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(The pattern of retaliation in a rhetorically (re)constructed
South : toward a national endorsement)

(Raphaël Iberg)

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Université de Lausanne

Faculté des Lettres

THE PATTERN OF RETALIATION IN A RHETORICALLY
(RE)CONSTRUCTED SOUTH: TOWARD A NATIONAL ENDORSEMENT

Section d'Anglais
Sous la direction de
Pr. Boris Vejdovsky

Mémoire présenté par
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1) Introduction

The narrative of retaliation in the literature of the American South will be at the center of this work because it is one of the main components of the rhetorical construction of the modern South. My point of view will not be that of a historian, but rather that of a literature student. My main focus as far as tracing the origins of this narrative is concerned will therefore be more on the imagined or fictional Reconstruction than on the historical events happening in the world after the Civil War. The pattern of retaliation did not originate below the Mason-Dixon line any more than it suddenly came to life after the Confederate army surrendered in Appomattox. For Western readers, the word “retaliation” comes from the Old Testament. *Lex talionis*, or the law of the talion, is the basis of retaliation, a practice that applies the rule of “an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth.”¹ This is why “retaliation” carries more power than such terms as “revenge” or “vengeance”, and is the word that will be used throughout this work. According to the Old Testament, “whoso sheddeth man’s blood, by man shall his blood be shed” (Genesis 9:6). In Western eyes, retaliation is therefore a narrative from the beginning, carried by the book of Western civilization, the Bible. While the dominant Western narrative did endorse retaliation through the Scriptures at first, this notion is no longer seen as compatible with what is called justice in the world of today and therefore cannot be directly related to the pattern at work in the Southern United States. Indeed, the New Testament had already rewritten the Old and Jesus Christ, while redeeming the Old Testament’s fallen humanity, had countered the law of the talion by telling his people to turn the other cheek.² Our societies have then created a judiciary system that guarantees trials, lawyers and juries to those who are charged with crimes in order to break away from the practice of retaliation. Indeed, this practice is at odds with our modern notion of justice and this is precisely why it needs questioning. In the case of this *mémoire*, the questioning will take place in the American South or, to be more specific, in Southern literature, where retaliation is omnipresent. The practice of retaliation can only appear in a context of exacerbated violence and it is indeed the case

¹ God tells Moses that “if any mischief follow, then thou shalt give life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burning for burning, wound for wound, stripe for stripe” (Exodus 21:24).

² Jesus tells his disciples: “Ye have heard that it hath been said, an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth: but I say unto you, that ye resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also” (Matthew 5:38-39).

in the South as well. Race provides this context in this region since slavery is predicated on violence. Unless one is coerced into bondage, one does not become a slave. Violence is the condition for slavery to exist. All aforementioned elements contribute to making the South a unique place in the American landscape. The South as a rhetorical construction owes its continued uniqueness to literature, which shapes reality through the performative power of discourse. The pattern of retaliation is an important part of this rhetorical construction that molds our vision of the South. This vision has been made so powerful by the unexpected performative effects of discourse that a similar process is also at work at the national level regarding the notion of retaliation.

William Faulkner's character Quentin in *Absalom, Absalom* claims, quoted by Michael Kreyling, that "you can't understand it [the South]. You would have to be born there" (54). And yet Kreyling's response to this seemingly peremptory statement reopens the door to outsiders' perspectives on the literature of the American South and thus to this *mémoire*. Indeed, according to him, "if one must be born in the South to participate meaningfully in its dialogue, then there is in fact only a monologue" (XVIII). As an outsider, I will therefore try to perpetuate the dialogue on the South. As it will be argued in the next chapter, literary anthologies shape literature but also culture and ultimately construct history and society through their editorial choices. My reality in writing this *mémoire* is somehow the same as an anthology editor's in this specific respect³: choices have to be made, although their aim is obviously different in my case. The literature of the American South has worn many labels and been led by many writers and critics, from antebellum (the Old South before the Civil War) to postbellum (the so-called New South as of the beginning of the Reconstruction) literature, from the Southern Agrarians, Louis D. Rubin, Jr or Richard Weaver to the first (and belatedly) established African American and female writers and of course William Faulkner, considered as the monument of Southern literature. In short, I could probably mention enough names to cover the space needed for this introduction. As I explore Southern literature, my approach can hardly encompass all these different topics and figures. Indeed, such a work as a Master's thesis, or *mémoire*, demands that a focus be determined.

Mine will therefore be the narrative of retaliation in Southern literature. Risking to fall into the same trap as the very conservative Agrarian movement in the early

³ I obviously do not claim the same influence as a literary anthology's for my own editorial choices. The process of selection is the same but not its consequences.

twentieth century, although my aim is obviously not to ignore race as they did, I will focus my analysis on three white writers, William Faulkner, Harper Lee and James Lee Burke. This very white and very masculine⁴ perspective is not a random choice at all on my part. Indeed, the theme of retaliation is very closely related to defeat, the end of slavery, the failure of Reconstruction (at least from the Southern perspective) and the myth of the Lost Cause in the South. All these aspects are definitely more connected to Southern white men than anyone else. Richard E. Nisbeth and Dov Cohen assert that “the culture of honor⁵ is interwoven with cultural concepts of masculinity” (26). In addition, these three novels will provide me with insight into twentieth-century Southern literature as a whole since their publication dates (1940, 1960 and 1993) allow me to get a broad diachronic perspective on this period. However, these three works are not merely connected by their “southernness” and their whiteness. Bayard Sartoris, Atticus Finch and Dave Robicheaux, the three main characters struggling with the pattern of retaliation in each novel, are representative of the typical Southern (once again male and white) protagonist trapped in this vengeful tradition. Their efforts to break away from the pattern are a good illustration of the difficulty to oppose Southern tradition, family values, or a corrupt political and judiciary system.

As I have used the word “white” many times, it is worth stressing that one cannot investigate the South without evoking the question of race. Indeed, without this issue, the South would not be the specific region it is considered to be today. The South’s “peculiar institution”, namely slavery, was obviously the main issue at stake (although some, on the side of the Confederacy, might argue that state rights were at the center of the dispute and that slavery was only one of these rights) during and after the Civil War since the Reconstruction did not prevent segregation after 1865 and at least until *Brown v. Board of Education* effectively put an end to it in 1954. To accentuate this point, Richard Gray observes about the Agrarians’ work that “the absence of many references to the black race and to slavery in particular, remains conspicuous and remarkable” (144-145). Indeed, the Southern Agrarians were trying to reclaim the Old South and its values through their writing after the defeat and the treatment inflicted to black people was not part of their priorities. They therefore negated one of the most crucial elements making the South the entity we know today.

⁴ Harper Lee is indeed a female author but the themes she develops in relation to the pattern of retaliation, along with Faulkner and Burke, mostly affect Southern white males.

⁵ This notion is directly related to the pattern of retaliation.

More importantly in this case, this question is directly linked to Faulkner, Lee and Burke's novels and the narrative of retaliation they illustrate. Bayard's story takes place during and immediately after the Civil War, the cradle of the notion of retaliation in the South. The practice of retaliation stems from the context of extraordinary violence provided by slavery and the racial issues that it implies. In the slave-holding South, whipping was necessary to enslave a black man and after emancipation, lynching became a way of preventing black men from using their new status in a society mostly ruled by white supremacists. According to Robyn Wiegman,

we might understand the panoptic and corporeal violence of lynching and castration as a disciplinary practice linked historically to the political and economic reorganizations that accompanied Reconstruction, when the antebellum figure of the male slave as docile, passive Uncle Tom failed to subdue the anxieties posed by the new conditions attending Emancipation. The legal enfranchisement of the black male slave made more urgent the prevailing threat to white masculine supremacy. (13-14)

Colonel John Sartoris's behavior illustrates that when he cannot accept that black men can be elected marshals in the postbellum South. His only response to this situation is to kill them, founding his reasoning into the only Southern values he knows and understands, those supported by a society depending on slavery. Atticus has to defend a black man in a mock trial where the Southern code of justice, namely retaliation, is clearly emphasized, and it all begins for Dave when a prostitute is murdered, which contributes to digging up an old murder case involving a black man apparently lynched. In all three books, whites and blacks are treated in different ways when it comes to justice. This exposes once again the origins of the pattern of retaliation in the slave-holding antebellum South, a time many Southern minds have not yet managed to leave.

In addition, both in Burke and Lee's novel, the actual or alleged rape of women is at the center of the plot, which is a typical Southern theme and often the trigger of retaliation, especially when it involves a white woman, as it is the case in *To Kill a Mocking Bird* where Mayella Ewell is supposedly Tom Robinson's victim. Atticus Finch summarizes the situation by stating that "she has merely broken a rigid and time-honored code in our society, a code so severe that whoever breaks it is hounded from our midst as unfit to live with" (Lee 272). The code that Atticus evokes here is the tacit

Southern law stating that a white woman should not have anything to do with a black man. In breaking this rule, she turns to yet another Southern code, the code implying that when a white woman accuses a black man of rape, she is necessarily right and he is necessarily guilty, whether facts are provided to back up the charges or not.

This specific kind of rape, alleged or confirmed, and its consequences are not newcomers in the South in the twentieth century since, according to historian Edward L. Ayers, it “haunted so many other white Southerners in the late 1880s and early 1890s” (237). Its use by Lee and Burke is in no way an isolated case. As Wiegman has it,

no longer tied to a slave economy that alternatively wrote him as the feminine or the savage inhuman, the black male emerged in popular discourses during Reconstruction as the mythic embodiment of phallic (and hence masculine) potentiality as the black rapist. (14)

The black man’s newly acquired masculinity is overemphasized in order to be able to completely take it away from him, as lynching is often linked with castration. Faulkner also used this theme in his short story “Dry September” in which a mere rumor of rape is enough to get a black man lynched. Lynching is thus used as a form of retaliation in this specific context. The connection between race, slavery, extreme violence and the pattern of retaliation in the South is therefore established, as well as their status as narratives⁶.

Faulkner, the celebrated “godfather of southernness in literature” (Kreyling 128), Lee, whose book is now a classic in many countries and Burke, whose hero Dave Robicheaux has been impersonated by Tommy Lee Jones in a Hollywood rendition of the novel⁷, have earned an influence that has flourished well beyond the borders of the South. This suggests that these three authors are instrumental in the adoption of the narrative of retaliation at a more general level than just “Dixie”. For this reason and those previously stated, William Faulkner’s *The Unvanquished*, Harper Lee’s *To Kill a Mockingbird* and James Lee Burke’s *In the Electric Mist with Confederate Dead* are a good basis so as to be able to investigate the narrative of retaliation in Southern

⁶ Indeed, Wiegman’s use of the terms “wrote” and “popular discourse” in her statement on the myth of the black rapist is no coincidence. These notions are fictions implanted in people’s minds through the performative power of discourse.

⁷ Not to mention that Alec Baldwin has also played the part in the film version of *Heaven’s Prisoners*, another Dave Robicheaux novel.

literature and beyond in order to determine the existence of a clear pattern and its influence on reality.

If one can study Southern literature as a specific and recognized branch of American literature, the South must have earned a status that goes beyond that of a mere set of states within the Union. This status makes it unique, as one might have understood by now. Benedict Anderson claims that

nationality, or as one might prefer to put it in view of that word's multiple significations, nation-ness, as well as nationalism, are cultural artefacts of a particular kind. To understand them properly, we need to consider carefully how they have come into historical being, in what ways their meanings have changed over time, and why, today, they command such profound emotional legitimacy. (Anderson 4, quoted in Kreyling 169)

Similarly, Michael Kreyling tries to figure out “the ways and means by which southernness has come into being and been sustained there” (169). This “southernness” Kreyling mentions is a crucial concept. Indeed, the whole idea of writing a thesis on a particular Southern narrative relies on the hypothesis that the South is a separate entity, more than just another region within the United States and that the investigation of the narrative in question is therefore relevant. According to J.K. Van Dover, “of all American regions, the one that has possessed the most there-ness for more than two centuries, in its own eyes and in the eyes of outsiders, has been the South” (Van Dover). This “there-ness” or sense of place that can be found in the South has roots that can mostly be found in the Civil War and its aftermath as well as in the ideology that led to the conflict. Indeed, many Southerners blame the changes that occurred in their region in the wake of the Northern victory on the so-called “Yankees”, and these transformations of their society make them react by showing a growing attachment to their land as it was before the war. As a result, when even such an author as Gustav Hasford, through Joker, his narrator in *The Phantom Bloop*, cannot forget his Alabama roots and put the Confederate past behind him and claims that “the South is a big Indian reservation populated by ex-Confederates who are bred like cattle to die in Yankee wars” (215), it is by no means an innocent statement. Of course, this kind of assertion is extremely reactionary. In other words, the haunted postbellum South and its

specificity are the origins of the narrative of retaliation as a recurring theme.

However, once again, “reality” (without getting into the philosophical debate that this word brings up) is not my main concern here. For instance, Fred Hobson suggests the impact of literature in the awareness of the uniqueness of the South. According to him, “what both the apologists and the critics did share was a devotion to their region. ... They brooded over their homeland, were convinced that it was radically different from the rest of the United States” (back cover) and they wrote about it this way. I will aim at showing that this “southernness” discussed by Kreyling is first created by literature as well as literary criticism before becoming “real” in the culture of the American South through the performative power of discourse. Indeed, according to *A Norton Anthology. The Literature of the American South*, “the South exists more in the imaginative landscapes imagined by its writers than in the realities of a terrain made up of Burger Kings, Wal-Marts, and the network of expressways linking it to the rest of the country” (Andrews 586).

Interestingly enough, one of the main narratives around which the South has been constructed and which triggers the pattern of retaliation, the narrative of race, works the same way. According to Wiegman,

specific racial categories are rendered “real” (and therefore justifiable) through the naturalizing discourses of the body, those discourses that locate difference in a pre-cultural realm where corporeal significations supposedly speak a truth which the body inherently means. (4)

Africans are reduced to their color, their blackness, through the performative power of discourse, which enables whites to treat them “as non- or subhuman, as an object and property” (4) in this “binary structure of vision” (4) they have created. By extension, the narrative of retaliation, as part of the concept of southernness, will follow the same structure. The primary texts that will be used in the course of this discussion will come in handy to demonstrate that this narrative has remained steadily endorsed in literature throughout the twentieth century and will be of much use illustrating the pattern through which Southern literature is turned into Southern reality.

This process is not specific to the South as far as the United States is concerned. Indeed, “America”, as an idea and as a nation, was created by a narrative. From Christopher Columbus, who decided to give “a new name” (Baym 32) to each island he

claimed for the Spanish Crown, to John Winthrop and the Puritans, who built “a city upon a hill” (158) in New England and of course Thomas Jefferson, who declared “these colonies to be free and independent states” (656), America has taken shape through a process of palimpsest. This narrative has become real once again through the performative power of discourse. In other words, as Boris Vejdovsky explains, “writing turns language into a mode of appropriating space and therefore writing is necessarily a political and imperialistic action that modifies the topos in which it is produced” (*Ideas of Order* 11). Since “the invention of the American South is hardly thinkable without the Western movement to invent nations” (Kreyling 170), the South follows the same pattern. It is constructed according to the same process, through the writing of a narrative. The most relevant of these American narratives as far as the South is concerned is Winthrop’s idea of a New Jerusalem since both are based on the premise that the land in question is exceptional or unique. Fred Hobson’s paraphrasing the apologists supports this point in the following passage: “the South was indeed a latter-day Israel, Robert Lewis Dabney and other apologists believed, and Southerners were God’s Chosen” (86). Using a similar process as John Winthrop did, the South has been constructed by narratives.

This transformation of a narrative into reality through the performative power of discourse has a political impact. According to Kreyling, “as much as a critic of Louis Rubin’s stature influences the construction of southern literature, he cannot be in every classroom every day” (57). However, a literary anthology can and is. This is the reason why its editorial choices are always oriented. “No literature anthology is innocent of political gamesmanship ... Perhaps nowhere in literary study is a political agenda so near the surface as in an anthology” (57). Choosing which texts and authors will best represent the South and those that will not is already of great significance. By doing so, the South already becomes a construction. And since this construction penetrates Southern and by extension national reality by way of such authors as Faulkner, Lee and Burke, it leads the way to an official endorsement at the national level of what used to be a mere local narrative. When the President of the United States of America creates a narrative, be it Barack Obama claiming that justice has been served after Osama bin Laden’s execution or George W. Bush calling for a “momentous fight between good and evil” (“9/11” 205) after 9/11, it is immediately established as an unquestioned reality. Indeed, as Boris Vejdovsky has it, “especially when it appears as synecdoche, ‘representation’ is the key concept to many political systems, most notably in our

representative democracies in which when the President speaks s/he speaks as/for the entire country” (206). As a result, when the Southern narrative of retaliation is spelled out by the President of the United States of America himself, it suddenly becomes the voice of the American people as a whole and this discourse turns words into wars of retaliation and justifies executions. While I might not be able to prove that the narrative of retaliation endorsed at the national level directly originates from a Southern pattern, demonstrating that both cases work according to a similar narrative process seems to be a good start, leading to possible further research. In the light of this preamble, it is little wonder that Kreyling claims that “the classroom where southern literature is taught is one of the most politicized on the campus” (XVIII).

2) The specificity of the American South

For my focus on the narrative of retaliation in the literature of the American South and its impact on reality to be considered appropriate, several crucial elements are to be regarded as true. First, the American South and thus its literature are worth investigating as separate entities. This means that they are unique in a way that makes their being researched different from an investigation on the United States or American literature as a whole and therefore relevant. Second, literature has an impact on reality in the South (before being able to demonstrate that there is a possibility that the same process is at work in the whole country), which turns it into a construction. This chapter will thus be directed toward a rhetorical approach, the South as a rhetorical construction, and will then examine what history has made of this construction, history as a result of this construction. Finally, the narrative of retaliation (as well as other rhetorical constructions such as race) is a part of the construction of Southern reality. This construction has turned the South into a unique entity.

2.1. From American exceptionalism to Southern uniqueness

As discussed in the introduction, the term “retaliation” came from the Old Testament. It is then no coincidence that the *Watchman of the South* should claim much later that “the express law of God that ‘whoso sheddeth man’s blood, by man shall his blood be shed’ stands unrepealed on the statute book of the only infallible Lawgiver” (Ayers 56). The relationship between the Bible and the creation of narratives in America does not stop here. As a matter of fact, one of the founding American narratives, namely the Puritan narrative, is directly based on the word of God. Or, more specifically, it is based, as Boris Vejdovsky has it, on the Puritans’ “reading of the Scriptures” (*Ideas of Order* 30), their interpretation of them. Indeed, after the Fall, humans have lost their straight connection with God. Our world is no longer a place where “the spoken word of God creates and animates the world; it is an un-written world where His will has no need to be mediated or represented to have effects in the world” (7). Since the fiction according to which the word of God was regarded as literal no longer exists and the world now does need to be mediated and represented, the Puritans decided to be the ones performing this task. Accordingly, “their typological reading of the Bible – which they read as a book of law – made them consider the New World to be *their* territory. It gave the Puritans not only the right but the obligation to settle there” (30). As a result, not

only does retaliation, later taken up as a practice by the South, come from the Bible but the broader American founding narrative follows the same pattern. In addition, the fact that these fictions emerged from readings of the Bible and not the Bible itself, will prove important for further points that will be made throughout this work regarding the impact of literature in constructing reality.

The Puritan interpretation of the Scriptures is the reason why since 1630, exiled English Puritans who later became New Englanders and finally Americans have considered themselves exceptional. Indeed on April 8, 1630, John Winthrop and his Puritan followers sailed to the New World on the *Arbella*. Upon leaving England, Winthrop uttered the words that became his most famous sermon, *A Model of Christian Charity*. In what is probably the most famous passage of his sermon, Winthrop tells his seven hundred fellow Puritans:

The Lord will be our God, and delight to dwell among us, as His own people, and will command a blessing upon us in all our ways, so that we shall see much more of His wisdom, power, goodness and truth, than formerly we have been acquainted with. We shall find that the God of Israel is among us, when ten of us shall be able to resist a thousand of our enemies; when He shall make us a praise and glory that men shall say of succeeding plantations, “may the Lord make it like that of New England.” For we must consider that we shall be as a city upon a hill. The eyes of all people are upon us. So that if we shall deal falsely with our God in this work we have undertaken, and so cause Him to withdraw His present help from us, we shall be made a story and a by-word through the world. (Baym 158)

In other words, according to Winthrop, the Puritans, after being persecuted in their native country, have been singled out by God to build “a city upon a hill”, a New Jerusalem in what will soon become the United States of America. This idea is at the origin of what we call American exceptionalism today and has quickly been followed by many other people, Puritan or not, starting with Mary Rowlandson’s husband Joseph, who wonders, in his last sermon, about “*The Possibility of God’s forsaking a people, That have been visibly near & dear to him*” (Rowlandson 149). As a matter of fact, this text is a jeremiad. Rowlandson insists on the decay of God’s chosen people,

which makes Him punish them⁸. This sermon is addressed to the second generation of Puritans since it was written in 1678. According to Rowlandson, this second generation has gone astray and the settlers have to go back to their Puritan ways in order to earn God's forgiveness. In 1782, J. Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur also insists on America being "the most perfect society now existing in the world" (Baym 597) in his essay/letter called *What is an American?* Finally, closer to us, if the 2012 presidential candidates on both sides of the aisle can argue over solutions to bring the United States back to its status of "greatest nation on earth", a phrase that has been used many times in recent debates, stated as an evidence without anyone on American soil begging to differ, it is thanks to the seeds sowed by John Winthrop. The connection between all these eras is not historical but rather rhetorical. Through them, a form of discourse has imposed itself to shape America as a palimpsest on top of what existed before. This narrative has turned America into a construction.

However, the American nation is not the only one to be rhetorically constructed around this claim of exceptionalism. Although it is different from the construction of the United States, the construction of the American South, as an entity almost permanently separated from the rest of the country by the Civil War, originates from a similar rhetorical process. Furthermore, the way the South is seen today both by locals and external onlookers has also been shaped by narratives. Indeed, according to Michael Kreyling, "understanding the South without attempting to understand the projects that have created, indicted, refurbished, or rebirthed it is impossible" (XVIII). He explains that historians Ayers and Mittendorf, "are strong in their implicit argument that something deeply personal autochthonous distinguishes southern identity. Regardless of genre, regardless of historical moment, the I of the southerner stands out as exceptional in American history" (75). Although C. Vann Woodward wonders whether this Southern "I" still deserves this status of exceptionalism and claims that "the time is coming, if indeed it has not already arrived, when the Southerner will begin to ask himself whether there is really any longer very much point in calling himself a Southerner" (3), there is little reason to completely discard Southern uniqueness.

The specificity of the South has of course nothing to do with its location on a map in this case. Indeed, in 1880, Atticus G. Haygood declared, "My hope is, that in

⁸ It is worth mentioning that Mary Rowlandson also wonders whether God has singled her out for punishment during her captivity among the Wampanoag Indians. The title of her book, *The Sovereignty and Goodness of God*, is quite revealing regarding the importance she gives to her Puritan relationship with God, as part of His chosen people.

twenty years from now, the words ‘The South’ shall have only a geographical significance” (Hobson 102). If this statement were uttered today, more than one hundred and thirty years later, it would probably not seem closer to reality than it was then. Geography alone is still completely irrelevant in explaining why the American South has been set apart from the rest of the country. George Washington Cable, quoted here by Fred Hobson, both follows Haygood’s hope and points out the origin of the special significance of the South in the American psyche in his commencement address at the University of Mississippi in 1882:

“When the whole intellectual energy of the [antebellum] Southern states flew to the defense of that one institution [slavery] which made us the South, we broke with human progress. We broke with the world’s thought”. Cable had urged his listeners to reunite with the “world’s thought” and “human progress”: “When we have done so we shall know it by this – there will be no South We shall no more be Southerners than we shall be Northerners”; and this, Cable added, was precisely what he desired. Not the “New South” but “what we want – what we ought to have in view – is the No South!” (113-114)

While the former Confederate States did not get to the point of permanently seceding from the United States, the consequence for the South was another kind of secession, more in mind than in practice. If this separation occurred because of the South’s “peculiar institution” in the first place, what then has enabled this region to keep its singularity for over a century? Because it is fairly obvious that the South is quite far from earning the status of “No South” called for by Cable or, in other words, from blending into the nation as just another set of regular states merely adding up to the number, as part of an American standard of sorts, without my asserting that such a notion could be established.

2.2. A haunted Southern literature leading to Southern reality

While C. Vann Woodward mentions a “present drive toward uniformity” (7) in the South and claims that Southern faults “are increasingly the faults of other parts of the country, standard American faults” (5), he concedes that “the most reassuring prospect for the survival of the South’s distinctive heritage is the magnificent body of literature

produced by its writers in the last three decades⁹” (24). In other words, when Southern reality seems to lose some of its specificity, Southern literature comes in to reclaim it. Indeed, since the South seems to be such an important notion as far as historical events are concerned, its fiction must have its specificity as well. It is especially true since famous Southern writer Eudora Welty, in her essay “Place in Fiction”, claims that “place is where he [the author] has his roots, place is where he stands; in his experience, out of which he writes, it provides the base of reference; in his work, the point of view” (781). According to her, “place in fiction is the named, identified, concrete, exact and exacting, and therefore credible, gathering spot of all that has been felt, is about to be experienced, in the novel’s progress” (786-787). In other words, place is both for the author and the reader the foundation of fiction and a way of making it closer to reality and believable in the reader’s eyes. Accordingly, when this location is the South and its uniqueness in America, the notion of place becomes even more crucial.

More importantly, Welty gives fiction even more power than that. As she puts it, “making reality real is art’s responsibility” (791). She therefore brings us back to America in general and it being created by written narratives through the performative power of speech. Writing conquers. In other words, it constructs lands out of narratives.¹⁰ This is the effect that the Puritans’ rhetoric had when they set ashore in America for the first time. Since the South has been defeated by the North in the Civil War, Southern writers are trying to repeat the process used by Winthrop and reconquer their own land by rewriting its history. They are therefore taking part in the construction of a rhetorical South. Michael Kreyling stresses this point as well by writing that “it is not so much southern literature that changes in collision with history but history that is subtly changed in collision with southern literature” (IX). The main figures of this reactionary attempt at reclaiming their own land are the Southern Agrarians, also called the Twelve Southerners, led by Allen Tate and Robert Penn Warren, among others. Their main work, *I’ll Take my Stand*, is the medium carrying their core ideas.

Michael Kreyling, in the course of his attempt at demonstrating that there is indeed a connection between literature and history and that this association is triggered by a first step made by literature rather than history, starts by opposing his point of view (and incidentally mine) to what he calls Louis D. Rubin, Jr’s “positivist position” (XII).

⁹ Woodward's book was first published in 1960.

¹⁰ As Mahmoud Darwich has it in *La Palestine comme métaphore*, mentioning his Israeli conqueror, “he who imposes his narrative inherits the Land of the Narrative” (Darwich 30, my translation).

Indeed, Rubin sees “southern literature as an untroubled vision of the ‘facts’ of southern life” (XII). On the contrary, Kreyling thinks that these so-called “facts” are directed by the narratives presented in Southern literature. He then uses two main examples in order to illustrate the ways in which this particular process works. His first example is how the Agrarians decided to craft their own South out of the narratives they produced about it, in order to end up with a more satisfying result to them than this New South they felt they were stuck into in the aftermath of the Civil War. Indeed, this new version of their region corresponds much better to their reactionary vision of an unconquered Old South, a less disappointing prospect for them. Kreyling writes that “the Agrarian project was and must be seen as a willed campaign on the part of one elite to establish and control ‘the South’” (XII). Even though they “knew full well there were other ‘Souths’ than the one they touted; they deliberately presented a fabricated South as the one and only real thing” (XII). In short, once again, literary narratives are powerful enough to have an impact on reality and even control it. The fact that Kreyling should mention the existence of several Souths that can be created or modified by narratives instead of just one unchangeable reality based on historical facts, is rather edifying as far as the point I am trying to get across is concerned.

Kreyling’s second example is literary anthologies, an instance that has already been mentioned in the introduction. Following the same process as the Southern Agrarians, literary anthologies shape the South or at least our vision of the South. According to Kreyling, they “constitute the primary means by which the paradigmatic modes of understanding the South are promulgated” (XIV). It is therefore very likely that several Souths are once again bound to come out of this operation. In addition, following his reflection on these different ways of defining and inventing the South through literature, Kreyling wonders whether those are truly useful or whether “we all know the South well enough by now” (75). However, why would the South not be “a process rather than a finished product” (75) that we know all too well? This final argument supports once more the vision of a South created by narratives as opposed to a South only regulated by historical facts. In other words, the South as a concept, as more than a geographical area merely delimited by borders. The South we have been getting acquainted with little by little through literature. This South is indeed a construction.

This construction could also be labeled as an “invented tradition”. I use here the term “invented tradition” because Kreyling brings up Eric Hobsbawm and his three categories of invented traditions to explain the impact of literary anthologies in

inventing the South. The categories set up by Hobsbawm and evoked by Kreyling read

- (a) those [invented traditions] establishing or symbolizing social cohesion or the membership of groups, real or artificial communities, (b) those establishing or legitimizing institutions, status or relations of authority, and (c) those whose main purpose was socialization, the inculcation of beliefs, value systems, and conventions of behaviour. (56)

Hobsbawm describes these categories as “overlapping” (56) and Kreyling explains that they can all be applied to what anthologies do as far as shaping the South as an idea in people’s mind is concerned. These features given by Hobsbawm to his invented traditions look very much like what it takes to establish something like “the South” as a constructed idea in the American psyche. By extension, these characteristics also furiously look like something that could be applied to the creation of any national narrative. Indeed, in the face of this last part, the founding American narrative written by Winthrop and its effect on the creation of an American nation seems very likely to meet aforementioned requirements. All this goes to show that there is indeed such a thing as Southern uniqueness in the American landscape and that both American and Southern exceptionalism are built around the same processes although their contexts are very different. Ultimately, the idea that Southern narratives actually shape Southern reality in the same way as colonial narratives have shaped American experience does seem worth considering.

To further support this theory of literature shaping reality, or discourse having a performative power on it, it is worth mentioning the way some Southerners struggled over the name to give to the Civil War. According to Gaines M. Foster, the debate raged between several appellations, including “The War Between the States”, “War of the Rebellion”, “the late unpleasantness”, “the late War” and “The Confederate War” (118). Depending on the label chosen, the South was seen in a more or less positive way. Accordingly, the defenders of the Old South and those who refused to admit that they had been defeated by the so-called “Yankees” were trying to find a denomination that would show their region off to best advantage. According to Foster, ““The War Between the States’ gradually became the most common, and the acceptance of the rationale behind that name – that the South had fought for constitutional rights – became even more so” (118). To Southerners, “The War Between the States” therefore became what

this conflict really was through the performative power of discourse. This is yet another element added to the construction of a rhetorical South.

Similarly, Richard Rodriguez, in his book *Brown. The Last Discovery of America*, explains how a dominant narrative is constructed by stressing the fact that American dominant narratives are constructed by whites. In so doing, he emphasizes the same process in terms of labeling. According to him, “how a society orders its bookshelves is as telling as the books a society writes and reads” (11). By putting his books under “Gay”, “Hispanic” or “Brown”, the American society tells more about itself than about Rodriguez. In the same way, by labeling the Civil War in such a way, Southerners give much more information about how their society functions than about the war itself. All these efforts to modify the way the South was seen through literature could be encapsulated into the Lost Cause, what Foster defines by “the postwar writings and activities that perpetuated the memory of the Confederacy” (4). What has been labeled “Brown” effectively becomes brown and what has been categorized as a struggle for constitutional rights is no longer questioned. This is yet another illustration of how the performative power of discourse works in the case of the South as a construction.

2.3. A haunted Southern reality as a result of a rhetorical construction

Southern reality and Southern history therefore come as a result of this Southern construction. According to Cable’s statement, the breaking point between the South and the rest of the United States seems to be the Civil War and its main cause, slavery, which is built on racial relations as a construction. According to Edward L. Ayers, “slavery was the key: slavery insulated the colonial and antebellum South ... from the economic and cultural forces so bound up with dignity” (27) in the North. This insularity leading to “the region’s unique position in the nineteenth-century world” (4) is explained by the fact that “no other society experienced a history as the world’s most powerful slave society within an Anglo-American civilization that saw itself as the antithesis of everything slavery embodied” (4). Indeed, the ideals of equality among all men¹¹ carried by *The Declaration of Independence* do not mix well with slavery.

¹¹ It is however worth stressing that when Thomas Jefferson wrote “we hold these truths to be self-evident: that all men are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with inherent and inalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness” (Baym 652), he implicitly excluded women, blacks and Native Americans and therefore restricted these rights to white males. Moreover, Jefferson was a slaveholder himself in the Southern state of Virginia.

The narrative of retaliation in Southern states developed from these circumstances of extreme racial tension and fed on the tremendous violence that led to the existence of slavery and is part of the features that helped build the South's separateness. While this hypothesis seems quite valid, Richard E. Nisbeth and Dov Cohen assert that the first Southerners already had certain predispositions toward retaliation. Indeed, according to them,

the South has long been thought to be more violent than the North, and we believe that some distinctive aspects of the South are key to this violence. Unlike the North, ... the South was settled by herdsmen from the fringes of Britain. Herdsmen the world over tend to be capable of great aggressiveness and violence because of their vulnerability to losing their primary resources, their animals. Also, unlike the North, ... the South was a low-population frontier region until well into the nineteenth century. In such regions the state often has little power to command compliance with the law, and citizens have to create their own system of order. The means for doing this is the rule of retaliation: if you cross me, I will punish you. (xv)

This is one of the founding elements of what they have labeled "culture of honor" (xvi), which is part of the rhetorical construction of the South. Moreover, this culture of honor is one of the aspects that make the narrative of retaliation very masculine, as I pointed out in the introduction. Indeed, a culture of honor tells "men to appear strong and unwilling to tolerate an insult" (xvi). Foster uses terms very close in meaning to Nisbeth and Cohen's: "the value system of the Old South demanded that males demonstrate personal bravery and protect their women" (26). He adds that "on some level people perceived surrender as a form of emasculation" (26). However, this value system cannot simply be taken for granted. Indeed, like race, the narrative of retaliation, or the myths of the Southern lady and the black rapist that will be analyzed later, the culture of honor is yet another component of the rhetorical construction of the South. It is not to be taken at face value as a mere historical fact.

Similarly, the narrative of retaliation that can be found in twentieth-century Southern literature must not be reduced to its historical origins in the aftermath of the Civil War. It is true that slavery and the other elements that led to the war carry a good

part of the responsibility for setting the South apart and the alterations brought about by the Reconstruction are also seen to be damaging to their region by many Southerners. Some of them, including Gustav Hasford, as seen in the introduction, saw the South as reduced “to a colonial status” (Gray 88). They felt this way because “the Civil War brought overwhelming change to this society so distrustful of change. The walls of slavery, walls that had given structure to the entire South, slowly crumbled” (Ayers 141). According to Ayers, one of the consequences of this deep modification in Southern politics and economy is that “the South in 1865 was a society without a center, a sense of control, a sense of direction” (150). In other words, as a result, both the federal government and local vigilantes tried to impose their influence on a relatively lawless South. Ayers mentions the Freedmen’s Bureau as one of the federal government agencies and obviously the infamous Ku Klux Klan as one of the opposing vigilante organizations, both sides struggling over control of the South with the ghost of slavery at the center of the debate (151). However, the vigilante groups quickly proved to be stronger than the Bureau, and segregation, or “de facto slavery” (151) was enforced by the so-called “Black Codes” (151) as of 1865. This was the first step toward the Jim Crow laws, which were put in practice a little more than a decade later. All these changes and their outcomes have contributed to implant a vengeful tradition in the South. Indeed, the humiliation of defeat, as well as the refusal to obey the federal laws even after the war, resulting in the spread of vigilantism, have nurtured a desire for retaliation and a willingness to take the law into one’s own hands in the South. It cannot be stressed enough that all these elements are deeply rooted in what was the cause of the Civil War, the heart of the Southern system and hardly completely eliminated after its theoretical abolition by the Northern victors: slavery. However, if the South is still as unique today as it was in the aftermath of the Civil War, it is due to a continued establishment of these elements as part of its rhetorical construction and not to the direct consequences of straightforward historical facts.

As part of Southern uniqueness, slavery is the result of yet another construction, race relations in the South. By way of illustration, Cornel West wrote a book called *Race Matters*. These two words could not make more sense in the American South. Moreover, Barack Obama himself, in *The Audacity of Hope*, follows in West’s footsteps by stating:

Still, when I hear commentators interpreting my speech to mean that we

have arrived at a “postracial politics” or that we already live in a color-blind society, I have to offer a word of caution. To say that we are one people is not to suggest that race no longer matters. (232)

Although it is true that Obama talks about the United States of America as a whole here, it is worth stressing that in the twenty-first century, even someone that West would probably have classified among “race-transcending prophets” (West 64) cannot transcend race enough to make it disappear as a relevant notion on American soil, let alone in the South. There is therefore no such thing as “No Race”. Similarly, to get back to George Washington Cable’s statement, there is no such thing as “No South” either. These two ideas are closely related. In the light of these conclusions, it is easier to understand the uniqueness of the American South and how intimately it is connected to the notions of race and retaliation, which remain narratives that influence reality.

2.4. The South as a construction in twentieth-century literature

Where then do my three authors fit into this picture, the reader might ask. As a matter of fact, they are at the center of the invention of the South through literature. First, William Faulkner, as the most famous Southern author of all time and a leader for many if not all the next generations of (Southern) writers, has the necessary influence to pass on these Southern narratives and establish them further into Southern reality. Faulkner’s “colleague” Eudora Welty corroborates this vision. She claims that “their [Faulkner’s works’] specialty is they are twice as true as life, and that is why it takes a genius to write them” (791). According to her, while a story like “‘Spotted Horses’ may not have happened yet ... It could happen today or tomorrow at any little crossroads hamlet in Mississippi” (791). The intuitive pattern is therefore broken once again. Literature comes before reality and not the other way around. Kreyling goes even a little further as far as Faulkner is concerned. He raises two essential points. In his opinion, “the domination of ‘Faulkner’¹² in southern literature leaves a mark on everything made under its influence” (128). Following this impressive range of influence,

¹² Kreyling uses here the term “Faulkner” to differentiate William Faulkner, the writer, “the actual person” (127) from “Faulkner”, what Kreyling calls a “perfect exemplar” (127), this term that encapsulates all Faulkner’s work without paying attention to differences. It is just “Faulkner”, a “one-size-fits-all name” (127).

we invested Faulkner with authority on many subjects: race relations, the history of the native people of the Old Southwest, the viability of the American Way versus totalitarian “ideology”, the future of democracy and the human race under the cloud of the atomic bomb, the meaning of Christianity, the role of the artist in society. (130)

These two aspects give Faulkner’s words tremendous power, much more power than mere words are usually allowed. In other words, Faulkner’s impact goes beyond that of literature. As the main representative of Southern literature (which is itself a representation of the South), he has an influence comparable to that of the main representative of a country, as defined by Boris Vejdovsky: “when the President speaks s/he speaks as/for the entire country” (“9/11” 206). Consequently, to push the simile a little further, Faulkner speaks for the entire South since the South itself has been created by literature.

Harper Lee and James Lee Burke both strengthen my point about Faulkner, in a way. Indeed, they have both been greatly influenced by Faulkner’s fiction, and what I will show in the next chapter regarding these books will demonstrate that. In addition, Lee wrote a regional story supposedly only regarding the South if not only Alabama and her novel became an international bestseller and claimed “universal appeal” (Lee, back cover). In other words, *To Kill a Mocking Bird* “is regarded as a masterpiece of American literature” (back cover) nowadays. Her being recognized far beyond the Mason-Dixon line demonstrates how Southern narratives are exported not only throughout the South as they are established as reality but also everywhere else. Finally, Burke represents recent Southern authors perpetuating Faulkner’s legacy and contributing to the continued establishment of Southern narratives. Moreover, Burke’s novels have also been read around the world through the years. This is why these works will help me illustrate how Southern literature shapes Southern reality. Besides, they will provide an insight into the way some Southern narratives like the narrative of retaliation are followed up on throughout generations of authors always applying the same pattern. A pattern that was constructed around slavery and the environment surrounding it, an aspect that these novels do not fail to emphasize. They will also underline how these stories may become national dominant narratives like that established by Winthrop, given their impact that is no longer limited to the South. This analysis will focus on the narrative of retaliation as a narrative representative of

postbellum writing in the South.

3) A literary analysis of *The Unvanquished*, *To Kill a Mockingbird* and *In the Electric Mist with Confederate Dead*

William Faulkner's *The Unvanquished*, Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird* and James Lee Burke's *In the Electric Mist with Confederate Dead* are representative of the rhetorical construction of the South. Whether it be in the 1930s with Faulkner, the 1950s with Lee or the 1990s with Burke, the scars of the Civil War and Reconstruction were still extremely present. One of the key constructions that originated from the Civil War, the narrative of retaliation is paramount in each of these books. This analysis emphasizes the power of this pattern, which has been able to travel through the years from Faulkner to Burke with few changes in structure. Literature contributes to passing the pattern on from generation to generation, from William Faulkner to James Lee Burke, establishing it in Southern minds as part of the rhetorical construction of their region. The literary pattern of retaliation therefore corroborates what has been claimed in the previous chapter, by adding actual examples to the theory presented to demonstrate how literature is fundamental in constructing reality, especially in the South. The pattern of retaliation is part of this construction launched by literature. Faulkner, Lee and Burke's fiction contributes to establishing this pattern as a reality in people's minds through the performative power of discourse.

In the course of this analysis, the point(s) of view will be crucial in demonstrating a more important point. Indeed, one needs a particular point of view to be able to identify the pattern. In an interview with Barbara Bogue, James Lee Burke claimed that

the first-person narrators we remember with fondness are characters who caught our fancy such as Ishmael. But they were possessed of many flaws and they all narrated stories to us that they believed were more important than themselves. (190)

This underscores the importance of the plot itself. However, Richard Rodriguez asserts that "History is a coat cut only to the European" (2), its narrator. Since the European is also the one who imposed his way of narrating the story on the American continent, the supremacy of the narrator over his/her fiction seems quite relevant. In other words, the telling of the story is more important than the plot itself. The narrator's perspective is

what matters, which is also relevant as far as Southern narratives are concerned. The narrative point of view and its relationship with the pattern of retaliation, in this case, are also more relevant than the writer's direct commentary. A mere depiction of one's behavior is usually more efficient than a judgmental remark plainly assessing its value. This makes the narrator's perspective an essential element of the literary pattern of retaliation in the South. Indeed, the pattern is only visible from a certain point of view. A point of view that is able to approach the elements constituting this pattern critically and therefore to identify these characteristics not as merely isolated features but as components of the Southern narrative of retaliation. This understanding is fundamental in getting to break away from the seemingly inescapable script imposed by the pattern.

This script is clearly defined in the novels. The main character's role extends to the first-person narrator of the story struggling with their family and/or society's pressure to retaliate as opposed to going through so-called "due process" and using the legal apparatus provided by Western societies to deal with crimes. These crimes involve racial relations, a defining element of the pattern of retaliation and of the South itself once slavery was put in practice. Retaliation has become a pattern because these elements are repeated both throughout a single novel and from novel to novel. Also because the message carried by the books implies that the Southern society has worked this way for ages and will continue to do so, unchanged by the events described by the narrator, after the narrative closes. The critique provided by Faulkner, Lee and Burke is not enough to prevent the pattern from shaping the South as part of its rhetorical construction. Once out of their control, their discourse has had unpredictable performative effects beyond the early twentieth-century South.

3.1. William Faulkner's *The Unvanquished*

Bayard Sartoris is the main narrative voice in *The Unvanquished*. His perspective is somewhat particular. Indeed, his vision is that of a twelve-year-old when the story opens on his battle of Vicksburg reenactment with his friend Ringo and their toys and he is a twenty-four-year-old law student when he is informed of his father's death in the opening lines of the last part of the novel. Between these two very distinct moments, much has happened in Bayard's life. Founding events have contributed to his coming of age at the end of the story. As Edmond L. Volpe has it, "each of the stories constitutes an episode in the transition of Bayard from childhood to manhood" (76), which means that this novel could be seen as a Bildungsroman. In the last episode, the war has been

over for ten years. Theoretically, this should have changed many things in a region invited to abandon its old ways to embrace the so-called New South. However, Bayard's family shows that this is not exactly the case yet. On the contrary, Bayard's perspective toward the pattern of retaliation evolves during his passage to adulthood. Accordingly, regarding the Bildungsroman component of this book as an essential aspect is in no way to be seen as an innocent detail.

Bayard's understanding as a character at the beginning of the novel is therefore that of a child, with all the naivety that it implies. As his adult self states with the hindsight provided by his narrative stance, "there is a limit to what a child can accept, assimilate, not to what it can believe because a child can believe anything" (Faulkner 66). The limited part of the child's perspective applies to events going beyond a child's grasp. One of these events is the Civil War itself. Indeed, Bayard and Ringo "knew a war existed; [they] had to believe that, just as [they] had to believe the name for the sort of life [they] had led for the last three years was hardship and suffering. Yet [they] had no proof of it" (94). The notion of belief comes back in this passage and is crucial as it is the unlimited part of a child's perspective. Moreover, according to Volpe, "these first two stories¹³ present the Civil War as the legend of heroism and glory that is the heritage of the Southern child" (79). Since Bayard does not yet have the intellectual capacity to fully appreciate everything that occurs around him, he is somehow forced to rely on his belief in what adults tell him about a world he is too young to demystify on his own. One of these adults is his father, John Sartoris, colonel in the Confederate Army. He is the dominant influence in his son's life, at least at the beginning. The range of this influence includes the narrative of retaliation that is so dear to Sartoris. He leads by example, thus setting up a pattern for his son to follow. He stands as a synecdoche for the other Confederate soldiers, "because Father's troop (like all the other Southern soldiers too), even though they had surrendered and said they were whipped, were still soldiers" (Faulkner 187). In the same way, he cannot let go of his old ways and accept that old traditions are now redundant therefore passing them on to his son Bayard. He is one of the "irreconcilables" (Foster 74) described by Gaines M. Foster, people who would not accept defeat and its consequences. Bayard's vision (or lack thereof) of the pattern is therefore shaped by his father's from the onset.

The best example of John Sartoris's enforcement of the pattern of retaliation and

¹³ "Ambuscade" and "Retreat" as *The Unvanquished* is separated in seven chapters.

violence takes place on the day he is supposed to get married to Drusilla Hawkhurst. Instead of getting united in the holy matrimony, the soon to be newlyweds decide to prevent a black man from being elected Marshal of Jefferson. Their way of settling the matter is to kill the two candidates, which illustrates the fact that race works as a trigger for the practice of retaliation in the South. Even after the federal government supposedly takes control of the whole country, Southern vigilantes are still on the war trail and Sartoris is one of them. In addition, Sartoris appoints himself judge, jury and executioner by trying to have his actions pass as justice. His asking “don’t you see we are working for peace through law and order?” (208) summarizes his attitude on taking the law into his own hands. As a result, not only does Sartoris personally take care of what he sees as a threat with murder, but he also has a brutal killing masquerade as justice. This promotes the tradition of vigilantism in the South by endorsing the pattern of retaliation and its connection with post-slavery race relations. In other words, Sartoris contributes to establishing personal revenge as a legitimate course of action, at least in young Bayard's eyes. Sartoris is deprived of the point of view that would allow him to see the pattern. From where he stands, there is no such thing as a pattern of any sort. Justice is the only label he applies to his acts. Bayard is in the same situation. He is “a small boy [who] lives with the code without recognizing it as a code, seeing his father as the embodiment of heroism” (172), as Hyatt H. Waggoner puts it. His innocent child self does not enable him to identify this “code” as a pattern. Furthermore, it is worth stressing that this is not the first time Sartoris has shed blood. Indeed, George Wyatt tells Bayard, shortly before his father’s death, that he knows “what’s wrong: he’s had to kill too many folks, and that’s bad for a man” (Faulkner 226).

Everything is then in place for Bayard to get personally involved in the pattern as well since for him, “the Colonel lives up to the image of romantic hero that [he] has created” (Volpe 79). And this is indeed what happens at first. When Rosa Millard alias “Granny” gets killed by a criminal known as Grumby, he exercises what he still believes is his legitimate right to revenge by killing his grandmother’s murderer. It is then little wonder that Bayard’s first reaction after Granny’s death is to say “I want to borrow a pistol” (Faulkner 159). It is not more surprising to read Ringo’s statement after the retaliation against Grumby has been completed: “now she can lay good and quiet” (184). The order as the South knows it at the time has been restored, “justice” has been served.

However, several scholars consider the significance of this event for Bayard is

more complex than it first appears. According to Volpe,

Bayard's determination to avenge the murder of his grandmother is not, however, simply a ritualistic observance of the traditional code. Nothing in the story suggests a blind adherence to a formal code. Bayard's pursuit is motivated by deep personal grief, by anger, and by shock; but it is also a declaration of war against the scavengers of the post-war South. (81-82)

In other words, this would mean that Bayard is not merely following the pattern of retaliation inherited from his father. There is something more profound to his falling for the narrative that has scripted his whole life so far. However, in the light of this analysis of Bayard's childhood perspective, it seems problematic to say that "nothing in the story suggests a blind adherence to a formal code", as Volpe claims. Peter Sharpe goes a little further than Volpe. In his opinion,

Bayard's killing of Grumby must be viewed not as a continuance of the mindless violence generated by the war in service of an inhumane regime, but separately as a simple act of decency and moral discretion. With it, he is freeing the landscape of an unfortunate virus attendant upon the larger conflict. (99)

This statement shows that Sharpe has evidently fallen for the pattern of retaliation himself. Indeed, turning retaliation into "a simple act of decency and moral discretion" in which Grumby fits as "an unfortunate virus" and no longer a human being is quite edifying. For David L.G. Arnold,

Bayard, though still a boy, is called upon to avenge his grandmother's death at the hands of the freebooter Grumby, and finds in the brutality of this act a satisfying sense of closure. Subsequently, however, the dilemma he faces in responding to his father's death thrusts him into both a psychological and a cultural crisis. (89)

Arnold adds later that "the impetuous decision to track and kill Grumby is the act of a

young, implicitly immature adolescent” (98). In short, Bayard’s perspective is still that of a child at this point and therefore leaves him no choice on how to act. He is bound to follow his father’s example. However, Arnold does mention an upcoming crisis brought about by John Sartoris’s death. Indeed, Granny’s death and the following revenge exerted on Grumby could be seen as the last demonstration of Bayard’s inexperienced point of view, a breaking point of sorts. According to Volpe, “it takes the shock of his grandmother’s brutal death to thrust Bayard over the threshold of maturity” (81). Diane Roberts gives us yet other elements to fully understand the significance of Grumby’s murder and its connection with the pattern:

According to the code of the Old South, when Granny was killed, ‘chivalric’ revenge was clearly called for, reasserting the hegemony of the plantation gentry. But when Bayard’s father is shot in the street, things are cast differently: John Sartoris was a killer himself. And now the call for vengeance comes not from another man, another ‘legitimate’ possessor of the phallus in the form of gun or sword, but from Drusilla, usurper of masculine prerogatives. (243)

According to her, Bayard would then be following the narrative of retaliation to the letter in Grumby’s case because it meets all the requirements of the Southern code, whereas his father’s death does not. As interesting as this theory is, this analysis will favor the hypothesis of Bayard’s change of perspective from innocence to experience between the two murders, his two chances to break away from the pattern.

In any case, Bayard will soon have to display evidence of the maturity Volpe evokes, as the last chapter of the book, “An Odor of Verbena”, the most relevant as far as my focus is concerned, approaches. The events occurring in the last part are triggered by John Sartoris, who attempts to break away from the pattern he has spent so much time enforcing. As if he knew what was about to happen to him, he tells Bayard, “I have accomplished my aim, and now I shall do a little moral housecleaning. I am tired of killing men, no matter what the necessity nor the end. Tomorrow, when I go to town and meet Ben Redmond, I shall be unarmed” (231-232). Ironically, this resolution will lead to his death, as if letting go of the Southern code had to be his ultimate act of redemption. It is also worth stressing that when the reader discovers Bayard’s new twenty-four-year-old perspective at the beginning of the chapter, he is now a law

student. This is relevant because of Bayard's struggle against the pattern of retaliation based on the exact contrary of law and because the aim of Bayard's academic career is to get "the law degree that Father decided [he] should have" (219). John Sartoris therefore leaves another very paradoxical legacy to his son. However, neither Sartoris's willingness to do away with the pattern or his subsequent death will succeed in putting an end to it. As Bayard has it, as he imagines what Ringo might say, "ah, this unhappy land, not ten years recovered from the fever yet still men must kill one another, still we must pay Cain's price in his own coin" (214). It is interesting to notice that the notion of retaliation is further supported by a biblical reference, following the origin of the word in the Old Testament as far as the Western world is concerned.

However, Bayard has decided to live by another biblical sentence: "*Thou shalt not kill*"¹⁴ (216, author's italics). While Sartoris failed to save himself from the deadly grip of the pattern, he did leave his son with the necessary tools to eschew it. His father being shot by his long-term rival Redmond acts as a trigger for Bayard. During his college years, "independently, Bayard is moving toward an ethics based on knowledge and experience, rather than custom and heredity" (Sharpe 91). He is now ready to face the challenge of responding to his father's murder in an appropriate way. In fact, as Arnold puts it, "Bayard intends to turn his father's death to some larger rhetorical purpose, to render the death in some way (though certainly not the way John Sartoris intended) socially useful" (99-100). This conclusion is inferred from Bayard's statement, "*at least this will be my chance to find out if I am what I think I am or if I just hope; if I am going to do what I have taught myself is right or if I am just going to wish I were*" (Faulkner 215, author's italics). Bayard does not take Sartoris's death as something personal (which usually leads to revenge) but as something broader, an opportunity to test himself and his newly formed convictions. In other words, this is his own rite of initiation, if we stay in the realm of the Bildungsroman. This statement is uttered when Bayard understands that he is "now The Sartoris" (214) thus implying society's expectations of him regarding his father's death in accordance with the Southern code. He is John Sartoris's son, his example will haunt him even beyond the grave. In fact, it will especially haunt him after Sartoris's death since Bayard is now supposed to carry his father's legacy on his still frail shoulders.

The pressure on Bayard is even greater as he is the only one enabled by

¹⁴ In *The Unvanquished*, the italics seem to be used mostly for character's thoughts, especially on pp. 214-216.

Southern society to avenge his father as his heir. His cousin Drusilla would be eager to do it, but her status as a Southern woman prevents her from acting. Ringo cannot act either since his status as a former slave deprives him of his masculinity, according to the white man's standards. These elements are in no way to be taken for granted in a historical perspective, but are crucial parts of the rhetorical construction of the South. The contrast between Drusilla's ideals and her femininity is the core of the problematic Faulkner creates around this character. Indeed, from her very first appearance in the novel, Drusilla deals with two opposite patterns: the pattern of retaliation and the pattern of behavior that the Southern lady (and even the Southern war widow) is supposed to adopt in this rhetorically constructed South. These aspects make her a very confusing character. According to Roberts,

Drusilla's real transgression is her semiotic multiplicity. Her desire for sex and death, preservation of the patriarchy and destruction of its roles; she can be both seductress and boy, but this collapsing of hierarchies is intolerable in a symbolic order that demands her subordination as feminine, as a lady. (245)

The very first line mentioning Drusilla is already crucial in depicting her character: "Cousin Drusilla, riding astride like a man" (89). This sentence will be followed by countless other references of her as a manly figure. Indeed, "Drusilla had deliberately tried to unsex herself by refusing to feel any natural grief at the death in battle not only of her affianced husband but of her own father" (189). Not only does "unsex[ing] herself" cancel her womanhood, it also eliminates all humanity in her, which enables her to avoid "natural grief". She was "one young girl who had happened to try to look and act like a man after her sweetheart was killed" (189). Unlike Aunt Jenny, the perfect example of the Southern widow, she does not want to be reduced to nothingness after her husband's death. She refuses to be told "that the purpose of her body is to bear children and reinforce the plantation order" (Roberts 241). In short, she is in no way interested in "the highest destiny of a Southern woman – to be the bride-widow of a lost cause" (Faulkner 191) now that the war is over. This is why she uses the pattern of retaliation, which she embraces, in order to escape from the realm of Southern femininity.

To her, this Southern femininity can be summarized in these terms:

Living used to be dull, you see. Stupid. You lived in the same house your father was born in and your father's sons and daughters had the sons and daughters of the same negro slaves to nurse and coddle, and then you grew up and you fell in love with your acceptable young man and in time you would marry him, in your mother's wedding gown perhaps and with the same silver for presents she had received, and then you settled down forever more while your husband got children on your body for you to feed and bathe and dress until they grew up too; and then you and your husband died quietly and were buried together maybe on a summer afternoon just before suppertime. Stupid, you see." (100-101)

According to Arnold, regarding the same passage, "what Drusilla is intoning is not an uncomplicated recapitulation of romantic stereotypes but an examination of her culture's addiction to its traditions, and the systematic disruption of those traditions" (102). Drusilla therefore carries Faulkner's commentary as much as Bayard. However, Drusilla fails to understand that by enforcing the pattern of retaliation to get rid of the traditional image of the Southern lady and widow, she adopts the exact behavior she criticizes so ardently. Here again, as in John Sartoris's case, Faulkner illustrates how much more efficient it is to just show controversial behavior than to plainly pass judgment on it. Drusilla's point of view does not enable her to see the pattern for what it is.

It is worth stressing that her commentary on Southern society is not Drusilla's only function in the novel. Indeed, her role also includes tempting Bayard to take the expected path of revenge and kill Redmond, since she cannot do it herself. In other words, "Drusilla is a personification of the forces that Bayard must defy" (Volpe 85). It is then little wonder that Faulkner should depict her as "the symbol of the ancient and eternal Snake" (228) who tempted Eve to take the forbidden fruit and led to the Fall. It is worth mentioning that Drusilla's attempt at corrupting her cousin once again mixes her two paradoxical sides. On the one hand, she tries to give him her two guns, "the long true barrels true as justice, the triggers (you have fired them) quick as retribution, the two of them slender and invincible and fatal as the physical shape of love" (237). These are very explicit phallic symbols, but also representations of "retribution" (or "justice" according to the Southern code). On the other hand, she tries to seduce him

with her womanly charms that are also present in the gun imagery. Even the verbena she constantly wears is a symbol of her double-sided personality since, according to Roberts, “verbena in classical lore has a double association, Venus and Mars, love and war, and was worn by Roman priests serving as guardians of civic order” (243). However, Bayard will not succumb to Drusilla’s charms as Eve did to the Snake’s. Drusilla represents

these matriarchs, whom Faulkner consistently depicts as the curators and transmitters of the old traditions, [who] will continue to impose upon future generations the empty and meaningless forms that will, within several generations, isolate the Southerner from twentieth-century reality and sap his individuality. (Volpe 82)

However, Bayard does not fall for it. He is the exception to the Southern tradition because he asks himself this simple question: “what good will that do?” (240). Asking whether killing a man makes any sense is already breaking away from the pattern which enforcement is not supposed to be questioned.

In fact, Bayard does triumph over the pattern in the end, but does this personal victory signify a total defeat of the Southern narrative of retaliation? Or, the contrary, is Bayard only an exception to the rule set up by Southern tradition that does not prevent the pattern from remaining established in Southern psyche in any case? In other words, who remains “unvanquished” in the end? There is no easy answer to this question. Indeed, according to Sharpe, “Bayard has effected a revolution in outlook in his ‘public’” (92) and his attitude toward the pattern of retaliation has had a certain impact on others. Sharpe refers here to the passage where George Wyatt, one of the fiercest defenders of the Southern code in the book, has to admit that Bayard’s way of dealing with Redmond is worth some respect: “you aint done anything to be ashamed of. I wouldn’t have done it that way, myself. I’d a shot at him once, anyway. But that’s your way or you wouldn’t have done it” (Faulkner 250-251). This statement is the proof of a slight change in attitude toward straightforward retaliation.

However, the last scene in which Bayard finds Drusilla’s verbena in his room, although quite cryptic, might be of even more significance as far as this issue is concerned. Bayard discovers Drusilla’s gift looking

at the pillow on which it lay – the single sprig of it (without looking she would pinch off a half dozen of them and they would be all of a size, almost all of a shape, as if a machine had stamped them out) filling the room, the dusk, the evening with that odor which she said you could smell alone above the smell of horses. (254)

The novel ends with these words, leaving their significance to the reader's judgment. Drusilla's gesture, after leaving for Montgomery on the night train and therefore apparently acknowledging Bayard's victory over her temptation, could be a tribute to the courage Bayard has been able to gather without causing any bloodshed. That would mean that Bayard has been successful in breaking the pattern "which [his father] had bequeathed [them] which [they] could never forget" (253). However, it could also be a reminder of what Drusilla considers as her cousin's cowardice, preventing him from enforcing the pattern, since verbena is associated with her and her desire for him to be violent and exert vengeance on Redmond. The ending therefore remains open, and both Drusilla and verbena keep their ambivalence. However, the continued enforcement of the pattern in the two other novels that will be analyzed next suggest that the narrative of retaliation is far from being vanquished at this point, at least in the realm of discourse¹⁵.

3.2. Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird*

Although he wrote in the 1930s, William Faulkner decided to set his plot during and immediately after the Civil War, therefore corroborating my theory on the origins of the narrative of retaliation, regarding both history and fiction. As Volpe puts it, "the lawless pattern of the future has been established. The modern South is born" (83). Indeed, Harper Lee sets her narrative a long way down the road of Reconstruction, in the 1930s, and in her novel the narrative of retaliation has not aged at all, which shows the strength

¹⁵ While America has not become a color-blind country and the Civil War has left permanent traces in American minds, it would be factually inaccurate to claim that the situation did not change in the South, historically speaking. This is therefore toward discourse that one must turn to find the pattern of retaliation as a firmly established construction. Novels are always read anaphorically since reading always intervenes after the author has completed the book. However, novels often have unpredictable performative effects into the future, well beyond the author's direct influence. They can therefore also be read cataphorically. The discourse contained in Faulkner, Lee and Burke's fiction is no exception. This is why their critique of the pattern contributes to establishing it further in the Southern psyche rather than discrediting it completely.

of its establishment in Southern minds. This also underscores the fact that it depends more on a rhetorical construction than on history itself. This narrative is indeed a pattern. For there to be a pattern at all, repeated elements are needed, hence the analysis of three different books in which clearly defined perspectives depict very similar struggles with one and the same narrative of retaliation in the South. Harper Lee's novel is consistent with what has been discussed in *The Unvanquished*. Indeed, as Claudia Johnson puts it,

obviously the thematic scope of *To Kill a Mockingbird* goes beyond the narrow limits of written laws. It is rather a study of the law in its broadest sense: familial, communal, and regional codes; those of the drawing room and the school yard; those written and unwritten; some that lie beneath the surface in dark contradiction of established law. (131)

One of these generally unwritten codes is the pattern of retaliation.

Atticus Finch says it himself when he explains to his daughter that “you never really understand a person until you consider things from his point of view” (Lee 39). The narrator's point of view is as paramount in *To Kill a Mockingbird* as it is in *The Unvanquished*. Jean Louise “Scout” Finch represents this perspective here. According to Jennifer Murray, “it might be most accurate to say that *To Kill a Mockingbird* is a novel without a clear protagonist, making do with a double-perspective first-person narrator instead” (84). Although Atticus could be considered as the main character, regarding his involvement with the pattern, this is yet another element proving the supremacy of the narrative perspective over the plot. The narrative voice is the protagonist. In addition, the narrator is once again very close to the author's position since this novel was constructed from short “stories [Lee] had written about her childhood experiences” (76). This autobiographical dimension of the book therefore implies that the narrative point of view and the writer's commentary are closely related. It also suggests that whatever stance emerges from the novel through the narrator's vision in the end must also be the message the author wants the reader to keep in mind.

What is this “double-perspective first-person narrator”? Similarly to Bayard Sartoris's, Scout's point of view switches from a seven-year-old's to an adult's. However, this process does not work in a linear fashion as it does for Bayard. Although some scholars describe the development of Jem, Scout's brother, as a coming of age

story, this book cannot be characterized as a Bildungsroman as clearly as *The Unvanquished*. The perspective changes in a different way:

The narrative voice in *To Kill a Mockingbird* is not uniform in its perspective on the past. Lee uses the possibilities of the remembering adult narrator, who has the distance of both time and maturity from the events, but at strategic moments she limits the insight of the narrator to what she, as a child, might have understood. (78)

Indeed, Scout's asserting that

when enough years had gone by to enable us to look back on them, we sometimes discussed the events leading to [Jem's] accident. I maintain that the Ewells started it all, but Jem, who was four years my senior, said it started long before that. (Lee 3)

and Scout's asking Atticus incredulously "you aren't really a nigger-lover, then, are you?" (144) are statements supposedly uttered by the same person. This is difficult to believe since the former has enough hindsight to come from an adult narrator whereas the latter is full of childish naivety. These are two narrative voices blended into one.

This is Harper Lee's highly efficient way of driving her points home through Scout's voice. Murray mentions a child's limited insight, just like Bayard's perspective at the beginning of Faulkner's novel. In Scout's case, this naive stance can also be an asset. Indeed, it gives her the power to question the Southern traditions including the pattern of retaliation that the grown-ups surrounding her have long taken for granted. For instance, she does exactly that when she questions her brother about the outcome of the trial: "Jem, how can you hate Hitler so bad an' then turn around and be ugly about folks right at home" (331). This introduces one of these seemingly wide-eyed statements, pointing out issues that should be obvious discussion topics but that nobody else in Maycomb had considered worth questioning. Scout points out the irony of despising Hitler for killing so many Jews on the one hand and applying a similar treatment to black people in the South on the other. Her point of view enables her, if not to clearly identify the pattern, at least to notice that something that seems normal to everyone else should be challenged. This emphasizes once more that the pattern of

retaliation can only be seen from a certain perspective, as was the case in *The Unvanquished*. Harper Lee was able to create a narrative voice that perfectly fits this purpose. According to Laura Fine, “The adult narrator surreptitiously endorses” (67) Scout’s innocent discourse and thus adds a constructed commentary to Scout’s immature discourse. Consequently,

Lee’s skillful mixing of her adult and child perspectives in effect allows her to have it both ways: she offers the point of view of an innocent eight-year-old at the same time she fashions an adult feminist liberal social critique ... an eight-year-old’s social critique seems harmless and forgivable. Shifting between the boundaries of the adult and child perspectives is a safe way to make piercing criticisms of small-town southern society. (67)

Scout’s ingenuous perspective also gives her the opportunity to naturally break away from the pattern since she has not yet been corrupted by Southern society, however Rousseauist this may sound. This questioning carries Harper Lee’s critique of the South.

However, Scout’s child-like perspective also has its drawbacks. Indeed, she will have to face many challenges, many of them similar to Bayard and Drusilla’s, in order to determine whether she will be able to let go of the pattern of retaliation. Much like Bayard, as the story begins, her child self and her society’s deeply established narrative push her toward what a Southerner would normally be expected to do: enforce the traditions. Indeed, according to Kathryn Lee Seidel, “she is in danger of becoming a southerner” (81). While Bayard relies on the romantic image he has of his father and retaliates against Grumby,

Scout embodies all the faults of the Old South when we first meet her: she is prone to violence; she fights for apparently no reason other than her honor and her own amusement. She is an elitist. She labels people according to their social class, denigrates them, and justifies her mistreatment of them because of what she perceives to be their genetic tendency for inferior behavior. She uses racist language ... She believes in and is a practitioner of the code of honor rather than the rule of law. (81)

Indeed, Scout's first reactions toward what happens around her are very much what is expected of a typical Southerner. She claims that "it was a sad thing that [her] father had neglected to tell [her] about the Finch family, or to install any pride into his children" (Lee 176), reproducing her Aunt Alexandra's thought about the ideal Southern family and its honor. She also utters this incredibly candid and racist comment during Tom Robinson's trial, when she addresses her friend Dill in these terms: "well, Dill, after all he's just a Negro" (266). However reactionary or racist these comments are, in Scout's eyes, they are nothing more than what everybody else in the novel thinks. However, there is no denying that her evolution throughout the narrative has many features that could be attributed to a Bildungsroman. Scout's perspective will indeed evolve from this very limited point of view to a still limited and quite naive (because still that of a child) perspective¹⁶. This perspective is however less directed toward the Southern traditions and therefore allows her to question the pattern of retaliation through her innocent yet relevant statements.

One man in particular is the trigger of this evolution in the novel. While Bayard's family, especially his father, are his main opponents against achieving his escape from the pattern of retaliation, Scout's father Atticus is the main influence protecting her from the impact of the Southern code and modifying her behavior toward it. The struggle Bayard undertakes against the pattern of retaliation is a burden that befalls Atticus in *To Kill a Mockingbird*, seen through his daughter's eyes. In Seidel's words, "Atticus may not change all southerners, but he does change one, absolutely and forever: Scout" (84). Although I chose to consider the narrative voice as the main "character" of the novel, the *Harvard Law Review*¹⁷, describes Atticus as "the central character and moral conscience of the novel" ("Being Atticus Finch" 1686). Atticus is indeed the protagonist of the key episode of the novel, namely Tom Robinson's trial. This traumatic event in small-town Alabama's history triggers the pattern of retaliation in Maycomb and that gives the reader a clear indication as to where each of the townspeople stands in this pattern. Although some people such as Maudie Atkinson, the Finch family's widowed neighbor, do not agree with the jury's verdict, Atticus is the only one who stands up for his black client throughout the case. "Simply because we

¹⁶ This is why, although Seidel defines this book as "a bildungsroman in which Scout must grow from innocence to maturity" (81), I still oppose the idea of a coming of age novel since Scout never reaches adulthood as a character (as opposed to her second narrative perspective).

¹⁷ No author is mentioned for this article.

were licked a hundred years before we started is no reason for us not to try to win” (Lee 101) is the principle he lives by. Although this sentence could very well be what an adept of the Lost Cause would say, he uses it to underscore that the battle for black Civil Rights is completely hopeless in the South at the time, which, to him, does not mean it should not be fought. Atticus asserts that, “before [he] can live with other folks [he’s] got to live with [himself]. The one thing that doesn’t abide by majority rule is a person’s conscience” (140). He plays the same part as Bayard in *The Unvanquished*, the only divergent voice toward the pattern, against the grain of Southern tradition. In other words, only his perspective allows him to see the pattern of retaliation for what it really is and therefore enables him to act against it and pass his vision to his children.

Retaliation is closely intertwined with the notion of race in the South. Tom Robinson’s trial represents what triggered the emergence of the pattern of retaliation in the first place, only on a smaller scale. As Robyn Wiegman points out, the context of extreme violence that helped the practice of retaliation emerge in the South was brought about by slavery and subsequent racial segregation. Extraordinary violence and race are intimately connected also because, on the one hand, whipping a man was the only way to ensure his enslavement and, on the other, the practice of lynching emerged following emancipation and the threat posed by black men on white masculine supremacy. In the case of *To Kill a Mockingbird*, race is once again at the origin of an explosion of violence in Maycomb, Alabama, working as a microcosm of the South. The town is an ideal place for old traditions to stick since, as Scout’s older narrative voice has it, “although Maycomb was ignored during the War Between the States, Reconstruction rule and economic ruin forced the town to grow. It grew inward. New people so rarely settled there, the same families married the same families until the members of the community looked faintly alike” (174-175). This certainly helped people remain set in their old ways¹⁸. In this context, no evidence other than Mayella Ewell’s confused and hesitant testimony (“no, I don’t recollect if he hit me. I mean yes I do, he hit me” (248)), and her father’s hateful confirmation, (“I seen that black nigger yonder ruttin’ on my Mayella !” (231)), is needed to charge Robinson with rape. In the same way, Atticus’s hint at the possibility that Mayella could have been raped by her father instead of the black defendant has no impact whatsoever on the jury. In this incestuous milieu where “the same families married the same families until the members of the community

¹⁸ I am only referring to the narrative level of the imaginary town described in the novel here and not to history as such.

looked faintly alike”, this should nonetheless not be considered as really surprising. In short, “Tom was a dead man the minute Mayella Ewell opened her mouth and screamed” (323). Retaliation must be the answer to this (non-)event.

This results in a construction that Wiegman calls “an intense masculinization in the figure of the black male as mythically endowed rapist” (83). Indeed, sexual intercourse between races has become one of the greatest fears of the white rulers of Southern society, whereas it was seen as beneficial when slavery was still the pillar supporting the whole Southern system. As Wiegman puts it,

the loss of miscegenation’s economic rationalization under slavery turns the question of interracial sexuality toward the more tension-wrought domain of sexual desire. The myth of the black male rapist serves to compensate for this economic loss, transferring the focus from the white man’s quasi-sanctioned (because economically productive) sexual activities to the bodies, quite literally, of black men. (84)

“The myth of the black male rapist” is not only triggered by a simple fear of a new kind of miscegenation that would escape the white man’s control. Indeed, there is another important reason why this fiction implies “lynching as a denial of the black male’s newly articulated right to citizenship and, with it, the various privileges of patriarchal power” (83). The latter used to be the white man’s exclusive property, and because they feel threatened by the black man’s new freedom that gives him equal status in theory, white men use this narrative, “working the fault line of the slave’s newly institutionalized masculinization by framing this masculinity as the bestial excess of an overly phallic primitivity” (96). In *To Kill a Mockingbird*, Tom Robinson, Mayella Ewell and Bob Ewell are the protagonists of this modern mythology: “the mythically endowed rapist, the flower of civilization (the white woman) he intended to violently pluck, and the heroic interceptor (the white male) who would restore order by thwarting the black phallic insurgence” (93). Tom Robinson ends up being lynched when the court’s decision is not enough to satisfy the white man’s greed for his own kind of justice against the black man who threatens his way of life. The pattern of retaliation is set up.

The novels suggest that the pattern of retaliation is implanted in people’s minds in such a way that even after a victorious outcome for his daughter and himself, even

when the judicial system gets as close to retaliation as it can by sentencing Robinson to death, Bob Ewell still wants more. Scout tells us that “this morning Mr. Bob Ewell stopped Atticus on the post office corner, spat in his face, and told him he’d get him if it took the rest of his life” (Lee 290). This leads Aunt Alexandra to make the seemingly obvious remark “that man seems to have a permanent running grudge against everybody connected with that case. I know how that kind are about paying off grudges, but I don’t understand why he should harbor one – he had his way in court, didn’t he?” (335). Bob Ewell’s way has nothing in common with a court decision. According to Scout’s reading of Mr. Underwood’s editorial in *The Maycomb Tribune*, “Atticus had used every tool available to free men to save Tom Robinson, but in the secret courts of men’s hearts Atticus had no case” (323). Very much like Bayard as a law student in Faulkner’s novel, Atticus is caught between two different codes: actual and established laws and implicit Southern rules. According to Johnson,

To Kill a Mockingbird presents the argument that the forces that motivate society are not consonant with the democratic ideals embedded in its legal system and that the disjunction between the codes men and women profess and those they live by threatens to unravel individual lives as well as the social fabric. (129)

The codes men and women live by, “the secret courts of men’s hearts”, in this case, are always the pattern of retaliation and this is why justice, in its strictest sense, is not enough for Bob Ewell. This is also why a mob tries to lynch Robinson before the trial even takes place, and why he is eventually killed by the guards of his prison who put “seventeen bullet holes in him” (Lee 315) because he allegedly “broke into a blind raving charge at the fence and started climbing over” (315). This turn of events is seen by most people in Maycomb as completely normal because of what is supposed to happen according to the unwritten Southern code of retaliation and what is expected from a black man. “To Maycomb, Tom’s death was typical. Typical of a nigger to cut and run. Typical of a nigger’s mentality to have no plan, no thought for the future, just run blind first chance he saw” (322). The older narrator’s voice emerges once again here with an experienced adult’s insight into people’s state of mind. In these circumstances, it is indeed quite difficult to address any reproach to Tom Robinson for being “tired of white men’s chances and [preferring] to take his own” (315).

Atticus is once again very aware of all these aspects while nobody else is. He knows the myth about Southern women and understands it is just a narrative whereas nobody else questions its legitimacy. He is “in favor of Southern womanhood as much as anybody, but not for preserving polite fiction at the expense of human life” (196).

[He] hope[s] and pray[s] [he] can get Jem and Scout through it without bitterness, and most of all without catching Maycomb’s usual disease. Why reasonable people go stark raving mad when anything involving a Negro comes up, is something [he doesn’t] pretend to understand... [He] just hope[s] that Jem and Scout come to [him] for their answers instead of listening to the town. [He] hope[s] they trust [him] enough. (117)

In this passage, Atticus accurately identifies what he calls a “disease” and its cause, which enables him to foresee the outcome of the trial. He also knows Scout is “listening, and it was not until many years later that [she] realized he wanted [her] to hear every word he said” (117). He realizes that the pattern of retaliation ruling his town will not let him have his way, and that “that boy might go to the chair” (195). His final aim, however, is somewhere else. He claims that Robinson is “not going [to the chair] till the truth’s told” (195). This may sound like a truism, but the respect of the notion of truth is more important to Atticus than a verdict he already knows. Fighting for the values he defends against all odds is the only way he can hope his children will not catch “Maycomb’s usual disease” and will be able to defeat the pattern of retaliation. According to Fine, “the novel suggests it is a moral imperative to act in accordance with one’s own conscience, even if it means social ostracism, even if it means endangering oneself and one’s family” (65). Scout’s evolution will not disappoint Atticus. He imprints his beliefs on his children little by little as the story unfolds. This is underlined by the many examples that can be found throughout the book. For instance, Scout mentions early on that “Atticus had promised [her] he would wear [her] out if he even heard of [her] fighting any more” (Lee 99). He insists later by telling her “don’t you ever let me catch you pointing that gun at anybody again” (121). After sending Jem and Scout to Mrs Dubose’s every day until her death to read to her, he explains that he

want[s] [his children] to see what real courage is, instead of getting the idea that courage is a man with a gun in his hand. It’s when you know

you're licked before you begin but you begin anyway and you see it through no matter what. You rarely win, but sometimes you do. (149)

This sentence reminds us of his attitude at the trial. Atticus reminds his children that the path leading to retaliation is dangerous. He tells them, "I don't want either of you bearing a grudge about this thing, no matter what happens" (211). Even when the topic of Hitler comes up, Atticus teaches Scout that "it's not okay to hate anybody" (330).

Scout shows that she has been listening to Atticus's lessons about how to live according to the law and not according to the pattern of retaliation. When she gets beaten by Uncle Jack, her reaction is to tell him, "you never stopped to gimme a chance to tell you my side of it – you just lit right into me. When Jem an' I fuss Atticus doesn't ever just listen to Jem's side of it, he hears mine too" (113). She also realizes that "it was times like these when [she] thought [her] father, who hated guns and had never been to any wars, was the bravest man who ever lived" (134). The naive racist statements and the tendency to easily and violently retaliate are long gone. She is now able to see people and events differently. According to Seidel, "if she had become a southerner, imbued with the code of honor, these would all be invisible to her. Indeed, they become real precisely because she can now see them" (90). Scout has assimilated her father's moral precepts and has therefore acquired the point of view that enables her to see the pattern that most people in the South cannot.

She has assimilated these precepts in such a clear way as to be able to do what Drusilla could not in *The Unvanquished*: refuse the pattern of Southern womanhood without embracing the pattern of retaliation. Indeed, the pattern of retaliation is not the only ritual to follow the same structure in both Lee and Faulkner's fiction. Everybody in Maycomb expects Scout "to grow up to be a lady" (Lee 105) sporting the same features as the ideal female figure embodied by Aunt Jenny and vehemently rejected by Drusilla in Faulkner's novel. Scout does "not particularly" (105) want to indulge them. Her position toward the fiction of Southern womanhood and its implications that contributed to Tom Robinson's death places her in complete opposition with Mayella Ewell and what she represents.

Her vision has changed so much that she is even able to "consider things from [another person's] point of view" (39), one of Atticus's first pieces of advice. This other person is Boo Radley. While standing on his porch for the first time after so many aborted attempts to discover who this man was, Scout realizes that she "had never seen

[her] neighborhood from this angle” (373). She then relives the whole story season by season through what Boo comprehended of it from his house. This is enough to make her understand that “Atticus was right. One time he said you never really know a man until you stand in his shoes and walk around in them. Just standing on the Radley porch was enough” (374). This new ability seems to guarantee that Scout has fully absorbed her father’s teachings. It also demonstrates the importance of the narrative point of view. Merely imagining what the story would have been if we had read it through the eyes of a man that we had not even thought of as truly real until the end makes it so much different.

Atticus therefore changes his children’s vision but he is powerless in changing anybody else’s. As Johnson has it, “Atticus’ code is a far remove from the realities of Maycomb, Alabama” (132-133). And the realities of Maycomb are powerful and very influential among its people. Even Atticus will not be able to resist them until the end. When Jem is attacked by Bob Ewell, the very mysterious Arthur “Boo” Radley intervenes and kills Ewell. Sheriff Heck Tate’s first move is to conceal what just happened and pretend that “Bob Ewell fell on his knife” (Lee 370). According to Atticus, “if this thing’s hushed up it’ll be a simple denial to Jem of the way I’ve tried to raise him” (366). He understands that accepting to let retaliation against Bob Ewell go unpunished would mean giving up all his principles and surrendering to the pattern. Tate nonetheless convinces him by his observation that “there’s a black boy dead for no reason, and the man responsible for it’s dead. Let the dead bury the dead this time, Mr. Finch. Let the dead bury the dead” (369). This statement is built on the logic of an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. It makes the presence of the pattern of retaliation even more explicit. Atticus gives us the confirmation of his falling for the pattern by repeating Tate’s words to Scout, “Mr. Ewell fell on his knife. Can you possibly understand?” (370), thus negating everything he has been teaching her, in a way.

However, the *Harvard Law Review* brings a very important element to the discussion. Indeed,

in the end, there is a return to ritual. But the narrative ultimately leaves ambiguous whether the occasional break – the exception made for exceptional cases – is valid and necessary to reinforce the meaning of the ritual, or merely a well-intentioned but futile attempt to evade it. (“Being Atticus Finch” 1691)

In other words, are Atticus's prescient words at the beginning of the novel, "sometimes it's better to bend the law a little in special cases" (Lee 40), and his putting them into practice in the end significant? Or is it just an exception to his principles that "is valid and necessary to reinforce the meaning" of the code he enforces up until the pattern finally gets to him? Alternatively, is Lee saying that Atticus's attitude is only a minor breach in the pattern? That his change of attitude is only a minor breach in the enforcement of his own values? Or is she telling us that Atticus represents a major opposition to the pattern, that going against his own words signifies his being completely at the mercy of the narrative of retaliation? Lee makes things even more complicated with the very metaphor her whole novel is based on, that of the mockingbird. As Murray has it, "through its association with Boo Radley and Tom Robinson, the intended force of the symbol is to represent those who are unjustly marginalized, excluded, and imprisoned (Hovet & Hovet 90 quoted in Murray 87). She adds that "the force of the title actually [resides] in the omitted word 'sin': 'it's a sin to kill a mockingbird'" (Hovet & Hovet 90 quoted in Murray 88). The problem lies in Boo Radley and Tom Robinson's connection with the mockingbird. On the one hand, Mr. Underwood "likened Tom's death to the senseless slaughter of songbirds by hunters and children" (Lee 323) and on the other, Scout concludes that charging Boo Radley with murder would "be sort of like shootin' a mockingbird" (370). This further complicates our understanding of the significance of Atticus's ethical position toward the pattern, since in one case taking the law into one's own hands is a horrible thing to do and in the other it just seems natural. These elements pose the same question raised by Faulkner's fiction: who is ultimately unvanquished between Atticus and the pattern?

In order to figure out Harper Lee's position toward that, stressing that Atticus's behavior is seen through Scout's eyes is in no way an innocent statement. Indeed, Lee's purpose throughout the book is to criticize the Old South and its antebellum ways that still regulate society more than half a century after the war ended. It has also been made clear that Scout's vision proves to be a very efficient tool in order to achieve this aim. Steven Lubet, has a very interesting theory that illustrates this point. According to him,

the text of *To Kill a Mockingbird* contains three distinct narratives of the Atticus Finch story. Two of these stories, as told by Scout, Atticus's daughter, and Tom Robinson, his client, provide the time-honored saga

of the virtuous lawyer. The third, barely audible, narrative is that of Mayella Ewell, Tom's accuser. Mayella's story, conveyed to us through Scout's eyes, is told only to be discredited. (1341)

He rightfully points out that "Scout is our only source of knowledge of Maycomb, Alabama" (1341). Mayella's take on the events that led to the trial is the only thing that matters to the jurors because it confirms what they know about what is supposed to happen according to the rhetorical construction of the region when a black man and a white woman interact in the South at the time: rape. It is not important whether that assumption is based on facts or not. This is why "the jury couldn't possibly be expected to take Tom Robinson's word against the Ewells" (Lee 117). However, the narrative point of view only takes Atticus's defense into account. And this defense establishes that "Mayella is a sexually frustrated, love-starved aggressor, who lies her way out of a dilemma and participates in a judicial lynching in order to avoid revealing the truth" (Lubet 1344). Scout comes to the conclusion that "Mayella Ewell must have been the loneliest person in the world" (Lee 256), and that "Tom Robinson was probably the only person who was ever decent to her" (257). Scout therefore takes for granted that Robinson did not rape Mayella and that she was just ashamed of her romantic involvement with a black man. Accusing him of doing what most white people in town expected him to do as a black man, namely raping her, was her only way out. It was the only way she could avoid taking responsibility for breaking the Southern code that stipulates that no interracial relationship is possible, especially for the always very pure and very much constructed Southern lady. Especially at the time, when miscegenation was listed among the worst fears in the South. According to Lubet, "Atticus nonetheless succeeded in demonstrating both the innocence of his client and the peculiar sickness of Jim Crow society" (1340). This is also the conclusion the reader remembers from the trial since there is no other apparently credible perspective to rely on. This is how Lee makes sure her message is what comes out of her narrative.

But does her message really come across as a real opposition to the pattern of retaliation or does it contribute to establishing it even more deeply in the Southern psyche? Indeed, while Lee's condemning the pattern is fairly clear, she still insists on all the features that construct it and therefore implants it even more in Southern minds. According to Johnson, "the trial of Tom Robinson in *To Kill a Mockingbird* represents a pattern of actual occurrences in Alabama during the late 1950s" (134). Literature and

reality are once again intertwined. Lee's fiction makes Southern history even more real by choosing this specific part of Southern behavior to stage it in a novel and molds the South according to this particular feature in the eyes of outsiders. However, the reader is the one who ultimately decides what they take from a narrative. As Lubet has it, "Scout merely told the story and Harper Lee merely wrote the book. Neither one can control our interpretation of the finished text" (1346). Indeed, one of the reasons why Lee's book is a bestseller is that it performs. It takes what Lee regarded as "a simple love story" (Lee, back cover) to create a momentum to talk about issues such as race and the pattern of retaliation. However, Lee has no control over the unpredictable performative effects her book has more than fifty years after its first publication. This is why, although Lee meant to criticize the Southern code, it is not necessarily the point that will strike all readers as essential in her fiction. Murray is one of the readers who focuses more on what Lee was depicting as the realities of the South rather than her actual message that was using these descriptions to introduce criticism. She claims that "the novel remains unconsciously condescending in its liberal formulations of 'family' and bows to the racist ideology of the 1930s which persisted in the 1950s present of the remembering narrator" (Murray 86). This is why Lee's narrative could be seen as a means to establish the pattern of retaliation as a construction by depicting it despite her criticism. The unpredictable performative consequences of Lee's discourse limit the effects of her critique.

Furthermore, the conclusion of the plot shows a Maycomb still set in its old ways in spite of Atticus's repeated attempts to break away from the pattern. Regardless of the significance (or lack thereof) of his gesture, Atticus did fall for the pattern in the end and did not influence anyone except his children in letting go of the Southern traditions. As the novel closes, "Maycomb [is] itself again. Precisely the same as last year and the year before that" (Lee 336), unchanged by the battle that took place over Robinson's fate. Even worse, "things had a way of settling down, and after enough time passed people would forget that Tom Robinson's existence was ever brought to their attention" (326). Even though Maudie thinks that the jury's need to deliberate longer than they usually do is "just a baby-step, but it's a step" (289) toward getting rid of the pattern, Atticus himself has to bow to the evidence. He acknowledges that "they've done it before and they did it tonight and they'll do it again and when they do it – seems that only children weep" (285), in this case his own children, the only ones able to grasp the actual meaning of what they see in court. Lee's position is made quite clear when

Atticus declares “don’t fool yourselves – it’s all adding up and one of these days we’re going to pay the bill for it” (296). Her aim is most certainly to make a somewhat cynical observation on the way her region is unable to distance itself from the precepts of the Old South in order to denounce this attitude. Fine confirms this by stating that “Lee depicts the revered structures of society – the educational system, the court system, the church – as thoroughly corrupt or as at best absurd” (62), thus reminding us of the importance of mere description in an author’s commentary. However, this is not enough to prevent the pattern of retaliation from being implanted in Southern minds through the performative power of her discourse.

Indeed, her bleak ending that shows no concrete improvement in the South¹⁹ could very well be interpreted as an acceptance of the seemingly inescapable pattern of retaliation and therefore as implicit endorsement. Atticus suggests that “only children weep” (285) when such a verdict is rendered in Tom Robinson’s case and he is echoed by Dolphus Raymond, another misfit in this very traditional Southern society, who admits that “things haven’t caught up with [Dill’s] instinct yet. Let him get a little older and he won’t get sick and cry. Maybe things’ll strike him as being – not quite right, say, but he won’t cry, not when he gets a few years on him” (269). In other words, tradition will catch up with him once he loses his innocence and really becomes a part of the adult Southern community who endorses the pattern, which is a very pessimistic conclusion on Lee’s part once again. This leads back to Lee’s use of a child’s perspective in order to point out things that she could not by simply using an adult narrator. Murray also mentions “Lee’s conclusion that the town is returning to the racist, classist, and sexist norms ... and that it will try to silence anyone who advances any viewpoint that challenges those standards” (Hovet & Hovet 77 quoted in Murray 82). Indeed, Atticus is silenced in the end as he breaks his own principles to fall for the pattern. Robinson is dead, and even Jem decides that he “never [wants to] hear about that courthouse again, ever, ever” (Lee 331). No learning process has taken place in Maycomb after this traumatic event that is, after all, nothing more than a common occurrence for the population. Lee’s closing statements therefore implicitly contribute to the rhetorical construction of the South and the establishment of the pattern of retaliation.

¹⁹ The South did change historically but this is not my point here. My point is that nothing changed in terms of discourse in the rhetorical South described in Lee’s novel.

3.3. James Lee Burke's *In the Electric Mist with Confederate Dead*

James Lee Burke's novel is set in the 1990s, which means that the Civil War and its immediate aftermath, depicted by Faulkner, and the consequences of Reconstruction, described by Lee, are long gone. Or so it seems. While these events are indeed long gone in terms of the unbiased notion of time, many of the Southern traditions staged in the novels of the first half of the twentieth century, most of which finding their origins in the Civil War era, are still very present in Burke's fiction. Barbara Bogue echoes my argument (largely supported by Eudora Welty) in the chapter treating the specificity of the South when she tells us that "setting is particularly critical as it anchors readers in time and place to evoke a sense of what setting has to say about the protagonist's worldview" (115) and this setting is a South bearing many similarities with the South discussed in Faulkner and Lee. A South which origins lie in the same rhetorical construction. According to Patricia Gaitely, "Burke's novels ... fall into the category of Southern literature in that there are certain characteristics that pertain to a region larger than the culture of one specific, unique area of the South" (42). Indeed, what was true in terms of Southern culture for Faulkner's Mississippi or Lee's Alabama is also relevant in Burke's Louisiana. Some of these characteristics are the Southern traditions presented in Faulkner and Lee's fiction. This suggests a long-term establishment of these traditions in Southern minds, as my analysis of *The Unvanquished* and *To Kill a Mockingbird* demonstrated. One of these diehard customs is the pattern of retaliation that the other two novels contribute to implanting. Gaitely supports this point by stating that

it is notable that other particularly Southern authors have made it a characteristic of certain of their characters. For example in William Faulkner's *Barn Burning*, Abner Snopes resorts to setting fire to the barns of those who are perceived as having crossed him. (43)

Moreover, in Burke's fiction, as in his predecessors', the question of race is never far when the practice of retaliation is raised in the South. All these elements are the results of a continued establishment of the Southern pattern of retaliation.

In this case, as in Faulkner and Lee's books, the point of view is of crucial importance in discerning and defining the pattern. New Iberia detective Dave

Robicheaux, who is also the main character of the novel, represents this narrative perspective in *In the Electric Mist with Confederate Dead*. Like Bayard and Scout, he is a first-person narrator but his impact on the reader's vision can be seen as more important. Indeed, as Bogue has it, "the reader is locked into the consciousness of the first-person narrator Dave Robicheaux and the internal struggle is felt and understood through Robicheaux's sensory perceptions and moral dilemmas" (Bogue 16). It is therefore difficult for the reader to be detached from Dave's stance and form a perspective of their own. Bogue evokes "Burke's strong attachment to a city and a region that is also symbolic of the nation's heritage and culture. Due to Burke's familiarity with and love of the region, the reader of the Robicheaux series is anchored firmly in place and time" (9). This closeness to the Southern environment, facilitated by Burke's very powerful first-person narrator, does not help the reader develop an external perspective enabling them to question Dave's behavior.

Much like Faulkner and Lee's narrative points of view, the author's commentary is never far either, since Burke claims that "the character's defects are largely the author's" (11), including their shared alcoholism, to name but one. Once again, the narrator is given a point of view that enables him to identify the pattern of retaliation but this time it is far more difficult for Dave to break away from it. When Burke describes his character, he mentions that "Dave is what [he] admire[s] most in people. He represents courage. He's ethical. At the same time he's flawed, like the tragic hero" (9). These flaws lead Dave to embrace the pattern of retaliation at certain key moments of the novel, in spite of his awareness of the said pattern. This does not prevent Burke from criticizing the pattern since, as I cannot stress enough, describing questionable deeds is often more efficient than just plainly judging them in a commentary. Burke also adds to his character's contradictions, a man who can identify the pattern and embrace it at the same time, by sometimes using his actions to indirectly comment on their inappropriateness and sometimes using his words to directly comment on Southern society, thus illustrating Dave's awareness of what he is facing. However, it does make one wonder whether Burke's narrative technique does not directly contribute to establishing the pattern even further than it has been done by writers like Faulkner and Lee.

In the Electric Mist with Confederate Dead acts as a reminder of the establishment of the pattern from the Civil War to the end of the twentieth century. After establishing a basis for the pattern of retaliation to work, the plot of Burke's novel

is mainly about examining how people deal with this pattern through the first-person narrator's perspective. It all starts with the classic trigger of retaliation in the South for Dave, racial violence. The story opens on his finding the body of a nineteen-year-old white girl, known as a prostitute, Cherry LeBlanc, who was raped and mutilated. This discovery leads him to dream about his witnessing the lynching of a black man, DeWitt Prejean, killed by two white men back in 1957. These two murders are connected. Indeed, it turns out that the 1992 murderer, Murphy Doucet, was one of the two men who chose to take the law into their own hands in 1957. At first, "at age nineteen [Dave] did not want to accept the possibility that a man's murder could be treated with the social significance of a hangnail that had been snipped off someone's finger" (Burke 12), and he therefore tries to erase this event from his memory before the more recent events force him to consider Prejean's lynching. This is the first instance Dave comments on the flaws of his society, this time on the difficulty for the South to overcome segregation when it comes to crimes involving black people. One of the events forcing him to examine the lynching he witnessed as a teenager is the discovery of Prejean's body shortly after the beginning of the investigation of LeBlanc's murder. Upon finding the body in the swamp of the Atchafalaya River, the St Mary Parish deputy in charge of the jurisdiction does not seem too concerned about investigating the circumstances of Prejean's death. According to him, "I don't know about y'all over in Iberia Parish, but nobody around here's going to be real interested in nigger trouble that's thirty-five years old" (22), which further demonstrates that segregation is not as remote as one might think in the 1990s South. Especially since Dave, after some research, discovers that Prejean was a prisoner but he "was never booked. He was left in a holding cell for two armed men to find him. You didn't even leave him a way to take his own life" (214). This shows that regular justice is hardly enough in the South when white men want to retaliate. Especially when this retaliation is once again the result of the myth of the black rapist. Indeed, "DeWitt Prejean had been arrested ... for breaking into the home of a white family and threatening the wife with a butcher knife" (208). Dave confirms that we are faced with the question previously raised by Harper Lee and very common in the postbellum South when he states that "the rape or attempted rape of a white woman by a black man was a more complicated issue" (209). As Brett Westbrook puts it,

Doucet and Lemoyne can get away with lynching in the first place

because such acts of violence are “collectively endorsed” (Burke 178) in an economy predicated on racial domination. These acts of racial domestic terrorism are not prosecuted in the “New South”, which has yet to fully and systematically address the failures of Reconstruction. And such acts did not count as terroristic at all under slavery because slaves had no legal standing as human beings. The usual sort of hard-boiled timeline would begin when Cherry LeBlanc got into a car and end with her death. The ghosts in *Electric Mist* take the time line further back, to historical and cultural origins of the crime. (“Believe Not Every Spirit” 106)

The novel does not just deal with an isolated and insignificant crime but with a pattern that was established a century before the discovery of Cherry LeBlanc’s body, the latest instance of a long series of crimes.

While segregation is still a reality in Louisiana in the 1990s, the Civil War is also a very vivid memory in this novel, especially for Dave, since he is directly confronted to its ghosts. Its shadow first intervenes as a movie about the war shot in New Iberia and bringing one of the main characters to town, actor Elrod T. Sykes. Dave’s response to the arrival in his town of a Hollywood crew whose funding largely comes from notorious local thug Julie “Baby Feet” Balboni is reactionary in a way that would not have been out of place in the 1865 defeated South. He has trouble accepting that “New Iberia is never going to be the same place [they] grew up in” (Burke 109) in a gesture that is reminiscent of Old South nostalgia. However, the Civil War does not only come about as a mere memory. The ghosts of the past come back in person to haunt the characters and therefore become real, as it were. However, as in any story where the supernatural is involved, its presence is always subject to hesitation, to whether readers conclude that they are confronted with what Tzvetan Todorov labeled as “the uncanny” or “the marvelous” (25).

As if the movie and its cast acted as a trigger, Confederate soldiers suddenly appear on Spanish Lake, the shooting location, and Sykes is bringing this information to Dave’s knowledge, therefore pushing Dave to finally address his unacknowledged past. According to Westbrook, “the general in *Electric Mist* is an insistent reminder that the motives for the crimes are rooted in a past that remains unfinished, that the catastrophic failure of Reconstruction still shapes our present” (“Believe Not Every Spirit” 101). The

crimes being both experienced by Dave as an individual and the violence that has shaped the South as a collective entity. Dave starts to see these soldiers at key moments in his investigation into what has become a series of murders. He mostly interacts with their commanding officer, General John Bell Hood, commander of the Texas Brigade and involved in the battles of Gettysburg and Atlanta. This information is completely accurate since Hood is not a fictitious character and actually took part in the Civil War. The General then appears several times throughout the novel in order to warn Dave against the dangers of the pattern of retaliation, trying to prevent him from walking in his footsteps and making the same mistakes as he did in his time. In other words, “Hood will do all in his power to prevent Robicheaux from becoming morally bankrupt” (Bogue 112-113). His presence, as well as everything else that is related to the Civil War, and the remainders of segregation and racial violence that are at the origins of the case Dave is working on set up the pattern of retaliation in this book as they also set it up in the South in the first place.

Since Dave Robicheaux is both the narrator and the main character of the book, his own struggle with the pattern is emphasized. His dual persona becomes clear as Dave fights against values he has much trouble preventing himself from applying. According to Burke in an interview with Barbara Bogue, “Dave again and again reminds the reader that justice is the prosecution of criminality and the attempt to establish justice in the court system” (Bogue 192). Theoretically, this fits perfectly Dave’s intentions. He shows that he understands the causes of the enforcement of the pattern of retaliation and he realizes that they are not to be deemed irrelevant in the South just yet when he remarks that “we live today in what people elect to call the New South. But racial fear, and certainly white guilt over racial injustice, die hard” (Burke 179). Toward the end, facing Doucet’s accomplice in the 1957 lynching, Twinky Lemoyne, Dave seems once again very aware of the presence of the pattern:

‘A lot of bad things happened in that era between the races. But we’re not the same people we used to be, are we?’ he said.

‘I think we are.’

‘You seem unable to let the past rest, sir.’

‘My experience has been that you let go of the past by addressing it, Mr Lemoyne.’ (Burke 328-329)

In this case, addressing the past would be for Lemoyne to confess to the murder of DeWitt Prejean and surrender to the authorities.

This is indeed what Dave thinks is the right course of action in this case but when he personally faces the choice between justice and retaliation, his theories have trouble being translated into practice. Like Lee's characters, he has a tendency to let "the secret courts of men's hearts" take over. His being a law enforcement officer is a crucial element in this regard since his job represents justice and is therefore in direct contradiction with the pattern of retaliation. Discussing *Heaven's Prisoners*, one of the previous novels of the Robicheaux series, Patricia Gately claims that, after his wife's murder,

it is also significant that Robicheaux joins the Iberia Parish Sheriff's Department before pursuing the murderers. In many ways, he could have acted as a vigilante and brought the men to a kind of vigilante justice, but instead, he does so while representing the law and wearing a badge. (46)

On the one hand, this attitude could be seen as a clear refusal to fall for the Southern code, but on the other hand, wearing a badge does not prevent anyone from acting as a vigilante. If anything, being a police officer gives him the opportunity to have retaliation masquerade as justice, therefore endorsing it as the normal thing to do since law enforcement is the institution that is supposed to represent justice. And this is what Dave is brought to do despite his willingness to avoid falling into this trap. His new partner on the LeBlanc case, FBI agent Rosie Gomez, quickly picks up on the trouble he has working within the boundaries of the law. "You seem to have a way of doing things on your own" (Burke 81), she remarks. After Dave "smashed [a man's] face into a men's-room door at the bus depot" (140), the second time Dave beats someone up after losing it on one of Balboni's men, the sheriff is "worried about a member of [his] department who might have confused himself with Wyatt Earp" (140). Movie director Mikey Goldman is not fooled by Dave either. "Don't pretend to be a Rotary man. I checked out your background before I asked you to babysit Elrod. You're as crazy as any of us. You're always just one step away from blowing up somebody's shit" (167), he tells Dave. Bogue claims that "Dave's physically aggressive actions are often provoked by an affront on his honor or in self-defense" (149). Despite his viewpoint allowing him to clearly see and even examine the pattern, Dave is unable to avoid

falling for it.

The other characters' fears about Dave are not without grounds. According to Gaitely, "he understands that there are times when the situation justifies taking matters into his own hands" (44). As the story unfolds, Dave repeatedly crosses the line marking the separation between justice and retaliation. Indeed, his joining the New Iberia police force (he used to be a homicide detective in New Orleans) in order to deal with the people who killed his wife does not seem to enable him to get complete closure. He tells Rosie,

several years ago my second wife was murdered by some drug dealers. ... One way or another, the guys and the woman who killed her went down for it. But sometimes I wake up in the middle of the night and the old anger comes back. Even though these people took a heavy fall, for a couple of them the whole trip, sometimes it still doesn't seem enough. (Burke 171-172)

Regular justice served by a judge and a jury in a courtroom does not make up for the murder of Dave's wife. Even "the whole trip", namely either a life sentence or death penalty as one can imagine, is not sufficient to satisfy Dave, very much like Bob Ewell in *To Kill a Mockingbird*. For Dave, it gets as personal as it does for the Ewell family. His wife was killed years ago and now his daughter has been kidnapped by Murphy Doucet. Both his distrust of the legal system that he is a part of and his willingness to personally retaliate against Doucet take over. Indeed, Dave realizes that in this barely reconstructed New South, a man who killed a black convict and is targeting prostitutes, hardly the image of the mythical Southern lady, will not be convicted. In addition, Doucet's testimony on Balboni's crimes would be much more valuable for the sheriff in order to be reelected by the New Iberia citizens who are tired of the thug's presence in town. As Dave cynically puts it,

He's going to walk. With some time we can round up a few of his girls from the Airline Highway and get him on a procuring beef, along with the resisting arrest and assault charge. But he'll trade it all off for testimony against Julie Balboni. I bet the wheels are already turning. (360)

Furthermore, the FBI is also more interested in catching Balboni, a bigger fish than Doucet. Dave realizes that they “were powerless over the bureaucratic needs of others” (372). In the face of the corruption of the system, “a justice system that often fails to protect those who need it most” (Bogue 167) in his opinion, Dave believes that the only solution remaining for him to be able to save his daughter and have Doucet pay for his crimes is to take the law into his own hands. He explains to Rosie that she is “used to operating in the normal world ... Lafayette Homicide has given that girl’s death the priority of a hangnail. Welcome to the New South” (Burke 244). This ironical statement both confirms Dave’s ability to identify the Southern issues and that he thinks that playing by the book is not an option here. He adds, “so far nothing official we do to this guy works. It’s time both of us hear that, Rosie” (375). In Dave’s opinion, it is time he took the law into his own hands.

His decision is made and he makes it clear to Doucet on the phone: “listen to me carefully. If you hurt my daughter, I’ll get to you one way or another, in or out of jail, in the witness protection program, it won’t matter, I’ll take you down in pieces, Doucet” (377). When Balboni becomes his last resort in his quest for information on his daughter’s location, he does not hesitate to threaten him with a shotgun until he talks. The means justify the end in Dave’s opinion, as long as he gets his daughter back and makes Doucet pay the price Dave thinks he should pay and that society is not ready to request from him. This is now a personal matter. Doucet represents more than just a murderer, he represents all of them for Dave. As he puts it,

if Murphy Doucet was our serial killer, and I believed he was, then with a little luck we were about to throw a steel net over one of those pathological and malformed individuals who ferret their way among us, occasionally for a lifetime, and leave behind a trail of suffering whose severity can only be appreciated by the survivors who futilely seek explanations for their loss the rest of their lives. (337)

This fairly profound description of the archetypal serial killer shows how deep Dave’s feelings are about this category of people. He adds that he “lost [his] wife to two such men. A therapist told [him] that [he] would never have any peace until [he] learned to forgive not only [himself] for her death but the human race as well for producing the

men who killed her” (337). This is how serious the manhunt to find Doucet on his own gets for Dave. His own daughter has been kidnapped and we know how important family bonds are in the South, as Faulkner and Lee have suggested through the Sartoris family and the Finch and Ewell families, for instance. All these elements lead Dave to favor the pattern of retaliation over actual justice, a kind of justice not decided by a single man but by courts of law.

Unlike Bayard or Atticus, Dave is not so much struggling with people trying to push him toward the pattern of retaliation (which is not to say it is not supported by his society) as he is opposed by people trying to prevent him from completely surrendering his lawful principles to the pattern. General John Bell Hood is one of these entities standing between Dave and the pattern of retaliation. According to Westbrook, “given the official refusal to address not just the murder, but the social, cultural agreement to condone the act, haunting is the only option left” (“Believe Not Every Spirit” 107). His haunting presence triggers the usual hesitation mentioned by Todorov about the presence of the fantastic. According to Linda Holland-Toll, “Hood may be a supernatural presence, or he may be a metaphor for Dave’s beliefs” (76). This suggests that the General’s presence could be triggered by Dave’s reluctance to completely embrace the pattern and act as a commentary criticizing it. He could represent Burke’s critique of his region.

On their first encounter, Dave is confused after the General tells him that the date is “*April 21, 1865*”²⁰ (Burke 189, author’s italics). “*Lee has already surrendered. The war’s over. What are you doing here?*” (189, author’s italics), he asks. The General answers that “*it’s never over. I would think you’d know that*” (189, author’s italics). It is not over yet for Hood because his mission did not end with the war. He needs to fix his past mistakes by preventing Dave from making them all over again. The following dialogue is very revealing of his intentions:

‘It’s my foolishness, son. Like you, I grieve over what I can’t change.

Was it Bacon that talked about keeping each cut green?’

‘Change what?’

‘Our fate. Yours, mine. Care for your own. Don’t try to emulate me. Look

²⁰ Burke uses italics when Dave speaks with the General to convey the surreal aspect of their conversation. The General is set apart from the other characters as a ghost whose appearances always trigger a hesitation as to whether Dave is hallucinating or not.

at what I invested my life in. Oh, we were always honorable – Robert Lee, Jackson, Albert Sidney Johnston, A.P. Hill – but we served venal men and a vile enterprise. How many lives would have been spared had we not lent ourselves to the defense of a repellent cause like slavery?’
(370, author’s italics)

Much like Dave, the General can make out the pattern since he is part of its roots, but he was not able to let go of the pattern during his lifetime. Dave is his one chance at redemption. His perspective enables him to anticipate Dave’s plans about Murphy Doucet: “*You plan revenge, don’t you? ... you must never consider a dishonorable act as a viable alternative*” (316, author’s italics). However, Dave does not change his position. His response is the following, “*let me ask you a question, general. The women who donated their dresses and petticoats for your balloon...what if they were raped, sodomized and methodically beaten and you got your hands on the men who did it to them?*” (318, author’s italics). Hood retorts that “*they’d be arrested by [his] provost, tried in a provisional court, and hanged*” (318, author’s italics). According to Dave, this would not be an option in the 1990s Louisiana described by Burke’s narrative because “*maybe we have so much collective guilt as a society that we fear to punish our individual members*” (318, author’s italics). What he seems to consider as an incompetent legal system could be seen as an element comforting him in his initial decision. The other element that does not encourage Dave to follow the General’s advice is that “a general like John Bell Hood, a ranking officer in the Army of the Confederate States of America, however, seems an unlikely spokesperson for the dead, for DeWitt Prejean murdered in a Louisiana bayou. Even though he is himself a ghost, General Hood is haunted” (“Believe Not Every Spirit” 107). Indeed, he has trouble distancing himself from his past actions, which makes some of his statements sound contradictory. For instance, when Dave remembers “*it’s the innocent we need to worry about, he had said. And when it comes to their protection we shouldn’t hesitate to do it under a black flag*” (289, author’s italics), the General indirectly condones Dave’s way of saving his daughter.

Since the supernatural will not do the trick, human elements must get involved in order to try to keep Dave within the boundaries of the law. This is where Rosie Gomez comes in. Rosie is “an agent who’s short, Chicana, and a woman” (Burke 80). She represents the federal government in this very unfamiliar area she is suddenly

parachuted into. In other words, everything opposes her to the South and its rhetorical construction leading to the pattern of retaliation. According to Gaitely, “she does things by the book, and it seems as if she doesn’t understand the ‘Southern’ way of dealing with matters, especially where family is concerned” (50). As a complete alien to Southern culture, she therefore has all the tools she needs to try and oppose the pattern of retaliation that mainly involves Southern white men. Her outsider position also enables her to identify the pattern. Very aware of what Dave intends to do, she wants his “word this isn’t a vigilante mission” (Burke 379). A little later, she asks, “you’re thinking about killing Doucet, aren’t you? ... What we won’t do is let the other side make us be like them” (387), she warns Dave. She tries to convince him that he is not “that kind of cop. [He] never will be, either” (237). Talking about another character in another novel, Bogue states that Dave’s “hope for collective redemption, perhaps, resides in the woman he wants to believe will not attempt to exact revenge for her father’s murder” (98). This comment could also apply to Rosie’s function in the story. Dave keeps hoping that someone else, be it the General or his partner, will save him from the pattern.

However, Rosie’s efforts are not very successful and, even worse, she fails to apply her own principles when she is confronted by Doucet. The reason why she is defeated by the pattern is similar to what is experienced by Dave. She explains:

when I was sixteen something happened to me I thought I’d never get over. ... not just because of what two drunken crew leaders did to me in the back of a migrant farmworkers’ bus, either. It was the way the cops treated it. In some ways that was even worse. ... The next day I was sitting with my father in the waiting room outside the sheriff’s office. I heard two deputies laughing about it. They not only thought it was funny, one of them said something about pepper-belly poontang. I’ll never forget that moment. Not as long as I live. (170)

Like Dave, because of her personal history with serious crimes, rape in this case, she has bred a distrust for law enforcement practices and her strong feelings toward felons make her a likely candidate for vigilantism. She did indeed lose her temper when she got to face Doucet. She shot him while “his hand held a can of dog food rather than a weapon ... but it didn’t stop there. She continued to fire with both hands gripped on the

pistol” (393). Rosie realizes that she has irremediably crossed a line, that Doucet “paid for something that happened to [her] a long time ago” (395). Dave has a chance to make things right, to refuse to give in to the pattern and let the police deal with what just happened but instead he condones Rosie’s act by declaring that “he had a piece on him, Rosie. You just don’t remember it right now” (395). He then plants a gun on Doucet’s dead body to turn Rosie’s retaliation into self-defense and acknowledges his defeat by saying that he is “like a man who has finally learned not to think reasonably in an unreasonable world” (395). The pattern of retaliation has got the best of both of them.

The narrative of retaliation is passed on in Faulkner’s fiction in the Sartoris family and among generations of citizens of Maycomb in Lee’s fiction as it is passed on from Faulkner to Lee and finally to Burke throughout the twentieth century. Similarly, this narrative is passed on in Burke’s novel until it reaches Dave Robicheaux. Westbrook, discussing *Purple Cane Road*, another Robicheaux novel, explains that “Robicheaux learned about violence from his own father, witnessing brawls ‘beautiful to watch’ (*PCR* 20)” (“The Evil That Men Do” 156). Like Bayard Sartoris and Scout Finch (although not as strongly for her since she has access to Atticus’s counternarrative), Dave was born in an environment enforcing the pattern of retaliation and, even as a police officer, this way of life is deeply rooted in his culture. It even goes back much further than just the upbringing he received from his father. Dave inherited this narrative directly from what triggered it in the first place, the Civil War and the whole historical and racial context enclosed in it. Indeed, there is a direct connection between Dave’s father and the Civil War era through General John Bell Hood. After seeing the soldiers out on the lake for the first time, Elrod Sykes quotes Hood: “your friend’s father took the revolver of my adjutant, Major Moss” (Burke 59). Going through a box full of childhood relics, he finds out that he does own a revolver with the letters “J. Moss” (63) engraved on it. This direct connection between a nineteenth-century soldier and a twentieth-century detective stands as a metaphor for the long-term establishment of the pattern of retaliation in the South.

In the end, Dave’s point of view allowing him to identify the pattern and his efforts, as well as those of Rosie and the General, to resist the pattern do not work on anyone even Dave himself. He cannot even create a counternarrative as powerful as those initiated by Bayard and Atticus (although ultimately none of them can change Southern society). The rest of society around Dave tends to enforce the pattern. When his girlfriend is killed, Elrod Sykes swears that “if [he] get[s] [his] hands on the

fuckhead who shot Kelly, you're going to have to wipe him off the wallpaper" (166). When Dave threatens him with a shotgun, Balboni retorts that he "I'll put out an open contract, [he]'ll cowboy [Dave's] whole fucking family" (384). How could these people be expected to break away from the pattern and embrace due process when a law enforcement officer does not manage to act according to standard legal procedures himself? Dave's controversial behavior is used by Burke to put together a critique of the modern South, which becomes a little more explicit toward the end. Indeed, "the detective serves as our agent as we enter the realms of moral confusion or utter depravity ... and we allow ourselves to hold up a mirror to see ourselves, if only for a moment, in the safe ordered world of fiction" (Kendrick 113 quoted in Bogue 94). Since one cannot assess the past, fiction allows the readers to examine themselves through the effect a book has on them when they read it. Burke's discourse reaches twenty-first-century readers through its performative power. This is how the pattern of retaliation remains established today as a rhetorical construction in the South. The epilogue turns a commentary exclusively concerning Dave into a judgment involving the whole region and its culture. While Atticus's efforts could have changed the destiny of the town in *To Kill a Mockingbird*, "Maycomb was itself again. Precisely the same as last year and the year before that" (Lee 336). Similarly, in *In the Electric Mist with Confederate Dead*, Dave starts the epilogue by telling us:

I'd like to tell you that the department and the local prosecutor's office finally made their case against Julie Balboni, that we cleaned our own house and sent him up the road to Angola in waist and leg chains for a twenty- or thirty-year jolt. But that's not what happened. How could it? In many ways Julie was us, just like his father had been ... (Burke 397)

Evoking one of the two 1957 killers, Dave asks:

what happened to Twinky Hebert Lemoyne? Nothing. Not externally. He's still out there, a member of a generation whose metamorphosis never quite takes place. ... Perhaps, just like Julie Balboni, Twinky Hebert is us. He loathed his past so much that he could never acknowledge it, never expiate his sin, and never forgive himself, either. (400-401)

Dave is back to his commentary function in order to confirm the victory of the pattern over its opponents and the status quo as a result of this struggle. The General himself both supports this point and corroborates Burke's position toward the pattern. Indeed, he helped Dave and Rosie capture Doucet by leaving "a wooden crutch that looked hand-hewn" (393), his own, on the ground for Doucet to trip on. However, once both Rosie and Dave have gone against his advice by killing Doucet and covering it as self-defense, he refuses to answer Dave's question ("*Don't you want to take this [the crutch] with you, sir?*") (396, author's italics) in the end, his way of disapproving. The book closes on this image of the Confederate soldiers:

old compatriots in butternut brown wending their way in and out of history – gallant, Arthurian, their canister-ripped colors unfurled in the roiling smoke, the fatal light in their faces a reminder that the contest is never quite over, the field never quite ours. (404)

The pattern of retaliation may have originated in the Civil War era when slavery was the South's defining element but it does not mean that Reconstruction signified the death of the pattern. "The contest is never quite over, the field never quite ours". More importantly, twentieth-century literature perpetuates and critiques the South as a rhetorical construction. This is why narratives like the pattern of retaliation can survive through the ages without being affected by history. On the contrary, they affect history.

As in the case of Lee's novel, Burke's commentary on the pattern of retaliation in the South could also lead to a certain establishment. According to Bogue, "indoctrination into the mindset of the overworked, underpaid, conscientious and frustrated police officer earns empathy for Robicheaux when he loses his temper and becomes violent when confronting a criminal or a corrupt cop" (148). Indeed, Dave is the hero of this book and we are not allowed into any other characters' mind. Dave's perspective is therefore the only one we can rely on, which gives him the opportunity to justify his deeds in a way that would make us condone them. As Gaitely has it, "Robicheaux's actions represent the kind of killing that is permitted by the Southern culture" (45). Southern society's tacit endorsement of Dave's acts and the defeat of the rare opponents of the pattern give the impression that Dave is just following a legitimate course of actions. All this makes it difficult to keep in mind that Dave's behavior is part

of Burke's criticism of the so-called New South. Gaitely exemplifies this difficulty as she seems to have lost track of Burke's message and appears to consider Dave's violence in a matter of fact manner. According to her,

the violent scenes which appear in all of Burke's Robicheaux novels are often examples of this "folk justice" and it is a type of violence that is not atypical in the South although it runs the risk of being misunderstood by readers not familiar with this distinction; to them it might appear gratuitous. (49)

What she earlier called "the kind of killing that is permitted by the Southern culture" (45) seems to have become something that she also personally condones. Burke's words thus tend to have a contrary effect to what he meant in the first place, namely an implicit endorsement²¹ of the pattern of retaliation in the South, very similar to what Harper Lee contributed. This implicit endorsement by these authors contributes to establishing the pattern as one of the main elements constructing our vision of the South. It therefore further sanctions the South as a rhetorical construction.

²¹ The term "endorsement" is problematic since none of these authors meant to consciously support the pattern of retaliation in the first place. However, the subsequent performative effects of their discourse has turned their original critique into what could be seen as implicit or unintentional endorsement.

4) Conclusion

This work has shown how the South was rhetorically constructed and the Southern narrative of retaliation was established and accepted through literature and the performative power of discourse. The implantation of the pattern of retaliation, at the regional level in the South, has created the possibility of a more global establishment at the national level in the United States. I propose that a national sanction of the pattern of retaliation directly arises from its Southern counterpart. Indeed, there is evidence in contemporary American culture that implies that an approval of the notion and practice of retaliation does exist at the national level and that Southern narratives are at its roots. Boris Vejdovsky claims that “literature in general may enable us to comprehend the catastrophes of our lives ... though literature of our past is not the harbinger of our present, it may however present us with something like a proleptic allegory of our times” (“Catastrophic Fiction” 189). This means that although a novel is always read anaphorically, its discourse can also perform into the future²². Faulkner, Lee and Burke’s fiction has had performative effects on the contemporary world, well beyond their time. One of these effects is to be found in American popular culture, which reproduces a pattern that was implemented by twentieth-century Southern literature following the same method. Indeed, one specific aspect of the connection between both patterns of retaliation – at the Southern and national level – can clearly be proved. They work according to similar narrative processes²³. In order to further explore the connection between the two patterns, politics, ethics and philosophy will be of much use both to support my point and to open up new perspectives that could be explored on a larger scale than possible with the necessarily limited scope of this *mémoire*. Indeed, political discourse about war and the death penalty, two notions that involve different ethical and philosophical stances, are an important part of the endorsement of the pattern of retaliation in the United States. My focus will however remain on fiction and narratives that construct a reader’s vision of the South and America as a whole, well beyond their initial reach.

Popular culture bears witness to the strength of the endorsement of retaliation. American television series and films are a good example of this phenomenon. According to Vejdovsky, “the power of the means of representation – the press,

²² This point is discussed in details in the second chapter analyzing the novels.

²³ The first chapter on Southern uniqueness has demonstrated this notion.

television, cinema – tends to impose a pre-written dichotomous²⁴ narrative” (“9/11” 214). The influence of television series and films on the establishment of a narrative, such as the pattern of retaliation, is therefore potentially very important. Especially since we live in “an era dominated politically, economically and culturally by the US on the global stage” (205). Much like Faulkner, Lee and Burke’s fiction, the performative effects of the discourse conveyed by television series and films are massive. These shows create a momentum to discuss topics such as the pattern of retaliation on the global stage since they are watched worldwide and television channels provide regular reruns of the most popular ones. Their impact is therefore reminiscent of that of a classic novel in that the performative effects of their discourse into the future are comparable.

On *The Mentalist*, CBI²⁵ consultant Patrick Jane is guided by his desire to exert retaliation against Red John, the serial killer who murdered his wife and daughter. He ends up killing a man he believes to be Red John, and declares at his trial:

I’ve been looking for him ever since [he killed my family]. Looking for personal vengeance. I believe that’s my right. I have the right to kill the man that killed my family. I don’t say I shouldn’t be punished for doing what I did. I feel I had no choice. What would you do? (“Scarlet Ribbons”)

This statement would remain an isolated instance of approval of the pattern if the jury had not subsequently decided to exonerate him of his crime therefore condoning his vision of retaliation as his right.

On 24, the protagonists, as CTU²⁶ agents, are constantly faced with a dilemma between their duty toward their country and their feelings toward their family or loved ones. In the first season, terrorists abduct the main character Jack Bauer’s wife and daughter as a personal vengeance against Jack. Indeed, he killed part of their family during a covert operation years before. Jack’s wife ends up being killed by Nina Myers, a CTU mole working with the terrorists (“11:00 p.m.-12:00 a.m.”). Two seasons later,

²⁴ Boris Vejdovsky mentions this dichotomous narrative in the context of the representation of death in American culture. The important part of this statement, as far as my point is concerned, is that the modern media are powerful enough to impose narratives in general.

²⁵ Fictitious California Bureau of Investigation.

²⁶ Counter Terrorist Unit, another fictitious government agency.

when the opportunity arises, Jack lets his vengeful feelings get the better of him, kills her and covers up the murder by saying he acted in self-defense in the line of his duty as a federal agent (“Day 3: 2:00 a.m.-3:00 a.m.”). Unsurprisingly at this point, he gets away with it and does not face any charges. The same happens in the fifth season when Jack’s friends and colleagues Tony Almeida and Michelle Dessler as well as ex-President David Palmer, are assassinated by Russian separatists on the orders of an American renegade as well as Jack’s ex-mentor, Christopher Henderson (“Day 5: 7:00 a.m.-8:00 a.m.”). When he gets a chance, Jack shoots Henderson dead thus denying him his right to a fair trial. When asked what brought him to kill Henderson, Jack answers “he fired on me, I didn’t have a choice” (“Day 5: 5:00 a.m.-6:00 a.m.”), therefore invoking self-defense once again. Jack is technically not lying but he omits to mention that Henderson’s gun was not loaded. As expected, nobody even investigates into Henderson’s death and retaliation masquerades as justice. Jack’s immunity and the repetitiveness of his vengeful behavior turn his deeds into a pattern of retaliation which could very well be part of the plot of a Southern novel.

The next example deals with a character whose entire way of life is based on the pattern of retaliation, which makes the establishment of the narrative even stronger. Indeed, on *Dexter*, based on Jeff Lindsay’s novels, well-intentioned serial killer Dexter Morgan kills people according to his own code of justice. Dexter works as a blood spatter analyst at the Miami Police Department by day and his “dark passenger”, as he puts it, appoints himself judge, jury and executioner to substitute vigilantism to justice by night, murdering criminals who have escaped regular law. The endorsement of the pattern of retaliation is clearer here since not only does he never get caught by his colleagues but he is also the main protagonist and narrator of the show. Viewers identify with his point of view and his methods based on the law of the talion, rather than with law enforcement and the actual code of justice they represent. Furthermore, Dexter’s deeds as a serial killer are seen as the result of a psychological condition he cannot control due to his witnessing his mother’s murder when he was just a baby. In other words, he cannot help himself. He has to kill. His adoptive father Harry, who is also the police officer who found Dexter sitting in his mother’s blood, understands that early on and decides to teach Dexter his “code”, the only presumable alternative to a life sentence or death penalty for his son. The dialogue between Dexter and his sister Debra, immediately after she finds out about his extracurricular activities, reveals much about this aspect:

- Harry said it got in me too early, too deep. He said I couldn't change it. So he thought up the code. He said if I had to kill I might as well kill people who deserved it.
- You make it sound like it's okay. Like you're the victim here. The people in that box, Dexter, they're the victims.
- Victims? A choir director who raped and murdered little boys, a married couple smuggling refugees who killed the ones who couldn't pay, a psychiatrist who manipulated women into taking their own lives...
- There's this place called the police department.
- Sometimes the system doesn't work. Killers fall through the cracks.
- Don't I fucking know it? I'm talking to one right now. . . . What am I supposed to do here? My name has the word Lieutenant in front of it. I can't turn my back on this. ("Sunshine and Frosty Swirl")

The never-ending debate between justice and retaliation is once again at play here.

The viewers are somehow pushed to agree with Dexter or at least sympathize, even empathize, with his situation because he established a direct connection with them by narrating his own story. He therefore exclusively lets them in on his perspective and not the other characters' in a way that is reminiscent of the process used by Faulkner, Lee and Burke in their novels. Indeed, Bayard Sartoris, Scout Finch and above all Dave Robicheaux directly connect with the readers by restricting their insight into the characters' minds to their first-person narrative perspectives. This is how the author's commentary on the pattern of retaliation emerges. This is also how unexpected performative effects establishing the pattern develop from the discourse carried by the novels, especially in Robicheaux's case. Dexter's refusal to take responsibility for his acts by claiming his murders are the results of an illness and necessity appeals to the viewers' emotions. His distrust of the system, much like Dave Robicheaux's, is yet another element in favor of his murders. He argues that "if [the legal system] worked as well as [Debra] think[s] it does, [he] wouldn't be so busy" ("Buck the System"). When Debra asks "what is it about your personal law that is so much better than the one that the rest of us agree to live by?" ("Buck the System"), Dexter answers that the killer "would have to murder somebody again for you to arrest him and I can stop him before"

("Buck the System"). This gives him a rational justification for retaliation²⁷. Dexter saves lives by ending others. His sister's position toward his crimes, hesitating between doing her job by turning him in and protecting her brother, adds to the confusion. The outcome of the debate therefore tends to favor retaliation by making "it sound like it's okay" ("Sunshine and Frosty Swirl") after all, as Debra puts it. Especially since Debra comes to the tentative conclusion that her brother's code "might be a necessary evil" ("Buck the System") and later even encourages him to enforce this code when she understands that a serial killer she has been chasing will get away with murder and is very likely to kill again. Debra tells Dexter that "there has to be some fucking justice. It's you, Dex. You know what I'm saying? She deserves it. I want you to make it right. Do what you do" ("Chemistry"). In the course of seven episodes, retaliation has become a synonym of justice in one of its fiercest opponents' mind and a police Lieutenant now gives herself the right to decide who "deserves" to die and who does not. Accordingly, both the federal government and local police endorse the pattern of retaliation in these shows, which suddenly makes it global.

Television series are not the only instances worth investigating as far as the pattern of retaliation is concerned. Indeed, comic books, as a cornerstone of American popular culture, explore this theme as well. Interestingly enough, many popular comic books have been (re)adapted into films year after year, since the beginning of the twenty-first century, thus showing current interest for the messages they carry. Among them, Batman and Spider-Man have recently put their capes back on for the big screen. A clear pattern²⁸ emerges from these two examples. The protagonist witnesses a family member's murder, which triggers an impulse for vengeance and leads him to become a vigilante acting according to his own rules, parallel to those followed by law enforcement, but on his own accord. His purpose is no longer limited to retaliation against the original murderer, but broadening to the protection of society at large. This usually leads to tensions with the police, who are supposed to be the only legitimate law enforcers.

However, these tensions do not usually last until the end. Christopher Nolan's trilogy (*Batman Begins*, *The Dark Knight*, *The Dark Knight Rises*) is the most recent attempt at bringing the famous vigilante back to life. In the first film, Commissioner

²⁷ Although one might argue that there always seems to be a rational justification for retaliation.

²⁸ This pattern is different from the Southern pattern of retaliation I have been discussing but it also leads to an endorsement of the concept of retaliation.

Gordon quickly decides to help Bruce Wayne in his nightly activities as the Batman. In this year's *The Amazing Spider-Man*, Captain Stacy, despite his hatred of vigilantism and his belief in due process of law, has to acknowledge, at some point, that Peter Parker's role is somehow necessary. Consequently, by accepting and even sometimes reinforcing the part played by these men who are eager to take the law into their own hands, law enforcement endorses the narrative of retaliation in these films. So does society as a whole. Indeed, while the trust of the imaginary populations of New York City and Gotham City in the vigilantes usually comes with suspicion and defiance, viewers usually give superheroes their undivided support.

In his second film, Nolan introduces an interesting vision on his hero. Indeed, at the end, Batman is the sole target for Gotham's whole police force in order for the city's district attorney Harvey Dent, Batman's counterpart, the White Knight acting in broad daylight, to keep his privileged status despite the crimes he committed as Two-Face. Batman will therefore take the blame for these crimes and be relentlessly chased so that the population does not lose faith in Dent, Gotham's last shot at redemption. In Gordon's words, he is "the hero Gotham deserves, but not the one it needs right now. So we'll hunt him. Because he can take it. Because he's not a hero. He's a silent guardian. A watchful protector. A dark knight" (*The Dark Knight*). He thus recovers his original outlaw status. However, the plot still presents Bruce Wayne's role as necessary to restore the order in the city. He is still "a silent guardian" and "a watchful protector". Furthermore, the final part of Nolan's trilogy completely restores Batman's legitimacy in his fellow citizens' eyes and definitely endorses the pattern that he is a part of. A pattern that the audience is also eager to see applied and that prompts applause in American theaters to this day.

Many features of the examples discussed here definitely point toward a connection between the Southern pattern of retaliation and its endorsement in American popular culture. Indeed, as far as television series are concerned, Patrick Jane, Jack Bauer and Dexter Morgan are all law enforcement officers who practice retaliation in complete contradiction with their job, which is reminiscent of Dave Robicheaux. Gordon and Stacy, in vigilante films, also have trouble staying away from this pattern. The vigilantes are always the protagonists and the viewers are provided with their point of view, whether they narrate their own story or not. Moreover, all the vengeful murders and vigilante vocations involved in these examples are related to family members (and more often than not, wives and daughters). Once again, this can be linked with the

rhetorical construction of the South where protecting one's family (including the sacred Southern lady) is often the trigger of retaliation, as it has been shown in the course of this analysis. There are therefore cases of endorsement of the pattern of retaliation at the national level in American culture as a whole nowadays. In other words, these are other instances in which both the South and the whole nation are constructed according to similar rhetorical processes. The impact of twenty-first-century popular culture influences our vision of the United States of America and contributes to shaping it as a rhetorical construction, much like twentieth-century literature in the South.

However, for the narrative of retaliation to be so deeply established in American culture, it has to be endorsed²⁹ at a much higher level than just popular American culture in the first place. Indeed, this narrative as it is nowadays experienced in the United States, originates at the governmental level. Vejdovsky suggests that the American government turned the events of September 11, 2001 into something that the American public could position themselves on. He explains how this narrative was constructed: "the traumatic character of these events is essential if they are to produce their effects on a mass of people. It is equally crucial that they be mediated and thereby turned into narratives that blur the borderlines between fiction and historical fact" ("9/11" 204). He adds that there were "only two possible alternatives: *either* you situated yourself on the side of America, *or* you situated yourself against it" (205). If one chose the side of America, retaliation against terrorism was the only possible response. This particular narrative is the point of departure of a war of retaliation against Osama bin Laden and the terrorists who were responsible for the attacks on the World Trade Center that led American soldiers into Afghanistan and Iraq.

The climax of these wars came on May 1, 2011 when President Barack Obama announced on national television that the American people's worst enemy, namely Osama bin Laden, had been killed by American forces in Pakistan. In his speech notifying the nation that the search for Osama bin Laden had finally come to an end, Obama mentions the American citizens' "resolve to protect their nation and to bring those who committed these vicious attacks to justice" ("Speech"). Justice, according to him, is "the killing or capture of bin Laden" ("Speech"). He then repeats that he "authorized an operation to get Osama bin Laden and bring him to justice" ("Speech").

²⁹ As opposed to Faulkner, Lee and Burke's critique of the pattern of retaliation that turned into an unintentional sanction of it through the performative power of their discourse, the term "endorsement" is completely accurate here. The American government's support of retaliation is indeed conscious.

To him, “the death of bin Laden marks the most significant achievement to date in [the American] nation’s efforts to defeat Al Qaeda” (“Speech”). Finally, he claims that “on nights like this one, we can say to those families who have lost loved ones to Al Qaeda’s terror, justice has been done” (“Speech”). Once again, due process of law was completely disregarded, this time by the highest-ranked member of the American judiciary system, the President himself, and killing a criminal without granting him a trial earned the denomination of “justice”. This occurred under the American people’s scrutiny without any discordant voice rising to object against what a huge majority of people took for granted as justice, therefore corroborating their commander in chief’s words. This can be explained by the President’s power in a representative democracy. As Vejdovsky has it, “‘representation’ is indispensable to the production of fiction ... a ‘representation’, whether it produces a political fiction – such as a President speaking for/as an entire country – or any other sort of fiction, implies a performance and a dramatic staging” (“9/11” 207). Obama gave his performance from the White House late at night due to time difference with Pakistan, thus adding to the drama, and the dramatic staging was given to him by the events of utmost importance that occurred halfway around the world³⁰. No one questioned his judgment because he was representing the country as a whole. He was the country. Accordingly, this rhetorical construction became real in American minds through the performative power of their President’s discourse.

Furthermore, no one questioned the President’s judgment because 2001 and 2011 were hardly the first occurrences of an official narrative endorsing retaliation as an act of justice in the United States. The death penalty is such an occurrence. Lloyd Steffen evokes the “assumption widely held in American society that the death penalty is morally justified” (v). He claims that “a majority of U.S. citizens find nothing morally objectionable about state-sponsored execution” (1). He then backs up this statement with figures. Indeed, according to him, “approval ratings for the death penalty hover at 75 percent, up from the 50 percent mark of twenty-five years ago; and a recent poll in Texas, which leads the nation in numbers of executions, pegs support in that state for the death penalty at 87 percent”³¹ (1). Why then is the death penalty so solidly implanted in the American psyche? So much so that “support for the death penalty has

³⁰ He did so hours after entertaining the audience of the White House Correspondents’ Dinner, yet another kind of performance on a completely different stage. It is worth stressing that all the jokes on Osama bin Laden were taken out of the script.

³¹ These statistics were gathered by Steffen in 1995 and 1996.

become a political necessity for any candidate who wants to be associated with taking crime seriously” (1) and therefore “so strong is the present political support that those who voice opposition to the death penalty risk being marginalized” (2)? Several hypotheses have to be brought forward in order to attempt to answer that question.

According to Steffen, as far as Western civilizations are concerned, “the practice of execution may be as old as political society itself. That it is as old as recorded history is an indisputable fact” (31). He places the first execution, in the soon to be United States of America, in Virginia in 1622 and claims that “over eighteen thousand legal executions [have been] carried out in America” (32) until our time. The first hypothetical reason why Americans have so much faith in the death penalty is its longevity. The process has had time to get imprinted in American minds over its lengthy tradition. The second possibility goes much deeper into Western tradition. Indeed, Corey Lang Brettschneider, describes how,

often, on the eve of an execution, two groups of demonstrators gather within sight of each other. On one side, a rowdy group carries signs expressing their approval of the death penalty. Many carry posters, which cite the ancient law of the Bible, that is, *lex talionis*. (15)

The practice of retaliation in the West is based on the Old Testament and its law of the talion. Steffen confirms that when he writes that “it is well known that capital punishment was sanctioned by the society out of which the Hebrew Scriptures grew – thirteen classes of capital offense are specified in the Mosaic law” (146). Accordingly, the tradition leading to the practice of the death penalty in the United States goes much further back in time than the first executions sanctioned by the state on American soil. Moreover, American society was constructed around a Puritan narrative that had much to do with Christianity and its tenets, hence a potential enormous influence on American culture in general and the absence of debate on the death penalty in particular. It is a notion which relevance no longer needs to be proven to the American citizens since it is largely sanctioned by the Scriptures. This belief would then rather be the result of a rhetorical construction than merely historical tradition.

Franklin E. Zimring, paraphrased by Messner, Baumer and Rosenfeld, investigates a little closer to home. Indeed, his answer to the question “why the death penalty was resurrected in the United States, when most of the rest of the world was

abandoning it, and why its application is so heavily concentrated in Southern states” (Messner 559-560) does not go as far back in time and space as John Winthrop or the Old Testament. According to him,

“vigilante” cultural traditions sustain the idea of harsh punishment as a communal ritual on the victim’s behalf and counteract the inhibiting effect of distrust of government in support for the death penalty. Such vigilante traditions are most likely to have taken roots in areas with a legacy of lynching, which are heavily concentrated in the South. (560)

This assertion is supported by statistics proving that

executions are heavily concentrated in Southern and border states. In 2002, 71 persons were executed in 13 of the 38 states with a death penalty: 33 in Texas; 7 in Oklahoma; 6 in Missouri; 4 each in Georgia and Virginia; 3 each in Florida, South Carolina and Ohio; 2 each in Alabama, Mississippi and North Carolina; and 1 each in Louisiana and California. (561)

Messner, Baumer and Rosenfeld add that

many Southern whites viewed lynchings “as an extreme, but necessary, form of popular justice that guaranteed the swift and severe punishment of black criminals” (1996: 789). Thus in some ways capital punishment can be thought of as a continuation of practices that were previously implemented by the cherished local community. (565)

I have established that the narrative of race relations in the South was indeed a crucial factor in the practice of retaliation while describing the myth of the black rapist early on. Messner, Baumer and Rosenfeld are therefore clearly connecting this fiction with the practice of a state-endorsed form of retaliation nationwide. Steffen brings even more evidence in favor of this theory when he states that

recognizing the contingency of racial attitudes and a racist environment

led the U.S. Supreme Court in the 1972 *Furman* case to acknowledge that the death penalty for rape in southern states fell so heavily and disproportionately on black males in relation to white males that execution policy for this crime violated any reasonable standard of fairness and amounted to cruel and unusual punishment. (34)

This supports my hypothesis of a connection between the pattern of retaliation in Southern literature and a similar tendency in American culture as a whole.

However, these explanations may not be as crucial as the power of the narrative that is behind the construction of the tremendous faith America has in its death penalty system. Zimring wonders how Americans manage to be both suspicious of their government's practices and supportive of "the supreme use of governmental power" (Messner 561), namely capital punishment. His answer is fairly simple. He claims that what he calls "extraordinary exercises of state power" (562) have been turned into something else – namely "a service for crime victims" (561) – by the government so that "those socialized into vigilante values are able to sustain the delusion that executions are not what they really are" (562). In other words, the government created a narrative that suddenly became real in American minds through the performative power of discourse and turned the death penalty into something popular. And this is no coincidence. As Messner, Baumer and Rosenfeld conclude,

public consciousness about crime and criminals is not a simple or automatic reflection of current "objective" conditions, such as chronically high rates of crime. For crime to influence punishment attitudes, it must be "problematized", and the ways in which this occurs will reflect the sociopolitical environment of the time. (585)

Literary and political discourses are among the factors responsible for this problematization of issues like the death penalty through the creation of narratives.

Steffen introduces the fiction written by the government as "just killing" (19). One of the major components of this narrative is that "a person put to death after being denied procedural justice is cheated of a great good" (20), this great good being due process of law. Consequently, if due process becomes part of an execution, it makes it fit to be called justice. The new script issued by the U.S. government therefore unites

two seemingly opposed notions – justice and retaliation – and integrates the latter into the former. Since using retaliation to justify the death penalty is problematic (Brettschneider 18-20), a distinction between retaliation and retribution needs to be made. Steffen uses philosopher Immanuel Kant’s thought to tell us that “the motive for just punishment must be located in rational retribution, not vengeance” (83). What, then, is the difference? According to Steffen, “the agent of retribution must never become an individual acting out of a desire for revenge but the collective of society itself, acting through its legal system to dispense justice in accordance with a rule of equal protection and ‘due process of law’” (99). Philosopher Ernest van den Haag, quoted by Brettschneider, defines

revenge as a private matter, a wish to “get even” with another one feels they have been injured by regardless of whether or not what the person did was legal. Unlike revenge, retribution is legally threatened beforehand for an act prohibited by law ... The desire for revenge is a personal feeling. Retribution is a legally imposed social institution. (Brettschneider 34).

The difference between retaliation and retribution, according to both authors, lies therefore in the opposition between the private and public dimensions. Using the public dimension, the American government has managed to construct a very persuasive narrative claiming that “capital punishment is not a killing of one person by another. It is the killing of one person by all. It is, as a punishment for crime, a societal sanction enforced by law and through the power of the state” (Steffen 93). This realization leads Steffen to wonder whether “the moral presumption against capital punishment hold[s] if the state has been granted authority from the people to impose this punishment, so that its legitimation can be located in the law and in the collective will of society” (93). The narrative written by the government is so powerful that most American citizens do not even reach the point of asking this question. This is how the American people collectively sanction the death penalty.

And this is also how other forms of retaliation are nationally endorsed. Indeed, the notion of “just war” (95) is not far remote from the concept of “just killing” or “just execution” that has been discussed. The same notion of retribution has been used by George W. Bush and Barack Obama in order to justify their war on terror and new

political voices are currently joining the discussion on the matter. Indeed, during a debate in Myrtle Beach, South Carolina in January 2012, former Massachusetts Governor and defeated Republican presidential nominee Mitt Romney exclaimed:

Of course we take out our enemies wherever they are, these people have declared war on us and killed Americans, we go anywhere they are and we kill them. The right thing for Osama bin Laden was the bullet in the head he received, that's the right course for people who kill American citizens. (Gingrich & Romney)

In the course of the same debate, one of Romney's opponents on the stand, former Speaker of the House Newt Gingrich, added that "Andrew Jackson had a pretty clear-cut idea about America's enemies: kill them" (Gingrich & Romney). These voices are not all that new in the American political landscape but they have reached a level of importance they did not have before, especially Romney's. It is also worth mentioning that these voices are very influential in the United States and that nobody – except maybe highly atypical candidate Ron Paul – stood to protest or showed any outrage at these statements, which is further evidence in favor of a continued collective endorsement of retaliation in American culture. However, it is worth stressing that this particular case only involves members of the Republican Party.

To conclude, C. Vann Woodward reminds us that "after all, it fell the lot of one Southerner from Virginia to define America. The definition he wrote in 1776 voiced aspirations that were rooted in his native region before the nation was born" (25). This is not to say that the rhetorical construction of the South is necessarily at the origin of that of America's, or that the pattern of retaliation that has been permeating American culture comes directly from Southern roots. However, this statement takes us back to several points that have been demonstrated in the course of this *mémoire*. Very much like William Faulkner, Harper Lee and James Lee Burke, Thomas Jefferson was able to transcend his origins and turn a local narrative into something powerful enough to deserve national attention and subsequently endorsement. *The Declaration of Independence*, which Thomas Jefferson drafted in 1776, is one of the founding American narratives as well as John Winthrop's *A Model of Christian Charity*. These narratives have constructed America as we know it today. Indeed, "there is no pre-textual 'America'" (*Ideas of Order* 14). America as an idea, is based on text in general

and these texts in particular. This is why one can use “‘American literary history’ in order to explore what [Boris Vejdovsky] call[s] the American topos, and which one could tentatively define as a set of perspectives on the construction of ‘American reality’” (3). These two notions are closely related. And narratives are indeed still constructing America nowadays, whether they are twenty-first-century television series and films or contemporary political fictions directly emanating from the Oval Office. It is no coincidence that defeated vice presidential candidate Paul Ryan mentioned the fact that Obama “said his job is to ‘tell a story to the American people’” (Ryan) even though Ryan’s aim in saying this was elsewhere. The President of the United States is indeed at the basis of the rhetorical construction of his country.

I have attempted to demonstrate throughout this work that literature and narratives such as the pattern of retaliation have contributed to shaping reality through the performative power of discourse in the case of the American South. Indeed, the South, very much like America as a whole, is a rhetorical construction that owes much to writing. I cannot at this point prove beyond reasonable doubt, that both constructions are related or that the Southern pattern of retaliation directly influenced its national counterpart. The evidence I gathered from my comparison between the pattern that exists in Faulkner, Lee and Burke’s novels and by extension in modern Southern literature and the pattern presented in current American political discourse and popular culture is merely circumstantial. The range covered by something as limited in time and space as this *mémoire*, primarily focusing on literature, is not broad enough to encompass all the material that one would need to obtain a final answer to that question. However, this study leaves room for further research and more thorough conclusions on the topic, provided it is given a bigger reach and includes a multidisciplinary approach, which was not my primary aim as a literature student.

Furthermore, I believe that I did prove that both the Southern pattern of retaliation and the tendency toward something similar in American culture, regardless of their connection (or lack thereof), work according to similar narrative processes. To go back to Vejdovsky’s words, used in the introduction of this *mémoire*, “writing turns language into a mode of appropriating space and therefore writing is necessarily a political and imperialistic action that modifies the topos in which it is produced” (*Ideas of Order* 11). Indeed, I have shown that both America and the South are constructions that emerged from narratives turned into reality through the performative power of discourse and that twenty-first century writers and politicians at the national level were

still adding chapters to these narratives, some of them bearing a distinctively familiar Southern spirit.



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