Not long after we moved in together, Joe received an enormous parcel in the mail from SUNY Press. It was the galleys of the book that he was co-editing. He explained to me that we had to “proof” the galleys. Other than my own writing, I knew nothing about publishing, and that fall day in Clemson, South Carolina was my first day in thousands...writing with Joe, proofing, editing, and reading. I was given the task of proofing Joe’s Morris piece. Well-tutored, I had been reading Southern novels, specifically Willie Morris, Pat Conroy, and Bobbie Ann Mason; and as a drama director I certainly had my share of Tennessee Williams. My Southern cultural capital had grown considerably while with Joe, and I read and proofed his piece with gusto. This is probably one of the best pieces Joe Kincheloe ever wrote. The chapter is an example of Joe’s lyrical, literary, informed style. His love of the South had always been a contradiction. The ghosts, the horrendous actions of Southerners were a counterpoint to the New Orleans ladies, the gentle breeze in the Blue Mountains, the raspy, rasty riffs of country musicians, and the accented voices distinguishable from town to town. Joe loved the South with every fiber of his being, and he hated much of its past. This article speaks to those issues, and celebrates both the brilliance of Willie Morris, certainly one of Joe’s favorite authors, and the genius of Joe’s own words. SS

JOE L. KINCHELOE*

2. WILLIE MORRIS AND THE SOUTHERN CURRICULUM

Emancipating the Southern Ghosts

In his speculations on the nature of a curriculum theory of southern studies, William Pinar draws upon the various strands of research that have informed reconceptualized curriculum theorizing. Grounded in critical theory and psychoanalysis, the southern curriculum is dedicated to a social psychoanalysis aided by the methodologies of historiography, ethnography, phenomenology, gender studies, autobiography, and literary criticism. In many ways Willie Morris brings together these approaches to southern studies in his corpus of work on his South.

Morris’s nonfiction draws upon historiographical and ethnographic traditions. His autobiographical sensitivity is innocently phenomenological, as he responds poetically to the southern ghosts that haunted his mind and body. His work is permeated with references to the process by which gender role is fashioned in the South. These references are sometimes presented consciously, other times they are uncovered only by gender sensitive readers who discover manifestations of gender
role formation by interrogating that psychic realm that is evidently not conscious to the author himself and is determined by subtle social conditioning. For a plethora of reasons, the work of Willie Morris is valuable in the reconceptualized southern curriculum.

Morris’s work is primarily autobiographical, constantly relating his personal story to the story of his place. He carries on a grand southern literary convention: The writer’s exploration of the southern traditions and his or her attempt to document the personal struggle to come to terms with those traditions in his or her own life. Morris is a student of the southern traditions, and the southern mythologies—he understands their variations, their nuances, and their death throes. He moves easily among the structures and codes of southern literature, invoking the vocabularies that were used by his literary ancestors without self-consciousness. As the twentieth century with its interstate highways and McDonald’s mute the old voices, Morris seems determined to pour through the family album one more time before consigning it to the attic. His work is a eulogy—the interment will follow.

By the time Morris published his first book *North Toward Home* in 1967, the journalistic motif of Southerner-in-struggle had fossilized. The ghosts had done their job well. The liberal sons and daughters of the South found themselves without a home, their small towns and cities haunted by the specters of racism, violence, and poverty. Critics sometimes blasted Morris’s work for its stylized quality—Faulkner without the urgency. While such criticisms hold some truth, they miss some important aspects of Morris’s work and place in southern literary history. Morris writes of structures of feelings that are no longer his; he utilizes literary conventions whose rules have been determined not by his but previous generations. The homage he pays to the southern memories is self-consciously temporary—tomorrow, we feel, Morris must move on to the business of the present. Today, however, he is showing his kids “how it was” when he grew up. Indeed, Willie Morris is the weigh station between Faulkner and postmodernist southern writer, Barry Hannah, the movement from Southern League baseball to Lynyrd Skynyrd, from moonshine to cocaine.

Faulkner was truly a regional writer. No doubt, he challenged the myths, but the myths still held the imagination. The modernist tendencies that Faulkner expressed were couched in southern terms. Where Faulkner’s work is of the South in a particular place and time, Morris finds his influences outside the temporal and spatial boundaries of Yoknapatawpha. Morris’s South is lost to him: he is no longer a small town Southerner (though he eventually moves back to Oxford, Mississippi); and his land is lost to itself as the myths fade away from memory.

This analysis of Morris concerns itself with emancipation or liberation, the diversity of its expression, and the peculiar textures of southern life as they relate to the concept of liberation. We are all familiar by now with the discourse of emancipation, its poetic tone, and its dangerous implications for the preservers of the status quo. We understand its attempt to render problematic that which had previously been accepted as given, and its exhortion to reflect upon the essence of that which before had only been considered in terms of its use, its instrumental value. More and more educators have come to realize that liberation embodies a form of rationality that involves the capacity to think about thinking (Gouldner, 1976).