(De)colonization Through Topophilia:
Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings's Life and Work in Florida

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Preface

Standing on the shoulder of Route 1, on the outskirts of Cross Creek, Florida, visitors find the Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings's State Historic Site, this 'quiet place,' time has left unchanged. It was only for a brief moment that the public and the literary world perceived Cross Creek, the home of the writer, ecologist, and anthropologist Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings. The author moved and called Florida her home, deciding that she would live in the 'uncivilized' heartland of the Florida peninsula while on a vacation with her first husband Charles Rawlings. With their marriage on shaky grounds and facing literary failure up North, Rawlings needed a drastic change in her life, and the heartland of the Florida peninsula provided the environment that would impact her physically and spiritually. Rawlings's biographical preconditions – a childhood spent in the rural area of Rock Creek, outside of Washington, D.C., a father who instilled in her a respect for nature's restorative power – enabled her to immediately embrace Florida's nature. Spending her days outside in the orange groves, the scrub[1] or the Florida hammocks, *feeling* the intense Florida heat, as well as the cool and mild spring rain falling on her skin or the mysticism of the morning fog, she quickly developed a love, a *sense* for this unusual place. The "human being's affective ties" (Tuan, *Topophilia* 93) with one's immediate surroundings is defined by the neologism – Topophilia - coined by the humanist geographer Yi-Fu Tuan. Rawlings writes of 'beauty' when referring to the Creek;[2] her topophilia comes alive in her Florida writings, unmasking her natural environment into symbols of cultural critique and metaphors for identity transformation.

The life and work of Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings strongly coalesces with the move to Florida, entering a reciprocal, symbiotic relationship. Without the 'inspiration' of the overwhelming and inescapable natural world of Cross Creek, Rawlings would neither have been able to face and overcome her failed marriage nor excel through the hostile climate women writers faced during the Roaring Twenties and especially during the Depression era. With (re)confinement and (re)consignment of women to the

[1] Florida's oldest horticultural community; the scrub is an open pineland with an understory of oaks and palmettos. The largest area occurs in the Ocala National Forest.

domestic realm, Rawlings remained unaffected in her Florida hamlet. At Cross Creek, she created a 'room of her own,' a utopian gender-free space in which she was able to write and heal as society reverted around her.

Writing about nature and the indigenous backwoods community of the Florida Cracker,[3] Rawlings was able to parallel the 'colonization' or domination of the 'invisible' scrub region and its inhabitants with her own 'colonization' and the situatedness of women in the 1930s patriarchal American society. Both forms of colonization had a common basis in 'otherness,' finding them marginalized by a patriarchal and hierarchal center. Throughout her Florida literature, Rawlings deconstructs dualisms and hierarchies; such as the strict Western separation between nature and culture, opting for their radical interrelatedness. 'Inscribing' herself into the natural ecosystem of the Florida backwoods - where every individual organism is interrelated and interdependent - she draws a picture of a 'natural' and sometimes utopian society in which gender, class and race do not automatically define or predetermine identity and behavior roles. However, this 'decolonization' or liberation from oppressive patriarchal structures in the society of her time is closely connected and restricted to the remoteness of her place and its status as 'colony,' making her a prisoner of her own constructed space.

With the surface text radiant with an eloquent and detailed depiction of life in the Florida backwoods, the natural world and man's interaction with it, Rawlings has been forgotten in the forming of a (Southern) women's literary canon, rather regulated to male local colorists or regionalists. Frequently overlooked is her close friendship and extensive correspondence with editor Maxwell Perkins at Scribner's Press, who influenced, nurtured and refined her work. As *the* editor of the 'literary geniuses' of the Lost Generation, he brought her in contact with Ernest Hemingway, F. Scott Fitzgerald, Thomas Wolfe and many more; this connection to the 'geniuses' of modernism misled critics to place her work within this seemingly

[2] The Creek = Cross Creek, Florida; it is the hometown of the writer Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings. Cross Creek is situated in the heartland of the peninsula, north of Orlando.

[3] The people most associated with Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings's literature are the Florida Crackers. They are the ancestors of the early settlers of the South, who, in search for new land, came to Florida in the beginning of the 19th century. Despite its common negative connotation, the term is used affectionately by Rawlings and resonates until today a whole culture and mindset. Cf. 2.4.2

coherent group where she simply does not belong. Her art fails to fit the mold of dualized and hierarchical comparison, which prefers and canonized male, objective narratives as opposed to female, personal experiential writing.

Time, location and the personal experience form the basis of Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings's Florida novels and short stories. Regionalism, in itself a marginalized and often underestimated literary genre, is the ideal expression for Rawlings's (and other 'colonized' people's) writing. Hidden in-between the lines - in the subjective subtexts - she wrote for women; however, always concerned that she would be detected and rejected by the mainstream literary community. Nevertheless, it is the 'objective' documentary surface text, popular during the 1930s and 1940s that has marginalized her today and which has, until the 1980s and 1990s, limited her art from being included and re-discovered by critics concentrating on female writers. However, with the contemporary new interest in the vast field of place-based writing and the late popularity of local literature, nature writing and regionalism, Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings's Florida art and especially her auto/eco-biography *Cross Creek* deserve to be re-visited.

"(De)colonization Through Topophilia" attempts to reveal the close entanglement of place and self. In her efforts to 'map' the story of the nonhuman and human world of the Florida Interior, Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings comes to terms with, and makes sense of, her personal situation as a woman, writer and resident of Cross Creek. The first section briefly introduces the largely unknown and underestimated writer Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings; providing background information on her younger years, the relationship toward her family and other important and influential persons in her life as well as the literary category of regionalism and her use of 'place' in her writings. The 'ecotone' of Rawlings's literature requires an interdisciplinary approach, using the intersection of feminist/gender studies, anthropology and social science with the blurring categories of ecology, ecocriticism, regionalism and nature writing. The second section is concerned with the 'region' itself, the state of Florida; it focuses on the natural peculiarities of the state's Interior, the Scrub and hammock land around Cross Creek as well as the unique culture of the Florida Cracker, which provides the settings for Rawlings's Florida novels. Referring to her

lecture notes and manuscripts - hosted at the Rare Books Collection at the University of Florida - section III takes a closer look at the regionalism of the interwar years, the 'experiential' quality of Rawlings's writing and her own understanding of the term "Regional Literature." Section IV is concerned with the analysis of her four Florida books, the three novels and the autobiographical narrative *Cross Creek* (1942). Today, the name Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings is still widely related to the ever-popular novel *The Yearling* (1938). *South Moon Under* (1933) and *Golden Apples* (1935) have not been frequently republished and have subsequently fallen into oblivion. *Cross Creek*, on the other hand, is one of the most interesting and long-neglected books by Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings. Recently it has gained renewed popularity through its use in classes on nature writers and the non-fiction essay but it also requires reevaluation in regard to (relational) autobiography. The analysis of the self through the physical terrain, inherent already in her regional fiction, is brought to completion in this work and reflects best the powerful emotion of topophilia. This dissertation follows Rawlings's spiritual and emotional growth through *place* and writing. Although her short fiction can only transfer her topophilia for the Creek in a limited way,[4] her early documentary was a means for her to immediately quench her thirst for the portrayal of *her* 'Cracker community' and their mindset.[5] However, the short fiction preceding the documentary already contains elements of the feminist ideal of nature as the ally of the 'colonized.' Furthermore, the early stories portrayed the typical Rawlings anti-hero, who subjugates or dominates nature to ultimately fail or die.

Cross Creek exemplifies once more that detachment from place is impossible for Rawlings; the intermingling of life and place in literature is essential for the (re)creation of her identity and for the healing of the wounds inflicted by an abusive husband reinforced by the patriarchal climate in the society of the 1930s. It seems that with *Cross Creek*, Rawlings meant to give the reader of her books a 'self-explanatory tool' with which to decode the deeper sense of her earlier writings. The conscious arrangement of the individual essays in *Cross Creek* – written at different

[4] Short fiction as a literary category is not predestined for the transference of emotional growth through place (topophilia) and time.

times during her life at the Creek – are pieces in the puzzle that, together, allow glimpses into the soul of an author otherwise shy and secluded. Once the close connection between female (de)colonization and topophilia is all too visible, the reader is inspired to turn into an '*auto*-investigator' and return to her fiction to search the *I.* Sadly, the Cross Creek Trial ends Rawlings's literary career in Florida; unable to draw strength from her self-constructed, utopian space/place, she can no longer be 'the angel of her ecosystem.' The "flight from nature" (Alaimo 1), however, leads her to literate a series of short stories about alienated women lost in *space* that mirror the author's own state of mind. Lost without nature's support net, she is unable to find her way out of crisis and cannot re-establish a healing bond to the Creek.

Cross Creek has hardly changed since Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings lived and wrote there. It still has the magical silence and the whispering of the great Magnolia tree in front of the kitchen window that creates the atmosphere of myth that is so poignantly depicted in Rawlings's Florida writings. Although the big attraction parks of *Epcot* and *Disney* are close by, tourists rarely find their way out to Cross Creek; it still is a 'blank' or 'invisible' spot in the many Florida tourist's guides; it remains the quiet place that mirrors so well Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings's life philosophy;

> "Cross Creek belongs to the wind and the rain, to the sun and the seasons, to the cosmic secrecy of seed, and beyond all, to time" (*CC* 380).

[5] Some of these essays ("Hyacinth Drift") were later reprinted in *Cross Creek* (1942), others (like "Cracker Chidlings") appeared in Scribner's Magazine.

I. Introducing Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings's – A *Snowbird* in Florida

1.1 Writing Out Of The Margin…

"The social ideal, in which I was bred, is the villain of my plot." – Mary Austin.

Today, the literary work of Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings is largely unknown to readers unfamiliar to a Florida heritage. Born in Washington, D. C., on August 8, 1896, Rawlings matured in the 1920s, experiencing greater latitude in acceptable female conduct, whereas a decade later, she faced the hostile climate of the Depression era, restricting women to the domestic sphere. Nevertheless, it was during this strenuous period of time that Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings liberated herself from an abusive marriage, making the courageous decision to stay in the seemingly 'hostile' backwoods of Cross Creek, Florida, on her own. It is in this stage of her life that she produced her most successful novels and short stories. In order to fully understand Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings's Florida literature, it is necessary to take a closer look at the entanglement of her life and text in the context of the socio-historical climate she faced and matured in. Re-reading her Florida literature, remembering the hostile climate women writers faced during this period of time, makes several short stories and episodes in her novels appear in a different light, shifting importance to details that have either been overlooked or considered as 'flaws' in her writing. Further on, the interdisciplinary and wide array of genres and categories her literature unites, prevents an easy classification of her art. Somewhere in-between all these different *genres* her art became *lost*, marginalized in the creation of an American literary canon.

Born in 1896, Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings belongs to a generation of women writers that Elaine Showalter has coined "the other Lost Generation" (Showalter, *Sister's Choice* 104). Facing a hostile climate to women's literary ambitions, much of *their* literature was excluded from the reading lists of colleges and universities, thereby marginalizing a whole generation of female authors, confining their art to the category of popular literature, young adult fiction or regionalist/local color fiction. In addition, society's prevalent image of womanhood was strictly incompatible with the

image of the successful writer or artist. An earlier generation of women writers, such as Willa Cather, Sarah Orne Jewett or Mary Austin, found themselves at odds with society's expectations and its new female ideals like the 'flapper.' Elaine Showalter speaks of the 1920s as "feminism's awkward age" (Showalter, *Sister's Choice* 105), drawing especially on the dilemma of post-suffrage feminism. Pre-war female intellectuals, raised in the belief that women were the 'purer sex,' escaped or refused marriage and turned to intimate relationships with other women; living in a female community at colleges and treasuring their independence from men, they saved their creative energies for their writing. Rawlings's generation of women, however, "read Freud and struggled to liberate themselves from outmoded sexual inhibitions" (Showalter, *Sister's Choice* 106). The feminism and hard-won aims of the suffragettes seemed forgotten and with the rising number of co-ed campuses, women were influenced much more by Hollywood and advertisement than by the former oneness of female college communities throughout the nation. During the 1920s, Rawlings's generation of (white) middle-class women experienced good times; with less pressure to be married, young women were able to indulge themselves in an increasingly commercialized popular culture and greater latitude in acceptable women's behaviors. Pronouncing the "revolution in morals" (Raub xiii), the nineteenth-century conception of marriage underwent continuous change; it shifted from an institutionalized arrangement to a more personal relationship; Rawlings, too, entered such a 'companionate' marriage. Having been friends with her first husband Charles all during their college years, she married him out of love and against the will of her mother.

The goal of many women in Rawlings's generation was a life that had both, a functioning relationship or marriage *and* a career. Due to the Depression, the ideals of the "two-job wives" (Raub xiii) remained most often unattainable. "[I]n a society where the husband's role was unexamined and unaltered, where wives were still expected to serve their men and their families, where in fact women's reproductive, marital, legal and vocational rights were few" (Showalter, *Sister's Choice* 107), young women faced self-doubts, anxiety and disillusionment. The recollection to the traditional role allocation during the Depression era, the confinement of women to the

domestic sphere and women's transformation into exclusive 'servants' of their families, created insecurity, preventing them from forming their own identity, making it extremely difficult to oppose male domination in their isolation. Increasingly, women were bombarded with messages and advertisement that promoted products which tied them to the house, creating feelings of guilt if a wife did not serve her family twenty-four hours a day. The social construction of femininity and the urge some women – like Rawlings - felt within themselves to have a career of their own, created an inner conflict that led to frustration and self-devaluation. Already in Rawlings's generation, women suffered from the same paralysis Betty Friedan depicted in *The Feminine Mystique* (1963) a decade later; anticipating 'the problem that has no name,' Rawlings was unable to define the tension she felt within herself. Throughout most of her life, she suffered from severe insecurity, believing herself to be the only one having marital issues and life anxieties. The reciprocal shift between the role of the 'ideal woman' she played in the public and the private authentic self, breathed out in her subtexts, promoted a schizophrenic split personality that ultimately chose to veil itself.

Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings had a very close relationship to her father; as a young tomboy preferring the company of boys over girls and loving the outdoors, she related much more to her father's 'male' world than to the domestic and socially-predefined world of her mother. From him, she inherited her sensitivity and respect for nature as well as a deep love for the land, whereas her mother, as a farmer's daughter, paradoxically could not relate to nature at all. Rawlings, however, needed the all-encompassing Florida backwoods setting as a referent for her books. Besides drawing on her Cracker friends and neighbors for the realization of her Floridian characters, Rawlings transcribed many of her father's character traits to her *auto-fictional* protagonists. In a letter to Norman Berg, she clarifies that her Florida literature has an autobiographical *rapport*, stating that her "books come from so far inside" (Bigelow/Monti 289);

> I know, too, what you mean by not wanting your principal character to be too autobiographically *you*, yet if that character is representing deliberately what you want most to say, it is right and proper that you put your thoughts in his head and your words in his mouth. In editing and revising later, you will probably see where you have

> been perhaps a little untrue to the created character, by being too much yourself. (Bigelow/Monti 289)

In all of her main male characters she inscribed character traits of her father whom she viewed as a God-figure without ever critically evaluating this picture of him. His early death made him a martyr and infallible in Rawlings's eyes. During the Oedipal crisis, a girl turns to the father for acceptance and begins to see "her mother only as a sexual rival" (Chodorow 114). Rawlings treasured time with her father; unconsciously, they formed a 'secret pact' that excluded her mother and younger brother. Writing formed this nurturing bond between Rawlings and her father. On the basis of the love and encouragement she received from him, she defined her self-worth and identity. The death of her father left her feeling lost, leaving her unprepared to reconnect with her former 'rival,' her mother. Without a clear self-identity she developed hate towards her mother, rejecting her mother's traditional socially-predefined idea of femininity. Unable to give up her God-like father, Rawlings was incapable of bonding with her 'earthy mother;' fearing the ultimate loss of her *pen* and the loss of access into the powerful male realm, she refused to become entangled with bonds of the 'powerless.'

The early writings have already reflected Rawlings's feelings of hate towards her mother. Her mother had always wanted to conform to society's mould of a proper young lady; instinctively, Rawlings associated her mother with the fact that she must be part of the 'colonized,' and be forbidden to pursue her own ambitions. Rawlings's first and posthumously published apprentice work, *Blood of My Blood*, discusses the strenuous mother-daughter relationship; although the writing process of this book had a liberating effect, she continued – throughout her life - to resent everything typically associated with traditional 'femaleness' or 'femininity.' Principally opposing everything her mother considered right and proper, she believed the opposite to be true, based on what her father had encouraged. "All my life I have hated little girls, swore that I wanted five children if they could be boys, and the more I see of this she-species, the more they annoy me" (Bigelow/Monti 366). Throughout her body of literature, despise for typically 'feminine' characters is visible; Eulalie Boyles or Twink

Weatherby (*The Yearling),* are two examples of "The *Sneaky* Girls" who interrupt the 'harmonious good male understanding.' When Rawlings introduces a strong female character, she undertakes the classical role reversal. In *Golden Apples*, Camilla van Dyne, a rich orange grower, embodies much of the white male 'colonizer,' coming to the 'virgin' land to act out hierarchies.

Camilla could also be contemplated as Rawlings's *alter ego*; in her, she portrays much of the New Woman of the turn of the century and vividly challenges the foundations of patriarchal society, creating in Camilla a self-conscious and even promiscuous young woman. Instead of seeking fulfillment in matrimony, Camilla embodies everything Rawlings's mother would have rejected her daughter to be. Written shortly after her divorce, *Golden Apples* underlines Rawlings's urge to embed subjectivity into her texts as she processes her separation from Charles. Most of her contemporary critics ignored the novel and failed to uncover the 'colonial' role reversal and the obvious patriarchal critique hiding in-between the lines.

After the sudden death of her father, Rawlings searches for recognition and a referent for her identity, expecting to find his unconditioned acceptance of her in other persons. Recognition by others turned into an obsession and succinctly made her dependent on the constant appraisal by others. The first man to substitute for her *lost* relationship to her father was her first husband Charles Rawlings. Rawlings met him in college; having finished her degree in English at the University of Wisconsin, she followed him to New York where he served in the military. The fact that Charles was 'different,' a little irresponsible and all her mother would disapprove of, made him more attractive in her eyes. A journalist, writer and member of the campus magazine, the *Lit*, he appeared sensitive, intelligent and open-minded to her. Rawlings saw in Charles mirrored character traits of her father. However, during the first years of their marriage, she discovered that Charles was not the emancipated, nurturing and understanding 'New Man' she thought he was. During the Depression years, Charles wanted a dutiful and self-effacing (house)wife, who took care of *his* desires instead of realizing her own ambitions. Many details of these strenuous and often violent arguments entered into her Florida novels and

stories; especially "The Pelican's Shadow" encompasses her feelings of this period of her life, namely betrayal, powerlessness and alienation. For Rawlings, life and art are inextricably entangled and interrelated; her writings are a mirror of herself and of the general social climate women (writers) of the time were exposed to.

Before their move to Florida, Rawlings tried to assimilate into the white middle-class society of Rochester, NY; here, she initially tried to "behave" (Bigelow/Monti 290), suppress her urge to write. Unable to refrain herself from writing, she reached for a 'medium' to express herself and turned to writing poems for the *Rochester Times Union*. In "Songs of a Housewife," Rawlings did not only *live* the life of the perfect American (white middle-class) housewife, she also *wrote* it. Later she would say of these poems that they avoided one kind of prostitution for another (Silverthorn 54). "Songs of a Housewife" was extremely popular and ran in over fifty newspapers across America. They were light and partly humorous material, concerned exclusively with the everyday life of the typical American (white middle-class) housewife; at the time the couple moved to Florida, Rawlings had already written 495 'household' poems! The poems were for her a way to be financially independent from Charles without risking upsetting him and straining their marriage. Nevertheless, Rawlings felt unsatisfied with her life and career; although her goal was a marriage that balanced both, career and relationship, she was unable to combine both and blamed herself for failing. Throughout her life, she struggled with the 'fig-tree problematic' of Ether Greenwood in Sylvia Plath's novel *The Bell Jar*. Recognizing within herself what Mary Austin called the "lurking, evasive Something" (Dorman 37) which so violently contradicted society's imposed behavior patterns for women, she believed that her life demanded radical 'either/or' decisions; the resultant paralysis that this mode of thinking creates, when "choosing one meant losing all the rest" (Plath 73), describes her state of mind at this particular period of time.

At the end of her marriage, she solely blamed herself for the failed relationship; believing she was not good enough or had not tried hard enough, she thought herself to be the only woman with a failed marriage. Near the end of her life, she recognized that many women suffered the same oppression and male dominance in marriage. The lost love and ultimate

rejection by Charles, through whom she was used to define the public side of her personality, made her even contemplate suicide. Charles had not been able to accept his wife's success as a writer, while he was a *mere* journalist, writing about yachting in Florida. Repeatedly, he criticized her art, calling it 'worthless,' even trying to convince her that she was going mad; but while Rawlings thought she must try harder to please her husband's high writing standards, he really wanted her to 'lay down the pen.' Trapped in these mutually exclusive alternatives of either career or marriage, her Florida writing reflects a self that is torn, fragmented and incoherent. Although resurging here and there in her texts, her subjective voice is exiled into her subtexts, veiled behind the 'rational' and 'objective' regional material that described the socially-defined adventurous male-dominated outdoor world. Like many other women writers and artists of her generation, she came to believe that to be a successful writer excludes marriage and motherhood.

The modernist era's recollection to a traditional role allocation held many difficulties for women writers who planned a literary career. "A country taking new pride in its cultural heritage after the war saw only weakness and sentimentality in the contributions women had made to our national literature" (Showalter 107). Mostly excluded or ignored in the formation of a literary canon, women's writing and female authorship underwent a devaluation and was largely ignored by the 'master narratives' and the 'serious' critics and publishing houses. Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings was one of the rare female writers admitted to the circle of the 'great' (Scribner's) male writers of the Lost Generation. She came to the attention of the legendary editor Maxwell E. Perkins in 1930 and they quickly formed a close friendship. As a friend and editor of most of his protégés, Perkins knew how to nurture and develop his internationally acclaimed writers, trying to bring them into contact with each other. Although Rawlings disliked big cities, tolerating only brief visits, avoiding metropolitan areas, she formed a lasting friendship with Ernest Hemingway, met Thomas Wolfe a few times in New York and F. Scott Fitzgerald in North Carolina. In a list next to these 'classic' writers, Rawlings appears indeed *lost*. However, it is only since the publication of her extensive correspondence (the Perkins-Rawlings correspondence comprises 698 letters!) with the famous editor that it became known that their relationship was the most intimate of all of

Perkins's protégés. Furthermore, they could not have been more unalike. Perkins, the urbane editor was a graduate from Harvard, Rawlings, the (by then) orange grower from Cross Creek, Florida, was a graduate from the University of Wisconsin. Although Rawlings owes much of her literary success to the intense nurturing of her famous editor, he had also trapped her into a literary corner where her work does not belong. This is one reason why critics used to mention her name in the same breath with the seemingly coherent group of the Lost Generation or classified her as a literary 'sister' to Mark Twain and other *male* regionalists and local colorists. This misconception and misclassification are major factors in the marginalization of her work. Increasingly, the steady comparison to the 'great' Scribner's writers worsened Rawlings's personal insecurity and inferiority complex, leading her into a continuous search for strategies to authenticate her female voice. Although she outsold William Faulkner, John Steinbeck and most writers of the Lost Generation, she was still not satisfied with her success. As an ambitious (woman) writer, she wanted to be equal to the acclaimed male writers of her generation; trying to assimilate into the 'male dominant discourse,' she struggled hard to achieve, what she called "a dispassionate sexlessness in writing" (Bigelow/Monti 366). During this period, Rawlings fought with norms, rules or 'master narratives' which radically excluded the inscription of female subjectivities. Finding herself in the margins of a hierarchical literary world, she feared the complete rejection and the uncovering of her subjective subtexts. Until the end of her life, Rawlings was not able to 'decolonize' herself from the prescriptive 'master genres/narratives,' which were presented and maintained by a male tradition. In 1951, two years before her death, she wrote to her friend Norman Berg:

> One's thinking is inevitably influenced and tempered by one's sex, along with one's background and conditioning and a hundred other elements. Yet I insist that there must be a plane, aesthetic, intellectual and spiritual where there is no sex […] I refuse to be *only* a biological female. (Bigelow/Monti 266)

On numerous occasions, Rawlings had uttered her anxiety of being classified as a *mere* popular writer, fearing discrediting by 'serious' critics

and other male writers who equated female *biology* with the social construction of femaleness/femininity and minor art.

In the beginning of her writing career in Florida, Rawlings included strong female main characters in her texts and a visible critique of patriarchy. Rawlings's most famous and most feminist short story is "Gal Young Un," a modern fairy tale which releases the female protagonist from male dominance. Through female bonding and nature as the helping ally in a utopian backwoods setting, Mattie Syles, a middle-aged woman, living on her own in the Floridian backwoods, escapes from patriarchal control. Clearly autobiographical, Rawlings processes her own grief. With one exception, all of Rawlings's submissions were handled by Maxwell Perkins. "Gal Young Un," however, was rejected, with the explanation that it was "too anti-male and too strident" (Tarr, *Max and Marjorie* 3). Rawlings's literary agent Carl Brandt then sold the story to the rival, *Harper's Magazine*, and it won the O' Henry Award for the best short story of 1932. Rawlings felt deeply betrayed by her friend's rejection. At the same time, F. Scott Fitzgerald, who had earlier "complained that the American novel was being emasculated by female conventionality and propriety" (Showalter, *Sister's Choice* 107), criticized "Gal Young Un" in a letter to Perkins, encapsulating the critical climate in which Rawlings strove for recognition. In 1934, Fitzgerald wrote to Perkins that he – Morris paraphrases -

> was tremendously impressed with *South Moon Under* [her first novel] until he read her prize short story, 'Gal Young Un.' It is interesting that this particular story, expressing a decisively feminine and feminist perspective, is the one that makes Fitzgerald reflect Rawlings's stature as equal to Hemingway, Dos Passos and himself. (Morris 42)

Fearing an end in 'nothingness,' Rawlings submitted every time she was criticized for the inclusion of female subjectivity and a patriarchal critique. It is a recurring pattern throughout her Florida writings that after a more openly feminist text, the following buries her female voice into the subtexts. *Golden Apples*, her most feminist novel, preceded *The Yearling*, a book omitting a thorough characterization of female protagonists altogether. It was *The Yearling* that became her most successful novel, reinforcing her anxieties that she would indeed be *forgotten* for the exact reasons she had tried to veil throughout her career.

Despite the repeated effort to be acknowledged as a major American author, Rawlings was aware of her 'colonization' in the patriarchal society of the 1930s; through the incongruity between the social norms for women of her generation and her own definition of self, she was able to internalize a minority mentality, which sharpened her awareness of the effect of hierarchies, (male) domination and the 'colonization.'

> Women, whether in community or in isolation, share a condition of oppression, or otherness, that is imposed by governing patriarchal or androcentric ideologies. Women as a group, therefore, share a certain awarenesses that are common to oppressed groups. (Donovan 199)

This psychology of 'colonization' or internalization of otherness shaped Rawlings's (and women's) modes of perception, creating psychic alienation.

> The harassed woman is forced into a schizophrenic response: either she can remain identified with her body which has been objectified as a tool for male purposes, in which case she denies her mind and her spiritual self; or she can deny her body and consider the mind the real self. The latter entails an autistic withdrawal from the everyday public world, a silent way of living within. (Donovan 101)

Rawlings lived in this 'schizophrenic world within,' suppressing her femaleness without being fully accepted in the male world.

> And again, perhaps, as you suggested once, I was born *half-male*, understanding the true male, and resenting the – what shall I say? – well, hypocrisy, sneakiness, of the average woman. (Bigelow/Monti 367) [italics mine]

In order to become a 'serious' writer and – in a Lacanian formulation – 'to enter the public realm of history,' she had to relinquish to male control and *their* social construction of reality. However, to remain in the "pre-literate, pre-Oedipal realm of the Mother" (Donovan 101) results in eternal silence and invisibility. Having internalized her otherness made it difficult for her to speak/write "in the language of the self" (Donovan 101). Her fragmented conception of self searched for ways to express itself and the literary category of regionalism fits the problematic ideally. Inscribing subjectivity into her subtexts, sheltered by the regional or 'objective' surface text, made it possible for her to express herself without being cast aside while escaping male domination. The many comparisons drawn from her literature to the art by other acknowledged male writers - for example Mark Twain's *Tom*

Sawyer and *Huckleberry Finn* or Ernest Hemingway's Nick Adams stories, John Steinbeck's *The Pony* or the frequent comparison of the hunt of Old Slewfoot in *The Yearling* to William Faulkner's "The Bear" - attest to her successful imitation of a supreme-reigning androcentric text.

From her very first moments in Florida, Rawlings was enchanted by the Creek and its inhabitants. She was a meticulous observer, never leaving the house without a pen and paper. Not imposing on her Cracker friends and neighbors, she took notes and immersed herself in their culture, discovering the rich natural environment around her. Despite being an 'outsider' to the conservative backwoods region of the Interior of the state, Rawlings was accepted by the community as one of them. For the first time she really had a home, a place to turn to and a referent for her writing and identity. Recognizing the Florida Cracker as a marginalized social group, a remnant of the vanishing frontier, she developed a missionary drive to bring them to the literary consciousness of America. Connecting her 'otherness' (or 'colonization') with theirs, she mentally formed an alliance with them and understood herself as a member of 'the Oppressed/Colonized.'

Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings's Florida literature must be read in a social context, taking into consideration the 'colonization' of women writers of her time and the construction of womanhood in general. Until the end of her life, the fear of exposing herself to the public dominated her writing. Her nurturing father and the latitude of female conduct in the 1920s in which she grew up sharply contrasted the social construction of womanhood in the 1930s, the time she strove for recognition. The move to the isolation of Cross Creek, where she found a literary safe-haven, 'a room of her own' and the discovery of the potential of the regional theme, enabled her to inscribe female subjectivity in her texts. Despite the fact that regionalism as a literary category has especially been regarded as a limiting, minor or restrictive genre, for women artists, it had the opposite effect. Regionalism enabled them to find a literary voice, thereby anticipating the autobiographical writing of ethnic and minority writers in the late twentieth century; rather than being restrictive, regionalism provides a *place* for female creativity.

1.1.1 Getting Personal! Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings's Female Voice Unveiled

Although the main focus of this dissertation is Rawlings's Florida novels, her short fiction should not be excluded in the assessment of her work. "Read as a group, the stories form a literary journal of her career" (Tarr *Short Stories* 24). Containing many autobiographical details, they provide valuable insight into her mental condition, the time she wrote in and portray her evolution from reportage and documentary to fiction, including subjectivity and a female voice. The stories also demonstrate the missionary drive with which she wanted to make the public aware of the *beauty* of the Scrub and the 'different' indigenous culture of the Florida Cracker. All in all, they shed a much more direct look on Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings, the regionalist, anthropologist and woman writer. Read *en bloc*, the stories develop into *herstories*, functioning as a looking glass and a means to reflect inward for a thorough evaluation of her past; writing short fiction enabled her to unleash her female voice and escape - although only for a brief moment – the oppressive structures in the American society and literary market of her time.

Rawlings began her literary career by writing documentary sketches about the Cracker frontier, revealing her full immersion in the locale. One of Rawlings's finest abilities is certainly her gift to authentically 'tell' a story. "Cracker Chidlings, Real Tales from the Florida Interior," her first series of sketches, vividly depict Cracker speech and dialect; in the tradition of the frontier tall tale, one is immediately immersed into the spirit of the locale and has the impression of sitting next to her on the porch of the old farmhouse, chatting about her neighbors and their unique way of life. Based on the author's real-life experiences in the Florida backwoods region of Cross Creek, Rawlings - self-consciously - uses dialect, "mak[ing] extensive use of misspellings and sprinkles apostrophes liberally across the page to show omitted sounds" (Bigelow, *Frontier Eden* 113). Responsible for the sketches' immediate success was the symbiosis of the nation's hunger for anthropology and documentary of America's manifold landscapes with Rawlings's personal enchantment with Cracker culture and nature. Most of her 'characters' were commonly known throughout the Cross Creek area;

'Shiner Tim in "A Plumb Clare Conscience" is based on Mr. Howard, a moonshiner, and the episodes in "Alligators" are thinly disguised versions of Rawlings's hunter and fishing companion Fred Tompkins. Under Rawlings's pen, these colorful backwoods people reached out to a nationwide audience in the beginning of the 1930s.

Her extensive use of facts did not only spark a law suit but also provoked Florida politicians who feared consequences for their tourist mecca and the absence of potential investors. Among them was the editor of the *Ocala Evening Star*, who – in an attack on her authentic material – "wrote a fatuous editorial, full of chamber-of-commerce indignation, accusing her of distorting the truth about the Florida backwoods" (Bigelow/Monti 37). Fully immersed in her own construction of rural Florida, Rawlings developed a fierce missionary seal for the rehabilitation of the poor-white country folk. Rawlings's identification with her region is demonstrated by the reply she sent to the editor of the *Ocala Evening Star;* any critique of *them*,[1] had turned into a critique of herself.

> I can verify all my material with dialect which to you 'sounds as if it must be spoken somewhere,' but which is made up studiously only of idioms, of phrases, of turns of speech, that I have myself heard here again and again. Perhaps my newness in this country gives a pristine quality to the oddities of speech that come to my ears. Perhaps my interest as a student of etymology has made me alert to quaintness and to archaism deep-rooted in the English language. One of my Cracker acquaintances in the cattle section of recent turmoil, said to me of 'coon-meat, of which he is exceedingly fond, 'It has a kind of foolish taste.' Do you know that one must go far back into Anglo-Saxon speech to find the word 'foolish' used currently in the sense in which he used it? And have you noticed that the Georgia 'hit' for 'it,' which persists hereabouts, is likely to be used at the beginning of a sentence, but not necessarily afterward?' No, my dear sir, do not let us hustle and deny out of existence the last of Florida's frontier. The State will so soon be just like any other. Before they have been quite swallowed up, let us know and enjoy these picturesque people, pioneer remains. (Bigelow/Monti 39/40)

As exotic and *different* as these sketches in "Cracker Chidlings" might have appeared to the public, which was still habituated to the art of the Lost Generation, these stories brought her to the attention of the renowned publishing house of Scribner's. Her meticulous nature depictions and

[1] The Creek and its Cracker inhabitants

precise folk knowledge convinced editor Alfred S. Dashiell that he had a major talent at hand and it was him who later introduced her to Maxwell E. Perkins.

Rawlings's short fiction can be divided into three major blocks: the early local color sketches, the stories containing 'unveiled' subjectivity ("Gal Young Un," "Jacob's Ladder") and the "Quincey Dover Stories," which demonstrate her gift as a comical writer; the later *New Yorker* stories, lead outside of a Floridian locale, showing Rawlings's rising interest in psychoanalysis. These stories are mostly concerned with female alienation, focusing on women's *silence* and their loss of a sense of self in patriarchal and oppressive marriages. The *New Yorker* stories comprise "The Pelican's Shadow," "Jessamine Springs," "The Shell" and "Miriam's Houses;" in them, Rawlings was determined to efface her literary ties with the backwoods material, trying - with little success – to prove that she could write without the powerful referent of the Florida scenery. Rawlings's favorite story of this group was "The Pelican's Shadow" in which she had included many autobiographical details. However, she refrained from an inclusion of the story in the 1946 collection *When the Whippoorwill.* At several occasions, Rawlings mentioned the "evilly good time" (Silverthorn 178) she had, portraying Dr. Tifton, "a man so sure of his own perspicacity that he is blind to his faults" (McLaughlin/Parry 50). Considering the story to be "too atypical and vicious" (Silverthorn 178), she feared the negative consequences on her recently-gained literary success with her 'male' voice in *The Yearling*.

Like Rawlings herself, the main character Elsa - once a successful editor and an independent woman - *fails* to transmute into the 'angel of the house.' Having fallen in love with the "immensely articulate" (TPS 291) Dr. Tifton, all her hopes for an emancipated marriage are shattered when Tifton acts out as a 'patriarchal monster,' making her his marital victim. Inverting Elsa's hopes, Tifton renders her mute, making her words meaningless, using his own language as a weapon. By calling her his mouse, he repeatedly defines her as physically and mentally inferior to him. He wants a wife that is "young and malleable" (TPS 291) who develops all her "latent femininity" (TPS 290). It is through cooking and housework that he defines her, thereby alienating Elsa from her former life and enslaving her for his

wants. Refusing to discuss with her anything apart from house work, he confines her. At the end, Elsa is unable to write a simple letter to a friend at the office. Like his real-life counterpart Charles Rawlings, Tifton throws a plate of tomato salad at his wife, claiming it inedible. In "The Pelican's Shadow," Rawlings once more reflects on her abusive first marriage and begins to mentally process the past through writing. She also addresses one of women's long-time taboo topics, personal failure in marriage. Rawlings herself had pored over cook books to become a *better wife*, trying to assimilate to a predefined life. However, divorce and self-realization on behalf of the female partner was still judged an egoistic and self-centered step in the middle of the twentieth century. Most women affected, could not even count on other women to align with them in their decision. However, the chasing away of the pelican who "comes to symbolize for the frustrated wife the qualities of her husband" (Silverthorn 178) at the end of the story, provide a ray of hope for Elsa's feminine revolt. Rawlings included greater unveiled subjectivity in her shorter fiction because she considered the short story a minor genre in comparison to the novel. In short fiction, she felt free to voice her progressive and pioneer feminist ideas, contemplating the genre as a medium for the inscription of (female) individuation and selfhood.

"The Shell" is another story in which Rawlings analyzes the helplessness of the average woman, exaggerating her fate by placing a fragile, seemingly mentally challenged woman in the center of the story. Limited in her comprehension of the world, the woman – deliberately left unnamed by Rawlings – is unable to understand linguistically complex language; her capacity to decipher a message does not go beyond the literal level. When her husband Bill is drafted, she is left without an interpreter or "buffer between her and the complex world" (Parry 43). Having to rely on herself for the first time, she is unable to understand the semantics of the word 'missing' in a war context written in a telegram. Rawlings focuses on women lost in *space*, bemoaning the lack of female bonding; failing to decode the unnamed woman's disability, the woman of the War Department mirrors the unnamed woman's language deficit and becomes complicit in her later suicide. Watching "the sea for [he] would be there" (TS 342), she walks into the ocean. Upon walking into the sea, she drops an empty shell. It "was worthless, and had been even when there was life within it. But it was

a pretty little thing and it was a pity that it should be quite destroyed" (TS 343). The ending of "The Shell" resembles Kate Chopin's ending in *The Awakening*, in which the heroine Edna Pontellier equally chooses death by swimming out into the sea. In Rawlings's story the "broken and imperfect" (TS 342) shell is the symbol for women's alienation if they do not conform to society's preformed ideas on womanhood. At the end of the story, both shell and girl are swallowed up by the sea, disappearing unnamed and without an imprint in the sand.

The *New Yorker* stories received virtually no critical attention at all. Apart from "The Pelican's Shadow," the stories have been first anthologized by Rodger L. Tarr in 1994. Critics tend(ed) to view them as anomalies of an author celebrated for her talent as a nature writer and her lively portraits of the Florida Cracker, the Scrub country and the 'male' adventure stories of the wildheart of the Sunshine State.

1.1.1.1 "Jacob's Ladder"

"Jacob's Ladder" is Rawlings's first story to turn away from the documentary mode, including an epic plot. Still trying to acquaint her readership with the local environs of the Florida wildlands, the story is a virtual travelogue of north central Florida, starting out in the flat piney woods of Dixie County above Suwannee River, continuing to Orange Lake in Alachua County, the mouth of a tidal river on the Gulf of Mexico (probably the Withlacoochee), the Big Scrub, and finally she turns back to Dixie County (Bigelow, *Frontier Eden* 129). The main characters of the story, Mart and Florry, are based on a young Cracker couple who, for a short time, lived in the tenant house on Rawlings's property. Tim and his wife haunted the author throughout her writing career; the chapter "Antses in Tim's Breakfast" in her autobiography *Cross Creek* provides the background information for the novella. On one of her regular evening walks on Creek road, Rawlings discovered "a space under a great spreading live oak" (*CC* 72) under which someone had made a living. She was told that a young couple had camped out there but wandered off one day to never return. Rawlings, deeply intrigued by this mythic discovery, found the

answer on her own property. The couple and their baby had moved into her tenant house and the man Tim had taken a job in her grove. After a short period of time, Tim, whose real "passion was for trapping," (*CC* 73) left with his family to move back into the scrub.

> 'I only takened this on account o' the baby comin'. A woman's got to have a roof over her then. Us'll git along better thouten no house, pertickler jest a piece of a house like this un here. In the woods, you kin make a smudge to keep off the skeeters. Us'll make out.' (*CC* 75/76)

Mart is a mirror image of Tim; Rawlings describes him as not being of "a breed that took to work for others" (JL 65) and having 'observed' the couples' daily routine, she transcribed their silent ways into her text. Cracker silence, which at first sight appears to be a sign of rudeness, is in reality a sign of trustworthiness, integrity and sympathy for the other. The Crackers' silent ways left a deep mark on Rawlings and it became an omni-present device in all of her Florida writings. Rawlings intended to 'realistically' portray Cracker culture in her fiction and a comparison from her autobiographical novel *Cross Creek* shows how little details she actually fictionalized or changed.

> 'A white woman don't ask another white woman to do her washin' for her, nor to carry her slops,' he said. ''Course, in time o' sicknes or trouble or sich as that a woman does ary thing she can for another and they's no talk o' pay. (*CC* 75)

> 'No white woman don't ask another white woman to wash her dirty clothes fer her nor to carry her slops, neither. 'Course, fer a favor, like, a woman'll do most ary thing fer a woman in trouble, sick-a-bed. Or fer her own kin-folks.' (JL 66)

The reciprocity between fact and fiction is an integral part of the 'regional discourse,' providing the tension in Rawlings's texts; thereby, regionalism can never be fully devoid of an autobiographical element. Similar to *Cross Creek*, which shows a self-in-progress, "Jacob's Ladder" includes a white Yankee grove owner, who commits one faux-pas after another, mirroring the author herself. Written from the perspective of the 'white natives,' Mart and Florry, the narrative perspective served her as a means to 'purify' herself from her initial 'frontier ignorance,' allowing her to harshly criticize the Yankee grove owner.

It is not astonishing that Rawlings's first main character is not a man but a fragile, vulnerable girl, approximately in her teens. In *Cross Creek*, Rawlings states that she first remembered "a woman, that stabbed me to the core, so that I shall never get over the wound" (*CC* 72).

> The only way I could shake free of her was to write of her, and she was Florry in "Jacob's Ladder." She still clung to me and she was Allie in *Golden Apples*. Now I know that she will haunt me as long as I live, and all the writing in the world will not put away the memory of her face and the sound of her voice. (*CC* 76)

Florry's sensitivity and inner strength is barely recognizable at the outset of the story. Mistreated by her father, an aging widower, she runs away with Mart, a young rascal, she met at a local county dance. Reminiscent of a nineteenth-century Russian tragedy" (Bellman, *Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings* 96), the story is an epic quest, every time the Cracker couple climbs 'Jacob's Ladder,' they suffer an even worse setback. At the outset of the story, it is Mart who claims authority over Florry, leading the way, caring for her when she is sick and earning their livelihood. In the end, however, Rawlings reverses the traditional role allocation, making Florry the emerging heroine in a male-dominated world. It is in the middle of a storm, on the way home to her farm that she discards passivity and asserts an active role. The farm which had originally belonged to her mother's family emphasizes the matrilineal strength in the family. During the writing process of "Jacob's Ladder," Rawlings was trying to save her marriage and the positive ending of the story hints at the fact that she hoped until the end that Charles might transform into the *New Man* Mart is in the end.

The final scene in which Mart repairs the slammed kitchen door is testimony of their reclusion from an outside world; safely tucked away within the house, sheltered from the storm outside, they deconstruct the socially prescribed gender roles. The sentimental ending bears resemblances to a traditional fairy-tale ending, signifying a new beginning for two child-like characters, triumphing over evil. "'Kin you make thet sorry door stay shet?' He thumped confidently with the rusty axe-head. 'Hit'll hold,' he said (JL 107).

1.1.1.2 "Gal Young Un"

Rawlings's best-known short story is certainly "Gal Young Un" for which she received the O' Henry Award in 1933 and which was made into a successful film by Victor Nunez. As discussed, Rawlings's body of short fiction describes the artist as a multi-facetted writer, mastering a variety of styles and genres but "Gal Young Un" is Rawlings "at her best and at her most feminist" (Tarr, *Short Stories* 11). Again, "Gal Young Un" is not free of an autobiographical *rapport*. The story was written at a time Charles Rawlings was still living at the Creek; his writing career did not profit from their move to the Sunshine State and "his criticism of her writing and of her personally became increasingly harsh" (Silverthorn 82) during this period of time. In a letter to her college friend Beatrice McNeill, she summarizes daily life in the last days of their marriage.

> He never, in a way, matured. […] With me, he was completely the bully. I took constant abuse. And because I loved him so, and just couldn't admit, even to myself, that he was an utterly impossible person to live with, I kept on year after year kidding myself, thinking that if this was changed, or that was changed, he would be all right and we would be happy. […] It almost broke me. (Bigelow/ Monti 91/92)

"Gal Young Un" is the story of Mattie Syles, a middle-aged widow, who falls in love with Trax Colton, a *ne'er-do-well* stumbling onto her property, seeing a chance to make a comfortable home for himself. Mattie who had lived in isolation for a long time, hungers for emotional warmth and is an easy prey for the sweet-talking young man. Both find in the other what they have been missing in life so far: Mattie is able to leave behind a life in isolation, whereas Trax can rebuild his self-esteem and identity by exploiting Mattie's financial resources. Trax, abusing Mattie's emotional dependency on him, builds an illegal still on her property and makes her work the still while he strolls off to amuse himself. The story climaxes when Trax brings home Elly, his *gal young un*, with whom he obviously has an affair.

Throughout all of Rawlings's novels food plays a central role. She repeatedly uses food and the preparation thereof to express a character's love for something or someone else. Ma Baxter in *The Yearling*, for

example, uses food to express her affection for her son Jody (see 4.2.1.1), and in "Gal Young Un" food becomes a means to express the growing romance and substitutes the love-making of Mattie Syles and Trax Colton. In line with the familiar assumptions about a linkage between the consummation and abuses of food to psychological traumas of desolation and loneliness, Rawlings uses the subject in her fiction in the 1930s, "decades before modern scientists studied the phenomenon of food as a substitute for security and identity" (Yurick 91). Nutrition specialists have since long proven that food is an easy and quick source of comfort; however, food will not satisfy the emotional hunger for self-acceptance and love, it can only mask painful feelings. Rawlings's *Cross Creek Cookery* and the chapter "Our Daily Bread" in *Cross Creek* confirm the author's occupation with food and its psychological effects. "I hold the theory that the serving of good food is the one certain way of pleasing everybody. [Cookery] is my Achilles heel" (*CC* 215).

Mattie first meets Trax when he and an older hunter accidentally stumble across her property during a hunt; Rawlings underlines Mattie's isolation, describing her voice as "unused, like a rusty iron hinge" (GYU 149). Rawlings skillfully hints at Mattie's loneliness and thirst for company, giving food a sexual connotation. Mattie does not "quarrel" with the hunters as "women always did" (GYU 149) instead she invites them to still their thirst at her well. This highly unusual backwoods behavior is highlighted by Mattie's rushing into the house to bring out a "white china coffee cup" (GYU 149) for the men to drink from. Amanda Yurick points out that this gesture suggests Mattie's affluence as well as the fragility of her emotional need (Yurick 93). The older hunter waits for the cup whereas Trax "guzzled directly from the bucket" (GYU 149), foreshadowing his ego-centric behavior and his insensitivity for the needs of others. In obvious need for company, Mattie even feeds their dogs and invites the hunters to have dinner with her. "She projects her emotional hunger onto the hunters whom she believes will be physiologically hungry" (Yurick 93). Consciously, Mattie uses her generosity to manipulate others. On a different level Trax is as needy as Mattie. His masculinity is threatened by the other men of the community who see it as a sign of weakness that he needs a hunting companion to keep his directions. He sets out to prove his masculinity but

stumbles helplessly and lost on Mattie's property. In seeking out Mattie to "feed him" (GYU 151), his physical hunger mirrors her emotional needs and food becomes interchangeable with affection.

The meals Mattie and Trax share, mirror sexual encounters (Yurick 94), and Rawlings consciously uses expressions with a sexual connotation.

> When she came to him from the kitchen half an hour later, her face red with hurry. […] He walked to the kitchen with a roll, sprawling his long legs under the table. […] The woman served him lavishly. […] His gluttony delighted her. His mouth was full, bent low over his heaped plate. […] She sat down opposite him, wiping back the wet gray hair from her forehead. (GYU 152)

Trax's ego-centric needs are satisfied and he refuses to listen to the tales Mattie would like to share. Mattie, however, is mesmerized by his tall tales of boot-legging and city life. Storytelling, another of Rawlings's devices for characterization (see 4.2.3), is used to underline their different way of life. When Trax leaves, Mattie is unable to recognize his ill intentions and becomes even more aware of her loneliness and isolation.

Bellman's interpretation of Mattie and Trax's relationship is that of a mother-son relationship which seems to be too simplistic for a story as complex as "Gal Young Un." However, it is true that Mattie's 'motherly' care strengthens Trax and weakens herself. This becomes most visible when Trax, early in their marriage, complains about breakfast. Although there is plenty of food on the table, Mattie hurries to prepare bacon; "she was miserable because she had not fried bacon and he wanted it" (GYU 159). Like a stubborn child, Trax refuses to have any after all, having already stilled his hunger with the rest of the food. Throughout the story, food becomes entangled in a power struggle. "The rejection of the bacon is Trax's rejection of Mattie; he needs her no longer" (Yurick 96).

Food is a symbol for Mattie's love for Trax. "It is the most vital interaction the couple ever has" (Yurick 98). When Trax brings home Elly and asks Mattie to feed her, she feels betrayed and refuses to do so. "She thought, 'I cain't do sich as that.' 'I'll not wait on her, nor no other woman'" (GYU 169). Elly, who is materially and emotionally needy, wisely refuses to eat, sensing the stress Mattie puts on food. Forced by Trax to serve Elly, Mattie capitulates and tries to convince herself that "'cornbread an' bacon's got nothin' to do with it'" (GYU 169).

"Gal Young Un" is a modern fairy tale in which Rawlings consciously reverses the traditional (happy) ending. "Gal Young Un" is an open critique of patriarchy and

> exhibits a basic characteristic of current feminist theory: it involves the contesting of natural attitudes, the challenging of agreed definitions – definitions which feminists have long recognized to be an integral aspect of the oppression of women in this society. (Boyd, "Cinderella" 1/2)

The story opens in the traditional sense, describing Mattie's homestead and the remoteness of it. As usual, Rawlings's setting is the Florida backwoods but here, she describes a faraway, mythic place, chooses a utopian setting the reader would find in a fairy tale. Mattie's hammock is transformed into an enchanted fantasy land, in which house and proprietor seem to interact and 'physically' resemble each other.

> The woman who gave them water from her well when the nearby branch was dry looked to them like the house, tall and bare and lonely, weathered gray, like its unpainted cypress. She seemed forgotten. (GYU 148)

To direct the reader's attention to the fact that "Gal Young Un" should be understood as a modern fairy tale, Rawlings inserts symbols which are common in fairy tales. One device in many fairy tales is the mirror or looking glass. Rawlings uses the voice of the looking glass to begin the story's plot. Soon after Mattie has met Trax for the first time, she looks into the mirror and is immediately transformed.

> An impulse took her to the mirror where he had smoothed his hair, as though it would bring him within her vision again. She saw herself completely for the first time in many years. Isolation had taken the meaning from age. She had forgotten until this moment that she was no longer young. (GYU 154)

The key message in this paragraph is undoubtedly that Mattie saw herself 'completely;' from this moment on, she sees herself as Trax sees her. Through the looking glass, Trax is able to control Mattie, having cast a spell on her.

> She understood sometimes – when she wakened with a clear mind in the middle of the night – that something strange had happened to her. She was moving in a delirium, like the haze of malaria when the fever was on. (GYU 157)

Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar have shown that in traditional fairytales the voice of the looking glass is a patriarchal voice (Gilbert/Gubar 38). Under the spell of patriarchy, Mattie loses her strength, her identity and her sense of self. Trax is now able to manipulate her and abuse her generosity. Through Mattie's loss of identity, he regains his patriarchal manhood, self-esteem and begins to dominate her and her land. Only upon Trax bringing home his *gal young un*, Mattie slowly awakens from her "drugged sleep" (GYU 171). Rawlings transforms the process of waking up, which in most fairy tales is only a brief moment, into a long journey out of alienation. Slowly Mattie realizes that Trax had never been the 'noble prince' (or *New Man*), she thought he was; she begins to realize "that she had been thrown in on the deal, like an old mare traded in with a farm" (GYU 166). The desperate exclamation "'What else did I have he'd want anyway!'" (GYU 166) emphasizes the loss of her sense of self. However, insidiously, she regains her former strength and wakes up from her drugged sleep.

> She spoke to them as she would to Negro field hands. Trax stared at her. He herded Elly nervously ahead of him, as though to protect her from an obscure violence. Matt watched them, standing solidly on big feet. She had not been whole. She had charred herself against the man's youth and beauty. Her hate was healthful. It waked her from a drugged sleep, and stirred faculties hurt and long unused. (GYU 171)

It is ironic that Rawlings chooses to let Mattie speak 'like she would speak to Negro field hands;' it is still Mattie herself who, imprisoned by the spell, is the one who serves Trax and his young mistress.

Rawlings deliberately reduced the characters of the story to enable Mattie to be both, a good and bad stepmother. Trax's transformation into the dominating patriarch could however be anticipated from the beginning. His self-righteous comments and his conviction that it was "''bout time somebody was fixin' to marry all that, goin' to waste'" (GYU 146) disqualifies him as the 'prince' in a fairytale. Further on, Trax also exploits Elly, bringing her home for the sole reason that Mattie "romp[s] on the girl," (GYU 146) flees, leaving her house to him. Being aware of Mattie's dependency on him and by choosing a very young girl as his mistress, he is able to manipulate both women and successfully sets them against each other.

In her arrangement of the story as a modern fairytale, Rawlings borrows another traditional 'Cinderella symbol:' the shoe. Upon forcing Elly to wear high-heeled shoes, Trax 'disguises' her, and Mattie cannot but recognize her as a potential rival. The shoes are a symbol for beauty and youth and they literally "absorb Matt's attention" (GYU 167). Trax successfully transforms Elly into an object of his personal lust, reminding her at several occasions to put the high-heeled slippers on for him (GYU 168).

Having recognized Elly as a potential rival, Mattie transforms into the bad stepmother. Like the queen in Snow-White, she tries to resume her old role and get rid of her rival. Mattie deprives Elly of food, refuses to let her decorate the house with flowers and even denies her the sympathy of the cat (GYU 172). However, Mattie's unfriendly behavior has no effect on Elly; she seems to be unable to understand the complexity of their relationship. Although Rawlings hints at Elly's innocence, Mattie does not perceive her as a child. She mistakes her childish behavior for stupidity and nastiness.

Diverging from the traditional fairy tale pattern, Rawlings does not make Elly the rising heroine of the story but Mattie. Although female bonding is difficult in a patriarchal environment, Rawlings refrains from condemning the queen, or Mattie, and instead condemns Trax. As soon as Trax loses interest in Elly, he stays away from the hammock for long periods of time. In his absence, Mattie is able to regain her sense of self and in an act of liberation, destroys Trax's still and newly-bought car, a symbol of his manhood. In this final scene of female liberation, Rawlings repeatedly uses the house, which in the beginning of the story had looked old and weathered gray, to characterize Mattie. "She towered over him. The tall house towered over him. He was as alien as on the bright day when he had first come hunting here" (GYU 180).

Upon chasing Trax away, Mattie ironically shoots him in the shoe/foot. Having been blinded by Elly's shoes, she ends his spell and reduces Trax to nothingness. In a childlike attempt, Trax asks Mattie for directions to town (GYU 180) and is reduced to the helpless man he was at the outset of the story. The moment Trax leaves the hammock, Mattie "was strong and whole. She was fixed, deep-rooted as the pine trees. They leaned

a little, bent by an ancient storm. Nothing more could move them" (GYU 181).

Upon chasing Elly off her property, Mattie realizes her complicity in Trax's patriarchal act. She finally recognizes the abused child in her and acknowledges her guilt in her passivity. With Trax gone and the spell undone, both women are able to bond, making space for mental and physical healing. Mattie helps Elly to put off "them crazy shoes," (GYU 183), a symbol of Elly's abuse and provides her with the shelter of her house. Gilbert and Gubar argue that the house is often used as a symbol for the mother's womb (Gilbert/Gubar 87); by inviting Elly into her house, Elly is transferred back into the save environment of the pre-Oedipal phase, her missing childhood. "Gal Young Un" is a critique of the patriarchal society of Rawlings's time, and the story underlines the author's devotion to the female voice in her literature; it shows her as a critical spirit who for once *dared* to 'fictionally' criticize society's prevailing gender roles.

1.1.1.3 "This is Truly a Man's Kind Of Humor!" The "Quincey Dover Stories"

The QD[2] stories show a whole different facet of Rawlings's writing ability, namely her mastery of the comical genre. Besides "Benny and the Bird Dogs" (1933), "Varmints" (1936) and "Cocks must Crock" (1939), "Fish, Fry and Fireworks" (1967), which were published posthumously, and "Donny Get Your Gun" - which is mentioned in a letter to Maxwell Perkins but for which no manuscript has ever been found – count among the QD series. Perkins wanted her to write a whole volume of QD stories but this project remained unfulfilled. Rawlings uses Southern humor extensively which got her into trouble quite a few times. At a party in St. Augustine, she once put a silk stocking in her friend's coat pocket. The 'victim' – writer James B. Cabell – walked around, greeting the guests with the stocking dangling from his coat (Bigelow, *Frontier Eden* 296). Cabell was not as amused as Rawlings and she had to write a letter of excuse in order for him

[2] QD = Quincey Dover

to forgive her. The QD stories underline Rawlings's capacity as a 'reader's writer.' The stories were extremely popular, not only with the reading public but also with other writers of her time. Cabell was "head over heels in love with Quincey Dover" (Silverthorn 177), and Robert Frost, who was a frequent visitor at Rawlings's Cross Creek home, considered himself as "Quincey Dover's greatest fan" (Bigelow, *Frontier Eden* 35). If one is to believe the rangers of the Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings State Historic Site, Frost is reported to have fallen off a chair on Rawlings's porch while reading "Benny and the Bird Dogs." Rawlings took special pride in the fact that Frost cornered people to read the stories aloud to them, treasuring the "man's kind of humor in all Dover stories" (Bigelow, *Frontier Eden* 35).

The stories are narrated by Quincey Dover, "a philosophical Cracker woman who weighs almost three hundred pounds (Silverthorn 93). In an unpublished letter, Rawlings says of Quincey Dover that "'She is of course *me*,' if I had been born in the Florida backwoods and weighed nearly three hundred pounds" (Silverthorn 174)! Although McLaughlin believes that "Rawlings's claim is not so much a statement of identity as it is a statement of difference" (McLaughlin 41), Quincey Dover is Rawlings's mouthpiece. In "Cocks Must Crow" Quincey literally summarizes Rawlings's literary concept:

> Now I got to put this together the best way I can. I ain't like them story writers can make a tale come out as even as a first-prize patchwork quilt. Life ain't slick like a story, no-way. I got to remember this, and remember that, and when I'm done it'll make sense. (CMC 256)

Taken as a series, the QD stories show Rawlings's exaltation in satire and irony; they are examples of her ability to convey a message by appealing to the reader's comedic spirit and most importantly, they are her most 'fictional' texts. In many respects Quincey Dover is Rawlings's version of Chaucer's *Wife of Bath*. They both manage situations by realizing that overt control is impossible (Tarr, *Short Stories* 12). The omni-present *sujet* of all stories is that "man-nature is man-nature and a woman's a fool to interfere" (CMC 254). Irony and satire is enhanced by colorful Cracker speech and frontier wisdom. Of all Florida stories the QD stories indulge most in local color. Rawlings deliberately writes in the tradition of the frontier tall tale

and concentrates on the use of nature similes. Extensively, Quincey explains nearly every thing in terms of another.

> Lurking behind this comparison, though, are the suggestions that the two things being compared are different and that the one thing is difficult to know and so must be approached in terms of the other thing, something else that is understood. (McLaughlin 42)

Quincey draws almost exclusively on nature for her comparisons, the 'medium' she best understands as a Cracker frontier woman. She compares Benny Mathers to "a mischievous little old billy-goat" (BBD 199), Luty Higgenbotham to "a hound dog at noon in August" (V 227) and herself to "an alligator watching for a shote he knows comes to the water" (CMC 260).

In "Benny and the Bird Dogs," the first of the QD stories, animals function as metaphors for people; "Varmints," the second story, uses similes interchangeably; human qualities are ascribed to animals. Quincey's 'victim' is Snort, a mule, the main characters Luty and Jim purchased together. In Snort, a "droop-eared, sway-backed, wise-looking, tobaccy-chewing, rum-drinking mule" (V 237), Quincey is sure to recognize human character traits.

> 'Luty,' I said, 'the creetur ain't natural.' The mule looked at me then. Iffen you'll notice, most animals don't look much at persons. But this mule looked at me, and I knowed I was looked at. Then he looked off again, chewing vigorous. He'd done forgot me, studying on whatever 'tis mules studies on. Then it come to me. He was knowing. That was it. He was knowing. He had a human kind of look, blest if he didn't. (V 230-231)

In "Cocks Must Crow" Quincey is meditating on the relationship to her husband Will. Whereas men are generally compared to varmints in the first two stories, "Cocks Must Crow" builds up its plot around the comparison of men to cocks. In her third QD story, Rawlings elaborates the use of similes. Quincey's observation is now

> filtered through a human-being centered framework for understanding the world. Her efforts to understand people through comparison to animals is not structured in a binary opposition but in a circle in which human characteristics pass through animals and are applied to people again or in a mirror in which humans look at nature but see their own reflections. (McLaughlin 44)

Good storytelling does not require a complex plot; it is in the way the story is told. Quincey's stories do not have complicated plot structures, containing only a handful of characters and the messages to convey are hinted at from the beginning. In "Benny and the Bird Dogs" the first sentence already anticipates the message of the whole story: "You can't change a man no-ways" (BBD 198) and if you try - like the Old Hen (Benny's wife) did - you will be "hornswoggled" (BBD 198). The same pattern is applicable to "Varmints."

> There's no woman in the State of Florida has got more patience with varmint in a man than me. It's in his blood, just like a woman has got a little snake and a mite of cat. A man's borned varminty and he dies varminty, and when the preacher asks do we believe our great-great-granddaddys was monkeys, I can't scarcely keep from standing up and saying, 'Brother, a good ways back, I figure things was a heap worse mixed up than monkeys.' (V 226)

The secret success of the QD stories lies in Quincey's 'natural' understanding of the world and her distinctive sense of her 'invisible' audience.

The pervading theme of Quincey's narratives is a fatalistic interpretation of what is 'natural' and 'on-natural,' meaning not normal. In "Cocks Must Crow" Quincey believes that "them fool roosters is following their nature. They're having them some kind of good time" (CMC 267). In "Benny and the Bird Dogs" she tells the Old Hen not to complain about Benny's 'roaming:' "I tell you what's in a man's nature you can't change" (BBD 215). In "Varmints" Quincey is convinced that Snort is an on-natural mule because he is unable to "learn Christian ways" and "plow a field without sashaying like a square dancer" (V 234). Quincey relies on a fatalistic idea of the natural, she firmly believes that people cannot change and so should be accepted as they are. She believes the world to be represented but is actually looking at her own reflections (McLaughlin 47). Her faith in the validity of her statements is elemental to the stories' comical touch. The "Quincey Dover Stories" best portray Rawlings as a connoisseur of the Cracker vernacular. Modeled on the frontier tall tale, her characters are grotesque but not ridiculed; they appear "humanly believable" (Bigelow, *Frontier Eden* 114).

> These comic stories are a major literary accomplishment, good enough to be placed beside the best of Ring Lardner or Faulkner or other American writers of this [former] century who have followed Mark Twain's lead in using folk narration. (Bigelow, *Frontier Eden* 116)

Rawlings's achievement is even more impressive considering that she had to learn the Cracker dialect, not being a 'native' Floridian.

Taken together, Rawlings's collections of short stories received almost unanimously positive reviews. The *Atlantic Monthly* classified her as "'one of the two or three *sui generis* storytellers we have'" (Silverthorn 181), and the *Boston Herald* wrote that "'if there were a Pulitzer Award for short story collections, this [*When the Whippoorwill*] would win it'" (Silverthorn 181). The *New Yorker* review equated her writing with that of Mark Twain, arguing that both "'share the gift of double vision: the ability to keep one eye on a local patch of earth and the other on human beings in general'" (Silverthorn 181). Most recently, in 1993, James Dickey praised Rawlings's short fiction as timeless, enjoyable literature. "The stories engage us today much as they did readers in the thirties. We never knew how much we needed them until we got them. And we have them now, thank God" (Tarr, *Short Stories* cover).

1.2 Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings's Literary *Landscapes*

Having Left Cities Behind Me

Now, having left cities behind me, turned
Away forever from the strange, gregarious
Huddling of men by stones, I find those various
Great towns I knew fused into one, burned
Together in the fire of my despising.
And I recall of them only those things
Irrelevant to cities; murmurings
Of rain and wind; moons setting and suns rising.

There was a church spire on a distant hill
Clamorous with birds by day and stars by night,
Devout and singing. I have forgot its sire –
Boston, or Rochester, or Louisville –
Of a certain city all I can remember
Its wild ducks flying southward in November.
- Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings[3]

Regional literature(s) usually have been misread, underestimated and ignored by literary critics, 'canon makers' and university textbooks. However, fairly recently, the "dreamy spinster-lady of the nineteenth century" (Foote 38) and its 1930s counterpart enjoy "a renaissance in interest" (Kowalewski 9), increasing popularity and a boasting readership; bookstores all over the country stocked local authors and books on local culture, history and nature while at the same time university courses focus on the (re)-discovery of well-known, marginalized and contemporary artists writing about and of place. At the beginning of the twenty-first century, approximately one-hundred years after the first surge of regionalism and local color, with today's repetitious suburban neighborhoods, shopping malls and fast food chains, regionalism is celebrating its 'third' resurgence. This homogenized American landscape results in what Barry Lopez has termed "false geographies" (quoted in Kowalewski 10), a stereotyped and predefined idea of what place is or should be, alienating man from experiencing landscapes and nature.

Besides the dominating role of the marketplace in the recent success story of regional literature(s) - which will be used as a very inclusive term - Charles Crow lists "the re-evaluation of the canon of American literatures" (Crow 1). Crow's recent *Companion to the Regional Literatures of America* (2003) is in itself a very inclusive study of regional writing, containing articles on the two major streams of the regional movement in the end of the nineteenth and beginning twentieth centuries. It also includes 'place-based writings' by Native Americans and other folk or indigenous cultures as well as the boundless field of environmental literature and ecocriticism. The process of re-evaluating the American literary canon began in the 1960s, a time where existing assumptions were questioned in favor of a more inclusive approach of literature. As a result, many undervalued and long-ignored writers were re-discovered or, as Crow writes, "unearthed" (Crow 1). Regional writing had further on registered in the public mind as "inherently minor, an art of the miniature, the commonplace, the local, and often the feminine" (Crow 1). Feminist analytic challenged the general assumption that women's regional writings were primarily concerned with the private life and were considered inferior to the universal stories of adventure, national consciousness or exploration. Judith Fetterley, Marjorie Pryse, Sandra Zagarell, to name but a few, analyze to what extent regionalism provides a useful minority mentality, a way of reflecting on society and its dominant values, trying to uncover the story of 'colonized' people(s) who – in regional texts – are most often defined as *natives* to a specific place. However, it must be noted that 'valuable' regional writing is "less about a place than *of* it" (Kowalewski 7); Michael Kowalewski uses the analytic of the new field of ecocriticism, writing that an author's "central nervous system [must be] immersed in the local ecology, subcultures, hidden history, and spoken idioms of a given location" (Kowalewski 7) in order to be able to write *of* place.

Although contemporary regional literature(s), including many re-discovered texts, provide space for a valuable discussion and analysis, regionalism - in general - still suffers a poor reputation. The often too rapid condemnation of the genre partly derives from the nineteenth century

[3] Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings, "Having Left Cities Behind Me," *Scribner's Magazine* 98 (1935): 246.

conception of 'local color' which regards regionalist writers as provincials and "isolated selves" (Kowalewski 17) concerned exclusively with the depiction of their locale. Writing from the *marginal landscapes* – if contemplated from the cities and "centers of commerce and culture" (Kowalewski 13) - regional art has registered in the public mind as the embodiment of T. J. Jackson Lears's "antimodernism" (quoted in Kowalewski 13). In the middle of the twentieth century, regionalism served to satisfy the increasing urban population's yearning for the countryside; in times of immigration, imperialism and nation-building (Foote 30), the region as "'knowable communit[y]'" (Foote 29), turned into a referent for nostalgia and kinship to one's roots. Moving away from "too much city and too much big business" (Bigelow, *Frontier Eden* 71), it turned to the *land* for intense experiential authenticity. The contributions by regionalist writers have therefore long been imaginatively connected to the cliché of local small-scale presses and uncritical recognition. Before their publications made it into the elite national magazines, regional writings were found in penny-press publications and local newspapers. During the nineteenth century tall tales and dialect sketches - similar to Rawlings's first writings in Florida - were largely attributed to the category of regionalism. However, by the early twentieth century, regionalism developed into a mouthpiece for authors writing about the indigenous American folk, who were threatened by American nationalizing tendencies and endangered of disappearing. Despite regionalism's interest in the contributions of varied non-normative groups and 'multi-culturalism,' the genre has paradoxically registered as monotonous, static, predictable and as a literary category of "relatively narrow interests" (Fetterley/Pryse, *Writing Out Of Place* 37). Critics have often dismissed regionalism, mistaking the aesthetic form of the genre for its contents. "In other words, critics have taken regionalism at its word as a genre that deals with merely local and regional concerns" (Foote 27).

Regionalism can be contemplated as a counterweight to an upcoming "monolithic national literary tradition" (Foote 26). By the time Rawlings strove for recognition, in the middle of the twentieth century, regionalism was closely connected with people, who were themselves marginalized or "outside of the normative category of American readers and writers" (Foote 27); women, indigenous folk or provincials were among those who

registered in the public mind as dissidents and aligned in their 'difference' and 'otherness.' In this, regionalism was innovative and one of the first American literary genres to negotiate bicultural identities and a multidimensional vision of the land. These writers embraced America's regional variety as "internally complex" places, "including within them their own secret or suppressed histories of racial or ethnic difference" (Foote 37). They depicted social difference, various complex subcultures, performing the important work of supplementing "the official story of what counted as American by providing 'unofficial' histories of the nation's inhabitants" (Foote 38). Challenging a homogenous and coherent definition of Americans and America itself, regionalism resisted cultural assimilation and anonymity; it is therefore not astonishing that Stephanie Foote marks as regionalism's "most powerful cultural work […] the culturalization of difference itself" (Foote 39). Regionalism's recent changing critical reception is mostly due to contemporary interdisciplinary studies in the field of 'place-based writing,' centering on the above mentioned new theories. In the beginning of the twenty-first century, regionalism is again a vantage point for contemporary cultural work and national literary traditions.

> Specifically, the question of identity and cultural difference links late twentieth-century literature to its nineteenth-century predecessor. Like the late nineteenth century, the late twentieth century was troubled by claims for recognition on the part of figures who have been seen as 'alien' or as somehow minor. (Foote 39)

It is one of regionalism's myriad paradoxes that it is today newly involved in the social contests of the nation although it still is connected to conservatism and antimodernism.

Regional stories build on hierarchies and binary structures, such as local-global, vernacular-higher literature, folk-civilization, nation-region, or community-individualism[4]; indeed, regionalism could be understood as a literary category in which marginalization and 'otherness/difference' has a positive connotation. Writing from "internal colonies" (Pryse, *Writing Out Of The Gap* 22), many regionalists were able to develop what W.E.B. Du Bois has termed a 'double consciousness' which they used to pass between two cultural worlds. It is this specific perspective, the "cultural gap" (Pryse,

[4] Cf. Val Plumwood, *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature* (1993).

Writing Out Of The Gap 19) that Marjorie Pryse discusses in her essay "Writing Out Of The Gap." It is "the story of the marginalized 'other,' written from the regions with a standpoint consciously defined against the dominant reading of 'others,'" (Pryse, *Writing Out Of The Gap* 25) that these writers embody in their works.

> The dominant reading, explicit or implicit in the texts of regionalism, and epitomized in part by the 'local color' approach to writing about regional characters, views persons and assigns them value (or devalues them) according to hierarchical cultural discourses about gender, class, race, age, physical ability, and marital status as well as region. Within the texts of regionalism, however, narrators and regional characters resist this dominant reading, muting its silencing effect, and teach readers how to approach 'others' differently. (Pryse, *Writing Out Of The Gap* 25)

A feminist epistemology and analytic is especially valuable in the exposure of these "dominant cultural narratives" (Fetterley/Pryse, *Writing Out Of The Gap* 25). Often confused with local color or classified as a subgenre of realism, regionalism has often been portrayed as the feminized version of these more 'serious' and well-acknowledged 'master genres.' During the nineteenth century, critics divided literary history in terms of gender, class or race; especially, women's local color writing was devalued as a mere preservation of the local material, turning it into the "literary version of the housework of realism" (Foote 33). It was this exact (mis)classification of regionalism that made it a vantage point for the rediscovery by feminist literary critics.

For women writers, especially, regionalism had a liberating effect and is heavily laden with emotional intensity. The desire for authentic expression was supported by regionalism which provided a platform on which to market 'otherness' and their selves. Autobiographical details, reflections and whole life stories are therefore frequently found in regional texts, as the example of Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings's Florida writings underline. Through their deep involvement in the material of their writing - be it the autobiographical self that is reflected, the locale that has catapulted them into the national spotlight, or a marginalized 'group' with whom they aligned in otherness – regionalists tend to create a close relationship to their audience. The regional writer tries to establish an affective tie between the reader and the material they identify with and "build readers into [their]

texts as collaborators in the practice of revaluing" (Pryse, *Writing Out Of The Gap* 32) the story of the marginalized; "this 'reading couple' [becomes] a part of regionalism's textuality" (Pryse, *Writing Out Of The Gap* 33). Rawlings opens a door into a 'different' world, providing glimpses into a culture that is interconnected with nature and its local environs, thereby inviting the reader to think about alternative concepts of lifestyle, provoking a "close reading" (Pryse, *Writing Out Of The Gap* 32), attention to dialect and the smallest detail of cultural peculiarity and particularity.

Regionalism both creates and is defined by a feminist analytic. Cecilia Tichi writes in her essay "Women Writers and the New Woman" that

> [u]nder cover of regionalism, however, these women writers explored the territory of women's lives. […] They were regionalists – but not solely in the ways critics have conventionally thought. The geography of America formed an important part of their work, but essentially they charted the regions of women's lives, regions both without and within the self. (Tichi 598)

Regionalism offers Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings a space in which she was able to analyze and critique the constructions and operations of the prevalent patriarchal ideology in the American society of her time. At Cross Creek, her physical and spiritual safe-haven, she was able to create in analogy to Virginia Woolf 'a room of one's own;' financially and mentally independent, she created highly subjective subtexts which remain, on first sight, hidden within a detailed depiction of nature and the local. The region or, to be more specific, the location of place reflects the "situatedness" (Fetterley/Pryse, *Writing Out Of Place* 37) of women. The land turns into a discursive and conceptual framework, allowing a 'sheltered' female subjectivity.

As stated above, Rawlings's Florida regionalism has much in common with the writings of other women regionalists (Cather, Austin) during the end of the nineteenth century. However, she was also influenced by literary streams and cultural developments of her time. The second wave of regionalism was much more informed by research on folklore and indigenous cultures. However, trying to find an "'accommodating middle ground'" (Dorman 59) between the modern world and traditional folkways, regionalists concentrated very much on means to safeguard these 'frontier

remnants' from total dissolution and extinction. The nation's introspective moment was enriched by the Federal Writer's Project which "sought to narrate a lively journey that would unearth the hidden histories and unique characters of each state and serve as an indispensable tool for both historians and traveler" (Coats/Farooq 83). These chapters of the nation's "first autobiography" (Coats/Farooq 83) tried to place regional self-awareness within the larger introspection of the nation. With modernization and the dying of the early settlers, oral storytelling and a way of life dependent on direct contact with nature, turned into depreciated tradition. The sense of loss, found in Rawlings's work as well as the revelation of many Americas, (the rise of multiculturalism and contributions by minority cultures) is typical of the literary climate of her time. Although many writers feared the transformation from an authentic, lively cultural element into a lifeless artifact, many writers (especially from the left) thought that modernism's obsession with form was expendable and self-righteous at the time of the Great Depression. "Portraying art for art's sake in such a time, stated Diego Rivera in 1932, served 'to limit the use of art as a revolutionary weapon'" (Coats/Farooq 85). Rawlings's missionary drive to portray and 'save' the Cracker culture from eternal invisibility is reminiscent in Rivera's statement.

The regionalism of the interwar years emphasized the heterogeneity of the American nation and placed it in the center of their analysis. However, the cliché and standardized writings of many writers during this time had the opposite effect, namely homogenizing the 'folk.' Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings, for example, criticized Erkskine Caldwell for his monotonous depiction of the poor-whites in the South; Rawlings, however, disapproved of a depiction of the Florida poor-whites without further differentiating, "held up naked […] for the gaze of the curious" (Rawlings, 1944, 384); instead, she incorporated them into her literature as individual voices. Benjamin Botkin, who – like Rawlings – was interested in overcoming the strict line of division between literature and anthropology, believed that the regional writer "was to 'live the life of the people he writes about […] not as an interpreter, but a voice, their voice, which is now his own'" (Coats/Farooq 87). However, it is important to note that the interwar regionalism paradoxically relied on the marginalization of the folk.

> The objective of regionalist representation in this era, it seems, was to maintain a subtle play between the emphasis on difference, on the one hand, as a means of keeping racial and socioeconomic hierarchies in place, and an erasure of difference, on the other hand, as a means of codifying and preserving stereotypes – thereby keeping these 'threatened' (and threatening) personalities at a safe distance from 'mainstream' white society. (Coats/ Farooq 88)

Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings's use of the 'region' is defined by her special sense of place, or Topophilia; she entered a symbiotic relationship with Cross Creek and especially with the Florida Scrub, resembling the intimate tie Native Americans have to the land. The unique culture of the Florida Cracker – with its folk beliefs, myths and traditional storytelling - entered her texts. It is a mixture of authenticity and myth that enriches all of her books and stories and provides the tension for her texts.

Rawlings's regionalist sensibility is also apparent in the close interconnection between the geographical location and her own positionality as a woman in American society. In their study on women regionalists Fetterley and Pryse speak of landscapes which lack "social inscription[s]" and any "sustenance for life" (Fetterley/Pryse, *Writing Out Of Place* 38). These 'blanks' "provide a space for the construction of meaning" for these women regionalists (Fetterley/Pryse, *Writing Out Of Place* 38); the very sparseness and inaccessibility of the Scrub region serves Rawlings as a referent. Region and writer become mutually self-defining.

> As landscapes of deprivation and blankness, they could be read as emblematic of the situation of women in patriarchal culture and particularly of those women who find themselves most at odds with the identity scripted by such a culture for them. (Fetterley/Pryse, *Writing Out Of Place* 38)

Through the move to the Creek and through the remoteness of her Cracker hamlet, she comes to consciousness. In 1943, one year after the publication of her auto/ecobiography of *Cross Creek*, her most personal Florida novel, Zelma Cason, a long-term friend of the writer filed a lawsuit, claiming to a right of privacy. Cason was a temperamental woman and had her finger constantly on the pulse of life in Cross Creek and Island Grove; however, Cason was also sensitive, vain about her true age (misstating it at several occasions) and obviously hurt by what Rawlings had written about her in *Cross Creek*. These are the words that so ignited Zelma Cason's temper:

> Zelma is an ageless spinster resembling an angry and efficient canary. She manages her orange grove and as much of the village and county as needs management or will submit to it. I cannot decide whether she should have been a man or a mother. She combines the more violent characteristics of both and those who ask for or accept her manifold ministrations think nothing of being cursed loudly at the very instant of being tenderly fed, clothed, nursed or guided through their troubles. (*CC* 56)

The lawsuit included a libel claim which was later dismissed, and the claim to a right of privacy, a claim, the State of Florida did not recognize at that time. An autobiographical work had never been sued by claiming invasion to privacy. Therefore the lawsuit was a gamble right from the beginning but Cason had found a determined young lawyer, Kate Walton, and took the risk. Walton was one of the first women to graduate from Law School at the University of Florida and had served in court when women could not even be on juries in Florida. The lawsuit lasted five long years and included two appeals to the Florida Supreme Court and even more important, it changed Florida's legal history (Acton 132). For the most part the case was sensational and a great strain to Rawlings. Philip May, her lawyer and friend, numerously urged her to settle the case, but for Rawlings a vital principle was at stake, the right of free speech. Although Cason won on the paper, she failed to prove that she suffered any damages as a result of the invasion and therefore Rawlings was ordered to pay only one dollar, the court costs amounting to $ 1,050.10 (Bigelow, *Frontier Eden* 44) and the much higher legal fees.

Although unanimously all of her Cracker neighbors and friends testified on her behalf, the magic moment of the symbiosis between her and her Creek backwoods hamlet had passed. The trial ended her writing career in Florida; it generated doubt concerning the basis of her creativity, made her distrust her intuition, questioned nature as a referent for her writing, overthrew her conviction that her art had a deeper use or *sense,* and it degraded her own sense of self which she had dared to express in *Cross Creek*. Having lost her identity, the stories following the trial depict alienated women, who seem to be lost in society and without a place to which they *belong*. *The Sojourner* is Rawlings's last novel. It took her six strenuous years to finish, years full of pain (Maxwell Perkins's death)

alcohol abuse and marriage strains (with her second husband Norton Baskin). In the end, the book lacked the symbiotic bond of the writer and the material which had enriched her Florida writings. During the last months of the creation of *The Sojourner*, Rawlings suffered a coronary heart attack, a warning she did not take seriously. Despite the spurning evidence of mental and physical fatigue, she plunged into her last project, a biography about her friend and fellow writer Ellen Glasgow. She never got beyond the note taking stage. On December 14, 1953 Rawlings died at her cottage in Crescent Beach, near St. Augustine. All her Florida writings reflect an intimate connection between the consciousness of the narrator and the physical wilderness and its indigenous residents; through them she defined herself, healed and achieved literary success. "And after long years of spiritual homelessness, of nostalgia, here is that mystic loveliness of childhood again. Here is home. An old thread, long tangled, comes straight again" (*CC* 277). At the moment this mystic thread was abruptly cut, Rawlings becomes the mirror image of her fictional Floridian characters; having "lost touch with the Creek" (*CC* 354) lead to the loss of her literary voice, her identity and ultimately even her life.

1.3 The Enchantment of Cross Creek: Topophilia, Spiritual Healing and (De)colonization

Topophilia is the affective bond between people and place or setting.
- Yi-Fu Tuan

Despite its role as the bedrock of oppressive ideologies, nature has also been a space of feminist possibility, an always saturated but somehow undomesticated space.
- Stacy Alaimo

When Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings first set foot in her orange grove at Cross Creek, it was love at first sight; she was immediately enchanted by the lush natural environment surrounding the shabby farmhouse and was overwhelmed by a deep sense of beauty.

> When I came to the Creek, and knew the old grove and farmhouse at once as home, there was some terror, such as one feels in the first recognition of a human love, for the joining of person to place, as of person to person, is a commitment to shared sorrow, even as to shared joy. (*CC* 17)

Rawlings's emotional response to the Florida backwoods region varies from "visual, aesthetic appreciation to bodily contact" (Tuan, *Topophilia* 92), resonating very well the complex conception of Yi-Fu Tuan's neologism Topophilia. In his humanist geographic study, Yi-Fu Tuan defines Topophilia as "the human being's affective ties with the material environment" (Tuan, *Topophilia* 93), an immense sensory stimuli that "couples sentiment with place" (Tuan, *Topophilia* 113). Rawlings's love for and absorption with her Cracker hamlet inspired her to *weave* an autobiographical (sub)text of personal loss but also of spiritual healing into the depiction of and reflection upon a variable (non)human 'other.' By *writing the external other*, "by working to understand [herself] primarily in relation to the nonhuman world around [her], [she] learn[s] ways of responding that teach [her] how to re-envision [her] own past" (Allister 1).

Despite its obvious and intimate connection to imperialism, the terms 'decolonization,' 'colonization,' 'the colonial subject' or simply 'colonialism' have become catchphrases that have served in Western humanism and philosophy as universalized descriptors of subjectivity; however, at the same time, these idioms are susceptible to oversimplification and essentialism. Thereby, a complete 'decolonization'

remains a feminist utopia. The (De) in brackets expresses this impossibility, underlined by Rawlings's conscious decision to ban subjectivity into the subtext or write the self through/in relation to a (non)human 'other.' "Participation in, through representation of, privileged narratives can secure cultural recognition for the subject" (Smith/Watson, *De/colonizing the Subject* xix). Fearing 'public' literary rejection, Rawlings complies, entering a vexing compromise that led to psychological fatigue and alienation.

> You put your finger on one very true thing – that I am afraid of a complete giving – and there is surely some simple reason for that. Or is there? It seems to me that there is something endemic in withdrawal for the writer. How else would the work get done? (Bigelow/Monti 291)

Despite the "comprehensive invocation of the concept of colonization" (Smith/Watson, *De/colonizing the Subject* xiv), the term corresponds accurately, depicting the reciprocal bond between gender and genre. Throughout her Florida writings, Rawlings integrates place "as a fourth category of analysis into the framework of an extended feminist theory which employs a race, class and gender analysis" (Plumwood, *Feminism* 2). The Florida narratives consolidate Rawlings's 'colonization' as a woman and female artist with the region's status as 'colony' within the nation-state and its dominant literary streams. As a literary 'blank,' Florida does not stand out as a well-known source of literature drawing on place. Rather, such landscapes as New England or the American West have been popularized and immortalized in literature. Inspired by a deep sense of loss, Rawlings developed a missionary drive to bring the unique cultural group of the Florida Cracker and the Scrub region to national consciousness, trying to capture the last remnants of this forgotten and dying culture; relating her own situatedness or 'colonization' as a (woman) writer with that of the 'colonized' cultural group, she – intuitively - *writes* her own 'decolonization.' 'Colony' and 'Colonized' become interdependent, rising to national prominence and entering the 'public realm' as one.

Experiencing Florida nature and absorbing the Cracker culture, Rawlings becomes a part of her landscape. Distancing herself from the typical American frontier myth of rugged individualism and domination of the land, she conceives herself as a mere organism in the ecosystem of the

backwoods country, becoming aware of nature's radical interrelatedness. Internalizing this earth-centered philosophy, Rawlings deconstructs for herself dualistic thinking, transferring nature's concept of interrelatedness to other prevalent oppressive hierarchies in society that define her 'colonization as a woman (writer).'

Florida nature and especially the Florida Scrub reveal themselves as an "undomesticated ground" (Alaimo 23). In this primordial wilderness, survival is dependant on close interaction with nature; domination or 'colonization' of this wild unique place is impossible. Rawlings writes that "[t]he scrub, as a matter of fact, has defeated civilization. It is one of the few areas where settlements have disappeared and the scanty population is constantly thinning" (Bigelow, *Frontier Eden* 49). As Rawlings's biographer, Gordon Bigelow, writes in *Frontier Eden* (1966),

> [t]he primordial wildness of the scrub had a strong appeal for her; she liked the notion that there never had been human habitation in the true scrub and probably never would be, that she might cross where no man had ever crossed before. (Bigelow, *Frontier Eden* 76)

Lacking any social inscription, the scrub remained 'virgin' land, secluded and sheltered by its physical and unconquerable terrain. Rawlings writes of it as follows:

> "The scrub is a silent stretch enclosed by two rivers, deeply forested with Southern spruce (almost valueless), scrub oak, scrub myrtle and ti-ti, occasionally gall-berry and clack-jack and a few specialized shrubs and flowers, with 'islands' of long-leaf yellow pine. There is an occasional small lake with its attendant marsh of 'prairie.' The only settlement is here and there on these bodies of water, and along the river edges, where the natural hammock growth had been bitten into by settlers' clearings. It is a fringe of life, following the waterways. The scrub is a vast wall, keeping out the timid and the alien." (Bigelow, *Frontier Eden* 50)

Living within nature and the land, the Cracker culture is unaware of the strict Western separation between culture and nature. Having 'crossed the frontier,' they embraced and adopted Native American conceptions of "Life and Self Within the Land." Rawlings's 'crossing of the frontier' and "ecological metanoia" (Schauffler 84) is best portrayed in her last Florida book, *Cross Creek*. In this autobiographical novel, Rawlings depicts the process of connecting to the land and its 'indigenous' inhabitants.

Cross Creek is testimony of her inner growth and development throughout her years at the Creek. The transformation from an ego-centered to an eco-centered conception of self, is spurred by her topophilia for Cross Creek. "*Writing* the Florida Scrub" has – for Rawlings – a therapeutic effect, providing a 'medium' in which she can indulge and lose herself. Mirroring Rawlings's Florida oeuvre, the 'ecotone' of *Cross Creek* offers a variety of interpretatory possibilities; this dissertation follows Charles L. Crow's and John Elder's recent anthologies by taking a broad and multi-disciplinary approach to her writing – letters, essays and manuscripts by the author, as well as studies from the field of ecology, ecocriticism, nature writing, regionalism and (eco)feminism/gender studies – are treated as equally reliable. Writing regional literature and nonfiction centering on place/nature, becomes inherently autobiographic. It requires the complete immersion of the writer in the material, revealing itself as a preferred means of (autobiographical) expression for women as well as for ethnic and minority writers. Enchantment, healing and 'decolonization' become interconnected and interdependent; the process and product of Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings's Florida literature illuminates this vital union.

II. A *Sense* of the Sunshine State

2.1 Changing Florida – Transitory Eden?

> Was there ever anything like the migration to Florida? From the time the Hebrews went to Egypt, or since the hegira of Mohammed the prophet, what can compare to this evacuation? The Forty-Niners did not go out in such great numbers, nor can the gold rush to the Klondike be put in the same class with this flight to Florida. Entire populations are moving away bodily. The personal columns of our local press are unable to chronicle the daily departures. – Tallahassee Democrat[1]

As apocryphal as these lines of a Northern journalist may be, they convey the fate of modern Florida. "Change seems to be the one constant in Florida" (Colburn/de Haven-Smith 71). Florida, an Eden overlooked until the beginning of the twentieth century became an Eden sought by Americans after World War II and an Eden threatened since the 1980s. As a favorite destination for countless tourists and as the new home for millions of retirees and multicultural migrants, the Florida of today has become a demographic, political and cultural bellwether. Floridians are among the most racially and ethnically diverse people in the nation. The state is righteously called the "Land Of Contrasts," a title Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings chose for her essay on Florida in 1944; ever since, writers and journalists have made these three words a steady byline of their essays about the state. The modernity of the 1920s intruded abruptly on a state habituated to a lethargic remoteness from the mainstream of national life. Due to the southern extremity of its peninsular location, Florida was one of America's last frontiers. During the time Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings lived in Florida, its image became one of "vitality and excitement, of shining cities, of skyscraper hotels and banks, of business opportunity and of the good life" (Gannon, *New History* 301). People, intoxicated by the potential of the region came seeking opportunities, chasing - some with more and some with less success - the dream of personal happiness and wealth. The Florida myth had also attracted a young writer from up North who quickly made Florida her home and is today an adopted daughter of the state;[2] unlike many of her Northern compatriots, Marjorie K. Rawlings dropped roots in Florida, rather

[1] Quoted in Gannon, *The New History* 292.
[2] President Holt called Rawlings an 'Adopted Daughter of the State of Florida' when bestowing upon her the Honorary Degree of Doctor of Literature from Rollins College.

than transitioning through. This part is intended to give a short portrait of the Sunshine State, the place Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings called home.

It was Ponce de León who has been given official recognition for the discovery of Florida, although "Spanish slavers from Cuba probably preceded him" (Gannon, *Florida* 4). The idea of Florida as a mythic paradise where a person's greatest expectations just might come true, has persisted throughout Florida's colorful history. Before the 1819 Americanization of the peninsula could begin and before conflicting perceptions of Florida could get established – namely the perception of Florida as a land of enchantment or as a rich land to be exploited – Florida would salute the flag of Spain for nearly two and a half centuries. "Not until the year 2055 will the American flag have flown over Florida as long as did the flag of Spain" (Gannon, *Florida* 4). The land of swamps, mosquitoes and hostile natives became

> Europe's first frontier in North America. Its history of permanent settlement by Europeans goes back over four and a quarter centuries. One would not know that fact, however, from reading the typical American textbook, even some used in Florida's own school systems. According to the best-known accounts, Western civilization arrived in our country with the landing of the English in Jamestown in 1607 and at Plymouth Rock in 1620, but by the latter date Florida had long since been explored and the Spanish city of St. Augustine was fifty-five years old. […] Because *La Florida* stretched north from the Keys to Newfoundland and west to Texas, St. Augustine could claim to be the capital of much of what is now the United States. (Gannon, *Florida* 3)

Nevertheless, little in Florida's history hinted at the state's future as one of the most populous and heavily urbanized regions in the United States. In 1900 most of the state's residents lived within fifty miles of the Georgia-Alabama border in a rural, isolated and frontier-like society. Throughout the northern regions of the state, these settlers re-created the Southern culture of their former homes, developed plantation systems, small farms, the timber and turpentine industry and reinforced economic as well as social ties with their Deep South neighbors.[3] In the southern part of the state, with

[3] In northern Florida especially, remnants of the Civil War period remain visible; memorials to Civil War veterans or statues of Confederate leaders dot the landscape of the northern peninsula. The Florida Constitution of 1865 acknowledged the results of the Civil War by rescinding the ordinance of secession and abolishing slavery but blacks were still hindered from voting and a large amount of black codes were instituted to uphold white dominance. U.S. Congress denounced the actions of Florida (and other southern states), passing the

approximately 1,700 residents, Miami was a mere outpost; Jacksonville was the state's largest city and Pensacola stood a distant second. In 1880, Key West, with the influx of Bahamian Conchs and refugees of the Cuban Ten Years' War, became Florida's largest city (Gannon, *New History* 420). In 1870, the State Grange - an organization of Florida farmers – had observed: "Unquestionably Florida's greatest need is immigration, next to immigration we need capital" (Gannon, *Florida* 392). In 1880, the time *The Yearling* takes place, Florida was still the smallest state in the South. The Western frontier states attracted many more settlers than Florida, whose ties to the former Southern Confederacy and whose inhospitable climate and swamp-like landscape repelled most Americans.

At the turn of the century, the concept of the 'New South' emerged, advocating modernization and the industrialization. Florida politicians courted investors, such as land developer Hamilton Disston and the railroad magnates Henry B. Plant and Henry Flagler. After the devastating freezes of 1894/95 Flagler was persuaded to extend his railroad further south to the Miami area where it reached in 1896. As soon as it became official that the United States would build the Panama Canal, thus opening up the Caribbean for commercial activity, Flagler decided to extend his railroad to Key West. It reached there in 1912, crowning the achievement of his life; an engineering masterpiece, with forty-two bridges, including the Seven Mile Bridge, which was badly damaged by the hurricane of 1935, it was replaced by today's Overseas Highway, running along the abandoned original.

Although most investments had stayed north of Florida, the railroad made the state accessible for the first time, setting the stage for future growth. The construction of the railroad, Highway 41 along the west coast and US I along the east coast had long-term consequences for the segregation of African Americans in Florida. They served as informal borders with racial and social implications.[4] Besides the racial politics of the era, efforts by white women to obtain the vote were equally opposed by

Military Reconstruction Act in 1867; the Union Army, including black soldiers supervised the process for nearly nine years, an era painful for some white Floridians who remained isolated from the national mainstream in rural poverty throughout much of the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

[4] Most cities in the late nineteenth century restricted black residential areas to the inland side of the tracks, while urban whites lived on the coastal side; consequently many black communities still run in a linear fashion from north to south.

white men. "Women were not to be sullied by such common and manly pursuits as politics" (Colburn/de Haven-Smith 18) but in truth most feared that universal suffrage would disrupt white male political dominance.

> Florida refused to support the submission to voters of the Nineteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, and Floridians did not ratify women's suffrage until it did so – symbolically – in 1969 on the fiftieth anniversary of the establishment of the Florida League of Women Voters. (Colburn/de Haven-Smith 18)

However, as soon as the Nineteenth Amendment was adopted nationally in 1921, women went to the polls in Florida and Edna Giles Fuller of Orange County became the first woman elected to office as a member of the State House of Representatives.

Following the 'Americanization' of Florida, were the boom and bust years of 1920 to 1940 in which the state re-invented itself; "[even] the sunshine was turned into a huckster [and] Florida became both outlandish and quaint" (Williams 23). The state's economy virtually experienced a roller coaster ride in the 1920s, gasping through the 1930s, paralyzed by what had happened. The Wall Street boom had provided Americans with income to spend and investors chose Florida to make their next fortune. Towns sprang up along the coasts and Northerners as well as Midwesterners rushed into the state to profit from the development.[5] When the shaky scheme collapsed and Florida's economy plummeted downward in 1925, the state was unprepared. Fascinated by the new wealth, state leaders neglected to regulate speculations and restrain massive debt that towns and counties had caused in order to attract investors. "Florida was a show, an entire state seemingly dedicated to the vacation principle" (Williams 23). In 1926, three years before the rest of the nation, Florida found itself in the middle of a depression, remaining there fourteen long years. "Florida became a metaphor for the boom-and-bust years of the 1920s, and no other state experienced the highs and lows more thoroughly" (Colburn/de Haven-Smith 21). Further on, Florida's environmental vulnerability was revealed in the fall of 1926, when a severe hurricane completely swamped the Miami

[5] Land which Carl Fisher had given away in 1915 to attract residents sold for $ 25,000 and more in the Twenties. Miami Beach became the hot spot for land purchases and Will Rogers commented, "Had there been no Carl Fisher, Florida would be known as the Turpentine State" (Colburn/deHaven-Smith 20). 'Binder Boys' bought lots for 10 cents down and then sold the binders to other speculators.

area, causing 400 deaths (Gannon, *Florida* 294). Two years later the hurricane of 1928 left about 2,000 Floridians dead, causing investors to leave *en masse* (Gannon, *Florida* 297). The fruit fly infestation that destroyed 72 per cent of the state's citrus trees and the onset of the national depression of 1929 were the points of culmination.

> By the time the stock market died in the fall of 1929, Florida had already been mired in three years of depression so severe that some counties had to forfeit on their bonds, close their schools, and in a few cases declare bankruptcy. […] State and local tax collections fell from $62.23 to $47.84 per capita, and state banking reserves virtually collapsed, from $593 million to a mere $60 million. (Colburn/de Haven-Smith 21)

The conflict and distrust between North and South Floridians which dominated state politics ever since, began to emerge during this period of time. Governor Doyle Carlton had suggested a tax increase in order to finance the road pavements and to keep the schools open but most residents of the North and Interior of the state felt they were paying for the sins of those who had risked too much during the boom years in the South. North Floridians suffered as well but most were small farmers, self-supporting and accustomed to less cash. In 1932 with nearly 30 percent of the population of Florida unemployed, the Democratic candidate for President, Franklin D. Roosevelt, received 75 percent of the votes cast in Florida (Colburn/de Haven-Smith 22). The New Deal provided some crucial relief for the state but the economy only stabilized in 1936 when tourists started reappearing. However, the modernization of Florida would begin with World War II, ending the state's economic drought.

Between 1940 and 1970, Florida's modernization and rise to national prominence came slowly, sometimes without clear direction. The Old and the New South collided in the Sunshine State; the deeply rooted culture of the Old South was reluctant to change whereas newcomers were first to adjust to their adopted state. Therefore, political dominance rested in the hands of North Floridian nativists who were able to restrain progress for decades. Without intervention from the federal government, Florida's modernization would most certainly have taken a different form.

The state's economy stabilized in the 1940s with the infusion of federal expenditures and the influx of more than 2.1 million men and

women into the state for military training (Colburn/deHaven-Smith 35); historian Garry Mormino describes Florida as "a garrison state" (Gannon, *Florida* 324). To see the war, Floridians did not have to go to Europe, rather the war came to them. "German U-boats sank twenty-four U. S. and Allied freighters and tankers off Florida's east and Gulf coasts" (Gannon, *Florida* 326). Residents and tourists were often able to watch as tankers burned and sank to the ground in front of their eyes. "Of the 327,000 German POWs incarcerated in the United States, 4,000 spent their time in Florida, most of them at Camp Blanding" (Gannon, *Florida* 326). World War II unleashed the greatest economic boom in American history and the attack on Pearl Harbor in December 1941 unified the nation and brought Florida fully into the national mainstream. The Florida of today is largely a post-World War II development.[6] World War II spurred the mobility of Americans; many were forced for the first time to leave home and get acquainted with other Americans from all different racial and ethnic backgrounds.

The introduction of DDT in the last year of the war and the gradual introduction of air-conditioning awakened newcomers to the potential of Florida. The summer months with its oppressive heat became easily bearable and with new roads and improved living conditions, Florida became desirable to the middle class. During the 1940s, nearly 900,000 people moved to Florida permanently, most of whom settled in southern Florida.[7] In order to avoid another collapse of the Florida Dream of beautiful beaches, sunshine and youth - as it had occurred in the 1920s - Governor Millard Caldwell (1945-1949) expanded the activities of the Florida Department of Commerce. His marketing strategy sought to sell the nation on an image of Florida as a place of opportunity, freedom, youth and beauty (Colburn/deHaven-Smith 40). The state emphasized low taxes, inexpensive land and a pro-business political climate which were to appeal to potential investors. In the post-war years population growth exploded in Florida with an average of 558 people arriving per day (Colburn/deHaven-Smith 40). "More people moved to Florida in this period than had lived in the state in all the years before 1920" (Colburn/deHaven-Smith 40)! The

[6] The military construction projects greatly helped communities, furthering economic expansion unlike that seen since the eraly 1920s.

introduction of a fence law to keep cattle from running in front of cars underlined the state's initiatives by acknowledging that tourists on Florida roads meant more to the state's future than its agricultural interests.

Although South Florida had the majority of the state's residents in the 1950s, it did not have the majority of the state's legislative representatives. Rural legislators formed a so-called 'small county coalition,' which made it possible for them to control the state legislature. "From 1945 to 1965, apportionment guaranteed small counties at least fifty seats, while the rapidly expanding urban counties seldom had more than twenty-five" (Colburn/deHaven-Smith 45). Racial unrest in Florida was brought under control by tourist-oriented businesses that lobbied state politicians. In conversations with political leaders *Disney* officials emphasized the company's need for a tranquil environment to ensure tourists visited the resort.[8] However, without the intervention of the federal government, it remains uncertain whether Florida would have been able to control racial extremism. With the adoption of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965, segregation was officially abolished in all areas of public life. Opposition to reapportionment was dismantled by the federal government and the stranglehold that North Florida and its political representatives had over the state was over. The political power shifted to the high-growth areas of the Southern and Central part of Florida.

Accompanying the emergence of South Florida as the dominant region in the state brought with it residents that neither understood the state's heritage nor its former ties to the Old South. In 1966, Claude Kirk became Florida's first Republican Governor and a staunch fighter for environmental issues. Florida's modern "growth-at-any-cost mentality" (Gannon, *Florida* 427) had already produced severe environmental damage and through the blocking of the Cross-Florida Barge Canal, which was to link East and West Florida, Kirk saved the state's drinking water from further damage.[9] South Florida politicians suffered more from a fragile

[7] Most new arrivals at the Southeast coast came from the Northeastern region of the United States while those settling along the Southwest, principally came from the Midwest.
[8] Racial unrest like in Little Rock, Arkansas in 1957 or in St. Augustine in 1964 had shown clearly how local economies could be impacted.
[9] The Governor's friend President Nixon who spent his vacation in Florida blocked funding measures to keep the canal alive. The halting of the canal signalled the growing prominence environmental issues had in the late 1960s.

environment than their Northern compatriots; with their rising vote, women – increasingly - supported environmental protection. Leading figures – besides Marjorie K. Rawlings – were Marjorie Stoneman Douglas, Marjorie Carr and Gloria Reins. Stoneman-Douglas's *Everglades: A River of Grass* and her battle cry "Save the Everglades" radically transformed the public's understanding of this "subtle, strange, shy [and] most delicate of all wildernesses" (Williams 24).

The 1970s and 1980s are the most dynamic years of the state in the twentieth century. "Northerners and immigrants from Latin America flooded into the state at a rate of 842 per day for this twenty-year period" (Colburn/deHaven-Smith 53)! Florida was often unable to accommodate all the newcomers; social services, public schools, natural resources and local governments were unable to meet the new challenges. "Instead of planting 100 more trees to the acre, grove owners found it more profitable to plant four Yankees to the acre" (Colburn/deHaven-Smith 54)! Commenting on the consequences of the dramatic population growth, historian Michael Gannon referred to Florida as to "a collection of cities in search of a state" (Gannon, *New History* 143). The growth in population eroded a *sense* of place and in the 1960s, Florida began to resemble more and more the Sunbelt States of Texas, California and Arizona.

Senior citizens and Latin Americans have dominated Florida's population expansion since the 1970s.[10] The Florida climate and the state's tax structure enable seniors to live comfortably on their fixed retirement incomes; the Florida myth of the *fountain of youth* became a part of the American Dream. Despite their 'drawbridge mentality,'[11] the 'condo-commandos' keep from investing interest and money in Florida, instead they support their state of origin; the 'Cincinatti-factor'[12] still complicates policies of progress in the state.

The second major element in Florida's post-1960 population growth is immigration led by Cubans and Latin Americans. Today, Florida's Hispanic populations account for 16.8 percent of the total state population (Colburn/deHaven-Smith 56). Cubans quickly became an economic and

[10] Cf. Colburn/deHaven-Smith 55.
[11] An attitude of people who migrated from the North to the scenic areas of South Florida, seeking now to stop migration.

political force in Dade County. This new ethnic Cuban emergence marginalized other racial concerns that had previously dominated Florida politics in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.[13] Throughout the second half of the twentieth century,

> Florida has become sharply divided by interest groups and by regions, with voters often expressing concern about their own self-interest and showing little or no concern for the other citizens of the state. (Colburn/deHaven-Smith 57)

The consequence of such divisiveness and lack of tax money was that in 1995 Florida ranked last in the nation in funding for higher education;

> the expression 'thank God for Mississippi' echoed in the state capitol as political leaders saw Florida falling further and further behind the rest of the nation, with only Mississippi keeping it from ranking dead last in several statistical categories. (Colburn/deHaven-Smith 59)

The changing demographic pattern and the population growth since the end of World War II replaced a rural Deep South identity with no identity at all. Most Floridians have little sense of themselves as a people or of the state's heritage. Instead of low-paying jobs in the service sector, political leaders need to find ways to attract high-paying skilled jobs and sooner or later will have to tackle the state's tax structure which is still largely dependent on the sales tax. Florida remains one of only eight states in the nation without an individual income tax, whereas the sales tax is quite high at 6% (Colburn/deHaven-Smith 109). Agricultural land is still taxed at a very low rate, due to the influence rural voters had on state policy in the past. "Vacant land in Florida's suburban areas typically has a cow or two on it to ensure that it is taxed as agricultural land. Florida's 'see a cow rule' remains a standing joke in the state" (Colburn/deHaven-Smith 109).

It is certain that Florida will remain enormously appealing to both, Americans and Non-Americans in the future. "The Florida Dream still resonates in the American psyche and has been only partially diminished by crime, overpopulation, the graying of the citizenry, and environmental damage" (Colburn/deHaven-Smith 76). The rapid transition from a state that

[12] People, who migrated to Florida but still consider their previous location their home.

was predominantly Southern to one that is increasingly ethnically diverse enlarged the gap between North and South Floridians. Only a century after the 'discovery' of the Florida peninsula by Americans from the North, most residents now live closer to the Caribbean than to the Georgia border. The *Regetón*-mentality[14] personifies the state's future, the embracing of different cultures to create one harmonizing sound. It seems to be so much easier for new residents relocating in Florida to pass as 'true' Floridians. Many consider themselves natives after a short time living in the state. Although many 'get sand in their shoes' after a short time, the permanently changing self of the Sunshine State and the transitory nature of Florida's population are unique; so many are on their way to somewhere else, too busy to halt for a moment and instill in themselves a *sense* of place or develop an intimate tie to the *true* although often 'invisible' Florida.

2.2 Florida as a Source of Imaginative Appeal

Today when people glide effortless in their air-conditioned cars along the Florida Turnpike or Highway 75, enjoying wide vistas of flat swamps and jungles, Spanish moss hanging from Live Oaks, palm trees and tropical birds remind them that they are in a strange, fascinating land. On April 2, 1513 Juan Ponce de León landed near Indian River Inlet, naming Florida (La Florida = The Flowery Land) and claiming it for the King of Spain, commencing 460 years of ever-expanding tourism. De Leon explored the cape that would become the launching site for the Apollo Space Program; it is the same Florida where the largest embodiments of fantasy and technology – *Disney World* and *Epcot* – have been created out of the very swamps that William Bartram had written so fondly about 225 years earlier (1773-1778).

> *Travels* is one of the earliest and fullest accounts of how Florida could touch the imagination of those who went there, and it embodies and is a precursor to what Florida would symbolize to the imagination of American writers who would treat it in their works. (Rowe 4)

[13] The needs of black citizen became less important issues. Hispanics also asserted their political dominance by voting in much higher numbers than blacks.
[14] Regeton is a mixture of Reaggae, Rap and Salsa

In the nineteenth century Florida gained the attention of writer Harriet Beecher Stowe; the "inviting climate, an exotic faraway past, and the charm of quaint, out-of-the-way villages and their picturesque inhabitants" (Rowe 28) greatly inspired her writing. Stowe settled in Mandarin, on the shores of the St. Johns River, and among others, published a series of sketches entitled *Palmetto Leaves* that depict Florida as a tropical paradise, minus poisonous snakes, mosquitoes, hurricanes or freezes. However, "this was probably the first unsolicited promotion writing to interest the northern tourist in Florida" (Graff xv); the population of the urbanizing Northeast responded to it.

Many of the important writers of the twentieth century visited the Sunshine State, all seeking a unique inspiration. Stephen Crane came to Florida in 1896 craving for an adventure. In that November the author of *The Red Badge of Courage* who had never seen combat himself, had to prove his own courage when he was on board of a ship transporting ammunitions to Cuba. The boat sank off the coastline of Jacksonville; the narrative "The Open Boat" depicts Crane's experience ensuring that "Florida would gain a place in the mainstream of American literature" (Rowe 50).

Wallace Stevens made his first trip to Florida in 1916 and called it "one of the most delightful places [he] had ever seen" (Rowe 124). Steven's poem "The Idea of Order in Key West" seems to underline that Key West became "furiously literary" (Rowe 125) in the 1930's; Steven valued Florida as a complex place and the images of Florida that William Bartram had recorded so faithfully would become in Steven's poetry symbols for the highest form of reality, the reality of the imagination (Rowe 126).

The man most associated with Key West, is Ernest Hemingway. In April of 1928, Hemingway first came to *Cayo Hueso*,[15] his "St. Tropez of the poor" (McIver, *Hemingway's Key West* 12), situated some seven thousand miles to the southwest of Paris. Key West has always been a melting pot where Cubans, Bahamians and Americans contributed to the unique island culture. "Hemingway's Florida was a place where a man could match himself against the elements in contests with the great marlin, a

[15] Spanish for Bone Key: The Island received its name from an ancient Indian massacre that left the key's sands covered with skeletons. 'Cayo Hueso' was anglicized into Key West.

place where someone daring enough could run whiskey for handsome profits" (Rowe 93).

The Florida Ring Lardner portrays is remarkably different from that of Hemingway, Stowe and Rawlings, with them preferring the *silence* of isolated places in the state.

> Lardner was very much a member of the middle class culture he satirized. He enjoyed golf and bridge, liked to go to race tracks, and appreciated fine hotels. He would not have cared for the clapboard senility of Key West that others found charming. (Linneman, "Ring Around the Peninsula" 55)

In his affiliation with the white middle class of the 1910s and 1920s and in his sharp observation of this class, Lardner resembles Fitzgerald who was his neighbor in Long Island. The paragraph describing Palm Beach in Fitzgerald's story "The Rich Boy," makes Lardner's influence visible. In February 1916, Lardner and his wife took a delayed honeymoon in Palm Beach which, as a playground for the idle rich, would provide the details for his best known story "Gullible's Travels." Lardner's characters mirror the uprooting of the American home in the 1920s; without a sense of place, they become transient, always in trains, on the road or in hotels. "Only skirting the society they cannot join, they are incapable of real pleasure" (Evans 128) and unable to enjoy the tropical merits of the Sunshine State. Lardner provides an accurate impression of a booming Florida emerging from the frontier to a premier tourist attraction. The satire and irony as well as the use of dialect and incorrect grammar provide the humor in his stories and are retraceable in the fiction of a younger generation of Florida writers like Hiaasen, Hall or Crews.

Due to the geographical location of Florida and the proximity to South America and the Caribbean, a Spanish influence is very much alive in the peninsula. Hispanic literature has been omitted in the Florida literary canon for a long time. Cuban writers and artists were among the first to reside in Florida; they constitute the largest homogenous literary group and with the Mariel boatlift, a new generation of Cuban exile writers revitalized the cultural scene in Miami. Among the younger Cuban artists writing *and* living in Florida are Carolina Hospital, Ricardo Pau-Llosa and Sandra Castillo. Although many of today's well-known Cuban authors choose to live in New York, Texas, California or abroad, "Miami still serves for them

as both mirror and lightning rod: reflecting the best and worst of Cuban culture, it both attracts and revolts them" (Gonzalez-Pando 170). Cuban exile writing articulates the concerns of over one million people who left Cuba for the United States.

Florida is a melting pot, including more than just the Spanish voice: during slavery, African-Americans found safe-haven in the inaccessible swamps and scrubs of the interior of the state; the Everglades would also shelter the Seminole Indians from their white pursuers.

> As luck would have it, while Rawlings was sitting on the porch of her cottage at Cross Creek getting the Crackers down on paper, at the southern fringe of the scrub in Eatonville a native black Floridian, Zora Neale Hurston was sitting on the porch of Joe Clarke's General Store, doing the same. (Kennedy 122)

Hurston grew up in Eatonville,[16] America's first incorporated black town. Similar to Rawlings, she is an anthropological field worker and researched Florida folk culture and the vanishing lore to preserve it. In 1948, Hurston dedicated her last novel about Florida whites, *Seraph on the Suwanee*, to her friend. In 1942 the autobiographies of both women, *Cross Creek* and *Dust Tracks on the Road* were published.

> These autobiographies are keys not only to the writers' lives but more generally to the community politics of the segregated South of the 1940s. As women writers in the South, both Hurston and Rawlings struggled with rigidly defined gender roles in their lives and in their fiction. (Trefzer 68)

The celebration of mythical Southern communities and the effect of time and place on their characters are dominant throughout both Rawlings's and Hurston's Florida literature.

One of Florida's foremost environmental spokesperson was Marjorie Stoneman-Douglas. The publication of her book *The Everglades: A River of Grass* in 1947, brought the attention to unsustainable land boom and the draining of the *Pahokee*.[17] Carl Hiaasen, author and columnist of the *Miami Herald*, is the advocate for realistic population growth in Florida. A Florida native, he was raised in Plantation, a subdivision of Ft. Lauderdale, which was once situated on the fringe of swamp land. Today, shopping malls and

[16] Although Hurston claimed to be born in Eatonville, it has been proved that her true birth place was Notasulga, Alabama

[17] Seminole for Everglades

condominiums cover the drained soil. Hiaasen's love for Rawlings's 'Invisible Florida' led him to write thought-provoking columns as well as ironic, funny novels which center on human greed, environmental issues, and the abundance of tourist attraction parks. In his 'eco-crime-fiction,' he carries Stoneman-Douglas and Rawlings's Florida achievements into the New Millennium. "'I felt such an outrage for so many years over those things happening that it wasn't a hard thing to carry into journalism'" (Stevenson xvi). Unlike Rawlings's rural setting of North-central Florida, Hiaasen found the subject for his writings in modern urban South Florida.

Southern literary settings have traditionally been rural and isolated. Although Florida is part of the geographical South, writers who permanently live in the state, find themselves in the gap of traditional Southern literature and mainstream genres.

> It is as though Florida as a setting constituted an entirely separate genre, not as unlike mainstream as romance, or science fiction, or detective fiction, but not mainstream Southern fiction either. (York, "This Ruined Landscape" 41)

Florida has become a popular setting for crime fiction, not only because of what it is today, but of what it once was. In its brief history, Florida deteriorated from a natural Eden into an ecological disaster. The fictional settings in such hitherto *unliterary* places as Clearwater or Ft. Lauderdale chosen by Joy Williams, James Hall, Harry Crews, Carl Hiaasen and others allude to the state's *lost innocence*. Florida has always attracted the attention of travel writers like William Bartram or Sidney Lanier who described the lush vegetation in mythical terms. These depictions contrast sharply with today's Florida fiction, evident in the titles of their works.[18] The theme of obsession with place still is a major metaphor in current Florida literature, but unlike Rawlings's use of place, modern-day characters experience dissociation and an alienation by place, thereby mirroring Florida's threatening ecological imbalance.

Florida is still the home of many old-time Crackers who prefer the remoteness and isolation of the interior of the state. Rawlings's Crackers have not vanished; although the number of *true* Crackers diminishes every year, thousands are still making a living in the nearly forgotten cattle

business. However, unlike the legendary cowboy of the West who inspired many artists, the Florida Cattle Hunter has reverberated in much less legendary or mythical terms. This has largely to do with Frederick Remington, who was greatly disappointed by the

> wild-looking individuals, whose hanging hair and drooping hats and generally bedraggled appearance would remind you at once of the Spanish moss. […] There was none of the bilious fierceness and rearing plunge which I had associated with my friends out West. (Remington 208)

With such criticism, Remington discouraged the formation of romantic legends about the Cracker Cowboy. Nevertheless, there is a large amount of 'unromantic' Cracker tales and even Cracker verse, collected by Southern natives as well as by Northern journalists and folklore researchers. In 2001, Patrick D. Smith was able to build a bridge between the Florida of the past and present. *A Land Remembered* covers three generations of a Cracker family, starting out in the pioneer days and ending with the youngest family member in 1968, who realizes that his wealth has not been worth the cost to the land.

Florida became the subject for many artists; they all discovered their niche within the turbulent megastate. For Rawlings, it was the interior with its Cracker inhabitants; for Hemingway, the Conch town of Key West and for Hiaasen it is the urban setting of Southern Florida. This rich and complex state often attracted writers from the North who became easily overwhelmed by the natural beauty surrounding them. Florida's powerful appeal has not diminished; the old and the new Florida coexist. Hollywood has embraced the Florida landscape, launching television series like *Miami Vice* in the 1980s and *CSI Miami* in the 2000s. Alfonso Cuarón's remake of Charles Dickens's *Great Expectations* starring Ethan Hawke, Gwyneth Paltrow and Robert de Niro was shot in John M. Ringling's Venetian Gothic Mansion *Ca d' Zan* on Sarasota Bay as well as on Cortez Island on the Gulf Coast; most recently, in summer 2002, *Bad Boys II* was shot in Downtown Miami, blocking the Julia Tuttle Causeway for days!

> Two hundred years after Bartram succumbed to a vision of this place, the idea of Florida remains an enchanted country – a place

[18] Cf. Hall, James *Tropical Freeze* (New York: Warner Books, 1995) and Carl Hiaasen *Stormy Weather* (New York: Warner Books, 1995)

> seductively different from the ordinary, a land where dreams just might come true. (Rowe 138)

Unlike anywhere and anything else, Florida is not merely a geographical region but a source of imaginative appeal. Rawlings as well as many other artists succumbed to a vision of Florida and made it the central element in their literature.

2.3 Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings's 'Invisible Florida'

Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings's adoration for Florida was not found in the tourist mecca or for the sophisticated business location; it was for the natural Florida, with a strong past, which could not restrain progress and urbanization. In a speech given at the Florida Southern College in 1935, Rawlings explicitly excluded 'many Floridas' from her writing and called the Florida of her novels and short stories the 'Invisible Florida.'

> "It is the Florida of the hammock, the piney-woods, the great silent scrub. This is the Florida, wild and natural, that I'm calling 'the invisible Florida.' Not because it's remote or inaccessible and can't be seen, because there it is, a physical sight plain to anyone. But it is invisible because its beauty must be seen with the spiritual eye as well as the physical eye. I've longed to re-create, to make visible, this invisible beauty." (Bigelow, *Frontier Eden* 99)

Hidden, off the beaten track of mainstream Florida, still exist these places which match Rawlings's definition. Photographer Woody Walter's *Visions of Florida* (1994) renders some of these places visible; far from the transportation arteries, these places do not automatically come to mind when one thinks of the Sunshine State. From the Seminole Mountains to Stiltsville's colorful huts – located two miles south of Cape Florida,[19] and today an invaluable sanctuary for pelicans, seagulls and cormorants - to the natural coast line from Cedar Key to St. Marks, where largely unspoiled wilderness shows Florida's *true* coast line before artificial sand dunes gave the Floridian southeast- and west coast a new face, are only a few examples of Rawlings's presently declining 'Invisible Florida.'

[19] founded during Rawlings's time in Florida by the fisherman Eddie Walker in the Thirties

Rawlings's knowledge of her natural surroundings partly stems from books like Bartram's *Travels*, partly from first-hand experience. She had always been more interested in the interdependence of man and nature than in the relationship of man to man; in her Florida novels she was able to use the excitement of this love affair. Her literary world is primarily comprised of the rural portion of three counties in North-central Florida: Alachua, Putnam and Marion. Although the region is considered to be mainly flat, it contains "low rolling hills and small creeks and river valleys" (Bigelow, *Frontier Eden* 72). Considering the dominant role the raising of citrus plays in her literature, readers might get the impression that Rawlings resided in the heart of the citrus belt but her grove is actually situated very near the northernmost commercial groves in the state. Lake Orange and Lake Lochloosa partially buffer the cold so that her groves are survivors of the disastrous freeze of 1894/95. However, Rawlings saw her crop wiped out by freezes at least four times.

In terms of setting, Rawlings's Florida novels fall into two groups: *Golden Apples* and *Cross Creek* are based on the Cross Creek area; *South Moon Under* and *The Yearling* are set in the Big Scrub. The Cross Creek landscape is also traceable in the "Quincey Dover Stories," where the town Oak Bluff is a composite of the three towns nearest to Rawlings: Hawthorne, Island Grove and Citra. The main setting in *Golden Apples*, the hammock of Luke and Allie Brinley, seems to be closely modeled on her own land in Cross Creek.

> The other main features of topography in the book are likewise reproduced faithfully from real life – the fictional town of Purley is the real town of Island Grove; the great orange groves of Camilla van Dyne on the western shores of Orange Lake were suggested by the Samson Groves in MacIntosh. Orange Lake appears as Sawgrass Lake, while Lake Lochloosa and the River Styx appear prominently in the story under their own names. (Bigelow, *Frontier Eden* 74)

The other focus of her Florida novels is the Ocala Scrub, which lies approximately twenty-five miles to the south and east of Cross Creek. She principally used two sections of the scrub which she knew best. The setting of *South Moon Under* centers on the home of Leonard Fiddia and "runs along the Ocklawaha River from Moss Bluff north to Orange Springs" (Bigelow, *Frontier Eden* 78); she describes the area with much detail,

naming a variety of points along the river as Tobacco Patch Landing, Big Saw Grass or Hog-Thief Creek. Rawlings had a special love for waterways and in *South Moon Under* "the Ocklawaha becomes almost as much a unifying presence as the scrub itself" (Bigelow, *Frontier Eden* 78). The second part of the scrub is the one she describes in *The Yearling* which is remodeled after Pat's Island, the property of her friend Cal Long. Baxter's Island, the homestead of Jody Baxter and his family, is located west of Silver Glen Springs, near the shores of Lake George. Rawlings's concern was for a Florida which - as Gordon Bigelow writes - "must decrease as the others increase" (Bigelow, *Frontier Eden* 99).

2.3.1 The Florida Scrub

The Florida Scrub is not only the main location in Rawlings's novel *The Yearling* and *South Moon Under*, it is also considered to be Florida's oldest horticultural community (www.fau.edu). The scrub is found in several areas throughout the peninsula: in the coastal panhandle, the coastal peninsula and the inland peninsula (www.archbold-station.org). The largest area occurs in the Ocala National Forrest. Rawlings's depictions center on the scrub of the inland peninsula, where the Northern temperate zone passes into the semi-tropics. This is the reason why this part of the scrub transitions through all seasons. Apart from mangrove swamps in the Everglades in the South and dry prairies in the North, the scrub is only one of the ecosystems in Florida. Characteristically, the scrub is an open pineland with an understory of oaks and palmettos (www.fau.edu).

The Florida Scrub is an ancient and harsh terrain. As the oceans receded millions of years ago, the scrub was revealed. The unique inland ridges were formed by rising and falling sea levels and the inland beach dunes were created as the sea resided. These seemingly infertile hills became the home of a variety of plants and animals. As the sea levels rose again, plants and animals were cut off from the main land and forced to adapt, developing unique traits. Some of the inland ridges are even considered to be existent since the Pleistocene (www.archbold-station.org).

Due to salt water, the Scrub soil lost almost all of its organic components (www.archbold-station.org). The rain drains quickly and

leaches through the Scrub sands, refreshing the sweet water lakes. The Scrub country is relatively high, sometimes two hundred feet above sea level. Hurricanes rarely reach this far inland but "lightning strikes central Florida more frequently than anywhere else in the United States" (www.archbold-station.org); most Scrub plants are adapted to fires and will resprout. Wild fires keep the scrub relatively low, consisting of shrubs, dwarf oak trees, low palmettos and scattered patches of dry sand. All of them find nourishment where none seems to be evident. Creatures as exotic as the gopher tortoise and the coral snake but also as common as the raccoon and the rattler find a home in the scrub. The most endangered species is Florida's Scrub-jay. Today, over two-thirds of the historical Scrub county has been destroyed (www.archbold-station.org).

'*The Yearling* country,' the Big Scrub of North-central Florida, encompasses the geographical area of the Ocala National Forrest. Rawlings treasured this unusual landscape and strongly emphasized the solitude of the scrub, its wilderness, lack of inhabitants and its mythical aspect to those unfamiliar with it.

> She liked the notion that there never had been human habitation in the true scrub [. . .] [and that it] had remained literally a frontier area where a man could still make a living with an axe and a gun. (Bigelow, *Frontier Eden* 76)

Rawlings's fascination with this region, which was 'invisible' to most Floridians of her time, is a place apart. The most accurate description of the scrub is given in the opening paragraph of *South Moon Under*, which comprises two full pages.

> It seems so badly improbable, this sophistically, college-bred Northern city girl suddenly transplanting herself into the Deep South wildlands and Cracker country of North-central Florida. (Burnett 62)

With the early success of *South Moon Under* and her major work *The Yearling,* Rawlings introduced the Big Scrub, a wild thick stretch of pine woods skirting the Ocklawaha River. Rawlings's literary concept of viewing people in their environment makes the setting in her writings so important. "She was something like Bartram in reporting for her generation the natural wonders of her part of Florida" (Bigelow, *Frontier Eden* 80).

2.4 Florida People(s)

A settler in Florida – whether he comes as a capitalist, as a farmer, or as a laborer – can live with more ease and personal comfort, can live more cheaply, can enjoy more genuine luxuries, can obtain a greater income from a smaller investment and by less labor, and can sooner secure a competency, than in any other accessible portion of North America.
- George Barbour

Barbour's *Florida for Tourists, Invalids and Settlers* touched off a similar reaction than Horace Greeley's 'Go West, young men' a few decades earlier. Most racial and ethnic groups share a predilection for sampling paradise and over a century later, Barbour's assessment still holds true. The never ending 'in-migration' into the Sunshine State turned it into a veritable sea of faces and faiths. Few Floridians recognize that the state has always had an ethnically diverse population. Some immigrant groups had a particularly profound influence on the state's development; Seminole Indians, Crackers, millions of 'Yankees,' African Americans and Cubans as well as retirees of all ethnic backgrounds. Traces of the *hidden* culture of the Seminole Indians are most easily visible in the names for towns, lakes and rivers, like the capital of Tallahassee, Lake Okeechobee, the rivers Withlacoochee or Ocklawaha; further on, it is interesting to note that the tribe is technically still at war with the United States, never having signed a peace treaty. Cubans still migrate into the state in search of a dream of a better life; African Americans, whose ancestors once fled slavery in other Southern states, found a safe-haven in Florida and retirees, seeking a place in the sun before its sets on them, choose Florida as a place to live.

Florida's Crackers and 'Yankees' may *reside* in one state but they *live* in different worlds; Crackers still represent the state's link with its past, its rural heritage of plantation politics and "sharecropping with forty acres and a mule" (Burt, *Tropic of Cracker* 34). Yankees are indicative of a changing Florida, of high-density subdivisions, crowded beaches and burgeoning metropolises with active night lives. The relocated Northerners do not share much of a common ethnic heritage; in this, they differ from Crackers who usually have a strongly developed sense of place keyed to their upbringing in the rural South. However, both Crackers and Yankees account for between 50 and 70 percent of the state's population. Besides

these major groups, other - often forgotten ones - deserve mention; for example the Greeks of Tarpon Springs, the Minorcans of New Smyrna, the Jews of Miami Beach, the Conchs of Key West as well as Haitians and Jamaicans fleeing from poverty. Florida is the home of a variety of cultural enclaves and as Rawlings characterized it, "Florida began and has continued as a combination of man's dreams and man's greediness" (Rawlings, *Florida* 59).

During the 1930s, when knowledge of indigenous or remote folk cultures were largely unknown, Rawlings's generation of regionalists became the first 'anthropological field workers' to accurately depict America's multi-cultural population, thereby paving the way for a more inclusive understanding of American culture. Besides the many faces of the state of Florida, this part is to take a closer look at the people Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings fictionally transcribed in her Florida novels, the Florida Cracker or poor-white settlers of the Florida countryside.

2.4.1 The Poor-Whites of the Florida Countryside

The poor-whites of the Florida countryside[20] are the real life counterparts of the characters of Rawlings's Florida literature. She portrayed them as a beautiful people, sometimes even idealizing them. The bottom of the white social and economic ladder of the Old South was identified with a group known most often as poor-whites. These people were landless, had no resources and without the existence of a governmental support net, they squatted on land otherwise unoccupied. They planted gardens, hunted, fished and some of them stole their daily bread in order to survive. The poor-white who owned no land, few animals, and who were powerless economically, socially and politically, could survive in Florida because of the semi-tropical climate which allowed for an abundant selection of food. With minimum effort they could build shelter and live on game, fish and a small garden, concealed somewhere in the backwoods. Although poverty was not a preferable state, leisure was prized and could be achieved without

[20] This part focuses on the poor-whites of the rural parts of Florida although the living conditions in other southern states might have been the same.

much work. This lifestyle was possible in antebellum Florida and in remote areas - like the scrub - because of the remaining Southern frontier. McWhiney describes the Southern frontier as an idea rather than a particular geographical area. Even after the Civil War, Florida constituted "a vast wilderness, with relatively few cleared and planted acres and with relatively few inhabitants, where cows and hogs and other livestock roamed the woods unattended" (McWhiney 62).

Many poor-whites lived in small isolated worlds of their own within the larger Southern society. Their origins are diverse but most of them trace their family back to poor immigrants or indentured servants of the seventeenth century. Even at this time already, these poor-whites formed their own secluded communities away from the more refined settlements. These camps set the course for a culture which, at that time already, had independently developed laws, codes and characteristic language traits which persisted in the isolated hammocks of the Florida backwoods. This is a reason why backwoods people prefer the solitude of the scrub and why they stay among themselves. In most cases they constructed small shabby shelters in swampy areas not desired by anybody else.

> When a poor-white or Cracker did settle in one spot in Florida, it was typically done in the middle of nowhere. [...] On isolated patches of mostly undesirable land like tangle scrub forests thick with saw-palmetto, snake-filled pine Flatwoods or impenetrable hammocks, they raised their meager crops and families in solitude. (Kimelman 21)

Most of the poor-whites had moved to Florida in the immediate aftermath of the Civil War hoping to find better living conditions than the ones they had left behind. "Their strong country backgrounds and their experience with hardship allowed them to endure until they were firmly rooted in their sometimes hostile backwoods environment" (Kimelman 175).

Poor-whites were ill-regarded by nearly everyone. Although squatting was "pioneer procedure" (McWhiney 251) in antebellum Florida, they were most often condemned for it. They raised shabby shelters because they usually never stayed long in one place. Poor-whites often fled plantation work in order to live uprooted with the natural surrounding encouraging their nomadic way of life; 'outsiders' or people from the North misunderstood this special nomadism as desolate poverty forced upon them.

Much of the culture of the Crackers, from work and leisure habits, can be traced back to the Celts.

> Being lazy to Celts and Southerners did not mean being indolent, shiftless, slothful, and worthless; [...] When a Celt or a Southerner said that he was being lazy he was not reproaching himself but merely describing his state of comfort. [...] He suffered no guilt [and] he could not understand why anyone would work when livestock could make a living for him; indeed he doubted the sanity of people who labored when they could avoid it. Nor did he see any good reason to have more than he could eat, or drink, or wear, or ride. (Kimelman 10)

The proverb "Southerners never sold what they could eat and Northerners never ate what they could sell" (Kimelman 15) seems to explain why they faced so many misunderstandings with Northerners, unwilling to adapt to the Florida environment that was capable of supplying the bare necessities all year-round. The poor-whites' way of life has many similarities to that of the Florida Seminole Indians. The Seminoles[21] were also chased into the remotest areas nobody else wanted to inhabit (Everglades or the Scrub) and their diet, medicine and folk beliefs are very similar. The isolation in which the poor-whites lived in Florida gave rise to their unique culture.

When poor-whites desperately needed money and had nothing left to trade, there were certain types of work they were reluctant to do. Field work was associated with slave's work and poor-whites did not want any connections with a group everybody understood as the most inferior. Women, for example, did not do any wage work and after the Civil War these jobs became even more unacceptable than before (Kimelman 203).

Pride or Cracker stoicism played a great role in their culture; unfortunately, this same pride affected their education. Since poor-whites could not afford tuition, their children would have to go to the same schools as black children. Unfortunately, most considered it degrading to have their children in the same classroom with black children and therefore illiteracy placed tremendous limits on them. The result of this conflict is that they found it difficult to find well-paying jobs. This forced them to carve out an existence highly adaptive to their natural environment in which they lived much like the Seminoles. Since the frontier continued to exist in South and

Central Florida, they had the possibility to live their isolated, nomadic lives. "They remained a pariah group in Florida's society, which operated in such a way as to deny their existence and any help to make them productive members" (Kimelman 239).

2.4.2 The Florida Cracker

The people most associated with Rawlings's literature are the Florida Crackers. Her writings strongly draw on stories she has picked up from her Cracker neighbors and from hunters who have lived in the isolation of the Big Scrub, close to her home in Cross Creek.

> I have lived off and on in the Scrub, where the few remaining inhabitants have been glad to pass on their memoirs of the old days and fast-vanishing way of life that characterizes the Florida Cracker, or backwoodsman. (Rawlings, "Autobiographical Sketches" 75)

Rawlings is not merely a fiction writer but also a historian, anthropologist and naturalist. She captured the dialect, folkloristic beliefs, sayings and way of life of a culture isolated in the remote area of North-central Florida. The pervading theme in her masterpiece *The Yearling* and most of her other Florida writings is the mystique of the earth which she found confirmed in the Florida Cracker.

> In all her work, the much-maligned Florida backwoods Cracker, depicted by writers for years as slovenly, backward or degenerate, is given a truer, more sympathetic appraisal. (Burnett 64)

Rawlings gave them a voice in her literature and portrayed them to the world.

During the English period in Florida (1764-1783), white settlers streamed into the new territory mostly from Georgia, Alabama and the Carolinas. These pioneers, mostly of Celtic origin, evolved into the unique cultural group known today as the Florida Cracker. The origin of the term 'Cracker' and its use is imprecise. Most accounts suggest that the Florida version of the term 'Cracker' derived from the cowboy's long buckskin

[21] The term is often translated as 'run-away' because the Tribe consists mainly of splinter groups of the Creek Confederacy who were pushed further South into Florida by white settlers.

whip, an instrument used to startle and discipline a herd of cattle and which could be heard for miles (Merzer 5). Beyond the cowboy origin, other historical speculations believe that the term derived from a description of the pioneer Floridians who *cracked* corn to make grits (Burt, *Florida* 102). Another source suggests that the term came from the Spanish word 'cuacaros' which means Quakers and loosely referred to all Florida settlers (Burt, *Florida* 102). While all these descriptions refer to Cracker life, the term can already be found in Shakespearian literature where it is used "to describe a person who was a *boaster* or *fast talker*" (www.members.tripod.com). Rawlings learned the Cracker dialect and described her neighbors as "men and women who spoke with a refreshing and vivid dialect that was Chaucerian, Shakespearian and that went back to their English and Scottish ancestry" (Rawlings, "Autobiographical Sketches" 74). She also remarked that Cracker speech inhabits many archaisms and without linguistic training she was only able to discern some dialectic differences. "'There is a tendency to slip an extra 'a' in whenever possible. [...] A prairie is a pararie, ripples on the water are riffles'" (Bigelow, *Frontier Eden* 112).

The Oxford English Dictionary defines the term 'Cracker' as following: "A contemptuous name given in southern States of N. America to the 'poor whites;' whence, familiarly, to the native whites of Georgia and Florida" (OED 1989). The definition of the term underwent many revisions over the years, whereas the definition of the poor-whites remained constant. A Cracker is not necessarily poor. In the 1860s, Jacob Summerlin was one of the few who achieved wealth in the cattle business and was commonly known as the "King of the Crackers" (Burt, *Florida* 102) but Rawlings focused on the depiction of the poor-white settler of the backwoods in North-central Florida.

The term 'Cracker' inhabits both a negative as well as a positive connotation. In the past Crackers were often thought of as poor and lawless; it was simply a disparaging term. This has been underlined by the overall negative depictions in literature; Erkskine Caldwell is only one author who depicted the poor whites as moral degenerates. But due to the writings of Rawlings, the term became a regionally affectionate term. In the first half of

the twentieth century, the Florida cow hunters[22] called themselves with pride Crackers (Merzer 5). For most of them, the term implies identification with traditional (Cracker) traditions and customs. Bob Graham, a popular politician in the 1990s, a native Floridian and a two-term US Senator, identified himself as a Florida Cracker (Burt, *Florida* 109). He used the term for his political campaign, distributing bumper stickers, "identifying the drivers as "'Graham Crackers'" (Burt, *Florida* 109). His voters have linked the term with a positive meaning and consciously or unconsciously, Graham produced and campaigned for a positive understanding of the term.

Cracker lore is still embraced by today's Florida cow hunters. They value good storytelling and the vivid comparisons to nature - which Rawlings extensively describes throughout her Florida novels - are still found in their language and they still have a strong bond with nature. "You could leave me out here the rest of my life and I'd be happy. Just me and the land. I won't ever get bored, I'll tell you that" (Merzer 8). Although Rawlings came to Florida as a *Snowbird,* her account of the Crackers was the first written from an 'inside' perspective and changed the way 'outsiders' thought of this backwoods community. Due to Rawlings, the term underwent a change in meaning. For most 'native' Floridians today, the term 'Cracker' implies a culture, a sense of belonging and is a link to the state's colorful past.

2.4.3 The Exceptional Portrayal of the Rural Poor-Whites in Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings's Florida Work

If one is to follow Richard Gray, Rawlings belongs to a group of writers "who have been marginalized by the making of a Southern canon" (Gray xi). Erkskine Caldwell, author of *Tobacco Road,* is supposed to be the best known of this small group which was concerned with writings about the poor-whites of the South. Caldwell and the majority of these writers depicted the poor-whites as moral degenerates. Caldwell's articles in the *New York Post* about the poor-whites of the Georgia countryside were

[22] They are called hunters because they search and hunt for lost cows in the scrub.

clearly intended to provoke a reaction. They describe these "unknown people" (Gray 155) as shiftless, ignorant and incapable. "To Erkskine Caldwell's claim that poverty was a cancer in society and had to be rooted out, the answer was simple, it was the poor people themselves who were the cancer" (Gray 159). As a result, Caldwell's depictions sparked a vivid discussion of the living conditions of the South and shaped the general opinion on this subject. It does not astonish that Rawlings's interpretation of the poor-whites as a beautiful people was regarded skeptically and often misinterpreted or ignored. "I was roundly denounced in a nearby newspaper for writing libelously of 'no such people,' while the mother of one of the time subjects was sending me notes to horsewhip me" (Rawlings, "Autobiographical Sketches" 81).

Rawlings's interpretation of the poor-whites as a beautiful people was shared by few and she developed in her a fierce missionary drive to make others see the beauty she saw. She saw herself as a medium to transcend these people's peculiar bond with nature. Nevertheless, Rawlings knew of their illegal undertakings but her descriptions justify that breaking the law was for forgivable reasons. Rawlings underlines that they had formed their own moral codes, laws and restrictions; in the isolation of the scrub, the government had never bothered to enforce state laws. The Crackers had filled this void with their own social codes. In Cross Creek, the old bridge became the weekly meeting point for a handful of families; disputes were settled with fists or handshake. The community's problems were solved by its own people; outsider interference was neither wanted nor needed.

Rawlings justifies the Cracker ignorance of the law by the fact that everything they do illegally is necessary to sustain life in the wilderness, emphasizing their responsibility for and harmony with nature. Rawlings's characters are so completely involved in their surroundings, and their environment in them that it is near impossible to imagine them living elsewhere. The reader easily comes to understand and value the richness of their lives despite the deprivations which they face every day. In *Cross Creek*, Rawlings addresses the problematic introduction of seasonal hunting laws; she openly states that her friend Cal Long breaks the law.

> All his way of life in the last of his nearly eighty years irked him. This was especially because a Federal game refuge has been established in the scrub, taking in his clearing [...] "The law says I cain't kill me a wild turkey scratchin' up my cowpeas. The law this, the law that!" "Why," he snorted, "I'm too old to begin obeyin' the law." (*CC* 246)

Rawlings openly criticized the depiction of the poor whites as moral degenerates and the arrogant attitude of some of her contemporaries. "'It seems painfully bigoted to attribute degeneracy to anyone living a simpler life than one's own – to drink moonshine and yet condemn moonshining'" (Bigelow, *Frontier Eden* 101). It did not go unnoticed by her Cracker friends how accurate Rawlings depicted their language, folk habits and other little details of everyday life. Leonard Fiddia once told her, "'Marge, while you were living here out in the scrub with Ma and me you must have done a hell of a lot of writing'" (Rawlings, "Autobiographical Sketches" 79). Rawlings portrayed the Florida poor-white backwoodsman in all the manifold significance and in all the involvement with time and place; her characters possess individuality, while appealing at the same time to the reader. Her portrayal of the Florida Cracker is the fullest account ever written.

III. Writing and Narrative Strategies

Rawlings's Florida writings belong to the second wave of regionalism, a major literary movement which took place in the years between the two World Wars (1920s-1940s). Distinguishing the regional movement from others of its time is its central emphasis on place. Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings shares similar biographical preconditions with other woman regionalists of her time and with most major representatives of the movement, she shares a sense of loss. During the Depression era, images of a 'postfrontier wasteland' (Dorman 154) haunted the national mind and Rawlings depicts the Cracker community as both, agent and victim in the process of modernization. Consumerism replaced a self-sufficient life and Rawlings tried to capture as accurately as possible these "postfrontier afterglows" (Dorman 96) in her Florida literature.

The second part of section three is concerned with Rawlings's critique of a literary regionalism. As many writers and critics have observed, the term is still "sloppily defined" (Berry, *A Continuous Harmony* 62) and quickly becomes an embarrassment or obstruction" (Berry, *A Continuous Harmony* 61). In her essay "Regional Literatures of the South," Rawlings condemns the many "futile outpourings of bad writing, done because they are salable" (Rawlings, "Regional Literatures" 382). For Rawlings, valuable regional literature is art that uses the locale as backdrop, as "a place where meaning is constructed, rather than simply the place where meaning can be *discovered*" (Fetterley/Pryse, *American Women Regionalists* 37).

Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings considered the Cracker community an aesthetic-symbiotic society; throughout her Florida writings she 'grew' on the stark environment of the Florida Scrub and thought about narrative strategies to convey to her readership the many ecological epiphanies she had personally experienced in the Cross Creek environs. The verbalization of 'Ecological Metanoia' and the importance she places on the involvement of the reader in the creation of her Florida novels, is reflected in the many speech and lecture notes, housed in the Rare Books Collection at the University of Florida. Regional indeterminacies, like Cracker speech and (folk) lore, are used to raise tension, guide the readers through the text and

involve them in a collaboration in the realization of the text. Rawlings renders the Florida Scrub visible on the map of the American literary landscape, writing against, what Mary Austin had termed, an "automobile eye view" (Austin, *Earth Horizon* 140).

3.1 The Regionalism of the Interwar Years

The Regionalism of the interwar years can be interpreted as a response to a severe crisis, namely the Wall Street Crash of 1929 and the resulting Depression.

> The continuous American search for a national identity has produced in literature, as in politics, alternating cycles of emphasis on the local and the national and the history of American Literature shows several peaks in regionalist writing, one occurring shortly after the Civil War, and another, more fruitful in the production of significant literary works, after World War I, during the late twenties and thirties. (Bigelow, *Frontier Eden* 70)

Towards the end of the 1920s and throughout the 1930s, the contradictory forces of regional differences and national unity produced heated debates between both advocates and opponents of national unity; consequently, the conflict united the previously lose groupings of local colorists, or by then newly-termed 'regionalists.' Rawlings's Florida novels were written at a time when other artists engaged in existential modernism; of the twenty-two Pulitzer Prizes for Fiction awarded in the years between the two World Wars, *fifteen* were for regionalist works (Bigelow, *Frontier Eden* 71). Howard Odum and Henry E. Moore estimate in their study *American Regionalism* that "between 1927 and 1938 some 1,500 regionalist novels were published in America, a count which excludes a much larger number of short fictions" (Bigelow, *Frontier Eden* 71). Rawlings herself personified the typical agrarian philosophy, *leaving cities behind her*[1] in exchange for the remote isolation of Cross Creek. "I was on the land again, I was poor and a little frightened but I was once more at home" (Rawlings, "Autobiographical Sketches" 74). Rawlings's move to Florida corresponds

[1] An allusion to her poem "Having Left Cities Behind Me"

exactly in its timing "with the larger wave of reaction from megalopolis" (Bigelow, *Frontier Eden* 71).

At the basis of the regionalist movement, stood the century-long transformation of the American society; a modern consumerist-oriented and mechanized mass society displaced an older America, which was constituted of a rural, producerist frontier and a decentralized farm and village society. In the time between the two World Wars, artists and intellectuals throughout the United States began to awake to the nation's regional diversity and potential that upheld heterogeneity over homogeneity;

> the region was more concretely, indeed, programmatically envisioned to be the utopian means for reconstructing the nationalizing, homogenizing urban-industrial complex, redirecting it toward an accommodation with local folkways and local environments. (Dorman, xii)

With its credo of decentralization the regionalist movement had no common center or dominant group.

> It was a movement less from its formal or organizational cohesiveness than from its simultaneity across the country, a simultaneity that stemmed, it is true, from generational experiences and backgrounds. (Dorman, 34)

However, one of the small local magazines of the time, the *Fugitive*, attracted a significant number of political activists, "who went on to form the only overtly political regionalist movement twentieth century U.S. literature has ever known" (Jordan, *New World Regionalism* 82). Members of this group, gathering at Vanderbilt University in Nashville were Donald Davidson, Allen Tate, Robert Penn Warren and John Crowe Ransom. Although the magazine was a short-lived experiment, theses writers passionately produced a body of work, whose titles (*I'll Take My Stand*, *The Attack on Leviathan*, *A New Declaration of Independence*) already reflect the personal dimension of their subject matter. Although a sublime distaste for the North underlies the rhetoric of the Agrarians - or *Fugitive* writers - their focus was not on a North/South rivalry but contradicting what Davidson – in 1938 – refers to as "domestic imperialism" (Davidson 19), where one "imperial or capital region" dominates a set of inferior "colonial regions" (Davidson 27).

Many regionalists of the interwar years pictured a "catastrophic scenario" (Dorman 10) in which folk and tribal cultures as well as traditions and a past are threatened by the ongoing modernization process. During Rawlings's time in Florida, vestiges of the past - namely vernacular architecture, regional speech and dialects as well as folk dances and habits - were still visible yet fading away as remnants of an older and increasingly forgotten culture. A feeling of loss and a sense of vanishing ideals are omni-present in the mind of the regional movement. For these artists the near - the regional *locus* - was used as a device for the far, namely for social commentary and political expression. Dorman argues that for many, their particular region embodied timeless political principles, universalistic and philosophical truth, even irrational mystical beliefs (Dorman 11). By interlacing regional portraits with grand American myths - like the frontier or the special virtue of people living close to the land - some regional works of the time resulted in romanticized escapist tales of local color and uncritical antiquarianism. However, by the 1930s, the decade Rawlings published her Florida novels, mass culture "proved to be one of the central evils and challenges confronted by the 'new regionalism' of the interwar period" (Dorman 19). Rawlings quickly recognized the individualism of the Cracker culture and wanted to preserve it from "the imperiling forces of modernization" (Dorman 19). She understood the interwar years as the last opportunity to first-hand capture (and experience) remnants of the American frontier with all its colorful myths and traditions. Once immersed in the process of passing down a region's culture for future generations, Rawlings fully identified with 'their' region; the writer's connection with the natural world and – in Rawlings's case its Cracker inhabitants - becomes equally important, sometimes even more important than interhuman contact and relationships. Together with other modernist movements,

> the makers of the Harlem Renaissance, the *Partisan Review* cosmopolitans, the *New Masses* communists, regionalists would share a common faith in cultural radicalism, the belief that artistic and intellectual production can in itself help to bring about dramatic change. (Dorman 22)

Distinguishing the regional movement from others of its time is the central emphasis on place; place is omni-present and "the function of a region is to endow the artist with character and purpose" (Davidson 239). It is the focus

on a particularism instead of the national or international which on one hand, provides common familiarity - since it is something typically American – and on the other hand, opens up a new and exotic world to be discovered.

> The challenge facing the regional writer is to avoid both literary myopia and hypermetropia – that is, to avoid focusing on either the unique particularity or the underlying universality of his regional world at the expense of the other. (Holman 13)

The regionalist is writing about two worlds: that of the region and that of the nation. In order to communicate universality, hidden behind a screen of the local, the regional writer is trapped in the paradox of regionalism; on one hand, the artist needs to stress a quaint new world whereas on the other hand, he has revealed this world in a way to make it accessible and understandable to the audience. Analyzing the national, mass culture or social norms, "regionalism as a body of fiction exists in tension with the definition of itself as 'regional'" (Fetterley/Pryse, *Writing Out Of Place* 37) or narrow. Place, as Fetterley and Pryse assume, is just a "conceptual framework" and for a text to be 'regional,' almost any place will do (Fetterley/Pryse, *Writing Out Of Place* 37). Rawlings's affiliation with her 'chosen' land and the intrinsic relationship she maintained with the Florida Scrub and hammocks takes on near religious symbolism. When she turned away from the Florida scene and left the Creek, her art lacked the 'magic,' founded on the intimacy of the author with her material. The moment in time seemed to have flown by, leaving her lost in time and '*splace*,' struggling for seven years to produce *The Sojourner*, with modest outcome.

During the interwar years, regionalists profited from the moment the American Dream was thrown into doubt. Images of a "postfrontier wasteland" (Dorman 154) haunted the national mind and called into question the American Dream of endless opportunity and mobility. Throughout the American history, the key euphemism was that America was blessed with a bountiful and practically empty wilderness; the natural abundance had for a long time also sheltered the Crackers in Florida.

> Because America was blessed with natural abundance, all men there could be independent and free – there need be no struggle for power, as all men possessed the essential power, over himself. Even the would-be ruler could not exercise control over men so independent. (Dorman 223)

Now that relying on nature and an escape into the wilderness became impossible or spatially restricted, the postfrontier state spread anxiety and a sense of loss among the American people to which artists reacted during the interwar period. Rawlings shared this fear and the plea for a "noncoercive 'unfenced world' of laissez-faire, the letting alone and acceptance of those frontier-nurtured self-directed individuals" (Dorman 223) runs throughout all of her Florida novels. Her criticism becomes especially visible in *South Moon Under* where the introduction of fence laws threatens to destroy the long established equilibrium between man and the land. Further on, Rawlings refers to the nomadic spirit of the early Southern pioneer for whom it signified freedom and independence to squat on land. This nomadic, and in Rawlings's opinion valuable heritage of the American folk culture, is destroyed by the interference and new understanding of modern mainstream America. In her writings, she focused on a critique of mono-culturalism, making regionalism a mouthpiece for a multi-cultural America.

Deeply ingrained in the American psyche and shattered throughout the Depression years, is the belief that one's lot can improve with time. "Never a settled peasantry in the usual sense of the word" (Dorman 84), the pioneer embodied the idea of culture as process.

> The pioneers at the earlier, frontier stages of a region's history were closest to the soil and its influences, furthers from an increasingly distinctive and standardizing urban-industrial life-style, yet also, paradoxically, working most fervently for the progress that would carry them away from the former and toward the latter. (Dorman 84)

Rawlings, too, depicts an American folk that was both victim and agent of modernization. During the time of the creation of Rawlings's Florida novels, consumerism replaced a self-sufficient existence; a shared aesthetic and close tie to the land began to be less desirable. Again, Rawlings's sense of loss becomes visible in the emphasis she puts on the relationship between soil and man which is for her a solution to the loneliness and the desperateness of the postfrontier wasteland. Although she refused any modern commodities in her life, such as a telephone or new agricultural machinery for her grove, most of her Cracker neighbors would have embraced the new technology if they could have afforded it. Regional texts reflect their author's life philosophy and most often – as in Rawlings's case

- their personal lives, a fact that also underlines the subjectivity inscribed in those texts.

Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings shares with other women regionalists like Willa Cather and Mary Austin the emergence of a self-conscious female regionalist mindset and similar biographical preconditions. All three enjoyed an upbringing with contact to a folk group, nature and the rural landscape; the discovery of an exotic provincial, a homeward yearning to the land and the experience of being lost or imprisoned in mainstream American society made them inseparable from their *chosen* region.

> In practical terms, the exploration, cultivation, and preservation of a regional culture became the vocation of the individual artist or intellectual. Region and regionalist rose from the unknown and into the known together. His or her career hinged upon making the local and obscure into the national, universal, and significant. (Dorman 34)

Austin came to California in 1888 and similar to Rawlings this move "ended a long spiritual drought" (Dorman 37). Austin describes her enchantment with the newly discovered Tejon district and its inhabitants as a "lurking, evasive Something, wistful, cruel, ardent; something that rustled and ran […] and when you turned from it, leaped suddenly and fastened on your vitals" (Dorman 37). This fascination enabled Austin to break free from "her total disappointment of marriage" (Dorman 38) and like Rawlings, she began an independent literary career, living off the material she gathered from the outback of California.

> Austin's personal life indicates a larger biographical pattern encompassing women regionalists particularly, a pattern in which the regionalist divergence from middle-class conventions was perhaps most manifest. (Dorman 37)

The regional artist writes in response to larger mythologies and often in reaction to them. As described in section two, the South and Florida have unshared pasts; with more than a century colonizing gap between them, they are historically different regions. Florida hardly had a plantation culture and its early Spanish influence shaped the state's historical identity. The open frontier with its unknown territory in the South, signified a literary playground for cowboy mythology and adventure epics. It is therefore not surprising that Rawlings's regionalist art is more in accordance with the

fictional mode of the Midwest - namely with what Holman defines as social realism - than with what he defines as romance in the South (Holman 17). Indeed, Rawlings's fiction fully excludes references to a typically Southern tradition!

> The great events in the myth-making minds of the South and the Midwest, respectively, are the Civil War and the settling of the Middle States – the myth of the aristocrat and the myth of the pioneer. (Holman 18)

Apart from the creation of the colorful 'aristocratic' orange planter Camilla van Dyne in *Golden Apples* and only a single reference to the Civil War in *The Yearling*, Rawlings omits any relation to or myth of the South in her Florida fiction. Holman argues that "the past of the South is tragic and complete whereas the Midwestern mind is characterized by its belief in the possibility that the promise of the past can still be realized in the future (Holman 17). Rawlings's characters are pioneer settlers from the 'up-country,' most of the time they come from Alabama in search for free land. Besides the hardships they undergo, a trace of hope and confidence in the future is omnipresent in all novels. Humoristic elements due to Cracker lore or dialect round off her novels and catapulted them to the top of the bestseller lists during the Depression era.

In terms of the frontier myth, modernization had heretofore always meant the triumph of a superior white civilization (Dorman 62); in the hands of interwar writers and earlier (women) regionalists like Mary Austin, this worldview was largely subverted. The fascination of a symbiotic community, be it Rawlings's Cracker community or Austin's California Tejon Indians, became in their minds an aesthetic society; in this organicist construct, all members are artists "in the sense that they participated in the intricately, ritualized and animist world conceived and ordered by this lore" (Dorman 67). A special respect for objects in themselves, their form and pattern as well as the understanding of storytelling as an art, is shared by these oral communities. These aesthetic-symbiotic and traditionalist societies served the artist as an analytic and as a response to *her* personal situation or 'situatedness' and to the crisis America faced during the interwar years. The act of recuperating a connection to history, nature and indigenous culture(s) via a relationship with place becomes a central aspect.

Remnants of an older America survived in isolated communities; the so-called "postfrontier afterglows" (Dorman 96) seem to underline David M. Holman's thesis that "Americans still recognize America as a confederation of regions and regional attitudes. Accessible transportation has not removed the exoticism of place" (Holman 24).

3.1.1 "The Faint Praise That Damns" - Rawlings's Critique of a Literary Regionalism

In chapter I of Odum's and Moore's study *American Regionalism*, the authors give forty-one definitions of the concept of the region. From most simplistic suggestions, like the one from V. B. Stanberry - "Region is a name for a man's concept of the entity of an area" - to more elaborate definitions as the one from Robert E. Park which harmonizes with Rawlings's conception of the Cracker *world*.

> My conception of a region is one in which the vegetation, animal and human life have acquired a character due to a permanent association; to the fact that the struggle for existence had brought about some sort of equilibrium among the competing and co-operating organism. (Odum/Moore 2)

Whereas Odum and Moore are easily able to provide manifold definitions of the concept of the region, the combination of the term 'regional' with 'literature' confronted the literary academe with a problematic definition. Like many other terms appropriated from the language of science, the words 'region' and 'regionalism' lose all exactness when they enter the literary vocabulary. For one group of critics, regionalism is still a catch-word which they used almost as a formula of dismissal for tendencies that they do not wish to take seriously. For another group regionalism is a battle-cry, the symbol of all they feel is worth fighting for in the reconstruction of American literature (Davidson 228).

Author and critic Wendell Berry, who considers his work to be often "in the neighborhood of the word 'regional'" (Berry, *A Continuous Harmony* 61), agrees with Davidson, arguing that the 'regional' "very quickly becomes either an embarrassment or an obstruction" (Berry, *A Continuous Harmony* 61); Berry believes that there is hardly any word

which is more "sloppily defined in its usage or more casually understood" (Berry, *A Continuous Harmony* 62). In his essay "The Regional Motive," he attributes the lack of seriousness ascribed to regionalism in a literary production, to two facts:

> There is, for instance, a 'regionalism' based upon pride, which behaves like nationalism. And there is a 'regionalism' based upon condescension, which specializes in the quaint and the eccentric and the picturesque, and which behaves in general like an exploitative industry. These varieties, and their kindred, have in common a dependence on false mythology that tends to generalize and stereotype the life of a region. That is to say, it tends to impose false literary or cultural generalizations upon false geographical generalizations. (Berry, *A Continuous Harmony* 61)

In 1939, Rawlings delivered a speech entitled "Regional Literature of the South" to the National Council of Teachers of English in New York, which was later printed in the edition of *College English* in 1940. Her line of criticism of the "ill-assorted mating" of the two words 'regional' and 'literature'" (Rawlings, "Regional Literature" 381) closely follows Berry and Davidson.

> I dare to say, as a writer who often suffers under the epithet of 'regional,' that there is very little regional literature of the South. I dare go farther and say that the sooner we divorce the two words the sooner shall we discourage the futile outpourings of bad writing whose only excuse is that they are regional, regionalism being at the moment a popular form of literary expression. (Rawlings, "Regional Literature" 382)

Rawlings's disapproval of literature, which is only written to sell, stems from personal experience. During her first years as a writer and journalist Rawlings was forced to produce what had been demanded of her; working as a journalist in St. Louis, individual expression and creativity was discouraged. With her discovery of the Florida Interior and its inhabitants, Rawlings finally found *a room of her own*, a place that supported a deeper sense in writing and creative effort. Therefore, it is not surprising that Rawlings disliked the coining of the term 'regional literature,' fearing it would breed a short-term literary market that would ultimately devalue *her kind of* literature.

> Regional writing done because the author thinks it will be salable is a betrayal of the people of that region. Their speech and customs are turned inside out for the gaze of the curious. They are held up naked.

> Not as human beings, but as literary specimens. (Rawlings, "Regional Literature" 384)

Upon writing her essay, Rawlings probably had in mind the writings of Erkskine Caldwell. She wanted to focus the critic's attention to the universal theme or subtexts *hidden* behind regional peculiarities which - as she believed - was not bound to place. Within its conceptual framework, the 'merely' regional transitions into the universal; Rawlings strongly believed that regionalism as a literary category transcends the definition of itself as narrow, minor or limiting.

Hardly any writer sets out to be 'regional.' The general disapproval of a writer's demarcation to be 'regional' has to do with artistic quality as well as with authorial intention in the creation of a literary work. 'Regional' "implies local color as the writer's predominant aim. Local color, as the examination and presentation of exotics, is anathema to the aims of most serious writers to present not only a region but the world as they see it" (Holman 14). Rawlings agrees with Holman in her criticism of the term 'regional literature' when it is used as an indicator of limitation or selling device.

> Of recent years the South has been again fresh literary meat. To subtitle a book 'A Tale of the South' was to guarantee a closer attention than would be given to a similarly mediocre story laid in Buffalo. And, after several generations of mistrust of the 'rebels,' the southern cause has come to be looked on with a sentimental sympathy. There is a distinct parallel between recent interest in writings about the South and interest in the Irish revival of letters of a generation or so ago. (Rawlings, "Regional Literature" 383)

Besides Rawlings's salty opening of her essay in which she condemns the many "futile outpourings of bad literature" (Rawlings, "Regional Literature" 382) that use "regionalism [as] a [momentanious] popular form of expression" (Rawlings, "Regional Literature" 382), she also provides insight into what she considers a worthy usage of regional material.

> It is the approach of the sincere creative writer who has something to say and who uses a specialized locale – a region – as a logical fitting background for the particular thoughts or emotions that cry out for articulation. This approach results in writing that is only incidentally, sometimes even accidentally, regional. It is only out of this approach that we can look for what may truly be called regional literature. For

> the producer of literature is not a reporter but a creator. His concern is not with presenting the superficial and external aspects, however engaging, of an actual people. It is with the inner revelation of mankind, thinking and moving against the backdrop of life itself with as much of dramatic or pointed effect as the artistry of the writer can command. (Rawlings, "Regional Literature" 385)

Rawlings's idea of how regional material should be used, reflects the predominant concept of regionalism during the 1930s.

Throughout all of her Florida novels, Rawlings's initial anthropological and scientific interests in the region and its Cracker culture are visible; the novels display her philosophy of "honest native regionalism" (Rawlings, "Regional Literature" 386) where place, character identities and intuitively the self are inseparable. So she writes that it is reasonable

> to find this honest and artistic regionalism to a greater degree among native or long-resident writers than among writers-in-search-of-material who may be struck by the novelty and usableness of a particular region. (Rawlings, "Regional Literature" 385/386)

Although Rawlings's admittance to the region of Cross Creek was as an 'outsider,' she considered herself a part of its *natural* community. In *Cross Creek* as well as in her essay on regional literature, she speaks in the first person plural ('us Southerners'), fully writing herself into the land. (Rawlings, "Regional Literature" 384)

> The best writing is implicit with a profound harmony between the writer and his material, so that many of the greatest books of all time are regional books, in which the author has used, for his own artistic purpose, a background that he loved and deeply understood. Thomas Hardy is a compelling instance. (Rawlings, "Regional Literature" 385)

Rawlings was convinced that the creation of valuable literature owes much to the profound harmony between the writer and their material, thereby mirroring the universal theme of her novels: the harmony between man and the land.

With her early critical thoughts on a literary regionalism, Rawlings demands an unprejudiced approach to regional art and proves that 'regional' does not necessarily imply narrowness or minor literature. As early as 1939, Rawlings claims that through the interchangeability of the literary category of regionalism with local color, - a catchword which at her time was heavily

laden with a negative connotation - the sincere creative writer suffers under the marginalized position often attributed to the writers of regional literature. At a time regionalism was still a young literary category, Rawlings anticipated David M. Holman's statement that "regional is often the faint praise that damns" (Holman 15)! Her credo that the good writer is almost independent of material is literally confirmed by Holman's passing comment that "William Faulkner would have been nonplussed at being pronounced one of the best Mississippi writers" (Holman 15).

3.2 Strategies of Experiential Writing: The Verbalization of 'Ecological Metanoia'

During her creative years, Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings regularly took time aside to meditate upon narrative strategies and the verbalization of what she simply called the 'beauty' of the scrub. In "The Invisible Florida," Rawlings depicts her anti-utilitarian approach to nature and illustrates her idea of the "Relativity of Beauty"[2] in an anecdote on hunting.

> "Two people can stand side by side and look at a Florida hammock. One sees only an obnoxious tangle and imagines rattlesnakes under every palmetto. The other sees beauty. I was duck hunting with two men one morning on Orange Lake. We crossed the lake just at dawn. The moon was setting and the sun was rising. It was a world of saffron and silver. One man said, 'Isn't it beautiful? And the other said, 'What's beautiful? Where are the ducks?'" (Quoted in: Bigelow, *Frontier Eden* 125)

With the move to Florida, Rawlings underwent a shift in consciousness, experienced a moment of "ecological metanoia" (Schauffler 84). The term metanoia is originally coined in theology, implying "a change of heart and mind, […] a renunciation of old ways and adoption of new beliefs and practices" (Schauffler 84). In Rawlings's case and in ecological terms, "metanoia represents nothing less than a conversion to earth" (Schauffler 84). Schauffler writes that "often the process is marked by visionary moments that serve as 'ecological epiphanies'" but she also states that ecological metanoia is "an ongoing process of renewing and deepening our

[2] The "Relativity of Beauty" is the title of one of her lectures held at the University of Florida.

ties to the ecological whole" (Schauffler 84). Rawlings experienced several of these intimate moments in nature, some of which she later translated into fiction; the most famous example of such transference is the 'whopping crane scene' in *The Yearling*. Writing regional fiction, reflecting on a subject that moves her deeply, Rawlings learns ways of responding to her environment and begins to view herself in relation to the nonhuman (Cracker) world. Writing becomes for her a spiritual renewal, strengthening her mental (and physical) interconnectivity to the land. Having re-constellated her inner world via 'place' and assuaged the grief from her divorce, she set out to find ways to communicate her topophilia for the Florida Scrub to her readers. The many lecture notes, speech manuscripts and correspondence attest to her prevailing concern with the process of writing and the effect the written text may have on the reader.[3]

Rawlings's regionalist philosophy is defined by her conviction that the natural environment inevitably shapes the individual and their culture. The effect nature has on her Cracker friends and then herself, is reminiscent in her writings. Rawlings's genuine regionalism is defined by her characters' extraordinary physical as well as spiritual response to their particular environment. Her conscious and conscientious experience in the scrub is what she tries to convey and what makes 'place' another character in her novels. She wanted to "make others see" (Rawlings, "On Characterization") what had stirred her so deeply in the Florida Scrub and it is the environment that exerts itself constantly upon herself as well as upon the mind and body of her protagonists. Hers is truly an experiential regionalism, which allows her to construct for her readers a sense of the region which echoes her own.

> You must have seen, some withered old woman in a gray and white percale dress, standing in the doorway of an unpainted pine shack under a live oak or a magnolia, and felt that she was a strong and lovely part of a sturdy, an admirable and difficult life. (Bigelow, *Frontier Eden* 100)

At several occasions Rawlings notes that she needed to feel "close to the background of any book [she] write[s]" (Rawlings, "Autobiographical Sketches" 74). The Florida Crackers were a part of something she

[3] Cf. Rawlings's lecture notes on "The Relativity of Beauty," "Facts, Verses, in Fiction," "Creative Writing," "The Mechanics of Writing" and "Characterization"

considered entirely beautiful and as Edna Louise Saffy writes in her dissertation, a *sense* of beauty was essential for her to become creative (Saffy viii).

> I always feel that I've failed completely as an artist when I've left anyone with a sense of ugliness. ("The Invisible Florida")

> I do not know what is beautiful or what is ugly, I only know what seems beautiful to me. As a writer I can only try to focus in. (Rawlings, "The Relativity of Beauty")

Circumscribing ecological epiphanies by simply calling it 'beauty,' Rawlings gives a clear definition of what this beauty is to her: "Beauty is anything that stirs an emotional reaction to an extent that we are conscious of a spiritual excitement over and above the sensory perception" (Rawlings "Creative Writing"). By *beauty* she means the intricate moment she as a regionalist faced when writing turned into something highly personal;[4] it is the moment when environment makes more concrete "the transcendental mingling of the physical and mental worlds" (Ellis 8). Schauffler describes these epiphanic moments as

> quantum leaps in perception, where one's vision is – as Bama suggests – 'miraculously enlarged.' The ordinary appears extraordinary and one catches a momentary glimpse into what Thomas Merton called 'the hidden wholeness.' (Schauffler 85)

In order to fictionally transfer her personal spiritual and physical experience at Cross Creek to her readers, Rawlings needed as a stimulus for her writing a semblance of a character from reality and focused very much on regionalism's inherent 'promise' of authenticity and

> the creative writer filters men and women, real and fancied, through his imagination as through a catalytic agent, to resolve the confusion of life into the ordered pattern, the coordinated, meaningful design, colored with the creator's own personality, keyed to his own philosophy, that we call art. Occupied with this magic-working, the creative writer finds a fictional character's speech, dress, and daily habits of importance only as they make that character emerge from the printed page with the aura of reality, so that the author has a convincing and effective medium for the tale he means to tell. (Rawlings, "Regional Literature" 385)

[4] As stated above, this is inherent in regionalism but has been overlooked until recent studies on nature writing/ecocriticism and autobiography (re-)discovered the personal element involved when writing about a 'beloved' place. The writer tends to use place as a medium to reflect upon himself or matters dear to him; in Rawlings's Florida novels, her subtexts deal - among others - with the role of women (writers) during her period of time.

In analyzing Rawlings's life and personal acquaintances at the Creek, it becomes evident that she modeled many of her characters from tales her neighbors told. The most obvious example is Piety and Lant in *South Moon Under* who are clearly recognizable as Leonard Fiddia and his mother Piety. Fearing to be accused of mere 'reportage,' Rawlings repeatedly justified herself, writing that most of her characters are only "based on people I know but not a single one is a life copy" (Rawlings, "Autobiographical Sketches" 76). Stressing the fictional element in her regional literature, Rawlings underlines that

> many of [her] characters have taken on a life of their own. They are completely real to me. They are no longer 'characters' whom I created but people whom I know. I should recognize Ma and Penny Baxter and Jody of *The Yearling* if I saw them in the Florida Scrub. Sometimes a character remains 'a character' and shadowy and then I realize with embarrassment that here I have failed. (Rawlings, "Autobiographical Sketches" 76)

Enmeshing her readers in a web of fact and fiction, Rawlings adheres to her philosophy that place must be – what Mary Austin had called - the "instigator of plot" (Austin, *Earth Horizon* 138).

Consequently, facts drawn from life have always been an important as well as critical issue for Rawlings. In her "Autobiographical Sketches" (1953), she states that "an almost exact topography is necessary for background" (Rawlings, "Autobiographical Sketches" 75). Her concern over accurateness also pervades many of her letters to editor Max Perkins. Her secret fear about *The Yearling* was not that there would be flaws in the plot but that the old-guard hunters and woodsmen would accuse her of wrongly depicting their reality; defining her newly-gained identity with her integration into this culture, she is afraid to inaccurately portray their lifeways and be openly expelled by them. For Rawlings, a work was not valid if the ecological and anthropological facts were not scientifically true in detail (Tarr, *Max and Marjorie* 345). For Rawlings the *ideal* realization of characters is one in which

> the writer knows and understands his main characters at the start even if in actual life he would not be in sympathy with them else he can never bring them to life for the reader. (Rawlings, "Autobiographical Sketches" 79)

In order to transfer the epiphanic moments experienced in the Cross Creek environs as well as the exotic indeterminacies accompanying a regional text, Rawlings was obliged to consider the reader in her process of writing;

> Let dilettantes prate of 'the ivory tower,' of writing 'for himself,' a book is not a book until it is read, just as there is no sound without an ear to hear it. The honest author writes to meet his own preferably severe standards, true, but he must have an audience if he is to communicate. (Rawlings, "Autobiographical Sketches" 79)

Rawlings knew that she would have to involve the reader in the 'act of reading' if she was to communicate ecological metanoia and make the reader 'feel' her resulting topophilia. For Rawlings, the reader actualizes and finalizes the reading process, thereby antedating Wolfgang Iser's argument that "the convergence of text and reader brings a literary work into existence" (Iser, *The Implied Reader* 257). Reading, as for Iser, is for Rawlings the actual "sense-making activity" (Suleiman 22), believing that "a potential text is infinitely richer than any of its individual realizations" (Iser, *The Implied Reader* 280). To Max Perkins she wrote that "readers themselves, contribute to a book. They add their own imaginations, and it is as though the writer only gave them something to work on, and they did the rest" (Tarr, *Max and Marjorie* 346). Years later, in an unpublished letter to Norman Berg, Rawlings speaks of the reader's obligation to give himself, mind and soul, to the text; in her lecture notes on "Characterization," she speaks of the reader's delight to give himself to a book, "to exercise his own imagination on the un-living material" (Rawlings, "On Characterization"). Rawlings would even go so far as to ask her audience whether a certain episode should be included or left out:

> My feeling about the hunting incidents is that their inclusion or elimination should be determined solely by the answer to the question: Does the reader recognize the beginning of another hunting episode with pleasurable anticipation, or is he bored at the thought of another, and impatient to be on with the narrative? (Tarr, *Max and Marjorie* 311)

Her conviction that the reader finalizes the reading process and enters in a dialogue with the author, derives on the one hand from the 1930s melting of literature with the new disciplines of social studies and anthropology and on the other hand stems from her early fascination with indigenous (Cracker) storytelling. In her 'masterpiece' *The Yearling*, Rawlings fictionally depicts

and analyzes artistic indigenous storytelling and demonstrates through the example of her spokesperson, Penny Baxter, how much power the teller may exert over their audience. In telling a story a communication takes place between teller and listener; the success or failure of good *telling* becomes immediately recognizable to the teller. Rawlings, too was in a constant 'mental' dialogue with her readers, mediating between them and the regional indeterminacies such as exotic nature and folk habits, in a larger sense also between her subtexts and 'objective' surface texts.

Rawlings literally enjoyed indulging in regional peculiarities, be it a description of the exotic flora and fauna or the colorful Cracker speech. Here, she could display her newly-acquired knowledge about Florida nature and Cracker life; by making extensive use of dialect, language becomes 'encoded.' The 'mainstream' readership up North was thereby transported into the margin, forced to take on the role of an outsider ('Colonized'), reversing them into the cultural 'other.' The heterogenic audience,[5] disposing of a different "repertoire" (Iser, "The Repertoire" 370), became highly dependant on Rawlings as a mediator between them and the generally unknown Cracker culture. In isolation and due to assimilation to the land (the crossing of the frontier), the Florida Cracker had created their own culture. Recognizing her status as a wanderer between two 'cultural worlds,' Rawlings uses the method of 'encoding' and 'decoding' to raise tension and bind the reader to the plot. Cultural exotics are slowly revealed through the context or simply used to stimulate the reader's *sense* of a faraway place. Always alert of 'over-encoding,' Rawlings was cautious not to frustrate her readers and to avoid misinterpretation. Being aware that the reader finalizes the reading process, she depended on the understandability of her texts: "Only a great genius is privileged not to be understood" (Rawlings, "Writing as a Career").

In order to further facilitate the 'act of reading,' Rawlings created a landscape the reader would be able to imagine; she developed characters that were particular but strongly mirrored the universal, and she inserted facts and details to underline the credibility of her story plots. The achievement of this universalism is essential to her most successful novels,

[5] Floridians and Southerners would be able to decipher most of the local folkways and dialect

The Yearling and *South Moon Under*. Baxter's Island, Lant's homestead on the 'other side of the river' as well as Luke Brinley's orange grove, function as microcosms with all their peculiarities of Cracker life; however, these microcosms reflect a larger macrocosm, namely the equilibrium of men with the land. Penny Baxter functions as Every Person; he is a man bruised by society, finding solace in his connection to the isolated scrub land. Lant and Luke are both epitomes of the Noble Savage, trespassers between two cultures, having a unique tie to the land but preferring solitude over a life within the community. This conceptualization is central throughout American literature. Henry David Thoreau's *Walden Pond* is only one example where a man turns to the land and refuses to live within the borders of society and its laws. Penny and his pine island, as well as Lant's and Luke's hammock function as a universal metaphor for the human condition. Further on, Edna Saffy points out that Rawlings's main characters function on a universal level, while the minor ones function more on the specific. This scheme becomes especially visible in *The Yearling*. Jody is not only a twelve-year-old Cracker boy of the Florida Scrub; he also signifies the universal process of growing up. The maturation is a common experience for every reader and it is easy to identify with the boy. This does not imply that the minor characters in Rawlings's fiction are boring and insignificant in a literary interpretation of them. Rawlings writes that she was "devoted to the Forresters in *The Yearling*. Their uncomplicated zest for life is a relief from more serious and worthy characters" (Rawlings, "Autobiographical Sketches" 78). With their funny, often clumsy commentaries and behavior, they are a great enrichment for *The Yearling*. Again their inclusion was a conscious one; at the time Rawlings wrote *The Yearling* she had found out that botanical details as well as Cracker folklore and speech greatly interested her readers.

> "It is only since *Golden Apples* that I realize what it is about my writing that people like. Now I feel free to luxuriate in the simple details that interest me." (Tarr, *Max and Marjorie* 251)

The harmony in which the Cracker characters live with the harsh environment overwhelmed Rawlings, unleashing ecological metanoia, which ultimately lead her to think about ways to incorporate this fascination into her texts. Edna L. Saffy even considers the "communication of

'beauty'" (Saffy 42) as the writer's foremost goal. Rawlings's talent as a mediator between two inherently different cultures finally enables the reader to locate - geographically and imaginatively - the settings of her books. The fact that *South Moon Under* was a finalist in the Pulitzer competition despite the fact that it was published in the middle of the Depression and that *The Yearling* climbed to the top of the bestseller lists, was made into a movie and had been translated into thirteen languages, attest the universal appeal, confirming the successful communication of 'place.' Today, locals of the Cross Creek area tell amusing stories of tourists searching for Baxter's Island in the Ocala National Forest. It is due to Rawlings's experiential quality of writing and the transference of topophilia that the Big Scrub is immediately identified as '*The Yearling* country.'

IV. The Florida Novels

4.1 *South Moon Under* and *Golden Apples*

4.1.1 Topophilia as a Means of Characterization

Yi-Fu Tuan has coined the term Topophilia in 1974, denoting the human love of place. Topophilia can be defined broadly to "include all of the human beings' affective ties with the material environment" (Tuan, *Topophilia* 93).

> The response to environment may be primarily aesthetic: it may then vary from fleeting pleasure one gets from a view to the equally fleeting but far more intense sense of beauty that is suddenly revealed. The response may be tactile, a delight in the feel of air, water, earth. More permanent and less easy to express are feelings that one has toward a place because it is home, the locus of memories, and the means of gaining a livelihood. Topophilia is not the strongest of human emotions. When it is compelling we can be sure that the place or environment has become the carrier of emotionally charged events or perceived as a symbol. (Tuan, *Topophilia* 93)

The definition Yi-Fu Tuan provides, reveals that the human being has more ways to respond to the world than the five senses of seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting and touching known since Aristotle (Tuan, *Topophilia* 6). The Florida Cracker inhabits this strong sense of place, which "couples sentiment with place" (Tuan, *Topophilia* 113). Being connected to the land in psychological, spiritual and physical ways, the Florida Cracker qualifies as one of America's 'indigenous' people(s) or groups. "Indigenous peoples are culturally distinct groups that have occupied a region longer than other immigrant groups or colonist groups" (Elder/Wong 6). When the ancestors of the Crackers first came to Florida, it was uninhabited, virgin land; most of the Creek Indian splinter groups which developed into the Seminole Tribe arrived at the same time.[1] Further justifying a classification as an indigenous group is the fact that they lived in isolation and turned to nature

[1] The first Indians came into the region that is now Florida 12,000 years ago. Caught up in the conflict between Spain and Great Britain and due to epidemics, the ancient Indians of northern Florida were gone by 1710. The human legacy of more than ten millennia had disappeared before Rawlings's Crackers settled in the area. (cf. Milanich 170)

as their only reality. Many Cracker folk beliefs and remedies are similar or even the same as those of the Seminole Indians in Florida. Hertha Wong classifies 'indigenousness' as a people whose culture is rooted in a particular landscape with which they [the cultural group] are essentially and specifically identified; further on, indigenous people view nature as a powerful force to be respected and honored, as a life-giving Mother to be cherished and they conceive of themselves as part of the intricate web of the natural world (Elder/Wong 7). All of this correlates very well for Rawlings's Cracker characters. Yi-Fu Tuan argues that whatever sense organ is given exercise varies with the individual and its culture (Tuan, *Topophilia* 23). Place can call to mind an entire complex of sensations and the Crackers seem to be equipped with an extraordinary topophilic sense. As cited above (2.4.2) this special sense of place has survived until today. Mr. Partin's definition of what he needs in life - "Just me and the land" - attests the complexity and omnipresence, nature, an eco-consciousness and a strong sense of place occupies in the life of these people. Rawlings does not merely write place into her texts - describing nature and the effect it has on its inhabitants - events literally *take place* (Momaday, "Native American Attitudes" 142); they have a strong effect on the character formation of her protagonists. Her main characters, Lant Jacklin, Luke Brinley as well as Penny Baxter and his son Jody are all furnished with this encompassing love for the land. Through their topophilia, they strongly appeal to the reader.

Rawlings's second kind of male characters are those alienated from the land, those who do not possess a seemingly inherent sense of place. They validate the cliché of broad dichotomy between a Western and an indigenous, intrinsic conception of the land.

> Westerners, as the generalization is most often articulated, see nature as a force to be conquered and tamed, as a resource to be utilized, and they see themselves as separate from, most often superior to, nature. (Elder/Wong 7)

They do not feel the same responsibility towards their natural environment and lack this special geocentric perspective. As in the case of Richard Tordell, they place themselves above the land, excluded from the intrinsic whole. Unable to feel interconnectedness with the land, they are lost. Damned by the author, they fail in the rough natural world of the Florida

Scrub. Cleve as well as Claude Albury are even doomed to death due to their inability to (re)-connect with the land. Tordell, however, survives and in the end, similar to the *rite de passage* narrations of Native Americans, he is able to make peace with the land and discovers for the first time an eco-conscious identity and a place in the cosmos.

Rawlings's women can also be divided into two groups; those who have strong ties with the land receive a positive characterization, the others are silenced. The first group of women can further be split up into assertive and quiet women. Both have their way of forming an alliance with the land; they seem to enter Rawlings's 'gender-free room' and become equal to the indigenous men. However, all women do not fully *belong*, most often they are expelled from the rest of the Cracker community and slip into the role of 'the other.' Having rejected the norm, they reflect the marginal position women held in mainstream American society during the Depression era. Rawlings's subtexts subtly critique conventions of gender, with place turning into a helping ally. In contrast to her short fiction, the novels were aimed to bring her the literary success and acclaim she had always envisioned for herself; therefore, the subjective voice in her texts mostly remains veiled in a deeper subtext. Torn between her public and private side, she became dependent on Max Perkins's suggestions, undergoing enormous anxieties every time a book went for publication. All her Florida novels are cross-cultured collaborative narratives; they are the work of a multitude of Cross Creek voices, a 'non-indigenous' editor and an author who imaginatively constructed a 'mediated' text.

4.1.1.1 Place as Cosmic Harmony – Indigenous Cracker Concepts of Self, Life and the Land

Lant Jacklin is the 'other child' of the Florida Scrub and a foreshadowing to Jody Baxter in Rawlings's success novel, *The Yearling*. Whereas *The Yearling* exclusively centers on Jody Baxter's *rite de passage*, Lant's passage from boyhood to manhood plays a minor role in *South Moon Under*; rather, the novel centers on Lant's hardships of making a living for his family in the scrub, an ecosystem threatened by a vanishing frontier and

encroaching civilization. Nevertheless, single episodes of the two 'Scrub novels' are strongly reminiscent (the shooting of the doe by Piety in *South Moon Under* and Ma Baxter's shooting of Jody's pet fawn Flag).

In indigenous cultures the process of growing up is still much more ritualized and apparent than in modern-day societies. Therefore, Lant traverses the typical steps a boy in the Florida backwoods would perform in order to become a man. Whereas Penny is both mother and father to Jody, Lant is left fatherless. Piety, his mother, shares his love for the land but from puberty onward, Lant naturally withdraws from her. However, Lant is not alone. His so-called 'second birth' in the circle of men – which Jody experiences in the middle of a hunt with the Forresters and Penny – Lant experiences with Old Man Paine, an old hunter of the area who takes him in as a son. Further on, his two uncles, Abner and Zeke, as well as crazy Ramrod with whom he shares the special bond of topophilia, help him to successfully enter manhood. Like Jody, Lant must face his own vulnerability. Jody feels betrayed by his father who orders him to shoot his beloved pet fawn; Lant, who is even more embedded in the natural environment of the scrub, feels betrayed by the land; for both boys, this disruption of a childhood idyll signifies the initiation into manhood. All of Rawlings's men learn to live with their vulnerability. Similar to the old mythologies of Siegfried, Odysseus or King Arthur, they live with early-afflicted wounds which make them into better characters and deepen their ties to the land.

Lant is part of the first group of Rawlings's men who live close to the earth and to whom it is possible to ascribe 'indigenous' character traits. In *South Moon Under*, the river Ocklawaha functions as the natural borderline between civilization and wilderness. When old man Lantry traversed the river, he made wilderness his home. Choosing to be part of the frontier's 'other side,' the side that is doomed to die, he opts for interrelationship with nature, rejecting a life amidst the river community, who adapt their way of life to the culture of mainstream America. Although the river physically marks a discernible line between 'them' and the Lantrys, Rawlings's backwoods setting of the Florida Interior mirrors James Clifford's understanding of the frontier, namely as "a social setting, not a fixed mappable but rather a culturally defined place where peoples with

different culturally expressed identities meet and deal with each other" (Clifford quoted in Krupat, *Ethnocriticism* 4). Although the community joins Lantry on his side of the river to build up his fences, they do not align with him in an act of subjugating or domesticating the 'virgin' Scrub country or impose human cultural laws; Rawlings makes clear that they are *marionnettes* in *his* act of fencing them out of his newly-created safe-haven. In *South Moon Under*, two subcultures meet in this shifting space of the Florida backwoods frontier, sometimes accepting each other's 'otherness,' sometimes eyeing each other skeptically. Alonso Ortiz, a San Juan Tewa Indian, critiqued the term 'frontier,' arguing that "one culture's frontier may be another's culture's backwater or backyard" (Ortiz 3). The same discussion unfolds around the term 'wilderness.' In the definition of the early pioneers, 'wilderness' constitutes an unknown and frightening area, an obstacle to overcome in the winning of a livelihood.[2] For Lantry and his later grandson Lant, the wildheart of the scrub is home. Viewing life from *within* the scrub, 'wilderness' and 'frontier' take on different meanings. The transformation of the wild Scrub land into a National Park later in the novel, constructs nature in anthropocentric terms; although the project was aimed to safeguard exotic nature, it did in fact alienate people from the land and paradoxically, proclaims human domination instead of interrelatedness with the environment. Rawlings shows that culture and nature need not stand in binary opposition but should, ideally, enter into an ethical dialogue among equals. It is significant to note that all characters who choose the scrub side of the river as a home - Old Man Paine, Piety, Lant and later Zeke - are furnished with an extraordinary topophilia the other characters lack or do not possess to such an extensive degree.

In her characterization of Lant, Rawlings depicts him as *woven* into the land. Thereby, she employs nature simile, describing him as wandering off "like a lean red cat into the swamp and hammock" (*SMU* 120) or as a "caged animal" (*SMU* 70) in school. Further on,

> the smell of him was different from that of other boys and men. There was a scent […] like an animal that bedded in dry leaves. Its pungency was threaded with something sweet and compounded, as

[2] Cotton Mather for example saw 'wilderness' through his sombre theological spectacles; as the empire of Antichrist, filled with frightful hazards, demons, dragons and flying serpents.

> though pine needles had been crushed with swamp muck and fish scales and blueberries. (*SMU* 134)

Early in the novel, Rawlings establishes Lant's kinship with the natural world; similar to Penny Baxter in *The Yearling*, Lant's intimate relationship with nature, his forming of a kinship with the land and his 'unmanly' sensibility for the beauty in nature, hint at Rawlings's female pen and allows for a comparison to other frontiersmen and women by female writers such as Alexandra Bergson in Willa Cather's *O Pioneers*. However, Lant's indigenousness covers up his feminine character traits and he is viewed in the public mind as the Noble Savage of the Floridian backwoods. Furnished with an extraordinary amount of courage and skillfulness, "[i]t pleased the boy that he may have crossed where no man had ever crossed before. It pleased him, that he would come up on no clearing, no cabin, no clatter of human voices" (*SMU* 125). Rawlings, herself, had been fascinated by the same 'blankness' of the region and she uses Lant as her mouthpiece to verbalize the loyalty she feels for her place; the deep bond of nurture, an emotion comparable to what Native American tribal cultures refer to as the mother-earth-theme, is visible throughout the text. Consequently, Lant is occupied with his exclusive reality, the scrub's exotic ecosystem.

> On his way he might see many things; a buck crossing the river; an otter's smooth flat nose lifted above the sinuous streak that was the swimming body; always alligators and Poor Joes, and perhaps a water-turkey that at sight of them would drop from its limb as if shot, straight into the depth of the river. (*SMU* 93)

As a child he had learned to anticipate the animal's next step, eager to understand nature's maliciousness and vagaries. The father and mentor role Penny assumed in Jody's situation is taken over by Old Man Paine. Himself deeply rooted in the land, Paine slips in the role of a 'natural' guide, sensing the boy's affiliation and commitment to the natural environs. Paine's art of nature teaching is reminiscent of Penny's. He lets Lant imitate and learn for himself, not prescribing what he ought to do.

> The old man was sure footed, putting his toe first to earth, so that if he stepped on a branch or twig that gave signs for crackling, he was ready-poised to withdraw his foot. The boy was inherently awkward. His body moved in spasms under his impassioned control. (*SMU* 103)

Mirroring a Native American's methodology of learning the ways of the land, the old-guard Cracker fully trusts the boy's responsibility for nature. "There is in the Indian worldview this kind of understanding of what is and what is not appropriate. It is respect for the understanding of one's own heritage" (Momaday, "Native American Attitudes" 83).

More than Jody, we see Lant 'acting indigenous.' This has certainly to do with the fact that *The Yearling* ends before Jody has fully grown into a man. Lant has internalized that all forms of life in the scrub are interrelated and that he is only a small part of a big whole. Furnished with an additional 'sense,' (a strong sense of place or topophilia) enables him to perceive nature in a way unknown to most people. "He could see nothing. The shadow of the magnolia lay on the earth. But there was motion. He *sensed it* [Italics mine] rather than heard" (*SMU* 108). Lant is able to *read* the land. Apart from 'physically' seeing things he also sees them with the "eye of the mind" (Momaday, "Native American Attitudes" 83). Even as an eight-year old boy, he is able to find his way out of the scrub when his mother and grandfather are lost.

> 'Son,' Lantry called, 'how come you to know the way?' The boy pointed to the ridge at his left. 'Why,' he said impatiently, 'I could see the tops o' them big trees yonder. Them's hickories. Ain't non o' them in the scrub. Ain't hickories nowhere excusin' right along above the river.' (*SMU* 67)

Lant distinguishes and observes occurrences that the two grown-ups do not recognize. For Lant the terrain is 'mapped.' Geographic landmarks tell him a story or recall events from his memory that help him to orient himself. In her essay "Landscape, History, and the Pueblo Imagination," Leslie Marmon Silko writes of tales that map the terrain; the land becomes 'storied.' Just as stories educate the people about geography, history, or a culture, so a specific geographic site recalls these tales to the people (Silko 274-251). 'Invisible' maps of the Scrub land serve Lant as a carrier for emotions, events and other actual guidelines he connects with the land. His personal story resides in the land; as long as the landscape exists in this way, he will be reminded of individual chapters or events in his life and a sense of self which then enables him to retrace his life story. As an adult, Lant explains the network of landmarks he has in his mind; however, the 'invisible' maps - the positive or negative sensations each place evokes in

him - he hides from the others. Animating place through topophilia, Lant is able to 'imagine' his way.

> 'What you go by? You always know where north lies?' 'I don't pay no pertickler attention to north. They's landmarks for them knows 'em. Jar Hill and Hog-pen Stand and Buzzard's Roost and Buckskin Parairie and sich as that. When the sun's shinin', I go by the sun, and the moon's good he'p when it's showin'. If they ain't no sun, and it cloudy or drizzlin', the wind's the best way to tell. Times, it blows from the river, times, from the scrub – don't matter which-a-way, long as you keeps track of it. If it changes, you belong to notice the change. And if they ain't no sun not wind nor moon, the trees theirselves is a good sign.' 'How's that?' 'Why,' he was impatient with their ignorance, 'the '71 storm done bended the tall pine trees towards the south-west.' (*SMU* 131)

For Lant, as for Silko, a rock is not simply a rock; it is much more. It has a life of its own, and a story to tell. The Western conception of the four directions is of little importance to him. "Survival in any landscape comes down to making the best use of *all* [italics mine] available resources" (Silko 254). For Lant it does not matter what came first, the incident, the story or the land!

Places have a face for Lant, place names recall events in the past that link them to the present, describing the geophysical composition. "Awareness of the past is an important element in the love of place" (Tuan, *Topophilia* 99).

> Lant knew the river by heart for a few miles below his own landing. Shingle Landing, Mud-Bottom springs, Sawgrass, Indian Bluff, where he had found the old 45-70 bullet, as big as his thumb, from the Indian wars – he passed them as he would pass folk he knew. Today their faces were a little strange, as though they showed an unsuspected lack of friendliness. (*SMU* 160/161)

Nonhuman and human world become interchangeable for Lant, enabling him to ascribe human character traits to nature; he is sensitive to nature's *language*, even hearing the river breathe (*SMU* 225)! When he has no luck with timbering he is deeply hurt, feels betrayed by nature, as one would feel betrayed by a close friend. "It was a bad matter when there was treachery in familiar things" (*SMU* 173). As in Jody Baxter's case, nature often substitutes for human relationships!

Lant is susceptible to the beauty of the land, to the 'magic' moments or ecological epiphanies evoked by place in someone equally receptive of it.

In the same way as the 'whooping crane scene'[3] affects Penny and Jody, Lant experiences a moment with the scrub, he will not forget.

> As though a rifle sight had been brought down accurately on an elusive mark, he saw them. An old buck was there, leading the play, with a doe and a yearling. [...] They were more like moonlit shadows than blood-filled animals. The boy could no more than discern them, nebulous as the ghosts of deer. He longed for his shotgun. He had left it in a clump of palmettos. He wanted to kill. Yet the deer stirred him. If he had had his gun, he decided he would not have shot. They were strangely dear to him. They were a part of him, closer than his mother or his dogs or his bed. […] Far off he heard the buck blow, calling to the others. He heard them *answer*. (*SMU* 108/109)

Where Jody is fortunate to have Penny to share his topophilia with, Lant is alone. However, he has become such an intrinsic part of his environment that when he heard the deer *answer,* he does not simply hear a sound but is able to decipher a message. For Lant, events in his life really *take place*. Writer N. Scott Momaday has numerously evoked the power of place throughout his oeuvre. Life experiences are rooted in the land. In *The Names,* Momaday writes that

> events of one's life take place, *take place*. Events do indeed take place; they have meaning in relation to the things around them. […] I existed in this landscape, and then my existence was indivisible with it. I placed my shadow there in the hills, my voice in the wind that ran there, in those old mornings and afternoons and evenings. (Momaday, "Native American Attitudes" 142)

Lant's life is rooted in the scrub and it is difficult to imagine and visualize him apart from his 'homeland.'

In the end of the novel, when fence laws, game wardens and 'furreiners' come to the hammocks and hunters intrude on the equilibrium of the scrub, it becomes impossible for Lant to live off the land. He literally panics at the thought of having to leave the scrub. Still believing that "if a place suits you, you kin make a livin' there" (*SMU* 201), he tries his luck on 'moonshining.' Although illegal, Rawlings justifies Lant's illegal undertakings by the interconnectedness he feels with the scrub.

> Here he liked the intimacy with the hammock. Its life washed over him and he became a part of it. The scrub yonder sent its furred and feathered inhabitants past him to eat and drink, and *he and the scrub were one*. (*SMU* 225) [Italics mine]

[3] A scene from *The Yearling* and the longest description of nature Rawlings ever gave in a work of fiction (cf. 152ff)

"All things are connected. Whatever befalls the earth, befalls the children of the earth" (Nerburn/Mengelkoch, *Native American Wisdom* 1). Chief Seattle's wise words about the ways of the land mirror Lant's personal philosophy of the relationship of humans to the nonhuman world. Conceiving of the land as an extension of himself, he strongly opposes land ownership and it hurts him personally that scarcely a day passes during the hunting season that a wounded animal does not slip through the swamp, "spattering the palmettos with its blood" (*SMU* 277).

> 'If them scapers comes in here knowed how to track, they'd have no need to let the deer go off, like this un, and die this-a-way. They could foller and come up with it and git the good o' the hide and the meat.' (*SMU* 277)

Through Lant, Rawlings voices her critique of the 'un-natural' intrusion of mainstream culture in a formerly harmonious ecosystem. Lant's eco-conscious behavior is underlined when revenue agents destroy his still and burn the land around it. Lant does not lament his monetary loss but reacts furiously because "hit'll be a year 'fore the hammock's green agin" (*SMU* 314). Lant's responsibility towards the land does not stem from a modern-day environmental sensitivity; it stems from his intrinsic conception of the land and his own need to survive.

> Every tree fitted into his life. Its beauty and its purpose were joined together, so that the most beautiful trees to him were those with the greatest use. For the slim white ash trees he felt a tenderness, gauging their probable length in terms of strands for firing in the furnace of his still. (*SMU* 250)

The governmental creation of the scrub as a National Park "redefines the scrub as wilderness, [as] a purely human construction that William Cronon has critiqued as 'the fantasy of people who have never themselves had to work the land to make a living'" (Rieger 209). Fostering alienation, the creation of the park speeds the extinction of the (sub)culture Lant is a part of and creates instead an artificial playground, where part-time hunters and rogues live off their macho behavior. Clearly Rawlings, as a woman and female writer aligns with their indigenousness against a 'male,' dominant Other from outside the intrinsic world of the backwoods frontier.

With the threat of the 'outside world' becoming more and more obtrusive, Lant recognizes that he lives on the dying side of the frontier.

However, he is unable to wander out of the scrub, although he may have a more comfortable life in civilization. His indigenousness, his way of life and the fact that he realizes that he is a marginal remnant of a (sub)culture that slowly ceases to exist, draws him nearer to the Seminole Indians (or Native American culture) who have also been chased off their ancestral lands. "They [Zeke and Lant] agreed that white men had treated the Indians shabbily" (*SMU* 321). Rawlings deliberately builds a bridge between Crackers and Native Americans to underline the similarity between both cultures and their equal fate. The 'crossing of the frontier' ultimately condemns Lant to poorness and transfers him into the cultural margin but the spiritual riches he found on 'his side of the river' make him hold on to this life.

The shooting of his cousin Cleve is the culminating point in Lant's search for his place in the world. Having failed to make a living outside of the boundaries of the scrub and having tried to be with a woman who is unable to share his topophilia, he finally *re-members* the scrub. The verb 'to remember' takes on a new meaning if contemplated in the sense of searching wholeness. As Brigitte Georgi-Findlay writes in *Amerikanische Literaturgeschichte* (1997), to *re-member* describes physical as well as spiritual healing (Georgi-Findlay, "Indianische Literatur" 392). Having lost his sense of belonging and recognizing that making a living outside the sheltering borders of the scrub is impossible for him, Lant remembers his gift of a sense of place - a sense the West has often judged as supernatural or beyond rationality. He finds his way back to his origins, re-members the scrub, (re)-entering the intrinsic whole as a newly-strengthened and responsible member. *Re-membering* signifies for Lant a second birth. To be able to experience beyond the five senses becomes part of the natural again. "'I'd dare ary man to mess up with me, yonder in the scrub'" (*SMU* 333). Being a fugitive of the law, he mirrors his grandfather's fate at the outset of the novel. In times of crisis and at the end of his life journey, he *re-members* the land;[4] topophilia becomes for him a means to *re-member* his place in the world and come home.

[4] He has always been a member of the land, although he doubted that he could live off the land forever. Now that he is forced to stay, he *re-members* the land.

Luke Brinley's 'indigenousness' is equally defined through the intrinsic relationship he - as a farmer – has with the land. Unlike Lant and Jody, who are approximately his age, Luke seems to have skipped boyhood; after the early death of his parents he is thrown into an adult role, having to take responsibility not only for himself but also for his younger sister Allie. While Lant and Jody roam the scrub, play and have time to become enchanted with the riches of the natural world around them, Luke earns the livelihood for his 'little family' on the field. As in the case of Penny Baxter, Luke becomes a father and mother substitute for his sister. In his life, however, role models or 'indigenous' mentors (like Penny or Old Man Paine) are lacking. Luke is supplied with a good amount of Cracker stoicism and like Rawlings's other 'native' men prefers solitude to a life amidst the community. "Luke and Allie Brinley had lived always, since their sires' death, on the fringe of the community, scarcely, in their isolation, a part of it" (*GA* 190). Lantry's crossing of the Ocklawaha river and his choice to live on the 'other side' of the frontier is equally consciously done by Luke when he squats on land hidden away from the Cracker community of Purley. Luke embodies many character traits that can be rediscovered in Rawlings's favorite character Penny Baxter. Both take responsibility for others, are wounded by civilization and have a strong affiliation for farming.

Something beyond the rational binds Luke to the hammock. Sitting on the steps of the deserted house, he rejoices in a "dangerous leisure" (*GA* 18), being in a complete symbiosis with the hammock, its wild grove and the cosmos in general. Topophilia, for Luke, is closely connected to *his* hammock. Unlike Lant and Jody who have to leave in order to *re-member*, Luke is surrounded by an aura of self-confidence and never doubts his place in the world. "The hammock had come to seem a safe retreat and a natural home" (*GA* 26); something about its cool blackness was comforting" (*GA* 20).

Right from the beginning of the novel, Rawlings describes Luke in terms of 'the native other,' differentiating him physically as well as spiritually from the rest of the Cracker community. As in Lant's case, she uses nature simile and reinforces his place *within* the Florida hammocks. "With his shaggy mane of hair, his blue eyes fierce in his tanned face, he looked like a bony lion back on its hind legs to face an unfriendly world"

(*GA* 19). Luke's indigenousness does not go unobserved by the inhabitants of Purley, and they eye him skeptically while admiring his adaptability to the land. "He was fourteen. His strength was equal to that of any of the three under-sized men who acted as the other pallbearers" (*GA* 1).

> A woman, passing close on the arm of a man, looked up at Luke's massive shoulders, clear-cut features and rough tawny hair under a ragged palmetto hat. She stared an instant into the blue depths of his eyes, then turned her face quickly to her escort. (*GA* 34/35)

For Luke, as for Lant, the hammock *breathes*. Filled "with a sense of having lived here in the hammock always" (*GA* 61), there is life in every plant and tree; so a tree must first be dead before it could be felled.

> The live oaks and sweet gums and hickories could come first. It might be best to girdle them and let them die while he cut out the undergrowth. A dead tree falling, made less havoc than a live one. It seemed as though a live tree went down fighting, like an animal. (*GA* 65)

Deeply resting in the land, Luke understands the interrelatedness of all organisms in nature.

> Here and there, he decided, he would leave a fine magnolia tree. The large, waxed leaves, so dark as to be almost black, with a copper lining, the great, white blossoms, would stand proud and handsome among the delicate citrus trees. He would leave standing all the palms. He had noticed that they had no tendency to sap the strength from the orange trees, but on the contrary, growing close to them, seemed to hold moisture for them through dry weather. (*GA* 65)

Rawlings tries to fully integrate Luke into nature; sometimes he even talks to the animals living on the hammock (*GA* 167); however, the scene in which he "instinctively" (*GA* 61) helps a king snake to peel off his skin, a thing "familiar that he had done before and would do again," (*GA* 61) appears too edenic.

Luke is free of what Joseph Bruchac calls "human-self-importance" (Bruchac 263); he does not exploit the soil, wringing last drops of essence from it to gain more profit. He has understood that "something in him and the hammock had no beginning and no end, but had existed side by side forever" (*GA* 61). Unlike Lant, who is a hunter and woodsman, Luke as a farmer thinks in terms of cyclical time. For Luke "the seasons complete a circle" (Bruchac 266) and function as a reminder to secure the survival of the land and every living thing for future generations.

> Luke thought these vast trees, these grapevines as thick and knotted as his arm, must have grown in this place since long before his father came to Florida from Alabama. His father's father might have been unborn when the greatest of these oak trees sprouted. For an instant he had a vision of the generations of men and forests, springing from the darkness and receding into it. (*GA* 17)

Bruchac argues that "if you see things in terms of circles and cycles, you begin to engage in commonsense practices. You learn to live in a way that keeps in mind, as native elders put it, seven generations" (Bruchac 266).

Luke's understanding of himself and the land restricts him to move on to new land if the old is worn out, while it was common frontier procedure to do so. For him, the other farmers of the area are passive and stand outside of the circle of creation. "They stood quiescent as trees, waiting for circumstance to beat against them or to pass them by" (*GA* 26). For Luke it is clear that these men are either dominated by the land or slip themselves in the role of the dominator. Luke's philosophy of being a part of the intrinsic whole, instead of being separated from the land, is also the target of criticism in Leslie Marmon Silko's essay on landscape.

> So long as the human consciousness remains *within* the hills, canyons, cliffs, and the plants, clouds, and sky, the term *landscape*, as it has entered the English language, is misleading. 'A portion of territory the eye can comprehend in a single view' does not correctly describe the relationship between the human being and his or her surroundings. This assumes the viewer is somehow *outside* or *separate from* the territory he or she surveys. Viewers are as much a part of the landscape as the boulders they stand on. There is no high mesa edge or mountain peak where one can stand and not immediately be part of all that surrounds. (Silko 248/249)

The tropical Florida weather as well as the harsh, jungle-like terrain shape Luke's awareness of the interconnectedness of the earth with all human beings and make nature an omnipresent force in his life. "Sun and rain through that time had touched his crops with a kind judiciousness. He was helpless without their beneficence" (*GA* 18).

Whereas Lant is threatened by the upcoming civilization and fears forced leave from the scrub, Luke is afraid of being chased away from *his* hammock. He has been forced to leave Bart Newton's land and after a short time of peaceful isolation, Richard Tordell has come and claimed the hammock. Although Luke is allowed to stay, his life-long anxiety is

comparable to that of Old Man Lantry who is haunted until his death by the fear of being caught by the revenue agents. Luke's vulnerability stems from his own topophilia; to be able to cultivate the hammock forever, he would have to *own* the land. Luke "needed to feel the sand under his fingers; […] He could of done good with [his] own land; it seemed to him he had a claim to the hammock" (*GA* 257/31). Although Luke *claims* the land, he does not want to dominate it, he simply cannot exist without it. If expelled from the circle of creation, he would lose his place in the world.

> He could not see how a man could ask more of living than […] to merge himself with the earth; to follow the seasons and let the sun and rain unite the sweat of his body with the soil he tended; to dream in the long nights of shining groves and golden oranges. (*GA* 74)

Luke is especially fascinated by the beauty and the new life that can be earned from the soil. Patience and the complete symbiosis with the land are the attributes that define his topophilia. "When he closed his eyes he could see the orange grove, green and civilized, where the jungle sprawled. In his own mind and body he possessed the means for creating order in this dark chaos" (*GA* 32).

Unlike Lant, who finds in Kezzy a partner who shares his topophilic sense, Luke is ultimately alone in the world. His tie to the land becomes even stronger towards the end of the novel and he literally melts into the land.

> His sight cleared. Men and women came and went. But night and day, summer and winter, through all the years, the sweet grove would be growing. And if catastrophe came again in his life-time, the roots would be safe underground. In not too long a time he should see the bright fruit hanging, golden as the sun. These things were certain. He was filled with satisfaction, thinning his sorrow. (*GA* 352)

Unlike in the case of Jody and Lant, the land never seemed to have *betrayed* Luke. "His stability was the stability of the forces behind him, to which he gave himself" (*GA* 250). Although storms and freezes hit the groves, Luke conceives of them as 'natural' and seemingly unhurt begins anew; he foreshadows Penny's powerful philosophy that "life knocks a man down and he gits up and it knocks him down agin" (*TY* 426). In the end, however,

Luke's turn to the land and his being a *member* of the hammocks, demands the resignation from all human relationships.[5]

As with all of Rawlings's indigenous characters it becomes impossible to imagine them living somewhere else. Nature and the Cracker characters unite in the cosmic whole of the Florida hammocks. Topophilia, the love of place, serves Rawlings as a means of defining the self of the old-time Florida Cracker and their 'natural' way of life.

4.1.1.2 Lost in Place – An *Alien* in the Florida Hammocks

It was Rawlings's primary objective in *Golden Apples* to confront the eco-conscious Cracker natives – whom she had depicted in precise detail in several short stories and in great length in *South Moon Under* - with an outsider to their culture, a person with a strong 'Western' anthropocentric worldview. Originally, Rawlings intended to endow Richard Tordell with a negative characterization and condemn him to defeat by the land; however, during the writing process she changed her view point and *decided to write him a life*,[6] saving him from eternal damnation as in Trax's case ("Gal Young Un") or to ultimate death as seen in the example of Cleve in *South Moon Under*. Entering a "symbiotic relationship" (Bellman, *Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings* 48) with Luke, Tordell emerges as a second main character. This different narrative perspective enabled Rawlings to fictionally depict the process of ecological metanoia, which ultimately transforms into topophilia; thereby she could analyze and clarify for herself the entire complex of sensations place can call to mind. In the end of the novel, Richard Tordell *belongs* and emerges as a 'natural' part of the land.

Tordell comes to Florida with a clear, pre-defined idea about what his life is going to be like in the Florida hammocks. He has succumbed to the widespread myth of Florida as a tropical paradise, imaginatively comparing it to other British colonies in the Caribbean Sea or the Middle East.

[5] Especially after the death of Allie.
[6] Allusion to Jean Rhys's statement about Bertha Mason in *Jane Eyre*; "I thought I'd try to write her a life" (Spivak 243).

> The only justice in his exile had been the choice he had been given – the abandoned Florida estate of a long-dead uncle, or Australia. He had seen Australia as flat and dun and treeless. Florida, of course, would be tropical, the Spanish land of flowers. There would be traces, picturesque, romantic, of Spanish occupation. He would live, with negroes to serve him, in a cross between India, as his brothers described it, and the forest regions of rural England. (*GA* 53)

When Tordell begins to realize that nothing is as he had imagined, he falls into a paralyzing nightmare. He has literally been *myth-taken*. Myth and reality become indifferentiable, forming one blurring picture. "The hammock […] was *lush and fertile*. It was also *black and sunless*, like a dark tropic nightmare [italics mine]" (*GA* 53). Tordell reverses in his mind the mythical Florida with the experiential Florida, thus living in make-belief land. Luke *senses* the lurking and advancing alienation Tordell begins to succumb to.

> He had gone away into a black region of his own, rejecting the hammock. He owned it with all its fertility, yet to him it was unimportant, and Luke and Allie came and went for him like shadows. (*GA* 74)

Understanding imperialism as England's social mission, Tordell violently subjugates Luke and Allie, who are to him the 'indigenous' other. "Indigenous American, Black slave, woman, colonial, and child were considered by the colonizer, to differing degrees, to be by nature dependent and inferior" (Drake 98). In 'othering' Luke and Allie, he automatically excludes himself from his natural environment; he places himself above the circle of creation and thereby renders himself 'landless;' having no place to go, since his *mythtake* hinders him from participating in the reality of natural life. Rawlings condemns him to a ghost-like existence, a void between dream and reality. 'Place' itself functions as the guardian of his self-inflicted prison. Florida nature and the extreme tropical climate hinder him from (*re)-membering* the land. "Everything is so hot – so slow – so dark -" (*GA* 79).

Caught in this "feverish sleep" (*GA* 78), Tordell, as the colonial 'white' dominator, becomes himself enslaved, turning into a marionette of place. He is literally drawn by the hammock, searching for coolness but finding himself even more entangled in nature's hostile arms as well as in his own nightmares.

> He longed for cool shadows in which to lose himself. This forest was a venomous tangle, evil and oppressive. It did not comfort. It smothered. And there was nothing beyond, neither beauty nor peace. (*GA* 87)

Upon his flight into the hammock, he stumbles upon Rhea, a mentally-challenged black girl with whom he has sexual relations. As a black woman, Rhea is the weakest link in the chain and lowest rank in Tordell's imperialistic worldview. In his 'colonial,' Southern-influenced conception of Florida, Tordell had imagined being *served* by negroes (*GA* 53); the sexual abuse of Rhea is acceptable because of his *mythtaken* picture of life at the Hammock and confirms his dead-set belief of the dominating 'white' patriarch. Myth and reality become interchangeable, forming one blurring picture and cause his physical as well as mental collapse.

Luke cannot understand "the newcomer's resistance to fact" (*GA* 50) and calls for Dr. Albury; unable to heal Tordell's hate for "this rotten, crawling, miserable place" (*GA* 104), he can only cure his physical ails, the malaria fever. Albury functions as a father substitute for Tordell. Anticipating Penny Baxter's philosophy that profound happiness can only be revealed in the harmony with one's natural environment, he instills in the young man an interest for his lands. He becomes aware of Luke's and Allie's 'secret knowledge' about this place so strange to him; as an intrinsic part of the Florida hammocks, they have a completeness he longs to comprehend and own. A sense of place becomes for him the key to survival and eventual oneness. "The blackness about him parted for an instant. He longed to know beauty in all its strangeness; to give himself to it" (*GA* 78). Tordell envies Luke's apparent interrelatedness with the land and struggles to see "in it the possibilities the young Cracker saw" (*GA* 57). In his search for a door to this secret world that eludes him, he begins to look more closely and finally *sees* Luke and Allie.

> The massive, sun-browned vitality of the big native Brinley no longer annoyed him. The soft hands of the girl Allie he recognized as definitely comforting. (*GA* 113)

Tordell begins to *see* himself as he appears to 'the others' in reality. Reflecting upon himself in the mirror, Allie hands him, he sees himself as a ghost, living in a space between reality and his *mythtaken* world; as a ghost

he is seen by others but cannot see himself. The mirror not only physically reflects him but also provides him insight into his mental state of mind. "For a moment he was shocked, at his pallor, his skeleton gauntness" (*GA* 123). Allie uses the mirror to manipulate Tordell, to make him see that he is 'the other,' the *alien* outside of this intrinsic whole of *Mother Earth*. Rawlings inverts the function of the mirror as a means of patriarchal oppression, using it to influence the male instead of the female.

Tordell awakens to nature's beauty and recognizes Allie as an intrinsic part of it. Allie is the source for his recovery and his growing topophilia, but the more he connects to the land, the more she ceases to exist. Shortly after he begins to *see* her, she is driven by "an obscure instinct" (*GA* 127) that will not let go of her until she dies. It is as if he has picked a delicate flower that – from the moment of the picking - is doomed to die. Tordell, however, is possessed by a sense of well-being.

> His close-hugged bitterness was muted, like melancholy music sounding in the distance. His hate was helpless for the moment against the good blood that began to replace the fever-ridden cells in the strong body. (*GA* 130)

Allie becomes Tordell's mistress and guide in the natural world of the Florida hammocks. Her oneness with nature is underlined by the scene in which a humming-bird flies into the palm of her hands. When she tries to let the bird fly into Tordell's palm, "the bird shivered […] as though it had sensed his strangeness" (*GA* 131). It flies away to never return to her again. A tender love germinates between Allie and Tordell in which he seems to admire her indigenousness, repeatedly comparing her to nature.

> Her pulse beat like the bird's heart. He tightened his arms and felt her quiver as the bird had quivered. […] Honey nor white jasmine could be sweeter than to hold her so and touch her. When he released her, she ran from him into the hammock, as the humming-bird had gone. (*GA* 131)

Tordell begins to embrace an eco-conscious life. The alien food was at once savory to him (*GA* 136), he learns how to fish using Cracker methods, fully absorbing "the substance of the Florida world" (*GA* 161). When making love to Allie "he was afraid to loosen her, for fear a wedge of darkness would come between them" (*GA* 145), even building a "*nest*" for them (*GA* 145) [italics mine].

It does not go unnoticed by Luke that Tordell's anxieties have disappeared (*GA* 158) and that Allie has gained self-confidence. He also senses a strangeness in her (*GA* 157); "something seemed to be ended and something new begun" (*GA* 163). Tordell fully blends his life with Luke and Allie's, rejecting any outside interference. "For a moment something hidden kept Tordell from slipping back into darkness" (*GA* 167).

Allie's and Tordell's love is not enduring, existing only in a room, lacking social inscription and in complete isolation. The discovery of Allie's pregnancy ends their relationship. The widow Raynes uses Allie's pregnancy as an opportunity to punish the *furriner*, motivated not only by the illegitimate child but also by Tordell's arrogant behavior against her. Instigated by the widow Raynes, Purley's men gather at Tordell's hammock and take him out for a communal whipping. The brutal act and intrusion in his "most secret sanctuary" (*GA* 206) leaves him physically injured but spiritually "untouched" (*GA* 206). The newly-won ties to his natural environment keep him from falling back into the darkness; the powerful emotions the land can evoke in a person are exemplified by Tordell. "Nothing could strike him while he stood so joined to it [the land]" (*GA* 351).

> The relation between man and a natural background was profound. It completed him as no other human could complete him. […] He could lose himself in its inscrutability; identify himself with its silences. It would in the end absorb him. The dark earth would enfold him. (*GA* 263)

Tordell had recognized that "there were affinities between men and places" (*GA* 307) that were stronger than any relationship to humans; he emulates Luke whom he considers "the only one secure" (*GA* 250) because he gains his inner strength from the "stability of forces behind him" (*GA* 250). Having 'stolen' Allie's life essence, he has no more use for her; she belongs to a "winter's dormancy" (*GA* 251), for whom "he felt no love" (*GA* 251). Although Tordell marries Allie, spiritually, he has widowed her at the moment of the communal whipping. As an enemy, yet a lover, "he had taken the blue-eyed girl with him into the blackness" (*GA* 207).

Allie becomes the Tordell she helped change, losing the intimate relationship with the land. Instead of receiving strength from nature, she "fed on the sight of [his] lean dark face" (*GA* 254). Exchanging 'eco-

consciousness' for 'ego-consciousness,' it is Allie who turns into a ghost, "white-faced and remote" (*GA* 317), searching "the shade of the hammock, eager for its greatest darkness" (*GA* 291). Allie knows that Tordell longs for a different woman, "bold and glamorous, who might never quite belong to him" (*GA* 252): Camilla van Dyne. Allie, who is unable to live, also is unable to give life and thus loses the child; "the end of living had come for her when he withdrew his closeness" (*GA* 328).

Tordell is not defeated by place. Through several stages, he has learned to assimilate to the land instead of 'colonizing' or dominating it. "He had come alien into this land and found it bitter and hot and insect-ridden and lonely. Now it was of importance to him whether the magnolia bloomed on the rise across the river" (*GA* 349). Tordell had developed a deep, personal and committed relationship to his lands, transforming him into a member of the Florida hammocks. Through his newly-gained topophilia he has found a basis of communication with the former 'colonized other:' the silent ways of the old-guard Florida Cracker.

> The sun swung above the hammock. The clearing was golden. The sand was rosy. The two men stood silent staring across the grove. Tordell was swept with wonder. It was not given to every man, he thought, to be present at the frail birth of beauty." (*GA* 350).

At the end of his journey, the powerful emotion of topophilia unites Luke and Tordell, enabling them to use Cracker silence as a means of communication.

4.1.1.3 Uniting in *Otherness* – Rawlings's Assertive and Quiet Women

Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings uses place as a camouflage for her critique on the prevailing gender hierarchies during the Depression era. Regionalism became her mouthpiece, liberating her to write the private without revealing herself to the public. Adhering to the 'fictions' of female behavior in most of her (surface) texts, *Golden Apples* is her most feminist novel; she uses the region as 'the other' to analyze (for herself) the construction of femininity in American society.

> Under cover of regionalism, however, women writers explored the territory of women's lives. They were regionalists – but not solely in the ways critics have conventionally thought. The geography of America formed an important part of their work, but essentially they charted the regions of women's lives, regions both without and within self. (Fetterly/Pryse, *Writing Out Of Place* 13)

At first glance, her Florida novels portray a traditionally 'male sphere,' the natural world of the scrub, 'male' outdoor activities - like hunting or fishing - and the initiation of boys into manhood. The *objective* surface text, depicting the life of the Florida Cracker intertwines in her novels – especially *Golden Apples* - with a strong subjective, often personal subtext; having been ignored or misread superficially in the past, it constitutes another side of Rawlings's writing, a long *silenced* facette. It is characteristic yet astonishing that she did not – throughout all the years of intimate correspondence with Max Perkins – mention once the subject of her subtexts or *hidden* female voice to him.

Throughout Rawlings's Florida fiction, a general motif of the characterization of women can be established; it is possible to divide them into two groups, assertive and quiet women. Her assertive women are modeled after the cliché of the *New Woman*. Robustly build, energetic and smart, those women stand on equal terms with men, presenting themselves as a participant or companion on equal terms rather than as a burden or dependent on the men. They are economically independent and because of their *other* views, they are skeptically eyed by the 'normal' women of their community. Camilla van Dyne in *Golden Apples*, Mattie Syles in "Gal Young Un," Grandma Hutto in *The Yearling* as well as Kezzy and her aunt Annie Wilson in *South Moon Under* belong to this group. The second group

of women is – on initial observation – quiet, nearly *mute* minor characters that seem to be in a subordinate position to the male characters. However, on further scrutiny, they come to resist the initial dominance by men and thereby support Rawlings in her critique of a patriarchal culture. All of these women have an athletic build and are described as delicate and fragile; they all seem to be molded from one woman; the nameless and 'storyless' woman that haunted Rawlings throughout her literary career: the wife of her short-term grove manager Tim. From this group of women, Allie Brinley is the most representative although Piety and Florry ("Jacob's Ladder") occasionally embody these same character traits. Both groups of women are endowed with a positive characterization, stemming from their innate topophilia. In contrast, women who lack topophilia - the tie that links them to nature and aligns them with the positively characterized male protagonists – remain shadows in the dusk. However, the women who step out of the shadow into the dawn are in conflict with their traditionally assigned female sphere, the enclosure of the house. In *South Moon Under*, Piety prefers the hard field work, laboring side by side with her father to domestic chores; her "distaste for domestic work and her antagonistic relationship with her mother are clear indications that she will not inherit the traditional gender roles that her mother embodies" (Rieger 203). In this, Piety resembles the author herself, who did not only have a strained relationship to her mother but also – like her fictional character – had a deeper bond to her father and the land. The death of her mother does not seem to affect Piety very much.

> The house was no emptier than before. No place would be empty, she thought, with Lantry in it. The man's bulk, the fire of his presence, filled the room so certainly that his wife, returning from the grave, would have crowded it. (*SMU* 41)[7]

After her mother's death and the marriages of her sisters and brothers, Piety remains with Lantry in the scrub. Living with her father, she is free to roam the hammocks, a space lacking predefined social norms for women. However, this female utopian space is soon intruded when *her father* courts a neer-do-well, Willy Jacklin, for his daughter; confronting the life as a

[7] Rieger gives a similar interpretation of Piety in his essay on gender and nature in *South Moon Under*.

'traditional' wife, she must - for the first time in her life - confront restraints she views – due to her upbringing - as 'un-natural.' "It seemed to her that she was picking up in the middle of something that had been interrupted. But if there was a meaning, she could not find it" (*SMU* 54). However, the 'un-natural' marriage does not endure very long. Will dies of a fallen tree, while lumber jacking along the river. Nature restores balance, aligning with Piety in the flight from an obtrusive marriage, killing the culler of the Piney woods. "Willy Jacklin […] is made to represent the hubris of a patriarchal culture that envisions men as rulers of nature rather than part of it" (Rieger 205). Similar to Camilla, Piety recognizes the scrub as a refuge from socially imposed gender roles and its very *otherness* enables her to live a life, starkly different from that of the other backwoods women in the novel. *Golden Apples* provides the most detailed, personal and feminist subtext of all the Florida novels, of which the two female characters, Camilla van Dyne and Allie Brinley, are most representative.

The orange planter Camilla van Dyne could be contemplated as the author's alter ego. As Rawlings herself, she is the proprietor of her own land, living among other male native grove owners. Rawlings puts Camilla in the role of the agrarian, thereby applying the traditionally male American (pioneer) myth of taming a 'feminine' landscape; at the same time, however, she inverts the myth by making a female protagonist become Jefferson's 'ideal husband*woman*.'[8] Camilla inhabits the same intrinsic relationship with the land as Rawlings's male indigenous characters. However, Rawlings includes very little material on her, introducing her very late in the novel, when more than half of the story is already told. The reason for the late introduction of Camilla in the novel was most certainly the author's fear of creating a character that mirrors herself too closely.

Although Camilla and Luke share topophilia and are coupled with the land, both do not transfer this philosophy of equality and relationship to their interaction with the opposite sex. Luke and Camilla are both "capable and authoritative" (*GA* 241); they share patriarchal character traits, "speak[ing] the same language" (*GA* 272). Luke replaces the early-lost

[8] Cf. Annette Kolodny's *The Lady of the Land: Metaphor as Experience and History in American Life and Letters* (1975), in which she discusses the pervasive metaphor of land-

father for his sister Allie and unconsciously, assumes patriarchal control over the girl; he moulds her into 'an angel of the house,' serving his wants instead of hers. Thereby he limits her place to the 'female' domestic sphere of the hammock. However, Allie is able to break free from Luke's control on several occasions; unsupervised, she plays with her doll, imaginatively transporting herself back into the innocent world of childhood. The flight to nature and the retreat into the fantasy world help her to cope with the abrupt and forced initiation into womanhood. When Luke brings her later husband Richard Tordell with him to the hammock, she seems to sense another embodiment of patriarchal oppression and slips away into the hammock before Luke can even introduce her to him. Although brother and sister, Luke is extremely possessive of Allie and on several occasions behaves like a jealous husband rather than a protective brother.[9] Luke prevents Tordell from severing the intimacy of his relationship to his sister, hoping for Tordell's departure so that he could be the one raising the "little bastard-baby" (*GA* 257) with his sister. Allie lives through a brief moment of profound happiness when Luke has gone to the van Dyne groves; "she had cherished her isolation, nursing[10] in sweetness" (*GA* 159). As soon as Luke returns, his "old authority stood over her again" (*GA* 159). As is often the case in traditionalist cultures, it is an older woman who acts as an accomplice to male patriarchal control. It is the widow Raynes, who sets Purley's men against Tordell, ending Allie's happiness and forcing marriage on them. Rawlings emphasizes that it is not Allie who wants to get married but Luke (*GA* 259). It is only in death that she finally finds the strength to oppose the dominance both men exert over her. By losing *his* child, she extinguishes any attachment that had once joined her to Tordell; in death she liberates herself from both, the sexual exploitation by Tordell and the patriarchal oppression of Luke, who has come to signify for her brother, father and want-to-be husband in one person.

> Tordell moved close to the bed and *stood over her*. He said, 'Allie - ' He could not tell *whether she recognized him*. Her lips were

as-woman, both as mother and mistress and as the cause for 'our' exploitative behavior towards nature.

[9] Luke and Allie resemble other child-like couples in Rawlings's oeuvre, for example Mart and Florry in "Jacob's Ladder," all of these couples seem to be modeled on Tim and his wife, her grove-worker

[10] an allusion to childhood

> colorless. She gave a light sigh. Then she *turned her head away*, as though in the end it was she who *rejected him*. (*GA* 28) [Italics mine]

Camilla, on the contrary, refuses to be made into 'the angel of the house.' The openness and neglect of her house mirror her fear of domestification. "The place seemed not so much a house, with locks and bars and shutters, as a shelter in a tropical place, open to wind and rain, to the encroachment of vines, to the coming and going of beast or bird" (*GA* 239). Being independent, energetic and capable, she threatens and even controls the other male protagonists of the novel. Especially Tordell, who has come to Florida with an imperialistic and predefined conception of 'naturally-ordained' female behavior, becomes her 'victim.' Rawlings argues that in a 'natural' place, so remote and free of social constraints, "men who have no apparent qualification save that they are not women" (Woolf, *The Moment* 41) have no means to exert patriarchal control over women; Anticipating Simone de Beauvoir's philosophy that gender is socially constructed, Rawlings reverses that traditional role allocation, making Tordell strongly dependent on Camilla. It is Camilla, who saves him from defeat by the land, providing the budwood fuel to heat his grove during one of the freezes.

Camilla challenges Tordell's traditional conception of women. For him

> capable women should be plain. This woman was beautiful; […] He decided that the type [of woman] was new to him. Tordell felt as though his habits were being inquired after, like an animal. (*GA* 227).

Similarly Camilla, like Luke, is as much a master of her groves and patriarch in her behavior. Clinging to hardness, she believes that "soft women – they go down" (*GA* 242). At the single occasion when she wears a dress, Rawlings makes sure that she appears unreal, as a disguised copy of her true self. The enclosed space of the house becomes immediately oppressive to her and she leaves the men to themselves (*GA* 245). It is only towards the end of the novel that Tordell comes to understand that it is this exact hardness that makes her such "a fit opponent of this land. She brought

to it the same abandon in giving, the same ruthlessness in withdrawal" (*GA* 283).

Camilla is dedicated to her groves, "cared for more elaborately than any Cracker child" (*GA* 154) Doc Albury calls her "unsparing when it comes to her gospel of citrus culture" (*GA* 150). However, in all of Albury's discussion regarding Camilla, lies an accusing undertone; describing her as splendid but at the same time as "very much herself" (*GA* 228), he stresses her *otherness* and aligns with Claude and Tordell who are equally challenged by Camilla's independence, stemming from her intrinsic relationship with the land.

> Camilla smiled. 'My reason's very simple. I'd like to plant orange trees in every desert." Claude said belligerently, 'That's your egotism.' Doctor Albury said, 'Hush now. No quarrelling. It's her overflowing female bounty, and you know it. But Camilla, if you had a dozen children I'd hate to prophesy how badly you'd neglect your oranges.' The physician's tone was bantering but she answered gravely. 'I don't think so. People are slippery things to work with. I'm sure citrus is more satisfying. At least, you're certain of your results.' (*GA* 245)

By urging Camilla into motherhood, calling her "built for it" (*GA* 296), Doc Albury tries to alienate her from the 'male sphere' of the outdoor world, luring her into the domestic sphere where patriarchal dominance can be exerted over her. However, Camilla has understood that she owes her safety to the land; for her, true protection does not come from other human beings; like for Scarlet O'Hara, the land signifies an eternal sanctuary without betrayal or personal or economic dependence. For Camilla, an eco-conscious conception of life is necessary and equated with personal freedom. Her close tie to the land is further underlined by the fruit of her trees, which she calls her children. When the groves are hit by the Big Freeze, she describes the loss she suffers as "though children die. The years you've watched the growing. You make them, you feed them, you love them. And overnight, they're gone" (*GA* 309). Despite Rawlings's obvious description of Camilla's strong sense of (female) independence, Bellman designates her as a frustrated, unsatisfied woman, desiring motherhood; seeing as evidence Camilla's offer to have the baby for the weak Allie Brinley (*GA* 296). Although his analysis stems from the 1970s, a time when feminist criticism had already shed light on the misogyny of literary practice

he follows the initial critiques of the book which had already overlooked this *facette* of Rawlings's writing in the forties and fifties; he succumbs to the myth that Camilla must be frustrated by celibacy. In citing Nina Baym's "Melodramas of Beset Manhood," Janet Boyd argues that this inversion of the myth is not unusual.

> Celibacy […] becomes a part of the male myth, and when women write female versions of the myth with women protagonists, the women are seen as 'electing celibacy to avoid domestification and socialization and are, therefore, perceived as untrue to the imperatives of their gender which require marriage, childbearing, domesticity.' (Boyd, "More Than Meets The Eye" 45)

Living outside of the socially-constructed laws of men,[11] Camilla is not celibate. *Daring* to assign promiscuity to Camilla, Rawlings does not only break another of society's conventions for women, but she also makes Camilla a female mirror image of Tordell. "She doesn't care what anyone thinks.' He thought again, 'Neither do I. I'm beyond that, too.' The idea gave him satisfaction, as though it joined him privately to her" (*GA* 230). Although never explicit, Rawlings gives several implications in the text that Camilla has more than one sexual relationship. Upon returning from Camilla's hammock, Luke states that he "longed for some strange woman, sweet and yielding" (*GA* 201); furthermore, Tordell states that Camilla once opened a door for him (*GA* 324), offering herself plainly to him (*GA* 244).

> Albury called […] the men hesitated. Voices sounded from the house. Tordell recognized the surliness of Claude Albury and the rich huskiness of Camilla. Doctor Albury call hurriedly, *to make himself known.* The man and woman appeared together in the doorway. […] She spoke hastily, as though she conciliated an insistent child. […] *Her black hair was disordered*. It seemed to the alien that *he had come inopportunely*. (*GA* 239) [Italics mine]

Claude reacts with extreme jealousy to every other man around Camilla. Without over-analyzing this passage, Rawlings – who had read and greatly admired *Jane Eyre* during the writing process of *Golden Apples* – could have created in Camilla a female version of Edward Rochester. Throughout her life, she was fascinated by role reversals; Janet Boyd briefly alludes to a connection between the locking up of Bertha Mason in Rochester's attic and the episode in which Camilla locks up Claude in her house (Boyd, "More

[11] which is reflected by the geographical location of her homestead outside of the Cracker community of Purley

Than Meets The Eyes" 47) *for his own safety*. Although Rawlings hints at a former husband in Camilla's life, she does not reveal his identity; therefore it would be possible that Claude was once the legitimate man at her side. Fanatically, Claude tries to attract Camilla's attention, but she ignores him, treating him like an importunate child.

> She passed by Claude on the couch. He reached out a quick clumsy hand and tugged at a fold of her dress. She pulled it away and crossed the room. She sat down beside Tordell on the sofa. (*GA* 243)

Furthermore, Claude directly accuses his father of being involved a complicit act against him.

> Claude asked, 'Has it taken all this time to learn to cut down trees?' Albury said, 'Oh, Camilla's given him very thorough lessons in orange raising. Laid the groundwork for the whole business.' 'What is it to her?' The doctor rubbed his hands together. He said brightly, 'Her usual generosity. […] 'I know Camilla better than you do.' […] 'There's something behind it. Something you haven't told me.' […]Claude said, 'I saw him getting this precious instruction. He was picking caterpillars off the nursery trees. Groundwork! Camilla's laying groundwork for your Englishman. You're to blame for it – you've filled her with him. Tordell this and Tordell that' (*GA* 150/151)

Having read *Jane Eyre* and being fully immersed in the 'spiritual' healing process from her first oppressive marriage, Rawlings involves the reader in the complicit act of Camilla's patriarchal oppression, inverting the traditional scheme of male dominance over the 'virgin' land and 'native' women. Both, Camilla van Dyne and Allie Brinley refuse to serve the men as a looking glass;[12] they dissolve hierarchical orders and it is in the same way in which Camilla is an inversion of Tordell, that Allie, in the end, exerts control over her brother, who eternally suffers from her death. For Rawlings, the dialogue of place and gender could best *take place* in the remoteness of the Florida backwoods. However, *Golden Apples* ends her 'outright' subjective subtexts; in *The Yearling*, the book following the open rejection of *Golden Apples*, Rawlings found it more secure to inscribe

[12] Virginia Woolf argues that "mirrors are essential to all violent and heroic action. That is why Napoleon and Mussolini both insist so emphatically upon the inferiority of women, for if they were not inferior, they would cease to exist. For if she begins to tell the truth, the figure in the looking-glass shrinks; his fitness for life is diminished." (cf. Woolf, *A Room of One's Own* 54)

female character traits to male protagonists and was rewarded: *The Yearling* instantly became a bestseller and her greatest success.

4.2 The Yearling

4.2.1 A Childhood in the Florida Scrub – The Process of Growing Up

The prevailing theme throughout *The Yearling* is certainly the process of growing up of Jody Baxter, a twelve-year-old Cracker boy. Jody's father, Penny Baxter, is the encompassing, loving father whereas his mother, Ma Baxter is a cold and stern woman and is less fully realized. She lacks topophilia and coupled with her distaste for every sort of boyish pursuit, she appears highly unsympathetic. Jody turns to his father for encouragement and Penny slips into the role of a substitute mother. The painful passage from childhood into manhood is realized over the period of a year. Among many adventures and the discovery of nature's wonders in the scrub, Jody has to come to terms with the death of his friend Fodder-wing, the farewell of Grandma Hutto and Oliver, and above all, the death of his pet fawn Flag. Rawlings waits until the last chapter to expose Penny's stoical acceptance of life and to reach Jody's arrival at maturation and manhood.

Rawlings purposely confined place to the microcosm of Baxter's Island, except for short excursions to Volusia, a settlement located at the borders of the scrub. More than in her first two novels, the emphasis is on the universal appeal of the characters; they are recognized as people first and as Crackers second. Language is 'mediated' by her, adapted to the public ear; refraining from an omnipresent inclusion of dialect, she includes Cracker speech only to highlight certain episodes in the novel, like the 'grammar scene' in chapter twenty-three.

> Penny said, "You and me had ought to be getting' out that speller, boy." "Mebbe the roaches has ate it." Ma Baxter poised her needle in the air. She pointed it at him. "You best study your grammar, too," she said. "You'd ought to say, the roaches has eat it." (*TY* 280-281)

Throughout the novel, Rawlings uses the universal, although often 'idealized' characterization of the Baxter family as a means to involve the reader in the story plot and the locale; with the creation of the Baxter microcosm, she transforms the scrub hammock into a fairytale land, instilling in the reader a sense of nostalgia for a forgotten past.

Rawlings places the point of view on Jody, journeying with the boy, although she found it difficult to keep Penny from taking over (Bigelow, *Frontier Eden* 136). Penny is Rawlings's spokesperson in *The Yearling;* it is through him that she conveys her personal philosophy of life, advocating the way in which the Crackers lived in harmony with their environment. Although her characterization of Penny draws very much on other 'noble' indigenous old-guard huntsman of the Cross Creek area, she also inscribes character traits she had admired in her father and from whom she inherited the attachment to the land.

Throughout *The Yearling,* Rawlings plays with symbolisms; "the continuous parallel symbolism of the fawn reinforces the yearling status of Jody and makes more poignant his passage into manhood" (Bigelow, *Frontier Eden* 136). The symbol of the flutter-mill she uses in the first chapter to underline the boy's playfulness and in the last, to make Jody's passage into young manhood visible to the reader, is another illustration of symbolism. In *The Yearling,* Rawlings was able to depict a contrasting set of characters integrated into the phenomena of nature. The story of initiation is well-embedded in the realistically depicted world of the Florida Scrub. Rawlings's idea to interconnect the universal subject - namely the process of growing up - with a typical Florida childhood in the scrub made *The Yearling* so appealing to the general readership and a multifaceted work of fiction.

4.2.1.1 Jody and His Parents

Penny Baxter's unique philosophy of life differs from the rest of the characters in the book. His understanding of nature echoes Rawlings's own 'topophilic' voice, as it is portrayed in *Cross Creek*:

> It seems to me that the earth may be borrowed but not bought. It may be used but not owned. It gives itself in response to love and tending, offers its seasonal flowering and fruiting. But we are tenants and not possessors, lovers and not masters. (*CC* 380)

The father-son relationship is of special importance for Jody's process of growing up. Ma Baxter seems unable to provide her son with enough

motherly compassion, so Penny fills this void and acts out the role of a mother as well as of a father. Unlike Penny, Ora Baxter is unable to overcome her bitterness, stemming from her inability to bear healthy children; it seems that "she had given all she had of love and care and interest to those others" (*TY* 20). The only time Ma Baxter is caring towards Jody is when food is involved. Through food she seems to be able to express her love for her only healthy child.

The relationship between Penny and his wife is shaped by Ma Baxter's dominant character. Ora Baxter is a big and stout woman whereas Penny is meager and fragile. Through her absence of traditional female character traits she appears masculine whereas Penny with his mothering abilities appears feminine. The role allocation in the Baxter family is shaped by the void Ma Baxter leaves and while the father-son relationship is essential for Jody, he suffers under the loss of his biological mother.

Penny's Philosophy of Life

Although Ezra Ezekial 'Penny' Baxter is a man in his fifties, he is no larger than a boy. Raised on a small farm near Volusia, Fl., Penny Baxter did backbreaking work from the time he was a boy. The son of a stern preacher, Penny is described as the only man among the backwoods folk who is able to read and write. As the eldest child of the Baxter family, he slipped into the father role for his brothers and sisters upon his father's death. The theme of orphaned children, who, after the death of their parents have to look out for their sisters and brothers, struggling to survive in the harsh environment of the Florida Scrub, is recurrent throughout Rawlings's fiction. *Golden Apples* as well as several short stories deal with children carving out a living in the wilderness. As late as in his thirties, Penny marries Ora Alvers and moves into the remote and isolated area of the Florida Scrub. Like all other main male characters in Rawlings's oeuvre, he chooses a place secluded from society, well-hidden, with "a safe four miles away" (*TY* 17) from his next neighbors, the Forresters.

In order to raise the mystic aura around Penny, Rawlings never explicitly states what happened to him that hurt him so much that he wished

to leave civilization. Penny Baxter is one of Rawlings's characters with a prior afflicted wound, strongly shaping his character development.

> He had perhaps been bruised too often. The peace of the vast aloof scrub had drawn him with the beneficence of its silence. Something in him was raw and tender. The touch of men was hurtful upon it, but the touch of the pines was healing. [. . .] The wild animals seemed less predatory to him than people he had known. The forays of bears and wolf and wild-cat and panther on stock were understandable, which was more than he could say of human cruelties. (*TY* 18)

Similar to Rawlings herself, Penny discovered 'spiritual' healing in the silence of the scrub, realizing and valuing the 'blankness' of the area. Like his fictional predecessors Lantry and Luke, he 'crosses the frontier' to lead an 'indigenous' life, close to nature. The reader's inquisitiveness for his true motivation is never satisfied, leaving the reader with the other people of the town of Volusia wondering.

Early in the text, Rawlings highlights Penny's noble conduct, creating in him a 'middle ground,' that of the universal father and that of the indigenous backwoods Cracker. His strong stoical desire to possess only what is exclusively his own might also explain why he bought land in the isolation of the scrub, land which seems worthless to the Western eye. Further strengthening Penny's universal nobleness, is his alignment with other female characters in the book; all develop a certain intimacy towards him. Penny's rejection of the male patriarchy and 'female' embracing of topophilia, enable him to move amidst the rough outdoor male world and the female realm. Grandma Hutto, who is not the natural grandmother of Jody, allows Penny to joke about her and her Yankee admirer Easy Ozell; her comment about Penny's way with women underlines the respect she has for him. "'A woman has got to love a bad man once or twice in her life, to be thankful for a good one'" (*TY* 127). The widow Nellie Ginright also reacts to Penny's surprising visit with great joy and even Jody senses the deep sympathy which lies between them.

> "You never asked me, but I often figger I made a sorry out of it, not encouragin' you. [. . .] None of us don't never know what we want 'til it's mebbe too late to git it" (*TY* 347).

It could also have been a broken heart which lead him into the scrub and marry late in his thirties a "buxom girl, already twice his size" (*TY* 18).

Equally yoked marriages are seldom in Rawlings's Florida novels; either the husband is an abusive patriarch (like Charles) or the wife is un-content with society's predefined restrictions as was the case for Rawlings. Luke Brinley in *Golden Apples* marries for the purpose of having a subjugated woman to tend to the house, it is only Kezzy and Lant that enter a loving relationship in the conclusion of *South Moon Under*. Penny still dealt with more sadness once he lived in the scrub. He had hoped for a big family but one child after another died soon after birth. The only child that survived was Jody and his "bowels yearned over his son. He gave him something more than his paternity" (*TY* 20).

Throughout the course of the novel, Penny is only once really tested and surprisingly the danger does not come from a human interaction but from an intrinsic part of nature, Old Slewfoot, a giant bear. Old Slewfoot is the arch enemy in the book. In her characterization of the bear, Rawlings chooses an anthropocentric approach, transposing Western male character traits. The bear is the incorporation of evil, an evil Penny regards as his personal duty to destroy. Old Slewfoot lives outside of (Penny's) and nature's 'laws,' namely that a creature should only kill to survive. Although Penny is reluctant to unnecessarily kill, he sets aside his hunting philosophy to track Old Slewfoot down, subjugating his 'nature will.' This change in attitude does not go unrecognized by his son.

> He had never seen his father so cold and implacable. [. . .] Jody was cold with more than the evening's bitterness. He hated having his father so silent. It was like eating with a stranger. (*TY* 343)

For the first and only time throughout the novel, Penny is consumed by the hunt; Penny's characteristic behavior becomes darkened and detached, accumulating in his losing his temper with his beloved son.

His difficult childhood, the mockeries about his physical size, the deaths of his children and the four years in the Confederate Army contribute to the heavy burdens Penny carries with him. By frontier standards, Penny seems physically incapable of establishing a life within the harsh wilderness of the Florida Scrub, yet he survives. Penny embodies indigenousness and an eco-centric perspective of the land; similar to Native American tribal cultures, he acts instinctual, believes in superstitions and folk beliefs and most importantly, he lives in peaceful coexistence with nature. Thereby

Penny is an exact mirror image of Rawlings's perfect embodiment of a man living in harmony with the land. Penny lives by a strict moral code, personifying much of what is called Cracker stoicism, accepting hardship, and he is the epitome of a good, noble man. Irregardless of temporary setbacks, Penny serves as a role model for his son who wishes to become as noble and wise as his father. Jody's unconditional love for his father mirrors Rawlings's own unshattered love for her father; having never experienced her father challenged as with Penny and the bear or yearling, her love remained in an infantile God-like state, never maturing into unconditional love.

The Father – Son Relationship

Penny's philosophy of life strongly guides the methodology he uses for raising his son. In contradiction to frontierism, Penny functions as Jody's mentor, sharing nature's wonders with his son, modeling for him a restraint for physical violence. One of the unique characteristics of a father-son relationship is the mode in which aggressive feelings are dealt with. Power sharing, intergenerational conflicts and rivalry are the most common aspects within a father-son relationship (Shulman/Seiffge-Krenke 54), a fact visible in nature itself. Penny does not embrace Western values, thus avoiding the intentional "emotional miseducation of boys" (Beg, *The New York Times*). He patiently answers his son's questions, takes Jody with him wherever he goes and empowers Jody to develop and strengthen his own abilities, thus building self-worth. Similar to tribal cultures, Jody learns by observing and imitating his father. Slowly Penny assigns more difficult tasks to his son, challenging him but never setting him up for failure with unachievable tasks. On his first bear hunt Jody "was trembling so violently that when he lifted his gun he could see nothing in front of him but a blur of water" (*TY* 260). Realizing that self-confidence only comes with success, he places Jody in situations where he can prove himself and feel proud afterward. "At first Jody was uneasy, alone in the new wilderness of water. Then, with his bear meat behind him, he felt bold again, and mature" (*TY* 263). Penny is omni-present, able to assist his son in dangerous situations if necessary.

Throughout the novel, Jody becomes more and more self-confident and in the end, surprises Penny how fast he internalized what his father taught him.

> Jody asked, "What's he dyin' of, Pa?" "Why, the creeturs dies the same as us. Them as ain't kilt by their enemies. He's likely old and couldn't ketch hisself nothin' to feed on." "His teeth wasn't wore down, like a old creetur." Penny looked at him. "Boy, you gittin' real observin'." (*TY* 266)

Without ever visiting a school, Jody develops more in a year than other children throughout several years. Even from today's perspective, Penny Baxter would be a role model in the eyes of child psychologist Michael Thompson who said at a 'dad's only' meeting,

> "If you're missing a father, your hunger is enormous. In the end, it's your own real father who you become. Your sons want to know it all. If we show a closed side, they feel deprived." (Beg, *The New York Times)*

Jody is not deprived in his relationship to his father. Since Penny is an older father, having longed for a child all his adult life, he is especially patient with his son. Penny senses Jody's anxiety and confusion in the exposure to nature's untamed and often brutal harshness.

> "How you like bear huntin', boy?"[. . .] "I like thinkin' about it." "I know." "I liked trackin' and the trailin'. I liked seein' the sapplin's broke down, and the ferns in the swamp." "I know." [. . .] "But the fightin's right fearsome, ain't it, son?" "Hit's mighty fearsome." (*TY* 42)

Father and son form a unity. This unity against all others welds Jody and Penny even more together and shared experiences in the scrub enable Jody to develop trust in his father. Father and son most often align against Ma Baxter whom Rawlings utilizes as a source for tension and conflict in the father-son relationship. In the end however, Penny's adult responsibility to provide for his family takes precedence over his desire to protect Jody's boyhood and the infantile trust is broken. Jody's response to the situation is desperate and he sees no other way out than to run away, so he flees. The void which his father leaves in Jody's life is unbearable for him and through this conflict he is forced to rethink his boyish self-centeredness.

Penny is the nurturing and protective force in Jody's life, raising him in the utopian space of the scrub, free from jadedness.

> "I've wanted life to be easy for you. A man's heart aches, seein' his young uns face the world. Knowin' they got to git their guts tore out,

> the way his was tore. I wanted to spare you, long as I could." (*TY* 426)

Penny, through his upbringing of Jody relies more heavily on the feminine motherly care-giving traits rather than on the authoritarian, patriarchal principles, though at no time does Jody question his submission to his father. Penny sees himself in his son and tries to prolong Jody's carefree childhood. "'Leave him kick up his heels,' he thought, 'and run away. Leave him build his flutter-mills. The day'll come, he'll not even care to'" (*TY* 21). Kierkegaard's philosophy of the father-son relationship as a mirror image is best exemplified by this quote. "Kierkegaard wrote that a son is like a mirror in which a father sees himself and a son looks up to his father as a mirror of his own future" (Shulman/Seiffge-Krenke 56). Jody idolizes his father, thus lacking the critical element of hatred and competition for the oedipal drama to take place. Jody's presence gives Penny contentment, modeling more of a feminine caregiver relationship except for the areas where nature interacts within their relationship.

Penny's most valuable gift that he passes on to his son is his topophilia for the scrub. The special harmony he feels with nature, the respect he has for all creatures of the scrub and his gift of recognizing nature's beauty is best portrayed in the 'whopping crane scene' of chapter ten. "'The whoopin' cranes is dancin'.' Jody saw the great white birds in the distance. His father's eye, he thought, was like an eagle's" (*TY* 94). It is Penny's unique gift that makes nature's beauty accessible to his son. While Jody can only see the whooping cranes, his father *experiences* nature. Rawlings depicts this scene through Western lenses, describing the dance the animals seemingly perform as irrational or supernatural. Jody's growing sensitiveness for nature's 'beauty' – passed down by his father - enables him to appreciate the extraordinary scene, underlined by the fact that both are unable to speak for the rest of the evening. From the early beginning of his childhood, Penny teaches his son an awareness of the interrelation of all nonhuman and human 'inhabitants' of the scrub, stressing that humans are merely a part of nature, not superior to it.

> "A creeture's got his livin' to make and he makes it the best way he kin. Same as us. [. . .] County lines is nothin' to them, nor a man's fences. How's a creature to know the land's mine and paid for?

> How's a bear to know I'm dependin' on my hogs for my own rations?" (*TY* 43)

The adventurous and turbulent twelfth year in his life and the valuable lessons he learned from his father let him become the individual who, at the end of the novel, returns home to take responsibility for his life and the life of his family. It is a hard life which lies ahead for Jody but through the examples of and the relationship to his father he is well-equipped to live a submissive, eco-conscious life but knowing his ability to subject nature if required.

Ora Baxter and Motherhood

Ora Baxter is one of Rawlings's typical anti-heroines; silenced, she serves as a foil to the men. Stern and about twice the size of her husband (*TY* 18), Rawlings uses her to write herself free of her hate for the traditional mother-woman. Her conflict with Grandma Hutto is a resultant of her opposing viewpoints in regards to the separation of men and women.

The Yearling is a novel in which the female characters are nearly eclipsed by the male. If female characters matter at all they function as obstacles or interruptions to the privileged male relationships.[13] Lynne Vallone goes so far as to argue that women merely exist as a threat to harmony (Vallone 40). The strained relationship between Ma Baxter and Grandma Hutto hinders Penny's ability to enjoy the company of the "two women he loves the most in all the world" (*TY* 324). Ma Baxter, who signifies the practical and religious woman with little external charms, is unable to get along with Grandma Hutto, an aged siren who naturally attracts men. Jody's and Penny's relationship exemplifies the perfect traits that Rawlings felt she had with her father or 'father-mother.' "The character of the infant's early relation to its mother profoundly affects its sense of self, its later object-relationships, and its feelings about its mother and about women in general" (Chodorow 77). Since Jody finds the relational motherly

[13] Rawlings's 'transgendered identity' is mirrored in the characterization of her fictional characters and their subsequent role reversal. The troubled relationship to her mother seems

traits in his father, only the domestic serving traits are needed from his mother. In this microcosmic world, he is unable to relate to other women (except for Grandma Hutto, who is a wanderer between the outside and the domestic sphere). Ma Baxter's work field is restricted to Baxter's Island and the house itself. She is wholly excluded from nature and is unaware of the extent of her son's immersion in the environment of the Florida Scrub. The external world, which is nature, cannot be accessed by her since she lacks the 'feminine' receptors to immerse and experience nature's 'beauty.' Excluded in Penny's and Jody's 'secret understanding' with nature, she comes to signify the outsider against whom they fortify. Biological femaleness becomes equated with negative connotations, reflecting the author's own biases. "Women were all right when they cooked good things to eat. The rest of the time they did nothing but make trouble" (TY 324). With her stern antagonism to boyish pursuits, Penny is able to align with his son in an exclusive 'male contract.'

> "Most women-folks cain't see for their lives, how a man loves to ramble. I never let on you wasn't here." She said, "Where's Jody?" and I said, "Oh, I reckon he's around some'eres." He winked one eye and Jody winked back. "Men-folks has got to stick together in the name o' peace." (*TY* 10)

"As males, Jody and Penny unite against a common Other, represented by Ma's inability to understand what men and boys value" (Vallone 41). Ma Baxter is the female Jody confronts the most and since their relationship is strained and defined by an absence of love, Jody puts all of his effort into the relationship with his father. Rawlings uses topophilia as a means to exclude Ma Baxter from an encompassing relationship to her son and husband. "There was no use in trying to explain the difference to her. She was outside the good male understanding" (*TY* 199).

Food, as a domesticated communication device, serves Jody as a means to receive love from his mother. Lacking encouragement and attention from his birth mother, Jody suffers under this neglect and deeply hurt by her coldness, further amplifies the love received from his father. On the hunting trip for Old Slewfoot, in chapter twenty-six, Jody questions the lack of love from his mother. "He wondered if his mother had ever been so

to be responsible for her position 'between' genders, not identifying fully or strictly as either male or female.

concerned about him, her only son, and he doubted it. He went with some mournfulness to sleep" (*TY* 344). Ma Baxter's un-motherly behavior towards her son originates from the loss, of five previous children; she probably loved them deeply but with each loss the pain suffered and the gradual fear of this 'loss pain,' rendered her unable to love Jody even though he survives healthy. "Jody's mother had accepted her youngest with something of detachment, as though she had given all she had of love and care and interest to those others" (*TY* 20). Food is Ma Baxter's remaining mouthpiece. "Anything that was remotely an occasion stirred [her] to extra cooking, as though her imagination could speak only by the use of flour and shortening" (*TY* 228). If food is not concerned, a communication between mother and son does not take place.

> "Look at him, Ma. Lookit that sleekity coat. Smell him, Ma." "I don't want to smell him." "But he smells sweet." "Jest like a rose, I s'pose. Well, to my notion, wet fur's wet fur." (*TY* 227)

Jody suffers under his mother's indifference and limited way in which she shows him her love. Ma Baxter leaves incomplete the mother-son relationship. Unlike Penny, Ora Baxter is unable to overcome her fate and although Rawlings draws a slightly more sympathetic picture of her towards the end of the novel, she fails in her role as a mother.

The Role Allocation in the Baxter Family

The Yearling was originally written to grant Rawlings access into the 'dominant male discourse.' Trying to assimilate to the 'master narratives' of her time, she adhered - in the surface text – to the 'fictions' of womanhood, stressing and universalizing traditional male frontierism. It was Maxwell Perkins who planted in her the idea of a book about a child's maturation process; Rawlings feared that the novel's adolescent theme would dilute her reputation as being a 'serious' writer. However, when Perkins supported the topic with examples such as the writings of Mark Twain, Rawlings saw the potential to create a literary classic, featuring her beloved scrub region. Hereby, Rawlings was able to avoid a mature realization of female characters, having until then 'merely' inscribed her own subjective

immature hate against patriarchal males and domesticated females into the text. *The Yearling* describes the traditionally male outdoor sphere. In contrast to domestic novels, which were intended for a female audience and which need male characters because they often include a sexual element, male-targeted books seem to function without the female character. Women are not a necessity for the story plot in a world where the physical struggle for survival is a daily routine and in post-Civil War Florida Scrub, natural violence and misfortunes occur on a regular basis.

Ma Baxter's 'un-natural' behavior[14] furnishes her with attributes which can be traditionally classified as 'masculine.' Role reversal or the transference of gender roles is also apparent concerning the physical size of Jody's parents. Further on, father and son have unisex names. It is significant that in the end of the novel Penny is unable to fulfill his male chores at Baxter's Island and his wife takes them over. Further on, Ma Baxter strongly criticizes her husband's soft-heartedness and questions Penny's manhood. "'I'm proud ther's men some'eres around'" (*TY* 287).

Even today, in our modern understanding of the family, mothering has a different meaning than fathering. The void Ma Baxter leaves is filled by Jody's father who becomes a substitute mother. The feminized father mothers the son, he is "the Mother Earth to Jody from whom all life originates" (Vallone 44). Although Rawlings claims to be "born *half-male*" (Bigelow/Monti 367), it is a 'female' access to life and nature that she promotes in *The Yearling*. However, Jody is not able to run to Penny whenever he seeks comfort because he has an unsubstantiated fear that it would infringe upon the male part of his relationship to his father. A childhood in the remote scrub isolates Jody from other social interaction and since he has neither brothers nor sisters, he is restricted in his social development towards his parents. Jody feels unfulfilled. In order to fill this void, Jody turns to mother Flag. "'I jest want something all my own. Something to foller me and be mine. […] I want something with dependence to it'" (*TY* 98). Unconsciously, Jody slips into a mother role himself and reproduces the mothering he experienced from his father and missed in the relationship to his mother. (see "Flag")

[14] This is demonstrated from a traditional point of view that every woman has motherly instincts for her children.

4.2.1.2 Of An Angelic Friend, *Sneaky* Girls, an Old Siren and a Sailor…

Living in the microcosm of Baxter's Island, Jody has limited interaction with other children his age; his only potential companion is Fodder-wing, the seventh and youngest child of the Forrester family. The Forrester family is an inverse mirror reflection of the Baxter family, Ma Baxter lost all of her children except for the last healthy boy, while Ma Forrester bore six healthy children and her youngest is physically-challenged. Unlike Fodder-wing's healthier frontier-like dominant capable individualist brothers, his being crippled and frail enables him to align or connect with nature more easily. Excluded from the unity his brothers form, he instead develops a playfulness and vivid imagination, living between reality and fantasy. Fodder-wing, unable to fulfill his (patriarchal) role in the dominant society and refusing to be subjugated (colonized), his only alternative is nature where he finds Jody. Jody sees past Fodder-wing's physical limitations instead embracing his imaginative fantasy world, his awareness for nature and his connection with the animals of the scrub. Fodder-wing instills in Jody a desire to develop creativeness. Fodder-wing, himself a 'child-mother,' aligns and prepares Jody for his future reproduction of the mothering of Flag, both boys having filled their 'voids' by interconnectedness to the natural world they inhabit. Jody can therefore reproduce the mothering from his 'feminized father' and from his 'feminized indigenous friend.' Fodder-wing's early death symbolizes the child part in Jody that 'dies' in the course of his adventurous twelfth year; the inclusion of Fodder-wing serves as evidence to Jody's own gradual departure from childhood into adolescence, underlined by Rawlings's insertion of retrospective peaks into a world growing dim. "A sense of pleasure came over Jody that he felt with no one else" (*TY* 50). The universal adolescent structure of the novel must occur so that through tragedy the affected character is propelled forward unable to stagnate. Fodder-wing is doomed to die and through his death teaches Jody about eternal oneness with nature.

The isolation of the scrub serves as a filter, it keeps the 'world around' out but makes it difficult for its inhabitants to explore outward. Dividing the vital space/place of the Florida frontier into two parts - the

indigenous, dying side and the side influenced by 'Western' civilization - Jody finds it hard to trespass this intracultural borderline and interact with other children 'from the other side.' Having undergone a different socialization, in adolescence where the different are seen as weak or are ridiculed, Jody's venturing out of his fortress loses the protection of his (non)human community, therefore he is unable to 'communicate' with the ferry-boy.

Besides Ma Baxter, Twink Weatherby and Eulalie Boyles serve the author as 'intermittent' females. Twink and Eulalie are the exact mirror image of what Rawlings had always detested in women: 'feminine femaleness.' It is this exact "hypocrisy [and] *sneakiness* of the average woman" (Bigelow/Monti 367) that she portrays in these girls. In *The Yearling* Twink is another example of a feminine character who disrupts the peaceful male understanding (Vallone 40); adhering to the myth of 'woman' as a conquerable, passive Beauty, Rawlings uses her as an agitator causing conflict where there was only competition, setting the course of the story. Denied a life of her own, she is a trophy changing possession as men claim her. For Jody, when conflict occurs, he blames the source of agitation for the situation rather than the agitators. Disrupting his relationship to Oliver and the Forresters, he fears that the 'yellow-haired girl' would terminate his friendship with Oliver and the Forresters. Underlying the 'non-characterization' of these female protagonists is Rawlings's personal rejection towards little girls. "All my life I have hated little girls, swore that I wanted five children if they could be boys" (Bigelow/Monti 366). Jody's impulsive hate goes so far as to imagine Twink eating poisonous meat, appearing brutal and must have come from very far inside of the author herself.

> He hoped most to see Twink Weatherby and pull her yellow hair or throw something at her. Because of her, Oliver had gone away without coming to visit them. [...] He dropped asleep, painting enjoyable pictures of Twink wandering in the Scrub and eating the wolf-poison and falling dead in deserved agonies. (*TY* 290)

Jody's view on women is limited, suffering the absence of a 'mothering mother.' This void leaves Jody not associating love and respect towards 'feminine females,' instead he fills this void with hate and disrespect; only when Twink kisses him on his forehead, he found "her touch was strangely

agreeable" (*TY* 369), triggering a realization that there exists something which can fill this void.

Astonishingly, it is the oldest woman in the book, Grandma Hutto, who signifies for Jody the ideal woman; she is a part of their 'male bond,' having been endowed by Rawlings with 'female-masculine' character traits. Perceptible of nature's beauty and eyed skeptically by other traditional women (Ma Baxter), she is the embodiment of the author herself. Ultimately, it is Grandma Hutto who brings peace through wisdom comparable to King Salomon by foregoing revenge and by falsely blaming herself for the burning of her house - knowing that the Forresters did it – she brings to conclusion the feud. Viewing herself as the wise woman in the Cracker community - once again - life and text fuse together; the line between author and creation blur.

4.2.1.3 Flag

When Penny nearly dies of a snake bite he kills a doe and uses her organs to save his life. With the doe sacrificing his life for him, Penny feels responsible to nurture the doe's fawn, left motherless. Named 'Flag' by Fodder-wing, the fawn becomes Jody's constant companion, easing the boy's loneliness in the scrub. Flag teaches the boy responsibility and Jody becomes a mother substitute for the orphaned animal. Flag symbolizes childhood and as soon as he becomes a yearling and Jody a young man, Flag is doomed to die. While Jody is still in the process of leaving 'nature's womb,' Flag overtakes him, entering into *naturehood*, increasing the inevitable tension between man and nature. The father's sudden and forced domination of nature, resulting in the shooting of Flag, jolts Jody; unable to see the immediate threat reassuring such action, the veil of interrelatedness between human and nonhuman world is suddenly ripped, leaving him with questions he must analyze on his circular journey.

Flag – A Mirror Image of Jody's Childhood and The Reproduction of Mothering

Growing up without the love of his birth mother, Jody misses a source of affection, taking in the fawn, mothering it as he wished he had been. Nancy Chodorow writes in her book *The Reproduction of Mothering, Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender*, "when biological mothers do not parent, other women, rather than men, virtually always take their place" (Chodorow 3). Although Chodorow does not exclude men as substitute mothers, she states that it is rather seldom. In *The Yearling* it is Grandma Hutto who partly mothers Jody, but primarily it is Jody's father, who functions as a substitute mother for the boy. In his 'anthropomorphic' childish understanding of the world, Jody parallels his imagined loss of his 'father-mother' (Penny) with the fawn's loss of his mother doe. Mirroring his father and filling an indefinable void in him, Jody – unconsciously – slips into the role of a substitute mother himself.

> He remembered the fawn. He sat upright. The fawn was alone in the night, as he had been alone. […] He pressed his face into the hanging covers of the bed and cried bitterly. He was torn with hate for all death and pity for all aloneness. (*TY* 158)

The void Ma Baxter's sternness leaves in Jody is now filled by Flag and Jody is sure "that he could never be lonely again" (*TY* 177). "Jody needs to reproduce the mothering he has from his father and recreate the mothering he has lost from his mother (Vallone 45). Arguing that "mothering reproduces itself cyclically" (Chodorow 7), Chodorow states that the gift to mother is passed on from mother to daughter. However, Rawlings's creation of a 'feminized father' and a 'feminized son' validates the application of Chodorow's theory.

From their initial encounter, Jody realizes the need to mother. Reminiscent of giving birth, he wants to be alone with the fawn at their first encounter, so that the mother-child bond would form. "His heart thumped with the marvel of its acceptance of him. […] It belonged to him. It was his own" (*TY* 177). He speaks to the fawn as a mother would to her new-born child […] Hit's me" (*TY* 171); when Ma Baxter shoots the yearling, Jody runs to Flag screaming these same mother-to-infant words that go

unanswered, Flag having returned to the natural realm. Penny affirms Jody in his mother role, calling Flag his baby (*TY* 177); in the course of the book, Jody identifies increasingly with his mother role, replicating the typical 'motherly' language. "'You stay quiet,' […] 'and I tell you all I see when I come home again'" (*TY* 240) "'Now you belong to do whatever I tell you,' he said. 'Like as if I was your mammy'" (*TY* 174). Becoming aware of his former un-fulfillment, the development of a motherly behavior serves as a guide into maturity, being an integral part in his process of growing up. Jody's attempt to shelter Flag with the 'fenced' microcosm of Baxter's Island, symbolically, mirrors Penny's attempts and ultimate inability to contain Jody.

The Act of Betrayal and Jody's Circular Journey

"Somewhere beyond the sink-whole, past the magnolia, under the live oaks, a boy and a yearling ran side by side, and were gone forever."
- Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings

The adolescent novel typically contains a ritualized maturation process, *The Yearling* is no different. The foreshadowing of Flag is seen starting with deer tracks, followed by an encounter with a fawn and then a fawn assumed motherless and dead, accumulating with Jody's opportunity to prevent fate from repeating by intervening in nature to save Flag's life. Concurrently mothering and mothered, Jody performs dual roles, completing chores demanded by Penny and fixing problems caused by Flag; Jody repairs what Flag had destroyed in secret just as Penny had completed chores expected by Ma Baxter to be done by Jody. *The Yearling* serves as an accelerated measurement of time, beginning with the need of a mother to independence within a year. It grieves Penny to give up his mothering of Jody but he watches with contentment as Jody imitates, reproducing the mothering skills that he had shown towards his son.

Himself still a child when he loses his 'adopted child' and his mothering role with which he had identified himself, Jody is overwhelmed with grief, unable to fully process the situation and flees. "He hung suspended in a timeless space. He could go neither forward nor back.

Something was ended. Nothing was begun" (*TY* 422). Heading away from the scrub which signifies for him at this particular moment only pain and betrayal, he heads for the river, the artery connecting the microcosm of the Florida backwoods with the outside world. The river turns into an instrument of self-discovery, as he meditates while floating on the water about his identity and place in the world. Reminiscent of Rawlings's personal experience on the St. John's river (as depicted in *Cross Creek* in the penultimate chapter "Hyacinth Drift"), he *re-members* (like Lant) his home and rootedness in the scrub. Uprooted in an outside world, Jody is 'the other' (colonized), does not belong.

The frightening experience with the element of water is frequently equated throughout her oeuvre with personal mediation, anxieties and alienation. For Jody, the macrocosm (of the world) poses a threat and the mailboat – which functions as a shuttle between the outside and the inside world – ultimately brings him back home. "Ahead of him, the open water seemed to stretch without an end. He turned about in panic and paddled madly for the shore" (*TY* 417). Rivers, with their "watery tentacles" (*TY* 115) shelter the exoticism of the scrub, enclosing a unique ecosystem from which 'native' man cannot flee. As Lant in *South Moon Under*, Jody returns, *re-membering* the scrub, although he returns changed, having grown. "Baxter's Island drew him like a magnet. There was no reality but the clearing" (*TY* 421).

The flutter mill that was once a toy, has lost its charm and meaning. At the end of his "circular journey" (Nordloh 25), Jody unites with his father; the reverse mirror image, it is now Jody who emerges strengthened from his journey in comparison to his weakened father. Enriching the adolescent novel's typical happy ending is the wisdom of life Penny Baxter shares at the end with his son:

> "Life knocks a man down and he gits up and it knocks him down agin. I've been uneasy all my life." (*TY* 426)

Penny summarizes the lesson Jody has learnt on his trip on the river;

> "'But ever' man's lonesome. What's he to do then? What's he to do when he gits knocked down? Why, take it for his share and go on.'" (*TY* 426)

It was this exact Cracker stoicism that so fascinated Rawlings upon her arrival at the Creek. While one can wander, as evident by Jody's fleeing the scrub, one cannot 'be' without an environment that does not provide self-healing as evident in Rawlings's departure from the scrub and the consequences of it; the harmony with which the Crackers live with their environment, the coupling of place and self become the omnipotent metaphors of Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings's Florida writings.

4.2.2 *Writing* the Florida Scrub

In *The Yearling* Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings uses the scrub nature to accompany step by step the process of initiation of her main character Jody Baxter. Locating the story's plot at the end of the nineteenth century in the remote Florida backwoods, his reality is restraint to nature's limiting social contacts. Jody's identity is embedded in nature; he follows the example of his father, developing topophilia and indigenous character traits on 'his side of the frontier.' In her masterpiece, Rawlings does not only give meticulous descriptions of the setting, her beloved Florida Scrub, but also writes the scrub into the narrative, using it as a means of characterization.

After the general rejection of her second novel, *Golden Apples*, Rawlings was forced to tone down her female subtexts. Complying to her editor's advice to focus on the stereotypical 'male' adventure story, located in a 'virgin,' faraway place, Rawlings derivates from the 'master narratives' by including 'feminized' male characters, transforming nature in a character of its own, personified in Jody's pet fawn Flag. Jody and his fawn enter a symbiotic relationship, facilitating a characterization of Jody as an intrinsic part of nature. Further on, nature's effect on character formation becomes highlighted in the comparison between the Baxters and the Forresters. In *The Yearling*, Rawlings's last Florida fiction novel, she displays once more and at best her capacity to fully *write* the Florida Scrub. The creation of a young boy who grows by discovering the natural environment of the scrub, mirrors Rawlings's personal awakening to the scrub's beauty and she is able to bring into words her own sentiments of topophilia.

4.2.2.1 The Exceptional Experience of Scrub Nature

Rawlings knew that in order to fully consume and understand nature, all human senses have to be involved. The descriptions of nature in *The Yearling* display her topophilic sensitivity and no detail escapes her notice. Consisting of an episodic plot of action, nature serves as a unifying element, connecting the chapters with each other. Further on, Rawlings identifies the action in time and space through comments on changing seasons, as well as

on flora and fauna. Time is measured by nature's seasonal cycles, each month is introduced by a detailed description of nature appropriate to this season.

> The first week in September was as parched and dry as old bones. […] The spring and summer berries, the brierberries, the huckleberries, the blueberries and choke-berries and the wild gooseberries, were long since gone. The wild plum and the mayhaw had had no fruit for bird or beast for many a month. The 'coons and foxes had stripped the wild grape-vines. The fall fruits were not yet ripe, papaw and gallberry and persimmon. The mast of pines, the acorns of the oaks, the berries of the palmetto, would not be ready until the first frost. The deer were feeding on the tender growth, bud of sweet bay and of myrtle, sprigs of wire-grass, tips of arrowroot in the ponds and prairies, and succulent lily stems and pads. (*TY* 221)

Although Rawlings is constantly in danger of merely cataloguing nature, the wealth of imagery and the detailed background information on the scrub serve the reader, unfamiliar with her work, to become immersed with the physical setting of the story plot and the unknown region. It is rare that she mentions an unnamed domestic animal and she celebrates the smallest detail; her attentive eye even captures the delicate blossoms of Spanish moss.

In *The Yearling*, Rawlings is able to link the action of the novel with her descriptions of nature; nature is used as a foreshadowing device, a certain atmosphere is created in which nature and plot seem to melt into one and achieve unity.

> The April morning that followed was clear and luminous. The young corn lifted pointed leaves and was inches higher. The cow-peas in the field beyond were breaking the ground. The sugar-cane was needle-points of greenness against the tawny earth. It was strange, Jody thought, whenever he had been away from the clearing, and came home again, he noticed things that he had never noticed before, but that had been there all the time. Young mulberries were clustered along the boughs, and before he went to the Forresters' he had not even seen them. The Scuppernong grapevine, a gift from his mother's kin in Carolina, was in bloom for the first time, fine and lace-like. (*TY* 74)

Further demonstrating her talent as a nature writer is her inclusion of certain stereotypical nature phenomena, serving as foreshadowing devices. Rawlings preferably uses rain and storms to foreshadow danger. The storm which precedes Penny's snake-bite is only one example.

> The cumulus clouds were white puff-balls, stained with the red and yellow wash of the sunset. The south was filled with darkness, like the smoke of gunpowder. A chill air moved across the Scrub and was gone, as though a vast being had blown a cold breath and then passed by. (*TY* 145)

In her description Rawlings uses more than one human sense. The colors red and yellow remind the reader of poison, the mention of gunpowder may foreshadow Penny's shooting of the doe, the chill air and cold breath Jody feels, remind the reader of death.

Unlike the case of Lant in *South Moon Under*, *The Yearling* turns the reader into a witness of Jody's process of growing up and resulting discovery of the nature of the scrub; in her role as a mediator between two cultural worlds, Rawlings links her main protagonists with the imagined reader, guiding him through the peculiarities of the region.

> The bodies of highland reptiles were as thick as cane-stalks. There were dead rattlesnakes, black snakes, coach whips, chicken snakes and coral snakes. At the thin edge of the receding water, cottonmouth moccasins and other water snakes swam about thickly. (*TY* 242)

Nature is also used by Rawlings to mirror the emotions of Jody Baxter.

> A bittern cried rustily in the swamp across the run, and as the sun set, the frogs began to croak and sing. He had always liked the sound of their music, coming from the sink-hole at home. The cry they were making now was mournful. He hated it. They seemed to be grieving. Thousands of them were crying out in an endless and unappeasable sorrow. A wood-duck called, and its cry, too, was sad. (*TY* 415)

The same cry which at the beginning of the novel seemed appealing to the boy, is at the end of the novel, sad and mournful, reflecting Jody's own desperateness. The 'whooping crane scene' which casts a spell over Penny and Jody is described in two long pages and is the longest description of nature Rawlings ever gave in a work of fiction; its inclusion is evidence of her deep love for the subject described, namely the mystical natural beauty of the Florida Scrub. With this scene, Rawlings makes clear how difficult it is to translate topophilia into words or even – as in her case - to communicate it to an audience. Penny and Jody react with complete silence to the emotional event; "they had seen a thing that was unearthly. They were in a trance from the strong spell of its beauty" (*TY* 96). The reader can

literally *feel* topophilia's powerful impact on these people, thereby attesting that Rawlings had discovered a language to communicate the love of place. Throughout her fiction, Rawlings emphasizes the close relationship her characters have to nature and her personal acquaintance with the region enriches her fiction, ultimately making it accessible to her readership.

4.2.2.2 Speaking Cracker! Dialect and Nature Simile

Apart from the peculiarities in Cracker speech - like the permanent positioning of 'old' before objects and persons (Old Julia, Old Slewfoot) - Cracker stories in general display the influence of nature on the language of the characters. In the folk tales Annette J. Bruce collected in her anthology *More Tellable Cracker Tales*, Cracker dialect is an omni-present element. Rawlings, too recorded Cracker dialect in the dialogues of her characters, occasionally slipping into Cracker speech herself. The most distinctive element in Cracker speech is comparisons involving nature. *The Yearling* abounds with this type of simile.[15] By analyzing the text rather than the dialogue it becomes evident that Rawlings often describes one natural object in terms of another and therefore imitates the language of the Crackers. "The brightness in the air dropped into darkness of the Scrub like a water turkey into the river" (*TY* 152). The fact that she intuitively compares an object of nature with other objects shows her successful adaptation into their world - mirroring their dialectal peculiarities in her own speech and written text - although it is highly improbable that a Cracker would ever form a comparison with a china cup! "The sky was as clear as spring water in a blue china cup" (*TY* 171/172). The most abundant type of comparisons found in *The Yearling* is man-nature similes. All human qualities – physical appearance, speech, character and emotion – are compared to nature. "Ever' one of 'em's lower'n a doodlebug" (*TY* 73). Nature is omni-present for Rawlings's characters, underlining their dependence and awareness of nature. It is a characteristic element of Rawlings's fiction that she uses nature to describe both human character traits and various other aspects of

[15] " 'Don't he [Jody] look like a wet yearling' crane' " (*TY* 225)

nature; this makes the natural world a forceful and vivid element in *The Yearling* and throughout her entire oeuvre.

4.2.2.3 Scrub Nature as a Means of Characterization

The attitude a character exhibits towards nature is essential for Rawlings and by confronting her characters with different aspects of nature she draws a characterization. However, female characters are often denied access to nature, as exemplified in Ma Baxter. After a hunt, Penny and Jody find it difficult to eat the meat. Ma Baxter, however, eats the horns of a yearling whereas "Penny and Jody had no taste for them. They could see too plainly the big eyes under the new horns" (*TY* 221). Rawlings adheres to the 'Fictions,' *playing* the misogynist, using nature as a means of exclusion. Having witnessed the whooping cranes *dance*, Jody and Penny ignore Ma Baxter, assuming that she would not understand.

> She said, 'What ails you, fellers?' They did not answer. They had no thought for what they ate nor for the woman. They were no more conscious that she spoke to them. (*TY* 96)

The lack of topophilia is used by Rawlings to silence Ma Baxter. Topophilia is a very personal matter to Rawlings; when applied to a female protagonist, it almost always leads to a positive characterization as well as to a subtextual critique of misogynism. In *The Yearling*, however, she deliberately slipped into the role of the 'male writer;' claiming to "understand the true male" (Bigelow/Monti 367) and refraining from an inclusion of a woman that aligns with her in topophilia.

In *The Yearling*, Rawlings conveys her belief that nature shapes the character of man by employing adjectives which are linked by the reader to the natural world; she then uses these adjectives for her depiction of man.

> The music was out of tune and thunderous. It sounded like all the wild-cats in the scrub rounded up together, but it had a rhythm and a gusto that satisfied the ear and soul. The wild chords went through Jody as though he too were a fiddle and Lem Forrester drew long fingers across him. (*TY* 67)

Jody is especially characterized through his connection to nature. Penny, as an adult has already formed his life's philosophy, whereas Jody talks with

all the animals of the scrub, finds solace in nature, is filled with curiosity to learn more about his natural surrounding and has a strong emotional bond to his pet fawn, Flag. Jody and the reader emerge as topophiliacs.

> He crouched under a bared and overhanging live-oak root where a pool was deep, thinking they [a school of minnows] might reappear, but only a spring frog wriggled from under the mud, stared at him, and dove under the tree root in a spasmodic terror. He laughed. "I ain't no 'coon. I'd not catch you," he called after it. (*TY* 4-5)

Nature is involved in Jody's initiation into manhood and it is a painful process to break free from a childish and naive contemplation of nature as one big playground to finally accept it as a giver and taker. Apart from nature Jody has little reality for his thoughts, actions or emotions. Rawlings depicts him as an intrinsic element of the scrub so that the reader is unable to picture him living somewhere else. Like the other indigenous characters in Rawlings's novels, Jody *belongs*. Only once throughout his young life does he show a lack of sympathy for nature.

> Jody sulked away to the bedroom and untied Flag and took him outdoors for a run. He was uneasy in the woods and did not go far. He called the fawn in and went and sat with him under the hickory tree and watched the squirrels. (*TY* 288)

Jody inherited his indigenous soul from his father. It is a childish joy the boy feels when he roams the woods and hunts with his father. It hurts him deeply when he has to kill the prey, wishing that they could get their meat without having to kill it (*TY* 108).

Rawlings's most evident example for the use of nature as character is Flag. Flag elucidates Jody's mind, his emotions and actions. Jody considers Flag a 'person,' speaking with him, conceiving of the animal as a child and member of the Baxter family. In the mind of the reader, Flag takes on the persona of a 'human.' "The fawn lifted its face to his. It turned its head with a wide, wondering motion and shook him through with the stare of its liquid eyes" (*TY* 170). Through Jody's anthropomorphic interpretation of the fawn's behavior, Rawlings achieves the balance between a realistic depiction of the animal and an adolescent 'universal' fantasy world.

In *The Yearling* Rawlings draws a comparison between two indigenous families living in the scrub: the Baxter and the Forresters. Nature has shaped their character and they reflect their attitude towards nature and

the land in their behavior towards other people. Rawlings emphasizes that the Forresters are leading a 'wild' and somewhat 'uprooted' life in the scrub, living from hunting and moonshining. Besides being good hunters, the Baxters are farmers, bringing them closer to the land; by consciously choosing isolation, they seek the interaction with the scrub. At numerous occasions, the Forresters battle with the land, literally challenging nature. Unaware of the intricacies of nature, they poison the wolves, unbalancing nature's equilibrium; as devastators, they view hunting as a sport; "[a] shot to them was a shot, whether or not they could use the game. Penny would shoot nothing for which he could not see a use" (*TY* 244/245). Killing is a daily routine and Penny intervenes, stopping Lem from torturing a bear cub (*TY* 299). In Rawlings's realistic portrayal of nature, natural violence is omni-present. Both families cope differently with this violence. The Baxters realize that every living creature is interdependent and they reflect little violence in their relationship to other human beings. Penny and Jody are susceptible to nature's beauty but seem to be immune to violence in nature. This does not mean that they do not suffer under natural catastrophes but both stoically accept nature with all its ills and do not mirror this violence in their behavior towards others. The Forresters however, view nature in Western pragmatic ways, *seeing* nature's beauty only when it is to their advantage. They rejoice in a hunt, and while reading traces and following their prey, appear to be one with their natural environment. However, an element of violence is nearly always reflected in their character. "There was ease and abundance here, as well as violence" (*TY* 64). The Forresters are described as rough and strong men. Although they are quarrelsome and always ready for a fight, Rawlings does not depict them as lost or alien in their natural environment; she stresses the point that they *belong.* The violence which is omni-present in nature, stirs the Forresters to react with even more violence and leads them to fight with other men and sometimes battle the unalterable natural laws.

As a farmer, Penny is constantly in intimate contact with the earth; like Luke in *Golden Apples*, the Baxters watch their seedlings grow, tend to them and derive contentment and peace from it; Penny is aware that ultimately nature determines the success of his harvest – all he can do is fulfill his role in the cycle by tending to the fields.

> Leaving it, Penny rested on the split-rail fence and looked back over it with satisfaction. There was a wistful look in his eyes as well, as though he were obliged now to leave his handiwork to forces he could only trust blindly not to betray him. (*TY* 386/387)

Having acknowledged a basic interdependence between man and nature, he contributes his share to facilitate the union.

4.2.3 The Art of Storytelling

In the culture of the Florida Crackers, storytelling is omnipresent. In *The Yearling*, Rawlings revivifies pre-literate 'indigenous' traditions of storytelling; storytelling becomes a means for the shaping of one's individual and communal identity as well as a key element in Jody's process of growing up. Language in itself is understood as something magic, artistic or even sacred. In the mind of the Cracker characters, words have the power to shape and to (re)create events of the past; storytelling is acknowledged as a gift and is differentiated from the daily routine of stoical silence and sparse conversation. Similar to the Cracker conception of nature, storytelling is another element in Rawlings's Florida novels that resembles and allows for a comparison to Native American tribal cultures.

Even today, when the Florida 'cow hunters' camp outside overnight to protect cattle - as they have done since the early pioneer days - stories are an essential part. Similar to other indigenous cultures, the crackers found a way to record their life histories, long before anthropologists and field workers came to live with them and write down their culture for them. The oral tradition of storytelling continues to be an integral part in the Cracker culture of today. Over time, stories were constantly reshaped, depending on the audience and the circumstance. Penny Baxter mastered the art of storytelling, adapting the stories to best entertain his audience. Penny Baxter acknowledges his responsibility as the community's "master storyteller" (Tarr "Transformations" 23). Both, Crackers and Seminoles find the source of their stories in nature and many Seminole tales can be similarly found in old Cracker tales. The element of indigenousness inherent in the Cracker

culture is reinforced by their continuous embracing of storytelling as a valuable oral tradition which continues to be utilized even today.

Penny Baxter, Rawlings's 'autobiographical' spokesperson in *The Yearling*, reflects the author's regionalist sensibility that fiction has to contain an element of authenticity. Penny does not tell the traditional ego-centered frontier tall tale; he includes his audience in the process of the 'telling,' allowing for the creation of a collaborative narrative. The active participation creates suspense as well as an enjoyment for which Penny is highly respected. Unlike Euro-American frontier culture(s)'s handed-down stories, Cracker stories are drawn from the land; being able to mould landscape into words, Penny is regarded as an artist. His ability to really *tell* stories earns him the respect of the Cracker community which recompenses for his physical weakness. As an apprenticed 'verbal' artist, Penny is able to manipulate his audience. Jody is eager to follow his father's footsteps and throughout the novel, he has yet to develop the *art* of storytelling. Flag serves the boy as audience and step by step he is able to distinguish between a good tale and stories lacking essential elements necessary for entertainment. Rawlings uses multiple storytellers; all in all, there are five tellers in *The Yearling*: Penny, Oliver, Buck Forrester, Ma Baxter and Fodder-wing. From the five, Penny is the only one who is a master of this art. All male storytellers happen to be role models of Jody.

Stressing the communal element, storytelling produces a sense of belonging and promotes awareness of self, of others and of nature. With the inclusion of oral traditions of Cracker storytelling into the written text, *The Yearling* emphasizes and fictionally captures the shift from orality to literacy.

4.2.3.1 The Audience is Speaking…

The minor storytellers in *The Yearling* are Oliver Hutto, Buck Forrester, Fodder-wing Forrester and Ma Baxter. Oliver is the romantic adventurer; as a sailor, he is full of stories of foreign countries and life on the sea. It is possible that Rawlings made Oliver another storyteller simply to validate Jody's admiration for him. When he comes back from one of his travels, Jody pleads with him to tell him stories from the world outside.

> "Where you been to this time, Oliver? Did you see whales?" Penny said, "Leave the man ketch his breath, Jody. He cain't turn out tales for young uns like a spring turns water." But Oliver was bursting with his tales. (*TY* 123)

Oliver's source for his stories is his travels although the reader does not hear a single one; from Oliver's remarks and Jody's vehement plead, the reader concludes that Oliver used to "tell lies" (*TY* 123) when he returned home. Discarding Oliver's tales as 'lies,' Rawlings underlines his lacking artistic ability. He does not seem to enjoy the telling of tales and is easily distracted. "Oliver told a tale or two, and some one came, or Oliver stopped to do something else, and never finished" (*TY* 128).

Buck Forrester, another minor storyteller in *The Yearling*, tells the typical 'rugged' frontier tall tales, strongly drawing on lies and exaggerations. Although elevated in Jody's eyes because of his ability as a hunter, he fails as storyteller.

> "My Uncle Cotton had red hair. They was a heap of it, stood up like a haystack, and red as a fightin' cock's comb. He was fire-huntin' one night, and the handle was a mite short, and a spark from the pan set his hair a-fire. And you know when he hollered to Pa for he'p, Pa didn't pay him no mind. He jest thought the moon had done rose and was shinin' through Uncle Cotton's hair." (*TY* 185)

Buck is unable to provide authenticity, failing to weave his audience into his story. "Jody gaped. 'Is that true, Buck?' Buck whittled busily. 'Now if you was to tell me a tale,' he said, 'I'd not ask you no sich of a question'" (*TY* 185). Buck has not learnt that for Jody, good storytelling has to be event-oriented.

It is Jody who sets the criteria for a successful story. Like Buck and Oliver, Ma Baxter also lacks the ability of an artistic storyteller. Her inability becomes evident in the story she tries to tell during the hurricane. Simply reporting what once happened to her, she neither uses imagination nor does she create suspense for the audience.

> "I ain't much for dogs, but they was a dog oncet I takened a notion to. It was a bitch and she had the purtiest coat." I said to the feller owned her, "When she finds pups," says I, "I'd like one." He said, "You're welcome, but 'twon't do, for you got no way o' huntin' it" - I wasn't yit married to your Pa – "and a hound'll die," he said, "if it ain't hunted." "Is she a hound?" says I, and he said, "Yessum." And I said, "Then I shore don't want one, for a hound'll suck eggs." (*TY* 231)

Jody is left unfulfilled which reflects the already strained mother-son relationship. "Jody waited eagerly for the rest of the tale, then understood that was all there was to it. It was like all his mother's tales. They were like hunts where nothing happened" (*TY* 231).

Storytelling and hunting are closely connected for Jody; both activities signify leisure to him. A good hunt begins with the stalking, then the chase follows and it ends with the kill. For him a good story is built up similarly. Stalking is comparable to the selection of a story, then the storyteller builds up tension which signifies the chase and the satisfaction the audience feels at the end of a story is comparable to the enjoyment of the prey. For Jody, storytelling – like hunting - consists of three major parts; if one part fails, he faces unfulfillment and dissatisfaction.

Both, Ma Baxter and Buck Forrester, seem to lack imagination and creativity. Fodder-wing Forrester represents the other extreme, unlimited imagination. "Fodder-wing said that a bear as big as God had scooped out a pawful of earth to get a lily-root. Jody knew the truth from his father" (*TY* 79). Penny even warns Jody not to believe his friend's fantasy tales. "His [Oliver's] tales? is tall as Fodder-wing's, but at least he knows when he's lyin' '" (*TY* 49). Fodder-wing lets his imagination fly like he tried to 'fly out' of his crippled body when he jumped from the roof of the barn. Although Jody craves to believe his tales he is held back by his hunger for authenticity. "This was, of course, another of Fodder-wing's tales. This was why his father and mother said Fodder-wing was crazy. But he longed to believe it" (*TY* 65). In his search to learn the art of storytelling, Jody is unconvinced by any of the tales from the minor storytellers. It is Penny to whom he looks up to; he tries to imitate him as he had imitated nature in his process of growing up. Thereby Rawlings effectively integrates storytelling into the 'indigenous' way of life of her Cracker characters.

4.2.3.2 *Weaving a Spell of Mystery and Magic* – Penny Baxter's Power of Articulate Speech

A story needs more than mere imagination. It consists of body language, hand gestures, facial expression, the right choice of words and audience awareness. Penny Baxter was endowed with these unique gifts for

storytelling; he is the only character in *The Yearling* who understands the communal element in the process of storytelling and who successfully involves his audience in his tales. The characterization of Penny Baxter integrates Rawlings's subjective voice and autobiographical experiences. Anita Tarr sees Rawlings's second husband, Norton Baskin, as the author's role model for Penny.

> Baskin is still known as a raconteur; as the proprietor of a hotel frequented by Hemingway and other celebrities who came to Florida for hunting and fishing, he had a large circle of acquaintances, whom he greeted and entertained with his witty stories, often drawn from his own Alabama boyhood. (Tarr, "Transformations" 161)

In a personal interview with Tarr, Baskin acknowledges her theory, stating

> Yes, […] it is quite probable that Rawlings used himself as a prototype for this aspect of Penny – his storytelling – for she was always asking him to please tell this or that story in the company of other people. (Tarr, "Transformations" 162)

Taking Baskin as a real-life counterpart, Rawlings was able to quietly observe her husband and at the same time study his storytelling audience's reactions. At several occasions Rawlings limits her description to Penny's audience. Penny does never actually tell the story of the deadly hunt for Old Slewfoot, the reader only knows his audience's reaction to the tale.

> Penny was surrounded by most of the men and boys. He sat on the edge of one of the church benches, pushed back against the plain bare walls, and tried to eat. He swallowed a few mouthfuls. Then the men's eager questions enmeshed him and he was away on the flowing stream of his tale of the hunt. (*TY* 360)

Penny is in control of his audience and lets them participate in his adventures. The collective awe the other characters have for his storytelling ability substantiates Penny's quiet authority and underscores his position among them. The art of storytelling enables Penny – like Rawlings in her writing - to (re)invent himself.

Most of Penny's tales are event-oriented and center on hunting. The longest story in *The Yearling* is the first hunt of Old Slewfoot. First, the reader experiences the hunt as a part of Rawlings's own 'written' narrative, then, at the Forrester's, she successfully shifts into the oral tradition of Cracker storytelling where Penny 'authentically' retells the episode, engulfing his audience. "And he [Penny] could sit, as he sat now, weaving a

spell of mystery and magic, that held these huge hairy men eager and breathless. He made the fight an epic thing" (*TY* 60). Jody is deeply impressed with his father's storytelling performance. Penny's storytelling resembles a ceremony in the tradition of Native American tribal cultures. His stories fuse the individual with his fellows and the group with the larger universe.

Penny's audience actively participates in his storytelling. In the story of his worthless dog, Rawlings mixes elements of the frontier tall tale which often contains an element of dishonest trading, with 'indigenous' Cracker concepts of storytelling. Penny, nicknamed by Lem Forrester, manipulates his audience to settle the score with Lem. Penny is in control of his audience, literally *guiding* them by his intellect and not by his physical strength. During the tale of the hunt for Old Slewfoot, Penny caresses his worthless dog and repeatedly states that the dog is of no worth in a hunt although his body language says differently. Lem falls into his trap and trades his best gun to Penny. By caressing the dog he makes the audience believe that the dog played a great role in the hunt but his words emphasize that this was not the case. Telling two tales at the same time, the one with his body and the other one spoken, Rawlings emphasizes once more Penny's role as an artist. The reader sees this scene through Jody's eyes who

> was filled with awe that his father had out-witted a Forrester. […] He had heard of the intricacies of trading, but it had never occurred to him that one man could get the best of another by the simple expedient of telling him the truth. (*TY* 61)

Although Penny later admits that he was afraid during the hunt, the fact that he adapted the story to his audience's ears underlines his gift as a storyteller even more. "'My words was straight, but my intentions was crooked as the Ocklawaha River'" (*TY* 62).

Penny is able to restrain his personal emotions but feeds from the energy of his audience.

> "Pa, I never told you. I was scairt when the dogs was fightin' him. I was too scairt even to run." "Hit didn't pleasure me none, neither, when I found I didn't have me a gun." "But you told it to the Forresters like as if we was mighty bold-hearted." "Well, son, that's what makes a tale." (*TY* 71-72)

Early in *The Yearling* Rawlings establishes Penny's reputation for honesty and his gift of storytelling. "It was good as seeing it, to hear Penny tell of it" (*TY* 34). In *Man Made of Words*, N. Scott Momaday tries to formulate what Penny fictionally transfers to the reader.

> Each word has a conceptual content, however slight; and each word communicates associations of feelings. [...] Storytelling […] is an act by which man strives to realize his capacity for wonder, meaning and delight. It is also a process in which man invests and preserves himself in the context of ideas. Man tells stories in order to understand his experience, whatever it may be. (Momaday, *Man Made of Words* 301)

Penny's storytelling is a mixture of legend, historical facts and self-narration. Besides making him an accepted member of the community of Volusia and the Forrester clan, Penny's storytelling also incorporates an element of self-interest; it helps him to process the world, enabling him to make peace with the past, curing his inner emptiness, elements reminiscent of Rawlings's experiential writing.

Penny's stories are full of excitement; all of them contain an element of suspense. Storekeeper Boyles is impatient to hear news from the scrub. He "was as fascinated and sat leaning forward, forgetting to smoke. A customer came in and he left the stove grudgingly" (*TY* 322). During his tale of Old Slewfoot, the Forresters "sat precariously at the edges of their seats, and listened with their mouths open" (*TY* 60). Similar to the storytelling of Native American tribal cultures, the audience is not merely entertained but through questions and comments validates stories and adds to them. Hertha D. Wong speaks of "intracultural collaboration," (Wong, *Sending My Heart* 18) if tribal members correct, affirm or accept the narrator's tale. Penny teaches his son to get involved actively and participate in the act of storytelling. During the hurricane, when his family is confined to the house for several days and storytelling serves as the only distraction, Penny interrupts his tale twice to force his son to ask how the story continues. He celebrates storytelling, making his son understand that it is an art, dependent on the audience's interaction. Jody considers Penny's tales "proper" (*TY* 230). For Jody 'proper' signifies the ideal tale where he is able to involve his own imagination and find alternative endings whenever he rethinks the story. Penny communicates with Jody throughout the *tellin*' process.

Through his spokesman, Rawlings proves that one's self does not stand autonomously but exists in relation to others of the community. Storytelling in *The Yearling* teaches Jody that besides being (inter)connected to nature and place, one's identity is also deeply connected with one's culture, an aspect which consistently contributes to his decision to return home to the scrub at the end of the novel.

4.2.3.3. Jody Baxter – Learning the Nature of the Word

Throughout *The Yearling*, Jody is developing his skills as an artistic storyteller. Although he does not tell a single story during the novel, Rawlings makes clear that he recognizes the power of words and the different modes of language - that of everyday communication and that of the ceremonial act of storytelling. Slowly, Jody ventures out of his muteness, trying at two occasions to 'compose' a tale of his own; however, he is still unable to finish his tales or even find the right words.

> He tried to tell his father the thing that he had felt that day. Penny listened gravely, and nodded, but Jody could not make the words fit his feeling, and could not quite make his father understand. (*TY* 219)

> The creatures of the water and the creatures of the air had survived. Only the things whose home was the solid land itself, had perished, trapped between the alien elements of wind and water. The thought was one of those that stirred him, and that he could never bring to earth to share with his father. It moved now across his mind like a remnant of the morning's haze. (*TY* 304)

Having inherited an extraordinary sensitivity to observe and find scenes in nature which stir the imagination, he has not yet found a way to articulate himself artistically.

Besides Penny, Flag's presence encourages him as an artist; thereby 'nature' serves him psychologically to create a sense for his audience, although Flag is unable to participate in Jody's storytelling.

> The finest part about talking to Flag was that he could think most of the talk and not have to try to say it. He preferred talking to his father, but he could never find the words in which to make things clear. When he tried to say a thing that he had thought, the idea vanished while he was still floundering. [. . .] With Flag, he could

> say, "There come the wolves, slippin' in to the pond," and he could sit and see the whole thing, and feel the feelings again, the fears and the sharp ecstasies. (*TY* 302)

In his boyish, adventurous mind, Jody is still too occupied to 'control' nature in his stories. He experiences that "language is not a neutral medium" (Wong, *Sending My Heart* 19) and recognizes that "to speak is not a casual affair, but a holy action. Words not only describe the world, but actively create and shape that world" (Wong, *Sending My Heart* 19). Towards the end of the novel, Jody attempts to tell the story of the deadly hunt of Old Slewfoot.

> He said quickly, "We follered him near about three days. We jumped him twice. We got into mud Pa said would bog a buzzard's shadow, and we wrangled out of it - ." They listened with faltering attention. He was filled with enthusiasm. He began at the beginning and tried to tell it as he thought Penny would do. Half-way through, he looked down at the cake. He lost interest in the account. (*TY* 361)

Rawlings deliberately calls Jody's tale an 'account;' having limited his story to the facts of the hunt, he could not yet transform the event into an artistic composition. Again Rawlings underlines that Jody is not yet mature enough to be an artist; he opts for food, whereas his father's "food sat in his lap, uneaten" (*TY* 360).

Jody wishes to become a good storyteller like Penny. He wants to be part of the mythic company of the other males and have a repertoire of his own stories. But he is still very much a child when he is out hunting with the Forresters; he falls asleep during the storytelling of the others.

> He wanted to listen. The hunting talk of men was the finest talk in the world. Chills went along his spine to hear it. The smoke against the stars was a veil drawn back and forth across his eyes. He closed them. For a moment the talk of the men was a deep droning against the snapping of the wet wood. Then it faded into the sound of the breeze in the pines, and was no longer sound, but the voiceless murmur of a dream. (*TY* 255)

Penny is Jody's mentor in his process of growing up as well as for his process as "emerging artist" (Tarr, *Sending My Heart* 185). He is well aware of the fact that Jody inherited his aesthetic *sense* and appreciation for nature's 'beauty' (topophilia).

> He found that the child stood wide-eyed and breathless before the miracle of bird and creature, of flower and tree, of wind and rain and sun and moon, as he had always stood. And if, on a soft day in April,

> the boy had prowled away on his boy's business, he could understand the thing that had drawn him. (*TY* 20)

In order for Jody to become an artist, he has to be able to observe. Nature is the child's only reality and his sensibility of nature's beauty helps him to be creative. Rawlings integrated several scenes in *The Yearling* which seem to be irrelevant for the story plot but are inserted to stir Jody's imagination. Such a scene is the procession of the Minorcans. "This strange group of people was brought over from Minorca, off the coast of Spain, in the late 1700 to work plantations in Florida" (Tarr, "Transformations" 201). At first, Jody wants to learn more about these strange people, even wants to "slip back clost and look at 'em" (*TY* 91); only later does he come to fully realize the impact this scene has had on him. In his imagination, Jody builds a framework around his observation as if he would create a story.

> The procession disappeared into the Scrub. Jody tingled, and the hair stirred on the back of his neck. It was like seeing Spaniards. It was as though phantoms, dark and shadowy, and not men and women, had passed before him, weighed with their strange burden of gophers and injustice. (*TY* 91)

Jody's storytelling skills increase throughout the novel. During his unique observation of the fight of two bears in the scrub, he recognizes that this would be perfect material for a story.

> Now that it was over, he shook at his own boldness. But it was done now, and he would follow again, for all men were not privileged to see the creatures in their private moments. He thought, "I've seen a thing." [. . .] He had a tale now of his own to tell on winter evenings. (*TY* 201)

He realizes that it takes time to gather and organize stories in his memory. "It was good to become old and see the sights and hear the sounds that men saw and heard, like Buck and his father" (*TY* 201). Witnessing, yet knowing that this would become definable as topophilia, he is able to appreciate, absorb and process the situation.

Throughout *The Yearling* Jody looks up to Penny and begs him to tell more stories. It is only at the end of the book that the reader sees a role reversal, when Jody returns home from his journey; it is him who has experienced something and has a story to tell. Now it is Penny who is eager to hear his son's 'artistic' tales. Storytelling is a steady companion to Jody's

process of growing up; learning to take responsibility for a story mirrors the rising responsibility he takes for his life and his family.

4.3 *Cross Creek*

4.3.1 The Ecotone of Cross Creek/*Cross Creek*

In the introduction to *American Nature Writers* - one of the rare anthologies that includes a section on Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings - editor John Elder premiers the term 'ecotone,' which in ecology describes the "'edge-effect' […] where two ecosystems meet" (Elder xiii). "These mixed, dynamic habitats […] contain more species than are found in either constituent ecosystem, and they have a greater density of organisms within a given species" (Elder xiii). Applying the scientific definition of the ecotone to nature writing, he writes that

> it, too represents a vivid edge – between literature and science, between the imagination and the physical process of observation, and between humanity and the many other forms of life with which we share this earth. (Elder xiii)

The physical ecotone of Cross Creek - orange grove, scrub and rich hammock land - mirrors the textual equivalent, the ecotone of *Cross Creek*, which is a blend of autobiography, environmental nonfiction and ethnocriticism.

> Cross Creek is a bend in a country road, by land, and the flowing of Lochloosa Lake into Orange Lake, by water. We are four miles west of the small village of Island Grove, nine miles east of a turpentine still and on the other side we do not count distance at all, for the two lakes and the broad marshes create an infinite space between us and the horizon. […] The road goes west out of the village, past open pine woods and gallberry flats. […] The four miles to the Creek are stirring, like the bleak, portentous beginning of a good tale. The road curves sharply, the vegetation thickens, and around the bend masses into dense hammock. The hammock breaks, is pushed back on either side of the road, and set down in its broding heart is the orange grove. (*CC* 9/15)

Beginning *Cross Creek* with a rich description of the physical environment and its inhabitants - nonhuman and human - Rawlings emphasizes the dominant role place takes in her "ultimate book" (Tarr, *Short Stories* 354). Textually difficult to define, *Cross Creek* has always occupied – in contrast to the ever-popular *The Yearling* - a minor role in the discussion of her literary oeuvre; this could change now due to new interdisciplinary

interpretatory models developed in the field of environmental fiction and the larger field of nature writing. Although Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings belongs to an earlier generation of writers, her nonfiction shows remarkably many similarities to the work of contemporary nature writers such as Gretel Ehrlich, Edward Abbey, Annie Dillard and Terry Tempest Williams. In a certain way, both generations react to a crisis; Rawlings's writings are sparked by the closing of the (Florida) frontier and she writes in response to the rapid interwar homogenization of American culture that threatens older, traditional lifestyles which were more closely connected to the interrelationship with the natural environment and the land. However, similarly, postmodern nature writers often write out of the same sense of loss originally inherent in the regionalism of the interwar years and mourn environmental destruction and the urbanization of formerly intact ecosystems (cf. Carl Hiaasen's Florida ecocrime fiction or in the West, Utah writer Terry Tempest Williams, who achieves connection of personal loss with the *loss* of the Bear River Migratory Bird Refuge bordering Great Salt Lake (*Refuge: An Unnatural History of Family and Place*)). This close relationship between Rawlings's literary motives and today's contemporary nature writers, warrants for a re-evaluation of her art, especially the long-forgotten nonfiction novel *Cross Creek*. Concentrating on *Cross Creek's* surface structure, a collection of essays depicting the nonhuman world – depictions of the (sub)tropical weather, geology, flora and fauna – and the indigenous inhabitants of this small patch of land, situated in the Florida Interior, literary critics hesitated to read *Cross Creek* as the author's autobiography. New insights and the enlargement of the formerly narrow canon of autobiography allow, however, for an inclusion of many marginalized and 'indeterminable' texts that had lost their place in the literary canon; [this was especially true for women writers of Rawlings's generation whose art used to be classified as inferior or minor literature because of its emphasis on the regional or local scene.]

Cross Creek has not (yet) gained the attention of critics interested in autobiography, despite the (fairly) recent widening of the term and the shifting interest to the 'autos,' the self behind the autobiographical act.[16]

[16] Rephrasing James Olney's words in his essay "Autobiography and the Cultural Moment"

Paul John Eakin's groundbreaking work – *Fictions in Autobiography: Studies in the Art of Self-Invention* (1985), *How Our Lives Become Stories* (1999) and his recent edition *The Ethics of Life Writing* (2004) is, among others, concerned with the paradigmatic shift from the Cartesian notion of a unified self toward a conception of the self/selves as relational. As Mark Allister argues in his book *Refiguring the Map of Sorrow* (2001), Eakin's claim that all selfhood is relational, "unhooked [the term relational autobiography] from its sole connection to women's books, into the center of autobiographical studies" (Allister 17). Further on, his concept of relational autobiography extends to include 'Western' authors, lacking an indigenous background; for decades, Native American and women's autobiography tend to place the self in relation to some Other.

> A Native American concept of self differs from a Western (or Euro-American) idea of self in that it is more inclusive. Generally, native people tend to see themselves first as family, clan, and tribal *members*, and second as discrete individuals. There is less of a sense of what Karl J. Weintraub calls 'individuality' – 'a personality conception, the form of self that an individual may seek,' which distinguishes him or her from the cultural community. Instead of emphasis on an individual self who *stands apart* from the community, the focus is on a communal self who *participates within* the tribe. (Wong, *Sending My Heart* 13/14)

Rawlings was greatly influenced by indigenous Cracker concepts of self that are reminiscent of Native American concepts of self and identity; the 'indigenous characters' of her Florida novels all adhere to this relational philosophy of viewing themselves as part of their natural environment and clannish community. The communal 'we' in *Cross Creek* and the inclusion of the many Cross Creek voices in the narrative, attest the author's prevailing concern with indigenous Cracker 'self-life-story-telling.' Hertha D. Wong further underlines that

> many of the most often quoted generalizations about Native American identity and its literary expression are remarkably parallel to current feminist discussion of women's autobiographies. Both female and Native American autobiographical narratives focus on a communal or relational identity and tend to be cyclical rather than linear. (Wong, *Sending My Heart* 7)

A decade before Eakin came forth with his concept of relational autobiography, Mary G. Mason's and Susan Stanford Friedman's essays[17] as well as other studies in women's autobiography showed "how culture encodes different models for women's identity formation" (Allister 18). Susan Stanford Friedman characterizes relational autobiography as "a model of selfhood in women's autobiographical writing, against the autonomous individual posited by Gusdorf, as interdependent and identified with a community" (Smith/Watson, *Reading Autobiography* 201). Both, Stanford Friedmann and Mason

> provided a useful challenge to assumptions about how identity is textually created and presented. […] This recognition of another consciousness […], this grounding of identity through *relation to the chosen other*, seems to enable women to write openly about themselves. (Mason 321) [Italics mine]

Similar to Rawlings's use of regionalism in her fiction novels, *Cross Creek* shows a *camouflaged* self; *Cross Creek* is testimony to the process she underwent (a self-in-progress), to create a *room for herself* in which she could write and define a 'truer' inner self, for as she writes in a letter to Norman Berg, her "books come from so far inside" (Bigelow/Monti 289). *Cross Creek* unites her elusive, communal and authoritative voice and sparks their vital game of reciprocity.

Eakin's necessary enlargement of the concept of relational autobiography to include all selfhood finally opens the door for many nature writers to be (re)discovered. In *Refiguring the Map of Sorrow*, Allister succeeds in exercising the paradigmatic shift from Eakin's human "proximate other" (Eakin, *How Our Lives Become Stories* 69) to a nonhuman "proximate other" (Allister 3). Writing nonfiction "no longer leads away from reflection on one's own life, the writers […] blend the two nicely into self-knowledge" (Allister 19). The conflict Allister refers to is between "an autobiography of an egoist, who seems interested only in

[17] Mary Mason "The Other Voice: Autobiographies of Women Writers," *Women, Autobiography, Theory*, ed. Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson (Madison: The U of Wisconsin P, 1987) 321-24.
Friedman, Susan Stanford. "Women's Autobiographical Selves: Theory and Practice," *Women, Autobiography, Theory*, ed. Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson (Madison: The U of Wisconsin P, 1987) 72-82.

himself, and on the other end a documentary by a writer absent in the work" (Allister 19) which is discernible throughout *Cross Creek*.

> I did not want to tell a story of myself, particularly. […] I wanted the thing objective, the only subjectivity consisting of my personal reaction to the Creek, its natural aspects and its people. I came as close as possible to a thread, in more or less dealing with the growth of my knowledge of place and people. If I had tried to use Martha as more of a hook, for instance, I could not use much of the subjective material that seemed to me important. (Tarr, *Max and Marjorie* 496)

Rawlings successfully "embed[s] the act of self-creation in a text primarily about an 'outside' subject," making "a satisfying life of outdoor work and write, in some sense, a version of a 'masculine' narrative" (Allister 18/19); this constitutes another reason why her work has not yet been fully assessed by critics of women's autobiography and writing.

In addition to Mark Allister's new scholarly work, Cecilia Konchar Farr's coining of the generic term "ecobiography" now endows the literary critic and reader with a 'model' of interpretation. In *Mediating Criticism. Literary Education Humanized* (2000), Roger D. Sell defines the literary critic or teacher as mediator;

> Through their own example they can encourage readers to empathize with otherness, to recognize the historical achievement of significant acts of writing, and to respond to literary authors' own faith in communication itself. (Sell cover)

With applicable and new interpretatory models of relational autobiography in mind – which have now been extended to include the natural sphere - the critic and above all the reader is able to mediate between the author and his text (the (non)human other) to fully grasp the 'embedded self.'

Merging autobiography studies with contemporary ecocriticism, Farr (and Allister) provide(s) the tools to analyze the methods in which writers "construct and interact with nature" (Farr 95). Founding her definition of ecobiography on Robert F. Sayre's essay "Autobiography and the Making of America," she writes that

> for a significant number of autobiographers America is [not only an idea, or a social construct but] most definitely, land. […] Constructed and idealized although it may be, the land that locates these writers begins as nature, as solid ground, as well as theoretical concept. (Farr 94)

Although Farr differentiates between earlier nature writers, such as "John Muir, John Burroughs, Mary Austin, John James Audubon" where she sees "careful chronicling and [a] tone of acute observation" (Farr 95) as the writer's main objective and ecobiographical works of the late twentieth century by writers such as Edward Abbey and Terry Tempest Williams, her definition of ecobiography could also be applied to Rawlings's *Cross Creek* (1942), published in the middle of the twentieth century. As a result of the growing

> environmental consciousness and postmodern thinking, the borders between nature and self blur. […] In ecobiographies, nature becomes us, and we begin to question who is constructing whom. […] It is impossible to tell where the Self ends and Nature begins or where Nature ends and the Self begins: ego and eco are inextricably intertwined. (Farr 95)

In the beginning of the planning process of *Cross Creek*, Rawlings set out to write a chronicle about the 'eco' Cross Creek, fully ignoring the 'ego,' "for the reason that [she] did not wish to write [her] personal story" (Tarr, *Max and Marjorie* 231); but years later, during the writing process, she realized that "the 'light' approach proved very wrong" (Tarr, *Max and Marjorie* 479). Slowly she comes to understand that it is the 'I' that is giving meaning to the 'unlived' material; it is a combination of a 'self-in-progress' and a mediating voice that she wishes to construct *within* the '(non)human Other.'

> It is difficult to explain the problem, but it is one principally of *time*. If I tell a direct, almost, in a way, day to day narrative, so many of the details of the stories of the people have no interest and no meaning. […] Doing it this way, as I was, it was necessary to write as of the moment, looking back to something completed. As I said, this seemed to me to make a choppy narrative. […] It is not enough for good anecdotes to be told, either humorous or moving. The sense of knowing a particular place and people with a deep, almost Proustian deepness and intimacy and revelation, with my own feeling about things back of it, is what I want. […] To do it as I have begun the last time, is more like doing hard creative fiction. I can call less on facts and true details, and must project myself painfully and slowly into years and scenes and feelings that I have actually forgotten, and must re-create. I would say that I cannot do it, except that I know by working hard enough, it is possible. (Tarr, *Max and Marjorie* 482/483).

While Farr reflects the paradigmatic shift from 'ego' (auto) to 'eco,' Rawlings undertook the shift from reversed perspective, from too much eco-

consciousness – inherent in the regional material of her Florida fiction novels - (back) to include more of the 'ego.' The usual adjustment to include more of the ecological material to achieve what Neil Evernden has called "causal connectedness" between the human and nonhuman world, does not take place. To Evernden "there are no discrete entities" (Evernden 102); he believes that "we must deal instead with the individual-in-environment, the individual as a component of, not something distinct from, the rest of the environment" (Evernden 97). Asking where one is "to draw the line between one creature and another" or if "there even [is] a boundary between you and the non-living world" (Evernden 95) underline his radical position and places - once more - the individual in relation to its context, especially to the nonhuman physical world. Seeing his theory reflected in the "human phenomenon […] of 'a sense of place,'" he states that it is "the artist [who] makes the world personal – known, loved, feared, or whatever, but not neutral" (Evernden 100). Evernden's 'sense of place' is comparable to Tuan's "Topophilia" (as explained in 4.1.1/ 2.4.2) where "space is transformed into place as it acquires definition and meaning" (Tuan, *Place and Space* 8).

Tuan's and Evernden's conception of a sense of place, as well as Rawlings's conception of 'beauty' instills in the individual a certain 'desire' for their places and thereby promotes a conception of the individual's self as relational. Writing herself in relation to Cross Creek, she endows 'her place' with value, constructs knowledge from encountering the local environs, combines mysticism with naturalism and metaphorical language and scientific explanations with the folk idiom, just as she attempts to define her place in the world.

4.3.1.1 Writing the Self Through the Nonhuman Other

Throughout *Cross Creek*, Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings places her 'self' in relation to the Florida Scrub and the near environs of Cross Creek. She seeks "a definition of and relationship to the self that allows her to establish nurturing and intimate relationships with others, and a space in which to conduct the relationship with the self and the 'other.'" (Jones, "Nature,

Spirituality, and Homemaking" 242) *Cross Creek* challenges the Cartesian notion of 'Western' autobiography, and Rawlings subverts the preoccupation with the self, making *Cross Creek* "primarily a book about the Other" (Allister 1). In 1942, Rawlings was convinced that *Cross Creek* could not be read as an autobiography; it simply did not "reflect the identity narrative practices [she had] been socialized to accept" (Eakin, *How Our Lives Become Stories* 74). With the move to the Creek, however, she formed a sustaining sense of self by drawing "on models of identity provided by the [Cracker] culture" (Eakin, *How Our Lives Become Stories* 46). In *Cross Creek*, a collection of loosely connected essays about the human as well as the nonhuman world of her backwoods hamlet, "the 'documentary' takes precedence over the self-construction" (Allister 13); at first sight, neither title nor the individual chapter headlines allude to a self/selves or the author of the text. However, "by writing of a subject that move[d] [her] deeply, by working to understand [herself] primarily in relation to the nonhuman world around [her]" (Allister 1), Rawlings succeeds in creating and redefining her self.[18] *Cross Creek* serves her as a "mode for negotiating crisis" (Jones, "Nature, Spirituality, and Homemaking" 240) which results in a 'spiritual' recovery of the self. She successfully constructs a narrative that helps her to "reframe and work through [her] grief by focusing on the external world" (Allister 2); at the end of this healing, literary self-therapy and self-inflicted journey through the inner dimensions of her soul, she is able "to make sense of it all" (Allister 2) and come to terms with her life. Topophilia and a strong sense of place, both largely coupled to the nonhuman sphere of the Creek, provide Rawlings with the tools to locate a formerly dislocated self. *Cross Creek* is testimony that from the complex relationship of humans to place, identity and meaning emerges.

[18] While selfhood in *Cross Creek* is asserted in relation to a variety of others, *Blood of My Blood*, follows a linear thread, focusing on the author's younger years and the problematic relationship to her mother. Rawlings never published the book during her lifetime, probably out of fear that her initial depiction of self would interfere and maybe even threaten her newly constructed self of *Cross Creek*. Beside the Florida novels, *Blood of My Blood* is an important background source to the author's life before she found a new home at Cross Creek. It also gives insights into her weak mental condition and her frustration with writing and publishing. Overcoming her mental grief by her topophilia for the Creek region, it is easy to understand why she considered *Cross Creek* a much more personal book in which she thought she must keep the self *hidden*.

As stated above, it is a true 'ecotonian project' to locate *Cross Creek* thematically and structurally. Although frequently misjudged as a 'mere' collection of anthropological and scientific non-fiction essays, *Cross Creek* is best read as a relational autobiography; Rawlings, the topophiliac, writes herself in relation to her place; Rawlings, the regionalist writes herself into the community of the Creek; and Rawlings, the woman asserts self-hood, soothing 'double consciousness,' although she camouflages the more personal material behind a veil of regional material. In 1941, most critics and readers were *blind* to the self defined through its relation to a 'proximate other,' human or nonhuman. Modestly as usual, Rawlings described her ambitious undertaking to Max Perkins, coming close to Farr's and Allister's contemporary definition of ecobiography.

> "I did not want anything like an autobiography of these past thirteen years. […] I want in any case just to give my own reactions to the people and the life around me – an *objectively personal document.*" (Tarr, *Max and Marjorie* 496/468) [Italics mine].

However, *Cross Creek* should not be classified in the genre of collaborative or 'as-told-to' autobiographies. Closer to the core of the work is Eakin's model of a definition of it as "the story of the story" (Eakin, *How Our Lives Become Stories* 59), for the "autobiographical act is doubled, for the story of the other, of the informant, is accompanied by the story of the individual gathering this oral history" (Eakin, *How Our Lives Become Stories* 59). Although Eakin had a human 'proximate other' in mind, *Cross Creek's* "native informants" (Wong, *Sending My Heart* 7) are most often nonhuman organisms. This part attempts to show how Rawlings defines her self through a nonhuman other, which signifies - in relation to all the 'other Others' in the text - the most intense and personal/subjective part of her topophilia for the Creek. Initially, Rawlings goes to nature to seek solitude and distance from the 'world outside.' Like Henry David Thoreau in *Walden*, who "went to the woods because [he] wished to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life, and see if [he] could not learn what it had to teach" (Thoreau 90), Rawlings finds in nature symbols of the

spiritual or transcendental and in the process (re)connects[19] both to the other and the self.

Rawlings begins her autobiography by deconstructing the "illusion of self-determination" (Eakin, *How Our Lives Become Stories* 43) inherent and usually promoted by autobiography. It is not the *I*, which is placed at the center of the (nonlinear, discontinuous, nonteleological) narrative, but a depiction of Cross Creek's physical and geographic features (and as the narrative proceeds, continues with the collectivity of the human inhabitants of the Creek) in which the self begins to be gradually embedded. Rawlings consciously *chooses* her place of (re)birth, establishing her connection to place not by *birthright* but by the topophilia for her place. Unlike Janisse Ray (in *Ecology of a Cracker Childhood*) who attributes her deep relation to her place by claiming that she was "born from people who were born from people who were born from people who were born here" (Ray 4), Rawlings promotes a *conscious choosing* of one's place, due to one's own preferences. "And along with our deep knowledge of the earth is a preference of each of us for certain different kinds of it, for the earth is various as we are various" (*CC* 10-11). José Ortega y Gasset's words - "'Tell me the landscape in which you live, and I will tell you who you are'" (quoted in Allister 3) - perfectly reflect Rawlings's own interpretation of the land and its human and nonhuman inhabitants. To Rawlings, it is only in the perfect symbiosis of place and people(s) that profound happiness can be achieved and - in her case - crisis overcome.

Cross Creek describes a self-in-progress that manifests itself primarily by its love for the land; by founding the assertion of selfhood on this intimate relationship to the Florida Scrub and hammocks, she transfers her Cracker protagonist's philosophy of profound harmony between humans and their natural environment on to herself.

> There is of course an affinity between people and places. […] The consciousness of land and water must lie deeper in the core of us than any knowledge of our fellow beings. We were bred of earth before we were born of our mothers. Once born, we can *live without mother* or *father*, or any *other kin*, or *any friend*, or any human love. We *cannot live without the earth or apart from it*, and something is

[19] Keeping in mind her biographical preconditions and her first 'epiphanic moments' on her father's farm

> shriveled in a man's heart when he turns away from it and concerns himself only with the affairs of men. (*CC* 10-11) [Italics mine]

Intuitively, Rawlings destabilizes Paul John Eakin's 'human proximate other' and extends, nearly ascribing it to the nonhuman world. Apart from viewing "the self's story […] through the lens of its relation with some key other person" (Eakin, *How Our Lives Become Stories* 86) – as it is also the case in *Cross Creek* – it is the 'nonhuman proximate other' that features the most intimate tie to Rawlings, the relational autobiographer. "Metaphorically, the author's life is written on the land […], and by turning terrain into text, geography into consciousness, these [nature] writers create a new and significant kind of life-writing" (Allister 3). It is an even greater achievement in the case of Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings, who always confronted the possibility of critical disapproval, and it is ironic that her fear of being misread and falsely interpreted, actually came true.

Unlike the case of contemporary ecobiographers such as Sharon Butala (who equally undertook the move from the city to the land, a place formerly unknown to her) and Gretel Ehrlich, Marjorie Rawlings's relationship to the Creek never seemed to be intimidating, although at some occasions oppositional. She did not experience the slow transformation from agoraphobia into agoraphilia or what Yi-Fu Tuan has called the transformation from space into place.[20] For her, it was love at first sight and "once entangled with the Creek, no other place seemed possible anymore" (*CC* 11). Her awareness of "the very mysteriousness of nature" (Slovic, "Nature Writing and Environmental Psychology" 353) quickly promotes a deeper awareness "of her own dimensions" (Slovic, "Nature Writing" 352), transforming *Cross Creek* into a record of deep self-exploration and personal psychoanalysis. In his essay "Nature Writing and Environmental Psychology: The Interiority of Outdoor Experience," Scott Slovic argues that "the verbalization of observations and reactions makes one much more acutely aware than would a more passive assimilation or experience" (Slovic, "Nature Writing" 353). Living on a patch of land, "surrounded by water or swamps for many square miles" (Bigelow, *Frontier Eden* 83), she

[20] Yi-Fu Tuan, *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience.* (Minneapolis: U of Minneapolis P, 1977).

was ideally situated to observe the interrelatedness of Florida's flora and fauna. Her isolation became

> a condition for acquiring a sense of immensity. Alone [her] thoughts wander freely over space. In the presence of others they are pulled back by an awareness of other peculiarities who project their own worlds onto the same area. (Tuan, *Topophilia* 59)

Although strangely indifferent, nature turns into a readily accessible *space* for self-representation and self-revelation.

> Folk call the road lonely, because there is no human traffic and human stirring. Because I have walked it so many times and seen such a tumult of life there, it seems to me one of the most populous highways of my acquaintance. I have walked it in ecstasy, and in joy it is beloved. Every pine tree, every gallberry bush, every passion vine, every joree rustling in the underbrush, is vibrant. I have walked it in *trouble,* and the *wind in the trees beside me is easing,* I have walked it in *despair,* and the red of the sunset is my own blood dissolving into the night's darkness. For all such things were on earth before us, and will survive after us, and it is given to us to join ourselves with them and to be comforted. (*CC* 14) [Italics mine]

Of all stimuli evoked by nature in these "sudden revelations" (Tuan, *Topophilia* 93), Rawlings concentrates very much on the translation of the sensory stimuli. In the first chapter of *Cross Creek,* "For This Enchanted Land," she reconstructs her first encounter with her Florida grove, describing in length her initial emotional response to it.

> It is necessary to leave the impersonal highway, to step inside the rusty gate and close it behind. By this, an act of faith is committed, through which one accepts blindly the communion cup of beauty. One is now inside the grove, out of one world and in the mysterious heart of another. Enchantment lies in different things for each of us. For me, it is in this: to step out of the bright sunlight into the shade of orange trees; to walk under the arched canopy of their jadelike leaves; to see the long aisles of lichened trunks stretch ahead in a geometric rhythm; to feel the mystery of a seclusion that yet has shafts of light striking through it. This is the essence of an ancient and secret magic. […] And after long years of spiritual homelessness, of nostalgia, here is that mystic loveliness of childhood again. Here is home. An old thread, long tangled, comes straight again. (*CC* 15-16)

By 'stepping inside the rusty gate,' Rawlings metaphorically executes an act of commitment, eloquently weaving her self into the (non)human community of the Creek.

The healing qualities of the writing process are comparable to an act of 'spiritual homecoming,' often contemplated in the texts by Native American writers (Leslie Marmon Silko; *Almanac of the Dead* and *Ceremony*). Confronted with feelings of alienation and patriarchal power structures of the American mainstream society (see 4.3.1.3), the (re)connection to the earth transforms her into a strengthened self-conscious woman, who recognizes the need to write down for other women her 'personal success story' of escaping her mental prison. "For myself, the Creek satisfies a thing that had gone hungry and unfed since childhood days" (*CC* 13). Preferring a simpler life in the 'cultural borderlands' and social marginalization to "urban confusion" (*CC* 11), she mourns for everyone who is unable to connect with the land.

> I do not understand how any one can live without some small place of enchantment to turn to. […] It is impossible to be among the woods animals on their own ground without a feeling of expanding one's own world, as when any foreign country is visited. (*CC* 45)

In contrast to all other textual 'Others,' it is through the subjective and intimate relation to the nonhuman world, that Rawlings's is able to appease her spirits, heal and be 'whole' again.[21]

Underlying her 'conversion' narrative from a 'Faulty Before' to an 'Enlightened After,' is the constant fear of environmental destruction and the homogenization of American mainstream society. Chapter fourteen, "Toady-frogs, Lizards, Antses, and Varmints," addresses the ongoing process of wildlife extinction, the transformation from wild and 'unconquerable' animals to the domestification and subjugation of animals into pets. The juxtaposition of a dying ecosystem with her personal healing process that is dependent on the 'functioning' of nature, promotes in her an intense sense of loss, which occasionally – as she fears – becomes "preachy" (Tarr, *Max and Marjorie* 497). Both, her identity as a self-conscious woman and as a 'topophiliac' are threatened by the continual destruction of the hammocks of the Florida Interior. Rawlings's conception of a relational, 'embedded self' and her growing awareness of the historical interconnection among the human and nonhuman species, leads her to

[21] Similarly, African Americans often created a deep connection to the nonhuman world, finding there a space where they could experience a sense of freedom from what W.E.B. Du Bois's has termed the state of 'double consciousness.'

condemn the dominant culture's efforts to 'other' both natural world and 'indigenous' inhabitants.[22] Rawlings conceives of herself as only *one* participating organism in the coherent ecosystem of the Creek where "everything is a part of everything else" (Eakin, *How Our Lives Become Stories* 70). The destruction of the environment has not had the consequence of destabilizing her own self and identity but also threatens a people dependent on and not yet alienated from their 'wild' environment (see 4.3.1.2). As stated above (2.1), Floridian land ethic of the 1940s meant growth at any rate, meaning that "the Other must either acculturate, assimilate or disappear" (Adamson 171). Rawlings bemourns "nature's fallen children" (Adamson 169) and raises her voice for the 'storyless,' for those incapable of progress. In this, *Cross Creek* is also a biography of the place Cross Creek and the minority cultures of the Florida backwoods.

Rawlings's formation of a relational self obliges her to insist that the environmental issue cannot be viewed separately from its cultural contexts. Searching for solutions to uphold her newly defined self, she turns to the 'wisdom' of the old-guard backwoods Crackers. Cracker culture is still closely tied to the environment; "the community's identity conventions run deep" (Eakin, *How Our Lives Become Stories* 76) and the culture still postulates a relational self. Unlike mainstream culture, Cracker culture still incorporates the cultural *moyens* (Cracker lore) to uphold their relational identity. Story-telling sessions - similar to Zora Neale Hurston's descriptions of *lyin's* on the porch in Eatonville and Native American storytelling events - promote and communicate to the group a model for ethic living. Rawlings inherited her love for the land from the old-guard Crackers and depictions of experiential topophilia are also included to induce in the reader an environmental consciousness for "biosphere 1"[23]

[22] Rawlings had already contested the positing of 'some' humans as superior to 'other' human beings in *Golden Apples*. Usually humans of non-Caucasian ancestry are considered as part of nature (Allie and Lant are considered indigenous, comparable to Native Americans and Rea is black). "This [contemporary] form of discourse, which environmental and cultural historian Giovanna Di Chiro terms Euro-American 'nature talk,' opposes an Edenic or sublime nature to a fallen culture, categorizing people of color as identical with nature, a move that throughout the colonial period entitled those of 'superior lineage' to exploit and have dominion over 'other' humans in the same way they claimed to have dominion over nature" (Adamson 169).

[23] An allusion to Leslie Marmon Silko's novel *Almanac of the Dead* in which "she clearly alludes to Biosphere 2, a glass-and-steel enclosure built in 1987 in the Sonoran Desert just north of Tuscon, Arizona, by Texas billionnaire Ed Bass and cofounder John Allen. In

(Adamson 169). "I like to think of the Spaniards blazing their trails through the Florida hammocks. The hammocks were the same then as now, and will be the same forever if men can be induced to leave them alone" (*CC* 42). Rawlings fears that mainstream American culture breeds alienation from the land, while at the same time calling it 'progress.'[24] Recognizing that each individual is connected and responsible for 'our' social *and* environmental communities, Rawlings develops a strong sense of preservation, which later manifests itself in her will, foreseeing for her land to remain 'untouched.'

Cross Creek still signifies for Rawlings a model biotic community to which she considers herself to belong.

> The jungle hammock breathed. Life went through the moss-hung forest, the swamp, the cypresses, through the wild sow and her young, through me, in its continuous chain. We were all one with the silent pulsing. […] It was important only to keep close enough to the pulse to feel its rhythm, to be comforted by its steadiness, to know that Life is vital, and one's own minute living a torn fragment of the larger cloth. (*CC* 46-47)

Rawlings partly succumbs to the ideal or 'utopian' vision in which the self fully merges into the natural world. However, in the act of writing, the relational autobiographer must – in an act of self-preservation - "stand apart, studying [nature] from the distance, and the sense of detachment, of separation, that this posture affords is doubtless one of its primary attraction" (Eakin, *How Our Lives Become Stories* 92). Although, initially, Rawlings favors an unmediated, non-anthropocentric approach to nature, she reverts it in the narrative.

> The human ego is a fearful thing and we consider those things, friends, relatives, stock, that touch our lives, to be somehow different because they are close to us. […] It is altogether too easy to attribute human characteristics to animals. (*CC* 260/262)

1991, eight 'biospherians' and thousands of rare and exotic plant and animal species from the rain forests, oceans, and deserts of the world were sealed into the enclosure to demonstrate how humans might survive if Earth, or 'Biosphere 1,' should become hopelessly contaminated. The biospherians and their 'mission' captured the world's attention, but many questioned the value of the project given the frequently whisperd rumor that Bass and Allen were simply rich, white, authoritarian cult leaders looking for a way to survive the coming environmental holocaust with a few chosen followers" (Adamson 169).

[24] My formulation echoes Joni Adamson's although she discusses the upheaval of contemporary violence among teenagers and its relation to the loss of a sense of place. (Adamson 178)

However, to look at nature without projecting emotions and other characteristics from the human realm to it, is ultimately impossible and it is a recurring pattern throughout *Cross Creek* that observations of the physical environment are "transformed into a creation of [Rawlings's] own mind" (Slovic, *Seeking Awareness* 95). By oscillating between scientific descriptions devoid of humanly ascribed values and anthropomorphic depictions, she is able to construct her own persona and voice her philosophy of life. As exemplified in "The Magnolia Tree" she characteristically begins with a scientific analysis of the "*magnolia grandiflora*" (*CC* 36) and continues her description of the tree in anthropomorphic terms, asking herself "whether character in all things, human as well as vegetable, may not be implicit" (*CC* 36). By describing the tree's perfect adaptation to its surroundings, its "breeding and harboring of many friendly parasites" (*CC* 39), and its consideration for the valuable sprouts of orange trees, she constructs the tree as a respectful 'biotic citizen' within the Creek ecosystem. The qualities appropriated from the human realm and projected onto the magnolia, indicate her own construction of an ecological self, deeply rooted and harmoniously *embedded* in her place. Her topophilia is largely coupled to the nonhuman world because here, she is able to indulge in constructions of nature that then serve her own self-construction. Although there is an 'ego' looming large in the text of *Cross Creek*, the general perspective of the book remains eco-centered. Writing herself ecologically into the narrative, as an organism 'with all its peculiarities,' Rawlings *actively* shapes her *chosen* ecosystem.

> This morning I crushed a fuzzy black caterpillar. […] Its only sin was that it was feeding on certain green leaves that I wished to look at. But in crushing the caterpillar, I have fed the ants. They are hustling to the feast, already tunneling the body. (*CC* 376-377)

Rawlings describes a deep ecologist's "'identification dilemma'" (Libby 254) which ultimately results in an 'ecological paradox;' on one hand, there is complete "human identification with nature," while on the other hand "we should leave the natural world alone to run its proper course" (Libby 254). Characteristic for Rawlings - as for other nature writers - is

> the possibility of being simultaneously ego- and ecocentric, individuated and integrated, and – once and for all – both human and 'natural.'[…] It is precisely such a vital, ongoing mediation between

> holism and individuation, ecocentrism and anthropocentrism, an insatiable outward- and inward-looking, that both unites and in the end produces the concurrent genres of nature writing and autobiography. (Libby 254)

Although she tries for the complete, although utopian, merging with nature, Rawlings nevertheless recognizes "the other as neither alien to and discontinuous from self nor assimilated to or an extension of self (Plumwood, *Feminism* 6). Plumwood's ecofeminist approach solves Rawlings's dilemma, enabling a classification of her as *related to* Cross Creek but also as a *distinct* individual.

In the last chapter of her cyclically arranged autobiography, Rawlings once again analyzes the overall pattern of relationality. Emphasizing that harmony between the human and nonhuman world is essential for both sides, she ends up stating that human life constitutes only *one* part in relation to the larger biotic ecosystem and is transitory in relation to the larger cosmos. "The individual man is transitory, but the pulse of life and of growth goes on after he is gone, buried under a wreath of magnolia leaves" (*CC* 379). Man enters the 'natural' circle of creation and ends where he has once been born: in nature. Throughout *Cross Creek,* Rawlings successfully proves that an autonomous self is unable to survive (in the primordial backwoods region); applying her newly-gained wisdom from the specific local environment to the universal realm, she concludes that - in a radical formulation - *all* identity *must* be relational. Having successfully established a relational self, she recognizes that she is no more than the king snake living beside her gate, the red-birds in the magnolia tree or any other inhabitant of the Creek; writing and living her topophilia for the Creek, Rawlings ends her 'labor of love' in an emotional summation of her personal ecological vision. Although her Florida hamlet has its stormy weather and its snake,[25] for her, it is still essentially an Eden. The answer to the question raised in the headline of the last chapter - "Who Owns Cross Creek?" – must therefore be: it belongs to the timeless nonhuman world rather than to the greedy human possessor or destroyer.

> Who owns Cross Creek? The red-birds, I think, more than I, for they will have their nests even in the face of delinquent mortgages. And

[25] Cf. 5.3.1.4 „The Ancient Enemy": Rawlings brought to Florida an immense fear of snakes.

> after I am dead, who am childless, the human ownership of grove and field and hammock is hypothetical. But a long line of red-birds and whippoorwills and blue-jays and ground doves will descend from the present owners of nests in the orange trees, and their claim will be less subject to dispute than that of any human heirs. Houses are individual and can be owned, like nests, and fought for. But what of the land? It seems to me that the earth may be borrowed but not bought. It may be used, but not owned. It gives itself in response to love and tending, offers its seasonal flowering and fruiting. But we are tenants and not possessors, lovers and not masters. Cross Creek belongs to the wind and the rain, to the sun and the seasons, to the cosmic secrecy of seed, and beyond all, to time. (*CC* 380)

4.3.1.2 Cross Creek Voices: Rawlings's Communal and Invading Persona/Voice in *Cross Creek*

Cross Creek signifies for Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings a space in which autonomous and strong subjects interact with each other and their natural surroundings. Living within the community of the Creek, Rawlings comes to understand – sometimes painfully - that everyone is interrelated with everything and everyone else; all individuals must subordinate their selves to the well-being and functioning of the larger community. By taking responsibility for each member of the Creek, the human community mimics the interconnectedness posited by nature. Consequently, Rawlings does not concentrate on one-on-one encounters with a specific human other, defined by a certain hierarchy, but finds herself entangled in a web of relations that must be negotiated on a daily basis. It is only through the process of writing that she comes to a deeper understanding of the community's intracultural *sense*.

Rather than standing above natural forces, the Crackers and African Americans forming the Creek community, stand with them. Instead of imitating the prevalent 'model' of autobiography or ethnobiography (which would require her to create a narrative in which she considers herself as the 'colonizer' or self-conscious individualist), Rawlings's foremost goal in *Cross Creek* is not to set herself apart from the community but to mimic Cracker conceptions of self which rather *speak* personal stories to become more fully accepted by the community (as shown in *TY*, 4.2.3); however, as *storyteller* of Cross Creek, she is also able to subvert and shape the Creek.

"Storytelling or wordtelling always necessitates some sacrifice of individual autonomy by the Written, the Other. It is a vexing bargain that Marjorie Rawlings profoundly understood, as she shows us in *Cross Creek*" (Prenshaw, "The Otherness" 23). Hertha D. Wong has coined the term "*communo-bio-oratory*" (Wong, *Sending My Heart* 6) which focuses on the connection between a communal or clannish framework of (Southern) identity with orality, displayed by the author's extensive use of dialect, the representation of folk beliefs, Creek Voodoo and cooking recipes. The communal spirit of the Creek folk and its interrelatedness to nature become especially visible in the seasonal chapters towards the end of the novel.

> At the Creek we watch for signs of change. When the dog fennel blooms, we count that it will be forty days until frost. When the curlew wheel, high in the sky, we are despondent, for they are called the dry-weather birds, and the circling flocks indicate that the rains are a long time away. (*CC* 310)

The seasonal changes are reflected in human reaction and adaptation to the slightest seasonal changes at the Creek. "Summer" is described in a lethargic quiet mood, inviting the Creek residents to "rest quietly in the shade" (*CC* 279), while "Fall," with its storms and hurricanes, creates tenseness and inner disquiet. The chapter is filled with Martha's colorful 'Creek voodoo;' "at the back of the farmhouse a dead chicken snake hangs in the crotch of a grapefruit tree […] to induce rain" (*CC* 312-313); in order to prevent quarrelling in the house, onion peelings and peanut hulls are not to be thrown out of the door and here and there, feet are heard going down the porch steps, which Martha attributes to the nightfolks coming by (*CC* 313). In the energized and exciting atmosphere, Rawlings becomes one with the communal spirit, admitting that "Martha knows it better [and] thinks that [she] learn[s] very slowly" (*CC* 312). In these chapters Rawlings most visibly subordinates her otherwise often authoritative and individual side of self. The tension of "Fall" is all of a sudden swept away by the September storms, leaving the air with "a translucent quality" and the year's most "superb weather" (*CC* 317), projecting Rawlings back into her old role as 'boss of the Creek.' Cross Creek becomes "a ground on which two cultures meet" just as *Cross Creek* turns into "the textual equivalent of the [Cracker] frontier" (Krupat, *For Those Who Come After* 33). The reciprocal

relationship or "dialogic self" (Krupat, *For Those Who Come After* 14) is determined by Rawlings herself, although she submits to Martha for the short duration of the fall season, the relationship described, is rarely "one between equals" (Krupat, *For Those Who Come After* 339). Throughout *Cross Creek*, Rawlings shifts between the construction of a communal and an individualistic, autonomous self.

Rawlings fictionalized a good deal of her *memoir*, and 'authoritatively' shapes the Creek individuals to fit her narrative. The Creek voices that wrote about life at Cross Creek from *their* perspective, notably Idella Parker, Rawlings 'perfect maid' and J. T. Glisson, the son of her neighbor Tom Glisson, attest that much of what Rawlings established as 'true,' is constructed to serve the creation of her relational self and is shaped by her own – often mistaken – vision of the Creek.

> I skimmed to see what she had written about my neighbors. Some things were flattering and others were humbling – there was a difference in the telling. I turned back to the first chapter and began to read. Everything was familiar yet also strange: the Creek I knew and a Creek I had never seen. There were blatant omissions and skillful enhancements of the people and the place. It was like the impressionist art I had only recently begun to admire and understand. Mrs. Rawlings's version of the Creek was in some ways more vibrant, yet more simplified, than the real-life Creek. Even the truth laid bare was as savory as it was offensive. The book was a gift of a place and a time that was passing, though I was too young to know it. (Glisson 106)

In his book *The Creek*, J. T. Glisson dedicates a whole chapter to "That Woman Next Door," writing that Rawlings often mistook the attempts of "well-meaning families to draw her into their community of friends [as] overtures […] to obtain charity" (Glisson 86);

> I am sure Mrs. Rawlings was unaware of the responsibility backwoods culture demanded of Crackers towards their neighbors, especially toward those who lived alone. […] She would later write of those sincere offers of friendship from the bias of her own misunderstanding. (Glisson 86)

Carolyn Jones believes that most Crackers and African Americans living within the community of the Creek constitute strong selves "to which Rawlings does not have access and, therefore, cannot fully control in her representation […]. In these persons, Rawlings's 'self' meets equally strong but different other selves" (Jones, "Race and the Rural" 229) she cannot

fully ignore but whom she finds equally difficult to fully realize in the narrative of *Cross Creek*.

Rawlings's 'invading persona' or authoritative voice is as complex as the Creek itself. On one hand, she aligns with *them* in 'otherness,' emphasizing a self-in-progress that is learning and which acknowledges its mistakes as it is mediated by a narrating 'I' from outside the action of the narrative. Numerously, she deviates from her initial aim to establish a communal self which is interrelated with all others at the Creek and actively 'invades' *their* selves to serve her individual self-assertion. The narrative is interspersed with acts of Rawlings's 'Faulty Before,' which is toned down by the "charm of fiction" (Jones, "Race and the Rural" 219) she brings to all of her texts. Nevertheless, Rawlings acts out social hierarchy and 'invades' the Creek "community's identity conventions" (Eakin, *How Our Lives Become Stories* 76). One example for her authoritarian and insensible voice is her note to Tom Glisson, 'ordering' him over to her house. (*CC* 374) "'Tom Glisson. I wish to see you. Hurry about it'" (*CC* 374). Glisson decoded her message as being transformed into a (white) other. "'That note you sent me. I'm as white as you are'" (*CC* 374). Glisson, whom she had falsely accused of having poisoned her dog, feels 'violated' not only because a woman asserts authoritarian control in the traditional backwoods culture, but also because he sees her as higher in the social ladder. Too much involved in integrating herself into the community, she has yet to learn that although she views her Cracker neighbors as a 'beautiful' people, they are equipped with a fierce pride and stoicism that cannot tolerate 'to be ordered around.' Posited on the end of the white social ladder, they shift on the borders of 'whiteness,' constituting in contrast to Rawlings, a "white Other" (Newitz/Wray 168) that defines itself by strictly marking a border between them and African Americans whom they consider at the bottom of the (Southern) social ladder. However, Rawlings draws attention to the stigmatizing practices of her contemporaries concerning the poor "white diaspora" (Newitz&Wray 182). Placing her self-in-progress, which commits one 'cultural' faux-pas after the other, in relation to the "white native" (Newitz/Wray 182) - a 'romanticized' Cracker 'other' - she inverts the social hierarchy. This scheme literally haunts the narrative as does the fractious encounters with one of the time beings, the unnamed Cracker

woman in "Antses in Tim's Breakfast." However, it is another sign of her cultural insensibility and of the fact that she is still an outsider to the Creek culture that she did not even inquire the name of the woman who lived for a couple of years in her tenant house. The woman only attracts her attention when she comes to Rawlings's house to ask her to read out some mail to her. Instead of aligning with her, Rawlings does not understand that her bypassing comment on "the antses [in] Tim's breakfast," (*CC* 74) is an encoded plea for financial support. In this particular case, Rawlings 'invades' seemingly without recognizing it, asking the woman if she would do her washing, only to learn that "'A white woman don't ask another white woman to do her washin' for her, nor to carry her slops'" (*CC* 75). Rawlings invades the couples' Cracker stoicism and they prefer moving on, leading a nomadic, unstable life to giving up their last connection to 'whiteness.' Rawlings still has to negotiate and find her place within the Creek community. However, interfering with the community's *mutual* collective self can also be dangerous. At the time of the Depression era, open range was a commonly agreed procedure in the scrub region and trampling one's petunias was no reason for shooting someone else's 'dinner;' although described as a humorous episode in *Cross Creek*, "A Pig Is Paid For" fictionalizes Rawlings's shooting of Mr. Martin's pig, ignoring the danger in such an undertaking. J. T. Glisson writes that

> shooting or threatening to shoot someone's cows was a serious business at a time when the Crackers at the Creek frowned upon anyone asking the law to intervene in their affairs. Just how serious is reflected in the court records of Florida during that period, showing the large number of people who were shot for killing someone else's livestock. (Glisson 94)

Rawlings's most striking violation of the Creek's communal identity is probably represented by the trial she initiates when Samson, her black gardener and an *outsider* to the Creek was shot by Henry, an *insider* to and *member* of the community.

> **I** decided that justice should prevail. Meantime, the rest of the Creek lined up solidly to stand with Henry. I think it made me angry that they all went behind my back. […] The truth came out. Old Boss had gone to the judge, a lifelong friend, and had told him, simply, that Henry was his man and he wanted him released. The judge released him. That was all there was to it. All, except that now I was aroused,

> and felt that I could not allow so flagrant a miscarriage of justice to transpire. (*CC* 206/207) [Emphasis mine]

Rawlings clearly places herself above the Creek's communal interests, challenging Old Brice's position as 'Boss of the Creek' and not unquenched with the trial loss, she persists to have the last word in the matter, declaring that

> 'Now we all know this has been as crooked a business as the Creek ever got mixed up in. Samson is all right, but the rest of you wanted Henry back. And if there's ever any trouble at the Creek again, it won't ever reach a court. I'll take care of it. And if there's any shooting, I'm going to do it.' (*CC* 211)

Although subordinating her interests to those of the community at the end, it is Rawlings who asserts control, nearly becoming threatening. Seeing Old Boss Brice cave in to Rawlings, Martha Mickens establishes Rawlings as the "new boss at the Creek. Boss o' Cross Creek now is her" (*CC* 211). 'Othering' them by establishing her selfhood through the means of social hierarchy, she destabilizes the communal yet her own sense of self. Craving to *belong*, and knowing that she (personally) healed through her relation to the Creek, she creates a text that shifts between both selves, revealing to the reader altogether a dislocated and insecure but ultimately much 'truer' self; [she uses her 'Faulty Before' whenever she tries to convey her philosophy of profound harmony with one's natural place.] Escaping the bonds of communal identity as an act of self-assertion is in itself a violation of Rawlings's philosophy of harmony between man and nature/man. However, throughout the writing process of *Cross Creek*, Rawlings must accept that some individuals of the Creek are shrouded in a web of mysticism, be it the unnamed woman or Martha Mickens; in their mythic otherness, both "resist representation" (Jones, "Race and the Rural" 223) and romantization, both "put[ting] a mark on [her]," haunting and tormenting her in her dreams (*CC* 76).

From today's point of view, issues of race must clearly upset the reader of *Cross Creek*. However, Rawlings's ideas on race were much more complex than they might first appear. Idella Parker writes in both of her books, that African Americans avoided the rural region around Island Grove for its reputation of being virulently racist (Parker, *IDELLA* 19); Parker, too,

was at first unwilling to live there. Given the time and place, Rawlings took a considerable amount of unpopular stances; she paid much higher wages than the rest of the (white) Creek community and preferably gave jobs on her grove to African Americans. Both, Idella Parker as well as Zora Neale Hurston stress at numerous occasions the author's 'modern' open-mindedness and generosity, but the narrative of *Cross Creek* – especially "Black Shadows," "Geechee" and "Catchin' One Young" show a side in Rawlings's writing, that is "heavy laden with racist essentialism and paternalistic images of blacks as hapless children" (Watkins 24), stereotyping and denigrating African Americans.

In his reading of *Cross Creek*, James H. Watkins includes Rawlings in a long line of Southern autobiographers, such as William Alexander Percy's *Lanterns on the Levee* (1941) (to whom he largely compares her), Stark Young's *The Pavilion* (1948), Lillian Smith's *Killers of the Dream* (1949) and many more, all following a recurring representation of selfhood.

> The authority with which Rawlings presumes to speak about blacks on the Creek, and African Americans in general, points to one of the most durable if also one of the most objectionable characteristics of white southern identity. In the paternalistic rhetoric of the pro-slavery apologia, white southerners defended the peculiar institution against abolitionist attacks in part on the grounds that they understood African Americans better than northern whites did. (Watkins 22-23)

Locating herself amidst the (white) Creek community, Rawlings thought it necessary to mimic part of her neighbors' racial attitudes. She constructs a self that seems to fall victim to racism, a self that is manipulated by the Cracker community who teach her how to understand and *deal with* her black help at the grove. However, this strategy of self-location appears dishonest; she uses the (white) community's 'constructed' influence on her to emphasize her emancipated up-bringing in the North, differentiating and placing herself nearer to the reader and the critics. The authority with which she 'others' her neighbors instills in her a feeling of guilt and she frequently apologizes for what she said of them in the sentence immediately following.

> It looked at one time as though the Creek area were too small to hold both, me and Mr. Martin. If Mr. Martin had put me under the jail, as he threatened, or sent me to eternity by way of gunshot, as he wanted, I should have made an effort to take his big burly body

> along to either place with me. We have become good friends. I was never angry with Mr. Martin. (*CC* 25)

Rawlings's *dislocated* self faces the ambivalence of not wanting to be a Yankee (*CC* 323) but at the same time she refuses to openly take a stance against segregation.

Rawlings's "paternalistic constructions of the racial difference are anything but peripheral to her self-representation" (Watkins 24). She uses her relation to her black domestics and the paternalistic comments to construct a Southern (Creek) 'male' identity. "While feigning bewilderment over black servants' behaviors, they nevertheless display a presumed expertise in the psychology and social practices of all blacks" (Watkins 30). In "Black Shadows," she first claims not being "of the race of southerners who claim to understand the Negro," (*CC* 189) while a few lines down, she indeed presumes to understand them and gives an exact portrayal, closely adhering to the stereotyped Southern definition of African Americans as unreliable and in need of care. In her relationship to black domestics, Rawlings also evokes the stereotyped image of the benevolent planter and the manipulating black employee (Watkins 36). In the case of Adrenna, Rawlings states that she "is doomed to pay for the operation and doomed to help [her] raise the baby" (*CC* 213), repeating this pattern with Geechee, who *uses* her to free her lover Leroy from prison. (*CC* 94 ff) Rawlings writes that she "had always known that we were building up to this; that it was not she who was serving me, but I who was destined to serve her" (*CC* 93). All in all, Rawlings does not mind to be used. This shows even more that the rhetorical inversion of the power hierarchies is limited.

> It is more a rhetorical ploy designed to elicit sympathy for themselves [Rawlings] at their [her] servant's expense rather than an accurate portrayal of interracial power relations, but it also shows how much white identity in the south was inextricably bound up with the racial other in a tangled web of dependency that operated on both the conscious and unconscious level. (Watkins 32)

Considering Rawlings's initial peripheral position at the Creek, the 'racial other' is agent of her self-location as well as self-disclosure and serves her "as a means in the act of performing white southern identity" (Watkins 24).

Nevertheless, Rawlings dedicates a greater amount of attention to the black inhabitants of the Creek, as would seem necessary. Decoding

Southern social practices, she also "cautions her readers to look beyond the [racial] stereotypes" (Watkins 31), writing that "back of these superficial truths lies the mystery of the primitive African nature, subjected precipitously first to slavery and then to so-called civilization, the one as difficult and unjust as the other" (*CC* 189). This part is not to evaluate Rawlings's 'modern' or 'un-modern' ideas on race, but to show how the author established a self by relating to a (racial or white) other. However, she 'consciously' chooses a black woman as a structuring device for her narrative of *Cross Creek*. Placing her at the center of the narrative, Martha is both strong self and 'other.'

> She is nurse to any of us, black or white, who fall ill. She is midwife and layer out of the dead. She is the only one who gives advice to all of us impartially. She is a dusky Fate, spinning away at the threads of our Creek existence. (*CC* 25)

Rawlings constructs in Martha a 'fluid' self, able to shift between white and black community. Supplying the families with various black domestics, both black and white families are dependent on her. Rawlings, too, is welcomed by her upon her arrival, and later states that Martha "will have a finger in [her] pie from beyond the grave" (*CC* 214). Martha's strong and individual self challenges Rawlings's self-construction at several instances throughout the narrative but it also draws her to Martha; it is in her, that Rawlings searches for confirmation of her art, trying to convince her of the importance of her writing.

> Pride picked me, I think, or the need of self-justification that Martha is likely to impose on one, and that day I showed her my published books. […] She put her hands on her hips and threw back her head. 'Sugar,' she said, 'they ain't nobody at Cross Creek can do that.' (*CC* 35)

Martha seems to be *intangible* for Rawlings. Ultimately, it is always Martha who decides over Rawlings's fate at the Creek, supplying her with her domestic help, making her 'boss of the Creek,' introducing her to Creek lore and making her *see* the inevitable interconnectedness of all 'organisms'- black, white or natural - at the Creek.

Besides Martha's central role in the structuring of the narrative, Rawlings donates a whole chapter to Geechee, another of her black domestics. Geechee, as "the racial other," turns into "an agent for

[Rawlings's] self-disclosure" (Watkins 24), constituting a narrative device commonly used by southern autobiographers. Rawlings's relation to Geechee is the most intimate and her portrayal of her, the most striking. Geechee, whom she describes as "the ugliest Negress [she] had ever seen" (*CC* 91) while at the same time "she was all [she] ever needed" (*CC* 97) uncovers a most vulnerable side of Rawlings. In an unguarded moment of self-disclosure, Rawlings admits that she is physically dependent on her. Although the 'bathing scene' ("Black Shadows," 102-103) makes race/color especially visible, it reverses the prevailing power relations. It also shows a moment of intimacy and female bonding across the borders of race.[26] Geechee's statement, "You cain't git along without me. I'se seed. You needs me." (*CC* 97), confirms Rawlings's dependence on her. Long after she had left Rawlings, she returns for short visits, stating that she would still be with her, if she could overcome alcohol abuse, thereby reflecting intracultural connectedness.

For all its shortcomings and racial misrepresentations, Rawlings depicts Cross Creek as a "vital union" (Jones, "Race and the Rural" 230), as a heterogeneous community, that assembles within the communal *sense*, a variety of different and vehemently individual selves. However, in the last chapter Rawlings transcends the barriers of race, equalizing Martha and Old Boss, stating that they "are the bests of us" (*CC* 372). She ends *Cross Creek* by melting her extravagant self into the Creek community, enriching the 'ecotone' of the Creek by another strong and *stoic* individual. The fact that unanimously all Creek residents stood by her side at the difficult time of the Cross Creek Trial (instead of Zelma Cason, a long-time member of their community) attest her status as a fully assimilated and accepted member.

4.3.1.3 A Female Modernist's Dilemma: Camouflage and Self-Assertion

Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings's move to Cross Creek signified for her an act of liberation, enabling her to find her authentic voice and imaginatively free herself from the prevailing gender hierarchies. Entitling her autobiography

[26] Cf. next chapter (5.1.3.1).

after the physical site of Cross Creek, explains the central role 'place' and the rising topophilia played in the process of her healing. The literary act of self-creation in *Cross Creek* brought an end to grieving, "announcing that [she had] moved – tentatively, awkwardly, mysteriously – through the mourning process" (Allister 1). In "Healing the Woman Within," Marilyn R. Chandler states that there are an "overwhelming number of modern autobiographers who have undertaken to record their life stories as a form of self-therapy" (Chandler 93). Writing becomes a refuge although or maybe because most female autobiographers of her time were caught in the dilemma of gender polarities, wanting to avoid public self-exposure while at the same time needing the writing about the self to articulate and define their personal situation; further on, many faced the ambivalence of wanting to assert selfhood while at the same time, subordinating their selves to a patriarchal 'other.' Nevertheless, as Rawlings and many other woman autobiographers of her time found out, self-affirmation finds the least resistance in writing and in nature.

Cross Creek has always been a book Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings felt she *had* to write. However, if one approaches *Cross Creek* with the expectation to find detailed information on the author's private life and literary career, one is likely to close the book with disappointment. *Cross Creek* – in what has been commonly designated as *female* autobiographical writing - only alludes to her earlier married life, her career and the strenuous relationship with her mother, Ida Traphagen; therefore it stands in sharp opposition to what autobiography in fact promotes. *Blood of My Blood*, or if one only considers the first letters of each word, *BOMB*, is Rawlings's apprentice work and although she claimed it to be fictional, it is heavily autobiographical. The book literally is a 'bomb;' it is an explosive outcry of the young Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings, containing much of the author's 'private' background and emotions, like the deep love for her early deceased father and the relationship to Charles in college; further on, the book is written in an angry tone, containing a harsh critique of her mother who viewed her daughter as an extension of herself. Rawlings seemingly enjoyed experimenting with her *fictional, nameless self*, and liberally describes a furiously enraged, young female persona and her aggressive emotions towards her mother. These extreme emotions are absent in *Cross Creek*; the

author shows that she has matured, although metaphorically she once again denies any relation to her mother's and the prevailing socially-prescribed female way of life (in "Our Daily Bread," see 4.3.1.4). Rawlings never tried to publish *Blood of My Blood* during her life, most likely because it would have damaged her hard-won literary reputation; further on, rage was still considered an emotion women were not 'supposed to' include in their writings. As if it were to make sure that she could not be misinterpreted, she numerously states in letters to Perkins that she wishes *Cross Creek* to be "as quiet in tone as anyone could wish for" (Tarr, *Max and Marjorie* 231). She refers to 'quiet' as in opposition to those other 'noisy' and – in Rawlings's 'colonized mind/view' - important (male) discourses; thereby she equates her position and her *kind* of writing as constructed by the prevailing discourses and as a mirror image of Cross Creek's geographical and marginal position within the nation-state, or as an 'invisible' section within the otherwise so 'visible' tourist mecca of Florida's Golden Coasts.

After a long and painful marital struggle, Rawlings made the courageous decision to go it on her own at the Creek. There she found a "room of her own" (Woolf, *A Room of One's Own* 6) in a semi-wilderness lacking socially-constructed behavior patterns for women. When Charles left the Creek, she wrote to her friend Bee McNeal, "It almost broke me. The alternative to my divorce was, frankly, suicide. Life just wasn't worth living with the black cloud of his daily disagreeableness over me" (Bigelow/Monti 91). Charles wanted his wife to find fulfillment in her role as housewife and potential mother, he literally *locked* her inside the house, blanketed under his patriarchal control. The physical outside terrain which Rawlings vividly explored and which promoted her writing, limited his power over her. Despite all the tensions, *Cross Creek* signified for her a textual 'manifest' of her personal process of liberation and escape from domestic confinement; it shows her entering exclusively 'male' realms, voices her 'migration' into a new culture and focuses on the depiction of her *male* friendships at the Creek. Despite regarding everything traditionally associated with the female realm, Rawlings portrays herself as free of confinement, outside the house; as writing on the airy porch, hunting and camping in the scrub, she redefines herself and also silences the part in her that craves for more subjectivity.

As a metaphor for her newly-gained freedom, *Cross Creek* signifies for Rawlings the most important and personal book of her literary career in Florida. With her 'self' inscribed in the text, she was afraid that it would not fulfill Perkins's expectations of it; on her visit to New York, she even refuses to meet with him in person, as they usually did. "There is really no reason for me to talk with you personally in New York about the material, for we do just as well by letter" (Tarr, *Max and Marjorie* 497). In the same letter, Rawlings justifies - nearly excuses herself - for her book, stating that she "did not want anything like an autobiography" and that it had seemed "*impossible* [to her] to provide *straight narrative*" (Tarr, *Max and Marjorie* 495). Consistently denying to have written about herself or her experience, she enters the network of public circulation which was for her – as for many other female autobiographers - enormously 'threatening.' Rawlings conquers her anxiety caused by being circulated only by carefully shaping the persona she (re)presents in *Cross Creek* and by subordinating *herstory* to those of others. In this way she avoids self-exposure and retains a narrative form, closer to fiction; camouflaging her 'truer' female voice and confirming Spacks's "self-in-hiding" (Spacks 112), it is therefore not astonishing that in this "crisis situation" (Hornung, "American Autobiographies" 209), Rawlings chose as her 'ultimate book' the form of (relational) autobiography.

> If one accepts the premise that all American autobiography originate in a specific crisis situation, then autobiography would appear to be a preferred medium for all individuals whose status in life and society is precarious, questioned or as yet undefined. […] [I]t is specifically applicable to all people considered marginal figures of society, such as ethnic minorities and women excluded from the androcentric discourses. (Hornung, "American Autobiographies" 209)

Underlying her 'camouflage strategy' is the fundamental paradox in which public (female) representation operates. The public realm or surface text of *Cross Creek* signifies a 'hollow shell,' an inauthentic space. The self-representation becomes merely a role she plays, mimicking her regional fiction in which she, too wears a protective mask. In a letter to Norman Berg, she writes "No actual autobiography, even, ever is truly the individual. In writing of ourselves, we shade ourselves almost as much as we do an imaginary character – often quite unconscious" (Bigelow/Monti

289). The local backdrop ultimately shields the private and 'truer' self from public gaze. The self-in-progress, described throughout *Cross Creek* can therefore better be defined as a "participant-observer," since the "'audience's attention is focused on the told, rather than on the teller'"[27] (Corbett 257). Narrating the self indirectly, she is revealed only in what she reveals about the other(s). As Patricia Meyer Spacks has noted, women "develop strategies of deflection, preoccupation with others, protestations of insignificance, or identification with women as a collectivity" (Smith/Watson, *Women, Autobiography, Theory* 31). Estelle Jelinek also emphasizes in her introduction to *Women's Autobiography*, that woman's autobiographies "rarely mirror the established history of their times […] or the public aspect of their lives." Instead, they tend to refer "obliquely to their careers, or […] camouflage[d] them behind the personal aspects of their lives" (Jelinek 7-8). She goes on, by contrasting the autobiographies of women and men, thereby essentializing 'woman' but in the case of *Cross Creek* - which is still not fully acknowledged as the author's autobiography and in which critics up to the present still limit their analysis to Rawlings's portrayal of the 'colorful' Florida frontier - Jelinek's introduction with its "manifesto quality" (Smith/Watson, *Women, Autobiography, Theory* 9) sheds light on *Cross Creek* as Rawlings's *intended* autobiography. Organized in "self-sustaining units," the individual chapters form a "disconnected" whole (Jelinek 17); written at different times during her life at the Creek, the author brought them in a new order. The penultimate chapter "Hyacinth Drift" which is to underline Rawlings's (re)connection to the land and successful healing through her topophilia for the Creek is therefore placed towards the end of the book although it had already been written in 1933! "[I]rregularity rather than orderliness informs the self-portraits by women (Jelinek 17), holding true for Rawlings.

As stated above, *Cross Creek* is testimony of Rawlings's integration into the local (non)human community at the Creek; right in the opening chapter she refrains from the 'I', placing her self 'safely' *within* the rest of the community. Considering herself an integral part of the communal 'we,' she begins *Cross Creek* in the first person plural, writing, "*we* are five white

[27] Corbett citing Crosland's *Landmarks*.

families at the Creek" (*CC* 9) [italics mine]; following the statement is the enumeration and presentation of the families living at the Creek, in which, however, she omits herself. Further on, by differentiating the Creek from the rest of the nation, she once more avoids the charge of ego-centeredness. "People in Island Grove consider us just a little biggety and more than a little queer" (*CC* 9). With the self camouflaged by the depiction of her Creek neighbors, *Cross Creek* depicts a fragmented, evasive and sometimes subordinate self. Again, in the opening chapter, Rawlings alludes to her own and other Creek women's *madness*; "I said, 'Kate, am I crazy, or are you?' She gave me her quick sideways glance that was never entirely impudent. 'Likely all two of us'" (*CC* 9). A few lines down, Rawlings equates this female 'madness' with otherness or the *queer* way of life of the rest of the Creek community. "At one time or another most of us at the Creek have been suspected of a degree of madness. Madness is only a variety of mental nonconformity and we are all individualists here" (*CC* 10). The *difference* Rawlings attributes to the Creek inhabitants in the surface text can then be enlarged to the subtext, in which she alludes to her own female experience and her 'otherness' (or "nonconformity") in contrast to the prevailing social expectations for women. 'Kate' is used by Rawlings to strengthen her theory that 'woman' can experience liberation from oppressive gender patterns in a geographically remote area, lacking social constraints of womanhood. Kate's sideways glance convinces the reader that she is aware of this, too. Rawlings (as well as her 'fictionally constructed characters'[28] Kate and Martha) knows that her alienation stems from the historically imposed image of female selfhood; it is this precise knowledge that has triggered her writing, motivated the creation of alternate (female) selves - although veiled behind the exotic Other - in the autobiographical act of *Cross Creek*. For Rawlings, the Creek enables her "to live the life one wishes to live, and to go down with it if necessary" (*CC* 27). One of the causes for her often severe depression was that she always considered herself to be the reason for failure, be it in her marriage or when her art was criticized; lacking self-confidence, she was constantly dependent on what other people thought of her personally and of her writing. Her 'false'

[28] Rawlings herself wrote to Perkins that she had "exaggerated her importance […] to keep a thread moving through the [book]. (cf. Tarr, *Max and Marjorie* 469)

modesty and downplaying comments on her Florida literature attest to this inferiority complex. During the creation of *Cross Creek*, the last decade of her life, she understood that other women suffered from the same patriarchal oppressions and discursive silences she had to grapple with during her literary life in Florida; recognizing herself as 'merely' a part of a larger generational social problem provided her with a spark of self-confidence and she emphasizes that alienation and silences can be alternated if "women as a group […] develop an alternative way of seeing themselves (Friedman 76). In *Cross Creek*, she writes,

> [y]et to achieve content under sometimes adverse circumstances, requires first an adjustment within oneself, and this I had already made, and after that, a recognition that one is not unique in being obliged to toil and struggle and suffer. This is the simplest of all facts and the most difficult for the individual ego to accept. (*CC* 27)

"[A]fraid of a complete giving" (Bigelow/Monti 291) and in order to further distract the attention the reader may easily posit on her persona in the reading of the text as an autobiography, Rawlings exaggerates Martha's role to keep a thread throughout the narrative; intuitively, she emphasizes the inauthenticity of the surface text. Martha confirms Kate's earlier 'sideways glance' and Rawlings's philosophy of the Creek as a healing and liberating space for women.

> "Me and my man, Old Will, was the first hands on this place. Time the grove was planted, me and Will worked here. It's home to me." […] They's been fine folks here since and they's been trash. But Sugar, the grove ain't trash, and the Creek be's trashified here and there, but it's the Creek right on. I purely loves the Creek." (*CC* 28)

Space turns into place (Tuan, *Topophilia* 8) and topophilia into an exceptional female experience. The omnipresent nature of the Creek soothes the harassed woman, liberating her from the confinement of domesticity. Aunt Martha seems to disclose female topophilia to Rawlings, also revealing to her a tradition of female bonding at the Creek which continues to be upheld by Rawlings herself. The 'bathing scene' with Geechee is only one striking example in which "the usual love built itself up" (*CC* 199) and female bonding transcends racial borders; nature, ethnicity and womanhood align against the (white) male other.

> It was like being in the hands of a black Florence Nightingale. All of us, no matter how self-reliant, long, I think, for tenderness. Her big rough hands touched me as gently as though I were made of glass, instead of being almost as sturdy as she. In the bath, she washed and dried me with a feather touch. She lingered over it, giving great attention at last to the toes. (*CC* 102)

When Geechee leaves because of her alcohol addiction, Rawlings writes that no one else could "fill the strange emptiness she left in a remote corner of [her] heart" (*CC* 104). In *Cross Creek*, Rawlings describes herself as a partaker of a 'secret' female minority culture. The semi-wilderness of the Creek signifies for her an "ecosystem in which man is a relatively unimportant factor," a place where man cannot interrupt her "dialogue with the earth" (Valenti 129). "[O]nly when our place is fixed in nature are we whole" (Valenti 128).

Rawlings's alienation does not result from her creation of "a self in language, as it is for Lacanian and Barthesian critics of autobiography" but from the "historically imposed image of the self" (Friedman 76). By the classical self-effacement in the text, she responds to the 'fictions' of the patriarchal culture in which "passivity and culturally conditioned timidity about self-dramatization become enshrined as the ideal qualities of the eternal feminine" (Smith, *A Poetics* 54). Perceiving of autobiography as an essentially androcentric genre, she feels obliged to reproduce and conform to male-defined selfhood in order to be accepted on the literary market. Although Rawlings was later enraged and "refuse[d] to be only a biological female," (Bigelow/Monti 366) at the time of the creation of *Cross Creek*, she was still very much absorbed with an 'imagined reader,' a "representative of the dominant order" (Smith, *A Poetics* 49), the 'other' through whom she is working to identify herself and to justify her decision to write about herself in a genre that is man's. The literal obsession with the patriarchal symbolic order defines the reciprocal self that shifts from self-conscious self-assertion (through nature) to an evasive persona (portraying *them*, she is revealed only through others) to a self mimicking the strong individual postulated by male-defined selfhood (in her discourse with Mr. Martin and other conflicts at the Creek). However, Rawlings shatters "the cultural hall of mirrors" (Friedman 76), unfortunately refraining from 'openly' attacking *leviathan*, the prevailing patriarchal symbolic order,

which is the 'real' source of her anxiety. Disclaiming to write about herself, she "slides from one fiction of self-representation to another as she attends to two stories, those doubled figures of selfhood in the ideology of gender" (Smith, *A Poetics* 50); adhering to her (mis)conception of connecting male selfhood with culturally valued stories, the surface text echoes what is expected of "the woman who lived among the Crackers" (Bigelow, *Frontier Eden* xiii) and she thereby confirms the structures she meant – but lacked the courage - to publicly dissolve.

In *Cross Creek*, Rawlings is unable to uphold the "'patrilineal contract'" (Smith, *A Poetics* 52), unable to provide "*straight narrative*" (Tarr, *Max and Marjorie* 495); while she was able to *hide* her subjective subtexts in her novels, the writing in the genre of autobiography 'naturally' requires some unveiling. *Cross Creek* followed her most successful novel *The Yearling*, in which the subjective subtext has largely been suppressed. Rawlings was afraid that she would register in the public mind as a "phallic woman" (Smith, *A Poetics* 53), if she (again) fully aligned in the male symbolic order. In chapter three, she briefly mentions the possibility of remaining unmarried, living alone at the Creek and turning into what society had termed a spinster. "When I am an old woman, so that too much *queerness* will seem a *natural* thing, I mean to build a tower like it on my own side of the lake, and I shall sit there on *angry* days and growl down at any one who disturbs me" (*CC* 46) [italics mine]. It is however only in old age, that she (or more precisely society's unwritten laws for women) allows her to be openly *angry* (when her literary career is already well-established) and although she suffers great mental and physical pain, brooding over the upcoming marriage with Norton Baskin, she ultimately represses her doubts and complies - once more - to the social norms; although it was the time in-between the two men that she was most successful with her writings, Baskin turned out to be the *New Man* she had always envisioned for herself and needed for the pursuit of her literary career.

An alternate and private story underlies the surface text of *Cross Creek* and is consciously integrated, although shaped and negotiated by the author. The writing process therefore helps Rawlings enormously "to grapple self-consciously with her identity as a woman in patriarchal culture and with her problematic relationship to engendered figures of selfhood"

(Smith, *A Poetics* 56); she comes to a deeper understanding of her "problematic relationship to language and the narratives she has been taught to speak" (Smith, *A Poetics* 56), finally coming to accept herself. Nevertheless, Rawlings faced disillusionment when she realized that "woman remains 'unrepresentable'" (Smith, *A Poetics* 56). Attesting to this dilemma, is her writing of the biography about her friend and fellow writer Ellen Glasgow at the end of her life, in which she was unable to decide whether she should present the woman, Ellen Glasgow or the writer (Silverthorn 402). She views autobiography as a "formal, public contract" (Smith, *A Poetics* 56) that requires the female 'un-representability' because it leaves no space for female selfhood. Rawlings is unable to regard *Cross Creek* as a pioneer achievement, as an alternative model for (female) autobiography; although she contemplates the work as something very personal, she cannot admit her traditional femininity in the structure of the work and furiously denies every connection to a female culture. Her anxiety expresses itself in near rage in a letter to Norman Berg in 1952 – a year before her death - in which she writes that she resents the "hypocrisy, *sneakiness*, of […] this she-species" and insists on "a plane, aesthetic, intellectual and spiritual, where there is no sex" (Bigelow/Monti 367); it is a denouncement of the powerlessness of the average woman, the impossibility of asserting female individualism and of having to write with a "double consciousness" (Friedman 76). "Women and minorities [are] reminded at every turn in the great cultural hall of mirrors of their sex or color" (Friedman 75). In her letter to Berg, she continues, stating, "perhaps, as you suggested once, I was born half-male, understanding the true male" (Bigelow/Monti 366). This 'understanding,' however, was something she considered absolutely necessary for women if they aim to become acclaimed and 'serious' writers, thereby anticipating Nancy Miller's argument that "female autobiographers know that they are being read as women" (Miller, "Women's Autobiography" 262).

Rawlings's anxiety increased as the publication of *Cross Creek* neared; her extreme fear of meeting with Perkins personally, is aggravated by the fact that she had – for the first time - "trie[d] to tell stories that have not been told before, ones that have remained unspoken within the ideological framework of the dominant discourses" (Smith, *A Poetics* 57).

The "relational model of female selfhood […] in which the individual does not oppose herself to all others" (Friedman 77) can – according to Nancy Chodorow's psychoanalytic study (*The Reproduction of Motherhood)* be retraced to the post-oedipal gender personality. Girls

> come to define and experience themselves as continuous with others; their experience of self contains more flexible or permeable ego boundaries. The basic feminine sense of self is connected to the world, the basic masculine sense of self is separate. (Chodorow 169)

Unable to appreciate the female, relational narrative structure in *Cross Creek*, she places herself in the prison of the dominant ideology of gender and the male symbolic order. "It is gratifying to have such a generous reception for so *queer* a book. I still wish, in a way, that I had done an entirely *serious* book with the 'classic' touch" (Bigelow/Monti 217) [italics mine]. Mirroring the situation of women autobiographers and writers of her generation, 'camouflage' signifies for Rawlings a means to escape being completely silenced; in *Cross Creek*, she defines herself through topophilia, through the interrelatedness of all (non)human beings at the Creek. Her 'ultimate book' turns into a "product and process" (Allister 2) of her personal healing and *(re)location* of identity at Cross Creek.

4.3.1.4 *My Past Years Have Become Somehow Unimportant*! - "The Ancient Enmity" and "Our Daily Bread"

"My past years have become somehow unimportant. They are a shadow, against the satisfying substance that is our life in the heart of the Florida hammock. This wild, beautiful country, tucked off the tourists' highways by no large number of actual miles, is in itself a challenge to the imagination."
- Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings in a letter to Alfred S. Dashiell[29]

With the flight to the land came Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings's conviction that "the self is a landscape that mediates the natural environment, while also being mediated by that environment" (Riley 588). Placing herself in the vital environment of the Creek, she mirrors and enacts her indigenous Cracker characters of her three Florida fiction novels; like them, she repeatedly re-connects with the land. Throughout *Cross Creek* (and to a

[29] Quoted in Bigelow/Monti 36.

larger extent also throughout her entire Florida oeuvre), Rawlings works with a set of consciously applied dualisms,[30] which are traditionally reflected and questioned by feminist philosophy as well as most recently by ecofeminism and which Rawlings, too, tries to resolve towards the end of *Cross Creek*. In "The Ancient Enmity," Rawlings reinvigorates intimacy with the natural world surrounding her, realizing interrelatedness as an escape from socially and historically established dualisms in Western culture. In contrast to other woman writers of her generation who took socially prescribed behavior patterns and the resulting hierarchies or dualisms as inevitable constructs (Simone de Beauvoir), Rawlings grasps the "satisfying substance" (Bigelow/Monti 36) and overcomes dualized identity patterns. Achieving interchangeability of her critique of androcentrism and anthropocentrism, she equates - in the typical ecofeminist tradition - the domination of nature with the domination and subordination of women by patriarchal structures, immanent in the American society of the 1930s.

"The Ancient Enmity" describes Rawlings's "blind, unthinking, 'instinctive' horror" (*CC* 176) of snakes, which, as she writes, is also "inherent in most animals" (*CC* 175) and most other *members* of her ecosystem.

> I came to Cross Creek with such a phobia against snakes that a picture of one in the dictionary gave me what Martha calls 'the all-overs.'[…] I had the common misconception that in Florida they were omnipresent. I thought, 'If anything defeats me, sends me back to urban civilization, it will be the snakes.' (*CC* 176)

Rattlesnakes for Rawlings represent "the last outpost of physical fear" (*CC* 177) and in a time of great "emotional distress," a time when "there was nothing left to frighten [her]" (*CC* 178), Rawlings felt encouraged enough to "rip the veil of panic between [herself] and the facts" (*CC* 178). Embedded in a web of (non)human relationships, she never goes alone into nature, there is always some friend, hunter or fisher who accompanies her on her excursions into the Florida wildlands; in "The Ancient Enmity" it is Ross

[30] Val Plumwood in *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature* lists the most important dualistic constructs, (eco)feminism and here Marjorie Rawlings analyzes and rejects: male/female, reason/emotion, universal/particular, human/nature (nonhuman), civilised/primitive (nature), public/private, subject/object, self/other" (Plumwood, *Feminism* 43).

Allen, an outsider to the Creek and herpetologist from the nearby University of Florida. Allen tries to *rationally* liberate Rawlings from her fear of snakes. He 'scientifically' explains to her a snake's limited vision, respectlessly proving it to her by blocking snake holes; he shows her how to handle the L-shaped steel, liberally reaching under rocks and other commonly-known shelters. Rawlings reluctantly complies in the 'colonizer's act,' helping to catch rattlesnakes for tests in his laboratory. "Again, because I was *ashamed*, I took the snake in my hands" (*CC* 180) [italics mine]. Rawlings tries to be "man enough" (*CC* 183), following him in his anthropocentric behavior, believing, she had to suppress her (natural) instincts which forbid her to deal with nature in such a disrespectful way. Allen's objective and rational approach to nature is that of a scientist who follows certain established 'rules' taught at the University; this seems to alienate Rawlings from her natural surroundings and transforms her into an outsider to the interrelated web of the ecosystem of Big Prairie. However, in the middle of the chapter, the 'rational character' of the snake hunt is interrupted by a "sudden, unexpected apprehension of nonduality" (Spretnak, "Radical Nonduality" 430). Most likely Rawlings chose the snake as a symbol for her long-suppressed instinctive, feminine and interrelated self, since traditionally, the serpent stands for "instinctive nature" and "potential energy" (Ball 64).

> When the power of the instinctive nature is understood and harnessed, [one] comes to terms with [one's] own sexuality and sensuality, and is able to make use of higher and more spiritual energies which become available. (Ball 64)

However, the epiphany described in the middle of the chapter underlines Rawlings's "awareness of a unitive dimension of being" (Spretnak, "Radical Nonduality" 430), alluding to an alternative to dualistic thinking;

> having watched again and again the liquid grace of movement, the beauty of pattern, suddenly I understood that I was drinking in freely the magnificent sweep of the horizon, with no fear of what might be at the moment under my feet. (*CC* 182)

Allen and his objective rationalism are suddenly reduced to a "shadow, against the satisfying substance that is […] life in the heart of the Florida hammock" (Bigelow/Monti 36) and she becomes once more subtly embedded in ecological as well as cosmological processes which may exist

in indigenous cultures but which are generally unknown in Western culture(s). In contrast to Rawlings's upsurging interrelatedness and re-enchantment, Ross Allen is part of the rugged individualist (Western) 'lone cowboy' image; he incorporates a sense of autonomy and respectlessness towards nature, following a hierarchical concept of difference, which lacks the recognition of the dependency of all things. He has since long stripped nature of its "magical powers," has "reduced *her* to 'natural resources' to be exploited" and believes in "unlimited control over nature" (King 20-21);[31] Rawlings exemplifies in him a member of "the dominant, white male Eurocentric ruling class" who conceives of himself as an "omnipotent subject at the center," who "constructs marginal Others as sets of negative qualities" (Plumwood, *Feminism* 44). From her own marginalized position in society, "in the peripheries of the master's center" (Plumwood, *Feminism* 63), Rawlings transcends and transfers her (hidden) critique of androcentrism and equates it with a critique on anthropocentrism. "[A]n ecofeminist reading of human kinship with the natural world does not arise out of a biological 'fact' of women's nurturing or cooperative qualities but as a product of women's social and historical alignment with them" (Libby 257). In the end of "The Ancient Enmity," however, Rawlings comes to the understanding that she is "just not <u>man</u> enough" (*CC* 183) [emphasis mine] to fulfill the final act and lift the snake and place it in the bag in the truck, ultimately removing it from the interrelated circle of creation. Having rejected the Western (male) conception of identity as outside of nature, catching snakes is 'un-natural' and impossible in such a close relationship of self to other.

Nature turns out to be Rawlings's mental support system, topophilia the omnipotent metaphor of the text; through interaction, she discovers the spiritual tools for her healing. Social and natural *terrains* merge and leave room for hope that she can confront women's plight of a 'double consciousness' and is able to resign from the 'patriarchal contract,' signed at the beginning of her literary career. It becomes clear that the Florida

[31] In "The Ecology of Feminism" Ynestra King states that man is caught in the paradox of the love-hate relationship to nature and women's bodies. Citing Simone de Beauvoir, she writes that man "'exploits her [woman/nature], but she crushes him, he is born of her and he dies in her; she is the source of his being and the realm that he subjugates to his will'" (King

wildlands have since long ceased to be a place outside of her; behind the story of the land resides 'very quietly' the story of the woman, (eco)feminist and topophiliac Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings. Returning from her physical and mental journey, she "felt a new lightness. I had done battle with a great fear, and the victory was mine" (*CC* 184). The realization of other dualisms clarified her personal situation as a woman and resident of Cross Creek; recognizing the other as distinct but valuable - although it is "impossible for [her] ever to feel affection for a snake" (*CC* 184) - she realizes the complexity of another organism, cherishes diversity and creates what Val Plumwood termed a "non-hierarchical concept of difference" (Plumwood, "Androcentrism and Anthropocentrism" 60) which ultimately deconstructs dualized identity.

The rejuvenated interrelationship with nature, described in chapter fifteen, seems to soften her radical stance against everything that is connected with traditional femaleness; in chapter seventeen, "Our Daily Bread," she focuses on cooking and the serving of food, activities, typically attributed to the feminine realm. However, Rawlings expands the realm of the kitchen, transforming it into an open space, closely tied to its natural surroundings. Similar to her character Camilla van Dyne, she cannot be restricted to the house, and it is rare that the "new foods" (*CC* 217) are served within the confinements of her house. Here, too, Rawlings challenges dualisms and the "illusion of inevitability" (Plumwood, *Feminism* 61), finding for herself a compromising connection between the male 'outside' and female 'inside' sphere. She realizes the subversive and oppositional potential of cooking and serving food and reworks for herself a 'healthy' gender identity.

Food is an omnipresent metaphor throughout Rawlings's Florida writings.[32] In *Cross Creek*, cooking is used to show her separation from the matrilineal line of great cooks in her family who, however, were unable to feel joy in serving others. Caring for others is a burden for them, deeply ingrained in society's hierarchical devaluation of their work in the kitchen. For Rawlings at the Creek, interrelatedness transforms cooking from its one-

21). Rawlings, as a 'biological' female, does not face the difficulty of having to overcome her link to nature to achieve womanhood; deeper connection is her goal.

dimensionality into a multi-dimensional 'happening,' as the plural pronoun (our) in her biblical chapter headline suggests; only on rare occasions, she prepares meals for herself and most of the times, she receives compensation in return (like the repair of a fence or fresh meat from the hunters); 'serving' loses its negative connotation, is rather connected with the joy of contributing to the Creek's communal spirit. The loss of the recipe of her mother's Almond cake (*CCC* 149)[33] testifies her break with the kitchen as a restricted female sphere, which "exhausted" her mother, left her with "a migraine headache" and put forever "a taint on her art" (*CC* 216). At Cross Creek, Rawlings is able to care for others without sacrificing the self.

Besides its use as a metaphor for the detachment from the traditional female sphere, food is used as a metaphor for writing. In the act of communal cooking, her Cracker friends and neighbors 'tell' her recipes as they had shared their stories and anecdotes. She begins the chapter by describing cooking "as one of the great arts" (*CC* 216), as her "one vanity" and that she is a "slave to any guest who praises [her] art" (*CC* 215). As with cooking, Rawlings was immensely sensible when it came to her writing; she needed an extraordinary amount of 'nurturing' – which Perkins mastered skillfully – and exuberantly rejoiced or suffered if other writers whom she considered 'serious enough' praised (I am alluding to Frost's positive reaction to the Quincey Dover stories) or misjudged (Fitzgerald's comments on "Gal Young Un") her work. As with cooking, Rawlings had largely taught herself to write. Initially believing that "cooking was a matter of instinct" (*CC* 216), she soon learned that it proved "a thing of horror" (*CC* 216). "This belief was as fatuous as the belief of most people that they could write if they cared to take the time for it" (*CC* 216). Just as her 'instinctive dishes' were scorned, once even thrown at her, her instinctive writing - among which the more openly feminist short stories and her apprentice work *Blood of My Blood* can be counted - were equally rejected.

Both cooking and writing links Rawlings to Cross Creek. As she writes of the preparation of her "'imaginative dishes'" (Prenshaw, "The Otherness" 20), she equally writes of her initial struggle with writing itself

[32] In "Gal Young Un" and *The Yearling*, both Mattie Syles and Ma Baxter use food to express their love for their husband/son.
[33] *CCC = Cross Creek Cookery*

and only when "science, art and instinct joined hands" (*CC* 217), the very ingredients of her (regional) Florida fiction, she had "solid rock under [her]" (*CC* 217). Both "the new foods" (*CC* 217) and writing in Florida proved to be "a challenge to the imagination" (Bigelow/Monti 36). "I have learned more about cookery in my years at the Creek than in those that preceded them" (*CC* 217). "Our Daily Bread" subtly connects Rawlings's earlier with her present life.

In a language 'inaudible' for her contemporary critics, Rawlings also inserted a critique of modern capitalist lifestyle, which is defined by commodity and exchange, detached from contact with the concrete (natural) material. In a mocking commentary she writes about the delicatessens at the Ritz-Waldorf in New York, which serves 'heart of palm,' a dish commonly known and regularly served as 'swamp cabbage' in the Florida backwoods (*CC* 226). Cooking, for Rawlings, is a means of self-expression, which, if done in close connection with the natural world - is neither a burden nor "a chore" (*CCC* 2). In her first letter to Scribner's editor Alfred S. Dashiell, Rawlings has written of Florida as "a challenge to the imagination" (Bigelow/Monti 36), and it is in her constructed non-hierarchical gender-free space at Cross Creek that she resolves the prevailing dualisms, linking nature and the self by the means of radical interrelatedness.

4.3.1.5 Metanoia Revisited: Communing with Nature in "Hyacinth Drift"

The succeeding and penultimate chapter, "Hyacinth Drift," is the only *story* in *Cross Creek* that is located outside the near environs of the Creek; although written much earlier than the rest of the episodes (in 1933), thematically and structurally it is well placed at the end of the narrative; it summarizes once more the author's communing with the land and its resultant overcoming of personal crisis. "Hyacinth Drift" is the 'literary' foundation of Rawlings's ecological metanoia and eternal bonding with Florida nature. "Hyacinth Drift" initiated the development of Rawlings's art from a literal representation of her surrounding environment to a stronger

awareness of the symbolic recreation of the self in nature.[34] Having "lost touch with the Creek" (*CC* 354), Rawlings hopes for relief from her broken marriage (Charles had left the Creek a few days prior to the trip) and paralysis in writing. The idea of nature as distinct from the human world promises relief from her annoyances and 'humanly-afflicted' pain. Entering the river via backwaters, where the water *still* smells of "decay" (*CC* 355) soon "[s]omething alive and potent gripped the flat bottom of the boat" (*CC* 355-356) and leads the two women into the mid-channel, drawing them away from civilization. Rawlings writes that "men [had] protested" (*CC* 345) at the thought of two women alone on the river. "The river runs through some of the wildest country in Florida. You'll be lost in the false channels. No one ever goes as far as the head of the river" (*CC* 345). Alluding to society's patriarchal power structures, she inverts the pioneer myth of exploring America's unrestricted wilderness, making two women the main protagonists; entering *man's* traditional outdoor domain, they become 'uncontrollable' "[T]he false channels" are in fact the right ones, the only ones possible for Rawlings's escape from alienation and from being lost in a society that defines women through their men.

Once the two women have left civilization, they enter a harmonious and very personal relationship. Rawlings tries to refrain from the 'I' as much as she can, the 'we' reflecting not only the interrelatedness of all things on earth but most importantly, it shows Dessie as a metaphor for the ultimate female freedom, shifting back and forth between civilization and the 'natural' life; in her, Rawlings describes the woman she tries to become throughout *Cross Creek*, a 'wanderer between two worlds,' who is able to "look mutually outward and inward" (Libby 252). Dessie navigates them through a storm, is familiar with the harsh outside terrain, even ripping her shirt apart to repair the leaking boat. However, much of what Rawlings says about Dessie is equally valid for herself.

> She is an astonishing young woman. She was born and raised in rural Florida and guns and campfires and fishing rods and creeks are corpuscular in her blood. She lives a sophisticate's life among worldly people. At the slightest excuse she steps out of civilization,

[34] It is likely that because of her own revitalizing experience on the St. John's river, her characters Jody Baxter (*TY*) and Lant Jacklin (*SMU*) equally come to terms with initiation processes on the river.

> naked and relieved, as I should step out of a soiled chemise. (*CC* 357)

Further on, Rawlings differentiates Dessie and herself from the indigenous but unfriendly Cracker woman who is unwilling to welcome them in her hut as well as from the Yachtswoman they encounter at a short stopover in Sanford. Both types of women cannot choose whether they want to live close to the earth. The Cracker woman must live with nature in order to survive, the Yachtswoman does not know the healing forces that lie in the communion with the land; it is a conscious choosing that represents for Rawlings 'true emancipation.' Rawlings describes Dessie as being "better prepared" (*CC* 364) for Sanford with "her bowie knife at one hip and her revolver at the other;" although they "had meant to bathe and put on clean shirts and slacks" (*CC* 364), they had not found a suitable landing place. They do not belong to the community of "soft clean women" (*CC* 364) and Rawlings emphasizes that it is "Pink Petticoats" (*CC* 366) and not them who appears strange and 'mis-placed' on the river's 'natural waters.' The long paragraph on the Yachtsman and his wife is a clear sideswipe at Charles, who adored and worked upon these people; the woman's rushing off to church emphasizes her ignorance of Rawlings's 'natural' religion and shows that she is unable to perceive nature's spiritual powers.

The river water, with its mysterious "decisive" (*CC* 356) ability to flow through, over and around objects, immediately encloses them so that "there was no longer any world but this incredible marsh, this unbelievable amount of sky" (*CC* 356). The communion with the water comes to symbolize a spiritual rebirth or 'baptism' in nature, metaphorically purifying her from her previous life and its shortcomings. Right from the beginning, *man's* charts and handbooks are incorrect and unhelpful to the two women; repeatedly, Rawlings states that charts fail them, be it when they stumble upon the uncharted ferry or attempt to obey the book of Pilot Rules, whose rules are ignored by the river folk (*CC* 366). Instead, the women turn to ask the indigenous men and women who make a living from the river to explain the directions to them using 'natural' marks on the river's banks. Bear Island, marked on Rawlings's chart as an actual island, is in reality 'invisible;'

> 'You won't never see Bear Island. Where they got a channel marked on your map it's plumb full o' hyacinths. Down the river a ways you'll see a big ol' sugar-berry tree stickin' up in the marsh. That's your mark. You keep to the left. The next mark you'll get is a good ways down the river. You go left by a pertickler tall piece o' grass.' (*CC* 356)

Once immersed in the mysterious life of the river, they recognize "instinctively" (*CC* 362) where they could camp; Rawlings writes that she felt secure that "not even the mistaking of whole lakes could lose [them]" (*CC* 361-362). From the very beginning, the river refuses to be mastered; 'unveiling' nature's entangled interrelated ecosystem, the river de-centers the human colonizer, minimizing *him/her* to a mere participant in the complexity of the ecosphere. Still bound to an anthropocentric conception of nature, Rawlings and her companion numerously fail to *read* their way. Other forces, those of the "subordinate other" (Plumwood, *Feminism* 3), seize their boat and enclose them in its "fluid heart" (*CC* 357), like in a mother's womb. Safely sheltered from influences of the world outside, they realize that rational "'map[s] and compass[es] don't amount to much'" (*CC* 358).

Having to spend their first night under the open skies, Rawlings writes that she "ha[s] never lain in so naked a place, bared so flatly to the sky" (*CC* 359). The gentle dewdrops on her mosquito netting in the morning, are a symbol for her (and Dessie's) spiritual refreshment and newness, are the remnants of a nightly rebirth in nature.

> I pointed to the northeast and she nodded vehemently. It had come to both of us like a revelation that the water hyacinths were drifting faintly faster in that direction. From that instant we were never very long lost. Forever after, where the river sprawled in confusion, we might shut off the motor and study the floating hyacinths until we caught, in one direction, a swifter pulsing, as though we put our hands close and closer to the river's heart. It was very simple. Like all simple facts, it was necessary to discover it for oneself. (*CC* 359)

Relinquishing control over to the river and becoming a part of it (*CC* 359/360), they come to reject all worldly, 'human' things, forgetting to read the paper (*CC* 366) and appearing "very strange indeed" (*CC* 351) to the old ferryman. Rawlings confirms nature as a transcending and powerful medium, which stimulates consciousness and awareness of self.

Accompanying them throughout their river journey and providing the title for the story, the hyacinths are for Rawlings a vital metaphor for all "earth others" (Plumwood, *Feminism* 137) which are connected to us and must be regarded with respect. Peggy Whitman Prenshaw states that

> obstacles like hyacinths – or all those people and events outside oneself that clog up, slow down, and interfere with one's private will and preoccupations [really] make the life journey purposeful. Even more important, they reveal to the traveler the main channel and thus guide one toward the sought-for destination. (Prenshaw, "Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings" 14)

"Hyacinth Drift" is a *story* of movement and escape; as the author learns to navigate the boat on the St, John's, she learns to navigate her life and redefine her position in society and at the Creek.

> Because I had known intimately a river, the earth pulsed under me. The Creek was home. Oleanders were sweet past bearing, and my own shabby fields, weed-tangled, were newly dear. I knew, for a moment, that the only nightmare is the masochistic human mind. (*CC* 370)

The mysterious heart of the river evokes the "exalted mental condition" (Slovic, "Nature Writing" 352) which inspires Rawlings's return to Mother Earth and which provide her with the creative energies necessary for her writing. Having "removed [all] superfluous clothing" (*CC* 363), Rawlings undergoes 'ecological metanoia;' she (re)defines for herself a new and *healed* ecological self, making "Hyacinth Drift" and the journey on the St. John's river the omnipotent metaphor of *Cross Creek* and of her life philosophy. "If I could have, to hold forever, one brief place and time of beauty, I think I might choose the night on that high lonely bank above the St. Johns River" (*CC* 362).

V. Concluding Remarks: The Natural (Inter)connection of Life and Work

Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings's use of her region is indicative of her own situatedness as a woman in the patriarchal climate of the first half of the twentieth century. Despite the connection to the American myth of 'virgin' landscapes that are to be conquered, Rawlings's turn to the land mirrors the paradigmatic shift that women writers undertook to discover through 'place' the answers to all their questions. They discovered nature as a space and place in which they could indulge in feminist utopian worlds, without hierarchies and oppressive dualism. However, these *splaces* often mirrored a too simplistic construction of a world, in which - free of men's greediness, violence and dominance – women lived in eternal harmony and nonviolence, interrelated with their natural environment. In these 're-visions,' nature (and the region) turns into an ally of the 'colonized,' rather than into a force to be conquered and subjugated. The feminist ideal of nature as the helping ally is a recurring theme throughout Rawlings's Florida writings. In "Gal Young Un," Mattie comes to consciousness due to the remoteness of her hammock, her close contact to nature and the seclusion from men; in *Golden Apples,* Camilla van Dyne revolts against confinement, knowing full well that it is only in the alignment with the land that she is able to uphold her independence and sense of self. Rawlings's first writings in Florida reflect her personal immersion in the concept of nature as an "undomesticated" (Alaimo 23) feminist space.

Rawlings's discovery of Florida nature as a referent and as a liberating and powerful force is closely connected to her past and personal experiences. Born into the white middle-class of Washington D.C., she was confronted throughout most of her life with the rules and adherence to the norms for acceptable female conduct. Only in the interaction with her father was she able to 'forget' or suppress her own femininity, entering the powerful realm of man's outdoor world, being allowed entrance into the 'Law of the Father.' Through the unrestrained acceptance into her God-like father's *world,* which Rawlings linked to female individuation and self-determination, she deferred from the traditional women's sphere and pre-defined roles for women. With her father's early death - which left her seeking a definition of herself - she developed hate towards her 'earthy

mother' and everything associated with traditional female conduct. This intense hate for 'girlish behavior,' haunted her throughout her entire (literary) life. "The Eternal 'Bad' Girls" in *The Yearling*, or the many other 'traditional' female characters that lack liveliness, mirror Rawlings's refusal to 'write *them* a life'; they are – more than the non-indigenous men - condemned to eternal silence and invisibility.

Through Florida nature and her upsurging topophilia, Rawlings integrates life and text. With the move to Cross Creek came the wish to be published and acknowledged as an equal to the literary 'geniuses' of her time. It was deliberate that Rawlings chose the novel as her means for expression; although she preferred writing poems or short fiction, she wanted to be part of the male discourse and 'appropriated' their genre. All of her novels are written in chapter form, with most episodes forming coherent units, a remnant indicative of her preference to write shorter fiction. The innumerable epiphanic moments experienced in the scrub or the overwhelming 'beauty' of the hammocks and especially her love for waterways and rivers (St. John's), provided her with the strength and courage to stay at Cross Creek on her own after Charles had left and instilled in her the wish to be published.

> When I settled here, and the delights of this Cracker material fired me with enthusiasm – material vital past any straight fiction I could ever create – I made up my mind that if I could not interest one of the few topnotch magazines in it, I would deliberately put the torment of unaccepted writing out of my life. (Scribner ix-x)

Rawlings was aware that the American public was not yet ready for a 'feminist revolt,' but might listen to the longtime 'inaudible' voices from America's regions, especially with regard to urban poverty and a homeward yearning during the Depression era. Although *South Moon Under* (1933) was published on the day the banks sealed their doors, the book sold extraordinarily well and was a finalist in the Pulitzer competition. Being reconciled and literally overwhelmed by the early success of her Florida literature, Rawlings discovered in the literary category of regionalism a mouthpiece for the integration of life and text. *Writing regionalism*, allowed her to pursue both, an individuated self and a self that assimilated with the 'master narratives' of her time. Further on, the turn to nature and the

outdoor world allowed for a near exclusion of female characters. While the domestic novel requires the inclusion of male characters, the adventure novel functions without the insertion of female characters. *Writing the region* made it possible for her to adhere to the 'fictions' of female conduct and femininity, while – at the same time- it became highly subjective and turned into a means of self-therapy.

Through the 'natural' interrelationship of place and self, Rawlings comes to consciousness. Inherent in her writing is the zealous missionary drive with which she tried to make her readers see the transformation she and her characters had undergone in the Florida backwoods. Hoping for re-vision, a second glance, she demands the 'close reading' and the 'unveiling' of her (surface) texts. It is a schizophrenic balance Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings attempted here: on the one hand, she tries to veil her self and the subjective material in her subtexts in order to avoid the rejection by 'serious' critics of her time, on the other hand she demands the reader to immerse themselves in her concept of the region as a *landscape* for female individuation and liberation. This situation had a significant impact on her mental as well as physical constitution. Rawlings underwent several breakdowns, suffered from severe stomach ails and throughout her career fought with alcohol abuse. With her identity split into selves, she tried throughout her life to form one coherent self, however unaware of the fact that she cannot unite private and public image or definition of self.

Although Rawlings shares with other women regionalists similar biographical (pre)conditions – first the assimilation into the prevailing norms of marriage and (motherhood) / the break-up of marriage / the discovery of the region / topophilia / (de)colonization – she lacked the open courage of Mary Austin to openly 'break the silence.' Throughout her entire life, Rawlings tried to manage a balance between traditional 'married' life and a radically self-determined life. It was only in the brief moment between her two marriages, that she produced her most successful novels. Although her second husband Norton Baskin was loving and caring – opposite to Charles Rawlings - he 'unconsciously' kept her from writing. Although Baskin did not hinder her urge to write, she believed that she had to spend more time with him than with writing. As a hotel manager of the *Castle Warden* in St. Augustine – a hotspot for the idle and rich – she moved away

from the Creek, driving back and forth, with neither one being her home. At the Creek, she concentrated more on the daily affairs of managing the grove and lost the quiet moments of complete immersion and creativity: in St. Augustine she became easily distracted by the frequent visits of famous writers or celebrities to her husband's bar and continuously wrestled with feelings of guilt that she did not write. The resulting instable moods Rawlings was in and the pressure and effect such an 'uprooted' lifestyle had on her physical and mental health, is best seen in the long letters she wrote to Norton Baskin, recently published in *The Private Marjorie: The Love Letters From Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings of Norton S. Baskin* (2004) by Rodger L. Tarr. Unconsciously, Rawlings's personal life mirrors that of her characters in her books; without the close entanglement of self and place, the 'natural' interrelatedness with place or the harmony of man with his environment, 'survival' is impossible.

At a time when writing documentary and the radical extraction of the self from texts was the prevalent literary genre, Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings inscribed herself into her texts. However, her talent as a nature writer, anthropologist and interested field worker, made her indulge in the locale and she achieved a form of narrative that fully immersed the reader, covering her subjective subtexts and strong female voice. This *camouflage technique* is in itself a great achievement; the intenseness with which she was able to resuscitate America's Lost Innocence, forgotten values and natural scene owe its vigorous expressiveness to the self mirrored in the land. With the subjective subtext unrecognized, most critics and fellow writers praised her work for the (re)vivification of the American landscape and its frontier characters, thought lost. Extracts from reviews of her time, including a letter from Fitzgerald (the last quote), show the predominant role *The Yearling* played in the assessment of her work; this limitation of her art explains the short-time success and resultant marginalization of her Florida oeuvre.

> She has, for example, a marvelous ear for the flavorsome Cracker dialect, she makes one see and smell the lonely arid Scrub. Never before, however, has she created a set of characters who are so close and real to the reader, whose intimate life one can share without taint of unconscious patronage. (Walton 2)

> With Tom Sawyer, Huckleberry Finn and the lesser member of the fraternity of young boys in American literature well in mind, it is quite possible to maintain that Jody Baxter, son of the farmer and huntsman, Penny Baxter, in Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings's new novel, The Yearling, is the most charming boy in the entire national gallery. (Soskin 1)

> "The Marjorie Rawlings book [*The Yearling*] fascinated me. I thought it was even better than *South Moon Under* and I envy her ease with which she does those action scenes, such as the tremendously complicated hunt sequences, which I would have to stake off in advance and which would probably turn out to be a stilted business in the end. Hers just simply flows; the characters keep thinking, talking, feeling, and don't stop, and you think and talk and feel with them." (Tarr, *Max and Marjorie*10-11)

Rawlings's misclassification and ignoring in the formation of an American literary canon stems from its sole concentration and connection of her name with *The Yearling;* overlooking her shorter fiction, the other Florida novels and especially the "Ecotone of *Cross Creek"* create a *myth-taken* and wrong picture of the author's achievements.

Cross Creek – the last Florida book - summarizes once more Rawlings's intimate connection to this unusual place; centering on the author's personal growth and healing through 'place,' it takes her subjective subtexts to the next level, namely the writing of the self through a variable (non)human other, or in relation to the natural environment. *Cross Creek* is testimony of Rawlings's inscription of self in her texts, bringing together in one – and sadly her last – book all that defines her life and writing: topophilia – healing and (de)colonization. Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings's Florida literature is not only product but also medium and process in Rawlings's assessment of her identity and self. The move to Cross Creek provided her with a literary voice, gave her a home, 'a room of her own' in which to write and come to consciousness; by *writing the Florida Scrub*, she was able to express herself authentically without being condemned for 'breaking the silence.' Looking "mutually outward and inward" (Libby 252), fusing with the dynamic eco-consciousness of her Cracker friends and neighbors, she emerges as their literary godmother.

"From that instant on, [Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings was] never very long lost. […] It was very simple. Like all simple facts, it was necessary to discover it for oneself." (*CC* 359)

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3. Unpublished Works

The Rare Book Collection of the University of Florida Libraries is not only the largest in the state but also houses the extensive Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings collection. Among handwritten material it includes many photographs, lecture notes, letters and a copy of her will.

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