reading" 125). Hellman's memoirs are often understood as the kind of project Eakin describes: the locations, order, and meanings she gives to scenes now, at the moment of writing, seem to be given priority in all four texts.

Conversely, however, they also engage in a serious way with the temporal otherness of the documents. As Linda Wagner-Martin has argued, Hellman uses autobiography to "challenge the notion that recollection is a means to truth" ("Lillian Hellman" 128).

Hellman's life writing works through the problem of evidence and traces that contradict the story of the self that the memoirist is trying to relate to a reader—it incorporates them, rather than turning authority over to solely the memoirist's voice.

In Hellman's autobiographical writing, documents from the past add to the authority of the text less because of their own authoritativeness as sources and more because they underscore the framing and selecting power of the narrating voice, of the voice of memory. It is that voice that orders them and introduces them, that establishes their meaning within the memoir. Ultimately, references to material evidence serve only to make the memoirist's current testimony more central to the persuasiveness of the narrative. Hellman uses documentation not to supplement incomplete remembrances but instead to establish the irrelevance of documentation to the rhetorical appeal of her account: she creates moments in the text in which documents contradict her memories but, bypassing any reference to truth or accuracy, come to occupy a position inferior to the way she remembers events now. She turns memoir into the dominant way of knowing the past, subordinating traditional understandings of autobiography to it. She assigns herself the authority not just to testify, but to judge and interpret the past according to present concerns.

“Fooling with facts”

In “On Reading Again,” the introduction she wrote in 1978 for *Three*, a compiled volume of her first three memoirs, Hellman complicates the effort to determine whether autobiographical truth, as she understands it, is a function of present understanding (a fidelity to memory, or to the “history of one’s self” [Eakin, “What Are We Reading” 125]) or a fidelity to representing events as they occur, what Eakin calls a “faithful and unmediated reconstruction of events” (*Fictions* 56). Hellman concludes “On Reading Again” with a statement that can be read in two ways: “I tried in these books to tell the truth. I did not fool with facts” (9). Her statement has a double meaning, however, as “fool with” could mean either “take the time to consider” or “alter.” Her research notes reveal that despite her claim, she fooled with facts extensively in both senses, especially in the sense of taking the time to track down news articles and other sources meant to help identify dates and places.

Hellman told Peter Adam in a 1978 interview that when she began to conceptualize *An Unfinished Woman*, she started with documents. She turned to the magazine work she had done throughout the years on the Spanish war, the Russian war, and the Washington march with Martin Luther King, Jr. “I got out those pieces to see what I thought of them, and thought maybe I could make a collection of them,” she explained to Adam. “And I began to use the pieces, and the diaries—to alter and usually to make longer. And that is how the Unfinished Woman began, and that’s how it ended” (“Unfinished Woman” 229). Entire chapters of that book are headed “from a diary,” the diaries being Hellman’s records of her trips to Spain in 1937 and Russia in 1945, and they are punctuated at times with insertions and reflections from the standpoint of the

memoirist's present. Similarly, *Scoundrel Time*'s narrator seems to be a woman who has decided to revisit an emotionally-loaded period of her past life after an interval of many years, who although she promises to "stick to what I know," has assembled and studied not only her own diaries and notes from those months, but also legal documents, memoranda, correspondence, and the transcript of her HCUA hearing (*Scoundrel Time* 41). She relives, reconsiders, and responds to those years of finger-pointing and blacklisting by examining the traces they left on paper. Although *Pentimento* is a collection of reminiscences of more personal moments and does not seem to make the same effort as Hellman's first and third memoirs do to document the events it recounts, even its first pages suggest that documentary evidence will be a preoccupation of the portraits. In the opening pages of *Pentimento*'s first portrait, "Bethe," Hellman writes about a briefcase full of letters and clippings documenting her father's family history which had briefly been in her possession during her teen years. Even though it has disappeared, Hellman uses those vanished documents as a framework to assemble memories that are available to her only in fleeting moments between sleeping and waking. "Bethe" begins, in fact, with the text of an old letter.

Hellman's initial vision, when she considered publishing a collection of her reportage in the late 1960s, was to reproduce those articles as they had originally been written: unedited, faithful to them as they were, the kind of method she explains in the preface to *Three*: "I did not make changes in the books, although I was often tempted, because alteration seemed a kind of cheating. If I don't like all that I was, or all that I wrote, I would equally dislike tampering on the basis that I am now wiser. I do not think I am" (5). (Here she is referring to her re-publication of the memoir books in the late

1970s.) But instead, at this earlier moment of memoir-writing, Hellman began writing commentary, filling out, remembering more, painting over the lines, rather than presenting the “originals” of her magazine pieces. Within the memoir books, the old letters, diaries, and notes that Hellman includes have been similarly reworked. A venture into Hellman’s personal papers suggests that virtually none except the most public and immortalized of her earlier writing remains in its original form in her memoirs.⁶⁴

However, she was extremely concerned in many cases to get her facts right and clearly relied at times on actual diaries whose details she trusted. Pages and pages of research notes made during the planning stages for both *An Unfinished Woman* and *Scoundrel Time*, and to a lesser extent *Pentimento*, the most personal and least publicly historical of the first three memoirs, show that she wrote repeatedly to the researchers she had hired with requests to verify dates, places, names, and events. “Sorry to worry everyone again,” she wrote during the revisions of *An Unfinished Woman* in October of 1968 in what appears to be a letter to her publisher Little, Brown,⁶⁵ “but if the research is correct and my memory isn’t, I will have to do a fair amount of rewriting” (Letter to “Arthur” 3). She was even willing to consider, though guardedly, that her diaries might be inaccurate. In a list of research notes from November 1968 that appear to be addressed to a secretary but possibly just to herself, Hellman asked, “When was Kiev recaptured from the Germans[?] Send this back [to researchers] again. It is given now as November 5, 1944, which would seem to me that I would have to be wrong about

⁶⁴ The most notable example of a public document remaining unaltered is Hellman’s letter to the House Committee on Un-American Activities, a performance that most people would argue could not be outdone or re-done because it is such a static icon of a moment in American history.

⁶⁵ The letter, addressed just to “Arthur,” was possibly written to Arthur Thornhill, Jr., the head of Little, Brown at the time, with whom Hellman regularly corresponded.

shooting in the streets and yet that's what the diary says" ("Research Questions" 4). Her files show that her research practices were unusual and paradoxical. She wanted to fact check, unexpectedly, given the famous attacks on her facts and dates. But at the same time, she often came back and asserted the authority of her diaries. She disputed a researcher's claim about when the film *The Spanish Earth* was reviewed in the *New York Times* by saying (to herself or a secretary), "If this is true, then the piece must be altered, or the dates in the diary must be altered, and the dates in the diary are correct. Pull out diaries and make sure diary dates are correct" ("Research Questions" 1).

At the beginning of the research process, the point seems to have been to request more context, to surround herself with more dates, facts, and stories from the time period, in order to produce an atmosphere in which she could remember and write. The year between May 19, 1952 (two days before her HCUA hearing) and May of 1953 had "gone out of my memory," she told a researcher in 1975, and she had "lost, if [she] ever had, most of the diaries of that year" (Letter to Robert Westbrook). To write the memoir, she needed "the names of a few plays and movies that opened between 1952 and 1953; the names of a few books that were reviewed; and any large news events" to jog her memory (Letter to Robert Westbrook).

Hellman put great emphasis on tracking down dates during her research process for *Scoundrel Time*, which, though she calls it her "own history," is a much more public history than *An Unfinished Woman* or *Pentimento* (41). In 1975 she wrote to the filmmaker William Wyler and his wife Talli, friends of hers since the 1930s, asking for their help pinning down dates for a trip the three of them had taken together in Europe in the early 1950s, during which Hellman was struggling to write a play and William Wyler

was trying to convince her to work with him on his film *Carrie*. She is working from “carefully kept diary notes,” Hellman says, as she tries to compose one section of *Scoundrel Time*, but her notes from that time period are not labeled with dates (Letter to Mr. and Mrs. William Wyler 2). “All I need since what I have written you is from a diary,” she tells the Wylers, “is the year that happened. I am pretty certain that it was in the autumn, but the year is a mystery to me” (Letter to Mr. and Mrs. William Wyler 2). This letter is one of many examples of Hellman’s requests to friends to verify or clear up the itineraries or timelines of European trips. While doing research for her memoir books, she often asked friends for their accounts of some of the events she remembered. Requests such as this suggest that Hellman knew that her diaries may have been inattentive to detail or even written slightly retrospectively, a few weeks after the events had occurred.

In the later stages of writing each memoir, Hellman began to focus in and force her diaries to square off against the facts researchers had dug up, in order to determine which version would appear in print. For instance, while preparing to write *An Unfinished Woman*, Hellman asked a researcher for the date the Soviet army had entered Warsaw in 1945, but she added that her diary had it recorded as January 14. After several rounds of correspondence, she finally conceded that it may have been January 17, as reference sources said, and not January 14 as her diary said (Research Notes for *An Unfinished Woman*). This exchange is particularly revealing because despite what she told the researchers, the January 14 date was not specifically mentioned in Hellman’s diary of her 1944-45 Russia trip. What the diary did say was that on January 7 a Russian general told her the army would enter Warsaw in a week. In the final version of *An*

Unfinished Woman, one of the general's subordinates tells her that the army will take Warsaw on the 16th or 17th. The struggle over the date is significant because both in the diary and in the memoir, her emotional and intellectual intimacy with the general and his trust in her are prominent themes. In her research process on this point, Hellman revealed the way that she read and interpreted her diaries according to the possible narratives mapped out in her memory.

Facts and her remembered experience seem to jockey for position. "Is the automobile road from Valencia to Madrid mountainous?" she asks a researcher in 1966 (Research notes for *An Unfinished Woman*). In an excerpt from her diary of her 1937 trip to Spain that had been published in 1942 in an edited collection called *This Is My Best*, the road had certainly been mountainous: a large part of the action in that early version depended on the twists and turns in the mountain road between the two cities. She also makes a note, in 1966, about the name of a street she had included in the diary published in 1942: "Is there, or was there, during or before the Spanish Civil war, a street called Calle De La Cruz in Madrid?" If there is not, she needs "to be supplied with the name of a street which was in a middle to lower class business-residential section in Madrid . . . [that] was heavily destroyed during the war" (Research notes for *An Unfinished Woman*). Presumably she is worried that she may have fabricated the street name in 1942, perhaps because she had not recorded the name during the trip. She takes names, dates, and exact wordings seriously; they are the underpinnings for the realist mode of these sections of her memoirs, even though they are sometimes missing from her own records or inconsistent with her actual, historical experience in 1937. She is willing, however, as the previously-mentioned research query shows, to change the literal facts of her experience

in Spain—to choose any street in a “middle to lower class business-residential section in Madrid” as the setting for the episode, to establish a sense of veracity while altering details from her own experience.

In her writing, Hellman questions the authority of primary experience and primary records themselves. In “On Reading Again,” she meditates on the instability of truth over time and its implications for memoir-writing: “What didn’t I see during the time of work that I now see more clearly? . . . Or what did I see in the past that I could not now duplicate? Perhaps because the emotions that made it possible are over and are not recoverable . . . or perhaps because the years blank out even passions” (4). But Hellman disrupted other generic conventions, as well: she also lied in prefaces and interviews. She stressed again in the preface to “Julia” in *Three* (published the year before the Mary McCarthy controversy and a few years before the entry of Muriel Gardiner into the public eye) how firmly situated Julia was in historical reality: one person has guessed Julia’s identity correctly, she says, and the son of the doctor in the portrait who issued the false death certificate wrote to Hellman, infuriated that his father had been mentioned. After Hellman’s fictionalizing became public knowledge in the early 1980s, she continued to deny vehemently that her detractors were speaking the truth. Gardiner may have been someone else’s Julia, she told a *New York Times* reporter, but not hers (Wright 404).

There is a double-edged nature to memory in Hellman’s life writing. It is persistently uncertain, Hellman tells us: “As time and much of life have passed,” she says in *Maybe*, her fourth, final, and most fictional memoir book, “my memory . . . won’t supply what I need to know” (63). In fact, she must sort out, “for the purposes of this tale,” “what I am certain of, what maybe I added to what” (63). Yet elsewhere she

defends her memories: “I trust absolutely what I remember about Julia,” she writes in “Julia,” the portrait in *Pentimento* that became so notorious for apparently not being an account of a real person’s life, yet seemingly being introduced as one (112). Richard Wilbur, an acquaintance of Hellman, reports that she once became indignant when he called her memory “rotten” and asked how she developed “any notion of what [she] ought to put down on paper” (qtd. in Rollyson 471). Rather than defend her memory itself, however, she retorted, “What are you talking about? I’ve kept diaries all my life! I can prove anything I put on paper!” (qtd. in Rollyson 471).⁶⁶

Memory is a troubled term and yet a productive one, and it is the category that Hellman seizes as a thematic organizing point for her memoirs. Her method, spelled out most directly in *Pentimento* and in her introduction to that book in her 1979 collection *Three*, is to return to an untouched memory, to a moment she has not thought about in decades, doesn’t consider constitutive of the identity she has since developed—doesn’t rehearse, revisit, or retell—and with the help of both remembered glimpses and her written records, to try to make sense of the incidents by “free association” (*Three* 586).⁶⁷ “I had not, for example, consciously thought of Bethe for perhaps thirty years,” she says of the writing of *Pentimento* (*Three* 586). The records and the glimpses (best recovered while she is near sleep, she explains in “Bethe”) clash productively, and it is at the site of that clash that Hellman takes up her telling. Her double fidelity to these two kinds of

⁶⁶ Wilbur told this story in an interview with biographer Carl Rollyson; the words cannot be attributed directly to Hellman.

⁶⁷ The exception, she tells readers in *Pentimento* and *Three*, is Julia, her memories of whom she has digested and rehashed and tried to write many times, whom she has long understood as essential to her way of understanding the world. With that portrait, Hellman says, she revisited the memories yet again and was finally able to write about them (*Three* 586).

fooling with facts produces a fruitful tension that registers in her manuscripts and research notes and animates her memoir books.

Revision and Diary

Hellman's belief that the truth of a moment can change over time did not affect only the retrospective portions of her memoirs. The drafts, diaries, and research notes among her personal papers in the archives reveal that even when Hellman introduces segments of text as diary entries, she often chooses not to reproduce them word for word, or even in order. The Russia diary sections in *An Unfinished Woman* differ in order, in emphasis, sometimes in content, and certainly in wording from the original Russia diary from 1944-45 that remains among Hellman's papers. There is a strong possibility that she also "included" entries from diaries she no longer had in her possession or had never previously written. In 1975 Hellman asked a researcher to read all of her published writing in order to see whether she had ever written about what Dashiell Hammett said after seeing Clifford Odets' play *Awake and Sing*. After several letters back and forth and several apparently unsuccessful rounds of searches by the researcher, her fact-checker commented that it would "help if you could remember roughly what Hammett's comment actually was" (Rosenberg). Yet in *Scoundrel Time*, Hammett's comment appears in a passage that Hellman says she has copied from a diary written in 1952 (59). Although the research correspondence does not prove conclusively that the diary cited never existed, it is unlikely that after paying someone to search her published writing, Hellman looked through her diaries again and found the appropriate comments ready to be copied exactly.

To see memory and diary not as complementary but as clashing, to see diary as a form that is not fixed under some sort of understanding of autobiographical factuality, but is available to the creative truth-making powers of the dramatist-turned-memoirist, as well as to a truth that can be better written in the memoirist's present than it could have been in the diarist's moment—that much-hailed origin of the “primary source”—was bewildering and unacceptable to readers. When the memoirs' departures from factuality became apparent following Hellman's 1980 dispute with McCarthy and the subsequent fact-checking by her detractors, Hellman was repeatedly attacked for being unfaithful to biographical, historical, and documentary truth, in favor of another kind of truth.

Because of the partial, but problematic, continuity between narrator and narrative persona in a memoir, Hellman is able to consider the relationship between notions of significance in the creation of the historical record and notions of significance when one collects and interprets evidence years later. In a notebook Hellman used while planning *An Unfinished Woman*, she scrawled across the top of one page, “Bring Spanish pieces up to date, as if diary just read and used” (Research Notes for *An Unfinished Woman*). Although this sentence is somewhat cryptic, the memoirs do attempt to bring her diaries and notes “up to date,” to put them in conversation with Hellman's present perspective. Addressing Hellman's use of diaries and notebooks (he is the only critic to have done so), Adams points out that Hellman's reflections on her life undercut the testimony of the diaries, but he speculates that Hellman has left them in because “their falseness tells another kind of truth” (126).

As explained previously, Hellman's notes and drafts show that the diary sections of her memoirs were heavily revised from version to version, and a comparison to the

diary from her Russia trip allows great insight into how she made use of her actual diaries in her memoir writing. William Wright has noted that parts of the Russia sections in Hellman's first memoir are drawn from a piece published in the magazine *Collier's* upon Hellman's return from Europe early in 1945 (330). In fact, the *Collier's* piece—"I Meet the Front Line Russians"—and the handwritten diary are woven together in *An Unfinished Woman*, not only in the book's main narrative of that trip, but also in the diary sections dated 1944 and 1945.

Although the Spanish diary from 1937 itself is not among Hellman's papers, the successive drafts of those sections show similar changes in content and wording. Indications of the ways Hellman revised these sections can be found in her previously published writings as well as in the Harry Ransom Center files. Comparison to previously published writings that were also labeled as diaries enables a further understanding of the degree of change in Hellman's "diaries" over the years. Hellman's relatively unknown contribution to the 1942 volume *This Is My Best*, mentioned previously, is clearly an early version of the material that appears in *An Unfinished Woman's* Spanish diaries. The title of the piece is "The Little War." It is prefaced by the notation "These are pieces from a diary written on a long trip to Europe in 1937. This part is about Spain during the Civil War" (989). Much of the content overlaps with *An Unfinished Woman's* diary entries, but in several places the same events take shape differently or hint at a different meaning, and in most parts the wording is different. In the 1942 publication, for instance (in a section headed "Valencia, October 13, 1937"), Hellman describes her recognition that a bombing raid is about to begin: "Ahead of me was a cat and I don't think I paid any attention to what had happened until I saw the cat

suddenly sit down in the middle of the street” (989). In *An Unfinished Woman*, this is the passage: “I didn’t hear anything until I saw the cat sit down in the street, its head raised at a queer angle” (73).⁶⁸

The most significant change in language that Hellman makes between the Spanish diary entries in “The Little War” and those in *An Unfinished Woman* is to shift parts of them to the present tense. Whereas in “The Little War” Hellman for instance says, “I went for a walk this morning and stopped at the flower market and bought a bunch of flowers,” (989) in *An Unfinished Woman* she says, “A few blocks from the Press Office, where I tell myself I am certainly going this morning, there is a flower market. I stop to buy flowers . . .” (73). Large portions of the diary sections in not only *An Unfinished Woman* but also *Scoundrel Time* are written in present tense. This strategy differentiates them more sharply from the retrospective prose that surrounds them. In each of these two memoirs, the present-tense construction seems to represent an imaginative tenancy of that moment as it was. Hellman brings the pieces “up to date” (her noted advice to herself) in the sense that she adds a suspended feeling of being in the moment and not being sure what another day of war, or the day of the House Committee hearing, will bring.

Hellman effectively suggests that her present perspective allows her a clearer understanding of her past experiences than she had at the time. She manipulates her past writings to emphasize her lack of understanding in the past. Perhaps the use of this technique most worthy of inquiry is Hellman’s account in *An Unfinished Woman* of her visit to the forced labor camp Maidanek in 1944. Although Maidanek was not technically

⁶⁸ Some parts of “The Little War” are nearly identical to passages from Hellman’s 1938 article “Day in Spain,” published in the *New Republic* after she returned from Spain. “The Little War” also includes additional material, however.

a death camp, tens of thousands of people died there. William Wright questions in his biography of Hellman whether she had actually been to the camp at all, pointing out that she did not mention the trip in her initial 1945 write-up of her time in the Soviet Union in *Collier's*, and that surely such a significant event would have found its way into the magazine article (331). But Hellman's Russian translator Raya Orlova asserted in an interview with Hellman biographer Carl Rollyson that Hellman actually did see the camp (229). For some reason she elected not to include it in the article.

In *An Unfinished Woman* Hellman uses an “overdone” language to attempt to capture her horror, Rollyson says, a “kind of language that came to her in retrospect” (229). He argues that any explanation of her visit “would have been entirely out of place in her journalistic report on the front line Russians” (229). Whereas another *Collier's* correspondent, Jan Karski, who had published an account in the October 14, 1944 special issue of *Collier's* of his visit to Belzec, wrote an account that sounds odd to modern ears—too journalistic, the emotions uncertain, almost searching for appropriate language—Hellman's account in *An Unfinished Woman* sounds very much like similar accounts written after a lapse of so many years. It is perhaps a representation of what she felt she *should* have felt at the time.

According to Rollyson, an FBI search of Hellman's luggage on October 14, 1944, while she was in Seattle en route to Fairbanks and then to Russia, turned up the October 7 issue of *Collier's*. She would have left the United States too late to read the Oct. 14 issue, despite being a *Collier's* reader (and under contract to write for the magazine upon the conclusion of her trip). The next month was taken up in a difficult and lonely journey westward across Siberia, but it seems likely that she may have heard of the special issue

at some point between her arrival back in the United States in February 1945 and the publication of her own article at the end of March, if not before she had visited Maidanek. Yet she avoided writing a similar kind of immediate reaction.

Hellman claims in *An Unfinished Woman* that her own Maidanek passage is based on a diary “written six months later” (133). In other words, the event became important to her, or she acquired the language to describe it, after a period of time had passed. She paraphrases in *An Unfinished Woman* to allow even more retrospect: “A diary written six months later tells me that . . . as we moved around that endless, wired horror of flat earth, we came to the death ovens . . . that, turning now, we faced a building that had a long worm crawling up the wall” (*An Unfinished Woman* 133). The account is impressionistic and notes Hellman’s horror using images that by 1967 were variations on standard encounters with the camps: among them the shock of seeing life at the site of so much death, and consequently her outright revulsion at the sight of the living worm. More accounts of visits to the camps had come out by the middle of 1945, and if Hellman is telling the truth about the diary written six months later, she found a way to speak about it months after the event, perhaps in dialogue with the newly-emerging modes of writing about the Holocaust. Discourse about the Holocaust was slow to develop in the United States. Ben Yagoda reports that only a “handful” of first-person accounts of the Holocaust were published in New York or London “in the immediate postwar period” and that they “did not penetrate the American public’s consciousness” (223). He quotes Elie Wiesel, who says that although he “knew the role of the survivor was to testify,” he “did not know how”; he “lacked a framework [and] mistrusted the tools, the

procedures’” (qtd. in Yagoda 223). Hellman’s was not the story of a survivor, of course, but she, too, claims an inability to tell about what she had witnessed.

Even if this diary entry from six months after her visit existed, however, it was not the first one she wrote. Despite her comment in *An Unfinished Woman* that she “could not make a second sentence” (133) when she sat down to write in her diary immediately after the visit to Maidanek, a comparison to her diary from her 1944-45 trip to Russia shows that at some point before January 3, 1945, before she had returned from the front, she made a page of notes that sound much like Karski’s article, informational but scarcely attempting to represent emotion: “Permanent concentration camp . . . Gassed in chamber and brought here . . . 5 ovens—thought they would [sic] bathed. To gas chambers. Without legs, arms—take two or three men at once . . . Major said he couldn’t believe it, either” (Diary from Russia Trip). The notes are the unprocessed records of a first observer. “One gets mad at people telling the story,” she protests in the diary notes, hinting at disbelief, a response later deemed unacceptable in discourse about the Holocaust. Other than this one moment of emotion, however, Hellman’s notes from 1945 reveal emotional distance, shock, less engagement than some of her other entries in the Russian diary. They are almost strictly factual. She gives numbers, dates, claims that her guides make, all without suggesting that she even believes they are true. Hellman’s later responses, however, make her memories intelligible by putting them in conversation with a subsequently-developed tradition of writing about the Holocaust. Although she paraphrases in *An Unfinished Woman*—and perhaps never wrote the image-laden entry she claims to paraphrase—her response to the camp serves as a powerful symbol of the

new world emerging in 1945 because she frames it as a perspective captured in that year, in the aftermath of the war.

In a number of cases in her memoir books, Hellman seems to have rearranged and revised the notes, diaries, and accounts given by her friends, in order to give primacy to the voice of memory. At least in the case of the Russia sections in *An Unfinished Woman*, her drafts suggest that her final step was to revise the diary entries in the interest of narrative coherence, re-ordering the events if they did not produce a convincing story, or changing the seasons or the characters to add drama. The order of the events at the Russian front, for example, are rearranged so that they build to a climax in a way that the diary notes do not. In *An Unfinished Woman* they build up to the offer by the Russian general to take Hellman to the front. In the diary, that offer is absent, and the account of the trip instead ends with an anti-climatic scene.

Some minor incidents in the Russia diary become much fuller scenes, or even quite different stories, in the diary passages in her memoir. In *An Unfinished Woman* there is a passage in which Hellman accidentally moves the hand she is using to shield a pair of binoculars from the light while watching a German encampment. Her mistake provokes an “answer of grenades and heavy guns” (135). This dramatic scene seems to be an extension of an episode in the diary in which guns, mines, and hand grenades go off while Hellman watches Russian practice maneuvers with binoculars (but not in response to anything she has done). In the only slightly retrospective piece of reportage that Hellman published in *Collier's* magazine in March 1945, soon after her return, the incident has just begun to be dramatic: the general gives her the glasses, and she says, “I didn't understand, and still don't, why, if we were only watching maneuvers, he suddenly

pulled me away from the glass slit and said sharply, ‘Keep the glasses down, please! We are too near to snipers’” (“I Meet” 71). Hellman recounted this incident three times in published writings. The third was in *Scoundrel Time*, in a diary entry supposedly written in May 1952 about a dinner with Clifford Odets before he testified before the HCUA. (In the entry, Hellman tells Odets the story as an example of her failures under pressure, so she has once again re-implemented it to serve a new purpose.) She revised the story each time, altering it to fit its new purpose.

Even the famous note from Julia, of which Hellman claims to “remember every word,” is carefully crafted and heavily revised across drafts in order to give it the literary force it has in the final version (*Pentimento* 111). In the first version among Hellman’s drafts, Julia’s note says, “When you cross the border, leave the candy box on the seat. Open this box and carry the muff in your hands. There is no thanks for what you can and will do from those whose lives are waiting. No thanks from me either. My love, Julia” (“Julia” TS). After several sets of revisions, the note published in *Pentimento* says, “At the border, leave the candy box on the seat. Open this box and wear the hat. There is no thanks for what you will do for them. No thanks from me either. But there is the love I have for you. Julia” (111).

Even when quoting the words of others, Hellman does not present their writing strictly as found; her fidelity seems to be, again, to her understanding of what her correspondents meant, rather than to the letter of the text. As she was preparing to write *Scoundrel Time*, Hellman wrote a letter to Joseph Rauh, her counsel before and during her HCUA hearing. In the letter she told Rauh she wanted to represent him in an “affectionate and admiring” manner and had “checked every mention of [him] against a

diary [she] kept” (Letter to Joseph Rauh). Nevertheless, in the book she very slightly edited a letter she had received from him, deleting commas and introductory phrases in order to make it sound more like a memorandum than like the friendly letter it was (Letter to Joseph Rauh). She also replaced the name of one person who figured in the letter with the name of another minor figure who had already been mentioned, presumably in order to simplify the story for her reader.

The description in *An Unfinished Woman* of an evening spent in Madrid with Ernest Hemingway, Martha Gellhorn, and a “large” and “overknowing” British journalist is one of the most useful scenes for understanding Hellman’s writing process as she read and re-worked her “diaries” (*Unfinished Woman* 87). (In the case of the Spain sections of *An Unfinished Woman*, these may have been either the “pieces from a diary” that she published in 1942 or an original diary that is no longer among her papers.) Gellhorn, in her article “Guerre de Plume,” objected strongly to Hellman’s account of this evening in *An Unfinished Woman*, drawing upon both her own memories and public records of bombing incidents. In an intermediate draft of *An Unfinished Woman* found in Hellman’s files, the typed text of this scene is written retrospectively, from the perspective of an older woman looking back (*Unfinished Woman* TS 19). However, Hellman’s handwritten revisions turn it into a diary entry. At the top of the page, Hellman has written “diary 1934” in pencil (*Unfinished Woman* TS 19). In the typed draft, Hemingway tells Hellman that he is glad that she has brought canned goods into Spain because “John Dos Passos hadn’t brought in any food but had eaten everybody else’s, and he and Dos Passos had had an ugly fight about that” (*Unfinished Woman* TS 19). “I have, through the years, heard many versions of this fight,” Hellman comments at the end

of the passage in the typescript, “but I have never heard that it was mended.” In pen, she puts brackets around that last sentence and inserts “1968—” between the first bracket and “I have, through the years,” presumably in order to make the retrospect of “through the years” fit the fact that this passage is supposed to have been written during Hellman’s trip to Spain (*Unfinished Woman* TS 19). Although the last sentence does not appear in the final version of *An Unfinished Woman*, in bracket form or otherwise, this draft shows the development of a technique she uses throughout her diary sections in that book and the other memoirs. She frames some of her writing as old, hailing from the historical moment she is writing about, though her notes and drafts demonstrate that it is not actual word-for-word diary. But then her narrating voice breaks in from the present, in brackets and preceded by the year of writing, putting the text she has framed as old writing in conversation with the text she is framing as new writing. She also inserts occasional footnotes that comment on the diaries. These moves bring the reader into the memoirist’s experience: she stages the pleasure of recollection upon reading old writing, or the shock of seeing how her perspective has changed, and the desire to fill in the gaps with thoughts that became significant in retrospect.

Often the bracketed sections and footnotes from 1968 in the case of *An Unfinished Woman* or 1975 in the case of *Scoundrel Time* express a troubledness or amazement at the innocent response of her past self to a horrible situation, especially when Hellman the diarist did not realize the extent of it. In a diary section labeled “From a diary, Moscow, 1944,” Hellman writes, “By now, December 1944, the people look tired, cold, shabby and exhausted-sick in this, the easiest, winter of the war” (116). A footnote to the adjective “easiest” explains: “This was the word used in 1944. In 1966,

three Muscovites told me it had been the hardest winter of the war. I think this conflict of memory came about because in 1944 they knew they were on the way to victory and an end. In 1966 they remember only the deprivation and the misery” (116).

One of *An Unfinished Woman*'s major projects is re-reading Hellman's 1944-45 trip to Russia in light of a trip she makes in 1967, just before writing her first memoir. During the trip, she meets many of the people she had spent months with 23 years before, compares the past and present culture and scenery of Moscow, finds out who is still living and who has died, and verifies some of her understandings of political, military, and economic situations during that earlier trip. After the 1944-45 diary sections in *An Unfinished Woman*, Hellman includes several diary sections from 1967, some of which are written from Moscow. She puts herself in the same space again and holds up the old writing to see how it compares to what she is seeing now: “How good it is to come back here. My room in the Astoria Hotel must be directly below the one I had during the war. I open the old notebook . . .” (180).

In *Scoundrel Time*, the set-up is similar, but the encounter with documents is even more deliberate. Hellman presents herself, the memoirist, as a woman finally prepared to look back at a traumatic period in her past. In order to do it, the memoirist surrounds herself with documentary traces. She writes to fellow participants in the events she is trying to recall, seeking clarifications of legal problems she did not understand, or care to understand, at the time but now wants to come to terms with and share with an audience who may not have a sense of the significance of the period she is describing. “I am looking at a recent letter from Daniel Pollitt [Rauh's assistant],” she says at one moment in the text (110). “I quote from a memorandum Rauh sent me, this July, 1975. The

memorandum is dated March 26, 1952,” she says at another (87). (Rauh had recently forwarded her the old memorandum, she says, which recounts a meeting he had had with the House Committee prior to her May 21 hearing. Hellman says in *Scoundrel Time* that she had not remembered reading it when she originally received it in 1952.) Hellman pulls from diaries and notes as well, draws from the hearing transcript, and includes the entirety of her famous letter to the committee. Her research notes give the same impression, that she surrounded herself with documents. Rauh’s memorandum is there in her *Scoundrel Time* research files, both the original 1952 copy with a cover letter from that year, and the new copy Rauh has forwarded to her in response to her request for information. (That one says, across the top in Hellman’s handwriting, “Used in piece.” [Rauh].)

In *Scoundrel Time*, Hellman frames her description of her HCUA hearing in May 1952 as an encounter with the transcript of the hearing. After years of being unable to write about that period of her life, she says in the opening paragraph of *Scoundrel Time*, she decides to face her “strange hangups” and write what she terms her “own history” of the time (41). Although Hellman begins the section about the hearing itself as a recollection, she transitions into a quotation from the testimony of Martin Berkeley, who had named Hellman and Dashiell Hammett as participants at a Communist Party organizing meeting held in his house in 1937. Then Hellman quotes the transcript of her own hearing, but only once, and briefly: “MR. TAVENNER: In other words, you are asking the committee not to ask you any questions regarding the participation of other persons in the Communist Party activities?” (*Scoundrel Time* 106). (Frank Tavenner, chief counsel for the committee, is attempting to summarize her May 19 letter to the

committee.) In *Scoundrel Time*, Hellman paraphrases, rather than quotes, her response to Tavenner: “I said I hadn’t said that” (106). She continues to paraphrase for the remainder of the account of the hearing, but her descriptions of the conversation follow the timeline of the transcript. The single direct quotation has signaled that she is working from the transcript itself. Prior to that quotation, her description had been framed as just a memory—she roughly describes the opening questions and the emphases the committee was putting on certain parts of her life. This later section of paraphrase instead has openings such as “I said,” “Mr. Wood said,” “Rauh said” (*Scoundrel Time* 106-07). Her switch to paraphrase shifts the focus back to the authority of the memory of Hellman the memoirist, whom she depicts as the same sometimes faltering hero from 1952, but older and with a more mature understanding of what had happened.

After describing the tension between Tavenner and Rauh, Hellman’s lawyer, when Rauh hands copies of Hellman’s letter to the committee to the press section, Hellman writes, “The polite words of each as they read on the page were not polite as spoken” (167). Since she has not quoted Tavenner and Rauh’s interchange, her reader has no means of considering her statement, and instead is left to watch this aging, authoritative memoirist read and remember. Hellman takes issue with the text of the transcript: “I am convinced that in this section of the testimony, as in several other sections—certainly in Hammett’s later testimony before the Senate Internal Security Subcommittee—either the court stenographer missed some of what was said and filled it in later, or the documents were, in part, edited” (107). The words on the page are what is left, but they fail to represent the truth of the hearing as Hellman remembers it: she casts doubt on their authority.

When she searches out the traces of events she has lived through, Hellman finds that what she chose to record at the time, or what news articles reported, are not the moments that later came to have meaning for her. “[M]y notebooks tell what people I saw, what the usually glum dinner conversation at Spasso was about, the bad plays that the Russians were convinced I wanted to see,” she writes in a retrospective portion of *An Unfinished Woman*, “but nowhere is there a record of how much I came to love, still love Raya, the remarkable young girl who was my translator-guide . . . And there are many entries about Sergei Eisenstein and our almost daily cup of tea, but I didn’t know, couldn’t know, that twenty-one years after his death he is more real than many of the people I saw last week” (112). And so she selects, modifies, and invents documents—and in at least some instances makes it quite clear that she is doing so—in order to give a picture of what the past might have felt like at the time, but with the benefit of understanding developed in the meantime. Her references to and excerpts from material traces, considered alongside her revision of some of those traces and their clash with some of her later research, allow her to undermine the claim of biography, as opposed to autobiography, to access the past and make meaning out of it. And perhaps this tendency in her memoirs helps to make sense of Hellman’s desire to prevent biographies from being written of not only herself but also her intimate friends Dorothy Parker and Dashiell Hammett. It is less likely that she was worried that all three of them had real things to hide than that she suspected that when a biographer attempted to access and narrativize their lives by interpreting the traces they had left behind, her motives and choices and those of her friends might seem strange or wrong, in retrospect.

Pentimento: Repenting and Repainting

Pentimento, though among Hellman's first three memoirs it is the one least concerned with the representation of major historical events, nevertheless provides a crucial interpretive key for coming to terms with her engagement with documentary evidence in all three books. In the first paragraphs of this work that she calls a "Book of Portraits," Hellman meditates on the book's title, *Pentimento*. Aged paint, she says, sometimes becomes transparent and allows the original lines on a canvas, the tracings of the artist's first vision, to show. "That is called pentimento," Hellman explains, and it allows the viewer to see, many years later, how the painter had repented, changed his mind (3). Hellman calls the painter's change of mind a way of "seeing and then seeing again" (3). She goes on to draw a parallel to her ways of seeing the people she will consider in her "portraits." Now that the paint has aged, she says, she wants to see what was there for her once and what is there for her now. Most critics associate the term "pentimento" with Hellman's own method: she peers through the translucent paint and considers possible versions of the past.

But the comparison on the first page of *Pentimento* can be misleading. Hellman brings two images together under one term. A painter's "repenting" has nothing to do with aging paint; the repenting and the aging occur hundreds of years apart. The painter sees and then sees again within a relatively short window of time, before he ever lays on the paint. It is not the transparency or the aging that allows him to see again—that is for viewers long after he is dead—but merely an initial and then a succeeding artistic vision. The word "pentimento" draws together that initial re-conception of the work by the artist and a later understanding by others, enabled by the passing of time, of his changing

vision for the work. The awkward analogy to this term from art history allows Hellman—precisely because of its failure to correspond—to dwell on the confusion between the viewing self in the present and the past self whom the present self is trying to comprehend.

Hellman initially positions herself, on the first page of *Pentimento*, as observer rather than as artist with respect to the characters that have peopled her life and the accounts she has given of them. She suggests that her purpose is to compare an earlier understanding of those people—“what was there for me once”—with her present understanding—“what is there for me now” (3). But the “for me” in both phrases calls to mind the artist re-envisioning a scene, laying on a new coat of paint and altering the original design. Adams’s reading is that “what Hellman has done is a kind of reverse pentimento”: she “has simultaneously layered old and new paint, deliberately exposed the pentimenti behind her portraits” (140). Hellman the observer, in the present moment, is not just seeing her past, but re-envisioning and repainting once again, over the top of the original lines.

The troubling question, however, is how the artist in the present moment comes to see the original lines at all. The painter has his original lines to reject or follow, as he re-envisions. What *are* the original lines, in Hellman’s version of pentimento? What does the memoirist, revisiting the past, depend on to let her know what is a reworking and what is not? The past from the perspective of the present always tastes of the present. Hellman glosses over the question in the introduction to *Pentimento*. But despite this initial sleight-of-hand, she is certainly aware of, or perhaps obsessed with, the problem of access to the past. It is for this reason, I think, that Hellman begins the first of the

portraits, a story called “Bethe,” with a document, a letter, from a relative in Germany, about her cousin Bethe’s impending arrival in America. The letter appears to be the kind of trace that a historian or a biographer would quote and interpret—the kind of object that is so important in historical research because it is primary, not layered with interpretations made in the interim—almost a window into the past. The first line of this first portrait is very much in conversation with the passage that has preceded it, the discussion of the term “pentimento.” “The letter said, says now, in Gothic script,” the portrait of Bethe begins, and what follows is nearly a page of quoted material (7).

The letter cries out its own content boldly: “Bethe will be sailing between November 3rd and November 6th,” it begins, and other straightforward declarative statements follow. There are no ellipses; no sentences break off unfinished. The letter is initially framed as a clear, complete, and authentic account of Bethe’s travel plans. Immediately, however, this clarity begins to recede. Hellman follows the long quotation from the letter with this passage: “The letter is blurred and the pages are torn in the folds, but the name Bowman appears several times and it is still possible to make out a sentence in which the writer tells of having sold something to make the voyage possible” (8). It is hard to believe that she is talking about the same letter on page one and on page two. After presenting hundreds of words inside quotation marks, Hellman describes the blurredness of the words, the tears in the page, and the fact that she can pick out a name here and there on the page and “make out” one sentence. Within the first two pages of *Pentimento*, Hellman has already quoted at length from a document and then asserted that the document she is quoting is almost completely illegible. She first suggests that remnants from earlier days can make pentimento possible because they establish the

original lines, and then she immediately undermines the stability of the idea of documentary evidence. Even if Hellman has copied the letter into her writer's book as a child and still has an exact copy of the text, it is unusual phrasing to say that the blurred and torn original "says now." Hellman refuses to allow this first document to serve as stable evidence of what the original lines were. More often than not, in the pages that follow, she references documents but declares that they are missing, even while she quotes them.

Hellman has set us up for this move already. The only phrase that precedes the letter has a verb whose tense changes: "The letter said, says now" (7). The present tense is immediately eclipsed by the past tense, and yet the original shows through. Hellman repeatedly doubles tenses when she describes documents in her memoirs. (Adams has noted these doublings as well and calls them "mixed tenses" [141]). The time indicated by the past-tense verb could be the moment the letter was written, or the moment the child Lillian Hellman first read it, and the shift to present-tense seems to indicate that there has been no change in the content of the letter in the intervening years. The memoirist can look at the document to see the original lines, perhaps accessing her first understanding of who Bethe was, and at the same time she can consider the overlaid paint, what the document has meant in subsequent re-readings. Re-reading and quoting from the letter provides an occasion to come to terms with the pentimento of the memoirist's vision of the past—what was there for her once, and what is there for her now. *An Unfinished Woman* begins more like traditional autobiographical writing: linear description of a childhood, the authority of the account based only on the author's testimony to remembered events. But on *Pentimento*'s first page, there is the meditation

on aging paint, and on the second, the long quotation from the letter. The earliest draft of “Bethe” that is available in the Hellman Collection is a very different kind of story from the published version; it is full of action, police, and mafia intrigue (Hellman, “Bethe” TS). Although the first two pages of the draft are missing, the amount of space the missing text fills and the fact that the third page of this draft is very similar to the third page of the next suggests that even this early, action-filled draft of “Bethe” began with the letter. The letter appears in every subsequent draft, consistently positioned at the opening of the portrait. The placement of this passage, I think, suggests the centrality of Hellman’s engagement with documentary evidence and then, immediately, the unreliability of that evidence.

Hellman is most often criticized for inventing memories in “Julia,” but she has already declared her independence from historical fact in the first pages of *Pentimento*. The lengthy quotation followed by the description of the letter’s illegibility sets the stage for the work that the portrait of “Bethe” will do, because while “Bethe” works through ideas about love and sex, as most critics note, it is also about missing evidence, forgetting, and whether one can access the past at all without making it merely an analogy useful for understanding the present. Later in the portrait, the narrator tells of “picturing” lost newspaper clippings and a letter from Bethe “in a German I couldn’t read” (16). Such traces are not only unattainable but literally uninterpretable. Hellman’s persona, in this moment, comes face to face with images of the originals, but their only meaning is in her retrospective glance. The letter in “Bethe” is present, then absent. It appears in the text briefly, then gives way to the memoirist’s ruminations about its place in her family’s history and her own emotional development. What the letter “says now”

immediately eclipses the text itself. The text's own claim to tell the truth is asserted, then subverted. Likewise, despite Hellman's fact-checking, the question of factuality is elided over and over in her memoirs.

Coming to terms with documents in order to "see again," as *Pentimento's* introduction puts it, appears to have been more than just one of the ideas Hellman's memoirs grapple with (3). William Wright points out that Hellman's 1938 and 1945 magazine articles are inconsistent with her supposed diary accounts in *An Unfinished Woman*. He implies, on the basis of that evidence, that it is because some of the events never occurred that Hellman has mixed up her accounts. However, Hellman's comments in her interview with Peter Adam suggest that before writing, she had quite recently referred to the magazine pieces. In *An Unfinished Woman*, she is perhaps trying to consider, from the perspective of the present, what her initial perceptions—months before the magazine articles were written, even—might have been. In *Scoundrel Time*, the likelihood that her May 1952 diary entry about her dinner with Clifford Odets was written in the 1970s suggests that she is trying to stage a meeting of her emotions in the days before her hearing and her emotions as she looks back on those days. She is working through the tension between doing justice to the past self and yet making the past comprehensible in the present, and the past self comprehensible to strangers. She is performing and developing the author function that we recognize as the contemporary memoirist.

Hellman allows the letters and diaries she quotes to "say" only briefly; her real fidelity is not to the "said" but to the "says now," the translation into a present meaning, the adaptation into art. Appealing to documentary traces seems to enable the *pentimento*

that Hellman says she is attempting—but by re-imagining the supposed “originals” themselves, she is doing something different, as well: admitting that the paint has not really become translucent as it has aged, but claiming the authority to paint both the old lines and the new since the original lines are no longer visible. Her research and fact-checking serve not to establish a referential factuality but instead to establish that the evidential authority of her past writings depends entirely on the way in which her present writing vouches for or disqualifies their truthfulness.

The artifacts she cites are part of a rhetorical structure in which memory underwrites the persuasiveness of the life story. Hellman’s investigative process as memoirist is structured by the requirements and possibilities of the genre. Her uncovered evidence has a second life as rhetorical evidence—selected, interpreted, and positioned to make a case for what memoir suggests is the more real truth provided by memory. All the layers of overwriting and revision in the diary entries and letters are paradoxically meant, in Hellman’s understanding of memoir, to produce the closest encounter possible with the original, to make the documents say now (or mean now) what memory says they said then. As she hints at the beginning of *Pentimento*, Hellman the memoirist is never really the viewer of the pentimenti or the aging woman examining her life through its traces. She instead inhabits the position of the artist, repenting and repainting, generating the kind of tension between invention and factuality that seems to define contemporary memoir.

EPILOGUE

I return like a detective to the dance floor in New York, or was it someplace else invented to look like October? I turn back to a music the d.j. never played because the room was too blue for falling angels. Nothing by Aretha, nothing by chance. A woman chased by spirits kept asking you to dance, made a gift of her hands. I add her to the evidence: we were there. She was a witness but I don't have her name. Or yours or mine, or was the shift in axis an event in the imagination? . . . I want you eternally ever, but this is the puzzle. There is no dance floor on Nineteenth Street. The woman with spirits left no forwarding address. There is no getaway car, no Brooklyn Bridge. The evidence floats by like rings over sweet water. Like rings over sweet water.

Joy Harjo, "Crossing Water," In *Mad Love and War*, 1990

The rhetorical power of poetry, like that of memoir, tends to be located in something other than its use of evidence. And yet Harjo's poem, like Hellman's memoirs, gestures toward missing evidence in order to try to prove that what the speaker claims has indeed happened. The speaker, who is investigating a remembered scene "like a detective," says of a woman she recalls, "I add her to the evidence: we were there. She was a witness but I don't have her name." To construe the woman's remembered presence as evidence is an act of pure assertion, of testimony with nothing tangible to corroborate it. It is having been "there" that underwrites the speaker's authority, a point that aligns this poem with the work of memoir. To name a witness who cannot be called is a move that fails to meet legal or even historical standards of evidence, and yet the speaker persists in using the language of evidence. Why is the use of evidence so rhetorically powerful? Why do we embrace it so fully? Why do we always want to see it used? Why would Hellman bother to quote from diaries and letters if she was going to

change them? She had the option as a memoirist of proceeding on the pure assertions of the voice of memory. Why this fascination with evidence, this attraction to evidence?

Just in the last week, I watched a series of articles from online sources of various stripes pop up on my Facebook newsfeed, posted by friends, colleagues, and acquaintances in the wake of recent gun control proposals. The first, drawing on a 1998 *U.C. Davis Law Review* article, purported to give historical evidence that the second amendment to the U.S. Constitution was passed in order to support the continuation of slave patrols.⁶⁹ The second, authored by a legal scholar who had previously published on the second amendment in other law reviews, tried to show (again with significant reference to various types of evidence) that the reason proposed by the first was absolutely not on the table at the time of the passage of the Bill of Rights.⁷⁰ The second article was followed by a string of reader comments (yet again citing plenty of evidence and authorial qualifications) arguing that neither of the first two articles got the story quite right. Historians and non-historians alike argue about what happened in the past in order to support arguments about the courses of action (political, legal, academic, personal) we should be pursuing in the present; every time we make these arguments, we dip into an incredibly broad archive of potential evidence for our arguments. The closer to the present the periods we study are, the more expansive these archives tend to be, and the more possible it seems to find just about any fact we need to serve as evidence for the historical account we want to tell—and for the argument contained within the narrative

⁶⁹ The first, by Thom Hartmann, “The Second Amendment Was Ratified to Preserve Slavery,” was written for an online news source called *Truth-out* and was based on a 1998 law review article by Carl Bogus called “The Hidden History of the Second Amendment.” See Works Cited for publication information.

⁷⁰ The second, “2nd Amendment Passed to Protect Slavery? No!”, was written by Paul Finkelman for the online black issues magazine *The Root*.

we are constructing. At some point the immensity of the archive of potential evidence overwhelms the possibility of even remotely doing it justice in our reading and considering it.

For a number of years Microsoft has been engaged in an experiment called MyLifeBits, a project that the Wikipedia article about its experimental subject calls “an experiment in life-logging (not the same as life-blogging)” (“Gordon Bell”). This differentiation, I think, is hugely significant: even the day by day, seemingly un-plotted blogging of a life requires an ordering consciousness, a great deal of narrative direction and selectivity about what constitutes an incident and what incidents to record. The logging of a life, on the other hand, is supposed to rely on systems set up to record a huge percentage of what the man whose life is being “logged,” Gordon Bell, experiences. (There are devices set up to record what he sees and hears, what he reads, views, and writes.) The record Microsoft is making of Bell’s life is in some sense just a slightly more thorough version of what is happening to much of the writing, seeing, hearing, and speaking done in the 21st century. A 2010 Amazon.com reviewer of Bell’s 2009 book on the MyLifeBits project and its implications (co-authored with Jim Gemmell) remarks that the book is already (in 2010) long-since outdated, if it was not already in 2009. What Bell’s apparatus enabled him to record in 2009 (though he appears to be still archiving his life) is not significantly greater, the reviewer claims, than what any person who uses a good deal of technology has the capability of doing to his or her own life: “Reality has already passed by this book. Perhaps if Mr. (Dr.?) Bell worked for Apple he’d have a greater appreciation for how many of his lifelogging ideas already are easy and automated” (Carpenter). Vast amounts of what is read and seen by the wealthy and the

technologically-inclined, at least, is being recorded—more than anyone, whether in a private capacity or as a researcher, will ever be able to sort through. With such an abundance of potential evidence, it becomes difficult to even pretend that these records themselves will shape the stories we and future generations will tell about these lives.

Significantly, Microsoft's goal is to make all this historical documentation *searchable*. To search it, Bell or anyone studying his life would need to approach the archive with a keyword (or some other similar index to the attributes desired in the object being sought). To go into an investigation with a keyword is to have a strong sense of the shape of the story you are going to be telling and the kind of evidence you will need. MyLifeBits, or the milder version of it that so many of us are living, with our e-mails and photographs and videos archived going back and back, does for the experiences of a life what Google does for so much of the potential evidence for the stories we tell and the arguments we make about the world and about the past: puts it at our command, if we know what we are looking for. Because of these archives the potential evidence is so overwhelmingly *there*, so overwhelmingly preserved and available, that the only way we can approach it is by knowing already what kind of evidence we are seeking, what kind of a story we are telling.

Hellman's method in her memoirs extends into the narrativization of lives and memories what Faulkner's, Warren's, and Owens's novels illustrate about how prior commitments and imagined end narratives alike direct the search for and interpretation of evidence by professional investigators. Considering Hellman's method, which she developed well before the digital age, helps me to make sense of the consequences of the MyLifeBits project, as well as the wider ramifications of the idea of a perfectly-

accessible past in mass culture. To be able to read a document from the past in the first place, Hellman suggests in *Pentimento*, the memoirist (or the person interpreting his or her own life) must come to it knowing what it is supposed to mean—the portrait of “Bethe,” the first in the book, is after all built around an unreadable letter. Memory in story form, as I argue in my chapter on Hellman’s memoirs, provides the organizing logic for the data the memoirist encounters as she attempts to access her past, whether that data is her old papers or her isolated and non-narrative (or at least less-narrative) glimpsed memories. The inclusion of more data points does not necessarily help bring a reconstruction of the past closer to what Ranke called “*wie es gewesen ist*,” how it was, how it happened (57).

The explosion of potential evidence for lives in the digital age suggests that even with an almost unlimited archive of potential evidence, using Hellman’s *pentimento* metaphor for understanding access to the past is still a sleight-of-hand. In the preface to *Pentimento*, Hellman likens her method as a memoirist to an artist’s “repenting” between the original pencil lines and the laying on of paint, which allows viewers centuries later to see the artist’s original vision alongside the final one, as the paint ages. “The paint has aged now and I wanted to see what was there for me once, what is there for me now,” she says (Hellman, *Pentimento* 3). But as I have argued about Hellman’s memoirs, the pencil lines beneath the painting of the memoirist will always need to be supplied by the artist (and that term could be used for anyone representing his or her past) in the present moment. Evidence is almost invariably uncovered, in historical investigations and explorations of the personal past alike, where and because it is sought. Hellman’s voice of memory equates to today’s keywords; without the narrative structure provided by

present consciousness, there is no access to the past. Yet the concept of evidence remains powerful. Like Harjo's speaker, we assert it to show that "we were there."

The texts examined in this dissertation dismantle the genre detective fiction apparatus through which evidence appears to lead to reconstruction and thereby to justice. In Faulkner's detective fiction and major works alike, the anticipation of the story that will eventually be told determines what the investigator figures can see and how they interpret it. In Warren's *All the King's Men*, Jack Burden's multiple loyalties shape his encounter with the evidence. In Owens's novels, the investigators' commitments to and education in two diverging epistemologies mean that they approach the evidence in the murder cases in ways quite unlike genre fiction detectives. Hellman's memoirs show evidence to be a rhetorical device subordinate to the authority of the voice of memory. Although they are responding, variously, to the work of Agatha Christie and Rex Stout, Dashiell Hammett and Tony Hillerman, all of the texts discussed in this dissertation nevertheless suggest, presciently, that this world we live in is not a *CSI* world, in which, as a critic I quoted in the Introduction stated, characters "finish each other's sentences, providing a single interpretive avenue available to anyone who has done the training" (Campbell). And it is not.

On April 17, 2012, while I was at the library, knee-deep in revisions to the Faulkner chapter of this dissertation, my 11-month-old son Noah suffocated to death in a back room at his babysitter's house. I had dropped him off just two hours earlier. When

I got back to work three months later, the first thing I had to say about evidence was the following:⁷¹

Noah was alone in the room; he was the only witness to his death. His babysitter claims she moved him to a regular bed because he would not go to sleep in a crib, and that she found him an hour later him on top of a pile of stuffed animals in a cubby next to the bed, his feet but not his hands wrapped up in a blanket, with nothing limiting his ability to move his face away from the stuffed animals. We waited with some mixture of anxiety and hope for the medical examiner's report, which we thought might give a clearer picture of what had happened. But his findings were clearly enmeshed in the musings of the detective and perhaps the testimony of the babysitter: positional asphyxiation, the medical examiner concluded; he had become trapped between the bed and the wall. Nothing on Noah's body as presented to the medical examiner, I am quite sure, indicated the participation of a bed and a wall in his death. The detective had a theory; the theory became the conclusion of the only piece of evidence supposedly external to the testimony. We will never know how much of the babysitter's testimony about when, where, and how our son went down for his nap and when, where, and how she later found him was true, how much was misremembered in that moment of fear and panic, how much was purposely altered to give her legal protection. Had he struggled? Had he cried? Would she have heard him if she had been listening? We will never know exactly what sort of injustice may have been done, what degree of carelessness led to his death. A theory formulated by the authority figure in the case enabled the production of the autopsy findings, the only piece of legal evidence there was. No one will ever be able to reconstruct what happened.

And on those grounds, why try to punish anyone? Furthermore, what could constitute justice for the dead? There was a great responsibility put on us, to try to decide whether to encourage the district attorney to pursue a neglect case. But what could have been the outcome, other than other people (the district attorney, judges, juries) bringing their expectations and desires to the story and the evidence that clearly did not tell a story on its own?

⁷¹ I admit to a Hellman-like maneuver here; the word-for-word version of the first thing I wrote did not quite give all the background information I need it to, at this point six months later, but this passage is close to what I wrote.

In this case, as in many others, there is no way forward other than the one *Bone Game* proposes: empathy and recognition for the dead. (Noah's death, of course, was almost certainly an accident, a case of nothing more than a stupid decision that cut a life short, while *Bone Game* is positioned in a history of significant violence, much of it quite intentional.) But when the past is past and the dead are dead, despite all the dreams of genre detective fiction, there is no justice; there is only the possibility of recognizing the dead. Like Cole McCurtain, Alex Yazzie, and Jack Burden, I have needed to refuse the role of the detective and the promises of genre fiction. There remains the possibility of saying Noah's name, of trying to listen if he speaks to us somehow, and of telling other people about him. We know that as we tell his story to our other children, it will take on a shape of its own and might become further and further distanced from who Noah actually was. The several thousand photographs and hundreds of videos we took of him, even the diary entries I wrote about him, do not have their evidentiary power on their own, outside of the way we use them in our storytelling. I rarely hang up a picture of Noah crying or pouting, for instance, and I probably rarely took one (though I would swear that he was almost always smiling). But I don't know; like Hellman I have no way to see outside of present consciousness, despite all the potential evidence. I add him to the evidence, as Harjo's speaker says—because that is how evidence happens, as Harjo and Hellman demonstrate—because there is an I who speaks something into evidence.

The Harjo poem I have quoted here is from a book of poems that is deeply invested (though it does other work as well) in putting into words and stories the lives of a series of people who had them stolen away and too often kept quiet—among them the activists Jacqueline Peters and Anna Mae Pictou Aquash. In the service of this project,

Harjo fills out the details of their lives and deaths imaginatively; there would be no other effective way for her to tell their stories, for which there is so little official evidence. Her purpose is not to reconstruct, but to recognize. In a similar way, all my husband and I can do in the present is try to be responsible tellers, try to tell Noah's story for his sake, somehow, yet with an idea of letting the story of his life do good work now. We try not to give it meanings that are unfair to other people in the present—we have joked about how we have to be careful not to tell our toddlers, someday, that Noah always ate his vegetables and went to bed on time. (He did neither.) In spite of the thousands of photographs and videos I have stored away, I can still really only assert, like the speaker in Harjo's poem, that I add him to the evidence, that we lived with him and loved him, that he lived and loved: we were there. And we were.

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