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Towards an Approach to Narrative Liminality

In an essay entitled “The Storyteller,” Walter Benjamin contends that, “Death is the sanction of everything that the storyteller can tell. He has borrowed his authority from death ... This authority is at the very source of the story.” In her study *No Voice is Ever Wholly Lost*, psychoanalyst Louise Kaplan explores the notion that the transmission of a dialogue between parent and child begins in infancy and continues on even after the death of one of the interlocutors, contending that the “voices of lost loved ones” are kept alive through various means. In response to the arguments put forth by both Benjamin and Kaplan, my current project addresses narrative forms of psychocultural liminality, examining how liminal experiences such as trauma, narrative inheritance, and the displacement of identity brought on by shifting sociopolitical and socioeconomic systems affect the cultural production of narrative and identity. I will discuss this notion of narrative liminality and identity fluctuation seen through both historicist and psychoanalytic approaches to postbellum Southern narratives, principally referring to Thomas Dixon’s *The Clansman* and William Faulkner’s *The Unvanquished* in order to show that, particularly in communities in which psychocultural liminality is more prevalent (which, I will argue, is certainly the case in postbellum Southern novels), both text (the physical novel which we, as readers, interpret) and narrative (the story as experienced by the characters within the text; the characters, as argued by Lisa Zunshine, are most productively viewed as cognitively capable individuals as opposed to flat figures, thus enhancing the relevant narrative interpretations) are always condemned (or blessed) to “maintain” uncertain meanings.