

Ties of Blood: Gender, Race and Faulkner

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Abstract

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This dissertation proposes a new reading of William Faulkner's career from his first novel, Soldiers' Pay (1926), through The Sound and the Fury (1929). I argue that Faulkner's probing of sexual relations in the 1920s provides the necessary context for understanding his treatment of race relations in the 1930s, and that his turn toward the issue of miscegenation should be read as a moment of crisis and transformation, in which racial anxiety explodes within an established landscape of sexual anxiety that takes the female body as its troubled matrix. Reading this crisis requires that we rethink the overall shape of Faulkner's career, starting with the text widely regarded as his first "important" novel. By resituating The Sound and the Fury within the context of the earlier, under-appreciated writings—Soldiers' Pay, Elmer, Mosquitoes, and Flags in the Dust—I argue that the novel is a pivotal rather than seminal text, one that newly articulates the psychosexual drama of the early career to the socio-historical problems that will increasingly occupy Faulkner in his subsequent work. Only when we see how the inward, psychological explorations of the early writings enable Faulkner's engagement with the U.S. South, and how his turn toward his "native soil" expands and enriches the solipsistic landscapes of the previous novels, can we begin to understand the complex ways that gender and race, psychosexual trauma and historical injury, speak through, for and over one another in the author's later work.

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## Introduction

This dissertation constitutes the first half of what I envision as a book length reevaluation of Faulkner's career as it addresses the issues of gender and race. Taking up Eric Sundquist's claim that race is, for this author, "*the* issue that determines and defines all others" (8), I argue that Faulkner's probing of sexual relations in the 1920s provides the necessary context for understanding his treatment of race relations in the 1930s, and that his turn toward the issue of miscegenation should be read not as a moment of division, as Sundquist suggests (ix), but of transformation, when racial anxiety explodes within an established landscape of sexual anxiety that takes the female body as its troubled matrix. In the pages that follow I endeavor to map that landscape as it emerges in the early and, with the exception of the last, under-appreciated novels of the 1920s—*Soldiers' Pay* (1926), *Elmer* (ca. 1925), *Mosquitoes* (1927), and *Flags in the Dust* (ca. 1927)—only to collapse in on itself in *The Sound and the Fury* (1929). The central assertion that I advance here is that *The Sound and the Fury* should be read as a pivotal rather than a seminal text, one which brings to a crisis the problems of female sexuality and embodiment that are central to Faulkner's earlier writings, even as it opens this complex to the issues of race relations and miscegenation that will increasingly occupy his mature work. Only when we recognize that race becomes, in this way, articulated as a subject for Faulkner from within a problematic of gender and sexuality, can we begin to understand how these issues become so intimately bound up with one another in novels such as *Light in August* and *Absalom, Absalom!*.

While gender and race are the key terms of this study, in thinking between them I am also trying to reconcile two broader registers in Faulkner's writings: on the one hand, the "psychosexual" orientation of his early novels, in which the author maps the white male psyche in relation to issues of sexual difference, female sexuality and the female body; and, on the other hand, the "historical" orientation of his later novels, in which he grapples much more directly with the U.S. South and the legacy of slavery. By exploring how Faulkner's engagement with race relations in the novels of the 1930s is preceded and enabled by his earlier engagement with gender in the 1920s, my reading of the career both acknowledges and resists this distinction. I want to insist that Faulkner's writing does move toward a more rigorous engagement with the U.S. south in all its socio-historical complexity, but that this trajectory need not be understood as a progression *away* from his earlier, psychosexual investments; rather, as I argue here, Faulkner's turn toward history and the social can be read as a *deepening* of his commitment to the inner, private life of the subject in ways that are continuous with the insights of his earlier novels. Indeed, it is only when we recognize how Faulkner's treatment of historical trauma is fundamentally shaped by his earlier mapping of psychosexual trauma, that we can appreciate how these two injuries remain intimately bound together, along with the correlated issues of gender and race, in Faulkner's most powerful fiction. Although the later works that I have in mind—*Sanctuary*, *As I Lay Dying*, *Light in August*, and *Absalom, Absalom!*—do not receive full

readings in this dissertation, my understanding of their places within the career as a whole rests largely upon the foundation that I lay down here. I will therefore gesture forward to these novels at appropriate moments and conclude with a summary statement that indicates the difference that my reading of the early career makes for our understanding of the work to follow.

There is a deeper proleptic dimension to the entirety of this project insofar as the original impetus for my reevaluation of Faulkner's work lies not at its beginnings but rather in the novel that constitutes, in my view, its pinnacle: *Absalom, Absalom!*. In order to grasp the seed of my argument, we must therefore begin by looking forward, beyond the actual parameters of this study, to an often cited but little understood scene from that novel, which is emblematic in my view of how gender and race interact in Faulkner's work of the 1930s. The scene in question is a memory, recounted by the novel's sole female narrator, Rosa Coldfield, of her confrontation as a young, white woman with the young, black woman and slave, Clytie Sutpen. The encounter occupies only an instant, the time it takes Rosa to move from the hallway of Sutpen's mansion to the foot of the stairs, and for the two women to struggle as Rosa attempts to mount the stairs and Clytie attempts to restrain her. Rosa's memory, however, dilates the moment into five pages in which she and Clytie move inexorably toward one another, and into a culminating event that seems to absorb all of the passionate longing, frustration and grief at least of Rosa's own youth and maybe even of the entire novel: Clytie's touch. Here is the encounter, pared down to its essential moments:

*Then she touched me, and then I did stop dead. [...]*

*[...] Yes, I stopped dead—no woman's hand, no negro's hand, but bitted bridle-curb to check and guide the furious and unbending will—I crying not to her, to it: speaking to it through the negro, the woman, only because of the shock which was not yet outrage because it would be terror soon, expecting and receiving no answer because we both knew it was not to her I spoke: 'Take your hand off me, nigger!'*

*I got none. We just stood there—I motionless in the action of running, she rigid in that furious immobility, the two of us joined by that hand and arm which held us, like a fierce rigid umbilical cord, twin sistered to the fell darkness which had produced her. [...]* *We stood there so. And then suddenly it was not outrage that I waited for, out of which I had instinctively cried; it was not terror: it was some cumulative over-reach of despair itself. I remember how as we stood there joined by that volitionless (yes: it too sentient victim just as she and I were) hand, I cried—perhaps not aloud, not with words [...]*—*I cried 'And you too, sister, sister?'* (111-113)

That Clytie's hand generates a personal crisis for Rosa is clear, but her touch also creates a broader, narrative crisis by binding the novel's greatest discharge of emotional energy to an encounter that has no obvious bearing upon the Sutpen family drama that forms its central plot. Rosa's command, "Take your hand off me, nigger!" is explosive enough, but it is the subsequent "cry," made "perhaps not aloud, not with words," that threatens to derail the story which Mr. Compson, Quentin, Shreve, and maybe even Faulkner want to tell, that probing, ambiguous question of kinship that undercuts her initial reaction and momentarily displaces the novel's focus on fathers, brothers and sons: "And you too? And you too, sister, sister?".

The words have all the qualities of a released repression, and yet their meaning remains buried. For to whom and to what nature of kinship does the term “sister” refer? In light of Rosa’s failure to revisit the episode in the remainder of her narrative, and the male narrators’ failure to address the encounter at all, the scene seems to add little or nothing to the novel’s action, and yet it provides an emotional epicenter for the waves of passion and grief that achieve tortured expression in the rest of the chapter, and virtually no expression anywhere else in the novel. Readers tuned into the emotional rhythms of Absalom, Absalom! will be drawn to this moment, and to the problem of how to account for a rupture at the literal center of the book, and yet outside that book’s central plot. The desire to contain and harness the power of Clytie’s touch and the effects it produces in Rosa’s narrative achieves its most startling expression in Eric Sundquist’s reading of the scene in his groundbreaking book, Faulkner: The House Divided:

Rosa’s shocked exclamation, “you too, sister, sister?” suggests not only that Clytie is clearly Judith’s sister (Sutpen’s daughter), and not only that Clytie, like Rosa, may be vicariously in love with Bon, but also that those possibilities reveal two further ones that constitute, in Faulkner’s imagination if not her own, precisely what Rosa “could not, would not, must not believe” and what the novel holds in passionate suspense: that Bon is Clytie’s “brother” and that Bon is “black.” (113)

Sundquist’s reading demonstrates the degree to which Absalom, Absalom! compels its readers into the position of its narrators, who, as Mr. Compson suggests, must deal with the facts that are “just incredible” and “just d[o] not explain” (80). By making the central, repressed term of Rosa’s chapter the same term that lies buried at the heart of the Sutpen-Henry-Bon triangle, Sundquist rescues the overall integrity of the story from the chapter’s excess by making what would otherwise constitute wasted passion, into the novel’s most passionate expression of its central theme: miscegenation. Although it does much to demonstrate the central role that race does play in Absalom, Absalom! and makes of Rosa’s chapter a corollary of appropriate magnitude, however, it does little to account for the suggestion in Rosa’s narrative that the sistership exists not, or not only, between Clytie and any of the Sutpens, but between Clytie and herself, an implication that forces itself upon Rosa’s mind in the image of their two bodies fused together by the “fierce rigid umbilical cord” of Clytie’s arm.

Rather than appropriating the explosive charge of this encounter toward the story of fathers, sons and brothers, I want to approach the image of white and black female bodies sistered by an umbilical cord as an imaginative formation that remains inexplicable within the novel’s dominant economy, and which in this way exposes, without necessarily explaining, the bearing that women, female bodies, and “female blood” have upon Faulkner’s understanding of race. That Rosa’s unbearable experience of dissolving racial boundaries appeals to the maternal body for articulation, and achieves expression only through a violent misshaping of that body—the umbilical cord, after all, connects the two sisters not to any mother but to each other—suggests that race and gender speak not so much to, but through one another in Faulkner’s most powerful work, and that their interdependency is both intimate and perverse, fundamental, unforgiving, and tortured.

Understanding this interdependency, or “sistering,” of race and gender requires a certain suspicion toward the masculine economy of Absalom, Absalom!, which dictates that “race” is primarily a story told by and about men, as well as of readings of Faulkner’s career that extend that masculine economy by asserting miscegenation as *the* central metaphor for race in Faulkner’s fiction, and the repressed term of Faulkner’s career until Light in August. For to argue, as Sundquist does, that the sudden appearance of miscegenation in Light in August justifies a “division” between “the three major novels that preceded [Faulkner’s] discovery” of this theme—The Sound and the Fury, Sanctuary, and As I Lay Dying—and the “three great novels that discovery produced”—Light in August, Absalom, Absalom! and Go Down, Moses!—reproduces across the entire spectrum of Faulkner’s career the tendency to isolate race from issues to which it is integrally bound (ix). It does so, firstly, by approaching Faulkner’s work prior to Light in August primarily in terms of *form* rather than content, as a “search for a way to say things that had not been said but desperately needed saying,” things that will not *be said* until the great breakthrough of Joe Christmas (6). It does so secondly by perpetuating the idea that everything prior to The Sound and the Fury is more or less irrelevant to our understanding of Faulkner’s “great” works, and certainly to our understanding of his treatment of the issue, which, by Sundquist’s account, is “the one issue about which [Faulkner] has much to tell us: the issue of race and its many implied or visibly actual dilemmas” (8). What falls out of this reading is the fact that the novels preceding Faulkner’s explicit confrontation with race are also the works in which the author is most explicitly and fluently concerned with women and, more specifically, with what Deborah Clarke has aptly identified as the female body and its “bloody functioning” (5), preoccupations that worry Faulkner’s imagination from his earliest writings and actively *shape* the emergence of race as a subject in his later work. Indeed, as I argue here, miscegenation’s primary signifier, blood, is deeply indebted to the female body from Faulkner’s earliest work, and it is a debt that is never fully released: the fear of “black blood” complicates and compounds, but never fully replaces or wholly “explains,” the fear of female blood inherited from the previous novels. Only by tracing this inheritance can we see how the inward, psychological explorations of the early writings enable Faulkner’s engagement with the U.S. South in all its socio-historical complexity, and thus how gender and race, psychosexual trauma and historical injury, become, to borrow phrase from Quentin Compson, “all mixed up” in the author’s later work.



## Part One “All that inside”

### Preface

It is tempting to read The Sound and the Fury as the beginning of it all. Though preceded by Soldiers' Pay (1926), Mosquitoes (1927) and Sartoris (1929), Faulkner's fourth published novel has achieved the status of a seminal text. As many have pointed out, Faulkner himself was the earliest advocate of this view and any attempt to situate The Sound and the Fury must reckon with the author's own accounts of the novel's genesis, and of its place in his overall career. The narrative that emerges from these accounts is by now well known—how he wrote his first three novels with “decreasing ease and pleasure,” how frustrations surrounding the publication of the third drove him into mental isolation, and how he discovered therein a state of creative rapture so pure and moving that the subsequent novels would be measured in his mind by their failure to recapture it.<sup>1</sup> With seven published novels behind him, he wrote in 1933, “I seemed to have a vision of [*Light in August*] and the other ones subsequent to *The Sound and the Fury* ranked in order upon a shelf while I looked at the titled backs of them with a flagging attention which was almost distaste, and upon which each succeeding title registered less and less, until at last Attention seemed to say, Thank God I shall never need to open any of them again.”<sup>2</sup> This vision casts The Sound and the Fury as both origin and apex; nothing that precedes it appears on the shelf of Faulkner's memory, and nothing that follows matches, much less transcends, its place therein.

Few if any readers today would characterize the works leading up to Absalom, Absalom!—a novel which now “outcanons all but the most canonical texts” (Godden 3)—in terms of steady diminishment; the idea that The Sound and the Fury is the first of Faulkner's novels worth reading, however, has proven considerably more resilient. If Faulkner's dismissal of his early novels has met with less resistance, it is in part because the gesture confirms our conviction that The Sound and the Fury is the product of a markedly different and better writer than the one who produced Soldiers' Pay, Mosquitoes, and, by a narrower margin, Sartoris. Irving Howe succinctly articulated this sentiment when he asked, in one of the earliest studies of Faulkner's career in 1951, “What happened to Faulkner between Mosquitoes and [...] The Sound and the Fury? What element of personal or literary experience can account for such a leap? (20-21). This characterization of the novel as jumping away from the earlier works, whether in spontaneous departure or active repudiation, has thoroughly shaped discussions of its place in

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<sup>1</sup> See The Sound and the Fury: an Authoritative Text, Backgrounds, and Context Criticism, editor David Minter. Minter reproduces two versions of introductions that Faulkner wrote for the novel, but never published. See “An Introduction to *The Sound and the Fury*,” 230.

<sup>2</sup> See “An Introduction for *The Sound and the Fury*,” 227, in Minter, ed., The Sound and the Fury.

Faulkner's career. Martin Kreiswirth, writing in the early 1980s, notes that critics "have insisted almost unanimously on the singularity of this first and perhaps greatest of his major achievements, emphasizing the degree to which it differed in substance, technique, and accomplishment from the works that preceded it" (1). Perhaps no single critic has spoken so eloquently and influentially along these lines than André Bleikasten, who, in his book-length study of the novel, describes it as "a sudden leap, unforeseen and unforeseeable." Even as Bleikasten points to the tantalizing gap between Faulkner's fourth novel and its predecessors, he suggests that there is ultimately no real point in reading any further into it, for, while "[h]ints may be found in Faulkner's early works of what he was to achieve in The Sound and the Fury and in his other major novels," they are "promises only for having been kept" (Splendid 5). In other words, the early writings can, at best, only reinforce what we already know, and know better, from The Sound and the Fury and the later works; they have little or nothing new to teach us on their own.

There is some irony that Eric Sundquist's landmark book on Faulkner and race sets out to dethrone The Sound and the Fury through a similar line of argument. The Sound and the Fury, he writes, "is not Faulkner's best novel, but the paradox is this: its importance only appears in the larger context of novels to which it gives rise, and at that point it comes to seem indispensable" (9). It is this conviction—that The Sound and the Fury is, on its own, clearly flawed, and yet when considered within the context of the novels that follow, seemingly profound—that leads him to his most remarkable claim, which is that miscegenation not only provides the explicit motivating theme for Faulkner's truly "great" novels, (Light in August, Absalom, Absalom! and Go Down Moses), but can be furthermore understood to tacitly, or "unconsciously" inform The Sound and the Fury. "One might say," he suggests, "that The Sound and the Fury [...] contains the repressed that returns with increasing visibility over the course of Faulkner's career as he discovers the lost dimension of Southern experience Sartoris failed to find" (26). One of the more fascinating facets of Sundquist's reading is how its privileging of race as "*the* issue which determines and defines all others" for Faulkner, the South, and the nation, both evacuates The Sound and the Fury of any intrinsic significance, while redeeming it within the economy of the larger career. For Sundquist, the novel doesn't add up on its own, because "the 'mind' it does not have—and will not have until Faulkner's career develops—the mind of 'the South' is paradoxically the only one that fully explains Quentin's incestuous fascination with Caddy's purity and the novel's strange obsession with her" (9). In short, Caddy's virginity carries within it the "myth of [Southern] innocence," an idea of purity that was projected *against* the miscegenation emancipation supposedly guaranteed, but could only be imaginatively sustained through "the repression of the miscegenation" that slavery had *already* sanctioned (23). Because the novel reproduces this repression nearly to perfection, however, The Sound and the Fury becomes, in Sundquist's reading, divided from its own mind, a text which not unlike Benjy Compson, is moved to tortured figures of expression by something that it is trying to "say" but cannot, something that will remain "hidden" and "speechless" until Faulkner revisits Quentin Compson by way of regional and national history in Absalom, Absalom!. In this respect, Sundquist argues, "the greater context of [Faulkner's] career may be said virtually to

create the significance of The Sound and the Fury” (17). Or, to apply Bleikasten’s terms, whatever significance we see in the novel, it is only a promise for having been kept.

All of this is to suggest that while Sundquist’s assessment of The Sound and the Fury as a not-so-magnificent failure departs from earlier readings of the novel, it relies upon a perspective largely endemic to criticism on Faulkner’s oeuvre, in which our readings of the early texts are shaped by our knowledge of what lies around the bend. A corrective to this tendency might be found in Gary Stonum’s early attempt to theorize the relationship between Faulkner’s poetry and what follows, in which he asks us to “suspend our capacity for hindsight a little and see the poetry on its own terms,” such that we can “understan[d] the path that Faulkner followed in order to reach the point of being able to write [the novels]” (40-41). The value of this approach lies in its commitment to keeping one eye focused on the larger trajectory of Faulkner’s career, while remaining sensitive to the path itself, which is neither so wayward as to be indiscernible except from some future vantage point, nor so fixed as to resemble what Stonum cautions us against reading as “a gradual evolution of its own latent tendencies” (25). To see the novels which precede Light in August “on their own terms” is, I would argue, to recognize that the texts which Sundquist sees engaged in a “search for a way to say things” that will not be said until he discovers the issue of miscegenation, are also the works in which the author is most explicitly fluent on the themes of women and sex. It is to acknowledge that The Sound and the Fury does have a “mind” in 1929—several in fact—and they are all clearly obsessed with the problem of Caddy’s sexuality, a problem which proves at once too troubling and not indeterminate enough to be read as symptomatic of a deeper, unspeakable anxiety centered on race. This is not to say that race is irrelevant to Quentin’s demise; indeed, we shall see that race emerges at the very heart of his sexual crisis. The significance of this presence, however, can only be approached in relation to the atmosphere of extreme sexual anxiety which not only surrounds and precedes, but seems to actively occasion its materialization at the novel’s center: race, I will ultimately propose, first acquires its volatile charge in Faulkner’s writing by becoming, like the smell of honeysuckle in Quentin’s mind, “all mixed up” with the problems of female sexuality and embodiment.

Understanding the “mind” of The Sound and the Fury will require that we abandon the idea that The Sound and the Fury is the first of Faulkner’s novels that really matters, a move which brings us back, paradoxically, to the scene Faulkner repeatedly identified as the story’s moment of transcendent genesis, and which has thus contributed more than any other to the dismissal of his previous writings. The image of Caddy’s muddy drawers, seen from below, as she ascends the tree to gaze upon death was, Faulkner repeatedly suggested, the origin of the entire novel, an idea which Sundquist argues has “so overwhelmed the novel itself that one no longer questions its relevance, even though there is good reason to do so” (10). There is indeed good reason to question it, for while the image dominates Faulkner’s comments, as John T. Matthews has pointed out, it “appears only fragmentedly in Benjy’s section and hardly at all thereafter, as if the novel advances by losing the initial image in its own writing” (Play 21). The “loss” of the image relates of course to the “loss” of Caddy herself, who disappears from her brothers’ lives, but also recedes, psychologically, from the reader as she is absorbed into their consciousnesses—a vanishing act which, as Sundquist notes, seems to be acted out within the

progression of the scene itself: “[Versh] went and pushed Caddy up into the tree to the first limb. We watched the muddy bottom of her drawers. Then we couldn’t see her. We could hear the tree thrashing” (39). From the perspective of her brothers and the servants on the ground, we might note that Caddy seems to disappear *behind* her muddy drawers, a detail that will prove prophetic for while she will thereafter emerge, herself, only in sporadic, ethereal snatches, the dark stain which subsumes her in this scene proves at once less ephemeral and more distinctively relevant than has been thus far recognized.

The tension between the image’s recession and its persistence is most pronounced in relation to Quentin, who does not witness Caddy’s ascent,<sup>3</sup> but who nonetheless lives entirely within the shadow of its implications. Indeed, Quentin’s absence from this scene should be understood in the same light as his later gestures of keeping “his face turned away” when Versh brings him back to the house, and then “turn[ing] his face to the wall” when Caddy undresses for bed: as a refusal to see what he has *already seen*, and does not want to see again. Quentin, of course, is the one who pushes Caddy into the branch to begin with, and this incident seems to divide him from the other children. When Versh, Benjy, Caddy and Jason head up the hill toward the house he lingers behind and Benjy sees him “chunking into the shadows where the branch [is]” and then “com[ing] slow” behind them to the kitchen (22; 23). When Caddy leads them back out of doors to peek into the window of Damuddy’s wake, Quentin doesn’t follow, but instead remains behind on the porch. That Quentin remains deeply moved and troubled by his sister’s soiling is furthermore evident in the meticulous cleanliness he maintains around his own person, as if trying, like Lady Macbeth, to outwardly rid himself of a contamination that has become etched into the very paths of his consciousness. It is precisely the impossibility of extracting the dirt within that seems to later haunt Quentin in the figure of the “dirty little child” who doggedly pursues him on the day of his suicide, the “moist dirt ridged into her flesh” recalling Caddy’s naked backside, onto which, as Dilsey laments, the mud has “soaked clean through.” The stubborn presence of the dirty child reveals the degree to which Caddy’s soiling has penetrated Quentin’s mind, as if the drawers have, as Mrs. Compson suggests about Caddy herself, taken not just the Compson name, but Quentin’s entire world and “drag[ged] [it] in the dirt” (103). Indeed, it is the very structure of memory that seems to be soiled when, walking past the swimming hole in town, Quentin’s mind plunges back to the day that Caddy walked in on him and “that dirty girl” Natalie in the barn, an incident which culminates with Quentin “wip[ing] mud from [his] legs” and “smear[ing] it on [Caddy’s] wet hard turning body.” The present moment in this way becomes a trigger for a memory in the past, which is, itself, a reenactment of the earlier incident of Caddy’s soiling. The same principle of return holds true for Caddy’s loss of virginity. While this event is often read as the seminal catastrophe of the novel, it affects Quentin by drawing him back to the earlier moment of her fall; he recalls, or perhaps imagines, asking her on the night of Dalton Ames, “do you remember the day Damuddy

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<sup>3</sup> I would like to thank Peter Lurie for pointing out Quentin’s absence in the scene when I presented an early version of this chapter at the *Faulkner and Yoknapatawpha* Conference in 2007. This interesting detail has also been noted by Francois L. Pitavy in his essay “Through the Poet’s eye: A View of Quentin Compson” (85).

died when you sat down in the water in your drawers,” and then again, “Caddy do you remember how Dilsey fussed at you because your drawers were muddy” (151-152). Whatever Caddy’s muddy drawers mean to Quentin, it is clearly something that he is compelled to relive over and over again until he takes his own life.

Accessing what Quentin sees in his sister’s soiled backside will require a broader context than the novel provides, but it is crucial to recognize from the outset that the significance of the drawers, or what Faulkner called their “symbology,” is rooted in their stubborn materiality, a fact which criticism has tended to elide in its interest, on the one hand, in underscoring Caddy’s invisibility and, on the other, in rescuing her from the novel’s masculine economy. Both arguments tend to read Caddy in terms of a fundamental indeterminacy, figured either as absence or excess; for Bleikasten, for example, she is a “blank counter, an empty signifier, a name in itself void of meaning and thus apt to receive any meaning” (*Splendid* 56), whereas for Minrose Gwin, she is “something more than we can say,” something which lies “beyond sound and syntax, between the lines” (36, 47). But, like that “long and fading smear” of cow dung that Ab Snopes leaves on Mrs. De Spain’s rug in “Barn Burning,” the stain on Caddy’s drawers is, itself, a sign, and its meaning is less indeterminate than readers have tended to assume (12). The following passage, in particular, demands that we read the soiled drawers not as a vague gesture toward “something ‘dirty’” (Sundquist 10-11), but as the sign of a specific filth which originates, significantly, from within the female body rather than without:

Because women so delicate so mysterious Father said. Delicate equilibrium of periodical filth between two moons balanced. Moons he said full and yellow as harvest moons her hips thighs. Outside outside of them always but. Yellow. Feet soles with walking like. Then know that some man that all those mysterious and impervious concealed. With all that inside of them shapes an outward suavity waiting for a touch to. Liquid putrefaction like drowned things floating like pale rubber flabbily filled getting the odor of honeysuckle all mixed up. (128)

As Diane Roberts points out, this passage “marks an early evocation of the Faulknerian hero’s long obsession with menstruation” (113). Anticipating Joe Christmas’s vision of the female body as a cracked urn, filled with a foul, deathcolored liquid,<sup>4</sup> the passage underscores the incongruity between surfaces and interiors, the way in which the “outward suavity” of the feminine shape conceals “all that inside.” The question of where the “filth” originates is critical, because what is at stake is precisely the distinction that Mr. Compson makes when he tells Quentin that “it’s nature is hurting you not Caddy.” If women are, as Mr. Compson suggests, “never virgins,” and if “virginity is a negative state and therefore contrary to nature,” it is because the female body is physically hardwired for impurity, and thus always already corrupted by the “filth” of menstruation (116).

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<sup>4</sup> When Bobby tells Joe about menstruation, he flees: “In the notseeing and the hardknowing as though in a cave he seemed to see a diminishing row of suavely shaped urns in moonlight, blanched. And not one was perfect. Each one was cracked and from each crack there issued something liquid, deathcolored and foul” (*Light in August* 189).

It is this unbearable truth that seems to torture Quentin in the image of Caddy's muddy drawers, for more distressing than the violation of his sister's virginity by all the Dalton Ameses of the world is the possibility that her virginity never mattered to begin with, that the "tragedy is second-hand" because Caddy's purity was never there to begin with. What the novel asks us to accept is that Quentin's loss of virginity *as a meaningful concept*—his realization that it "doesn't matter"—threatens him with nothing short of annihilation, because it seems to render everything not only, as we have already seen, irredeemably dirty, but also utterly meaningless. It is precisely this sense of nullification that haunts him when, following his escapade with the dirty little girl in town, he sees "a piece of torn newspaper lying beside the road," and begins to laugh and cry at the same time, thinking, "I thought about how I'd thought about I could not be a virgin, with so many of them walking along in the shadows and whispering with their soft girlvoices lingering in the shadowy places and the words coming out and perfume and eyes you could feel not see, but if it was that simple to do it wouldn't be anything and if it wasn't anything, what was I" (147). In other words, if virginity is no more significant than a torn piece of paper, its loss as simple and unmomentous as passing another person in the dark, then Quentin's own existence must, by extension, be utterly without consequence. But why must this be so?

The novel's reticence on this question—its failure, or refusal, to supply a clear explanation for Quentin's obsession with virginity—is precisely what makes it possible to read a great deal of significance into that obsession, and for Faulkner himself to later rewrite it via the Quentin Compson of Absalom, Absalom! as a meditation on the history of American race relations and miscegenation. When placed in the context of the preceding, rather than subsequent novels, however, The Sound and the Fury tells a different story, one which suggests that Quentin's investment in his sister's purity originates not in the historical past, but in a psychosexual history that comes down to him through a line of male artist figures from whom he seems to directly descend, and that his suicide marks the logical culmination of a sexual drama that points back to the origins of the Faulknerian male subject and the author's own writings. Insofar as Quentin's death brings this drama to a point of crisis and resolution even as it initiates, as earlier intimated, a confrontation with race that will not reach its climax until Absalom, Absalom!, it stands at the nexus of two crucial developments in Faulkner's career and thus demands a dual response. The remainder of part one of this dissertation will therefore be devoted to demonstrating how Quentin's obsessions and suicide are rooted in the psychosexual concerns that lie at the heart of the early career by situating his chapter in relation to two of Faulkner's early novels: "Elmer," which he started and abandoned in 1925, and which would have been his second published novel had he completed it; and Mosquitoes, written immediately thereafter and published in 1927. Then, in part two, I will revisit Quentin's death in relation to the emergent, racial concerns that will increasingly occupy Faulkner in the novels to follow, an inquiry which will also occasion a return to the early career, this time to Faulkner's first novel, Soldiers' Pay written before "Elmer" and published in 1926, and Flags in the Dust, written immediately after Mosquitoes and published in abridged form as Sartoris in 1929.

In privileging “Elmer” and Mosquitoes here at the outset, and thus breaking with the chronology of the career, my aim is to bring into the clearest possible relief how Faulkner’s early and abiding concern with the female body—a preoccupation which informs *all* of Faulkner’s early novels but receives its most thorough treatment in Elmer and Mosquitoes—provides the necessary context for understanding Quentin’s psychological breakdown in The Sound and the Fury, and how this crisis conditions in turn the transformation of race from an ostensibly benign and marginalized aspect of Faulkner’s imagination into an increasingly volatile and central theme. Only by discovering the problem of race relations as Faulkner seems to have discovered it, that is, through a prior confrontation with the female body and the fact of menstruation, can we fully appreciate how race relations and miscegenation are first articulated as subjects from within an established problematic of gender, and how the sexual matrix of the early career opens up in The Sound and the Fury to the racially divided south and the material presence of history.

I  
“The image within him”  
Elmer (ca. 1925)

Along with “Father Abraham,” Elmer is one of two novels that Faulkner started and then abandoned in the early years leading up to The Sound and the Fury. Though eventually revised and published as a long story titled “A Portrait of Elmer” in the 1930s, the original fragment has received more attention from critics, typically read, by those who find it relevant to the career as a whole, as a kind of sourcebook and testing ground for ideas and techniques that Faulkner will employ with better skill, and toward more worthy subjects, in his later writings.<sup>5</sup> Whereas such readings appreciate Elmer for its possession, in embryo, of various ideas and techniques that the later career will further fuse and develop, David Minter and Michael Zeitlin have suggested that the novel fragment is perhaps more unified and less nascent than these critics imply. For Minter, Elmer conducts an “examination, essentially in psychological terms, of the sources of artistic impulses,” the “result” being a “portrait of the artist presented as kind of psychosexual history, the terms being so distinctly Freudian as to make it inconceivable that Faulkner did not know exactly what he was doing” (56, 58). Zeitlin similarly argues that “Elmer” puts forward “a coherent psychosexual history or ‘case,’” and that in doing so it does not simply produce the rudiments of more sophisticated concepts to follow, (though he does find the novel’s “psychoanalytic configurations” to be “rude” in comparison to later works), so much as it “grapples with the narrative problems and psychosexual issues that Faulkner would subdue in his greatest fiction.” Rather than discovering hints of yet unrealized material, Zeitlin thus identifies in Elmer a more explicit and concentrated treatment of concepts and techniques that will be further “disguised” and “elaborated” in his later, more mature work (“Faulkner and Psychoanalysis” 220). Elmer, these critics suggest, is more than a false start or dead end: as Faulkner’s first attempt to construct a “psychosexual history,” it has both a story to tell and a strategy for telling it. It is to this history that we must turn if we want to understand why Quentin kills himself in The Sound and the Fury, for, as I shall attempt to demonstrate here, his profound investment in the illusion of his sister’s purity, and his experience of psychic

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<sup>5</sup> Michael Millgate suggests that the novel’s “interest lies mainly in its autobiographical elements, and in its occasional hints of characters, episodes, and images which appear in more developed form in later works” (22). Thomas McHaney similarly observes in the first essay to be devoted entirely to Elmer (of which there are only two in existence, to the best of my knowledge), that “many characters, themes, and even patches of dialogue and imagery from ‘Elmer’ found a way into the novels which followed, especially *Mosquitoes* (1927) and *Sartoris* (1929)” (282), adding that while Elmer is “by no means the source of all Faulkner’s early fictional ideas,” in it “Faulkner seems to be toying openly with ideas and techniques which he would perfect and couple with better material as his artistry matured” (304). In his study of Faulkner’s early career, Martin Kreiswirth also underscores the novel’s formal innovation as one of its central contributions to the author’s development when he suggests that though “Elmer” was “justifiably abandoned,” it “shows Faulkner [...] discovering certain *expressive techniques and structural procedures* that had to await a more fully realized imaginative vehicle before they could come to fruition” (76).



dissolution before the truth inscribed in her “muddy drawers,” makes the most sense when approached from within the psychic economy that Faulkner maps out in the early career, in which the male affiliation of female sexuality with filth is introduced and deconstructed.

I shall suggest here that Elmer provides our greatest insights into the origins of male sexual discomfort that produces a continuum of white female characters in Faulkner’s work ranging from the immaculate to the lightly soiled to the pestilent. Before we turn our attention to that novel in earnest, however, it will perhaps be useful to take a more panoramic view of this spectrum as it plays out across the early career. What becomes immediately apparent in surveying Faulkner’s white women from Soldiers’ Pay through Flags in the Dust is the deep appeal that the pre-pubescent, asexual female body—what Cleanth Brooks labels the “epicene girl” (127)—holds for Faulkner and for his male protagonists. Cecily Saunders provides the prototype in Soldiers’ Pay, where she appears with a body “flat as a boy’s” with “long virginal legs,” characteristics that are then taken up by Elmer’s older sister, Jo-Addie, who disappears from his life at the age of sixteen, still “flat across the chest,” with a stomach “poised and flat as an athlete’s on her wary little hips,” and legs that are “thin and unformed” (348, 351). There is nothing feminine or alluring about Jo—she is hard, angular, and aloof, like a “young ugly tree” or a “bird dog eager to be off: a dog that both suffered man and ignored him in the face of higher and more perfect things to do in the world” (346, 353). And yet Elmer seems to love nothing so much as the shape of her body. On the night before she departs, Elmer, though already eleven years old, is allowed to share a bed with her, and the anticipation of her proximity makes him feel “as though he were on the verge of something beautiful and clean and fine,” a natural extension of the pleasure he experiences from the sensation of the bed sheets, “pleasantly cold, like the first water in the spring” because not yet “human and soiled” by the body of the sleeper (348-350).

In Elmer’s unreflective yoking of beauty to cleanliness, and cleanliness to his sister’s sexless body, lies the foundation for an aesthetic that will persist in increasingly cerebral forms in Gordon, the protagonist of Mosquitoes, Horace Benbow of Flags in the Dust, and eventually Quentin Compson of The Sound and the Fury. Jo never returns to Elmer, but she reemerges in Mosquitoes in the character of Patricia Robyn, another slim, flat-chested sister who attracts the men around her. Upon meeting Patricia, the sculptor, Gordon, studies her shape intently, immediately drawn to her “flat breast and belly, her boy’s body which the poise of it and the thinness of her arms belied,” a body “[s]exless, yet somehow vaguely troubling” (24). Patricia’s unsettling presence is not lost on those who lack Gordon’s acute sensitivity; even the fool, Talliaferro, for all his posturing, detects the “clean young odor of her, like that of young trees” and her “hard clean youngness,” and David, the inarticulate steward who follows Patricia with dog-like yearning, connects her presence to the experience of waking up to a “clean dawn” (24, 31, 162). When, in Flags in the Dust, Horace admires the “awkward virginal grace” of the young girl, Frankie, “pleasuring in the skimpy ballooning of her little dress moulded and dragged by her arms and legs, watching the taut revelations of her speeding body in a sort of ecstasy” he only confirms what we already know from the previous texts (202): that the virgin female body

inspires the male subject with a simple, passive pleasure, a feeling of transcendence untouched by what is “human” and “soiled” (Elmer 350).

The sexual female, by contrast, provokes a distinctly carnal response. In the world of Faulkner’s early fiction, girls and women who are sexually initiated, or receptive to such initiation, exhibit a fleshy disposition, an embodied fullness that triggers an involuntary, visceral reaction in the males around them. This reaction always possesses some degree of ambivalence in which physical desire and repugnance struggle for ascendancy. In the case of the sexual neophyte, desire nearly triumphs by appealing to the male subject at the level of fundamental, even infantile, need. The male response to the young sexual female is distinctly oral: spilled sugar provides the occasion for Elmer’s first sexual encounter, and the girl, herself, “plump,” “soft and pink and curved,” is at once confectionary and mammary (373). Though Jenny entertains a more mature audience in Mosquitoes, she provokes similar, if now glorified, lactic fantasies; likened to an “expensive pastry,” she is “rife as whipped cream,” with breath like “wind come recently off from fresh milk” (222, 127). While Faulkner’s men instinctively gravitate toward these replete, consumable bodies, they do so with an irrepressible sense of disease, as if anticipating the moment when appetite, sated, sickens into disgust. As Elmer mounts the ladder to the loft where the girl awaits him, desire and revulsion converge upon the “thick warm salty liquid” that rises in his throat (374); Talliaferro similarly experiences a “surge of fire” in Jenny’s presence, which seems to “lightly distend all his organs, leaving a thin salty taste on his tongue” (127). In both cases, the disconcerting physicality of these bodies and the response they produce correlates with the conviction that they are somehow unclean. Amidst the constellation of impressions that Elmer retains of this girl—her “angelic blue” eyes, her “full red mouth,” her “plump body,”—he also registers her clothes, “always a trifle damaged, soiled” (373). Jenny’s “little soiled hand” and “slightly soiled green dress” similarly suggest that her flesh is perishable and, having been handled, already becoming unfresh (127, 55).

Even in her prime, the young sexual female is thus a body in decline, and the descent into sexual maturity is not subtle; whereas the neophyte is sweet, ripe and only lightly soiled, the experienced woman is cloying, rotten, and thoroughly corrupted. Narcissa Benbow’s lament over her brother’s affair with Belle Mitchell in Flags in the Dust is prudish, but the early novels largely reinforce its implications: “You’ve got the smell of her all over you. Oh Horry, she’s dirty!” (223). Narcissa presumably refers here to Belle’s perfume, but Horace’s resigned response, “I know,” stems from his conviction of her innate filthiness. Though irresistibly drawn to Belle, he associates her body not with sugar or cream but with shrimp, her favorite food, the smell of which “invariably rouse[s] in him a faint but definite repulsion” and seems to “cl[i]ng about his clothing” for hours after he has carried it home to her (402). Whereas the oral sense dominates the response to the young sexual female, the sexual woman engages the male primarily through her scent. Like Belle, the woman that Elmer encounters in Venice also “exhale[s] an odor,” a “soiled exciting smell,” which he elsewhere associates with that “unmistakable scent of female flesh no longer fresh” (417, 423). In both cases, this malodorous quality links the dirtiness of the sexual woman specifically to death. Belle’s “sultry imminence” is, for Horace, “like the odor of death” (228), and the Venetian woman’s smell reminds Elmer of “scent

bottled of things that grew once in the ground now long and cleverly dead, stale exciting flesh” (417). No longer plump but putrid, the flesh of the sexually experienced woman is a body in a state of decay; the prostitute’s hand is “sick with too much touching,” and somewhere beyond her thighs “heavy as old bread turning warm and stale inward,” waits a “wall rising soft too soft ever to be conquered cleanly,” a wall “[s]oft with many assaults” (418).

The origins of this abject view of female sexuality, which stratifies women into pristine virgins and dirty whores, cannot be understood apart from Faulkner’s interest during this period in the relationship between sex and the origins of the male artistic drive, an issue which he takes up for the first time in *Elmer*. In this “psychosexual history” of the artist, Faulkner interrogates the idea of a pure artistic impulse that can only fully exist prior to the male subject’s discovery of women. Artistic purity is associated here with unconnected form—lines divorced, or not yet attached, to any human use or meaning. In his youth, Elmer’s “strange passion for form” leads him to admire the “pure blank serenity” of a folded piece of paper, and the “shining nickel joints,” “slim pipes” and “tall simple glass vases” that he sees through the window of the hardware store; he has no interest in their function, just in their shape (350, 377). As most evident in his final memory of Jo, the pleasure he takes in his sister’s prepubescent body is consistent with his passion for simple form. Waking at dawn, he sees Jo’s slight figure in silhouette against the pale light of the window, her uncomplicated body further reduced to an outline of the “cracked and jagged bell of her hair, her high shoulder and the little scarcely-tipped protuberance of one breast rounding briefly into the thin dropping line of her torso” (354). Elmer’s admiration for pure shapes extends naturally into his first artistic endeavors. Lying on his family’s living room floor—his mother “querulous, busy, stepping over his sprawled body,” his father “nursing his pipe in a tactful self-effacement” in the corner—Elmer draws “smokestacks, people armless and sweeping upwards in two simple lines from a pedestal-like base: lines that entranc[e] him with clean juxtaposition, pure and meaningless as marble.” Neither “listening nor not listening” to the activity around him, he exists within a state of happy oblivion, creating with no conscious effort or intent. His father meditates from his corner upon the “irreconcilability of lines on discarded paper and work with an inevitable monetary return,” but Elmer has no interest in reconciling his art to money, or to anything else in the outside world. The outside world, in turn, makes no demands upon his art. The wrapping paper which serves as his sketchpad is “clean and virgin to [him] no matter how creased and spotted it might be in reality” (377).

Elmer’s bliss is of course destined to end, and it is sexual awareness that seems to trigger the emergence of self-consciousness and, with it, an altered artistic drive:

...later, in the throes of puberty, a dark soft trouble that seemed to associate itself with an odor somewhere that he dreaded yet longed for, he was consciously drawing people. Not lines at perfect liberty to assume any significance they chose, but men and women; trying to draw them and make them conform to that vague shape somewhere back in his mind, trying to reconcile what is, with what might be...

Later still, when women had forced him to consider them as individuals, that shape, that image within him had become quite definitely alive: a Dianalike girl with an

impregnable integrity, a slimness virginal and impervious to time or circumstance. Dark-haired and small and proud, casting him bones fiercely as though he were a dog, coppers as if he were a beggar, looking the other way....

In the meantime he had had his first sexual experience. Elmer raising his round yellow head in the dusk, smelling hay pungently, saw again a full red mouth never quite completely closed, a young body seemingly on the point of bursting out of its soiled expensive dress in soft rich curves. (378)

What we see in this scenario is the fundamental, and fundamentally paradoxical, role that sex plays in the making of the artist. On the one hand, the discovery of sexual desire, that “dark soft trouble,” seems to destroy the pure artistic impulse that accompanies male innocence by transforming Elmer’s art from a spontaneous act of creation to a conscious struggle to make the external world “conform” to one within his mind. Once “pure and meaningless,” his lines now assume the definite function of mediating this divide between what “is” and what “might be,” a struggle which materializes into two female bodies—one dirty, permeable and deeply embodied and the other so inviolable as to be purged of anything reminiscent of actual flesh. Even as this discovery of women seems to destroy the “perfect liberty” of Elmer’s imagination, the gap it opens between a soiled reality and a pristine ideal also supplies the fundamental urge behind mature artistic production, and not simply by fueling disappointment. For it is not enough, or quite right, to say that the sexual woman drives the male to create by failing to conform to his ideal; this assumes *a priori* the existence of a pure desire that is then thwarted by experience, an idea that the novel itself thoroughly complicates. For while the above passage introduces the Dianalike figure before it recounts Elmer’s loss of virginity, its implications counter that chronology by suggesting that Elmer’s ideal actually emerges in response to his discovery of sex. It is not until “women ha[ve] forced [Elmer] to consider them as individuals,” Faulkner suggests, that the “image within him [...] become[s] quite definitely alive.” The individuation of women is not explicitly linked in the passage to sex, (Faulkner only tells us that his “first sexual experience” happens “in the meantime” of everything else), but the perfect opposition between the images of the open, damaged body of his first sexual partner and the inviolate, pristine figure of the Dianalike girl suggests that it is the sexual female who gives urgency and focus to the previously disconnected impulse of his youth. Prior to this crystallization, Elmer’s internal ideal does not exist as such; the Dianalike girl is still but a “vague shape somewhere back in his mind,” an undefined potential not yet anchored to any concrete referent. It is thus the sexual woman who seems to install the image of the virgin body in his mind, destroying Elmer’s innocence in the same moment that it sets the economy of desire in motion.

As their displacement into the “meantime” of the above narrative suggests, however, sex and the sexual female are not strictly speaking the origins of Elmer’s troubles. His loss of virginity to Velma occurs within a broader psychosexual history which casts the confrontation with female sexuality, and its codification of the split between the internal ideal and external reality, as part of an ongoing confrontation with an earlier, unresolved realization of sexual difference. Elmer experiences puberty not simply as the emergence of physical desire, but as an awareness of sexual *division*: amidst his dread and longing for “an odor somewhere,” he finds

himself for the first time “consciously drawing people,” and not the armless, sweeping figures of his youth, but “men and women.” When, sometime later, his encounters with women “forc[e] him to consider them as individuals,” they thus finalize an individuation that has essentially already occurred. The sense of repetition here is crucial, because what the novel suggests is that Elmer’s sexual encounters force him to acknowledge a sexual difference that he has already discovered, and already repudiated. Two schoolmates, we learn, have “taken him aside and explained, becoming joyously physiological in the face of Elmer’s abysmal innocence”:

Elmer was bitterly shocked. I wont ever get married he swore, having fled like a hurt beast. Boys and girls ran and shouted on the playground just as yesterday, just as on all yesterdays. But was it the same? Wasn’t there something beneath it that he hadn’t seen, hadn’t been told about? Boys and girls... Things that Elmer had heretofore accepted without question now had a terrible soiled significance: why there were different urinals for boys and girls, why boys herding touching each other shouted over nothing, why girls clumped giggling and sibilant [...]. The schoolhouse dull and ugly in brick, the playground ungrassed by generations: trees, light: his mother and father, his own body all become sinister, dirty... Elmer fled not even getting his books. That night he undressed in the dark. (370)

Prior to this revelation, Faulkner tells us, Elmer possesses a “lack of self-consciousness” that is “beautiful,” through which the world appears as a “continuous succession of happy astonishments” in which “all mankind including Elmer [is] admirable” (369). The “shock” that he receives on the playground explodes this blissful continuity from within, for what it exposes seems now to have always been there, lurking beneath the surface of things and just out of sight. The scene clearly anticipates Joe Christmas’s discovery of menstruation in *Light in August*, but it is significant that Faulkner represses the specific content of Elmer’s shock; we are told only that the two boys “take him aside and explain,” but explain what, exactly? The effect is that the scene becomes a discovery not of sex or menstruation, but of difference itself, the splitting of “all mankind” into “boys and girls,” and the consequent social congealing into separate “herds” and “clumps,” one raucous and bewildered, the other secretive and knowing. What is striking is how the very fact of division utterly debases Elmer’s world, infusing everything with a “terrible soiled significance,” which casts a “sinister and dirty” film upon his own body, surroundings, and even his memory. Nothing is left clean. Elmer’s response to this fallen world is an early version of what will become classic Faulknerian male repudiation: confronted with an unbearable reality, he flees, reemerging the following morning “made clean again” by the sun and the smell of spring, his “temporarily atomized oneness coalescing again” (370).

Given that the “soiled significance” initially circumscribes Elmer’s own body, it is remarkable how swiftly it is deflected onto women, and how firmly it sticks. Elmer sutures his innocence back together by deciding to be “through with women,” “even his mother,” and to “never get married” (370). His encounters with the female sex are thereafter marked by discomfort and feelings of dissolution, (his “whole being seem[s] to disintegrate” in the presence of one woman), but they are often followed by a sense of restored purity and wholeness which he attains by placing himself apart from the offending female body (437). His world is in this way

partially redeemed, split between odorous, stale, clinging spaces inhabited by women, and the cool, clean, expansive spaces of solitude. Not long after his disillusionment on the playground, Elmer finds himself in the living room of his school teacher, an “iron gray spinster” who is drawn to his “so unassumingly yet obviously masculine” body (368-9). Perspiring, his hair “hot and prickly on his head,” Elmer remembers the “clean chill darkness outside, higher than trees or mountains, higher even than stars” (372). When he finally bolts from the house, which “seem[s] to draw inward on [him] crowding the walls against him,” he “fill[s] his body with air in deep gulps,” until “spring and darkness soon was[h] [...] away” her presence, “that odor of hers, of loneliness and singleness and time” (373). The progression continues in his later encounter with the woman he meets in Venice. He “smells her,” and feels her leg against his own, “clinging with a heavy impersonal muscularity,” but as their boat floats down the channel, he finds that after a time he “doesn’t smell her any longer,” and “with freshness in his hair,” he relaxes, “feeling his body cool until he [is] no longer conscious of it, losing the glued automatic contact of her thigh...” (419). When he awakes to find her leg once more glued to his, he longs again to get away, “to take a boat alone and drift among dark places where silence and solitude could cleanse him and make him whole again” (422). Shock, then flight, then reconstitution—this becomes the rhythm of Elmer’s existence; only thus is he able to recuperate his “abysmal innocence” in the face of repeated disillusionment.

As Elmer himself seems to intuit, however, the embattled integrity which he achieves in the absence of women is only an imperfect approximation of the wholeness he seeks. Solitude is a defensive mechanism, a way of steeling himself against the repeated “shocks” of existence and achieving, if only momentarily, a fragile sense of cohesion. It is in precisely this state that we find Elmer, all grown up, in the novel’s opening pages. Aboard a ship to Venice where he plans to become a painter, he has spent a week at sea, on a ship with no women and no talk of women. Being “in the middle of the ocean” has “given him a sense of firmness, of independence, as if solitude had herded all the floating atoms of Elmer together and by quiet constant pressure welded him into a compact erectness” (345). As the ship is already approaching land, however, he is “begin[ing] to feel human again, i.e. to remember that after all he [is] still heir to the emotions of loneliness and impatience, to what circumstance and his fellow man [can] do to him” (343). It is within this state of tenuous, reconstituted, soon-to-be lost integrity that Elmer engages in the following ritual, and gives us the novel’s clearest articulation of the perfect integrity for which he truly longs:

Then he would rise, and in his cabin draw forth his new unstained box of paints. To finger lasciviously smooth dull silver tubes virgin yet at the same time pregnant, comfortably heavy to the palm—such an immaculate mating of bulk and weight that it were a shame to violate them, innocent clean brushes slender and bristled to all sizes and interesting chubby bottles of oil... Elmer hovered over them with a brooding maternity, taking up one at a time those fat portentous tubes in which was yet wombed his heart’s desire, the world itself—thick-bodied and female and at the same time phallic: hermaphroditic. He closed his eyes the better to savour its feel... (345).

At once female and male, womb and penis, virgin and pregnant, the unstained paint set possesses a purity that precedes all division, all loss, and thus all desire as he knows it, an “immaculate mating” which can only be articulated, from this side of its violation, as the paradoxical reconciliation of opposites. “Hermaphroditic,” “clean,” and “comfortable” the tubes embody precisely the “oneness” that he seems to lose on the playground, when the discovery of sexual difference splits and soils his world and his own body, a loss which he relives again and again in his encounters with women. Whereas the sense of integrity that Elmer is able to salvage by distancing himself from women requires that he embrace and preserve the split between his own pristine ideal and a soiled external reality, the paint tubes embody an unadulterated wholeness in which Elmer’s “heart’s desire” *is* “the world itself;” the two are, like male and female, “yet wombed” together, and there is thus no internal and external, no gap between want and fulfillment. The sense of integrity that Elmer achieves through “isolation” is thus but a poor substitute for a “oneness” that lies not with “independence” but absolute merger.

If the unopened tubes hold the promise of unadulterated wholeness, however, they also hold the promise of inevitable disappointment. Elmer’s suspicion that to break the seals on the tubes is to “violate” their innocence and his own desire helps us to understand not only why Elmer never gets around to painting, but also why he can never really be “through with women” and thus never stay “clean” or “whole” for good. For what Elmer intuits in this scene is precisely what Joe Christmas will learn when he is dragged from the closet with the “ruined, once-cylindrical tube” of toothpaste in his hand (121)—that being, in its most fundamental sense, is predicated upon violation, and thus that the “hurt” and “dirt” from which he flees are the very conditions of existence. As such, they originate not with Elmer’s loss of virginity, nor with his discovery of sexual difference, but in the “moment” when he becomes, like the cool bed of his innocence, “human and soiled.” As he will do for Joe and for Thomas Sutpen, Faulkner dramatizes this founding violation through a specific incident in Elmer’s life, in this case, his earliest recorded memory, of the night his family’s home burns down when he is five years old. The memory comes back to him as he fondles a tube of red paint:

Never would he forget the red horror of that night. He had always hated to be seen unclothed: his modesty was somehow affronted even in the presence of his immediate family; and then to be dragged out of sleep into a repressed fearful Sound composed of the disintegration of wood and stone which his young mind had accepted as being stable and impervious to sudden change, surmounted and ridden by a faint vain fatuity of human voices; then to be hurried ere sleep had released him into a mad crimson world where things hurt his feet and one side of him seemed to curl bitterly, smelling heat and people, strange people. (345)

The scene is an early instance of the author’s interest in imagining and probing those unknowable moments when the subject emerges into self-consciousness, plucked from oblivion and installed into a body which, pried away from its environment by duress, confronts a newly alienated world with unmediated terror and sadness. Dragged out of unconsciousness and into the chaos of his family’s burning home, Elmer finds the foundations of his world in dissolution, all familiar, stable things rendered strange and frightening. Even his mother becomes

unrecognizable to him, the “loving querulous busy creature” replaced by a “stark, un-human face” (345). Within this harsh landscape he becomes painfully aware of his body, the sharp ground beneath his feet, the scorching heat against his naked side. But when he attempts to “shield the tender young skin of his back,” he loses hold of his mother’s hip and must take refuge instead in the “comforting human cloth” of a strange woman where, wrought with feelings of inconsolable grief, abandonment and vulnerability, he “cling[s]” to her skirt and “we[eps] for himself, for man, for all the sorrows of the race” (347). Caught between the bitter recoiling of his own body against an alien, persecuting world, and the conviction that his family has “deserted him,” Elmer is essentially hurt and abandoned into consciousness.

It is this founding injury, and all its associated feelings of surprise, fear, grief, shame, dissolution, discomfort and vulnerability, that Elmer repudiates anew when he flees the “shock” of sexual division or, later, the atomizing proximity of the sexual female body, experiences which acquire their particular horror by calling him back to the bitter anguish of his own becoming. Elmer’s flight thus begins on the night of the fire, and its path is laid in the moment when he glimpses against the backdrop of chaos the figure of Jo Addie, “fiercely erect as ever, watching the fire in dark proud defiance,” the “unearthly crimson” of the flames rendering her “immortal and fleeting and unforgettable” (345). What attracts Elmer to his sister in this scene is her apparent immunity to all external influence; whereas the fire reduces Elmer and his brothers to terror and tears, Jo is utterly unmoved, “breathing fire and flourishing on it” (347). Elmer thereafter “quietly worship[s]” her defiance as a form of extreme autonomy, a “fierce integral pride” out of which she “ridicule[s] him for wanting always to cling to her because she was his sister, ridiculing him for wanting to cling to anyone” (348). The gesture which Jo scorns is characteristic of Elmer’s disposition; he “clutches” and “cl[ings]” to the bodies around him on the night of the fire (346-47), and then spends the remainder of his youth “cast[ing] about for another wall for his emotional ivy,” whether it be his sister, who he must ritualistically touch before falling asleep, an older boy at school to whom he becomes passionately attached, or the school teacher whom he follows around like a dog (370). An involuntary gesture of need, “clinging” is the trademark of the wounded subject who yearns after the wholeness he has lost, and thus in order to effectively deny his own injury Elmer must repress his urge to cling to others, and most notably, to his mother, for whom Jo Addie, and everyone who follows is but a substitution. Elmer believes at one point that the war has accomplished this severance for him by “giving him independence,” “br[eaking] him completely of wanting someone to touch, to cling to,” and enabling him to contemplate his mother “from the vantage point of absence, of detachment.” We learn in the same passage that Elmer has also, during his time away, “lost his dread of the color red,” which had remained with him from the night of the fire (363). Only by severing all primary attachments and primary associations can Elmer establish an “independence” which, like Jo Addie, seems to suffer no losses because it needs nothing outside of itself.

But it is crucial to note that what Elmer “can’t know,” as Faulkner tells us, is that Jo Addie, too, “fe[els] the ties of blood, hating them” (348). This truth underwrites Elmer’s childhood memory of watching his sister undress, and seeing her “funny undergarment,” held up



around her hips by a “twisted ropish length of bright red cloth” (351). The rope makes tangible, even umbilical, those psychic “ties” that persist beneath Jo’s fierce autonomy. It’s tempting to draw immediate connections between Jo’s drawers and Caddy’s, but the image communicates more if we recognize that the color red, which forms its salient feature, has a primary association in Elmer’s mind not with blood, but with “that scarlet loud night when their house had burned,” and the “fear and nakedness” that he associates with that memory (376, 415). To be “red,” in this novel, is thus to be laid open to the world, a state of penetrability which Elmer comes to associate with the sexual woman, and her “full red mouth never completely closed,” but which he first sees reflected in the “fierce scarlet filling [the] gaping mouths” of his terrified, howling brothers and experiences himself when, having lost hold of his mother, he turns to a strange woman for comfort and feels “his back beg[*in*] to draw the heat” (345-46). The link between psychic and physical vulnerability is further reinforced when Elmer receives a debilitating injury during the war that seems to reactivate the memory of his founding violation. Handed a live grenade, Elmer becomes entranced with its “comfortable feel—that heavy solidity that is almost sensuous to the palm, that you release with regret” (381), a sensation similar to what he later experiences when he fondles the “dull silver tubes” of his paint set, “comfortably heavy to the palm” (345). The reader will recall that these tubes stir Elmer’s longing for an innocent wholeness that precedes all division and loss, a psychic integrity the violation of which can only be reenacted by opening the paints and initiating the artistic project. This same resistance to separation seems to underlie his reluctance to release the grenade, which of course does nothing to stop the inevitable. When the subsequent explosion lacerates his back and exposes the “thin scarcely hidden fiery nerves along his spine” it is his own founding injury—that “red horror” of his own becoming—that seems to be reopened (384). It is this wound which Elmer “cannot know” in relation to his sister, because the recognition that Jo Addie, too, “clings” to the world carries with it the knowledge that the autonomy he actively pursues is no more attainable than the undivided wholeness for which he passively longs.

It is both as a symbol of the perfect detachment he will never achieve, and a denial of the undivided oneness he has already lost, that the virgin female body emerges in Elmer’s mind, and in Faulkner’s fiction more generally, forming a deeply problematic object of desire. We have already seen that the debased, sexual female body inspires horror insofar as it confronts the male subject with the injury he cannot bear to own. To an equal degree, Elmer’s virgin ideal—that “Dianalike girl with an impregnable integrity, a slimness virginal and impervious to time and circumstance”—demands to be understood as an image of Elmer’s *own* integrity, which he desires in opposition to the sexual woman and thus, though he cannot know it, against the truth of his own injury. Just as the sexual female body must simultaneously exhibit Elmer’s hurt while concealing the truth that it is his own, the virgin ideal must reflect Elmer’s integrity while repressing the truth that it is already beyond recovery. Thus, when Elmer recoils from the sexual woman, the denial which has quarantined his founding injury in her soiled, damaged flesh reaches *back* into his mind where it sets up an image not of the “pregnant” wholeness which he cannot afford to want, but of an “impregnable integrity” which admits no harm. “Dark-haired and small and proud, casting him bones fiercely as though he were a dog, coppers as if he were a

beggar, looking the other way,” the Dianalike girl is clearly modeled on Jo Addie, but when Elmer’s encounter with the sexual woman installs Jo’s lost body at the center of his consciousness, it becomes newly cathected with an idea of *sexual* inviolability. The fierce integrity that Elmer has worshipped in his sister thus emerges, in the Dianlike girl, as an exalted virginity in which sexual intactness signifies immunity to all earthly forces.

The novel’s most abiding insight is that the external, physical world provides both the model and the impetus for the materialization of Elmer’s internal ideal, and thus however disembodied the Dianalike girl may appear in contrast to the sexual woman who catalyzes her emergence, she is still fundamentally an extension of the flesh and blood reality which she functions to deny. The virgin ideal in this way emerges in Elmer’s mind, and in Faulkner’s fiction more generally, as a symbol of purity that is, itself, paradoxically impure. “Purity,” as we’ve already seen, is associated in the novel with disconnected form, lines “at perfect liberty to assume any significance they ch[oo]se,” “blank shapes” unattached to any human use or consequence. To be “pure,” the novel suggests, is to be “vague,” like the sweeping, armless, undifferentiated “people” that Elmer draws in his youth. When the Dianalike girl replaces the “vague shape in the back of [Elmer’s] mind,” she thus corrupts his last refuge of purity, for, as Faulkner made more explicit when he revised the novel into a short story, her image is “unvague, concrete and alive;” it is still, after all, a girl (Uncollected 620). As such, it must inevitably disappoint, and not in the glorified sense of “dissatisfaction,” which the novel suggests is actually vital to the sustainability of the creative urge. As David Minter points out, Elmer can only remain an artist insofar as he is never satisfied with either “the real woman” or “art,” both of which must remain “substitutes for, signs of, the impossible and forbidden shape in his mind” (58). If Elmer fails as an artist, he argues, it is because he is in the end “easily, even conventionally satisfied,” taking Myrtle as “the real thing” and abandoning his impossible desire. What the novel also suggests, however, is that while Myrtle seals the doom of Elmer’s art, the die has been cast long before, because Elmer accepts Myrtle as an approximation not of the “vague shape” itself, but of the Dianalike girl who has already replaced it, and thus of another woman. If, as Minter, suggests, the “real woman” must remain a “secondary substitute of the vision for which his art is the primary substitute,” Elmer’s consciousness inverts the necessary order by placing his sister’s body at the very heart of his vision, making it the standard against which everything else—both art and other women—must remain approximations.

## II

### “Where do they carry so much blood?” Mosquitoes (1927)

The ramifications of the artist’s substitution of the virgin body for the impossible shape in his mind are of central concern to Faulkner’s next novel, Mosquitoes, where he invents not just one artist but a whole community, throwing them together on a yacht for a four-day excursion full of “Talk, talk, talk: the utter and heartbreaking stupidity of words” (186). Not all the talk that takes place on board the *Naussika* is stupid, but the novel’s heady atmosphere, in which “ideas, thoughts, became mere sounds to be bandied about until they were dead,” has led to its reputation as an unfortunate, if necessary, misstep in the career of a writer on the verge of discovering an environment more native to his genius (186). Michael Millgate describes Mosquitoes, Faulkner’s second published novel, as “something of a sport, a deliberate exercise in a particular contemporary mode,” observing that “the major line of development seems to run directly from Soldiers’ Pay to Sartoris” (76). André Bleikasten similarly finds something wayward about the novel, deeming it a “necessary detour through alien territory—the last detour before [Faulkner] began to touch true ground” (Splendid 33). For Martin Kreiswirth, Mosquitoes falls more squarely in line with the larger trajectory of Faulkner’s career, insofar as it produces “early versions of some of Faulkner’s most sophisticated formal experiments,” but its ultimate contribution is to give the author an “opportunity to experiment with—and finally get out of his creative system—a whole range of contemporary styles and influences” (98).

Kreiswirth’s description of Mosquitoes as a creative purge bears some resemblance to the author’s own characterization of the novel as the dross thrown off in the making of an artist. Asked if he agreed with Malcolm Cowley’s estimation of Mosquitoes as a “very bad early novel,” Faulkner said that he did, but qualified his response by saying, “I’m not ashamed of [the book] because that was the chips, the badly sawn planks that the carpenter produces while he’s learning to be a first-rate carpenter” (Blotner and Gwynn, University 257). The metaphor seems to be in dialogue with the novel’s opening scene, where the sculptor, Gordon, first appears to us amidst the “thin fretful flashing of the chisel beneath the rhythmic maul,” under which the “wood scented gratefully slid[es] from its mute flashing” (9). The question of what great art discards in the process of its own creation will prove central to Mosquitoes, and thus, in considering the relationship between this “bad early novel” and the great ones to follow, we should keep in mind the possibility that the carpenter’s “chips” are more than the excess that must be removed in order for the career to assume its true shape. For while Mosquitoes takes a conscious detour into the novel of ideas, it is a detour that is continuous with Elmer in crucial ways, and thus part of a trajectory which leads, much like Marlow’s journey in Heart of Darkness, to which Mosquitoes pays obvious tribute, simultaneously away and within, couching the intimate and familiar within the distant and the alien. While a kind of lark at the level of style, and, like Elmer, deeply ironic in tone, Mosquitoes is also a haunted novel, which cannot quite convince itself that it’s not serious; and though Mrs. Maurier’s yacht never goes as deep into the interior as Marlow’s, it

does uncover a sufficiently dark region of the author's own imagination that will alter the landscape of his fictional world for good. Insofar as its contribution to the career thus lies not in what it draws off from the author's creative system, but what it draws up, it should be seen less as a detour from, than a deepening of, his developing vision, and an extension of the story that Faulkner had already been engaged in telling through the "psychosexual history" of Elmer.

Indeed, one need not search hard to find the tracks leading from one novel to the other. While important differences will quickly emerge between Gordon and Elmer Hodge, it becomes clear within the first few pages that the sculptor has inherited some of his predecessor's preoccupations, most notably, his passionate attachment to the virgin female body. It is under Gordon's capable hand that Elmer's Dianalike girl finally finds physical expression:

As you entered the room the thing drew your eyes: you turned sharply as to a sound, expecting movement. But it was marble, it could not move. And when you tore your eyes away and turned your back on it at last, you got again untarnished and high and clean that sense of swiftness, of space encompassed; but on looking again it was as before: motionless and passionately eternal—the virginal breastless torso of a girl, headless, armless, legless, in marble temporarily caught and hushed yet passionate still for escape, passionate and simple and eternal in the equivocal derisive darkness of the world. Nothing to trouble your youth or lack of it: rather something to trouble the very fibrous integrity of your being. [...]. (11)

Like Elmer's internal ideal, the marble torso is an apotheosized virginity, a girl's body that has been divorced from the "equivocal derisive darkness of the world" to emerge "untarnished and high and clean" in its immunity to the forces of time. Whereas "Elmer" is primarily concerned with the involuntary processes that install the virgin female body at the center of male consciousness, Mosquitoes is more interested in how the male subject actively preserves this ideal through his art. Gordon, we learn, only maintains the purity of his vision through calculated disavowal, locking himself away within his studio, and within the "marble tower of his loneliness and pride," a tactic that seems to work well enough until Patricia Robyn shows up, uninvited, at his door (153). Immediately drawn to his sculpture, Patricia observes, "It's like me," and when she demands an explanation for the "high unemphasis of the marble's breast," Gordon responds, "You haven't much there yourself" (24). The similarity proves profoundly troubling to the sculptor, because whereas Elmer posits the distance between desire and reality as the motivation behind mature artistic production, in Mosquitoes the inverse turns out to be true: for Gordon, art is less the product of the gap between a pristine ideal and a soiled world, than the means by which that separation is "cunningly" and necessarily maintained. Patricia thus throws Gordon's world into crisis by confronting him with something that Elmer, who loses Jo Addie once and forever, never really does: the flesh and blood corollary to his ideal.

Once the artist has taken the virgin body as the object of his desire, and thus given his idea of purity over to concrete form, his task is no longer to "reconcile what is with what might be"—to make the world "conform to that vague shape somewhere back in his mind"—but rather to prevent the definite shape in his mind from being absorbed back into the reality whence it has sprung. The novel thus everywhere underscores the necessary labor of repudiation that

underwrites Gordon's art. Distracted by Patricia, Gordon berates himself, "fool fool you have work to do o cursed of god cursed and forgotten form shapes cunningly sweated cunning to simplicity shapes out of chaos more satisfactory than bread to the belly form by a madmans dream gat on the body of chaos le garcon vierge of the soul horned by utility o cuckold of derision" (47). Beneath its garble, this stream is underwritten with the familiar idea of an artistic purity associated with disconnected, simple form, a purity that Gordon can only now achieve through concentrated effort. The product of "cunning" and "sweat," his "shapes" do not proceed from unconscious impulse but labor and design. The "passionate and simple and eternal" figure of his desire is, the novel reveals, essentially an amputated body—not only armless, like the sweeping, undifferentiated "people" that Elmer draws without urgency or effort in his youth, but legless and headless, as well, a body which is only "pure" insofar as it has been severely and purposefully reduced. Even thus deprived of its appendages, however, the torso cannot be fully absolved of its ties to humanity, what Talliaferro calls, its "objective significance." Against his friend's interpretation of the sculpture as "pure form untrammelled by any relation to a familiar or utilitarian object," Gordon insists with heavy irony that it is in fact his own "feminine ideal: a virgin with no legs to leave me, no arms to hold me, no head to talk to me," not an organically pure shape, but a cut down version of a real body (26).

More than the sculpture itself, the physical landscape that surrounds it evidences the futility of Gordon's attempt to flee an offending humanity. While the marble emerges "untarnished, high and clean," the narrative obsessively registers everything around it as dirty and inextricably linked to the body, as though the virgin torso has thrown off its impurities in the process of its own creation. In the opening scene, Talliaferro attempts to engage a self-absorbed Gordon in conversation amidst a "bluebeard's closet of blonde hair in severed clots," noting with dismay, a "powdering of dust upon his neat small patent leather shoes" (9). The severed clots of hair, like the dust, are in fact shavings from Gordon's sculpture, which cling to every surface in his studio, leaving the punctilious Talliaferro to lament that "whenever he [comes] here he invariably soil[s] his clothes" (10). Even the flesh that has been chipped away from the sculpture seems to manifest itself in Gordon's own body, which appears, at least from the perspective of his slim friend, exceedingly muscular from wielding the chisel and maul. It is within the context of this stubborn persistence of the body in spite of the male artist's attempt to sever, via his art, his own ties to the physical world, that we can understand the presence of the maternal body in a novel which exhibits a notable lack of actual mothers. As becomes evident when Gordon sends Talliaferro on an errand to replenish his "unwashed milk bottle," Mosquitoes, like "Elmer," links the male subject's repudiation of the physical world to his desire for an absolute autonomy that denies all primary dependencies. That it is the milk, and not the bottle, which stirs Talliaferro's "acute repugnance" becomes clear as he sets out on his comic quest, "nurs[ing] his bottle" which feels "unbearably dirty" in his hand, through a city that confronts him at every turn with images of pregnancy and lactation. The bottle "bulge[s] distressingly" from its hiding place beneath his coat, a distress which mirrors itself in his encounters with "women nursing babies into slumber, " a man "nursing the Italian balloon of his belly on his lap" and, finally, to his horror, the patroness Mrs. Maurier, who, upon discovering his parcel, shrieks, "her breast heav-

[ing] with repression, glinting her pins and beads” (13-18). The linking of dirt to milk, and milk to breast reminds us that Gordon’s list of necessary amputations to the feminine ideal—“no legs to leave me, no arms to hold me, no head to talk to me”—should also include “no breast to feed me.” As his passion for “shapes out of chaos more satisfactory than bread to the belly” suggests, he understands artistic creation as a form of self-sustenance, a means of cultivating purity through an absolute detachment which clings to nothing outside of itself. What the novel’s landscape everywhere suggests, however, is that the world clings to the subject, and thus the amputation of the self away from the world is never complete.

Far from immune to this sobering truth, the virgin female body emerges in *Mosquitoes* as its most powerful reminder. As earlier suggested with respect to “Elmer,” the irreconcilable split between the sexual female and the pristine virgin guarantees the sustainability of the male artistic drive while providing the last refuge for his embattled integrity. It is precisely the reconciliation of a soiled reality and a pristine ideal which art functions to prevent, and which Patricia Robyn threatens to enact—or rather, to suffer. For what the novel suggests is that for all the awful power that the male subject invests in the female body, whether in the form of a corrosive sexuality or an inviolable virginity, women are human, and thus victims to the same exigencies of existence as men. Patricia threatens the necessary dichotomization of the pristine virgin and the dirty whore by proving susceptible to the soiling and injurious forces which the sexual female absorbs, and which the virgin ideal functions to deny, a vulnerability which Faulkner ruthlessly probes in her failed escapade to Mandeville with the yacht’s steward, David. Having slipped away from the yacht to shore, the two young people find themselves stranded in a swamp, which, like the streets through which Talliaferro flees with his dirty milk bottle, calls them back to their human origins. Surrounded by a mist that “might have been the very substance in which the seed of the beginning of things fecundated,” and by trees that “might have been the first of living things, too recently born to know either fear or astonishment, dragging their sluggish umbilical cords from out the old miasmatic womb of nothingness latent and dreadful,” Patricia loses her boldness and becomes again like a child, “crowd[ing] against [David], suddenly quiet and subdued [...]” (169). Their adventure quickly takes a turn for the worse as they lose their way in a debased landscape with “scars” for roads, “foul sluggish” water, and, worst of all, multitudes of mosquitoes (174). Throughout the novel, these insects pester the characters, reminding them of their own thin, incessant talk, but also of their own embodiment. Relentlessly besieged in the swamp, Patricia is reduced to the fiery agony of her body:

She rocked back and forth, then wrung her body in an ecstasy. “They hurt me, they hurt me,” she wailed, crouching again in that impossible spasm of agony. [...] “Look,” she said wildly, “on my legs—look, look,” staring with a sort of fascination at a score of great gray specks hovering about her blood-flecked stockings, making no effort to brush them away. She raised her wild face again. “Do you see them? They are everywhere on me—, my back, my back, where I can’t reach.” She lay suddenly flat, writhing her back in the dust, clutching his hand. Then she sat up again and against his knees she turned wringing her body from the hips, trying to draw her bloody legs beneath her brief skirt. He held her while she writhed in his grasp, staring her wild bloodless face

up at him. "I must get in water," she panted. "I must get in water. Mud, anything. I'm dying, I tell you." (179)

The image of Patricia writhing in the dirt presents a stark contrast to her marble counterpart, which exists in the moment of her suffering locked up in Gordon's studio, "untarnished and high and clean" amidst the "equivocal derisive darkness of the world." It's precisely this "derisive darkness," the world itself, which seems to puncture Patricia's exposed flesh, driving her into the dust in search of relief. Her lament, "my back, my back, where I can't reach," recalls Elmer, who feels "his back [...] draw the heat" on the night his family's home burns down, a hurt he relives again when the grenade exposes the "thin scarcely hidden fiery nerves along his spine." When the "vicious darting of invisible fire" drives Patricia to earth, it is thus that burning wound in the male psyche that would seem to be once again reopened (188).

But this is not quite all, for Patricia is soiled not only from without but also from within. Indeed, the mosquitoes' appeal seems to reside, for Faulkner, in their near invisibility, and thus the illusion that they create of a self-soiling flesh, which spontaneously gives itself up to the external world. When David follows Patricia into the jungle, he sees "two splotches of dead blood on her stockings," and then, "[a]bruptly there [are] three of them" (177). In contrast to her ravished legs, Patricia's face becomes "bloodless," "wrung" and "pale," as though her body is draining itself out, producing a delirium which she identifies as "hydrophobia, or something," but which is rather its opposite—a desperate yearning for "water. Mud, anything," to relieve her agony and replenish her leached body. Within this delirium, which seems to affect not only Patricia's mind, but also the entire landscape of the novel, the substances of water, mud and blood become interchangeable, such that when David finds her "kneeling beside the foul ditch," preparing to drink of the poisonous swamp, it is the threat of reconciliation, not contamination, which comes to a crisis (187). For rather than simply puncturing her flesh, the mosquitoes seem to draw her interiority outward, making it impossible to distinguish where her body ends and the world begins, an ambiguity she further compounds by wallowing in the swamp, draping David's shirt, which he has "dipped [...] into the foul warm ditch," over her shoulders and putting her feet and blood flecked legs into its "hot ooze," "mud and slime" (179). Mingling Patricia's blood with the fetid water of the swamp, the mosquitoes thus bring the feminine ideal back to earth by putting the soiled world back into the virgin female body.

Patricia's muddied and bloodied flesh is clearly a precursor to Caddy's soiled drawers in The Sound and the Fury, but unlike Caddy's stain, the dark splotches that appear on Patricia's flesh draw their symbolic power from an idea of internal corruption in the novel which is not, or not yet, fully articulated to a specifically *female* filth; it will take Mr. Compson's description of the menstruating body to codify that association. Indeed, Mosquitoes insists upon precisely the unspeakable truth that menstruation will later seem to foreclose: that "all that inside" the female body has as much to do with men as with women. While Patricia's "dead blood" binds her, on the one hand, to the soiled, death-bound world of Mosquitoes, it also links her unexpectedly to two ostensibly disparate characters in the novel: her aunt and namesake, Mrs. Maurier, but also the sculptor, Gordon. The complex network of association that connects these three characters to one another becomes clearest when the sculptor, seeking insight into the niece, pulls the aunt

aside and runs his hand over the contours of her face, demanding “why aren’t you her mother so you could tell me how conceiving her must have been, how carrying her in your loins must have been?” (154). The encounter inspires the following work of art:

It was clay, yet damp, and from out its dull, dead grayness Mrs. Maurier looked at them. Her chins, harshly, and her flaccid jaw muscles with savage verisimilitude. Her eyes were caverns thumbed with two motions into the dead familiar astonishment of her face; and yet, behind them, somewhere within those empty sockets, behind all her familiar surprise, there was something else—something that exposed her face for the mask it was, and still more, a mask unaware. (322)

It is significant that Gordon chooses Mrs. Maurier as the model for his sculpture, because while on board the yacht, he finds occasion to study the younger Patricia’s face, as well, “learning [it]” in the same way, by tracing its shape with his hand (272). For André Bleikasten, the choice of the elder Patricia marks a departure in Gordon’s art, for in depicting “a silly old woman” instead of a “beautiful young girl,” the artist moves from “a private dream of sexless beauty and timeless youth” to “the humble and poignant truth of a human face; the former sprang from the romantic impulse to dissociate art from life, the latter from the wish to relate it back to life” (30). While the shift from girl to woman and marble to clay does, as Bleikasten suggests, bring Gordon’s art back to earth, the subject of that art remains essentially unchanged, as becomes clear when the men are inspired by the sculpture to “explain” Mrs. Maurier by going over the story of her youth and marriage. In response to Julius’s suggestion that there is more to the patroness than “just silliness, lack of occupation,” “something thwarted back of it all, something stifled, yet which won’t quite die,” Fairchild offers the following interpretation:

A virgin [...] That’s what it is exactly. Fooling with sex, kind of dabbing at it, like a kitten at a ball of string. She missed something: her body told her so, insisted, forced her to try to remedy it and fill the vacuum. But now her body is old; it no longer remembers that it missed anything, and all she has left is a habit, the ghost of a need to rectify something the lack of which her body has long since forgotten about. (326)

Within this account, the “silly old woman” is the “beautiful young girl” all grown up—and still a virgin. The new piece of art can thus be seen to supply the marble torso with its missing head, and give the feminine ideal back its human face, an act of restoration in which the virgin ideal, that “private dream of sexless beauty and timeless youth,” is not so much abandoned as exposed for what it is: a “mask unaware” and, moreover, a mask of death.

Given what “Elmer” has already suggested about the virgin ideal’s function for the male artist as an image of his own integrity, it is not surprising that the skull lurking within Mrs. Maurier’s mask turns out to be a mirror of Gordon’s own face. In particular, the “caverns” that he thumbs into the clay, those “empty sockets” where the eyes should be, are most recognizable as belonging neither to Mrs. Maurier nor Patricia, but to the sculptor himself, he who “look[s] down upon [Patricia] with his cavernous uncomfortable eyes,” and stares out at his male companions “from beneath his caverned bronze brows” (269, 329). Mrs. Maurier attributes the hollowness of his features to the fact that he “doesn’t get enough to eat,” which is not far from the mark, because his disdain for people like her who, as Fairchild puts it, “own food and



automobiles,” is intimately linked to his desire to take himself out of the impure, material world, to sustain himself on “shapes out of chaos more satisfactory than bread to the belly” (47). Ironically, this cultivated detachment further binds him, at the level of character, to the woman he despises, for we learn that just as Gordon tries to isolate himself within his studio, the “city of his arrogance,” and the “marble tower of his loneliness and pride,” Mrs. Maurier seeks refuge in her yacht, that “island of security,” which, “walled and secure,” takes her “beyond the rumors of the world and its sorrows” (163). If death haunts the faces of both the artist and patroness alike, it is in part because their retreat from the world, each in their own way, is, itself, a form of death; deprived of its metaphysical qualities, virginity is simply abstinence, and the repudiation of sexual desire is only another attempt to amputate outward connections and dependencies, or, as Mrs. Maurier puts it, “to go through life, keeping [one]self from becoming involved in it” (153). Patricia suggests as much when she tells Gordon, “you ought to get out of yourself. You’ll either bust all of a sudden some day, or just dry up” (270).

Of the two options, “busting” is more likely, for while Fairchild underscores Mrs. Maurier’s lack, the “vacuum” created by having “missed” out on sex, what little insight we gain into her interiority reveals not an absence, but a presence, a “thing” of which the novel gives us an inward view when, having finally engaged herself to an unsuspecting Mr. Talliaferro, the patroness feels “within her a terrible thing [...] swelling, a thing terrible and poisonous and released, like water that has been dammed too long,” as if “there [is] waking within her comfortable, long familiar body a thing that abode there dormant and which she [has] harbored unaware” (291). Rather than drying up, the “thing” behind Mrs. Maurier’s mask seems rather to have festered during its latency:

She sat on the edge of her bed, feeling her strange chill limbs, while that swelling thing within her unfolded like an intricate poisonous flower, an intricate slow convulvulae of petals that grew and faded, died and were replaced by other petals huger and more implacable. Her limbs were strange and cold: they were trembling. That dark flower of laughter, that secret hideous flower grew and grew until that entire world which was herself was become a slow implacable swirling of hysteria that rose in her throat and shook it as though with a myriad small hands [...]

 (292).

The rising up of this toxic presence in Mrs. Maurier, “like water that has been damned too long,” only seems to confirm what Patricia’s bloodying and muddying in the rank and treacherous swamp has already suggested: that the virgin female body conceals within itself the world that it effects to escape, harboring it unaware. Virginity thus resembles a mask of death in two ways, firstly, as previously suggested, because its implicit disavowal of life is, itself, a form of death, but more importantly because the world it repudiates—dark, dirty, and deathbound—continues to haunt it from within in the shape of its own unrecognizable desire.

As evident in the strong resemblance between Mrs. Maurier’s pent-up “thing” and what Joe Christmas discovers beneath Joanna Burden’s “clean austere garments” in Light in August—“that rotten richness ready to flow into putrefaction at a touch like something growing in a swamp” (262)—the alien presence that rises up within the virgin body of Mosquitoes will become increasingly associated in Faulkner’s subsequent novels not only with menstruation, but

also with another ostensibly “female problem” to which menstruation will remain intimately bound: nymphomania. What the earlier novel enables us to see, however, through its probing of the virgin mask to what lies “back of it all,” is how these twin afflictions emerge in Faulkner’s imagination as expressions not of an inherently corrupt female sexuality, but of a sexual alienation that seems even more constitutive to men than to women. Gordon, we learn, also has intimate knowledge of this “dark flower of laughter.” In the moment before he turns to his double to trace her face with his hand, he imagines Patricia “coming into the dark sky of his life like a star, like a flame” and feels that “[s]omewhere within him was a far dreadful laughter, unheard,” as if “his whole life was become toothed with jeering laughter” (153). That this hysteria is linked for him, as for the patroness, to his own, repressed sexuality becomes clearer in a separate episode in which, tortured by thoughts of Patricia’s body under her clothes—“the two little silken snails somewhere under her dress horned pinkly” and the “thin odorless moisture of her thighs”<sup>6</sup>—he “laugh[s] a huge laugh in the loneliness,” whereupon “from the other shore a mirthless echo mock[s] him” (48). As the scene implies, it is the world itself, in all its “derisive darkness,” that seems to jeer *at* Gordon *through* his own, alien desire, an impression which traces back to the memorable episode from “Elmer,” in which the schoolteacher, another old virgin, corners the protagonist in her home and then “grin[s] painfully at him, like an idiot” until he meets her eyes and “grin[s] too, and they fac[e] each other cropping the room with teeth” (373). Just as the distant shore gives Gordon’s desire back to him as a “mirthless echo,” so does Elmer find himself caught up in an exchange of painful “grins,” a mirroring which leaves the room “cropped” with teeth much as Gordon’s hysteria, operating within an aural rather than visual register, renders his life “toothed” with laughter.

It is only within the context of these episodes of extreme sexual alienation, in which the self experiences its own desire as a dreadful, jeering presence that possesses it from within or, conversely, mocks it from without that we can begin to interpret the meaning of Caddy’s cryptic insistence to Quentin, “[*t*]here was something terrible in me sometimes at night I could see it grinning at me” (112) or understand what motivates that incongruous “grin” that Temple Drake presents to the man who has violated her in *Sanctuary*, even as the “flesh beneath the envelope of her loins cring[es] rearward” in dread of his approach (159). For while the dissociation of desire embodied in this dreadful expression will pass under the name of nymphomania, what the earlier texts suggest is that the internal division that underwrites it—the experience of the body’s urges as “something terrible in me”—is continuous with that profoundly ambivalent gesture whereby the subject “turn[s] his back” upon the injurious world even as he “clings” to it. What “Elmer” and *Mosquitoes* jointly insist is that no matter how the subject may try to shore up his integrity by disavowing all external dependencies and attachments, he is destined to be *of* the world from which he has been irrevocably sundered, and to carry that wound in the form of a fundamental self-alienation or internal division. Like Elmer’s emergent sexuality, which affects him as a

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<sup>6</sup> Citing Ilse Duso Lind’s observation that this is a “biologically precise reference to the functioning of the glands of Bartholin,” Joseph Blotner argues that Faulkner “was moving more and more towards the depiction of women in the flesh, no matter what non-corporeal attributes they might have” (*Faulkner: A Biography* 201).

“dark soft trouble that seemed to associate itself with an odor somewhere that he dreaded yet longed for” (378), the sexual desire of Mosquitoes disrupts the subject’s illusion of containment and autonomy by exposing at its core the presence of that “thing” which is simultaneously of and apart from the self, what we might identify at this point in Faulkner’s career simply as the “world-in-me.” As made explicit when Elmer’s drunken imagination transforms his companion’s laughing mouth into the nightmarish image of a “grinning skull,” and as tacitly implied in the “dead blood” that stains Patricia’s virgin flesh and in the dark laughter that yawns open, like a laughing skull within the bodies of Mrs. Maurier and Gordon, this presence of the world in the self is registered as the specter of death. Thus shadowed, the subject of Faulkner’s early novels comes to us paradoxically doomed to live, destined to cling with the body to the world that it repudiates with the mind.

### III “Her blood or my blood” The Sound and the Fury (1929)

At the beginning of this chapter, I suggested that the question The Sound and the Fury raises but does not fully answer is why Quentin’s sense of his own integrity is so thoroughly bound up with the idea of his sister’s virginity, and thus why the negation of that virginity—the realization that it “doesn’t matter”—undoes him at his very foundations. As Eric Sundquist suggests, Quentin’s obsessions seem “determined by forces” that lie beyond the novel’s frame, forces which he argues “only the historical depth of Absalom, Absalom! can reveal” (20). Without contesting the claim that the later novel will ultimately provide the fullest and most compelling explanation for Quentin’s suicide, I want to suggest that he chooses death in The Sound and the Fury under a different set of pressures than those that will shape his character in Absalom, Absalom!. One of the more interesting questions of Faulkner’s career is how Quentin’s doom develops from one text to the other, the distance between the two registering in miniature the broader, seismic shifts in the author’s conceptualization of the forces and conditions that move his fictional subjects. As I will argue in the next chapter, social forces do contribute to Quentin’s experience of psychic dissolution, but they are not the central cause of that undoing; his “doom” will not become fully articulated to the “doom of the south” until Faulkner revisits him by way of history in Absalom, Absalom!. In order to read between these two Quentins, it is vital to appreciate the degree to which his dilemma in The Sound and the Fury remains bound up in the story that Faulkner had been engaged in telling through “Elmer” and Mosquitoes, where, as demonstrated in the previous pages, the origins of the virgin ideal are systematically mapped and deconstructed. If we want to understand why, as Richard Godden demands of Quentin, “a sister’s hymen [should] matter quite so much” we should begin by consulting “Elmer” and Mosquitoes, where that question is more explicitly addressed (21).

What becomes clear once we resituate The Sound and the Fury within the context of “Elmer” and Mosquitoes is the degree to which Quentin is a transitional figure whose suicide brings the psychosexual drama of the earlier novels to its logical culmination, even as this drama constitutes the necessary pre-text for understanding his psychological investments and preoccupations. In one important sense, The Sound and the Fury begins where Mosquitoes leaves off: the striking image of the virgin, Patricia, going down into the swamp returns in the generative image of Caddy rising up from the branch “all wet and muddy behind” (19). The significance of this repetition, in my reading, differs slightly from what Martin Kreiswirth has identified as the way The Sound and the Fury effects the “transmutation” of earlier themes and techniques, while also “cannibalizing” (2), or, in Gail Morrison’s starkly opposite metaphor,

“bring[ing] to life,” specific images and scenes from the previous texts (42).<sup>7</sup> Whereas these critics underscore how the novel redeploys material and narrative strategies from earlier work, I am suggesting that The Sound and the Fury draws upon Elmer and Mosquitoes in a more fundamental, psychologically “deep” sense by reopening, via Caddy’s fall into the branch, the central trauma of the earlier texts. This is not to say that the novel is purely regressive from a thematic standpoint, that it simply “sinks back” into past preoccupations, for though Caddy’s soiling repeats Patricia’s demise, it does so with one crucial difference: Quentin, unlike Gordon, is made to see it. In the earlier novel, the only witness to Patricia’s soiling is the yacht steward, David, who Fairchild discovers on the evening of the couple’s return from the swamp sitting silently on the deck and, in a posture which anticipates Benjy Compson, cradling Patricia’s slipper, “cracked and stained with dried mud,” in his hands (235). While visibly affected, David is the most inarticulate character in the novel, and the impact of his experience with Patricia thus remains largely unexplored; when he vanishes from the vessel the following day, he removes it from the novel’s frame entirely.

It is this impact that returns with visceral force in Quentin’s chapter, where, as I will attempt to demonstrate here, we find out what happens when the virgin ideal—that image “in” the male psyche—begins to bleed. The great difficulty of Quentin’s character, and the gambit of my reading, is that the novel everywhere depends upon the psychosexual drama that unfolds in Elmer and Mosquitoes to give Quentin’s psychological meltdown a more than personal significance, and yet it does very little to explicitly reconstruct that drama within the text, reducing it, in essence, to a single pair of over-determined underpants, which are both nowhere and everywhere in Quentin’s chapter. As earlier noted, Quentin resists seeing his sister’s soiled body, and yet, just as the act of averting his face only gives away his grief, leading Caddy to demand, “What are you crying for[?],” so does his entire chapter, in turning away from the trauma of that image, expose his utter subordination to its psychic content (73). Thus, while Quentin, like Elmer, flees the “soiled significance” of Caddy’s muddy drawers, unlike his predecessor, who displaces his “dirt” and “hurt” in order to emerge the next morning “made clean,” his “temporarily atomized oneness coalescing,” Quentin seems incapable of making himself clean and whole ever again (370). As earlier noted, the mud he refuses to see on his sister’s body resurfaces within the very tissue of his own psyche, soiling both his memories and his present experience. More importantly, the “hurt” that Elmer disavows by resolving to be “through with women” becomes, for Quentin, the inescapable condition of his own existence, what Francois Pitavy beautifully describes as the “tear” by which “Quentin lets out his being and his life.” Whereas for Pitavy the “tear” in Quentin’s psyche is “the distance between the reality of a world he denies and must nevertheless inhabit, and the ideal which is his reason for living” (85), I want to insist here that it is rather the collapsing of this distance, the breaching of

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<sup>7</sup> Morrison identifies several precursors to Caddy in Faulkner’s early works, including Jo Addie (Elmer), Juliet Bunden (“Adolescence”), Marietta (Marionettes), and Dulcie (“The Wishing Tree”). Patricia Robyn does not appear in her genealogy.

the real *from within* the ideal, the world from within the self, that Quentin sees in his sister's soiled backside, and relives with unbearable immediacy on the day of his suicide.

The essential structure of Quentin's dilemma is neatly expressed in the early episode when, having awoken to find that he is "in time" again, he proceeds to dismantle his grandfather's watch:

I went to the dresser and took up the watch, with the face still down. I tapped the crystal on the corner of the dresser and caught the fragments of glass in my hand and put them into the ashtray and twisted the hands off and put them in the tray. The watch ticked on. I turned the face up, the blank dial with little wheels clicking and clicking behind it, not knowing any better. [...] There was a red smear on the dial. When I saw it my thumb began to smart. I put the watch down and went into Shreve's room and got the iodine and painted the cut. I cleaned the rest of the glass out of the rim with a towel. (80)

In attempting to remove himself from time by shattering the watch's "face" and twisting off its offending "hands," Quentin reenacts Gordon's ritual of dismemberment, in which the sculptor had similarly tried to extract himself from the time and death-bound world by relieving his virgin ideal of its head and limbs. Like Gordon, however, Quentin is thwarted by interiors, for the truth driven home in the "little wheels" that continue "clicking and clicking" beneath the blank dial is that Quentin is not, as the opening line of the chapter suggests, "in time" so much as that time is *in* him, its "law," as André Bleikasten suggests, "inscribed in the organic depths of the flesh, in its rhythms and routines" (*Ink* 93). This truth seems to occupy Quentin's thoughts on the day of his suicide. Walking through town, he recalls how when he and Versh would go hunting, they "wouldn't take any lunch, and at twelve o'clock [he]'d get hungry," and, later, riding the trolley around lunch hour, he muses to himself, "You can feel noon. I wonder if even miners in the bowels of the earth [...]" (104). The metaphor is acute: if time penetrates the farthest recesses of the earth, it is because it inhabits the deepest recesses of the body. Thus, Quentin remembers how, as a child, he would count down the final seconds of the school day until the bell sounded, whereupon his "insides would move, sitting still. *Moving sitting still. My bowels moved for thee*" (88). For one who has "been longer than history getting into the mechanical progression of [time]," losing time would seem to entail getting out of the body, or at least losing consciousness of it (83).

In Quentin's experience of "*moving sitting still*," of outward stasis and inward flux, is inscribed what I have earlier identified in *Elmer* and *Mosquitoes* as the condition of the "world-in-me," the subject's subordination to physical urges, which, like that dark laughter that rises up within the bodies of Gordon and Mrs. Maurier, are at once "in" the body and deeply alien to it. The urges to eat and defecate—significantly, acts which involve taking in the world and putting it out—are in this way linked, structurally, to sexual longing as forces which bring Faulkner's characters back to the irrepressible and inextricable fact of their own embodied subjectivity, their fundamental implication in a world which "moves" them, like the inexorable clicking of the watch's gears, from within. We might note, in this regard, that in "A Portrait of Elmer," the long story that Faulkner drafted in the early to mid-1930s out of the abandoned "Elmer" material, the protagonist finds himself in the ludicrous position of suffering an emergency of the bowels at the

same moment he learns that Myrtle, the young woman he has long pursued and often confused with the Dianalike girl in his mind, awaits him in his quarters. Fearful of missing his one opportunity to gain Myrtle's hand in marriage, he races toward the toilet, thinking "with desperate despair that he is to lose Myrtle twice because of his body: once because of his back which would not let him dance, and now because of his bowels which will give her to think that he is running away." With the "echo of his downwardsighing trousers about his legs," he "seems to see his life supine before the secret implacable eyeless life of his own entrails like an immolation, saying like Samuel of old: Here I am. Here I am. Then they released him." Once "released" from the grips of his own internal organs, Elmer finds himself trapped in a stall with no paper in sight, save the one cherished painting upon which he places all his hopes as an artist. Thinking to himself, "Myrtle. Myrtle. Myrtle," he watches his hands "take up the portfolio and open it and take out the picture" (640-641). Faulkner claimed to have originally abandoned "Elmer" because it wasn't "funny enough," and in writing this ending he seems to have finally arrived at something genuinely comic. The implications of the scene are also serious, however, for in literally marrying Elmer's art to his own excrement, the story implies not only the sacrifice of his artistic vocation to a woman, or to anything outside of himself, but rather the inevitable subordination of the ideal to the reality of his *own* physical need, the "immolation" of *what might be*—that "vague shape" in the back of his mind—to the "soiled and human" body that *is* and will not be denied.

The most powerful insight that Elmer's fate holds for our understanding of Quentin's dilemma lies with the equivalence he draws between "his back" and "his bowels"—injury and excrement—for together they register the self's irremediable openness to the world from all sides, how, even as the subject "turns its back" on the hurt that flays it from without, it nonetheless finds itself "supine" (face up) before the implacable urges that continue to move it from within. It is precisely this, the self's prostration before the stubborn reality of the body, that thwarts Quentin in his battle with time, for even as he "turns the watch face down" and then "turn[s] [his] back to the shadow of the sash," his efforts only draw him into a more direct confrontation with time's embodiment though the "red smear" that soils the blank dial. In the bloodstain, which initially seems to emerge from the body of the watch itself, we see the futility of Quentin's attempt to strip the object, and himself, of all ties to the external world: the watch can be no more purged of time than Quentin can be purged of his own blood. However, at the same time, the rising up of Quentin's blood also signals the rupturing of the temporal system that the watch represents. If as Sartre argues, the breaking of the watch "gives us access to a time without clocks" (266), it does so by unleashing, as if through that cut in Quentin's flesh and the correlate "tear" in his mind, an alternate temporality, one which is not linear but cyclic, not progressive but recursive, not "was" but "again"—namely, the deep psychic time, which Faulkner had already begun to explore in *Elmer*, where, as Michael Zeitlin argues, we see a "structuring of the present by the past" ("Elmer Case" 233). Indeed, the very act of breaking the watch face is, itself, a kind of repetition within Quentin's own life, insofar as the gesture that it completes—that of "turning his back" on time—reproduces his much earlier gesture, on the night of Caddy's soiling in the branch, of lying down on the bed and "turn[ing] his face to the wall" so

as not to see his sister's muddy drawers (74). If we trace the trope of Quentin's "turn" even further to Elmer's posture when he "turn[s] his back and lie[s] down" beneath the force of the grenade, (an act which, in turn, reenacts the moment when he "turns his back" on the fire of his childhood (346)), we can begin to see how Quentin's opening scene launches the final act in a drama already in motion by tapping into Faulkner's ongoing concern with the male subject's repudiation of his own founding injury and the thwarting of that repudiation by the materiality of the body. By "taking a cut," Quentin thus turns away from the regular progression of time, ordered by chapel and classes, but in doing so he opens himself to the old rhythm, that internal flux of "*moving sitting still*," in which the past surges periodically into the present, turning him back again and again toward the nadir of his despair (77).

As criticism has long recognized, this nadir seems to reside in the previous summer, for as Quentin's chapter unfolds it becomes clear that his mind is torn by the conflicting desires to repress and relive not simply the past in general, but the *specific* memory of Caddy's loss of virginity to Dalton Ames. Retrospectively, the entire chapter can be seen to gravitate involuntarily toward that memory through the repetition of the phrase, "one minute she was standing there," which appears with slight variations at least four times in the chapter's first half, choked off, in each instance, before it can complete itself. For example:

Dalton Ames. Dalton Ames. Dalton Ames. If I could have been his mother lying with open body lifted laughing, holding his father with my hand refraining, seeing, watching him die before he lived. *One minute she was standing in the door*

I went to the dresser and took up the watch, with the face still down. (80)

Or here:

The shell was a speck now, the oars catching the sun in spaced glints, as if the hull were winking itself along him along. Did you ever have a sister, No but they're all bitches. Did you ever have a sister? *One minute she was*. Bitches. Not bitch *one minute she stood in the door* Dalton Ames. Dalton Ames. (92)

The chapter's climax arrives in the episode when, riding in the Bland's car after the farce with the local police, the wall of repression finally breaks down completely—a release triggered, significantly, by Quentin's experience of an hysteria reminiscent of the alien laughter that rises up within Gordon and Mrs. Maurier. Given over to the custody of the Blands, Quentin "beg[ins] to laugh again" in a resurgence of the mirth that had first overcome him upon learning that he was under arrest, when he had told the sheriff, "I'll h-have to qu-quit [...] It'll stop in a mu-minute. The other time it said ah-ah-ah" (140). The reference here is to an earlier incident in Quentin's past, when he apparently fell off a horse and broke his leg: "*they told me the bone would have to be broken again and inside me it began to say Ah Ah Ah and I began to sweat [...] my jaw muscles getting numb and my mouth saying Wait Wait just a minute through the sweat ah ah ah behind my teeth [...]*" (113). Quentin does eventually "quit" in the scene with the sheriff, but when he gets into the Blands' car, the laughter returns, and he realizes that "if [he] trie[s] too hard to stop it [he'll] be crying," so he "quit[s] trying to stop it" (147). What follows is not an external but internal eruption, in which Quentin remains outwardly calm even as he is inwardly consumed by the past. Shreve will later remark that Quentin "didn't seem to be paying any



attention to what anybody was saying,” an impression confirmed by the fact that we, as readers, gradually lose contact with the motoring party, through increasingly fragmented snatches of conversation (“Is that hamper is in his way, Mr MacKenzie, move it [...]”) and sensations (“[Shreve’s] hand touched my knee”) that finally vanish completely as Quentin’s consciousness gives itself over entirely to the night of Dalton Ames and its aftermath (147). Once released, the past trumps even the most immediate reality, for it is only when Quentin notes, several pages later, that “[i]t kept on running for a long time, but my face felt cold and sort of dead, and my eye, and the cut place on my finger was smarting again” do we, and Quentin himself, realize that he has attacked and been thoroughly beaten by Gerald during his long reverie, which, like the blood itself, runs for a long time: at sixteen pages, it’s the longest uninterrupted streaming of the past in the chapter. Psychic and physical rupture thus converge upon Quentin’s return to that fatal summer.

By allowing the memory of Dalton Ames to unfold, Quentin clearly relives a traumatic memory; however, just as Elmer’s discovery on the playground shocks him as the reopening of a prior “hurt” that he has already confronted and already denied, so does Caddy’s loss of virginity, as briefly suggested at the beginning of the chapter, seem to affect Quentin by drawing him back to the earlier event of her soiling in the branch. The unfolding of one memory thus seems to expose the kernel of another, more thoroughly buried incident, a repressive layering anticipated in miniature in an early iteration of the trigger phrase, in which Quentin’s memory seems to glance past the night of Dalton Ames, in order to arrive at the night of Damuddy’s funeral:

So I never could come out even with the bell, and the released surging of feet moving already, feeling earth in the scuffed floor, and the day like a pane of glass struck a light, sharp blow, and my insides would move, sitting still. *Moving sitting still. My bowels moved for thee. One minute she was standing in the door. Benjy. Bellowing. Benjamin the child of mine old age bellowing. Caddy! Caddy!*

*I’m going to run away. He began to cry she went and touched him. Hush. I’m not going to. Hush. He hushed. Dilsey. (88)*

Quentin’s meditations on his own bowel movements trigger the memory of Caddy’s loss of virginity, (either because he associates sex with “dancing sitting down,” or because “bowels” reminds him of “bellow”), but this memory then slips, in the final line of the excerpt, into another episode, which, when cross-referenced to Benjy’s chapter, becomes recognizable as the night of Caddy’s soiling. Benjy records the episode as follows: “‘I’ll run away and never come back.’ Caddy said. I began to cry. Caddy turned around and said ‘Hush’ So I hushed. [...] Caddy was all wet and muddy behind, and I started to cry and she came and squatted in the water. / ‘Hush now,’ she said. ‘I’m not going to run away.’ So I hushed” (19). Quentin’s memory retains the same basic progression—from Caddy’s threat to “run away,” to Benjy’s weeping, to Caddy’s “hush,” to Benjy’s quieting. Notably censored in his version is the actual image of “Caddy all wet and muddy behind” that his brother’s memory more faithfully records, and which only makes its way back into Quentin’s consciousness obliquely, through a separate memory of Caddy washing herself off in the branch following their fight in the hogwallow. Quentin vividly recalls “*the water building and building up the squatting back the sloughed mud*

*stinking surfaceward pocking the pattering surface like grease on a hot stove*" (138). What is, in Benjy's case, a posture of intimacy, (she stoops to be eye-level with him), becomes, for Quentin, deeply profane, suggestive, in its projection of a squatting body dropping stinking matter down into the water, of physical evacuation. The slippage that we see in Quentin's shift from the meditation on his own bowels (*My bowels moved for thee*), to Caddy's loss of virginity (*One minute she was standing*), to Caddy's muddying (*I'm going to run away*), thus belies his deep preoccupation with the lower body's surreptitious movements, in which Caddy's sexual activity constitutes a significant but only *intermediate* term in a string of associations that points beyond Dalton Ames, or any of the countless men that Caddy sleeps with during that terrible summer, to the earlier trauma of her childhood fall.

I have already suggested that what Quentin sees, and then refuses to see, in Caddy's muddy backside is, in a word, menstruation, but what should be clear by now is that the menstrual body, with its "outward suavity" concealing "all that inside," signifies a broader condition of embodied subjectivity for Faulkner, which is human rather than exclusively female. Menstruation, too, is a form of *moving sitting still*, in which the body is outwardly serene and contained, but inwardly agitated by forces that are at once of the self and deeply other. Even as we recognize the structural affiliation between all bodily functions in Quentin's imagination, however, it is vital to distinguish between the menstrual implications of Caddy's muddy stain and the more broadly sexual and narrowly scatological ones. As registered in the "red smear" that appears on the watch face, blood carries a distinct charge in Quentin's chapter, one which can only be fully appreciated from within the symbolic economy of "Elmer" and *Mosquitoes*, where, as I have argued, the virgin ideal's immunity to the "ties of blood" is precisely what enables the male subject to deny his own fundamental openness to the "dirt" and the "hurt" of the world, what I have called his own founding injury. When, in *Mosquitoes*, Patricia goes down bleeding into the mud she stages a powerful reopening of this wound, but it is not until Mr. Compson issues his lavish description of the "liquid putrefaction" that resides "inside" *all* women that the virgin ideal's essential fraudulence—its concealment of the dark and derisive world beneath its seemingly impervious exterior—achieves the status of a physical, even physiological, reality in Quentin's mind and in Faulkner's writing. This is not to say that menstruation is the repressed or hidden term of Faulkner's early career, underwriting the trope of blood from the start, but rather that menstruation conducts what Michael Zeitlin identifies, with respect to Caddy's muddy drawers, as the "work of condensation on a large scale" ("Returning to Freud" 73), drawing together the earlier texts' anxious preoccupations with dirt, time and—most importantly—injury, and fusing them within a single, evocative idea. Insofar as women's "periodical filth" codifies an entire complex of associations, it is not, in this sense, the *root* of any problem so much as the formal expression of a trauma that lies at the origins of the Faulknerian subject and the author's career—that unsutured and unsuturable wound of embodied existence that the male psyche must deny again and again in order to preserve the illusion of its own autonomous integrity.

The materialization of menstruation in Quentin's mind acts as a powerful index into his fate and its difference from the fates of his similarly virginity-obsessed predecessors. Indeed, if Quentin alone commits suicide of all Faulkner's "self-consciously insane aesthetes" (Sundquist

17)—a class of characters that can be traced back to Elmer and Gordon and ultimately produces the likes of Horace Benbow and Darl Bundren—it is apparently because with the possible exception of Darl, he alone is truly “self-conscious” in the sense of possessing relentless and irremediable knowledge of his own unsutured and unsuturable condition. It is this, the male subject’s knowledge of his *own* injury, that menstruation essentially embodies in the male psyche of Faulkner’s early writings. For to know that menstruation *is*, as Darl might say, is to know that the impregnable integrity that virginity signifies in the male psyche *never was*, a bitter awareness that comprises what Gail Mortimer describes as the fine, but crucial “degree” that separates “the ‘average’ character in Faulkner’s prose and the deeply troubled one” (4)—in this case, the difference between Elmer and Gordon’s ability to shore up their ideal and thus their fragile integrity against the blows of reality, and Quentin’s experience of steady dissolution into the vertigo of “I was I was not who was not was not who” (169). In seeing what Gordon is not made to see, and in knowing what we are told Elmer “cannot know,” (that his sister, too, “feels the ties of blood, hating them” (348)), Quentin involuntarily claims the hurt he knows to be his, thus becoming, in a deeply affective sense, *menstrual*—suffering the return of the old injury, the old rhythm, as the membrane between the ideal and the real, self and world, past and present, “*her blood and my blood*” yields before what André Bleikasten describes in deeply appropriate terms as the “hemorrhage of being.”

In reliving, via the memory of Caddy’s loss of virginity, the deeper trauma of her fall into the branch, Quentin does not so much see the soiled drawers as he *feels* the condition of hemorrhage that they have come to embody in his mind. The intensity of his identification is immediately clear from the passage that launches his long swoon in the past, in which—following the pattern traced earlier—the trigger phrase, “one minute she was standing” pulls him immediately into the memory of the night of Dalton Ames only to resolve, with all the uncanny familiarity of a dream, at the image of his sister’s body lying down in the branch:

one minute she was standing there the next he was yelling and pulling at her dress they went into the hall and up the stairs yelling and shoving at her up the stairs to the bathroom door and stopped her back against the door and her arm across her face yelling and trying to shove her into the bathroom when she came in to supper T.P. was feeding him he started again just whimpering at first until she touched him then he yelled she stood there her eyes like cornered rats then I was running in the gray darkness it smelled of rain and all flower scents the damp warm air released and crickets sawing away in the grass pacing me with a small traveling island of silence Fancy watched me across the fence blotchy like a quilt on a line I thought damn that nigger he forgot to feed her again I ran down the hill in that vacuum of crickets like a breath traveling across a mirror she was lying in the water her head on the sand spit the water flowing about her hips there was a little more light in the water her skirt half saturated flopped along her flanks to the waters motion in heavy ripples going nowhere renewed themselves of their own movement I stood on the bank I could smell the honeysuckle on the water gap the air seemed to drizzle with honeysuckle and with the rasping of crickets a substance you could feel on the flesh (149-50)

More than simply reenacting Caddy's childhood fall, this scene unpacks the meaning of the earlier incident by refracting it through the lens of menstruation that Quentin has from his father: the moonlit spectacle of Caddy's "hips" and "flanks" submerged in the water and mingled with honeysuckle reinscribe his father's description of female "hips" and "thighs" like "harvest moons" carrying between them a liquid "like drowned things floating like pale rubber flabbily filled getting the odor of honeysuckle all mixed up" (128). Whereas the body in Mr. Compson's vision keeps "all that inside," Caddy's body seems to be letting it all out as the "heavy ripples" flow through her skirt and radiate into the surrounding atmosphere of Quentin's memory. Though he remains on the bank, Quentin, too, becomes "mixed up" with what he sees, finding his shoes wet as her heavy, saturated body seems to flow out from the "mirror" of his gaze, smearing the boundaries between his senses. The smell of honeysuckle, which is everywhere associated in his mind with Caddy, saturates the air until it seems to "drizzle" out of it, like rain, and even the "sawing" sound of the crickets assume a physical weight, like "a substance you could feel on the flesh." In the physical pressure of the atmosphere upon his senses he seems to suffer an inversion of the synaesthetic transcendence of the Symbolists, for whereas, in Arthur Symons' words, Symbolism "endeavour[s] to disengage the ultimate essence, the soul, of whatever exists and can be realized by the consciousness," and to break "the regular beat of verse [...] in order that words may fly, upon subtler wings" (5), the emulsification of sensory data in Quentin's mind produces not euphoria and elevation—that "feeling untarnished and high and clean" (*Mosquitoes* 11)—but rather physical suffocation, as he is driven mercilessly back upon the object, and back down to earth.<sup>8</sup>

Caddy further hones this subordination of all feeling to the body when she refuses to speak of her "love" or "hate" for Dalton Ames and instead forces him to put his hand directly upon her chest and throat, where he feels the pulsing of her blood:

do you love him  
her hand came out I didnt move it fumbled down my arm and she held my hand  
flat against her chest her heart thudding  
no no  
did he make you then he made you do it let him he was stronger stronger than you  
and he tomorrow Ill kill him I swear I will father neednt know until afterward and then  
you and I nobody need ever know we can take my school money we can cancel my  
matriculation you hate him dont you don't you  
she held my hand against her chest her heart thudding I turned and caught her arm  
Caddy you hate him dont you  
she moved my hand up against her throat her heart was hammering there  
poor Quentin

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<sup>8</sup> Compare this to "Afternoon of a Cow," of which Alexander Marshall, III writes "All five sense are totally involved in a kind of orgiastic, linguistic fury of euphemism and double entendre; and at the same time, the elevated style creates an aesthetic distance, lifting the action above the baseness of perversion or bestiality" (398).

her face looked at the sky it was so low that all smells and sounds of night seemed to have been crowded down like under a slack tent especially the honeysuckle it had got into my breathing it was on her face and throat like paint her blood pounded against my hand I was leaning on my other arm it began to jerk and jump and I had to pant to get any air at all out of that thick gray honeysuckle

yes I hate him I would die for him I've already died for him I die for him over and over again everytime this goes [...] (151)

In an early rendering of what Addie Bundren will describe in *As I Lay Dying* as how “words go straight up in a thin line, quick and harmless and how terribly doing goes along the earth, clinging to it,” Quentin tries to abstract his sister’s experience into a script of rape and revenge only to be confronted with the reality of her own embodied experience (173). It is vital to recognize here that for all the grief that Caddy’s loss of virginity causes Quentin, he actually *clings to* the idea of her violation as a positive refuge against the more distressing truth inscribed in the thudding, hammering, and pounding of her blood beneath his hand. For Quentin, this driving rhythm confirms just how “terribly doing goes along the earth, clinging to it,” for brought under the influence of his sister’s pulsing body, he feels that the very sky has been pulled downward, pinning him beneath its “slack tent” as though he, too, has been laid down in the branch with her damp skirt thrown across his sensory horizon. When, on the following day, he attempts to revive the old script one more time by arranging a meeting with Ames, he is once again defeated by blood—this time, his own. Striking out at his enemy, he feels suddenly that he is “looking at him through a piece of colored glass,” an impression clarified when he “hear[s] [his] blood” and finds himself in Ames’s arms, staring up at the branches of the trees (175). Like Elmer, Quentin is betrayed by his body, prevented from acting out the role of the hero not by Ames or anything outside of himself, but by the rushing of his own blood, which, like his sister’s driving pulse, lays him out flat.

That Caddy’s embodied experience poses a powerful challenge to the story Quentin wants to tell is clear; however, it does not, in my view, generate what feminist critics such as Minrose Gwin and Dana Medoro have identified as a “counter-narrative” (*Feminine* 49) or “subtext” (*Bleeding* 79) to the despair that pervades his chapter and the novel as a whole. What Caddy’s experience undermines is not Quentin’s despair, but his desire to believe that Ames “made [her] do it,” thus taking his sister’s virginity by force once and for all. Her body tells a more complex story: that she is a victim not to Ames but to her own paradoxical desire, and that her prostration, which is also her pleasure, is not discrete but ongoing; coming “over and over again” with every surge of her blood it is a kind of orgasm-as-hemorrhage. Mixing love and hate, subordination and complicity, pleasure and immolation, it is a conflicted desire that becomes more familiar to us when Caddy describes it, in language suffused with the sexual alienation of Elmer, Gordon and Mrs. Maurier, as “something terrible in me,” something that “grin[s] at [her] through” the faces of her lovers, urging her into the arms of “too many” and leaving her “sick” and “dead.” Rather than “displac[ing] the novel’s pervasive sense of tragedy and wretchedness” (Medoro 74), Caddy’s blood, much like Caddy’s “voice” in Carolyn Porter’s

view,<sup>9</sup> signifies most powerfully to the degree that it *embodies* the wretchedness that drives Quentin to take his own life. Indeed, to draw a clear distinction between Caddy's "feminine desire" and the "dark folds of Quentin's despair" is to subordinate what is most subversive about her experience, which is precisely its mixing of desire and despair, and its suggestion of a pleasure that carries death, not as an external structure—what Gwin refers to as the "entrapping vice of Quentin's despair and rigidity"—but as its own, *constitutive* element (47, 54).

The scene that Gwin cites as the moment where we can most clearly "hear Caddy's voice emerging from [the] shadows [of grief and despair]" thus seems, in my reading, rather to collapse the distinction between shadow and voice, prison and prisoner, punisher and injured:

When I was little there was a picture in one of our books, a dark place into which a single weak ray of light came slanting upon two faces lifted out of shadow. *You know what I'd do if I were King?* She never was a queen or a fairy she was always a king or a giant or a general *I'd break that place open and drag them out and I'd whip them good* It was torn out, jagged out. I was glad. I'd have to turn back to it until the dungeon was Mother herself she and father upward into weak light holding hands and us lost somewhere below even them without even a ray of light. Then the honeysuckle got into it. (173)

Gwin argues that Caddy's voice "rises" from within the "male discourse" that constructs this nightmare in order to "restore the maternal space, the counter-narrative to despair and entrapment." What goes unremarked in her reading, however, is the fact that Caddy, resolves not to displace but to inhabit the position of the King or, in Quentin's reading, the Father, in order to "drag out" and "whip" the impounded who are, in Quentin's interpretation, the Compsons themselves—not only mother and father but also Caddy and Quentin, who are "lost somewhere below even them." She thus disrupts the narrative of the children's book—for surely *those* prisoners would be freed if the story ran its course—even as she perpetuates the narrative of despair that compels Quentin, even as a child, to "turn back" to that scene of impending doom again and again. One could argue that it is Quentin's interpretation which turns Caddy's defiance into self-injury by casting the narrative in obsessively familial terms: Mother-as-dungeon and Father-as-King tyrannizing mother-, father-, and children-as-prisoners. As will become clear in *As I Lay Dying*, however, where Caddy's fantasy will be literalized and more fully explored through Addie Bundren's use of the whip as a tool of violence *and* intimacy that forces her blood and the blood of others to "flow as one stream," the sado-masochistic dimensions of this story are not simply the product of Quentin's personal neurosis (172). What comes through most

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<sup>9</sup> In "Symbolic Fathers and Dead Mothers: A Feminist Approach to Faulkner," Porter responds to Minrose Gwin's reading of Caddy's "voice" in *The Feminine in Faulkner*, as follows: "Nor am I able to hear Caddy's voice as Gwin is, much less to believe that it registers 'a powerful challenge to despair.' It seems to me, insofar as it can be heard at all, to be the voice of despair itself, as much as Benjy's, Quentin's, and Jason's are" (79). Diane Roberts makes a similar point in *Faulkner and Southern Womanhood* when she suggests, also in response to Gwin, that "the 'voice' that Gwin hears as Caddy's is not unadulterated, not 'pure': unpacking the novel to get at this hidden treasure comes close to valorizing the feminine as somehow more worthy than any other voice." She argues that "to hear Caddy is, at least in part. To hear Quentin, and to hear Quentin is to hear Caddy, so imperiled is his status as masculine, as separate" (111).

powerfully here, though, is simply the impossibility of separating Caddy's voice from the "dark place" which it simultaneously ruptures and reproduces, and of distinguishing between the body that pleasures (*I'd whip them good*) and the body that bleeds.

It is precisely this collapse of meaningful boundaries—the way that everything seems to become, like the smell of honeysuckle that "[gets] into" Quentin's breathing" all "mixed up" with everything else—that he finds so tortuous, for like Elmer and Gordon Quentin wants nothing more than to isolate his ideal out of the dark and derisive world. In language that resonates with Gordon's mental image of a "chrysalis of fire whitely" (337), he envisions himself and Caddy "merg[ing] like a flame swirling up for an instant then blown cleanly out along the cool eternal dark," blasted to a place where "[Caddy] *will have only [him] then only [him] then the two of [them] amid the pointing and the horror beyond the clean flame [...] walled by the clean flame*" (116-117). The wall between the ideal and the real, the "two of them" and all the rest, will not hold, however, for even as Quentin "merges" with Caddy by identifying so viscerally with what he sees and feels in her, she, in turn, seems to be "mixed up" with a world that is not only "on her," like the smell of honeysuckle, but *in her*, in the shape of her own terrible desire. It is perhaps for this reason that Quentin seems to suffer the loss of his sister less to Ames than to the world itself, their "coupling" imprinted on his memory not as an isolated act of violation but as part of a broader process of emulsification, in which her body seems to be dissolving into the surrounding atmosphere. Prior to introducing Quentin to Ames, Caddy "*talk [s] about him / bringing [...] him between [them] until the shape of her blurred not with dark [...] they two blurred within one another forever more*" until Quentin imagines them as "*the beast with two backs,*" "*the swine of Euboeleus running coupled*" (148). When Ames physically materializes, "coming out of the trees into the gray toward [them] coming toward [them] tall and flat and still even moving like he was still," it is only to compound the illusion of Caddy's blurring: when he lifts her from the ground, they seem to become one body with two heads, "their shadows one shadow her head rose it was above his on the sky higher their two heads," and when Ames kisses her, even their heads seem to merge—"then not two heads the darkness smelled of rain of damp grass and leaves the gray light drizzling like rain the honeysuckle coming up in damp waves I could see her face a blur against his shoulder [...]" (154-155). Just as Quentin registers Caddy's face on the bank as "a white blur framed out of the blur of the sand by her hair" (150), here he can no more distinguish her body from Ames's body than he can separate it from the gray light, which, in turn, is indistinguishable from the rain, the scent of honeysuckle, the grass, and the leaves; it is all part of the "damp waves," which, like the ripples of water moving through Caddy's flanks and the pounding rhythm of her pulse beneath his hand, seem to Quentin to flow outward from her blooded body. When Caddy calls Quentin to her and "lean[s] down her shadow the blur of her face leaning down from his high shadow," he "dr[aws] back" and says "look out," afraid, it seems, of becoming subsumed in her blurring shape.

It is appropriate that, for Caddy, the termination of the terrible desire that drives her into the arms of "too many" arrives with her pregnancy, for it marks the cessation of her blood in a literal sense. She tells Quentin "*I died last year I told you I had but I didn't know what I meant I didn't know what I was saying [...] now I know I'm dead I tell you,*" a statement that reinforces

her earlier claim that the grinning thing that tortures her all summer “*is gone now and [she’s] sick*” (112). The only way to stop dying over and over is, as Addie Bundren will put it, to “stay dead,” and, for Caddy, pregnancy is apparently both the poison and the antidote (175). For Quentin, however, there seems to be no end to the hemorrhage that Caddy’s loss of virginity has opened up in his life. He recalls how during that terrible summer he would “lie in bed thinking when will it stop when will it stop” until

the honeysuckle got all mixed up in it the whole thing came to symbolize night and unrest I seemed to be lying neither asleep or awake looking down a long corridor of gray halfflight where all stable things had become shadowy paradoxical all I had done shadows all I had felt suffered taking visible form antic and perverse mocking without relevance inherent themselves with the denial of the significance they should have affirmed thinking I was I was not who was not was not who. (170)

Seemingly nonsensical, this stream closely tracks the progression of Quentin’s decentering, his coming-into-awareness of the fact that his “I,” like Caddy’s virginity itself, has not been violated and destroyed—“*I was*”—but rather retroactively exploded—“*I was not*”—thus throwing the very possibility of an integrated self that *ever was* into question: “was not who?”. Or, to return to the query that sums up Quentin’s entire dilemma, “If virginity wasn’t anything, what was I?”. The logical response would seem to be “nothing,” but here again the earlier novels are instructive, for it is not exactly self-negation that Quentin suffers. Rather his experience is largely continuous with the shock that Elmer receives on the playground, where he feels that everything is “just as yesterday, just as on all yesterdays” and yet it is all changed, because now he knows that there was “something beneath it that he hadn’t seen, hadn’t been told about,” something that was *always there*, concealed beneath the veil of his own innocence (370). As we have already seen in *Mosquitoes*, the central problem of the Faulknerian subject is not absence or lack, but rather presence, the stubborn persistence of the world within what Rosa Coldfield will describe as the “citadel of the central I-Am’s private own” (112). The realization that menstruation *is* thus paradoxically entails the awareness that virginity *does* “matter,” but in precisely the wrong way, for like Elmer’s “portentous” paint tubes, it carries the world, in all its gross materiality, “wombed” within itself (345). It is a realization that affects not only how Quentin sees Caddy, but how he sees himself and his entire world, which are not emptied but rather inverted, made “paradoxical” or “inherent [...] with the denial of the significance” that they “should have affirmed.” “Antic,” which carries the obscure connotation of “grinning,” Quentin’s fallen world is a grotesque place in which things are not devoid of meaning, but rather invested with perverse suggestion, filled, like the “suave shape” of the virgin body that conceals “all that inside,” and like his own body racked with joyless laughter, with the *wrong* or *opposite* implication.

It is precisely this sense of a perversely pregnant world that seems to follow Quentin back into the present when, after his failed confrontation with Ames, he and Caddy reenact the ritual of the previous night, and the pulsing rhythms of Caddy’s body push him out of memory and back into the present where he discovers anew his old, bleeding wounds:

Do you love him Caddy



[...]  
she took my hand and held it flat against her throat  
now say his name

[...]  
Dalton Ames

her blood surged steadily beating and beating against my hand  
It kept on running for a long time, but my face felt cold and sort of dead, and my eye, and the cut place on my finger was smarting again. I could hear Shreve working the pump, when he came back with the basin and a round blob of twilight wobbling in it, with a yellow edge like a fading balloon, then my reflection. I tried to see my face in it. [...] I dipped the rag again, breaking the balloon. The rag stained the water. "I wish I had a clean one" (164).

It is clarity that Quentin seeks when he searches for his own reflection in the water and wishes for a clean rag to tend his cuts, but like the rag itself, the present moment and his own reflection are contaminated by the past, and there is no shoring up of the boundaries between clean and unclean, virgin and not-virgin. For even before Quentin dips the bloody rag into the basin, the mirror of the freshly pumped water is subtly tainted, its "round blob" yellow edged and balloon like, underwritten, like the earlier image of Caddy's submerged hips and flanks, by the menstrual body of Quentin's memory. "Breaking the balloon" of the water's surface with the rag, it is as if Quentin releases, (rather than introduces), that filth that lies hidden behind its apparent purity, much as he seems, in the chapter's opening scene, to release the blood from within the blank watch face. Every effort to repair the edges of his own identity, to make himself "clean and whole again," thus seem doomed not simply to failure but to an ironic reversal, in which they aggravate the injury that he is attempting to eradicate.

It is crucial to recognize here that healing is not a viable option for Quentin. Indeed, though he insists that "again" is the "saddest word," the one thing that seems to torture him more than the prospect of perennial hurt is his father's suggestion that "someday it will no longer hurt [him] like this" (177). If he'd rather die than get over his pain, it is because the loss of grief carries with it for Quentin the recognition that "even [Caddy] was not worth despair" (178), an idea Dalton Ames articulates more bluntly when he tells him not to "take it so hard" because all women "are bitches" (160). Confronted with this scenario, Quentin's hurt ironically becomes the only arsenal he has for protecting his crumbling belief that Caddy's virginity *ever mattered*, that it—and his own integrity—were *there* to be violated in the first place. As Gordon suggests in *Mosquitoes*, "grief" is the only thing that "sticks to your guts;" it is the emotion by which the post-traumatic subject finds affirmation that there are—against Mr. Compson's claim to the contrary—things in the world worthy of being mourned. What Quentin wants is not inurement but innocence, a distinction that he works out through his memory of the story he has from Versh, of the man who "mutilates himself": "He went into the woods and did it with a razor, sitting in a ditch. A broken razor flinging them backward over his shoulder the same motion completed the jerked skein of blood backward not looping. But that's not it. It's not not having them. It's never to have had them then I could say O That That's Chinese I dont know

Chinese” (116). As implied in the fact that the man cuts himself in a “ditch”—a term which Quentin elsewhere uses interchangeably with the word “scar” (153)—no act of amputation can leave the self clean and whole; it can only compound injury with injury. By throwing his own genitals “backward over his shoulder,” creating a “skein,” or thread, of blood that is “backward not looping,” the man puts the offending part of his body literally behind him, thus freeing himself from the circuitous torture of memory that Quentin knows so well; at the same time, however, he leaves himself marked by loss, the newly created lack of “not having” binding him, as if through that fragile thread, to everything that he has turned his back upon. Quentin does not want to put his troubles behind him; rather, he wants “never to have had them,” which is to say that he wants to exist in that state of “pure blank serenity” that precedes all division and all desire, in which the self “do[esn’t] know” anything about hurt or scars, the terrible movement of the blood or its cessation.

That death alone can satisfy Quentin’s desire becomes apparent in the few instances in the chapter when he actually comes close to attaining the stillness and emptiness he longs for. Leaving his sister in Dalton Ames’ arms, he starts running “in the gray grass among the crickets the honeysuckle getting stronger and stronger and the smell of water” until he finds himself at the branch again:

I lay down on the bank with my face close to the ground so I couldnt smell the honeysuckle I couldnt smell it then and I lay there feeling the earth going through my clothes listening to the water and after a while I wasnt breathing so hard and I lay there thinking that if I didnt move my face I wouldnt have to breathe hard and smell it and then I wasnt thinking about anything at all she came along the bank and stopped I didn’t move (156).

A similar state of relief follows his failed confrontation with Ames at the bridge. Leaning his head against a tree, he feels that “everything sort of roll[s] away” until he doesn’t “feel anything at all,” a numbness that seems “almost good after all those days and the nights with honeysuckle coming up out of the darkness into [his] room where [he] was trying to sleep.” Even the knowledge that he has “passed out like a girl [...] doesn’t matter anymore” as he sits “there against the tree with little flecks of sunlight brushing across [his] face like yellow leaves on a twig listening to the water and not thinking about anything at all [...]” (162). It is this sense of peace, in which he escapes the building smell of the honeysuckle and his own streaming thoughts, that eludes Quentin in his present life and beckons to him from the other side of death, the other side of drowning, where he envisions a “healing out to the sea and the peaceful grottoes” (112).<sup>10</sup> Suicide, it seems, is the only form of “healing” that Quentin can tolerate, for it stops the hemorrhaging of memories, blood, and antic laughter, that keeps coming and coming inside of him, while allowing him to cling to, and carry out, the grief that his father suggests he will eventually get over, and by which he measures the worth of his own life. As anticipated in the moment when he lies down by the branch and turns his face into the ground, feeling the

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<sup>10</sup> The peace that Quentin associates with death also recalls Elmer’s longing to escape the Venetian woman to “drift among dark places where silence and solitude could cleanse him and make him whole again” (422).

“earth going through his clothes,” his suicide is thus an act of resistance *and* surrender, a turning away from, and a yielding up to, the world that presses upon him from all sides.

## Part Two “Getting it all mixed up”

### Preface

In the previous section, I resituated The Sound and the Fury within the context of Elmer and Mosquitoes in order to demonstrate how Caddy’s muddy drawers bring to a crisis the problem of female embodiment so central to the previous texts, and in this way reopen an injury that lies hidden not only within Quentin’s own mind, but within the Faulknerian male psyche mapped out in the earlier writings. Quentin’s suicidal response to the possibility that Caddy was “never virgin” becomes more comprehensible, if no less extreme, once we recognize the degree to which the male subject’s integrity is, for Faulkner’s early protagonists, fundamentally bound up with the idea of virginity, and thus how menstruation stands to rupture the very foundations of Quentin’s being. Even as women’s “periodical filth” fills the virgin ideal with precisely the elements of time, dirt and death which that ideal functions to deny, so does it render everything in Quentin’s world, including his own grief, “antic” and “paradoxical,” a grotesque inversion of what he has believed them to be. Confronted with a choice between the condition of endless hemorrhage, in which the hurt of disillusionment keeps coming and coming, and the condition of inurement, in which he accepts that nothing is even worth mourning, Quentin chooses death.

In this section, I will revisit Quentin’s suicide in relation to two other texts from Faulkner’s early career in order to explore the bearing that race has upon the sexual drama that I have been tracing thus far. As the critical history of the novel reveals, the question of whether race plays a role in Quentin’s undoing in The Sound and the Fury is inseparable from the broader question of whether his chapter, and the novel as a whole, can be seen to reveal or prohibit an immanent historical perspective. Cheryl Lester observes the text has been accused of being “too private, too mired in the psychic realm, and too inarticulate about social forces that are more clearly revealed in the later works” (123). While Eric Sundquist was the first to explicitly link this critique to race by arguing, as we have seen, that The Sound and the Fury can be understood to “contain” a “latent” or “repressed” anxiety over miscegenation that only becomes explicit in the later novels, the debate over the novel’s alleged insularity, and the insularity of Quentin’s chapter in particular, goes back much farther. Irving Howe argued in 1951, for example, that the “exact nature of Quentin’s obsession is not easy to determine: it is partly a problem of his sexual life and partly a problem in family or caste pride.” Insofar as his chapter “abruptly reduces the scope of the novel to a problem that is ‘special’ in a clinical sense,” Quentin is unable, Howe concludes, to become more than “merely a psychological case” (168). For Cleanth Brooks, writing in 1963, it is not just Quentin’s chapter but the novel as a whole which proves irreducible to history insofar as it records, in his view, “the downfall of a particular family,” the “case” of which “seems rather special,” and which might have occurred “anywhere at any time” (334, 341). Michael Millgate argued in 1966 that the novel is not quite so insular, but nonetheless

concedes that of all the Compson brothers, only Jason is “wholly in the world, acutely sensitive to social values, swimming with the contemporary commercial current” and thus, while “social, economic and political perspectives” play an important role in the novel’s later sections, “[t]o interpret *The Sound and the Fury* simply as a socio-economic study of the decline of a Southern family is obviously inadequate” (99). Given that Faulkner “wrote the book from within the comprehensive conception of the world of Jefferson which he had already achieved and amply demonstrated in *Sartoris*,” Millgate finds the relative weakness of social context in *The Sound and the Fury* striking and somewhat regrettable, proposing that “it is possible to think that *The Sound and the Fury* would have been strengthened by some such stiffening, by a richer notation of setting and social context” (100).

Recent criticism has found that even without the “stiffening” that Millgate describes, the novel—and this includes Quentin’s chapter—registers the impact of social context in legible ways. Citing Frederic Jameson, John T. Matthews argues in an important essay in this vein that Faulkner’s text, like all texts, “act[s] to drive contextual material away or under,” a process which “leads to the resurfacing in crevices of contradiction of that very reality elsewhere invisible.” In order to “glimpse historical reality,” Matthews suggests, we “must be prepared to look in the gaps that open in all texts,” what he identifies in *The Sound and the Fury* specifically as the “structures of disjunction” that reveal the “larger social contradictions that condition the outlook of its characters and its authors” (“Rhetoric” 59-60). Seeking out these “pits of contradiction” enables him to do what other “critics of Faulkner’s early modernism” “seem to find impossible”: to “read the concerns of the South out of the private worlds of *The Sound and the Fury*”—concerns that he traces primarily to the economic upheaval of the novel’s historical moment, and the “racial redefinition” that it entailed (“Rhetoric” 59-60, 63).

Richard Godden and Cheryl Lester also find that the novel is fundamentally shaped by socio-economic conditions that it both represses and represents, and, furthermore, that these pressures provide the missing explanation for Quentin’s suicide. For Godden, the “specific racial and sexual pathologies” present in *The Sound and the Fury*, and in Faulkner’s writings more broadly, prove “causally connected” to what he identifies as the “primal scene of bound southern labor.” Much as Matthews suggests that repressed historical reality resurfaces through “crevices” and “gaps” in the text, so does Godden argue that that “Faulkner’s language most habitually ‘conceals and makes secret’ while at the same time ‘producing by means of secretion;’ the “labor trauma” of the south is thus “neither an absent source nor a deferred center” in Faulkner’s work, but an open secret that “saturates these texts at the level of their preoccupations and of their intonations” (4-5). Exploring how the circulation of terms like “slave,” “bluegum,” and “blackguard” function in *The Sound and the Fury* as “covert forms of blackface, by means of which the brothers achieve displaced penetration of their sister,” Godden “put[s] the black, the virgin, and the incestuous brother [...] into the Black Belt at the turn of the century,” thus resisting what he perceives as criticism’s tendency to “psychologize” the issues (22-23). Only by thus recognizing how Faulkner’s “founding deep-plots lie in the southern politics of race and gender,” he suggests, can we see how Quentin’s suicide constitutes a reaction to the racial and sexual pathologies of his culture, which he attempts, without success, to revise and escape

(22-23). The inability to transcend old “plots” also emerges at the heart of Cheryl Lester’s reading of Quentin’s death, which she attributes to his awareness of the “dissolving dialectics” of race and gender. “[U]nable or unwilling to reconstruct himself in the context of a newly reconfigured racialized and gendered dialectic,” Lester concludes, “Quentin himself dissolves” (139). For Lester, “the material and ideological conditions” that the novel both “flees” and “seeks to disclose” center upon the “complex and overdetermined figure of Caddy,” who, though “thematized as the primary cause of change,” “stands for” a variety of shifts in the social climate of the novel’s writing (123)—namely, the migration of black southerners to the north during the 1920s. The Great Migration thus emerges as the salient historical context, or, in Godden’s terms, “submerged plot,” that informs the novel’s central preoccupations in her reading.

Each of these readings break with earlier criticism by insisting that none of its chapters, including Quentin’s chapter, fully escape or “contain” their historical context, but they do not fundamentally challenge the conviction that an inherent antagonism or dissonance exists between the “private” and “psychological,” on the one hand, and the “social” and “historical” on the other. In each case, the text is understood to disclose (or secrete, or reveal) its historical context through, but also despite, a psychological orientation that pushes that reality down or away through mechanisms of displacement and containment. If we, as readers, are to discern the social implications of the novel’s story, we are thus tasked with looking beyond, or into the interstices of, its psychosexual concerns in order to see the historical implications that these preoccupations necessarily try, and inevitably fail, to conceal.

What I would like to propose here is something different, which is that the novel’s psychology works toward, rather than against the text’s particular engagement with the social world, and that it does so through the reconciliation of two commitments that coexist uncomfortably in Faulkner’s earlier fiction: on the one hand, his abiding concern with the “psychosexual history” of the subject, which, as we have seen, Elmer and Mosquitoes are largely engaged in mapping out; and, on the other hand, his desire to engage the racially divided south as a creative resource—a vein that this chapter will explore in relation to Soldiers’ Pay and Flags in the Dust. Only having traced this divided commitment in Faulkner’s early writings will we be in a position to fully appreciate the break-through of The Sound and the Fury, in which the inward-turned psyche will be seen to produce, within its most private recesses, the material presence of the racially divided south—not as a backdrop for the fiction, as in Soldiers’ Pay, nor even as its subject, as in Flags in the Dust, but as the hardware of a white male subjectivity oriented around the female body. I will continue to maintain here that of all Faulkner’s early novels, Elmer and Mosquitoes remain the most vital to our understanding of Quentin’s suicide, but it is only when we recognize how the crisis of menstruation that culminates their sexual drama occasions in turn the materialization of a racial consciousness in Quentin’s chapter and an historical consciousness in Faulkner’s writing more broadly, that their significance for the career as a whole becomes clear.

IV  
“Two rotten tricks”  
Soldiers’ Pay (1926)

Published in the same year as The Sun Also Rises, Faulkner’s first novel fits more readily than either Elmer or Mosquitoes into the major vein of post-war American fiction now associated with the likes of Hemingway, Fitzgerald, and Dos Passos. It has tended to suffer, however, from the comparison. Irving Howe notes that while Faulkner’s novel resembles Hemingway’s early writings insofar as it seems to “announce the discovery of a generation that has been sold and is ‘lost,’” it does so “with hardly a grain of their fierce authority” (17). Olga Vickery similarly observes that the novel’s author “appears to be one of those bitter young men who brooded over their pain and frustration in print, thereby contributing to the ever-increasing mass of undistinguished post-war fiction” (2). Faulkner will treat the theme of post-war disillusionment with greater authority in Flags in the Dust, where, having abandoned Elmer and completed Mosquitoes, he revisits the figure of the wounded WWI veteran in relation to the Civil War and southern myth. This comparison, however, only makes Soldiers’ Pay seem all the more archaic, a kind of “museum-piece in which [he] tried to master the war imaginatively and then enroll ‘himself among the wastelanders’” (Minter 53).

This view of Soldiers’ Pay is not the final word for any of the critics cited above, each of whom ultimately find something in the novel to redeem it for the career as a whole, whether it be the detectable presence of “interests more germane to his later work” that lie “beneath” its ostensible concern with post-war disillusionment (Vickery 1), or a “certain verbal talent” that indicates “anticipations of the writer to come” (Howe 18-19). As David Minter argues most compellingly, Faulkner’s first novel is best appreciated when we recognize in it not simply the author’s botched attempt to enlist in the ranks of the lost generation, but rather his determination to “stress continuities [...] between his present and past work” as well as “between his experience and the experience of others, between his world and others’ worlds” (53). This suturing of self to other, past work to present, can be seen clearly in the central figure of Donald Mahon who, in his stillness, “delicate pointed chin,” and “wild, soft eyes,” carries forward the title personae of Faulkner’s first volume of poetry, The Marble Faun (1924), even as his “terrible scar” and blindness merge this “poetic self-portrait” with the modern figure of the wounded soldier (Bleikasten, Ink 6). It is not within the scope of this study to address Faulkner’s verse, but we can note here that if, as Judith Sensibar and others have argued, the “marble-bound” faun of the early poetry gives concrete expression to the author’s sense of paralysis within his own imitative verse—his imprisonment within “a mold carved out for him by another artist” (Sensibar 13)—then in trying to merge the “solipsistic isolation” of the marble faun with the cultural alienation of the wounded soldier, Soldiers’ Pay navigates between two similarly static modes. For by 1926 the theme of the lost generation was “no longer very striking or fresh” (Howe 17); the idea of “‘postwar disillusionment’ had become something of a pose, and

such figures as the sad young man, the discharged soldier and the Fitzgeraldian flapper were already literary stereotypes” (Bleikasten, Ink, 18). If, as Vickery observes, the novel’s “characters are seldom more than types,” all of whom “move woodenly through stock situations,” it is partly symptomatic of the text’s double burden, its condition of being bound, on the one hand, to the “cold pastoral” of the past and, on the other hand, to a present in which, both in life and literature—and here again he is anticipated by Hemingway—“there is nothing new under the sun.”

What is ultimately most striking and fresh about Soldiers’ Pay is how Faulkner situates its inherited figures—the faun, the nymph, the flapper, the soldier—and their conventional spaces—the formal garden, the pool, the dance, the (remembered) trenches—within the less conventional context of a small Southern town. In underscoring the novel’s southern setting, I am departing to a certain extent from critics such as Cleanth Brooks and Michael Millgate, who have argued that while Faulkner’s first novel takes place in the fictional town of Charlestown, Georgia, it makes little or no use of the south as an imaginative resource. Brooks finds that while the setting and atmosphere of Soldiers’ Pay does anticipate Yoknapatawpha, the novel ultimately gives the “regional setting [...] no special significance,” and, as a result, “Charlestown, Georgia might just as well have been Charlestown, New Hampshire, or Charlestown, Indiana” (99). Michael Millgate similarly observes that “[f]or all the evocations of a Southern town which are offered at various points in the novel, the action remains curiously unlocalised in time or space: the local inhabitants are a composite chorus rather than individuals; the Rectory itself could be in England almost as convincingly as in Georgia; and the class-structure of the novel seems at times to be quite specifically English” (67). As Thadious Davis has demonstrated, however, much of the meaning of Soldiers’ Pay resides in the interplay between its actors and a regional setting that often signifies precisely by removing or dislocating itself from the central events, thus providing the “backdrop for action” and a counterpoint to the “modern, postwar world” (45). If, as Millgate acutely observes, the novel’s “actions” seem “curiously unlocalised,” it is in part because the novel represents its actors as cut off—spiritually, psychologically and emotionally—from a carefully delineated local environment. It is thus only appropriate that the rectory seems strangely English, for as the home to which Donald retreats to rest and, eventually, to die, it stands at the farthest retreat from the world embodied by the novel’s more southern spaces.

In constructing the southern landscape of Soldiers’ Pay—and this is Davis’s key insight—Faulkner relies heavily upon depictions of southern black people. In the dislocation of action from setting, white actors from black background, we thus find an early rendering of the racially divided world that will become so central to novels such as Light in August and Absalom, Absalom!. If critics prior to Davis have shown little interest in drawing such connections it is in part because there seems to be so little in Soldiers’ Pay to anticipate the trenchant treatment of southern race relations that we find in Faulkner’s later works. Blyden Jackson goes as far as to argue that “in Faulkner there are two fictive Negroes, the Negro before Yoknapatawpha and the negro as he developed [...] after Yoknapatawpha preempted Faulkner’s art” (62). He finds that black people are too scarce, too stereotypical, and too marginal in the novels prior to Flags in the Dust in order to count for “much of anything,” and that “they contribute nothing that either [Soldiers’ Pay or Mosquitoes] could not do without” (60). When Pamela E. Rhodes draws



comparisons between Faulkner's depictions of black people in Soldiers' Pay and Flags in the Dust, it is in order to underscore the later novel's advancement beyond the "comforting black stereotypes" of its predecessor, and its achievement of a "rudimentary critique of the black picturesque of Soldiers' Pay" (95-96). Racial stereotypes persist in subtle and not-so-subtle ways throughout Faulkner's career, but as the comments of both of these critics suggest, there is a wholesale quality to the author's reliance upon such figures in his first novel that reminds us of just how far he goes in imagining his way not only beyond the artistic bonds of his youth, but the cultural bonds as well.

It would be a mistake, however, to assume that because the novel's depictions of black people tend toward stereotype that they are therefore inessential to its story. Indeed, given that Soldiers' Pay is everywhere caught up in static "poses"—both neo-romantic and modern—stock racial figures such as the "mammy" with her "balloon like breast" (295) and the porter with "white teeth [...] like a suddenly opened piano" (12), though severely truncated in comparison to the novel's depictions of whites, contribute nonetheless to the novel's overarching aesthetic, in which, as Gary Stonum argues, all the characters resemble "figures in a tableau," whose significance is constituted by "clothes, features, posture and [...] alignment with respect to similarly constituted figures in the composition" (72).<sup>11</sup> If we recognize in the novel's depictions of Charlestown's black community a minor element within this composition, it becomes possible to think of "race relations" not just in terms of interactions between blacks and whites, though these play a small role as well, but also as the interplay between white subjects and black background or what Philip Weinstein identifies across the author's entire career as the distinction between the black "margin" and the white "center" (Cosmos 43-44). I will argue further on that the distinction between the center and the margin, subject and background, is, in certain important respects, undone in Faulkner's later works, and that it is precisely in its inversion that The Sound and the Fury makes its most significant advance over Faulkner's earlier writings; in Soldiers' Pay, however, the stable presence of a racially black, southern periphery is what enables the fractured white world to come into focus. More specifically, the novel's strategic deployment of a black background contributes to the construction of white *female* subjects who embody the twin problems of war and sex that emerge at the novel's center.

Blyden Jackson's claim that in both Soldiers' Pay and Mosquitoes the "visibility" of black characters "barely escapes the nebulousness of shadows," and that the action in both novels "owes not one whit of either its impetus or its direction to a single world or deed originated by a Negro" is far more true of the second novel than of the first. (It is most true, we might note, of Elmer, where blacks do not even achieve the status of shadows). Charlestown's black community does, as Blyden observes, remain largely in the anonymous background of Soldiers' Pay, but at certain moments individuals do move into the foreground, assume names,

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<sup>11</sup> Jacquelyn Scott Lynch has similarly noted the novel's visual orientation, describing it as an "erotically charged tableaux" (3). Millgate finds in its descriptive passages certain resemblances with the "highly mannered drawings" that Faulkner drew in the early 1920s, featuring "highly formal and vaguely symbolic landscapes, with slim figures in attitudes of repose or of graceful arrested movement, the whole composed into a patterned relationship of bold and precisely defined forms" (61).

and participate in the story's dialogue. Such episodes are illuminating because they perform, in explicit ways, how race relations tacitly function elsewhere in the novel. This is certainly the case in the following scene, in which Donald's "mammy," Caroline, and her grandson, Loosh, come to visit the wounded aviator upon learning of his return from the front:

Loosh took two paces and came smartly to attention, saluting. "If de lootenant please, Co'pul Nelson glad to see—Co'pul Nelson glad to see de lootenant looking so well."

"Don't you stand dar wavin' yo' arm at yo' Mist' Donald, nigger boy. Come up here and speak ter him like you been raised to."

Loosh lost his military bearing and he became again that same boy who had known Mahon long ago, before the world went crazy. He came up diffidently and took Mahon's hand in his kind, rough black one. "Mist' Donald?" he said.

"Dat's it," his grandmother commended. (167)

The implication of the exchange is that the war, which has made a lieutenant out of Donald and a corporal out of Loosh, has disrupted southern race relations not by altering the hierarchy itself—Loosh still addresses Donald as his superior—but the manner of their interactions. "Before the world went crazy," Loosh was, as both the narration and his mother remind us, a "boy" who showed respect not through bold symbolic gestures and statements, but "diffiden[t]" and "kind" ones. When he "loses his military bearing," abandoning the salute in order to take up Donald's hand gently in his own, he reverts to a role similar to that performed by the porter who, in the novel's first section, takes it upon himself to look after the soldier during his train ride home. Joe Gilligan refers to this individual as "Claude," but given that he also calls him "Othello" and "George," one suspects that this is not his actual name and the narrator supplies no other. What seems to matter is that the porter knows Donald's name, and is determined to see him safely to his father's house. When Joe describes Mahon as "a lost foreigner," the porter replies, "Lost? He ain't lost. He's from Gawgia. I'm looking after him" (22). Later, as he arranges Donald's pillow, he asks if he should call ahead to his father, querying, "I can look after you far as I go, but who's going to look after you then?" (24). When Margaret Powers joins the party, he immediately asks her, "You going to look after him?", repeating the question again as his "dark gentle hand lower[s] the officer carefully the platform" (31). Kind, gentle, and familiar, Loosh and "Claude" demonstrate one of the central ways that southern blacks contribute to Faulkner's first novel: by acting as carriers of a "long-ago, before the world went crazy" from which the novels' white characters, Donald being the most extreme example, find themselves alienated.

More common than scenes of interracial exchange, such as those above, are what Davis identifies as "brief pictures of black people in the background of the central action," which function to "establish the basic rhythm of life that has been lost to the modern, postwar world" (45). Here are two of the more memorable scenes:

The lawn mower was long since stilled and beneath a tree [Margaret] could see the recumbent form and one propped knee of its languid conductor lapped in slumber. Along the street passed slowly the hourly quota of negro children who, seeming to have no arbitrary hours, seemingly free from all compulsions of time or higher learning went to

and from school at any hour of a possible lighted eight, carrying lunch pails of ex-molasses and –lard tins. Some of them also carried books. (111-12)

[...] Niggers and mules.

Monotonous wagons drawn by long-eared beasts crawled past. Negroes humped with sleep, portentous upon each wagon and in the wagon bed itself sat other negroes upon chairs: pagan catafalque under the afternoon. Rigid, as though carved in Egypt ten thousand years ago. Slow dust rising veiled their passing, like Time; the necks of mules limber as rubber hose swayed their heads from side to side, looking behind them always. But the mules were asleep also. [...] (147)

In each of these passages, the stilled or slowly moving figures of black people are at once peripheral and meaningful, contributing not to the novel's action—as do Loosh and “Claude”—but to its *inaction*, by constructing backdrops of temporal suspension. Compelled neither by time nor education, the schoolchildren of the first passage wander freely between home and school, defined more by their lunch pails—which, being “ex-molasses and [ex]-lard tins” carry the aura of past purposes—than by the books that prepare them for their futures and for which they seem to have little use. A similar aura of suspension characterizes the wagon full of “Negroes humped with sleep” in the second passage; even the mules are backward looking. As made explicit in this second, frieze-like tableau, the “long ago” time that the black community embodies in contrast to the post-war condition of the novels whites lies neither in the immediate past leading up to the war, nor in the historical past that will become so central to Faulkner's imagination from *Flags in the Dust* onward, but rather—pointing back “ten thousand years ago”—outside of history all together (52).

It is only when we recognize that the changing world to which blacks act as a static, timeless counterpoint in these scenes is registered primarily by the novel's white female characters that we begin to understand how race and gender relations become mutually implicated *and* dissociated in Faulkner's early fictional landscapes. The basic structure of this tension can be detected in the following scene involving Cecily Saunders, fiancée to the recently returned Donald Mahon, and George Farr, the man she has taken up with during Donald's absence:

Mr. George Farr, lurking casually within the courthouse portals, saw her unmistakable approaching figure far down the shady street, remarking her quick, nervous stride. [...]

“My God,” he said, “I thought I'd never get you on the ‘phone.”

“Yes?” She paused, creating an unpleasant illusion of arrested haste.

“Been sick?”

“Yes, sort of. Well,” moving on, “I'm awfully glad to have seen you. [...]”

[...] She moved again, her blue linen shaping delicate and crisp to her stride. A negro driving a wagon passed between them, interminable as Time: he thought the wagon would never pass, so he darted around it to overtake her.

“Be careful,” she said quickly, “Daddy’s downtown to-day. I am not supposed to see you any more. My folks are down on you.”

“Why?” he asked in startled vacuity.

“I don’t know. Perhaps they have heard of your running around with women, and they think you will ruin me. That’s it, probably.”

Flattered, he said: “Aw, come on.”

They walked beneath awnings. Wagons tethered to slumbering mules and horses were motionless in the square. They were lapped, surrounded, submerged by the frank odor of unwashed negroes, most of whom wore at least one ex-garment of the army O.D.; and their slow, unemphatic voices and careless, ready laughter which has also somehow beneath it something elemental and sorrowful and unresisting, lay drowsily upon the noon. (139-140)

When Cecily refuses George’s offer of a coca-cola, he is “forced to watch her retreating from him, mincing and graceful, diminishing” (141).

There is a practical explanation for Cecily’s hurry: as she tells George, she’s been forbidden to contact him, and she doesn’t want to be seen consorting or, in her words, “running around” with him in public. There is also, however, a more subtle undercurrent to the scene, which emerges only through the juxtaposition of Cecily’s “quick,” “nervous,” and “mincing” stride, the way that she approaches, pauses, moves again, and finally retreats, and the “interminable,” “slow,” and “unemphatic” aura exuded by the black characters around whom she moves and George darts in pursuit. The association of young, white women with movement and flight is a pervasive theme in Faulkner’s novels; Caddy Compson and Temple Drake come immediately to mind, but they are anticipated by Elmer’s sister, Jo Addie, who “vanishe[s] between two of [the family’s] innumerable movings,” and in Patricia Robyn, who, in separate instances, “speeds” away from Gordon and David on the deck of the yacht and, later, runs from the latter in the swamp, her “legs twinkl[ing] on ahead in the shimmering forgotten road” (82, 166, 190). In *Elmer* and *Mosquitoes*, the fleeting quality of the virgin female body is associated with what Gary Stonum identifies as the “pure, fleeting essence of beauty and wholeness,” an essence which, as we have seen, the male artist seeks to capture and preserve by divorcing it from the world of time and circumstance. Considered within this context, Cecily’s slim, graceful figure is striking precisely because it is neither arrested nor decontextualized; her “quick, nervous stride” carries her through an environment oriented around courthouses, streets, horses, and wagons, and made dense with voices, laughter, and odors in which the couple are “lapped, surrounded, submerged”—a sensuously textured world which emanates from the surrounding black bodies, and which, while very much peripheral to the central action located in Cecily’s mobile form, generates the context within which her mincing haste pops into relief.

Once we recognize how the novel deploys its black characters toward the delineation of a modern condition embodied by its white female subjects we can make better sense of how, in episodes such as those described above, black characters can preserve what Davis describes as a “rhythm of life that has been lost to the modern, postwar world” (45), but in another instance play a decidedly opposite role by supplying the tempo for the “haste” that keeps a woman like

Cecily Saunders on the move. At the dance thrown by Mrs. Wardle, Cecily once again materializes against a racially black background, but here the black characters supply a rhythm not of the world that was, but of a distinctly modern, jazz-infused scene, in which Cecily seems entirely in her element. In place of the “slow, unemphatic voices,” the “negro cornetist and his crew” produce the “rhythmic troubling obscenities of saxophones” and “puls[ing]” syncopation, which inspire the white dancers to “erupt” into couples, “clas[ping] and danc[ing]” in a series of poses, which “promise no satiety” (188, 193). Cecily and Lee Rivers “t[ake] the syncopation,” and then, “locked together, [...] pois[e] and slid[e] and pois[e], feeling the beat of the music, toying with it, eluding it, seeking it again, drifting like a broken dream” (191). What persists between this episode and the earlier scene, in which George pursues Cecily through town, is the interplay between background and foreground: the white figures, and particularly Cecily’s “slim, animated turned body,” “flat as a boy’s” with “long virginal legs,” comes into focus against a black, atmospheric presence (188-189, 195). However, whereas in the earlier scene, the lounging black figures exude something “elemental and sorrowful and unresisting,” which creates a clear contrast with Cecily’s rapid and nervous movements, here the musicians actively feed the sexually charged gestures of the white dancers. As Davis points out, however, the “projection of intimacy” between the musicians and the dancers is “external to the blacks themselves and propelled by the observable rhythm or motion of their activities (“Faulkner’s Development” 81).<sup>12</sup> In other words, the black musicians—like the somnolent “niggers and mules”—operate solely toward the construction of white subjects and white sexual interactions; they are attributed no subjectivity of their own.

Indeed, if we place additional pressure on this question of intimacy, we find that the narration seems rather determined to separate the musicians from the “troubling” effects of their own music, thus shoring up the distinction between foreground and background, black and white, subject and context. As Davis notes, the jazz band behind the music barely materializes, with the exception of the cornetist, who, as the group’s leader, achieves some degree of individuality. When a young white girl “stoop[s] ostrich-like,” exposing her “young shapeless leg” to the light of a nearby window, the narrator remarks that the “negro cornetist, having learned in his thirty years a century of the white man’s lust, blink[s] his dispassionate eye, leading his crew in a fresh assault” (188). The distinction between white lust and black dispassion seems to additionally motivate the narration’s oddly insistent references to Mrs. Worthington’s “negro driver” who accompanies Donald and his two self-appointed care-takers—Margaret Powers and Joe Gilligan—to the dance, and acts as a disinterested party to the events that occur in the vehicle’s backseat. The driver’s presence recalls the occasional, seemingly inconsequential references to Mrs. Maurier’s servants in *Mosquitoes*; in this instance, however, Faulkner places the driver in conspicuous proximity to the sexual drama that unfolds when Cecily enters the car in order to kiss and caress Donald, accompanied by the lecherous Januarius Jones, who’s body remains doggedly in contact with her, “as though it were attached by suction, like an octopus’ tentacle.” As she “[sinks] into the dark seat beside Mahon,” the narrator remarks that the “negro driver’s

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<sup>12</sup> Unless otherwise indicated, all references to Davis are to *Faulkner’s Negro: Art and the Southern Context*.

head was round as a capped cannon-ball: perhaps he slept” (203). Later, after Cecily hurries off, we are told that “[t]he negro driver’s head was round as a capped cannon-ball and he was not asleep” (207). The only time that he speaks is when Joe, seeing Cecily move into the light as she runs away from the car, says aloud, “Say, you can see right through her,” to which the driver responds “Dat’s de war,” but then “sleep[s] again immediately” (204-5). While relatively inconsequential to the action of the scene, the driver demonstrates the way that black people produce, through their disengagement from white actions and intrigue, a form of acute commentary upon the problems of white people—problems, which, as his brief statement on Cecily Saunders suggests, are neatly summed up in the figure of the young, modern, white woman.

If Cecily’s figuration of the modernity’s sterility is at first difficult to detect it is because she is cast by the narration as a type of nymph and is often depicted in naturalistic terms. She thus first appears amidst a “quick tapping of feet down the uncarpeted hall and she entered, saying:”

Good morning, Uncle Joe,” in her throaty voice, crossing the room with graceful effusion, not seeing Jones at once. Then she remarked him and paused like a bird in mid-flight, briefly. Jones rose and under his eyes she walked mincing and graceful, theatrical with body-consciousness to the desk. She bent sweetly as a young tree and divine kissed her cheek. (66)

The key term in this passage is “theatrical,” for what becomes increasingly clear over the course of the novel is that while Cecily is repeatedly compared to birds, trees, and water, she does not have a natural bone in her body. As Margaret intuits when she muses to herself, “What luck that girl has playing her parts. Even God helps her,” Cecily’s particular charm lies with her innate capacity to imitate nature, whether by “undulating [...] like a slim wave” or “turn[ing] graceful as a flower stalk” (77-79). “Never having engaged in an unself-conscious gesture of any kind,” even her most spontaneous movements are a kind of pure performance, natural only insofar as everything in the post-war world, as Joe Gilligan laments, has become “fake” (77).<sup>13</sup> Next to the dance floor, Cecily’s most native environment would seem to be the Rector’s garden, though, as we shall see shortly, it is Margaret who is most drawn to its graveled paths and clipped, cultivated flowers. As several critics have noted, the carefully depicted garden is strongly derivative of Faulkner’s poetry, as well as of his early dream play *The Marionettes*, both of which rely heavily upon the metaphor of the walled, formal garden, in which nature has been carefully routed and contained. When the narrator describes the row of poplars, “poised and vain as girls in a frieze,” it becomes clear how the natural world mirrored in Cecily’s gestures is, itself, modeled upon art, and thus how her character embodies a cold and formal beauty from which nature has been largely evacuated. This lack of substance—what the narration frequently refers to as her “shallowness”—reflects the general condition of her milieu, and she is in this

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<sup>13</sup> Faulkner may have had in mind George Eliot’s character, Rosamond Vincy, who, similarly slender and blonde, is “by nature an actress of parts that entered into her *physique*: she even acted her own character, and so well, that she did not know it to be precisely her own” (117).

sense perhaps the most significant precursor to that other theatrical red-head, Temple Drake. Like her successor, Cecily is a her father's daughter, a connection that Margaret draws when she observes, in a strangely backwards fashion, that Mr. Saunder's is essentially "Cecily in the masculine and gone to flesh: the same slightly shallow good looks and somewhere an indicated laxness of moral fiber" (92). This laxness points back, in turn, to the Rectory and Donald's father, who is frequently referred to as "the divine" and is, like Cecily's father, not so much corrupt as weakened. His entrance to the novel thus occurs as Jones stands gazing up at the church spire against the shifting clouds, enthralled by the "illusion of [its] slow ruin," an impression reinforced by the rector's admission that "one of [his] cloth is prone to allow his own soul to atrophy in his zeal for the welfare of other souls [...]" (53). His shaken faith makes him resemble, at certain surprising moments, Mr. Compson, as when he tells Joe, "God is circumstance, Joe. [...] You are suffering from disappointment. But this will pass away. The saddest thing about love, Joe, is that not only the love cannot last forever, but even the heartbreak is soon forgotten. [...] I know that is an unbearable belief, but all truth is unbearable" (314).

As Davis argues, the sterility of the white world finds its alternative in Charlestown's "earthy, religious blacks," who "stand in thematic counterpoint to the post- World War I despair and disillusionment at the center of the novel" (34). In the novel's final scene, Joe and the rector wander past a black church service and pause, "listening, seeing the shabby church become beautiful with mellow longing, passionate and sad" (315). In stark contrast to the episode at Mrs. Wardle's party, in which the musicians supply the beat for the "broken dream" of the white dance, here the congregation produces a rich and vital chorus in which the passion, notably absent from the eye of the black cornetist, is taken up and sublimated into an ecstasy, which, in stark contrast to the empty "lust" of the white world, unites sex and spirituality:

The singing drew nearer and nearer; at last, crouching among a clump of trees by the road, they saw the shabby church with its canting travesty of a spire. Within it was a soft glow of kerosene serving only to make the darkness and the heat thicker, making thicker the imminence of sex after harsh labor along the mooned land; and from it welled the crooning submerged passion of the dark race. It was nothing, it was everything; then it swelled to an ecstasy, taking the white man's words as readily as it took his remote God and made a personal Father of Him." (315)

Individual desire is taken up in "the longing of mankind for a Oneness with Something, somewhere," and the connection to nature that Cecily can only imitate finds a truer vessel in the "clear soprano of women's voices" that soar upward, interwoven with "harmonic passion of bass and baritone," like "a flight of gold and heavenly birds" (315). Cecily's own "throaty voice," we might recall, is likened to a "tangle of golden wires," an image which recalls Fitzgerald's Daisy Buchanan, whose "voice" ensnares the ear with something that seems ineffable but is, as Gatsby suggests, just "full of money." Faulkner's version of Daisy isn't full of anything, at least not until she loses her virginity to George Farr, an event to which we will shortly return. For now we can note that if you can "see right through" Cecily, it is not because she's a skimpy dresser, (though this, too, is part of her modernity), but because the world she embodies lacks precisely

what the novel's black characters are here shown to possess: that "something elemental" that lies "beneath" their voices, joining them to one another, to the earth, and to God.

If Cecily's emptiness signifies on the one hand, in opposition to the embodied substance of the novel's racially black presence, it also registers in counterpoint to her foil, Margaret Powers who, in a manner that anticipates both Gordon and, looking even further to *Sanctuary*, Popeye, is racially white, but consistently identified by the narration and the novel's other characters as "black." In situating Margaret within the economy of color that we have already identified and explored, we should first recognize that for all her "blackness," she is clearly one of the novel's white subjects, and as such receives a different kind of attention from the narration. Whereas Charlestown's blacks are, as Weinstein argues about Faulkner's black characters more generally, "largely deprived by the narrative of interior voice, of point of view, of a sense of their own past and future (their memories and desires)" (*Cosmos* 44), Margaret Powers is one of the novel's central figures, and also the one invested with the most psychological depth and complexity; indeed, as we shall see, her blackness is intimately linked to this deep quality, which distinguishes her dramatically from the shallow and transparent Cecily, but also from the novel's racially black characters, who, though they are of "essence" insofar as they are grounded and substantial in ways that Cecily is not, are also "flat" in the sense that their depth exists, as Weinstein argues, *for* white characters and characterization. As individuals, they are attributed no interior lives of their own.

Margaret's blackness is particularly complex because it signifies within multiple, not necessarily continuous registers in the text, one of the most prominent being that of late nineteenth-century decadence, and specifically the art of Aubrey Beardsley. When Faulkner first introduces Margaret as a "dark" woman that "Beardsley would have sickened for," he identifies her with a certain type—the "Beardsleyean woman"—who, as Addison C. Bross has argued, is characterized not only by a "stark black 'chevelure,'" which stands out against the "stark pallor of her face," and a "large and sensual mouth," but also by the quality of "retaining, in a rather bored, patient manner, some dark secret." "Part of our fascination with" the Beardsleyean woman, or "femme fatale," Bross notes, "is the unanswerable question of just what depths of evil she has known" (11). With her "pallid distinction," "black hair," "red scar of her mouth," and "slim dark dress," Margaret Powers certainly resembles the woman of Beardsley's drawings (27-28), and in this way provides a sharp contrast to Cecily, with her fine hair and shallow good looks that make her resemble a "daughter of sunlight" (80). More importantly, however, Margaret possesses the opacity of her Beardsleyean counterpart; whereas one can "see right through" Cecily, Margaret is decidedly inscrutable, "young" as Joe intuits, and yet "not young, as if she kn[ows] everything" (29). As Jacquelyn Scott Lynch has suggested, what makes Margaret "black" to the narrator and the novel's other characters, bears some relation to sexual knowledge, and it is this element of her character that draws most heavily upon the Beardsleyean tradition, while also placing her in sharpest contrast to the novel's racially black characters. To suggest, as does Lynch, that the association of white female sexuality with blackness functions as an oblique form of racialization takes into account cultural stereotypes circulating during the historical moment of the novel's writing, stereotypes upon which the Compson brothers will explicitly



draw when they accuse their female relatives of “do[ing] like nigger women do,” but it does not account for the way that racial blackness signifies within the symbolic economy of *Soldiers’ Pay*, where, as we have seen, black “passion” is posited in opposition to white “lust,” and framed in explicitly religious terms that suggest communion rather than, as in the case of Margaret, an inwardness and opacity.

Margaret does share certain characteristics with the novel’s racially black characters, but these continuities lie specifically with her capacity to soothe the wounded men that gravitate toward her. When the porter on the train carrying Donald back home to Georgia hears Margaret’s voice, he leans down to her and says, “I’m for Gawgia, too. Long time ago,” to which she responds, “You are? I’m from Alabama.” The Porter replies, “That’s right. We got to look out for our own folks, ain’t we?” (30). Despite the fact that Margaret has never met Donald before seeing him on the train, she agrees to “look after him,” thus taking over where the porter leaves off (24). Her ability to “look after” not just Donald, but any lost soldier she encounters, is one of her defining characteristics, and a quality that differentiates her strongly from the other young, southern women like Cecily Saunders (194). Thus, for example, when Margaret arrives at Mrs. Wardle’s party, she immediately attracts the attention of a group of ex-soldiers who have been hovering uncomfortably on the porch “talk[ing] loudly, drowning the intimation of dancers they could not emulate, of girls who once waited upon their favors and who now ignored them—the hang-over of warfare in a society tired of warfare” (194). After one or two has danced with her “all of them that danced at all [are] soon involved in a jolly competition,” and some, finding their courage restored, “even [go] as far as to seek out other partners whom they kn[ow]” (206). When she finally insists upon retiring for the night, they say “goodnight with regret and gratitude,” feeling, as one soldier puts it, that “[i]t was like old times” (207).

It is vital to recognize here that while Margaret has the capacity to draw the soldiers back into life by recalling them to “old times,” she is as much a figure of the post-war condition as is Cecily. Indeed, with the possible exception of her black hair and eyes, Margaret’s most frequently noted feature is the “red scar of her mouth,” a detail which aligns her intimately with her husband, who was shot point-blank in the face by one of his own men, and Donald Mahon and his “dreadful scar” (25). If both Margaret and Donald are described as simultaneously youthful and old—Donald’s face is “young, yet old as the world” (25), Margaret is, as Joe Gilligan immediately intuits, “young,” and yet “not young, as if she kn[ows] everything”—it is because experience has left them both prematurely aged and similarly damaged. As the doctor privately discloses to Margaret, Donald’s “body is already dead,” a diagnosis that resonates with Margaret’s own conviction that she is either “cold by nature” or has “spent all [her] emotional coppers” such that she doesn’t “seem to feel things like others” (35). This deadening of feeling informs her peculiar, detached manner of “look[ing] after” the soldiers that she meets, “[taking] them all” in with her “slow, friendly, unsmiling glance” (207), her “brie[f], coo[1]” kiss (50), and “firm sexless embrace” (161). Upon first meeting her, the aviator Julian Lowe notes with admiration and longing how she “ignore[s]” him, and that she is “impersonal” and “self-contained,” (28) language that anticipates Elmer’s sister, Jo Addie, who scorns his need to “cling” to people, and whom he remembers as “Dark-haired and small and proud, casting him

bones fiercely as though he were a dog, coppers as if he were a beggar, looking the other way,” as if she “both suffer[s] man and ignor[es] him in the face of higher and more perfect things to do in the world” (353). Whereas Jo comes to embody for Elmer a state of pure and impregnable integrity, however, Margaret’s self-containment is decidedly post-traumatic; she is not whole but scarred, “sexless” not because she is virgin but because she is sealed-up. (We might recall, in this vein, that Elmer’s first sexual partner will also have “a full red mouth,” but one that is “never quite completely closed” (378)). If Margaret can look after the wounded soldiers, and bring them back, if only temporarily, to their former selves, it is because, she, too, as Joe intuits, has “known disappointment,” and can thus identify with their disillusionment and sterility. What is most striking is that Faulkner chooses to approach this disappointment primarily through Margaret, whose interiority, unlike Donald’s, is accessible to the narration from the beginning, and thus to probe the psychic wounds of the white psyche through the experiences and memories of a female character. A telling precedent for this technique in Faulkner’s own writing can be found in his treatment of Marietta in The Marionettes. As Judith Sensibar has argued, Marietta, who is situated in a walled garden, is “an elaboration of the faun figure” (22), who “wants to leave her Adamic garden in order to know’ and to be free,” but whereas the faun is “physically unable to escape from the sheltered garden,” Marietta is human and therefore able to know what the Faun cannot (28). In Soldiers’ Pay, Faulkner similarly pairs male impotence with female knowledge, and thus uses the female subject as a means of crossing boundaries that he cannot, or will not, transgress directly via his male protagonists.

Margaret’s connection to Marietta is important because it underscores the sexual nature of her “disappointment,” and thus the fundamental ambiguity of the trauma that Faulkner unearths when he opens her psychic life to the narrative. That Margaret has been scarred by the war seems clear enough. Early in the novel, she meditates upon her deceased husband, thinking that “[t]his in some way seemed the infidelity: having him die still believing in her, bored though they both probably were,” referring to this flawed timing as a “rotten trick [he has] played on her.” Richard’s “trick,” it seems, is dying on her, thus bequeathing her with a terrible guilt, as she tells Joe, over not being “square with him” (160). Thinking back upon their final nights together in a hotel when “they had tried to eradicate to-morrows from the world,” however, she decides that there have in fact been “two rotten tricks” (32). If Powers’ ill-timed death on the front is one trick, the nights that she spends with him prior to his deployment seem to constitute the other, for, as Michael Zeitlin has argued, “Faulkner’s inner portrait of Margaret leads steadily and decisively to the psychological locus of that disturbing event, the passage and repassage in her mind of a highly ambivalent sexual encounter with Richard Powers” (“Passion” 361). The ambivalence Zeitlin describes is manifest in Margaret’s description of their nights together as “like when you are a child in the dark and you keep on saying, It isn’t dark, it isn’t dark” (159). In one sense, she seems to suggest that sex is a sanctuary from the “dark,” and might thus be read along the same lines as Hemingway’s description in A Farewell to Arms (1929) of how Catherine Barkley’s creates momentary stays against the horrors of war by enclosing herself and Frederic within the “tent” of her hair when they make love or by “pulling [his] cape around her so it cover[s] both of [them]” (114,150). As becomes evident when Faulkner further dilates Margaret’s

memory of her time with Powers, however, it is not clear whether her intimacy with her husband is the stay against, or the source of, the darkness she wants to deny:

Dick, Dick. How young, how terribly young: to-morrow must never come. Kiss me, kiss me through my hair. Dick, dick. My body flowing away from me, dividing. How ugly men are, naked. Don't leave me, don't leave me. No, no! we don't love each other! We don't! we don't! Hold me close, close: my body's intimacy is broken, unseeing: thank God my body cannot see. Your body is so ugly, Dick! Dear Dick. Your bones, your mouth hard and shaped as bone: rigid. My body flows away: you cannot hold it. Why do you sleep, Dick? My body flows on and on. You cannot hold it, for yours is so ugly, dear Dick.... (178)

Even as war poses the imminent threat of division ("Don't leave me, don't leave me"), the immediate reality of sex seems to split her internally ("My body flowing away from me, dividing"), as the man's body, "hard and shaped as bone: rigid" breaks the "intimacy" of her own. What is the object of horror, of darkness, in this scene? Is it the specter of tomorrow or the presence of her husband, "Dick," that "hard," "rigid," "ugly" body, which, like the child cringing in the dark, she is thankful her "blind" body cannot see?

In Margaret's memories of this encounter we seem to find a precursor to Caddy's sexual awakening, in which tenderness and disdain, desire and revulsion, release and violation, are all mixed up. Like Caddy, Margaret seems to revel in her violation, how, in being divided from herself, her body "flows on and on," defying her husband's ability to "hold it" much as Caddy's pounding blood will defy Quentin's attempt to contain her desire; at the same time, just as Caddy's endless pleasure is a form of dying over and over, so is Margaret's sense of ecstatic flow intermingled with a disgust and horror reserved for the corporality of the dead. Sitting in the hotel room with Joe, she thinks back upon that other room, in which she and Richard consummated their marriage, imagining it as

an appointed tomb (in which how many, many discontents, desires, passions, had died?) [...] (Dick, Dick. Dead, ugly Dick. Once you were alive and young and passionate and ugly, after a time you were dead, dear Dick: that flesh, that body which I loved and did not love; your beautiful, young, ugly body, dear Dick, become now a seething of worms, like new milk. Dear Dick. (38)

If we return to Catherine Barkley's technique of creating temporary sanctuaries from the war, we can see here how a more appropriate metaphor for Margaret's experience might lie with Hemingway's ironic redeployment of that technique in the hospital, where, as Frederic recalls, the doctors would "put up a screen around the bed" of anyone who was about to die, thus transforming the "tent" of intimacy into a make-shift coffin. For in a similar fashion, the "rotten trick" of sex does not shield Margaret from the horrors of death so much as it draws her within its terrible veil, where the body that breaks into hers becomes indistinguishable from the body rotting in the ground.

Lest we write-off Margaret's ambivalence toward sex as a neurosis specific to a war-bereaved wife, Faulkner ascribes a similarly troubled sexual encounter to Margaret's female foil, Cecily Saunders, who loses her virginity to George Farr following Donald's return from the

front. As with Margaret, Cecily's interior life functions in part to expose what Zeitlin identifies with respect to her Beardslyean counterpart as "the gap between the man's desire and the woman's autonomous reality" (365): whereas George remembers her naked body "silver and prone" like "sweetly dividing water, marbled and slender and unblemished by any shadow"—an image that resonates with Margaret's recollection of her own "dividing" body, but sweetens it considerably—Cecily's experience, like Margaret's own, is more fraught and bitter. Following their midnight rendez-vous, she "run[s] into the dark house in her nightgown, weeping" and when George finally manages to corner her in town, having failed repeatedly to reach her by phone, she "look[s] at him swiftly, delicately, with terror and something like loathing." Bewildered, George touches her arm but Cecily "shudder[s] shrinking from him" and utters the very words that Caddy will later speak to Quentin: "Don't, don't touch me." Left behind to gaze after her departing figure once again, George can only "part[ake] of her pain and terror, not knowing what it [is]" (144). At this point in his career, Faulkner, himself, doesn't seem to know what exactly makes sex so unbearable for his female characters, but in Cecily's case, the fear of exposure to public opinion seems to play a much larger role than it does for Margaret, whose actions are motivated by a personal code that shows little concern for ideas of social propriety. The terror and loathing that George reads in her features thus seems to stem in part from her conviction that she either is, or will be seen as, "no longer a good woman"—a phrase she uses once in private meditation and again when she says goodbye to Donald's father before running away with George. However, much as Temple Drake—Cecily's clearest descendent—will live out her prolonged debasement in *Sanctuary* in part from her fear of facing her own people following her rape, and in part from the unleashing of her own dark sexuality, so does Cecily's transformation following her loss of virginity seem to belie a sense of internal transformation as well as social transgression. As Jacqueline Scott Lynch points out, this deep shift in Cecily's character is registered through subtle details in the narrative: after her night with George, Cecily's eyes, which are previously "gray or blue or green," turn "dark, black," like Margaret's, and, in stark contrast to her earlier characterizations, she appears in her final extended scene "sail [ing] across the room like a bat, dark in the darkness" (68, 272). Clearly, sex has done something to Cecily that fills her with shame or with something else, something sufficiently "dark" to lend even the most shallow, transparent woman a degree of genuine opacity.

It is significant that the only white woman in *Soldiers' Pay* who does not seem traumatized by sex is Emmy, who loses her virginity to Donald before he goes off to war and is then subsequently taken in by Joe Mahon as a house servant. Emmy's lower class status places her in a unique position within the novel's racial and sexual economies. While marked, sexually, by the tell-tale black eyes, in her case the trait does not imply the depth and inscrutability that it signifies for Margaret and, following her liaison with George, Cecily; rather, her eyes are "black and shallow as a toy animal's," a description that Faulkner will draw upon again when he describes the little Italian girl in *The Sound and the Fury* as "a little dirty child with eyes like a toy bear's," her face "like a cup of milk dashed with coffee" (125). As we shall see when we revisit Quentin Compson at the end of this chapter, this portrait of the immigrant child as a blending of white and black, milk and coffee, is an integral part of the novel's complex racial

economy, in which racial boundaries are in a state of dissolution. In *Soldiers' Pay*, however, these boundaries are still being erected and tested, rather than deconstructed, and Emmy thus emerges as a kind of border figure, whose class situates her closer to Charlestown's blacks, but whose race aligns her with the novel's white community. The narration registers her liminal status when it suggests that "you could imagine her developing like a small but sturdy greenness on a dung-hill. Not a flower. But not dung, either" (116). That Emmy originates in "dung" is, paradoxically, what seems to shield her from the sterility and death that afflicts her upper-middle class, white counterparts: like Charlestown's blacks, she is rooted in the old, warm world, a time when Donald was still a "faun," nymphs were true nymphs, and everything wasn't "rotten" and "fake." Her memory of her night with Donald thus documents precisely the kind of human encounter that seems impossible for whites in the post-war context:

And so I laid down. I couldn't see anything except the sky, and I don't know how long it was when all of a sudden there was his head against the sky, over me, and he was wet again and I could see the moonlight kind of running on his wet shoulders and arms, and he looked at me. I couldn't see his eyes, but I could feel them somehow like things touching me. When he looks at you—you feel like a bird, kind of: like you was going swooping right away from the ground or something. But now there was something different, too. I could hear him panting from running, and I could feel something inside me panting, too. Was afraid and I wasn't afraid. It was like everything was dead except us.

Afterward, the two young people hold each other in a state of peace that Emmy recalls feels "so quiet, so good," as Donald's hand "go[es] right slow from [her] shoulder along [her] side as far as he could reach and then back again, slow, slow [...] so smooth and quiet" until they fall asleep (124). Emmy's account could not be more different from the one we have from Margaret, particularly her feeling that "everything was dead except us," a statement which seems to invert the other's experience of sex as an intimacy *with* death. Strikingly, Emmy's loss of virginity to Donald seems to restore an even earlier, more innocent condition from their childhood, for when Donald comes to get her at his house, Emmy feels that "it [is] like old times" when the two of them would go every day to a swimming hole they'd built and "lie on an old blanket [they] had and sleep until time to get up and go home" (121). Her loss of virginity is thus no loss at all; rather, it is recuperative. In contrast to the experiences of the novel's other white women, it creates no conflict, no pain, and no terror.

As manifest in Emmy's idyllic sexual experience, the "peace" lost to whites in the aftermath of WWI draws simultaneously upon two ideas of prelapsarian innocence, pointing, on the one hand, to a condition that predates WWI and the fall into history, that "long ago time before the world went crazy," and, on the other hand, to a condition that precedes the fall into sexual maturity, what Emmy refers to as the "old times" of childhood. We have already seen how the Charlestown's black community is made to embody the fullness of being associated with the pre-war past, and the same principle holds true for the time of psychosexual innocence. Consider, for example, the following scene, in which the Saunders' servant comforts Cecily's

brother, Robert, who suffers a sudden spell of inexplicable sadness on the day of Donald's funeral:

How strange everything looked! This street, these familiar trees—was this his home here, where his mother and father were, where Sis lived, where he ate and slept, lapped closely around with safety and solidity, where darkness was kind and sweet for sleeping? He mounted the steps and entered, wanting his mother. But of course, she hadn't got back from —He found himself running suddenly through the hall toward a voice raised in comforting, crooning song. Here was a friend mountainous in blue calico, her elephantine thighs undulating, gracious as the wake of a ferry boat as she moved between table and stove. She broke off her mellow, passionless song, exclaiming: "Bless yo' heart, honey, what is it?"

But he did not know. He only clung to her comforting, voluminous skirt in a gust of uncontrollable sorrow, while she wiped biscuit dough from her hands on a towel. Then she picked him up and sat upon a stiff-backed chair, rocking back and forth and holding him against her balloon-like breast until his fit of weeping shuddered away. (294)<sup>14</sup>

Like the Saunders's unnamed servant, Margaret also "mothers" the men she encounters, "draw [ing] their head[s] against her breast" (50; 296), but whereas her charges encounter a touch that is cool, brief, and firm, taking them in only long enough to set them back up, often unwillingly, on their own, young Saunders finds a maternal substitute who is neither scarred nor "spent;" rather, hers is a body of wholeness and plenitude, a seemingly endless reserve of sympathy, familiarity and comfort to which the white child is allowed to "cling" with unselfconscious abandon, a "voluminous" black body, which seems to make him at home again by restoring the "familiar," "kind," and "sweet" world that he has temporarily lost.

The longing for this world finds its fullest expression on the actual warfront, which comes to us primarily through the memory of Richard Powers's superior officer, Lieutenant Madden, who also returns to Charlestown following the war. He recalls the following conversation with his commanding officer and friend, Captain Green, on the night before the latter's departure for a new assignment:

They sat silent across a table from each other. Their faces were ridged and sharp, cavernous in the unshadowed glare of light while they sat thinking of home, of quiet elm-shaded streets along which wagons creaked and crawled through the dusty day and along which girls and boys walked in the evening to and from the picture show or to sip sweet

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<sup>14</sup> It is interesting to note here that Faulkner reuses certain elements of this episode in *Elmer* and *Mosquitoes*, and that in each case the racial component of the scene is removed. Thus, Robert's sense of inexplicable misery provides a model for Elmer's grief on the night of the fire, when his whole world is rendered strange and frightening, but in the latter's case there will be no "mammy" to replace his mother; rather, he will make do with the kindness of a neighboring, presumably white woman whose "hands [...] [come] into his blind red loneliness" and wrap his naked body in her skirt. The black woman's "ferry boat"-like body becomes, in *Mosquitoes*, an actual berth on a yacht, which, as we have seen, provides Mrs. Maurier with a sanctuary from the world, in which she feels, like young Robert within the woman's arms, "surrounded, lapped in security and easeful things, walled and secure within the bland, hushed planes of the bulkheads" (163). This conservation of affect amidst the erasure of the racial dynamic that initially enables and structures it reveals how both *Elmer* and *Mosquitoes* redeploy material from *Soldiers' Pay* toward the construction of their largely solipsistic psychological landscapes.

chilled liquids in drug stores; of peace and quiet and all homely things, of a time when there was no war.

They thought of young days not so far behind them, of the faint unease of complete physical satisfaction, of youth and lust like icing on a cake, making the cake sweeter. . . . Outside was Brittany and mud, an equivocal city, temporary and twice foreign, lust in a foreign tongue. To-morrow we die. (171)

The idyllic world that Madden and Green remember in the first paragraph is the same world that we have already seen in the episode with Cecily and George, when he pursues her tapping figure amidst the wagons and the dust. It is a world—or rather a “time”—embodied, as we have seen, by Charlestown’s black community, who still inhabit the peaceful, quiet, and “homely” state of being from which the novel’s whites have been severed. As becomes more explicit in the second half of their shared musings, the “time when there was no war” overlaps with that period in the psychosexual life of the subject, in which he still exists in “the faint unease of complete physical satisfaction,” when “lust” is yet “icing on a cake, making the cake sweeter.” Faulkner will further explore this phase through Elmer who, the reader will recall, similarly feels a sense of uneasiness with the onset of puberty—that “dark soft trouble that seem[s] to associate itself with an odor somewhere that he dread[s] yet long[s] for”—and also experiences his own emergent lust in a similarly oral register when he pursues Vera after an incident of spilled sugar. For Madden and Green, as for Elmer, sexual desire evokes the sweet promise of infantile pleasures, but it also carries within it the imminent doom of satisfaction and, with that satisfaction, the onset of an adult sexuality of disgust marked by a shift from oral delight to olfactory revulsion—what is, for Elmer, the transition from the “plump” and “soft and pink and curved” sexual neophyte to odorous sexual woman and her “female flesh no longer fresh” (423, 373).

In Soldiers’ Pay, the male descent from satisfaction to loathing plays out on the warfront, where sex and death, the female body and the trenches, are mutually imbricated. Toward the end of their conversation, Green thanks Madden for “helping [him] get by with that dose,” to which Madden replies, “Why don’t you let those women alone? They are all rotten with it” (171), an exchange that plays upon the double entendre of “dose,” connoting both an unpleasant experience and an episode of a venereal disease. While it may be easy enough to “let women alone” on the all-male front, however, one cannot escape the “rot” and contamination of the trenches. When Madden shakes Green’s hand and steps outside the tent he “fe[els] mud, kn[ows] darkness and damp” and “smell[s] food and excrement and slumber beneath a sky too remote to distinguish between peace and war” (172), a sickening mix that only gets worse when he and his men go into battle:

They tramped by night, feeling their feet sink, then hearing them suck in mud. Then they felt sloping ground and were in a ditch. It was as if they were burying themselves, descending into their own graves in the bowels of the wet black earth, into a darkness so dense as to constrict breathing, constrict the heart. They stumbled on in the darkness. (389).

One of the most fascinating aspects of Soldiers’ Pay is how, in describing the physical horrors of WWI—the plunging descent into the odors, mud, ditches, excrement, darkness, and wetness—

Faulkner maps out a landscape of disgust that will continue to inform his depictions of the male encounter with female embodiment even when the war, itself, is not an active presence. The pervasive muddiness of As I Lay Dying, for example, a novel in which the almost complete absence of the war coincides with the visceral presence of a female corpse, leads John Liman to conclude that Faulkner's "preoccupation with mud has its origin in World War I," or else that his "personal obsession with mud finds in the trenches of World War I a catastrophic objective correlative" (39). That there is a strong, material correlation in Faulkner's mind between the mud of the trenches and the female body finds further evidence in Faulkner's short essay, "On Literature and War," in which he demonstrates an intimate familiarity not with the warfront, itself, for, like Julian Lowe, he never saw combat, but rather with *writings on* the trenches. As Michael Millgate points out, "mud and rain provide [...] the central motif for the first three paragraphs of the essay," a fact which he attributes to the pervasiveness of these elements in the primary accounts, themselves, and especially in "Barbusse's novel *Le Feu*, first published in French in 1916, translated into English as *Under Fire: The Story of a Squad* in 1917":

The earth! It is a vast and water-logged desert that begins to take shape under the long-drawn desolation of daybreak....With its slime-beds and puddles, the plain might be an endless grey sheet that floats on the sea and has here and there gone under. Though no rain is falling, all is drenched, oozing, washed out and drowned, and even the wan light seems to flow. ("Faulkner on the Literature of the First World War" 254)

Even more than Faulkner's own imaginative reconstructions of the front in Soldiers' Pay, this description of a water-logged land suffused with grey light, drenched "[t]hough no rain is falling," resonates powerfully with the world into which, as we have already seen, Quentin descends in The Sound and the Fury when he is subsumed by the memory of Caddy's loss of virginity to Dalton Ames. As Millgate suggests, WWI persists throughout Faulkner's career "as subject-matter and as theme—as a point of reference, a gauge which his characters must come to terms [with]," but it also endures as a sexualized landscape of decay and dissolution in the mind of a character such as Quentin, who, dead by 1910, has no memory, personal or collective, of the trenches. Thus, while the Great War may have given this terrain to Faulkner's mind, it is only by re-mapping its attributes onto a broader experience of trauma that he transforms it into a lasting feature of his fictional landscape.

In Soldiers' Pay the correlation between the horrors of war and the horrors of sex remains inconclusive insofar as the text seems divided between the desire, on the one hand, to approach the war as what Lothar Hönnighausen describes as an "arena of psychological projections" and, on the other hand, to approach the psyche as an index of historical effects. Of course, these two strategies are not mutually exclusive and I will argue further on that the crucial nexus of Faulkner's mature work lies precisely at the intersection of psychic fantasy and social reality. At this early moment in the career, however, sex and war, psychosexual trauma and historical injury, coexist rather than cohere, the bed and the trenches twin "tombs" into which youth and desire go to die. As we shall see in what follows, this fundamental tension will resurface in Flags in the Dust, where, having abandoned Elmer and completed Mosquitoes, Faulkner will revisit the story of the wounded veteran's return to his southern hometown. As Millgate argues, Flags in the Dust



is Faulkner's first "explicitly and directly 'Southern'" novel, and as such it constitutes a crucial turning point in the career. In shifting our attention to Flags in the Dust, however, it will be vital to retain the insights of Soldier's Pay, Elmer and Mosquitoes, for Faulkner's first Yoknapatawpha novel advances by way of regression, executing its turn toward the U.S. south through a return, via the psychological "detour" of the two intervening texts, to the central themes and problems that had motivated Soldiers' Pay—what Noel Polk identifies as the "touchstone triumvirate" of race, gender and war (Faulkner and War vii). Paradoxically, it is only by subordinating both the war and race in the psychosexual dramas of Elmer and Mosquitoes that Faulkner ultimately discovers, or rather rediscovers, the postwar, racially divided south, this time as a central source of tension in his fiction, rather than its formal counterpoint. It seems that in order to discover the south *as a subject* the author must first go away from it, for only having left Charlestown, Georgia does he then come back, in Flags in the Dust, to the "native soil" of Jefferson, Mississippi.

V  
“The shadow of death and doom”  
Flags in the Dust (ca. 1927)

In two separate interviews given in the 1950s, Faulkner claimed that in writing Flags in the Dust he discovered that “[his] own little postage stamp of native soil was worth writing about” and that, looking back on his career, Sartoris—the abridged version of Flags in the Dust published in 1929—could be seen to contain “the germ of [his] apocrypha” (Meriwether and Millgate 255; Blotner and Gwynn 285). By locating both the soil and the seed of the author’s fictional universe here, in his third published novel, and thus casting as seminal what was more accurately a pivotal moment in the author’s career, these statements echo Faulkner’s account of how he wrote The Sound and the Fury. A more nuanced and ultimately useful metaphor might be found in Faulkner’s claim to Horace Liveright, upon completing the manuscript of Flags in the Dust, that it was “THE book, of which those other things” (his previous novels) “were but foals” (Blotner and Gwynn 204). This statement can be read in at least two ways: on the one hand, it suggests that Flags in the Dust brought to maturity something that had remained nascent or undeveloped (“foal”-like) in his earlier work; on the other hand, it suggests that in writing Flags in the Dust Faulkner neither attained the fruition of his earlier writings, nor—as implied by the “germ” theory cited above—uncovered the embryo of the work to follow, but rather tapped into the creative matrix from which his earlier works *had already sprung*, but of which they were only derivative—only the “foals”—compared to this novel, which was, in Faulkner’s own mind, the “mother” of all books, or at least of his own. In writing Flags in the Dust, he thus seems to make his way back to the source.

Faulkner returned to this idea in an essay started and then abandoned sometime in 1931, in which he offered an account of the novel’s writing, rejection, and revision into Sartoris. In this incomplete fragment, he suggests that the novel emerged from his realization that “there would come a day on which the palate of [his] soul (?) would no longer reach to the simple bread-and-salt of the world as [he] had found it in the finding years [...],” a feeling that ultimately leads him to try “by main strength to recreate between the covers of a book the world as [he] was already preparing to lose and regret [...],” desiring “if not the capture of that world and the feeling of it as you’d preserve a kernel on a leaf (to indicate the lost forest) at least to keep the evocative skeleton of the desiccated leaf” (Blotner, “Composition of Sartoris” 123). Having begun to write “without much purpose,” he realized that “in order to preserve [his] belief in the savor of the bread-and-salt” (as well as his “own interest in the writing”) he would have to make it “personal” (122). What follows is a description of the writer’s process in explicitly parturitive terms:

(So I put people in it, since what can be more personal than reproduction, in its true way, the aesthetic and the mammalian. In its own sense, really, since the aesthetic is still the female principle, the desire to feel over the bones spreading and parting with something alive begotten of the ego and conceived by the protesting unleashing of flesh.) So I put

got some people, some I invented, others I took created out of tales I learned of nigger cooks and stable boys (of all ages between one-armed Joby, [who] 18, who taught me to write my name in red ink on the linen duster he wore for some reason we have both forgotten, to [Aunt] old Louvinia who remarked when the stars “fell” and who called my grandfather and my father by their Christian names until she died) in the long drowsy afternoons. Created I say, because they are composed partly from what they were in actual life and partly from what they should have been and were not; thus I improved on nature God, who, dramatic though He be, has no sense, no feeling, for theatre. (123)

This account of the creative process confirms Deborah Clarke’s assertion that “[a]s a writer, [Faulkner] retains a kind of maternal position, with control over literal and linguistic creativity,” “literal” because, for Faulkner, “the physical, not the linguistic, provides the engendering power, a power which grows out of female sexuality” (9, 5). Indeed, Faulkner’s gendering of the creative process in the above passage insists upon the visceral quality of that process, which, described in terms of the “bones spreading and parting” and the “protesting unleashing of flesh” harkens back to Margaret Powers’s experience of her own body “dividing” as well as to Dewey Dell’s pregnancy in *As I Lay Dying*, that “agony and the despair of spreading bones, the hard girdle in which lie the outraged entrails of events” (120). In conceiving *Flags in the Dust*, the Faulkner of this account not only writes the mother of all books; he also becomes, in a deeply embodied sense, a mother himself. What makes the account even more striking is how, in becoming a mother, and thus gaining access to the “engendering power” of female sexuality, Faulkner turns instinctively toward the “tales [he] learned of nigger cooks and stable boys,” out of which he either “took” or “created” the “people” that inhabit his new, fictional world, a detail that confirms Thadious Davis’ assertion that the “Negro,” both as “an actual physical presence, and as cultural concept...is integral to [Faulkner’s] art” (*Faulkner’s Negro* 17). That Faulkner specifically recalls how Joby taught him to write his name on the linen duster further reinforces the sense that the generative impulse behind *Flags in the Dust* is intimately bound up with black people in the author’s imagination. As we shall see further on when we turn to the novel proper, however, the salient feature of Faulkner’s account lies less with the materiality of the writing, itself, than with the materiality of the voices, which, filling “the long drowsy afternoons” of Faulkner’s childhood, become woven into the fabric of the world that he reproduces in *Flags in the Dust*.

In weighing the meaning of Faulkner’s claim that he was able to “put people” into his work for the first time with *Flags in the Dust*, (a statement that begs the question of what, exactly, he had been doing in all the novels up to this point), it is clarifying to consider the author’s account of the novel’s composition in relation to Fairchild’s oft-cited musings on the artistic process in *Mosquitoes*. In response to Julius’ accusation that artists are “not satisfied with the world as it is and so must try to rebuild the very floor [they] are standing on,” Fairchild replies that “[i]t’s more than that,” that it’s “getting into life, getting into it and wrapping it around you, becoming a part of it.” Women, he suggests “can do it without art—old biology takes care of that,” but it is only through art that men can “create without any assistance at all,” an act which he admits is a “perversion” but a “pretty good” one given that it has produced the

likes of “Chartres” and “Lear” (320). Having reached this conclusion, Fairchild’s mind wanders into darker territory:

Creation, reproduction from within. . . . Is the dominating impulse in the world feminine, after all, as aboriginal peoples believe? . . . There is a kind of spider or something. The female is the larger, and when the male goes to her he goes to death: she devours him during the act of conception. And that’s man: a kind of voraciousness that makes an artist stand beside himself with a notebook in his hand and always, putting down all the charming things that ever happen to him, killing them for the sake of some problematical something he might or he might not ever use. (320)

Two competing views of art and of “the feminine” emerge from Fairchild’s meditations. Both views suggest that in order to become an artist, a man has to become (like) a woman, but they conflict in their characterization of what Faulkner refers to in his essay as the “female principle”—what is, in Fairchild’s initial statement, an inherent, generative capacity that women have gotten by way of “old biology,” and, in his subsequent conclusion, the “dominating impulse” that compels the artist, like the woman, to “kill” all of his own experiences in order to conceive his art. Whereas the first model depicts art as a way of “getting into life,” the latter suggests that art extinguishes life, “devour[ing]” it in the process of conception.

As Clarke points out, Faulkner enacts the latter model insofar as his writing can be seen to “ingest” the mother, effectively “kill[ing] [her] off” in order to “appropriate” the creative powers of female sexuality (4). At the same time, however, the Faulkner who sets out to “recreate” the world “between the covers of a book” also inhabits the maternal position in an attempt to circumvent the cannibalistic impulse that Fairchild describes. For whereas, in Fairchild’s view, the artist-as-female literally murders the world with his pen by “putting down all the charming things that ever happen to him, killing them for the sake of” his art, Faulkner inhabits the maternal position in order to “*preserve* his belief in the savor of the bread-and-salt,” what he also describes as the “feeling” of the world that he is “already preparing to lose and regret” (my emphasis, 122). As registered in his striking of the words “put” and “took” in the passage cited previously, this is not simply a matter of “putting down,” in Fairchild’s words, his own experiences, nor of lifting “people” directly from the tales of his childhood; rather, it is a merging, or mating of these elements in order to produce people, characters, “composed partly from what they were in actual life and partly from what they should have been and were not.” He thus defines the “aesthetic”—and the “female principle” from which it derives—not as a blood-sucking voraciousness, but as something more “mammalian,” a desire to feel something “alive begotten of the ego and conceived by the protesting unleashing of flesh” and thus to produce a kind of flesh-and-blood art.

It is important to recognize here that while *Flags in the Dust* evokes the “bread-and-salt” world in decidedly different ways than any of Faulkner’s previous writings, the desire for a more warm-blooded, embodied art, one which preserves rather than severs its connections to the realm of lived experience, is not, in itself, entirely new. *Mosquitoes*, as we have seen, had already begun to insist upon precisely such an aesthetic by driving the virgin ideal back to earth, a gesture further reflected in Gordon’s transition from the marble torso, and the “cold pastoral”

that it implies, to the clay mask of Mrs. Maurier's face. What distinguishes Flags in the Dust from Mosquitoes is not its commitment to the connections between text and context, self and world, for the earlier work had already insisted upon the mutual implication of these spheres; rather, its innovation lies with the determination to reproduce a world in his fiction that is not only rooted in flesh and blood but that is also deeply southern. As David Minter suggests, along with "Father Abraham," Flags in the Dust "represent[s] a staggering discovery of [Faulkner's] region as a resource" (80), for in it, as Bleikasten puts it, the author "dr[aws] more than ever on his own experience," probing "broader segments and deeper strata of his memory, reaching back to early recollections and reaching out concentrically toward his family, his town, and his country and toward the South, past and present, real and mythic, to which they all belonged" (Melancholy 30). Or, in Millgate's words, "In developing a social context for the central action of the novel, Faulkner seems to have set out quite consciously to present a portrait, as full and as varied as possible, of the life of the South, or at least of his particular part of it" (77).

Here again, however, Faulkner extends rather than breaks with earlier work, for the definitive act of "reaching out" to his native soil advances him into the next phase of his career by turning him *back* to the major themes and problems of his first novel, where, as we have seen, the story of a WWI pilot's return to his southern hometown opens up a fundamental ambiguity between the two "rotten tricks" of war and sex in Faulkner's imagination. As I will demonstrate here, Flags in the Dust revisits both the central premise and the central problems of Soldiers' Pay through the pairing of Bayard Sartoris and Horace Benbow, a strategy which enables Faulkner to render the doomed soldier with much greater humanity, even as it exacerbates the earlier text's divided commitment to the possibilities of psychosexual and historical doom. The interplay between Horace and Bayard can be traced in Sartoris, as well, but as Michael Millgate has observed, many of the edits that produced the more concise version of the novel published in 1929 involved excising material related to Horace, changes which produced a more coherent story while also abandoning the "internal balance" between the two protagonists. What I will suggest here is that in retaining the Horace material, the unabridged novel preserves not an internal balance so much as a vital, internal tension, whereby it can be seen, on the one hand, to pursue the familiar theme of sexual doom that had centrally concerned Faulkner in Elmer and Mosquitoes via Horace's surrender to Belle Mitchell, while, on the other hand, and via Bayard's pursuit of his own literal death, excavating the issue of historical doom which had been only superficially explored in Soldiers' Pay.

Even as it formalizes Faulkner's divided commitment to these two "dooms" through the largely discrete stories of Horace and Bayard, Flags in the Dust also exposes the deep continuities that underwrite these two plots and the compulsions that drive them, how, as I will demonstrate here, Faulkner relies upon the psychosexual insights of his earlier work not only in his construction of Horace, who brings the inward-turned, sexually tortured artist to a point of passionate eclipse, but also in the construction of Bayard, for whom the "ties of blood" come to signify the ineradicable urges of the body *and also* of familial and cultural descent. It is, I thus propose, precisely through the "detours" of Elmer and Mosquitoes, and not in departure from

them, that Faulkner becomes able, as he suggests in his essay on the composition of Sartoris, to “put people” into his fictional world. Only by putting the world back into the body is he able to radically reconceive the past as the source of the tension that undoes the white male psyche from within and thus to make the transition from the dead center of Donald Mahon to the full-blooded, psychologically deep character of young Bayard Sartoris. Though largely obscured by the contrapuntal relation that Faulkner establishes between Horace and Bayard, these deep connections can be detected in Faulkner’s treatment of sexual and race relations, through which the otherwise rigorous differentiation between the two protagonists, and the sexual and historical compulsions that respectively move them, can be seen to break down. The quarantine between female sexuality and race, we should note, remains largely untroubled in Flags in the Dust, as in Soldiers’ Pay; if, however, we are to understand how race becomes, in The Sound and the Fury, “mixed up” in the sexual trauma that forms the core of that novel, we must look with special attention at Flags in the Dust, for it is here that the south first moves out of the margins of Faulkner’s fictional world and into its center, forcing the dissociation of psychosexual and historical injury to the point of crisis that Quentin Compson will confront.

\* \* \* \*

In approaching Flags in the Dust, it is useful to consider Faulkner’s statements regarding the “contrapuntal” technique that he used in his later novel, The Wild Palms (1939). Originally titled If I Forget Thee, Jerusalem, the novel consists of two storylines that take place at different historical moments and in different geographical locations, and therefore never intersect in the world of the fiction: one plot chronicles the ill-fated love affair between Harry Wilbourne and Charlotte Rittenmeyer, and the other follows the unlikely pairing of two unnamed strangers, a convict and a pregnant woman, who find themselves thrown together during a flood. By his own account, Faulkner wrote the story of the convict and the pregnant woman “simply to underline the story of Charlotte and Harry,” “writ[ing] the chapter of one and then [...] the chapter of the other, just as the musician [...] puts counterpoint behind the theme that he is working with” (Blotner and Gwynn 171). The story that he was “trying to tell,” Faulkner insisted, “was the story of Charlotte and Harry;” the other couple needed only to be “people in motion doing the exact opposite thing” to the main subjects, “just orchestrations of sounds that the musician puts back of the theme of his symphony” (Blotner and Gwynn 176).

In reading Flags in the Dust, one senses that the story of Horace Benbow is similarly intended to “underline” that of young Bayard Sartoris. The novel’s first two sections revolve around the central event of young Bayard’s homecoming, which precedes Horace’s own and thus establishes the environment into which the latter arrives over a third of the way through the text. Once introduced, Horace falls into a kind of lock step with the other, their paths physically crossing only once, and yet following a similar progression that includes a temporary phase of respite, then a resurgence of their individual “natures” leading to shame and self-loathing, and, finally, their submission to their respective fates. Internal to this structural parallel, the two characters are, like Harry and the convict, decidedly opposite—Bayard with his “bleak and brooding gaze” and “cold leashed violence” that drives him to his own brutal death, and Horace with his “air of fine and delicate futility” that leads him to submit passively before his own

sexual nature (80, 170). What becomes less clear as the narrative unfolds, however, is which of the stories Faulkner is, to borrow his own terms, “trying to tell,” an ambiguity further compounded by the numerous other characters who spring up and increase around and between this central pairing, creating additional plots and new resonances. For readers today, the novel’s inclusion not only of the Sartorises and Benbows, but also the Strothers, Snopeses, MacCallums, and Mitchells, as well as individuals such as Doc Peabody and Ratliff, constitutes proof of the novel’s fecundity and prescience, indications that, as Bleikasten puts it, “the threads with which [the author’s *oeuvre*] will be woven are now all in the writer’s hand” (*Ink* 31). To Faulkner’s editors at the time, however, the novel’s multiple strands were just confusing. The most generous critique came from Faulkner’s friend and agent, Ben Wasson, who insisted that the “trouble” with the manuscript was that Faulkner “ha[d] about six books” in it that he was “trying to write [...] all at once” (Blotner, “Composition” 124). As evidenced in the revisions that were made to the novel for its publication, the “trouble” with the original text seems to lie primarily with Horace. Michael Millgate observes that “the Sartoris material remained virtually intact, apart from the passages describing Narcissa’s relationship with John, but the Benbow material underwent a drastic reduction” (84). More specifically, it was only by cutting out several long passages detailing Horace’s internal struggle with his own sexual nature, and eliminating in its entirety his bizarre affair with Belle’s sister, Joan, that the two men were able to salvage, out of Flags in the Dust, the more concise and, as the new title reflects, more clearly centered narrative of Sartoris.

As implied in Faulkner’s essay on the novel’s composition, however, and as confirmed in the text’s palpable drive to flesh out an increasingly wider cross-section of its fictional landscape, the story that Flags in the Dust is trying to tell is apparently not the story of any one character, couple or family, but of the world within which all of the characters’ fates unfold. Considered from this angle, the tension between Bayard and Horace exposes not simply a dual commitment to two characters, two plots, but rather the degree to which, in setting out to evoke this world, Faulkner “reaches out” toward the south and the tales of his youth while also reaching back to Elmer and Mosquitoes, as if he is trying, in this, his first Yoknapatawpha novel, to mate the real and the imaginary, not only by “creat[ing]” people “from what they were in actual life and [...] what they should have been and were not,” but also by bringing the psychic material of the preceding works to bear in some way upon his rediscovered “native” soil. More faithfully recorded in Flags in the Dust than in Sartoris is how Horace enables the imperfect grafting of these terrains by functioning both as a siphon and a bridge, drawing off the inwardness of Elmer and Mosquitoes such that Bayard’s fate can materialize within a dense, social context, while also preserving the deep connections between this environment and the psychic domain that Faulkner had been engaged in mapping out in the earlier novels.

Of these two roles, it is Horace’s capacity to divert and quarantine that is more immediately felt, for what is most striking about the world that initially emerges in Flags in the Dust, prior to his arrival in the novel’s third section, is just how little it resembles the inward and, in the case of Mosquitoes, rarified environments of the novels that immediately precede it. In atmosphere, the early sections most resemble Soldiers’ Pay in their delineation of a small,

southern town inflected by generation, class, and race, and yet there is little in Faulkner's first novel that prepares us for the way that the south materializes in Flags in the Dust, not as a background for the principle actors and events, but as a physical, embodied presence *within* its central spaces and interactions. This shift plays out at multiple levels across the novel, but it can be immediately detected in the initial substitution, as the primary locus of the story's central action, of the Sartoris home for what was, in Soldiers' Pay, the Mahon's rectory, and thus of a palpably, even overbearing, "southern" space where there was a distinctly "English" one in the earlier novel. The rectory's "foreign" aspect, the reader will recall, reflects the sense of personal isolation that its white characters feel in the present as well as their alienation from the "long ago time" embodied in the novel's southern landscape, both of these conditions finding their clearest, and most extreme, expression in the monad of Donald Mahon, whose blindness separates him from his immediate surroundings even as his loss of memory severs him from his past. The Sartoris home similarly reflects the isolation of its inhabitants, and especially of the patriarch, Old Bayard, who exists, we are told within a "wall of deafness" (9); unlike the rectory, however, this self-enclosure belies a deep attachment to, rather than a disconnection from, a southern past that is preserved most powerfully within its walls rather than without.

One of the most significant indicators of this presence is the materialization of a black family within the space of the Sartoris household. In Soldiers' Pay, as we have seen, the domestic affairs of the rectory are overseen by Emmy, the poor, young white woman with whom Donald has had a brief affair before the war, and who has subsequently been taken in as an act of kindness by his father—an arrangement that contributes to the "foreign" or "English" quality of this, the novel's central location. In Flags in the Dust, in contrast, Emmy's place is filled by Eleanora Strother, a "tall mulatto woman" who, along with her father, Simon, her brother, Caspey and her son, Isom, constitute three generations of a family whose connection to the Sartoris goes back for at least another two generations, and finds its origins in slavery. The novel's substitution of this historical intimacy for the somewhat contrived arrangement between Emmy and Joe Mahon can be attributed to its greater "realism," but it also registers a more precise and fundamental development in Faulkner's conceptualization of the past between Soldiers' Pay and Flags in the Dust. For, as neatly reflected in the Sartoris silver, which is "so fine that some of the spoon handles were worn now almost to paper thinness where fingers in their generations had held them" (40)—generations that include not only Sartoris but Simon's grandfather, Joby, who "had buried [it] one time beneath the ammoniac barn floor while Simon, aged three in a single filthy garment, had looked on with a child's grave interest in the curious game"(40)—the condition of peace that Charlestown's black community embodies for the novel, that "time when there was no war," is radically reconceived in Flags in the Dust as a collective memory that resides, along with the novel's black characters, within the very heart of the white family, and points back to *another* war. We shall see further on that this reconceptualization of the past significantly impacts Faulkner's depiction of race relations, but for now we should simply note that the presence of the black family within the Sartoris household marks not only the migration of the southern context out of the margins of Faulkner's fictional world and into its



center, but also the reinsertion of the southern past into history, from which it had remained largely removed in the previous novel.

It is into this “long ago time”—an historical past oriented around the Civil War—that we seem to be steadily drawn when, in the novel’s opening section, we are first introduced to the Sartoris home in the company of Old Bayard. Leaving the town behind them, with its “gasoline propelled paupers,” Simon steers the carriage that Old Bayard continues to use as part of his “testy disregard of industrial progress” into a more pastoral landscape, in which “from time to time a negro lift[s] his hand from the plow handle in a salute,” until they pull up beside a “bed of salvia where that Yankee patrol had halted on that day long ago” (11). This detail is the first in a series of objects that fall under Old Bayard’s gaze, each of which points back toward an earlier time in the family history, from the chandelier “fitted originally for candles but since wired for electricity,” to the parlor doors that open into the room in which John Sartoris’ body had been lain in its “grey regimentals,” to the “narrow windows” that frame the upper hallway, each “set with leaded vari-colored panes that, with the bearer of them, constituted [John Sartoris’] mother’s deathbed legacy to him, which John Sartoris’ youngest sister had brought from Carolina in a straw-filled hamper in ‘69” (12-13). These last objects are particularly charged, occasioning the narration’s long, backward leap to the day of Miss Jenny’s arrival half a century before. Faulkner had already experimented with the technique of memory recall in *Elmer*, but whereas the feel of the red paint tube turns Elmer’s mind backward to his own childhood, and the memory of the fire, the cathected objects in the Sartoris home turn its inhabitants back to experiences that belong to a previous generation, which, for reasons that are made clear in the recount of Miss Jenny’s arrival in 1869, remain very much alive in the memories of the living. The hamper of glass, we learn, is not the only heirloom that Miss Jenny has transported to her brother from Carolina, for she also bears the details of their sibling, the first Bayard’s death “prior to the second battle of Manassas” (13). This story, first related on the night of her arrival, has been retold many times since, made “richer and richer” with each telling until it has “tak[en] on a mellow splendor like wine.” The “hair-brained prank of two heedless and reckless boys wild with their own youth” has gradually acquired the dimensions of a myth: “a gallant and finely tragical focal-point to which the history of the race had been raised from out the old miasmatic swamps of spiritual sloth by two angels valiantly and glamorously fallen and strayed, altering the course of human events and purging the souls of men” (14). As criticism has noted, this tale is the very distillation of the past that abides so strongly within this household, an enriched history, which, like the face which Miss Jenny brings to her brother’s home in 1869 with its “delicate replica of the Sartoris nose and that expression of indomitable and utter weariness which all Southern women had learned to wear” is at once distinctly Sartorisean and essentially southern (13). It grafts family to region, eventually elevating the “history of the race” into a kind of genetic legend–cum-cultural myth that is preserved within the Sartoris memory like wine in a bottle.

This is the environment to which young Bayard Sartoris returns in 1919, the same year that Donald Mahon was brought back to his father in *Soldiers’ Pay*. Unlike Donald, whose head injury severs him equally from the memories of the war and from his “faun” like youth, young

Bayard's wounds are psychological and indirect, the result of having witnessed his own brother's death. In stark contrast to his predecessor's amnesia, his trauma leaves him at the mercy of both the immediate and the distant past; indeed, what is most striking about young Bayard's predicament in relation to Faulkner's earlier treatment of the doomed soldier is the degree to which the young Sartoris is driven to remember, recount, and ultimately reenact the memory of his brother's death, attempts that embroil him, as Pearl James has argued, in "other pasts, other plots" from the family history. As James and others point out, this insinuation of the past into the present, cultural myth into personal experience, is depicted in part as a narrative dilemma that the novel seems to both critique and reinscribe, in which the reified story of the first Bayard's death "establish[es] the idiom" through which all subsequent stories, including that of young Bayard, must be communicated (170). When he "[falls] to talking of the war" with MacCallum, for example, young Bayard slips into the same, elevated rhetoric that precedes it in both the novel's historical and narrative chronologies, speaking in language resonant with the story of the first Bayard's death "not of combat, but rather of a life peopled by young men like fallen angels, and of meteoric violence like that of fallen angels, beyond heaven or hell and partaking of both: doomed immortality and immortal doom" (133). As becomes clear when he tells the same story to Narcissa, however, his experience cannot be reconciled to the "history of the race" that we have from Miss Jenny. A "brutal tale, without beginning, and crassly and uselessly violent and at times profane and gross," it remains raw and meaningless where the first Bayard's death has been rendered rich and "finely tragical" (280). Unable to articulate his experience to the only available narrative in his family, young Bayard seems doomed to repeat the death that he cannot render intelligible, and, as James points out, citing Freud, to "reproduce it not as a memory but as an action" (173).

It is vital to recognize, however, that even as the novel implies that Bayard's familial and cultural surroundings compound his misery by failing to provide him with an adequate context for his grief, it also proposes something darker and more fundamentally deterministic, which is that the past "dooms" young Bayard by insinuating its own potent fatalism into his body as surely as it bequeaths to Old Bayard the bad heart that ultimately kills him. This heart condition is clearly tongue-in-cheek; the family's problems are not exactly physiological in nature, a point reinforced by the comic episode involving the wen on Old Bayard's face, and the subsequent debate over "blood poisoning" (265). The underlying suggestion, however, of an inherited and embodied flaw or contaminant, one which, as Miss Jenny laments, kills her nephew "from the inside out," cannot be readily dismissed. For though Cleanth Brooks suggests that "[u]nless one believes as seriously as Miss Jenny does that blood will tell and that the Sartoris family is somehow doomed, one will have to seek out a more credible reason for the malaise that affects the twentieth-century Sartorises," the novel itself treats the possibility of genetic doom with the same offsetting mix of seriousness and irony that it seems to bring to all aspects of the Sartoris family, and we therefore cannot assume that it is a red herring (175).

Indeed, Miss Jenny's insistence that there is no real difference between the generations of Sartoris men because they are "[s]avages, every one of 'em," and that the flaw is "in the blood" is in many ways confirmed by the novel (331). Like his father, young Bayard is pitted against

the “dark struggling of his heart” (360); however, whereas the Sartoris legacy lies on Old Bayard like an imprint, its characteristics worn into his body like the marks of his father’s teeth upon his pipe, it affects young Bayard as a more visceral possession, as if, constituting as he does the final male descendent, the family blood and all its toxins have become concentrated within the tissue of a body which he inhabits but cannot control. It is precisely the innate “savagery” that Miss Jenny describes that seems to rear its ugly head whenever young Bayard indulges his need for physical violence, the experience of driving at breakneck speed drawing out “the lipless cruel derision of his teeth” (121), and the subsequent agony of broken bones reducing him to a kind of animal, “his teeth show[ing] between his drawn, bloodless lips” as he “bend[s] lower and lower on all fours, like a wounded beast [...] with his sweating, bloodless face and the dry grinning of his teeth” (235). He shows the same, contorted expression to Narcissa as he talks brutally about his brother’s death, “grin[ing] his white cruel teeth at her” beneath his “bleak eyes,” and clutching her arm until “she could feel the flesh of her wrists, feel the bones turn in it like a loose garment” (281). Young Bayard’s torment in this scene is clearly bound up with his memory of Johnny, and, as Pearl James argues, more specifically with the crucial fact—revealed for the first time in this moment—that he was unable to “pick up” his brother’s body after it fell into the clouds, a detail that she attributes to the “particular obscenity of death during World War I,” in which “[m]any were deprived of the opportunity to see, touch, and care for the loved one’s corpse” (179). We need only think forward to Absalom, Absalom!, and the body of Charles Bon—a body which Rosa Coldfield will insist that she “*never even saw dead*” even though she helped to bury it in 1865, and therefore “*did not love*”—in order to confirm the powerful hold that the absent body has upon Faulkner’s imagination, but also to see that this power might lie in its capacity to evoke unspeakable obstacles to love and mourning that are chronic rather than unique, and rooted in “obscenities” that lie deeper than WWI. For as implied in Old Bayard’s memory of gazing into a spring as a child and seeing the image of a “skull” reflected in the “cavernous sockets of his eyes and the panting animal snarl of his teeth”—the sadistic expression that overcomes young Bayard whenever he attempts to recount or reenact his brother’s death is, the novel at times suggests, intrinsic to the family inheritance, the shadow of death having been cast so long ago, and become so thoroughly ingrained, as to resemble a kind of embodied determinism (93). Within this model the ostensible differences between the Civil and World Wars become irrelevant insofar as all wars are, as Miss Jenny says of Johnny’s war, simply an “excuse to get himself killed,” occasions for the manifestation of the old Sartoris doom that drives each generation to acts of violent self-destruction (32).

In determining the degree to which the novel supports or deflates the idea that young Bayard is doomed by his family past, it is necessary to consider his story in relation to that of Horace Benbow and, through Horace, to the psychosexual plot that unfolds between Elmer and Mosquitoes. Even before Horace enters the picture, we should note, there are certain indications that young Bayard’s character is in some, indeterminate sense, continuous with the sexually tortured protagonists of the previous novels. The face that emerges by moonlight on the night of his return from the war, for example, with its “hawklike planes” and “eyes like cavernous shadows,” reveals two genealogies, the first pointing back, via his grandfather, to John Sartoris

and the second pointing back, unexpectedly, to the sculptor, Gordon, who first appears to the reader of *Mosquitoes* with “a face like that of a heavy hawk,” (a description frequently reiterated over the course of the novel (12, 27, 267, 318, 337)), and who, as previously noted, gazes out at the world with “cavernous” eyes (152, 269). More significantly, the “dry grin” that appears so frequently upon young Bayard’s face whenever he is driven to acts of violence mirrors the expression not only of his grandfather, and of the “fatality,” the “augury of man’s destiny” that he sees gazing back at him in the spring (97), but to the sexually doomed subjects of Faulkner’s two previous novels, as well, through whom, as we have seen, Faulkner had already probed the alien, jeering presence that Elmer sees reflected in the “grinning skull” of the Venice woman’s face (418).

The resurfacing of this grotesque expression in Bayard’s face is a residual trace of deeper affinities that are largely obscured by their deflection onto the figure of Horace, who, as earlier intimated, absorbs and quarantines much of the novel’s explicitly sexual content, such that young Bayard’s body can be, in a sense, “given over” to the social and historical pressures that exhibit such a powerful presence in his family. The end result of this arrangement is the “contrapuntal” effect previously mentioned, in which, despite the fact that the men return to the same town and, as we shall see, to the same woman, their stories seem to unfold in two discrete worlds. From the moment that he descends from the train in his “clean, wretchedly fitting khaki,” with “his distraught gaze like a somnambulist,” it is clear that Horace exists in a realm largely immune to the forces that motivate young Bayard (170). Whereas his counterpart returns from the front with no possessions save the traumatic story of Johnny’s death at six-thousand feet, a story that is already on his lips when he first arrives on his grandfather’s porch, Horace carries home an “astonishing impedimenta of knapsacks and kitbags and paper-wrapped parcels” that are filled, like his talk, with evidence not of time spent in the air or down in the trenches—he went to war with the YMCA, and thus as a noncombatant—but rather in the caves of Venice, where he has somehow found leisure to study the art of making blown glass vases (170). It is this sense of historical oblivion that he seems to carry home from the war, and which he continues to indulge as he returns to the “brick doll’s house” that he shares with his sister, Narcissa, off a quiet road, surrounded by “a golden Arcadian drowse” at the end of a long, tree-lined driveway that surrounds them perpetually with “that cool, faintly-stringent odor of cedar trees” (179). Unlike the Sartoris home, which is saturated with memories both personal and inherited, the Benbow home is largely untroubled by a past that abides, in stark contrast to the physical, claustrophobic presence of the past within the Sartoris home, only as “a delicate lingering impalpability” (188). Whereas Bayard spends his first night home in a state of physical suffocation, “gulping air into his lungs like a man who has been submerged and who still cannot believe that he has reached the surface again,” Horace allows himself to “slip, as into water, into the constant serenity” of his sister’s affection, which emanates outward from her body and fills the rooms of the house (49, 183).

What becomes clear as Horace’s story unfolds is the degree to which his character is a kind of interloper from the previous texts, secreting the preoccupations and atmospheres of *Elmer* and *Mosquitoes* into the intensely southern landscape of *Flags in the Dust* much as he

carries his Venetian glass blowing equipment home to Jefferson. In his “delicate futility” and heavily aestheticized experience of the war, Horace most resembles the protagonist of *Elmer*, who, the reader will recall, suffers his injury not in battle—as do both Donald and young Bayard—but during training, when he fails to release a grenade because of the auto-erotic pleasure he derives from fondling its surface, a sensation that he later relives as he caresses his paint tubes on his way back to Europe. For Elmer, the front becomes more of a study in color than carnage—“Brown and blue. The colors of war, [...] Brown, khaki, the color of his ill-fitting uniform [...] and blue, the starched grayish blue of nurses’ uniforms” (356); Horace produces during the weeks following his homecoming, five vases “in different colors and all nearly perfect,” each one with a name. (Meanwhile, Bayard is reenacting his brother’s death on horseback and behind a steering wheel). In his industry, Horace resembles another artist figure, Gordon. Actually, Horace comes closer to Gordon than to Elmer, who never does get around to making any art. Indeed, Horace even seems to outdo the sculptor in some respects; “macabre and inviolate,” “purged and purified as bronze,” his vases approximate the ideal that Gordon’s marble torso never quite reaches (179). The fire anneals all signs of articulation in order to better approximate the pure shape, “strange and new as fire swirling” that burns within Gordon’s heart(172), that “vague shape” that we encounter first in Elmer’s mind (378), which, significantly, finds an early corollary in the “tall simple glass vases” that he gazes at longingly in his youth (377). It is precisely the condition of “pure blank serenity” toward which these artists yearn that Horace seems to achieve in his creations, one of which he “k[ee]ps always on his night table and call[s] by his sister’s name in the intervals of apostrophizing both of them impartially in his moments of rhapsody over the realization of the meaning of peace and the unblemished attainment of it as thou still unravished bride of quietude” (190).

It comes as no surprise to readers familiar with “Elmer” and *Mosquitoes* that Horace’s “unblemished attainment” of the ideal is both illusory and unsustainable, the futility of the artist’s attempt to purge himself of the world having constituted, as we have seen, the central, abiding theme of these earlier novels. As manifest in the description of Horace coming to Narcissa “in his stained disheveled clothes and his sooty hands in which [a] vase lay demure and fragile as a bubble, and with his face blackened too with smoke,” the conviction that the dirt and darkness thrown off in the pursuit of the ideal clings to the self through its own flesh achieves a kind of gem-like clarity in *Flags in the Dust*, as though the conclusions at which Faulkner had labored to arrive in the previous texts have undergone a process of vitrification that renders them, like the vases themselves, objectified, crystallized and cooled. What is most striking about Horace, and what differentiates him from his predecessors, is the way he seems to stand simultaneously within and outside the bubble of his own fate, both the object of, and spectator to, a doom that he carries forward from the previous novels. The following descriptions of his turn from Narcissa to Belle Mitchell, for example, create before Horace’s inward eye a compendium of the sexual drama we have traced across *Elmer* and *Mosquitoes*:

Still unchanging days. They were doomed days; he knew it, yet for the time being his devious and uncontrollable impulses had become one with the rhythm of things as a swimmer’s counter muscles become one with a current, and cage and all his life grew

suave with motion, oblivious of destination. During the period not only did his immediate days become starkly inevitable, but the dead thwarted ones with all the spent and ludicrous disasters which his nature had incurred upon him, grew lustrous in retrospect and without regret, and those to come seemed as undeviating and logical as mathematical formulae beyond an incurious golden veil. (191)

Or here:

It was like a road stretching on through darkness, into nothingness and so away; a road lined with black motionless trees O thou grave myrtle shapes amid which Death. A road along which he and Narcissa walked like two children drawn apart one from the other to opposite sides of it; strangers, yet not daring to separate and go in opposite ways, while the sinister gods watched them with cold unwinking eyes. And somewhere, everywhere, behind and before and about them pervading, the dark warm cave of Belle's rich discontent and the tiger-reek of it. (223)

Unlike Elmer, who never seems to wholly lose his innocence in his baffled and doomed search for his "dianalike girl" within the world of real women, Horace walks the road away from Narcissa and toward Belle with full consciousness of what awaits him at the other end—and yet there seems to be no possibility of pursuing another path. At times, the narration suggests, "the dark lift[s] and then Horace and Narcissa wal[k] the road in sunlight, as of old," but these moments are but temporary stays against the dark that "descend[s] once more" as Horace "merge[s] with himself, fused in the fatalism of his nature" (228). Even when the siblings steal an afternoon together later in the novel, their sense of happy companionship is, we are told, but "two roads become parallel for a brief mile and soon to part again" (339). The only explanation the novel gives for Horace's "nature," is the one that he, himself, provides, and which is consistent with what Faulkner had suggested in his previous novels—that it is, itself, derived from Nature, which watches not only him but all mankind, as "he tries to wean himself away from the rank and richly foul old mire that spawned him, biding her time and flouting that illusion of purification which he has foisted upon himself and calls his soul" (338).

None of the passages cited above survived the cuts that produced *Sartoris*, and one of the strongest arguments in favor of the unabridged text lies with the greater attention that it gives to Horace's surrender to the nature that moves him inexorably toward disaster. For even as Horace's sense of his own, passive drift toward the "mire" of Belle highlights, on the one hand and by way of counterpoint, the active nature of young Bayard's pursuit of his own death, it also, on the other hand and by way of parallel, underscores the degree to which the Sartoris' self-destructive drive remains, like that of Horace, deeply compulsive and intractable. Thus, for example, in *Flags in the Dust* the excised description of how Horace's "devious and uncontrollable impulses" become, for a brief time, "one with the rhythm of things as a swimmer's counter muscles become one with a current," immediately prefaces the account of Bayard's experience, during roughly the same period, of "a smoldering hiatus that might have been called contentment," in which the routine activities of planting and harvesting quell his perverse need for physical violence by installing the "sober rhythms of the earth in his body" until "his muscles gr[o]w so familiar with them as to get his body through the days without

assistance from him at all” (229-230). Like the peaceful river or quiet road that draws Horace steadily, irremediably, toward Belle, nature relieves young Bayard of his burdens only to guarantee their return; though springtime “ensnare[s]” his body with “activities repeated and repeated,” it leads inevitably to summer, and with the turning of the seasons he feels the return of the old, brutal impulses which have not been eradicated, so much as rendered dormant, “always and constant beneath activity and bodily fatigue and sleep and all” (228). Around the same time that Horace is “watch[ing] himself drown” in the “motionless and cloying sea” of Belle Mitchell, young Bayard nearly drowns himself by flipping his car in a creek bed (230-32). Situated thus in a rigorous parallel with his counterpart’s subordination to his own stubborn nature, each of young Bayard’s successive phases of peace—a category that includes the “smoldering hiatus” of spring, the affair with Narcissa that follows the accident described above, his retreat to the MacCallums after a second accident that kills his grandfather, and his brief stay with a black family before leaving Jefferson en route to his own death—come to resemble, as the novel explicitly suggests with respect to Narcissa, only “temporary abeyance[s] of his despair and the isolation of that doom he could not escape” (324).

If we are to appreciate the full-blown, historical determinism of later characters such as Joe Christmas, it is vital to recognize the degree to which young Bayard’s doom remains, even in its mobilization of historical rather than sexual compulsions, essentially libidinal in the sense that Faulkner had explored in the earlier texts, which is to say that it moves him with urges that are at once “in” the body and deeply other. To recognize this dimension of Bayard’s character is not to deny the historical motivations behind his behavior; rather, it is to appreciate how, in returning to the figure of the wounded veteran in Flags in the Dust, Faulkner builds upon the psychosexual insights of Elmer and Mosquitoes in order to flesh out the trauma that had remained largely untouched in the opaque figure of Donald Mahon. Cleanth Brooks has argued that “in moving into the Yoknapatawpha country, Faulkner did not abandon his interest in madness, psychic aberrancies or social complexities and ambiguities” (165), but what I am suggesting here is that Flags in the Dust retains the psychological investments of the two previous texts not only through the persistence of neurotic characters and sexual themes, but also, and more importantly, as a kind of deep structure, which fundamentally shapes the novel’s understanding of the relationship between individuals and the world which surrounds and constitutes them. As we have seen, the world to which young Bayard returns exhibits a drastically different texture than those that Faulkner constructs in Elmer and Mosquitoes, the grossly material yielding, in Bayard’s case, to the densely historical. Yet the early novels’ conviction in the fundamental implication of the subject in that world, or what I have previously identified as the condition of the “world-in-me,” as well as the *embodied* nature of that condition, abides like the bones upon which the novel’s dense, social tissue is subsequently laid. It is precisely this presence of the old terrible desire that is revealed in the cavernous sockets and toothed grin that rise up beneath the Sartoris flesh in Bayard’s face.

The deep continuities that haunt Bayard’s expression find more direct expression in Narcissa, who, by providing one of the only physical connections between the otherwise distinct plots of her brother and the man who becomes her husband, acts as a kind of mediator between

the psychosexual and historical dooms that form the novel's central, divided core. The translation initially seems to move entirely in one direction—from the historical to the sexual—because Narcissa is very much her brother's sister, which is to say that she exhibits an obliviousness similar to that which enables Horace to return from the war with a glass-blowing machine instead of a wound. While the “world looks on with hysterical amazement,” she “within her walled and windless garden,” thinks of those at the front only with “a sober and pointless pity,” the war having been “brought about” in her mind “for the sole purpose of removing [the Sartoris brothers] from her life as noisy dogs are shut up in a kennel far off” (77-78). We can already detect in this characterizations hints of the woman Narcissa will become in *Sanctuary*, but whereas in that novel she will be the embodiment of a cold and even cunning “respectability,” here she is still a flesh-and-blood virgin in the tradition of Mrs. Maurier of *Mosquitoes*, which is to say that she still exists very much within her body, and maintains her “grave” serenity only by keeping her distance from people like Bayard. Though doomed in one sense, Bayard is also deeply alive in his enthrallment to the kind of violent, internal forces that she, herself, abjures—forces that her sensitive nature experiences acutely, and gives back to the novel in distinctly sexual terms. As invariably registered in the compulsory widening of her lips and eyes whenever she is forced to bear witness to his acts of self-destruction (141, 279, 280-291), Narcissa experiences young Bayard's violent behavior as a physical penetration. Made audience to his debacle with the horse, for example, she stares with her “mouth partly open and two eyes round with a serene astonishment,” unable to turn away from the spectacle that subsequently “crashe[s] with that hot violence of his through the bastions and thundered at the very innermost citadel of her being” (159). Despite her attempts to push it out of her mind, Narcissa continually reencounters the memory “like a recurring echo in her violated corridors” or a “stabbing rush like a touched nerve,” the “mad rush of the beast and its rider like a bronze tidal wave,” which, having “spent its blind fury and ebbed,” leaves him “prone on the wet sidewalk while the horse stood erect like a man and struck at him with its forefeet” (159).

As captured in this striking image of his body lain “prone” before the “erect” horse, Bayard is at the mercy of a wild impulse or “rush” that he actively indulges, but which ultimately subordinates him to its blind violence. It is this sense of inward prostration—of being made victim not simply to external forces, but to one's own, surging need—that both horrifies and attracts Narcissa, for even though “all of her instincts [are] apathetic toward him, toward his violence and his brutally obtuse disregard of all the qualities which compos[e] her being,” she is nonetheless drawn toward these raw elements, watching both Bayard and Johnny, prior to the war, with “shrinking and fearful curiosity, as she might have looked upon wild beasts with a temporary semblance of men” (77). Much as Belle's sister, Joan, unleashes something primal in Horace, reminding him of a moment from his childhood when the gaping mouth of a caged tiger had awakened “in him a thing these many generations politely dormant,” a “shrieking” thing that transforms his entire body into a “tranced and soundless scream,” Bayard seems to undo Narcissa not simply by penetrating her, but also by stirring up something latent and forgotten in her grave serenity. This thing compels her to visit him following his first car wreck and to stand outside the door to his sick room, “rigid with repressed trembling,” “clenching her hands at her



sides,” and with her “teeth clenched upon her lower lip” in an attempt to “throttle” the “swelling convolutions of laughter in her throat” (242). In a manner reminiscent of the ironic mirroring that Faulkner creates between Mrs. Maurier and Gordon in *Mosquitoes*, Narcissa’s posture at the threshold of Bayard’s room anticipates the spectacle that she will later witness within those walls, when she sees the latter’s unconscious body, wracked by a nightmare, “straining terrifically in its cast, and his clenched hands and the snarl of his teeth beneath his lifted lip” (279). Both characters, it seems, are at the mercy of forces that turn them inward upon themselves in a struggle for control, a connection that the novel further underscores through the refraction of their shared torment through the grotesque figure of Byron Snopes, who, having learned of Narcissa’s engagement to Bayard, stands before his young blackmailer, Virgil Beard, “with his clenched trembling hands” and his breath coming and going “with a fast ah-ah-ah sound in his throat” until it seems to him that “his eyeballs [are] being drawn back and back into his skull, turning further and further until the cords that drew them reached the snapping point” (294). It is vital to recognize in Byron’s contorted expression the presence of something fundamentally continuous with the drive that underwrites the clenched bodies and wrung faces of Narcissa and Bayard, for though his “worm-like nature” and near constant condition of physical discharge—drool, perspiration, vomit, blood—makes him the novel’s most abject character, the alien compulsions that “coi[l] within him” tap directly into a major artery in *Flags in the Dust*, one which extends back to Faulkner’s earliest novels and will yield its most powerful material in the works to follow.

We have already seen elements of Byron’s fit in the hysterical laughter that precipitates Quentin’s swoon into the summer of Dalton Ames, reminding him of the time he broke his leg: “*they told me the bone would have to be broken again and inside me it began to say Ah Ah Ah and I began to sweat [...] my jaw muscles getting numb and my mouth saying Wait Wait just a minute through the sweat ah ah ah behind my teeth [...]*” (113). Even more striking are the resonances between Byron’s thwarted lust and the nymphomania of Temple Drake, which is worth reproducing at length here:

[...] she felt long shuddering waves of physical desire going over her, draining the color from her mouth, drawing her eyeballs back into her skull in a shuddering swoon. [...] Her eyes began to grow darker and darker, lifting into her skull above a half moon of white, without focus, with the blank rigidity of a statue’s eyes. She began to say Ah-ah-ah-ah in an expiring voice, her body arching slowly backward as though faced by an exquisite torture” (233-34).

The meaning of Temple’s shuddering, arching form can only be understood within the complex apparatus of *Sanctuary*, but what we can note here is that the “waves” of desire that grip her from within, transforming her face and body into a palimpsest of the tortured figures that people the preceding novels, emerge from the confluence of sexual and social compulsions that are both stubbornly aligned and rigorously distinguished in *Flags in the Dust*. For though the marriage of Narcissa and Bayard constitutes, in one sense, the consummation of the novel’s sexual and historical drives, their union comes about less through their surrender to one another than to their own, inward natures. Thus, for example, in the episode that seals their engagement Bayard takes

Narcissa for a ride, and, despite his promises to the contrary, “jerk[s] the throttle all the way down its ratchet,” an act which opens up Narcissa’s body as well as the engine, releasing the hysteria that she had successfully “throttled” in the earlier scene outside his bedroom. Gazing with “her bloodless mouth open” and her “wide hopeless eyes,” she clings to him, “moving her hands crazily about his shoulders,” her “crazed hands [...] on his face” and her mouth “sobbing wildly against his[...]” (291-92). The release of Bayard’s old compulsions thus triggers, in turn, Narcissa’s submission to her own, repressed sexuality. In the end, however, neither character seems truly touched by the need that moves the other: temporarily stayed by Narcissa, Bayard eventually leaves her and their unborn child in order to resume his old quest for danger and violence; Narcissa, who seems more relieved than distressed by Bayard’s removal, reverts to something like her original state. “[S]ad a little with vibrations of ancient fears,” those “vibrations of old terrors and dreads” which young Bayard had stirred up within her life, she is like a “lily” that has been “rocked to its roots” but has now recovered, “the bell itself [...] untarnished save by the friction of its own petals” (431).

As Narcissa herself intuits when she “discern[s] the dark silver shape of that doom which she has incurred,” she does not emerge wholly untarnished by her husband, for her recuperated serenity contains within it the seed of the next Sartoris, and thus breeds its own antithesis. If, as I have suggested, Bayard’s tortured grin looks backward to *Elmer* and *Mosquitoes*, thus exposing the libidinal drive that underwrites his compulsion to reproduce the deaths of his forebearers, then in Narcissa’s pregnant impregnability we can detect something rather opposite, which is how the drive of history is perpetuated through and within the sexual female body, an idea that Faulkner will explore more fully in the novels to follow, but which finds its first, crucial expression, here, in the transformation of Narcissa from an “unravished” vase into a physical vessel for the Sartoris line. In considering how this happens, it is vital to recognize that she is neither an innocent who stumbles into Bayard’s destructive path, nor the passive victim of Miss Jenny’s match-making; as she, herself, insists in response to Miss Jenny’s apology for “[getting] her into this,” she “[does] it herself.” Significantly, she also claims that she would do it over again if given the choice, a commitment that the narrator attributes to “that fine and passive courage of women throughout the world’s history” (331-32), but which assumes a rather different motivation in the descriptions of their strange courtship. For though Narcissa muses to herself at one point, that it is “better to have lost it, than never to have had it at all,” it is the loss, itself, more than the having, which seems to console her (278); put another way, she seems to love Bayard better dead than alive. Indeed, it is precisely this loss, this death, that she seems to actively long for when she gazes down at his unconscious form immediately following his fall from the horse,” noting “the pallid, suddenly dreaming calm of his bloody face from which violence had been temporarily wiped as with a damp cloth, leaving it still with that fine bold austerity of Roman statuary, beautiful as a flame shaped in bronze and cooled; the outward form of its energy but without its heat” (159). Narcissa, it seems, is in love with Bayard’s death as much as Bayard himself, for only death can cleanse him of the heat that both thrills and repulses her. It is precisely the possibility of recovering this “purged” and “refined” version of her husband that she then anticipates in her unborn child, whom she resolves to protect from the

legacy that has claimed his father by “surrounding [him] with wave after wave of that strength which well[s] so abundantly within her as the days accumul[at]e, manning the walls with invincible garrisons (409).

As registered in the similarities between the “bronze mask” of Bayard’s face, in which the “outward form” of his energy is captured and cooled, and Horace’s vases, “purged and purified and bronze,” Narcissa’s desire for a version of her husband from whom the Sartoris blood has been “wiped away” perpetuates an illusion familiar to us from Elmer and Mosquitoes. What is striking about her desire is not only its reversal of the gender dynamic we have seen at work in Elmer, Gordon, and Horace—the male body becoming, in this case, a projection of the woman’s irrecoverable “pure, blank serenity” —but the way it re-articulates this old longing for physical and psychic integrity as the emerging, and equally doomed, effort to purge history itself that will become so central to Faulkner’s later novels. It is important to recognize that unlike Miss Jenny, Narcissa has no conscious loyalties to the Sartoris tradition, and yet, in cherishing the beauty and “fine bold austerity” of Bayard’s stilled expression, she falls prey to one of its most seductive illusions, which is that the positive elements of that tradition can somehow be separated and cherished apart from the toxic ones. The novel would seem to reinforce this idea through the contrast between Johnny and Bayard, who can be seen to embody the two humors that inhere in the Sartoris blood, the one a “right, warm-hearted boy” who was always “[g]ittin’ a whoppin’ big time outen ever’ thing that come up,” and the other, as we have seen, brooding, cold, and tortured—qualities which he exhibits even before the war and Johnny’s death (379). The differences between Johnny and Bayard are misleading, however, for as embodied in the two interwoven plants that decorate the Sartoris veranda—a rose and a wistaria that have been “trained onto the same frame,” the one “slowly but steadily kill[ing]” the other (11)—the dark and light aspects of the Sartoris legacy that both undergirds and strangles the living generation cannot be so readily distinguished.

Indeed, in a manner that anticipates the twinship of Henry Sutpen and Charles Bon in Absalom, Absalom!, both of whom spring from the “same source,” though the one will run in “sunlight” and the other in “shadow,” Flags in the Dust suggests that the respective natures of Johnny and Bayard are not only intertwined, but, more radically, derivative of a single root, and thus that a fundamental sameness is to be found beneath their polarized affects. Narcissa intuits this shared quality when she remarks upon the “air of smoldering abrupt violence” which “[Johnny] and his brother had both had,” though “Bayard’s was a cold arrogant sort of leashed violence, while in John it was a warmer thing, spontaneous and merry and wild” (76). It finds more concrete expression in a separate scene fated for truncation in Sartoris, in which Old Bayard opens the family chest and, working his way through the physical layers of the past that lie like sediment within, comes upon a rapier:

It was a Toledo, a blade delicate and fine as the prolonged stroke of a violin bow, in a velvet sheath. The sheath was elegant and flamboyant and soiled, and the seams had cracked drily.

Old Bayard held the rapier upon his hands for a while, feeling the balance of it. It was just such an implement as a Sartoris would consider the proper equipment for raising

tobacco in a virgin wilderness; it and the scarlet heels and the ruffled wristbands in which he fought his stealthy and simple neighbors. And old Bayard held it upon his two hands, seeing in its tainted fine blade and shabby elegant sheath the symbol of his race; that too in the tradition: the thing itself fine and clear enough, only the instrument had become a little tarnished in its very aptitude for shaping circumstance to its arrogant ends.” (95)

It is significant that the final line of this passage did not make it into *Sartoris*, as it offers the novel’s most subtle and acute articulation of the contradictions that inhere in the family legacy. As inscribed in the oxymoronic descriptions, (“tainted fine” and “shabby elegant”), the virtues and flaws of that legacy are so intimately bound up and “balanced” that it is difficult to tell where the “thing itself”—the blade, the dream, the tradition—ends and the taint begins. True to the metaphor of tarnished silver, the passage suggests that the tradition is *self*-tainting, darkened not by external elements but by its own “aptitude for shaping circumstance to its arrogant ends.” Like the “viciously and coldly utilitarian” derringer that he uncovers deeper in the chest, and which, “tucked between two dueling pistols,” resembles a “cold and deadly insect between two flowers,” the rapier—that “symbol of his race”—is, for all its delicacy and fineness, an instrument of violence. As such it is only the “proper instrument” for raising tobacco insofar as it enables the first Sartoris to fight off the “stealthy and simple neighbors” that would challenge his claim, much as John Sartoris will use “that ‘er derringer” to intimidate those “niggers come hyer to vote” and then to murder the two “cyarpet-baggers” who had stirred them up to do so (6, 263-64).<sup>15</sup> The violent streak manifest in both Johnny and Bayard is an integral part of the tradition that they have inherited from their forefathers, a perpetuation that is made possible through a cycle of purification, whereby the death of one Sartoris purges the dream of its impurities, guaranteeing its fatal hold over the next generation. Thus, for example, John Sartoris is described as the man “whose stubborn dream, flouting him so deviously and cunningly while the dream was impure, had shaped itself fine and clear now that the dreamer was purged of that grossness of pride with that of flesh” (121), an idea that Faulkner clarified further in *Sartoris* when he described how, “by losing the frustration of his own flesh” John Sartoris is able to “stiffen and shape that which sprang from him into the fatal semblance of his dream [...]” (35).

We should be reminded here of that “vague shape” in the back of the artist’s mind, which is corrupted precisely to the degree that it becomes “unvague, concrete and alive,” for insofar as the impurity of the Sartoris tradition resides in the “instrument” itself, the very “flesh” through which the ideal seeks realization, it follows that no matter how clear and fine the desire for honor, for courage, or for glory may seem in the abstract, its pursuit in the real world can lead only to brutality and crassness and waste. The tradition that “stiffe[ns]” and “shap[es]” Bayard and Johnny not into the dream itself but its “fatal semblance”—a tradition which Narcissa reproduces both in her desire and her body—can thus be seen to enact, in historical rather than aesthetic terms, the studied disarticulation that Gordon carries out with his maul and chisel in an

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<sup>15</sup> Faulkner’s confrontation with Yoknapatawpha’s Indians is still a long ways off, but it is worth noting here that by tracing the violent streak that lies at the heart of the Sartoris family through the Civil War and back to the frontier, he identifies a legacy that is not only southern but deeply American.

attempt to transform living flesh into cold marble, and thus to mold the woman that “is” into the pure shape of what “might be.” In both instances, it is the futility of extracting the impure, human element that is underscored, Narcissa’s desire for a version of her husband that preserves the fineness of his “outward form” without the heat and violence of his Sartoris blood proving as futile as the desire for a “pure shape” in which the “ties of blood” have been wiped away. Faulkner will make this futility more explicit in Sanctuary, when he introduces Narcissa and Bayard’s son just long enough to suggest that he is, despite his mother’s will to the contrary, his father’s son, having inherited “Bayard Sartoris’ back, to the living life” and his father’s “bleak, light-colored eyes”—both of which recall the statue of John Sartoris that stands over his grave, with its head “lifted a little in that gesture of haughty arrogance which repeated itself generation after generation with a fateful fidelity, his back to the world and his carven eyes gazing out across the valley where his railroad ran and beyond it to the blue changeless hills [...]” It is the flesh, itself, in all its pride and arrogance that is reproduced from generation to generation, and, within that flesh, the old, elemental taint, which is simultaneously “the virus, the inspiration, the example of that one which dominated them all,” and which, though it might be kept off through vigilance, can never be fully extracted (427-28).

It will require Light in August and Absalom, Absalom! for Faulkner to fully explore the deep connections between the stains that inhere within the fantasies of sexual and historical purity, and the role that women play in the reproduction of both, but we can already see how the evocative metaphor of the self-tarnishing blade exposes an imaginative node that lies in close proximity to the image of Caddy’s muddy drawers in The Sound and the Fury. If we want to understand how these nodes come into contact, we must first consider one final dimension of Flags in the Dust, which is how race relations function with respect to the sexual and historical currents that we have traced thus far. I have already intimated that the novel breaks with Faulkner’s earlier work by installing a black family within the space of its central white household. For Thadious Davis, this innovation contains a basic continuity, in which Faulkner’s treatment of white and black life “not from two separate, insular positions...but from a degree of intimacy” can be seen to “exten[d] his treatment and conception of the Negro as contrapuntal to his primary thematic concerns” in Soldiers’ Pay (68). I would like to suggest here that the interweaving of the black and white families at the novel’s center revises the model of race relations that we have from Faulkner’s first novel in more fundamental ways. For whereas in Soldiers’ Pay, as we have seen, the black community signifies precisely by standing apart from, and as counterpoint to, the modern white world, in Flags in the Dust this position of disengagement becomes untenable for several reasons.

At the most basic level, the position of the black family within the white household fundamentally undermines the dynamic of the center and margin, foreground and background, that figures so prominently in Soldiers’ Pay. Charlestown’s black characters tend to be located, with the notable exception of the Saunders’s servant who comforts young Robert in the kitchen, in social or public spaces such as the Mahon’s front porch, the dance party, the town square, and the train station. The materialization of black characters within the domestic, private spaces of the Sartoris, Benbow, and Mitchell homes thus adds an entirely new dimension to the

architecture of the novel's world. As is evident in the episode when Old Bayard and Miss Jenny quarrel over the mysterious salve that Old man Falls has put on Bayard's face while Simon "lurk [s] behind the pantry door" listening, black characters are privy to the private affairs of the white family. The "concussion of Miss Jenny's raging and Old Bayard's rock-like stubbornness [comes] in muffled surges, as of far away surf" as the Strothers sit down to dinner, and continue "blurred a little by walls, but dominant and unequivocal" until Simon answers his family's curiosity with the words, "Dat's white folks' bizness [...] You tend to yo'n, and dey'll git erlong all right" (266). The emphasis on voices, and the sensory experience of voices, is central to understanding the relationship between "white folks' bizness" and black folks' business in Flags in the Dust, for it underscores how the rigorous distinctions that structure the interactions between these two families coexist with a day-to-day intimacy that leaves them, if we can return to the wisteria and rose vines that have been "trained onto the same frame" on the family porch, deeply and inextricably intertwined.

What emerges from Flags in the Dust is a new racial harmonic, in which white voices seep through the walls into black spaces, but also in which black voices constitute—and this should remind us of Faulkner's own recourse to the tales of "nigger cooks and stable boys" in his account of the novel's writing—a constant, essential feature of private, white experience. Consider, for example, the following episode, in which Old Bayard and Miss Jenny each gaze, individually, out into the evening landscape from the perspective of the Sartoris house:

Bayard Sartoris sat with his feet on the veranda rail, in the moonlight. His cigar glowed at space intervals, and a shrill monotone of crickets rose from the immediate grass, and further away, from among the trees, a fairy-like piping of young frogs like endless silver small bubbles rising, and a thin sourceless odor of locust drifted up intangible as fading tobacco-wraiths, and from the rear of the house, up the dark hall, Elnora's voice floated in meaningless minor suspense.

Miss Jenny turned aside just within the door and groped about the yawning lesser obscurity of the mirror until she found her nephew's felt hat, and she carried it out to him and put it in his hand. "Dont sit out here too long, now. It aint summer yet."

[...]

Before turning up the light she crossed to the southern wall and raised a window there, upon the crickets and frogs and somewhere a mockingbird. [...]

Just beyond the corner from this window the kitchen lay, and Elnora's voice welled in mellow falling suspense. *All folks talkin' 'bout heaven aint gwine dere* Elnora sang, and presently she and Simon emerged into the moonlight and took the path to Simon's house below the barn. Simon had fired his cigar at last, and the evil smoke of it trailed behind him, fading; but when they had gone it still seemed that the rank pungency of it lingered yet within the sound of the crickets and of the frogs upon the silver air, mingled and blended inextricably with the dying fall of Elnora's voice.

*All folks talkin' 'bout heaven aint gwine dere.* (42-43)

The scene recalls certain atmospheric moments in Soldiers' Pay, such as when George and Cecily's nervous bodies are "lapped, surrounded, and submerged" by the "frank odor" and "slow,

unemphatic voices” of the black people gathered in the town square (140). Whereas in Faulkner’s first novel, such moments function to reinforce the distance and difference between the white and black worlds, center and margin, this episode seems to do the opposite by weaving the sound of Elnora’s voice and the odor of Simon’s cigar into a sensuously textured environment that is constitutive of, rather than contrapuntal to, white experience. Distilled thus to a minor note that floats outward from the interior space of the kitchen, and dissolves into the moonlit air, and a fading scent that becomes “mingled and blended inextricably” with that voice and all the ambient sounds and “sourceless odor[s]” that surround Old Bayard and Miss Jenny as they stare out into the darkness, black characters becomes part of the world that materializes around white characters in their moments of private, inward reflection.

It is not until he writes the interior monologues of The Sound and the Fury that Faulkner begins to explore in earnest the psychological ramifications of the scenario only hinted at here, in which black people are taken up, sensorially, within the very tissue of white consciousness. The racial intersubjectivity that will prove so central to the inner-lives of the Compson brothers is anticipated, however, in the relationship between Simon and Old Bayard, and the way in which the former’s voice, though “not particularly robust nor resonant” is audible to the latter whereas “[o]thers must shout in order to penetrate that wall of deafness beyond which Bayard live[s]” (9). Simon’s ability to “hold long, rambling conversations” with the old patriarch acquires additional significance when we consider that he is also heard, by his grandson, Isom, talking to the dead John Sartoris as he “labor[s] about the stable or the flower beds or the lawn,” thus conversing with one Sartoris in his own mind even as he penetrates the insularity of the other with that “monotonous, rather high singsong” voice (99, 120). As is evident when he reminds the ghost of “Marse John” that he needs to exert his influence over the young generation because the Sartorises have “set de quality in dis country since [he] wuz bawn,” Simon’s ability to access a kind of private, internal frequency within the white family is bound up with his function as a “nostalgic link” to the past (Davis 66), and a “custodian of memory” for the Sartoris tradition (Rhodes 95), roles that he carries out not only through what he says and how he speaks, but through his entire physical deportment. That his body functions as an open channel to “de ole times” is registered in the narration’s description of how an “effluvium of his primary calling [clings] about him always,” even when he is “swept and garnished for church and a little shapeless in a discarded Prince Albert coat of Bayard Sartoris’.” If all of his comings and goings, “every advent into the dining room with dishes” and the “easy attitudes into which he [falls] near the buffet,” leave behind a “faint nostalgia of the stables” (40), it is because his very person evokes for his employers’ and the reader’s consumption the past from which the current, “cyar ridin” generation has mournfully strayed.

This reliance upon the black body as a conduit to the past is familiar to us from Soldiers’ Pay, but whereas Charlestown’s black community exudes “elemental” qualities no longer accessible to the novel’s whites, Simon’s embodiment of the past introduces a new, performative component that significantly complicates his function as a figure of unmediated nostalgia. Consider, for example, how Faulkner depicts his daily ritual of escorting Old Bayard home from the bank by horse-drawn carriage:

With his race's fine feeling for potential theatrics [Simon] drew himself up and arranged the limp folds of the duster, communicating by some means the histrionic moment to the horses so that they too flicked their glittering coats and tossed their leashed heads, and into Simon's wizened black face there came an expression indescribably majestic as he touched his hat brim with his whiphand. Bayard got in the carriage and Simon clucked to the horses, and the shade fell before the book-keeper's face, and the bystanders, halted to admire the momentary drama of the departure, fell behind. (8)

The emphasis upon the "theatrics" of the entire scene, the "histrionic" structure within which Simon and Old Bayard collaborate in an antiquated scene from the past, and the bystanders become temporarily caught up as spectators to the "drama" that unfolds before them, has two competing functions. As evident in the "indescribably majestic" expression that comes across Simon's face, it clearly reinforces a deep, inarticulate nostalgia for the past that seems to circumscribe everyone involved; however, as critics such as Walter Taylor and Pamela Rhodes point out, it also destabilizes that idea of the past insofar as it reduces the "magic" of the moment to a form of behavior, which Simon adapts depending upon the situation. Thus, the "leashed military imminence" that he displays in this scene gives way, later in the chapter, to a more "gallant and slightly patronizing deference," which the narrator labels his "Miss Jenny attitude" (33). Insofar as the novel distills Simon's nostalgic "effluvium" down to a set of evocative attitudes and gestures, it treats his embodiment of the past less in terms of racial essentialization than as racial performance.

For Taylor and Rhodes, Faulkner's revelation from beneath Simon's "mask of the comic darky," a "series of other masks," is ultimately compromised by his inability to finally arrive at something like a human face (Rhodes 95). "It was as though," Taylor ventures, "those old stereotypes of the world of his youth had a life of their own, and, now that he was trying to deal with that world, they surfaced again, blurring the focus of his vision" (34). Rhodes, too, finds that while Simon "enable[s] Faulkner to set up a rudimentary critique of the black picturesque of *Soldiers' Pay*," the author in the end declines to pursue the implications of the "social change" that Simon introduces into the novel (95, 103).<sup>16</sup> The "distance" opened between "the mask and man"—between the "comic stereotype and the more complexly independent figure who pursues opportunities for self-definition"—finally collapses as "his behavior confirms the predicated terms of the cultural stereotype" rather than rewriting them (106-107).<sup>17</sup> To recognize that no "man" fully materializes behind the various "masks" that Simon wears in the novel is not

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<sup>16</sup> For Rhodes, the "social change" imminent in Simon's affair with Meloney can be traced to the currents of "black advancement" that were circulating "outside the novel," what is, for Simon, the activities of banking and investment and, for Meloney, the prospect of opening her own beauty shop.

<sup>17</sup> It might be worth noting here that the futility of such attempts at self-definition is, in one sense, the whole point of *Flags in the Dust*, and that no character, black or white, actually achieves the "self-definition" that Rhodes finds lacking in Simon and his family. Olga Vickery argues that even young Bayard "despite his own grim earnestness, unrelieved by any trace of humor [...] is not permitted to conduct his search for death on a tragic or even a serious level" (15). I would argue that young Bayard's struggle falls short of tragedy, it is still allowed enough seriousness to give his character a much higher degree of humanity than the novel's black characters.



necessarily to conclude that the “distance” opened up between performance and reality disappears. The fissure that abides, however, lies less with our understanding of Simon himself than with our understanding of the past that he embodies for the novel, a distinction with which we will have to come to terms if we are to appreciate both the depth and limitations of Faulkner’s engagement with race relations not only in Flags in the Dust, but throughout his career, where we will find that the deconstruction of race does not always entail a correlate materialization of black subjectivity.

In the case of Flags in the Dust, racial performance seems to function primarily to expose not the underlying reality of the novel’s black characters, but rather the inherent instability of the past that they embody for the novel’s white characters. It is in this respect that young Bayard’s bronze mask, which symbolizes the fine and beautiful features of the Sartoris dream, is forged in the same tradition as the “mask of the comic darky” that Simon wears so expertly, for the novel suggests that both of them are “outward forms” of a cultural memory that has been purged, imaginatively of its impure elements. Just as young Bayard’s expression yields to the old Sartoris violence that warps the “fine bold austerity” of his face with the “dry grinning of his teeth,” however, so do the Strothers have a way of drawing up the very tarnish that they, as custodians of the Sartoris silver, are tasked with keeping off. The clearest instance of this involves not Simon but his son, Caspey, who returns from the war around the same time as young Bayard. Critics have found Faulkner’s rendering of Caspey regrettably comic and deflating, the description of his “retur[n] to his native land a total loss, sociologically speaking, with a definite disinclination toward labor, honest or otherwise, and two honorable wounds incurred in a razor-hedged crap game” setting him up as a ridiculous foil to young Bayard’s more earnest, if not more honorable, wounds and losses (62). What is ultimately most striking about Caspey is how his return from the front, and behavior toward his white superiors, both reiterates and revises Faulkner’s earlier treatment of the same theme in Soldiers’ Pay. The reader will recall from that novel a previously discussed episode involving Donald Mahon and a young black man, named Loosh, who having saluted the former as “de lootenant” and reported himself as “Co’pul Nelson,” is ordered by his grandmother to “speak ter him like you been raised to” and thus subsequently “los[es] his military bearing,” becoming “again that same boy who had known Mahon long ago, before the world went crazy” (167). A correlate scene unfolds in Flags in the Dust when Old Bayard, not finding his horse saddled as usual for his afternoon ride, enters the Strothers’ home to confront Caspey:

“I sent you word a week ago to come on out here at once, or not to come at all,” Bayard said. “Did you get it?” Caspey mumbled something, still chewing, and old Bayard came into the room. “Get up from there and saddle my horse.”

Caspey turned his back deliberately and raised his glass of buttermilk from the table. [...]

“Are you going to saddle that mare?” he demanded.

“Aint gwine skip it, big boy,” Caspey answered, just below Bayard’s deafness.

“What?”

[...]

“I says, I aint gwine skip it,” he repeated, raising his voice. Simon stood at the foot of the steps, the setter beside him, gaping his toothless mouth up at them, and old Bayard reached a stick of stove wood from the box at his hand and knocked Caspey through the door and down the steps at his father’s feet.

“Now, you go saddle that mare,” he said. (86-88)

The rewriting of the scene in Flags in the Dust is more inflammatory, for whereas Loosh’s perceived insubordination doubles as a form of respect, (in addressing Donald man-to-man he still recognizes him as his superior), Caspey’s response to Bayard preserves the traditional terms of their relation but flips them, addressing his employer as “boy” even as he disregards his command by turning his back upon him. Despite the striking differences between the two scenes, however, the basic structure is the same: young black men return from the war no longer speaking to whites as they have been “raised to,” and are subsequently reprimanded into returning to their previous roles. Caspey, we later learn, “ha[s] more or less returned to normalcy (with the exception of Saturday nights)” (224). One might wonder what he does on Saturdays, (his proclamation “I got my white in France, and I’m gwine git it here, too” points to the radical possibilities), but the novel doesn’t tell (67).

The salient feature of the confrontation between Old Bayard and Caspey lies with the violence that it arouses in his employer, which, though uncharacteristic for Old Bayard, is fundamental to the Sartoris tradition, itself. In his act of beating Caspey into assuming his old role we would seem to witness, in practice, how the tradition “shap[es] circumstances to its arrogant ends,” a feature inscribed equally upon the tarnished rapier used to “fight off” Indians and the derringer which John Sartoris wields, significantly, in order to intimidate would-be black voters and to murder abolitionists (95). The history of slavery is no more the subject of Flags in the Dust than the history of Indian conquest, but if we are to fully appreciate how these issues eventually materialize as central concerns in the later novels, we should recognize how race relations become, here, at this formative moment in Faulkner’s “turn” toward the South-as-subject, a vital part—though not the point—of his interrogation into the southern dream. If, as Davis argues, Simon and his family remind the elder Sartoris that their “twentieth-century world has not changed drastically from their familiar nineteenth-century one,” they do so by preserving not only the “outward form” of that remembered world, but also the innate impurities that abide within the “mellow splendor” of that hermetic tradition from generation to generation like bitter tannins in a bottle of wine. If we think back to the description of how Elnora’s voice, singing, “*All folks talkin’ ‘bout heaven aint gwine dere*” combines with “the evil smoke” of Simon’s cigar, the “rank pungency” of which “lingers[s] yet within the sound of the crickets and of the frogs upon the silver air” after he and his daughter leave the Sartoris home for their own, we can see how those impurities haunt the sensory presence of black characters within the intimate spaces of white experience.

It is only when we consider it in relation to the old taint of the Sartoris doom that we can make much sense at all out of Simon’s mysterious murder toward the end of the novel, killed by a “blunt instrument anonymously wielded” in the cabin of Belle Mitchell’s servant, Meloney, with whom he has entered into some combination of a business/sexual arrangement. Rhodes

argues, provocatively, that we might imagine Faulkner, himself, “step[ping] in as the authoritarian author, with his own stick of stove wood, to hit an awkward character over the head,” unable, at this point in his career, to “allo[w] the historical momentum of characterization to continue” by exploring “new forms of labor and of self-definition for blacks” (108). It is also important to recognize, however, that even as Simon’s death seems to kill off one story line, it also marks the culmination of the historical drive that Faulkner does pursue in Flags in the Dust, and which is concerned not with new forms of anything for whites or for blacks—consider that young Bayard, too, fails in his quest for self-definition—but with the Sartoris doom that drives each generation to its death. As Miss Jenny, herself, acknowledges when she thinks to herself that Simon “*is* the last one of ‘em” but then decides that he is “hardly a Sartoris” because “he had at least had some shadow of reason,” Simon inhabits a liminal space, one that lies at the permeable boundary between “white folks’ bizness” and black folks business, but also—given the conditions surrounding the murder—at the confluence of the sexual and historical currents that drive the novel’s characters toward their respective fates. Indeed, the anonymity of the murder makes it available, in a sense, to both plots, his clandestine affair with Meloney aligning him with Horace, who has of course also been sneaking around with a member of Mitchell household, and thus with the sexual doom that governs that man’s life, even as his role as a custodian of the southern past aligns him with the Sartoris family, and thus with the historical doom which ultimately becomes, despite his attempt to remain apart from it, his “bizness” as much as young Bayard’s. Much like Narcissa’s pregnant body, Simon’s crushed head materializes at the nexus of pressures that are not so much anonymous as divided, pointing simultaneously to the forces of sex and history that lie intertwined at the novel’s center.

VI  
“Like sharp black trickles”  
The Sound and the Fury (1929)

At the end of part one of this dissertation, I suggested that Quentin’s suicide in The Sound and the Fury marks the culmination of a psychosexual drama that unfolds across the earlier career, and receives its most concentrated treatment in Elmer and Mosquitoes. Caddy’s muddy drawers, and the menstruation that they evoke in Quentin’s mind, rupture the virgin ideal that he has inherited from Elmer, Gordon, and Horace, thus forcing him to confront the fact of his own injury, or what I have called the “world-in-me”—the subject’s fundamental openness to the “hurt” and the “dirt” of the world to which he clings, and which cling to him, through the ineradicable ties of blood that bind all bodies to the earth. In this chapter, I have thus far attempted to trace between Soldiers’ Pay and Flags in the Dust a second trajectory leading up to Quentin’s death, one which depends upon the insights of Elmer and Mosquitoes in order to flesh out the figure of the doomed soldier, but does so only by splitting off the psychosexual preoccupations so central to these intervening texts. It is only through the quarantining of these preoccupations that the south and the southern past are able to materialize as central, motivating forces in Faulkner’s imagination. What I would like to suggest now is that The Sound and the Fury begins to reconcile the author’s competing commitments to what we might think of as his two “native soils”—that of the psychosexual life and that of the south—and that it does so by excavating the social world from within the sexual matrix of a white male psyche oriented around the female body.

In order to fully appreciate the break-through of The Sound and the Fury we must recognize how the novel continues, amidst its regression into the psychosexual trauma of Elmer and Mosquitoes, to flesh out the world that Faulkner had discovered in Flags in the Dust. If the continuity between Faulkner’s first Yoknapatawpha novel and The Sound and the Fury has remain largely unexplored, it is in part because the expansively delineated social world of the Sartoris family is precisely what would seem to fall away when Faulkner turns inward upon the radically subjective, stream-of-consciousness interior monologues of the Compson brothers. Flags in the Dust, as we have seen, immediately situates its characters within a post-WWI southern landscape saturated with the Civil War past; every object on the Sartoris property, from the bed of salvia where the Yankees drew up their horses, to the ancient window panes carried from the Carolinas in ‘69, to Old Bayard’s pipe, worn down by his father’s teeth, is inscribed with associations from family and cultural history. The Sound and the Fury, in contrast, seems bent from its first, unforgettable line on stripping away precisely the sense of location in time and space that the previous novel had meticulously cultivated. As John T. Matthews suggests, “No traces of intertextual reference signal our literary bearings; no gesture of realistic technique evokes an historical time or place; nor do the individual observations cohere under any design of self-representation on the part of the speaker.” Faulkner’s text behaves, in other words, “as if it has no context” (“Rhetoric” 55).

Our sense of the novel's insularity finds apparent confirmation in the author's accounts of the novel's composition: "One day," he wrote, in the most frequently cited story, "I seemed to shut a door between me and all publishers' addresses and book lists. I said to myself, Now I can write. now I can make myself a vase like that which the old roman kept at his bedside and wore the rim slowly away with kissing it" (The Sound and the Fury, ed. Minter 227). As David Minter suggests, and as we have seen in Faulkner's earlier works, the figure of the vase implies among other things "a haven or shelter into which the artist may retreat; a feminine ideal to which he can give his devotion" (102). Elmer, Gordon, and Horace all suggest that what the Faulknerian artist seeks in the space of art is a way of holding off reality and preserving an internal ideal divorced from the world. When Faulkner shuts the door and embraces the vase in his mind, an act ostensibly mirrored in the novel's first three, hermetic chapters, he thus seems to reproduce the gesture of denial that he had traced and critiqued in his earlier novels. According to Donald Kartiganer, "There is no question but that The Sound and the Fury, unlike the Compson family, insulates itself tightly against the social forces that surround it. They are part of that world on which Faulkner had 'clapped' the door, as if seeking to rid his verbal creation of everything that threatened to limit the freedom of what he might say" (94).

It is also vital to remember, however, that the world Faulkner shuts out in his account of the novel's genesis is specifically the world of "publishers' addresses and book lists," a reference which points directly back to an event that immediately preceded the writing of The Sound and the Fury, and also seems to have actively fueled its conception: the rejection of Flags in the Dust by his publisher, Horace Liveright. David Minter suggests that Liveright's letter, in which he not only declined the novel for his own press but discouraged Faulkner from offering it to anyone else, "initiated one of the darkest periods in Faulkner's life" (89). In his essay on the composition of Sartoris, the author stages that rejection as follows:

I was shocked: my first emotion was blind protest, then I became objective for an instant, like a parent who is told that its child is a thief or an idiot or a leper; for a dreadful moment I contemplated it with consternation and despair, then like the parent I [*veiled my own eyes in the shut my own eyes*] hid my own eyes in the fury of denial. I clung stubbornly to my illusion [...]. (Blotner, "Composition" 123)

A suggestive resonance emerges here between Faulkner's rendering of authorial disillusionment and his earlier depiction, in Elmer, of the would-be-artist's psychosexual disillusionment on the playground of his youth. Though Faulkner casts himself not as the contaminated child but the disbelieving parent—a characterization consistent with his claim to have "mothered" the novel earlier in the same essay—his progression from "shock," to "despair," to "denial," remains consistent with that of Elmer, who, "bitterly shocked" by his discovery, "fle[es] like a hurt beast" in order to recuperate his "temporarily atomized oneness" within the darkness of his own room (370). The parallels between the two scenes are instructive insofar as they register how, in clinging to his "illusion," the author of this account, like his character, seeks to preserve the integrity of his own wounded ego. Beneath the structural similarities, however, we find a crucial difference, for whereas Elmer's integrity, like that of Gordon and Horace, depends upon the shoring up of the boundaries between self and world, internal ideal and external reality, for the

Faulkner of this account the opposite would seem to be true. As he suggests elsewhere in the same essay, and as I have discussed in the previous section, Flags in the Dust had enabled him to “affirm the impulses of [his] own ego” not by constructing pure shapes divorced from reality, but rather by “recreat[ing] between the covers of a book” and “bind[ing] into a whole the world which for some reason [he] believe[d] should not pass utterly out of the memory of man” (124). His “illusion” thus seems to encompass his belief not only in the novel’s greatness—that it was, against his publisher’s claims to the contrary, the mother of all books—but also in the “teeming world” that he had engendered within that novel’s pages by reaching out to the south of his youth, a world, which, “begotten of the ego and conceived by the protesting unleashing of flesh,” he can now no more disown than the mother can disown her own flesh and blood (123).

What I want to suggest here is that when Faulkner shuts the door on his publishers and turns inward upon the vase of The Sound and the Fury, he takes Yoknapatawpha with him, thus marrying the defensive, doomed posture of his artist figures to the inclusive, affirming gesture of Flags in the Dust. The novel’s great innovation is how it manages to do so without the elaborate splitting mechanisms of the earlier writings, how, in turning inward upon the “dark room” of the psyche, The Sound and the Fury uncovers a deeper reality, one which is radically internal and personal, but in no sense removed from the social world to which he had become newly committed. It will be useful here to recall Quentin’s experience of being pressed upon from all sides, how, in turning his back on reality, he finds himself “supine” before the forces that move him from within, for in shutting the door Faulkner similarly discovers within the dark room of art not a sanctuary so much as another way, another door, into the world that he would seem to have left behind, one which enables him to approach the south as a feature of psychic life, and to flesh out the psychological terrain mapped in Elmer and Mosquitoes in relation to the social landscape that had materialized with unprecedented density and richness in Flags in the Dust. One of the great mysteries of The Sound and the Fury is how this discovery of the “world-in-me”—a condition epitomized by the figure of a vase, a body, with “all that inside”—leads, in the case of Quentin Compson, to suicide, even as it produces, for Faulkner, something rather opposite, not the bleeding out of the self but what he described retrospectively as “that ecstasy, that eager and joyous faith and anticipation of surprise which the yet unmarred sheet beneath [his] hand held inviolate and unfailing, waiting for release” (The Sound and the Fury, ed. Minter 226).

The basic contours of this paradox are inscribed within Faulkner’s account of what happened behind the closed door of his imagination. Having “just beg[u]n to write about a brother and a sister splashing one another in the brook,” Faulkner suggests, he arrived at the moment when Caddy “quit the water fight and stooped in her wet garments above [Benjy],” at which point “the entire story...seemed to explode on the paper before [him],” presenting his mind’s eye with a series of crucial visions:

I *saw* that peaceful glinting of that branch was to become the dark, harsh flowing of time sweeping her to where she could not return to comfort him, but that just separation, division, would not be enough, not far enough. It must sweep her into dishonor and shame too... I *saw* that they had been sent to the pasture to spend the afternoon to get them away from the house during the grandmother’s funeral in order that

the three brothers and the nigger children could look up at the muddy seat of Caddy's drawers as she climbed the tree to look in the window at the funeral, without then realizing the symbology of the soiled drawers... For I had already gone on to night and the bedroom and Dilsey with the mudstained drawers scrubbing the naked backside of that doomed little girl—trying to cleanse with the sorry byblow of its soiling that body, flesh, whose shame they symbolized and prophesied, as though she already saw the dark future and the part she was to play in it trying to hold that crumbling household together. (The Sound and the Fury, ed. Minter 230-31)

The progression of the scenes is telling, for in the movement from the image of Caddy being swept away by time, to that of the brothers and the anonymous “nigger children” staring up at her soiled backside, to that of the specific black character, Dilsey, trying to make that backside clean, we witness not only the unfolding of the tragic story that forms the novel's central kernel, but also the fleshing out of its original, oneiric image into an increasingly concrete and recognizably southern tableau. For if the sister's fall into time takes Faulkner directly back to the central trauma of Elmer and Mosquitoes, Dilsey's attempt to restore, via that sister, the integrity of a “crumbling” white household, revisits the scenario of Flags in the Dust, where, as we have seen, the black family materializes within the declining white household as a “custodian” of its tarnished memories and traditions. It is vital to note here, however, that Caddy's soiling doesn't just “give rise” to this story, because it doesn't yield; rather, it persists at the center of each, crucial scene as the stubborn, material stain—the “muddy seat,” the “mudstained drawers”—around which the pantomime remains oriented. Thus, even as the “dark, harsh flowing of time” acquires an historical momentum, which, retroactively, will be seen to flow beyond The Sound and the Fury and into Absalom, Absalom!, the novel's eye remains, in this moment in Faulkner's career, riveted upon the initial trauma of “separation, division” that sets it all in motion. The result is a “symbology” of doom that is at once psychosexual and southern, the “dark future” of the declining white family becoming mobilized around the soiled “body, flesh” that persists at its center.

Captured in Faulkner's account of the novel's genesis is the degree to which race relations play a crucial role in the mulching together of Faulkner's two native soils in The Sound and the Fury. Just as the embodied presence of black characters within the central white spaces of Flags in the Dust had both indicated and effected the materialization of the south as a subject rather than a backdrop of his fiction, so, I will argue, does the embodied presence of the black family within each of the seemingly dislocated, hermetic worlds of The Sound and the Fury register the degree to which the south continues to engage the author's imagination, even as it fundamentally shifts the terms of that engagement from one of verisimilitude to one of introjection. Interracial intimacy emerges in The Sound and the Fury not, as in Flags in the Dust, as a physical feature of a meticulously rendered social world, but rather as a feature of psychic life, the constant presence of the black family within the white household only becoming known to us insofar as Dilsey, Roskus, Versh, Frony, T.P., and Luster materialize within the recesses of its white characters' minds. What is most striking about the psychological landscapes that

successively emerge as the novel unfolds is the pervasive and constitutive quality of this black presence, the way that the intricate weave of the white male psyche is shot through with sensory impressions, memories, and ideas of and about black people.

The resurfacing of race from within the white mind plays out in different ways across each of the novel's first three chapters, but it is most immediately striking in Benjy's chapter, of which virtually every page includes multiple—sometimes upward of twenty—references to what this or that member of the Gibson family did or, more often, "said." Indeed, in turning inward upon Benjy's mind, it is as if Faulkner discovers an internalized version of the racial harmonic that he had already begun to explore in *Flags in the Dust*, in which the black voices that had materialized around that novel's central white characters can suddenly be heard to "speak," as it were, from within the tissue of white consciousness. Consider, for example, the following early passages in which Luster leads Benjy through the broken fence, and then past the carriage house, in an attempt to get him away from the sounding of Caddy's name on the golf course:

We came to the broken place and went through it.

"Wait a minute." Luster said. "You snagged on that nail again. Cant you never crawl through here without snagging on that nail."

*Caddy uncaught me and we crawled through. Uncle Maury said to not let anybody see us, so we better stoop over, Caddy said. Stoop over, Benjy. Like this, see. We stooped over and crossed the garden, where the flowers rasped and rattled against us. [...]*

*Keep your hands in your pockets, Caddy said. Or they'll get froze. You don't want your hands froze on Christmas, do you.*

"It's too cold out there." Versh said. "You don't want to go out doors." (4-5)

Or here:

*Cant you shut up that moaning and slobbering, Luster said. Aint you shamed of yourself, making all this racket. We passed the carriage house, where the carriage was. It had a new wheel.*

"Git in, now, and set still until your maw come." Dilsey said. She shoved me into the carriage. T.P. held the reins. "Clare I don't see how come Jason wont get a new surrey." Dilsey said. "This thing going to fall to pieces under you all some day. Look at them wheels." (9)

We have already seen how, in *Flags in the Dust*, the Strothers had played a "custodial" role in relation to white memory by evoking certain ideas about the past for their white employers. What we encounter here is much more simple but no less profound: because Benjy's mind is, as Donald Kartiganer suggests, "utterly open to whatever sight and sounds and smells happen to touch its senses," his consciousness is largely made up of sensory impressions derived from the black family who orchestrate every aspect of his daily life, and thus come to orchestrate his psychic activity, as well. In the passages cited above, we should thus note how members of the Gibson family attend the psychological "snags" of memory at both ends: when Luster pushes Benjy through the gap in the fence in the novel's narrative present, delivering his mind to an afternoon over two decades earlier, not only Caddy but Versh are there to greet him on the other



side. Similarly, when he steers Benjy past the carriage house, triggering the earlier conversation about the surrey, Dilsey picks up the conversation, and the thread of consciousness, to it carry it forward. It is only through this “passing” of Benjy’s mind across time and between generations of the Gibson family that the halting “stream” of his consciousness, much like his everyday existence, is able to proceed at all.

It is important to recognize that though the pervasiveness of black people in Benjy’s mind reflects the particularities of his condition, it also provides, from a developmental perspective, a point of continuity between his psychology and those of his brothers. As Dilsey reminds both Roskus and Jason, she “raised all of [the Compson children]” (198), and Benjy’s reliance upon her, and the other members of the family who dress and feed him, scold and comfort him, take him out of doors and bring him back, is, in this sense, unique amongst the brothers only insofar as he alone has never outgrown it. For all of its radical otherness, then, Benjy’s section provides a psychological map of an interracial dependency constitutive of all the Compson siblings’ childhoods, a fact that will prove crucial to our understanding of Quentin and Jason, as well. Benjy’s utter obliviousness to race, coupled with the fact that his mind is literally “made up” of black people, in this way establishes one of the basic conditions of racial consciousness in the novel as a whole, which is that it assumes not an awareness of, or preoccupation with, race, (though this, too, will be true for Quentin and Jason), but rather a consciousness mediated by black people, in which the things that black people say and do become internalized as psychic touchstones through which the white male psyche navigates between the present and the past.

To be more precise, Benjy’s consciousness lays the foundation for the subsequent chapters by reviving the dynamic of interracial, domestic intimacy that Faulkner had begun to explore in *Flags in the Dust*—where, as we have seen, the black family materializes within the most private spaces of the white household—and integrating it into the structure of compulsion that he had earlier mapped in *Elmer*, where the white male psyche is driven involuntarily back to events in its psychosexual history that it cannot bear to confront. The result is a recognizably southern, interior landscape that remains organized around a principle of traumatic repetition that points back not, as in the Sartoris plot of *Flags in the Dust*, to the historical past, but rather to personal history, which is the only kind of history that can really exist for Benjy. Thus, in the two passages cited above, we can note how the passing of Benjy’s consciousness across time, and between Luster, Versh, and Dilsey leads him back to moments from his childhood that aggravate rather than quiet his inconsolable crying, a fact registered by Luster’s repeated interjections, “*What are you moaning about?*” and “*Cant you shut up that moaning and slobbering?*” (9). That Luster delivers Benjy again and again into memories that are more likely to make him moan than hush tells us less about his competence as a caretaker than it does about the inner-workings of Benjy’s mind—how it seems bound, regardless of what Luster says or does, to relive events in his past that move him to grief. Insofar as every object and locale on the Compson property—including the broken fence and the carriage house cited in the passages above, but also the family cow, the hill, the ditch full of Nancy’s bones, and the porch swing—function like wormholes in Benjy’s mind that turn him backward into his childhood, and back to Caddy, in particular, Luster seems bound to fail in his task of keeping Benjy quiet.

It is thus neither pure coincidence nor through any fault of Luster, himself, that when the latter takes Benjy down to the branch, he unlocks the memory, which, by Faulkner's own account, doubles as the novel's central trauma and ecstatic origin:

"Sit down." I sat down and [Luster] took off my shoes and rolled up my trousers. "Now git in that water and play and see can you stop that slobbering and moaning."

I hushed and got in the water *and Roskus came and said to come to supper and Caddy said,*

*Its not supper time yet. I'm not going.*

She was wet. We were playing in the branch and Caddy squatted down and got her dress wet and Versh said,

"Your mommer going to whip you for getting your dress wet." (17)

We will look at the remainder of this scene a little further on, but what I want to insist now is that the materialization of this crucial episode here, in Benjy's chapter, and nowhere else in the novel is more than a formal conceit. Though, as critics have long recognized, Benjy's chapter enables Faulkner to introduce the central motifs and structural principles that will only assume significance in the subsequent chapters, it does not follow that his interior monologue meets a strictly practical demand within the fiction. Richard Godden overstates the case for rhetorical effect when he argues, in response to the critical tendency to read Benjy as a "machine," that Benjy's "control over time," though spasmodic, is "consistent enough to be spoken of as *his* control" (17), but he is right to insist upon the existence of a human intentionality to Benjy's psychic process, what he characterizes as a "preference for particular times" (11) and an underlying "aim" to its seemingly random ricochets. The presence of this subjective "aim" in Benjy's psyche need not suggest agency of any kind, however, for if we have learned anything from the early career, it is that, for this author, to be an embodied subject is to exist in a condition of passive victimization to compulsions that turn the psyche involuntarily back, again and again, to unhealed wounds. By mobilizing this psychic drive within Benjy's consciousness, while also depriving him of the capacity to divert it, Faulkner does not deny him humanity so much as he denies him the defensive mechanisms necessary to repudiate the fundamental condition that makes him human to begin with, a fact registered in the resonance between his near-constant, inconsolable bellow—that "grave hopeless sound of all voiceless misery under the sun" (316)—and Elmer's cry on the night of the fire, when, overcome by the scorching heat and his own feelings of terror and abandonment, he "we[eps] for himself, for man, for all the sorrows of the race" (347). Whereas Elmer, Gordon, Horace, Quentin and, as we shall see further on, Jason, all attempt with varying degrees of failure to evade the hurt that they cannot bear to own—a hurt which points back for Quentin but also, as I will argue further on, for Jason, to the crucial night of Caddy's soiling in the branch—Benjy can no more resist this memory than he can keep his hand out of the fire.

Insofar as he takes Faulkner back to the origins of the subject and also to the central concerns of his earlier writings, Benjy is a deeply regressive character; however, by unearthing at this ground zero of being the naked kernel of a white subjectivity that is ignorant of race but everywhere mediated by black people, he also marks the first articulation of a crucial idea that

Faulkner will continue to work out through Quentin and Jason, but will not fully come to fruition until Light in August, which is that race, like gender, “gets into” the subject long before the subject becomes aware of it. That Benjy never achieves this awareness is precisely what enables his narrative to disclose, with utter indifference, the degree to which the white male psyche is fundamentally constituted by the black people who make up its outer and, consequently, its inner life, a truth which his brothers’ narratives will also admit, but only under extreme duress. This resurfacing of race relations from within what I am calling the “hardware” of the white male psyche is shown in its greatest depth in Quentin’s chapter, but before we turn to Quentin, it will be useful to consider Jason’s more two-dimensional narrative, where the relative lack—or, rather, concealment—of psychological depth enables us to see more clearly how race is deployed within the mechanisms of repression and displacement that Quentin’s chapter will undermine.

As André Bleikasten has argued at length, the distinguishing feature of Jason’s chapter lies in “the way in which society conditions and shapes [his] very language and thought,” enabling Faulkner to “set the family drama in a social context and to relate it to all the pressures and influences of a specific cultural environment” (Ink 120). We should note that Faulkner had already begun to explore the possibilities of such social and cultural “pressures” through the Sartoris family drama in Flags in the Dust, but whereas young Bayard struggles with a potent cultural and familial myth that seems to grip him from the inside out, and with all the violence of a visceral possession, Jason’s conditioning seems to work from the outside in, a quality that Bleikasten captures acutely in his suggestion that his chapter is “thickly encrusted with ideological deposits” (Ink 120). Thus, while we are given more direct access to Jason’s interiority than we are to young Bayard’s, his inner world feels strangely external, because—in sharp contrast to the novel’s first chapter, which, as Philip Weinstein suggests, projects a narrative voice which seems to lie “beyond the inflections of class, race, and gender” (Cosmos 117)—it is virtually all social inflection. “Bitches,” “sluts,” “niggers,” “jews,” “rednecks”: his recourse to these terms evidences what Bleikasten describes as Jason’s tendency to “congeal” individuals into “rigid categories” that “reduc[e] their being to a small set of unalterable predicates” until, “petrified by prejudice, they become safe objects for hatred and contempt” (Ink 112). The result is an interior monologue that reads less like a stream-of-consciousness than a public rant. The novel’s third chapter is, in this sense, the obverse of its first, the otherness of Benjy’s consciousness stemming, in part, from the radical democracy that attends his utter obliviousness to social groupings—all characters, regardless of race, class, or gender, retain their individuality and, if they are a constant in his existence, the integrity of a proper name in Benjy’s mind—and the otherness of Jason’s consciousness stemming from its obsessive adherence to stereotypes that parse and stratify his world into pre-determined, impersonal categories.

Beneath this ostensible difference, however, lies a deeper continuity, for in the particular contempt that Jason reserves for “bitches” and “niggers,” and his tendency to yoke these groups both in the grammar and ideologies of his invectives, we can detect the degree to which his mind remains, like that of his brother, centrally organized around the women and blacks who make up his inner world. The opening lines of his narrative are telling in this respect: “Once a bitch always a bitch, what I say. [...] I says she ought to be down there in that kitchen right now,

instead of up there in her room, gobbing paint on her face and waiting for six niggers that cant even stand up out of a chair unless they've got a pan full of bread and meat to balance them, to fix breakfast for her" (180). What Jason is talking about here, as everywhere else in his narrative, is himself, but it is a gesture of self-assertion that he completes only by putting down the "bitches" and "niggers" in his environment, killing two birds with one stone by ensconcing the critique of the latter as a subordinate clause within his critique of the former. The emphasis that he places upon positionality—Quentin should be "down there" in the kitchen rather than "up there" in her room, whereas the black people in the kitchen are sitting down when they should be standing up and working—belies the underlying purpose of his tirade, which is to establish his *own* place in the world, an upstanding position, which, to borrow his own metaphor, he maintains only by "balancing" himself against his projected inferiors, piling insult upon insult in order to elevate his own sense of righteousness and authority. As revealed in his warning to Miss Quentin, "dont think you can run it over me. I'm not an old woman, nor an old half dead nigger, either. You dam little slut," he can only hold his ground by constantly cutting down the women and blacks around him (185).

If we are to appreciate Jason's contribution to Faulkner's larger project of mapping the white male mind, and to this novel's particular project of fleshing out the psyche as a social space, it is vital to recognize his virulent misogyny and racism as sweeping, reactionary responses to an acute sense of injury that remains, as for his brothers, located in the novel's psychosexual past. Bleikasten makes a vital contribution to our understanding of this dynamic when he observes that though "memory plays no prominent part in [Jason's] life"—a claim that I will complicate somewhat further on—"the 'outrage' [Jason] suffered when Caddy deprived him of the promised job is still an open wound," leaving him "as trapped in the past as his brothers are" (115). I want to emphasize here, however, that the lost job is not, in and of itself, the wound against which Jason's psyche rails; rather, much like Caddy's loss of virginity for Quentin, it is the more recent affront to which Jason positively *clings*, and which he obsessively nurses in his mind, in order to avoid a deeper, older, and more damaging hurt that his entire posture of economic autonomy functions to deny. His psyche thus becomes a kind of case study, as Bleikasten puts it, in "how alienation works" (*Ink* 123), which is to say, how social identity is secured only through a scabbing over of deeply personal wounds into a shell of a self—a posture of fierce autonomy, which, in departure from Faulkner's artist figures, relies upon an illusion not only of sexual but also racial integrity, and which converts what was, in Faulkner's earlier writings, an idealist, aesthetic position into a vulgar, economic stance.

In order to detect the tender wound that persists beneath the scab of Jason's rhetoric, it is first necessary to recognize that the economic language that structures all of his relationships, including those that he holds with women and blacks, functions as a way of controlling or, in his own idiom, "managing" the past and the genuine feelings that are associated with it. It is notable in this regard that whereas his brothers minds constantly gravitate toward memories of their childhood and youth, Jason's chapter only includes one extended detour into the past, and it is limited to the period following Caddy's departure. This focus is in part a practical device: Jason's memories of the baby Quentin's arrival, Mr. Compson's funeral, and Caddy's subsequent

visits to Jefferson, bring us up to date on what has happened between Quentin's suicide and the present day. It also reveals something essential about Jason's psychology, however, which is that while he regularly cites the "lost job" as a touchstone for his sense of self-righteous outrage, he never actually revisits this period in his life or anything prior to it. As captured in the following exchange, this means Jason only actively remembers Caddy in situations where their relations are structured around financial transactions:

"Jason," she says, looking at the grave, "if you'll fix it so I can see her a minute I'll give you fifty dollars."

"You haven't got fifty dollars," I says.

"Will you?" she says, not looking at me.

"Let's see it," I says. "I don't believe you've got fifty dollars."

I could see where her hands were moving under her cloak, then she held her hand out. Dam if it wasn't full of money. I could see two or three yellow ones." (203)

The image of Caddy reaching into her cloak and pulling out bills anticipates how, in the novel's last chapter, Jason will similarly compel his mother to yield up, from within the folds of her sache, a "huge bunch of rusted keys on an iron ring like a mediaeval jailer's" (281). Both images work through a form of metonymy, in which Jason's relationship to the women in his life is captured in the objects that he attempts to wrest from their bodies. Like Jewel Bundren of As I Lay Dying, another favored son tasked with being the "salvation" of his mother, what Jason seems to want most from Mrs. Compson is a means of escaping her, but what he wants from Caddy is something more tangible, something that he can put his hands on much as he "gets ahold" of her daughter during their physical struggles. Though his extortion of his sister seems utterly heartless—Caddy, herself, accuses him of "not having a drop of warm blood in [him]" (209)—by siphoning off the funds that she sends home for Quentin every month, and by wresting additional money from her in person, Jason is essentially exploiting an arrangement to which his sister has agreed by necessity in order to steal not only her wealth but the love that her money symbolizes. For it is love that Caddy is trying to smuggle back to her daughter, a feeling that she tries to convey to her brother when she says, "I'll send more each month. Just promise that she'll—that she—You can do that. Things for her. Be kind to her. Little things that I cant, they wont let..." (209). Caddy's money is, as the image of her pulling cash from underneath her clothes suggests, a kind of "blood money," a substitute for her body and physical presence through which she tries reach out, via Jason, to her daughter, much as "her eyes" seem to "touch [his] face" when she tries to elicit a promise from him to treat Quentin tenderly (210).

It is this human touch that Jason converts into hard cash, and then secretes away into a locked box, under a board, in the back of his closet, behind the locked door of his bedroom, both as a way of sealing it down and away, but also, perhaps, as a way of holding it close and keeping it all to himself. Indeed, given his claim that "money has no value; it's just the way you spend it. It don't belong to anybody, so why try to hoard it" (194), it is curious that he does keep Caddy's cash so close, a fact which the sheriff points out when he asks, "Jason... What were you doing with three thousand dollars hid in that house?" (303). If he hoards rather than spends his sister's money it is apparently because it does have value, but value not in how its spent but in how its

kept; thus, having cheated Caddy out of the hundred dollars, he locks himself in his room and “count[s] the money again...and put[s] it away,” noting, “I didn’t feel so bad. I says I reckon that’ll show you. I reckon you’ll know now that you cant beat me out of a job and get away with it,” a ritual that he repeats on the afternoon of April 6<sup>th</sup>, apparently as a way of soothing his increasing headache (205): “I took the box down and counted the money and hid the box again and unlocked the door and went out. I thought about the camphor, but it would be too late now, anyway” (237). In short, he keeps the money in the house so that he can count it, and he counts it for much the same reason that he bothers to “coun[t] over a hundred half-hatched pigeons on the ground” (247), minutes on the clock, and “no count niggers” who eat in his kitchen—because these rituals of counting, like the act of re-counting memories of exploiting his sister, make him “feel better,” which is to say that they enable him to avoid feeling altogether.

Though these strategies work well enough within the limitations of Jason’s own mind—and we shall see further on that they ultimately fail even within those limitations—they function within the economy of the novel as a whole to expose the contingency of his identity, how, much like a Hemingway protagonist, he only avoids feeling “so bad” through vigilant policing of his own thoughts and emotions. For, as with his brothers, memory leads to memory, and thus in retracing one fragment of the past he runs the risk of exposing other fragments that he is at greater pains to avoid. Thus, for example, When Jason mulls over the memory of Caddy’s first return home on the day of their father’s funeral, he seems to come dangerously close to remembering the night of Damuddy’s funeral and Caddy’s soiling in the branch. In a manner more characteristic of Quentin’s chapter than his own, his attention gravitates toward the dampness and muddiness of the landscape when he recalls the grave diggers “stamping every now and then and trying to kick the mud off their feet and sticking to the shovels so they’d have to knock it off, making a hollow sound when it fell on it,” and then later “throwing dirt into it, slapping it on anyway like they were making mortar or something or building a fence” until he “began to feel sort of funny and...decided to walk around a while” (198, 201). Having stood beneath the dripping cedars until the mourners leave, he “follow[s] the path to keep out of the wet grass,” (an act that also recalls his brother’s failed attempts to keep himself dry and clean), comes upon Caddy standing over the graves of Mr. Compson and Quentin, and then begins “thinking about when [they] were little and one thing and another and...[gets] to feeling funny again, kind of mad or something...” (203). What this episode suggests is that Jason’s psyche only maintains its elevated pitch of bombastic and self-righteous outrage through strategic evasions of the “funny feeling” that comes over him when he unwittingly thinks about his own childhood, a feeling that he conflates with anger, but which is almost certainly tinged with grief. He detects and immediately disavows the same feeling in his niece’s face when, crumbling momentarily under his wrath, her “eyes tur[n] kind of funny,” inciting Jason to inwardly warn “if you cry here in this car, on the street, I’ll whip you. I’ll wear you out. Lucky for her she didn’t” (188). Lucky for him, as well, because if there’s one thing Jason can’t do, it’s cry.

By skirting the tender wound of “when they were little,” and channeling his sense of injury into anger and rage, Jason denies the truth that haunts so many of Faulkner’s early protagonists, and which he had first explored through Elmer, which is that despite his claims to

have “no more ties than a pigeon”—a statement that undermines his intention insofar as the pigeons, like Jason himself, apparently don't have “sense enough to leave town” (247)—he, too, feels the ties of blood, hating them. As for Elmer, these ties bind him to his childhood, but as captured in Faulkner's account of the novel's inception, in which the original trauma of “separation, division” that unfolds between brother and sister is progressively fleshed out into an increasingly concrete, southern scenario that includes the “nigger children” and Dilsey, Jason's childhood implicates him within a crosshatch of sexual and racial dependencies that his posture of economic autonomy functions to repress. It is thus only when we juxtapose his insistence, “I can stand on my own feet; I don't need any man's mahogany desk to prop me up,” with the memory preserved in both Benjy and Quentin's chapters but elided in Jason's own, of how, on the night of Caddy's soiling in the branch, Jason “ran on, his hands in his pockets fell down and lay there like a trussed fowl until Versh set him up” that we can see how Jason's pose of self-sufficiency functions to mask his dependency not so much upon “any (white) man” as upon the people who have physically raised him up from childhood—the “bitches” but also the “niggers” whom he continues to rely upon rhetorically, as we already have seen, to “prop up” his manhood. By clinging to his convictions about “niggers” Jason thus avoids the truth that comes through so powerfully in Benjy's constant citation of what Roskus, Dilsey, Versh, T.P. Fronney, and Luster say and do, which is that despite his constant complaints against “no count niggers,” his life has been made up of countless acts of physical intimacy between himself and the individual members of the Gibson family, Versh's gesture of setting him back up after his fall constituting only a single, emblematic example.

If Jason seems to derive a kind of sadistic pleasure from taunting Luster with the promise of a nickel he has no intention of giving him, and if he seems to actually relish the “kitchen full of niggers” about whom he constantly complains, going so far as to inflate their number to six, though with Versh off in Memphis, Roskus dead, and Fronney married, it seems unlikely that there are ever more than three members of the Gibson family in his kitchen at one time, it is because these acts enable him to hide, or buy his way out of, his own neediness, concealing his emotional vulnerability by exposing and exaggerating the material dependency of others. That Dilsey emerges as a target for particularly vicious attacks along these lines—he remarks at one point, “She was so old she couldn't do any more than move hardly. But that's all right: we need somebody in the kitchen to eat up the grub the young ones cant tote off” (185)—it's because he has relied, and continues to rely, upon her the most. The reference to her “eat[ing] up the grub” is particularly transparent, for as Faulkner pointed out in his appendix, she cooks the food he eats, and it is precisely this reliance upon her for his physical sustenance—a form of dependency that is particularly troubling to the Faulknerian male subject—that he tries to reverse by translating their relationship back into strictly economic terms. In response to Dilsey's damning statement “You's a cold man, Jason, if man you is...I thank de Lawd I got mo heart den dat, even ef hit is black,” he says, “At least I'm man enough to keep that flour barrel full...And if you do that again,” (Dilsey has allowed Caddy to see her own daughter in secret), “you wont be eating out of it either” (208). As Jason, himself, admits, however, Dilsey “wont pay [him] any mind” (207), which is to say, she won't buy into his posture of male authority. After he taunts

Luster with the extra tickets to the show, she scolds him, “You, Jason...Aint you shamed? A big growed man like you...Git on outen my kitchen” (255).

What Dilsey knows better than any other person in Jason’s life is that beneath his swagger he remains the same vulnerable child that he always was. This ability to see through Jason’s posturing is, from one perspective, simply a more elaborate version of a device that Faulkner had first experimented with in Soldiers’ Pay, whereby black characters provide acute commentary upon the problems of white people, precisely through their disengagement from them. As evident in the following scene, however, Dilsey critiques Jason’s posture of manhood precisely by refusing to play passive spectator to its performance:

[...] “You put that cup down and come in here a minute,” I says.

“What for?” she [Quentin] says.

“Come on,” I says. “Put that cup in the sink and come in here.”

“What you up to now, Jason?” Dilsey says.

“You may think you can run over me like your do your grandmother and everybody else,” I says. “But you’ll find out different. I’ll give you ten seconds to put that cup down like I told you.”

She quit looking at me. She looked at Dilsey. “What time is it, Dilsey?” “When it’s ten seconds, you whistle. [...]

I grabbed her arm. She dropped the cup. It broke on the floor and she jerked back, looking at me, but I held her arm. Dilsey got up from her chair.

“You, Jason,” she says.

“You turn me loose,” Quentin says. “I’ll slap you.”

“You will, will you?” I says. [...]

“You, Jason!” Dilsey says. I dragged her into the dining room. Her kimono came unfastened, flapping about her, dam near naked. Dilsey came hobbling along. I turned and kicked the door shut in her face.

“You keep out of here,” I says.

[...]

Dilsey came in the door. “You, Jason,” she says.

“You get out of here, like I told you,” I says, not even looking back. [...]

“I’ll show you,” I says. “You may scare an old woman off, but I’ll show you who’s got hold of you now.” I held her with one hand, then she quit fighting and watched me, her eyes getting wide and black.

“What are you going to do?” she says.

“You wait until I get this belt out and I’ll show you,” I says pulling my belt out.

Then Dilsey grabbed my arm.

“Jason,” she says. “You, Jason! Aint you shamed of yourself.”

“Dilsey,” Quentin says. “Dilsey.”

“I aint gwine let him” Dilsey says. “Don’t you worry honey.” She held to my arm. (183-185)



We shall see another version of this dynamic in Quentin's chapter, in which Caddy, like her daughter in this scene, literally brings a member of the Gibson family between herself and one of the Compson brothers. What the above episode underscores, however, is how Dilsey inserts herself between Jason and his niece despite his dogged attempts to "keep [her] out," which is to say, to keep her behind the kitchen door and in her place. If we compare this intervention to the scene from Flags in the Dust, in which the Strothers family sits in the kitchen and listens to Miss Jenny and Old Bayard's raging argument, "blurred a little by walls, but dominant and unequivocal"—a sound that Simon discourages his family from tending to because "dat[s] white folks' bizness" (266)—we can see how Dilsey's active participation in the Compson's most private, even shameful, disputes crosses a border that had remained largely intact in Faulkner's earlier novels. It is a border that is both physical and psychological, for insofar as her refusal to "pay [him] any mind" plays out from within the space of Jason's own mind, her stubborn appearance through the door that he kicks shut in her face, and her persistent naming of him with the words, "You, Jason," in a kind of counter-refrain to his monologic "I says," Dilsey materializes within his consciousness as a figure of self-indictment, an internal reminder of the human dimension that he cannot buy off completely and that persists despite his attempts to close it off and shut it up. Indeed, in the physical struggle that goes on between the three characters—Jason showing Quentin "who's got hold of [her] now" by pinning her arms with one hand, and Dilsey grabbing his other arm from behind—we can detect a pantomime of Jason's entire psychological stance, how, in contrast with Quentin, who folds passionately inward upon the memories that worry him from within, Jason "gets hold" of his immediate environment as a way of holding off the past that continues to touch him, via the woman who has raised him up, regardless of whether he looks back at it or not.

The crucial point about Jason, however, is that he never does look back, which is to say that even though his rhetoric of "bitches" and "niggers" belies the interweave of primary dependencies that bind him to the women and blacks who raised him up, his mind remains stubbornly turned toward the present, and riveted upon the "bitch of a girl" who constitutes, in his own imagination, the sole avatar of his old, unbearable wounds. Thus, though Dilsey embodies the truth of Jason's dependency more directly than any other person in his life, it is Quentin who, by reaching into the hidden recesses of her uncle's room and withdrawing the money with which he has stanchied all feeling, literally turns him inside out, setting in motion a series of ironic reversals whereby every prop he has set in place to shore up the illusion of his own integrity—including the crutch of racial superiority—systematically betrays him by exposing precisely the dependencies that they are designed to mask and deny. The cache of money that is supposed to make him "feel better" but ultimately serves as the central mechanism of his downfall is the most obvious example of this reversal, but it also underwrites the debacle of his car, that literal vehicle of his disgrace. In a precursor to Jewel and his horse in As I Lay Dying, Jason buys the car in order to get out from under his mother, but also to "show" Caddy, who was the first person in town to own a car, that he won't be outdone by a "bitch of a girl." On April 8<sup>th</sup>, however, both of these functions are overturned, for though Jason refuses to admit it, the car makes him sick, the smell of gasoline having become bound up in his mind—much

like the smell of honeysuckle for Quentin—with his sister: Quentin recalls, “*the first car in town a girl Girl that’s what Jason couldn’t bear smell of gasoline making him sick then got madder than ever because a girl Girl...*” (172). A greater irony is to be found in the camphor handkerchief that he depends upon to counteract the gasoline, for though it eases his headaches, it is also bound to remind him of the other woman that he is trying to escape: his hypochondriacal mother. Quentin recalls how, on the night that Caddy leaves with Herbert head, “*Mother lay back in her chair, the camphor handker-chief to her mouth. Father hadn’t moved he still sat beside her holding her hand the bellowing hammering away like no place for it in silence,*” a sound that seems to underwrite Jason’s throbbing head, which “feel[s] like somebody [is] inside with a hammer, beating on it” (238). The car that is supposed to afford him autonomy and comfort thus delivers him directly back to the throb of feeling, the women, and the past that he is so bent on escaping. That he is ultimately reduced by his own headaches to soliciting a black driver to escort him back home in his own car, and thus to rely upon one of the anonymous “no count niggers” who, by his own account, depend upon him, is just the final blow in a string of outrages that begins with his niece’s betrayal and transforms him over the course of two days from a “man” who “stands on his own two feet” to one “sitting quietly behind the wheel of a small car, with his invisible life raveled out about him like a wornout sock” (313).

The unraveling of Jason’s life should remind us of Quentin, who, to borrow Pitavy’s formulation, suffers a “tear” in his mind through which he “lets out his being and his life,” for though Jason never relinquishes his illusion of autonomy, he, too, undergoes a form of internal hemorrhage as a result of his niece’s betrayal (85). Indeed, of all the outrages that he suffers on April sixth and seventh, none is more profound than the inversion that occurs from within the very discourse of blood that structures his narrative. Like everything else that troubles Jason’s psyche, blood is not so much repressed as reified in his mind, transformed into a set of static, foreclosed meanings that he attempts to manage by way of reiteration. Thus, whereas blood challenges Quentin’s integrity by rupturing his ideal of a pure (read: bloodless) virgin body, in Jason’s chapter a distinction must be drawn between the rhetoric of blood that forms part of the crust or scab of his interior monologue—expressed in statements such as “blood always tells” (238) and “if it’s in her blood...” (233)—and the embodied experience of blood that comes back to him through his migraine headaches, which make him feel as though his blood is “go [ing] into [his] head like it would explode any minute” (240). It is worth noting here that Faulkner had already explored these two bloods to some degree in *Flags in the Dust* through the figure of young Bayard, who lives simultaneously in the grip of the “dark struggling of his heart” that affects him, as we have seen, like a visceral possession, and the so-called “curse” of his “Sartoris blood,” which circulates as a myth within his family. In *Flags in the Dust* these two registers are largely aligned insofar as young Bayard’s physical subordination to his own death-driven impulses seem to confirm the seemingly specious idea that this family is somehow genetically doomed, both individual and family following the same trajectory of decline.

In Jason’s chapter, by contrast, Faulkner pits the discourse of blood against full-blooded experience, such that Jason’s subordination to the internal hammering that dogs his every step gives lie to the shibboleth of “bad blood,” the idea that Caddy and her daughter are somehow

contaminated, or cursed, by a blood that is different from his own. What his chapter suggests is that blood *does* tell, but not in the way implied by the timeless invective that launches his chapter, “Once a bitch always a bitch” (180). Rather, the inextricable truth that blood reveals in his chapter is that Jason, like his brothers and like all of Faulkner’s early protagonists, carries “ancient wounds” that points back, beyond the outrage of his niece and the insult of the lost job, to “when [he was] little” (306). It is for this reason, perhaps, that he imagines his headaches as a person beating upon him not only from within, but also as if from behind, as when he imagines that “with every step... somebody [is] walking along behind [him], hitting [him] on the head with a club,” or when, having turned his back on the man with the hatchet, he feels “something cras[h] against the back of his head,” a sensation that leads him to wonder, irrationally, if someone had “hit [him] a long time ago... And [he] just now felt it” (310). It is only when we consider these sensations in tandem with his refusal to “look back” at Dilsey and the period in his life that she embodies, that we can see how Jason’s body registers the touch of the past even as his mind refuses to acknowledge its hold upon him. As captured in our final glimpse of his character leaping into the carriage and raining blows upon Luster, Queenie (the horse), and Benjy, while shouting “Shut up! Shut up!” in a vain attempt to silence the “hoarse agony” of his brother’s bellow, Jason continues to beat back the old hurt until the novel’s bitter end.

It is to Quentin’s chapter that we must return if we are to trace the deeper implications of Dilsey’s touch, for, as we have seen, it is through his narrative that Faulkner maps the dissolution of an adult male mind down to its founding trauma, a hemorrhaging of the self that reveals—as I shall now suggest—an intricate black underweave that extends into the core of his psyche. As critics have long recognized, Quentin’s mind lies somewhere between the deeply “private” and radically “public” worlds of his brothers. Deprived, on the one hand, of Benjy’s innocence to all social distinctions, his psyche nonetheless retains, on the other hand, the openness to genuine feeling that the scab of Jason’s bigotry everywhere disavows. What this means in effect is that though Quentin, like Jason, exhibits what Thadious Davis identifies as a “preoccupation with blacks” in which he “return[s] time and again to ‘niggers,’” this gravitation towards black people tends to stir up precisely the things that Jason’s racism functions to hold off, namely, the past and all its associations (94). It is useful to recall along these lines Quentin’s suggestion that “when you don’t want to do a thing, your body will try to trick you into doing it, sort of unawares” (83), for his heightened awareness of black people seems to operate, much like his sensitivity to clocks, factory whistles, and the angle of the sun, as a kind of embodied “trick” that manipulates his mind against its conscious will, in this case, by drawing him into memories of a “home,” which, like his sister’s body, proves antic and perverse—a still, suave shape filled with the internal flux of unbearable experience.

The essential structure of this racial consciousness can be seen in what Richard Godden labels the “discover Deacon plot” that occupies the first part of Quentin’s chapter (32). That Quentin spends the early hours of his last day on earth searching for a black man in Cambridge should immediately remind us that, unlike Benjy, he is not surrounded by black people so much as he gravitates toward them, a truth further underscored by the manner in which his eye seems to involuntarily register the presence or absence of “niggers” in his immediate environment.

Having noted that “Deacon wasn’t at the postoffice either,”—this line being the first indication to us that Quentin has, in fact, been looking for Deacon to begin with—he encounters “two bootblacks” at the corner, “one on either side, shrill and raucous, like blackbirds” (83). After he leaves these two men behind, he boards a train and notes that “[t]he only vacant seat was beside a nigger,” an observation that he will repeat in reverse later on when he takes a different train and sees that “[t]here was no nigger in this car” (86, 94).

Quentin theorizes his own sensitivity to blacks when, having taken the vacant seat on the first train, he muses, “I thought at first that I ought to miss having a lot of them around me because I thought that Northerners thought I did, but I didn’t know that I had really missed Roskus and Dilsey and them until that morning in Virginia” (86). The transition between the two clauses of this statement captures something essential about the inner-workings of Quentin’s mind, which is how it tends to move from north to south, and also from abstract ideas about race—what he “ought” to feel and what Northerners expect from him, as a southerner—to memories of black people from his own past. It is precisely these southerly, backward looking tendencies that direct the stream of thought that unfolds as he sits down beside the black man and recalls that Virginia morning when another train had carried him home from Harvard for Christmas. What follows is one of the more frequently cited, and thoroughly criticized, scenes in the novel, in which Quentin’s encounter with the northern black, who is dressed in a “derby and shined shoes” and holding a dead cigar stub, gives way to his memory of seeing a “nigger on a mule”:

The train was stopped when I waked and I raised the shade and looked out. The car was blocking a road crossing, where two white fences came down a hill and then sprayed outward and downward like part of the skeleton of a horn, and there was a nigger on a mule in the middle of the stiff ruts, waiting for the train to move. How long he had been there I didn’t know, but he sat straddle of the mule, his head wrapped in a piece of blanket, as if they had been built there with the fence and the road, or with the hill, carved out of the hill itself, like a sign put there saying You are home again. He didn’t have a saddle and his feet dangled almost to the ground. The mule looked like a rabbit. I raised the window. (86-87)

After engaging in a game of “Christmas gift” with the man, Quentin throws him a quarter and the train begins to move again.

I leaned out the window, into the cold air, looking back. He stood there beside the gaunt rabbit of a mule, the two of them shabby and motionless and unimpatient. The train swung around the curve, the engine puffing with short, heavy blasts, and they passed smoothly from sight that way, with that quality about them of shabby and timeless patience, of static serenity [...] (87)

If Quentin’s southern daydream were to end here, it would present the flip side to Jason’s sour bigotry, for though laced with sentimentality rather than acrimony, the man on the mule is as much a stereotype as any of Jason’s maligned “niggers,” evoking what Thadious Davis describes as the “age-old conception of the South’s ‘nigger’” by drawing upon language and imagery that Faulkner had relied upon in his first novel, *Soldiers’ Pay* (100). Though sketched in greater detail and granted a speaking role, the “nigger on a mule” revives the condition of suspended

motion and stopped time that we have traced in the “niggers and mules” of Charlestown, those “long eared beasts” and “Negroes humped with sleep” that make up the southern backdrop against which the novel’s white characters and their modern problems come into focus (147).

Davis makes an important distinction, however, when she suggests that “the Negro and mule standing ‘motionless and unimpatient’ is a metaphor characterizing Jefferson and home” not as they are, but rather “the way Quentin *would like them to be*” (110; my emphasis). For, as his memories everywhere confirm, there is very little in Quentin’s home life that conforms to the “static serenity” that he longs for in this scene. Indeed, though Quentin apparently awakens to find the man and the mule outside the window of his car, the entire episode has the quality of a daydream, one that subsequently gives way to the more unsettling recollections that lie coiled beneath:

And all that day, while the train wound through rushing gaps and along ledges where movement was only a laboring sound of the exhaust and groaning wheels and the eternal mountains stood fading into the thick sky, I thought of home, of the bleak station and the mud and the niggers and country folks thronging slowly about the square, with toy monkeys and wagons and candy in sacks and roman candle sticking out, and my insides would move like they used to in school when the bell rang. (88)

As Quentin’s attention slides from the seemingly motionless and eternal landscape outside the window, to more inward thoughts of the station, the mud, and the “thronging” crowds, his “comforting image of a familiar, fixed world” yields to the impatient, surreptitious, alien movements of his own “insides” (Davis 100). As we have already seen, this stream of thought subsequently leads Quentin, via the ringing of the school bell that would make “his insides... move, sitting still,” to the deeper memory of Caddy’s loss of virginity (“*One minute she was standing in the door*”) and then to the buried kernel of her soiling in the branch (*I’m going to run away. He began to cry she went and touched him. Hush. I’m not going to. Hush. He hushed*) (88-89). His initial encounter with the “nigger” on the train in Cambridge thus eventually delivers him, via the memory of the man on the mule, to the trauma of Caddy’s soiling.

If we turn to the episode in which Quentin finally locates Deacon, we can see that the same basic pattern repeats, whereby Quentin’s encounter with a northern black man turns his mind back to memories of southern blacks, which unearth, in turn, the old wounds of childhood. Whereas the man on the mule is largely a throwback from *Soldiers’ Pay*, Deacon borrows more from Simon Strother, the patriarch of the black family who materializes, as argued in the previous section, at the heart of the Sartoris family. Though Roskus occupies that role in the Compson household, Deacon inherits more of Simon’s character, particularly his penchant for racial performance. Much as Simon acts out a repertoire of roles for his white employers, so does Deacon, by Quentin’s account, initially greet southern transplants to Harvard in a “sort of Uncle Tom’s Cabin outfit, patches and all,” which enables him to relieve the unsuspecting undergraduates of their pocket cash before they “began to learn better” (97). We might even seem to detect something of the “leashed military imminence” that Simon puts on for Old Bayard in the “salute” that Deacon executes upon first catching sight of Quentin, and which Quentin interprets as a residual effect of the Decoration Day Parade in which he had last seen

him. (According to Quentin, Deacon will take part in “whatever parade came along,” and dressed for the part (82)). However, whereas Simon’s entire attitude toward Bayard is an homage to the Old South, (his deference and formality evoke the more decorous days of John Sartoris), Deacon’s military demeanor seems to point, as Richard Godden has argued in detail, not to the nostalgic past but rather “toward future purposes,” purposes, which, however ambiguous, seem decidedly political rather than simply sartorial in nature, and therefore lie “beyond Quentin’s powers of definition” (Godden 33). If, in seeking out Deacon, Quentin is looking for a reminder of the backward-looking “home” embodied in the man on the mule, he would seem to have come to the wrong person.

It is therefore all the more remarkable that his mind still manages to turn Deacon into Roskus:

He was looking at me now, envelope white in his black hand, in the sun. His eyes were soft and irisless and brown, and suddenly I saw Roskus watching me from behind all his whitefolks’ claptrap of uniforms and politics and Harvard manner, diffident, secret, inarticulate and sad. “You aint playing a joke on the old nigger, is you?”

“You know I’m not. Did any Southerner ever play a joke on you?”

“You’re right. They’re fine folks. But you cant live with them.”

“Did you ever try?” I said. But Roskus was gone. Once more he was that self he had long since taught himself to wear in the world’s eye, pompous, spurious, not quite gross. (99-100)

As in the earlier episode with “nigger” on the train, the northern black man provides Quentin’s mind with an occasion for reflecting back upon the southern blacks that he has left behind, a maneuver that his mind executes in this instance only by interpreting everything about Deacon that makes him different from Roskus as “claptrap,” a costume that he has “taught himself to wear” over the deeper, truer self that seems to gaze out at him from beneath this northern mask. As Godden puts it succinctly, Quentin “runs south” in this moment, but it is vital to recognize that in seeking out Roskus through Deacon, south within north, past within present, Quentin’s mind delivers itself into memories that prove no more stable, familiar or comforting than the future that Deacon seems to embody, and of which Quentin cannot yet conceive. After Roskus vanishes from behind Deacon’s eyes, the two men parts ways and Quentin’s mind slips back home again, but this time into more unsettling memories:

The chimes began again, the half hour. I stood in the belly of my shadow and listened to the strokes spaced and tranquil along the sunlight, among the thin, still little leaves.

Spaced and peaceful and serene, with that quality of autumn always in bells even in the month of brides. *Lying on the ground under the window bellowing* He took one look at her and knew. Out of the mouths of babes. (100)

Whether it is due to the bells themselves, the recent impression of the “envelope white in [Deacon’s] black hand”—an image that perhaps recalls the wedding announcement that sits unopened on Quentin’s desk—or something about the look that Quentin ascribes to Roskus’s eyes, his mind slips through the veil of tranquility, “spaced and peaceful and serene,” into a volatile cocktail of memory in which Caddy’s wedding (“*Lying on the ground under the window*

*bellowing*”) and Caddy’s loss of virginity (“He took one look at her and knew”) are intimately mixed. In “run[ning] south” for the second time, Quentin is thus delivered once again into the old wound of Caddy.

By drawing up the old stains of the past, the black characters that materialize in Quentin’s narrative elaborate upon a role that we have already traced in *Flags in the Dust*, where black characters serve as “custodians” for white memory by preserving both a romanticized myth of the southern past and the elemental taint of violence and waste that tarnishes that myth from within. It is also vital to recognize, however, that Quentin’s southern daydreams are interrupted not by an historical past oriented around the Civil War—a past that finds its clearest expression to date in the tarnished rapier, that “symbol of his race,” that Old Bayard pulls from the family chest—but rather by a psychosexual history that points back to Quentin’s own childhood, and which finds its central symbol in his sister’s muddy backside. Considered in light of *Absalom, Absalom!*, in which southern history and race relations will prove so central to Faulkner’s understanding of Quentin’s character, and of his obsession with Caddy’s virginity in particular, the (re)materialization of this soiled body at the core of Quentin’s psyche is prone to being read, on the one hand, as wholly regressive—a “default” of sorts into the psychosexual blueprint of Elmer, Gordon and Horace, in which the “ties of blood” bring the virgin ideal back to the material world but not back into history—or as extremely pregnant, replete with the racially charged content that will explode in *Light in August*, but which remains, at this moment in the career, largely unconscious and/or inarticulate.

The problem with both of these readings is that neither recognizes the true innovation of Quentin’s chapter, which is how it initiates Faulkner’s confrontation with race from within the innermost spaces of the white male psyche, not by tapping into a pre-existing, hitherto repressed core of racial anxiety, but rather by fleshing out an interracial intimacy that touches every part of Quentin’s psychosexual past. It is helpful in this respect to recall Faulkner’s account of the novel’s genesis, and the series of crucial visions that seem to rise up before him as the “dark, harsh flowing of time” sweeps Caddy away from her brothers and into the “dark future” of a declining southern family. For what we experience in the ushering of Quentin’s mind back to old wounds is essentially the undertow of this momentum, the deep, eddy current that pulls him back to the original trauma of “separation, division” that set the entire story in motion. What makes this traumatic return revelatory rather than strictly regressive is how, in working its way back to that founding injury, it recovers from within the folds of his mind traces of the southern blacks who have made up his childhood and youth, and who resurface from within the most recessed spaces of his consciousness.

Consider the integral role that black voices play in calling Quentin simultaneously into his own past and into the depths of his own mind in the following passages:

When [the bridge] closed I crossed to the other side and leaned on the rail above the boathouses. [...] The shadow of the bridge, the tiers of railing, my shadow leaning flat upon the water, so easily had I tricked it that would not quit me. At least fifty feet it was, and if I only had something to blot it into the water, holding it until it was drowned, the shadow of the package like two shoes wrapped up lying on the water. Niggers say a

drowned man's shadow was watching for him in the water all the time. It twinkled and glinted, like breathing, the float slow like breathing too, and debris half submerged, healing out to the sea and the caverns and the grottoes of the sea. The displacement of water is equal to the something of something Reducto absurdum of all human experience, and two six-pound flat-irons weight more than one tailor's goose. What a sinful waste Dilsey would say. Benjy knew it when Damuddy died. He cried. *He smell hit. He smell hit.* (90)

Or here, as Quentin notes the difference between the climate in Cambridge and Jefferson:

Even sound seemed to fail in this air, like it was worn out with carrying sounds so long. A dog's voice carries further than a train, in the darkness anyway. And some people's. Niggers. Louis Hatcher never even used his horn carrying it and that old lantern. [...] [...] And we'd sit in the dry leaves that whispered a little with the slow respiration of our waiting and with the slow breathing of the earth and the windless October, the rank smell of the lantern fouling the brittle air listening to the dogs and to the echo of Louis' voice dying away. He never raised it, yet on a still night we have heard it from our front porch. When he called the dogs in he sounded just like the horn he carried slung on his shoulder and never used, but clearer, mellower, as though his voice were a part of the darkness and silence, coiling out of it, coiling into it again. WhoOoooo. WhoOoooo.

WhoOoooooooooooooooooooo. *Got to marry somebody*

*Have there been very many Caddy*

*I don't know too many will you look after Benjy and Father* (115)

What we hear in both of these passages is the sinking of Quentin's mind backward in time, and also downward, into the areas of consciousness that lie at the farthest remove from his immediate life, a trajectory that is facilitated, in each instance, by his recollections of what black people "say," "would say," or actually did say in his childhood. The displacement of Quentin's "I" by the words, or, in the case of Louis, the inarticulate sound of black people, should remind us of Faulkner's recourse, in his account of how he "captured" the world of his childhood in Flags in the Dust, to the stories he learned from "nigger cooks and stable boys" in the "long drowsy afternoons" of his youth. For in the black voices that rise up to meet Quentin as he turns inward upon his own thoughts, we hear, in a sense, what the latent structure of his mind sounds like, the myriad black voices that remain when, like the leaf left in water, the tissue of the whole yields to the "delicate fibers" that constitute the web of his being. Indeed, in his impression of the water that "twinkle[s] and glint[s], like breathing, the float slow like breathing too," a sensation echoed in the "slow breathing of the earth and the windless October" in the second passage, we seem to encounter first-hand the texture of Quentin's unconscious life, for these atmospheric moments record instances not of conscious experience so much as the freedom from such consciousness, what Virginia Woolf identifies as the experience of "non-being," that "cotton wool" that precedes and follows the "blows" or, in Faulknerese, "shocks" of unbearable reality (Moments of Being 70). The resurfacing of interracial intimacy within such moments indicates the degree to which black people are woven into the very fabric of his psyche, part, as I have suggested, of the psychological hardware that undergirds his narrative.



That the sinking of Quentin's mind in the passages above takes him, in both cases, through the "cotton wool" of black voices and into more volatile memories of Damuddy's funeral (*He smell hit. He smell hit.*) and Caddy's pregnancy (*Got to marry somebody*) reinforces what we have already seen in Quentin's encounters with Deacon and the "nigger" on the train, which is how, in using his encounters with northern blacks as occasions for turning inward, backward, and southward upon embodied memories of southern blacks from his youth, Quentin's mind seeks out a state of equilibrium that ultimately gives way to deeper, more volatile recollections. This is not quite all, however, for in addition to ushering him back to the traumatic past, the southern blacks who rise up within Quentin's mind also materialize *within* those wounds, thus becoming, themselves, intimately bound up with the hurt that Quentin initially seeks to evade through their memory. Thus, for example, we should note that many of Quentin's most volatile memories bear traces of the Gibson family's presence, including Caddy's wedding day ("She ran out of her dress, clutching her bridal, running into the bellowing where T.P. in the dew Whooley Sassprilluh Benjy under the box bellowing" (81)) and Caddy's loss of virginity ("when she came into supper T.P. was feeding him he started again just whimpering at first until she touched him then he yelled she stood there her eyes like cornered rats" (149)). In moments such as these, T.P., is taken up, in Benjy-like fashion, in the net of sensory impressions that make up Quentin's memory, but in order to pursue this pattern further, we must look outside of Quentin's chapter altogether, for, as we have seen, each of these episodes affects Quentin as an after-shock to the original blow of Caddy's soiling in the branch, which is at once everywhere and nowhere in his narrative.

It is thus only in Benjy's chapter, where, freed from the repressive mechanisms operative in both his brothers' psyches, the central kernel of Quentin's despair opens up to reveal the interracial intimacy at its core.

"Sit down." I sat down and he took off my shoes and rolled up my trousers. "Now, git in that water and play and see can you stop that slobbering and moaning."

I hushed and got in the water and Roskus came and said to come to supper and Caddy said, It's not supper time yet. I'm not going.

She was wet. We were playing in the branch and Caddy squatted down and got her dress wet and Versh said, "Your mommer going to whip you for getting your dress wet."

"She's not going to do any such thing." Caddy said.

"How do you know." Quentin said.

"That's all right how I know." Caddy said. "How do you know."

"She said she was." Quentin said. "Besides, I'm older than you."

"I'm seven years old." Caddy said. "I guess I know."

"I'm older than that." Quentin said. "I go to school. Dont I, Versh."

"I'm going to school next year." Caddy said. "When it comes. Aint I, Versh."

"You know she whip you when you get your dress wet." Versh said.

"It's not wet." Caddy said. She stood up in the water and looked at her dress. "I'll take it off." She said. "Then it'll dry."

"I bet you wont." Quentin said.

“I bet I will.” Caddy said. “I bet you better not.” Quentin said.  
Caddy came to Versh and me and turned her back.  
“Unbutton it Versh.”  
“Don’t you do it, Versh.” Quentin said.  
“Taint none of my dress.” Versh said.  
“You unbutton it, Versh.” Caddy said. “Or I’ll tell Dilsey what you did yesterday.”  
So Versh unbuttoned it.  
“You just take your dress off.” Quentin said. Caddy took her dress off and threw it on the bank. Then she didn’t have on anything but her bodice and drawers, and Quentin slapped her and she slipped and fell down in the water....Caddy was all wet and muddy behind, and I started to cry and she came and squatted in the water.  
“Hush no,” she said. “I’m not going to run away.” So I hushed. Caddy smelled like trees in the rain. (17-18)

We have already read this scene in relation to Elmer and Mosquitoes, a perspective that enables us to see in Caddy’s soiling the culmination of a psychosexual drama that points back, via the image of Patricia going down, bleeding, in the mud of the swamp, to Elmer and his apotheosization of his sister’s virgin body as his internal ideal. If we consider it now in relation to Soldiers’ Pay and Flags in the Dust, we can see how it also marks a crucial moment, though not the culmination, of another story that unfolds across Faulkner’s early career, whereby the anonymous black community that forms the backdrop of Soldiers’ Pay can be seen to migrate inward, resurfacing in the black family that materializes within the most private spaces of the central white household of Flags in the Dust, only to resurface yet again, in The Sound and the Fury, within the deepest recesses of the Compson brother’s minds. It is this dual history that comes to bear upon the crucial scene at the branch, and which produces, to borrow Faulkner’s phrase from a different context, “a series of repercussions like summer thunder” in which Caddy’s muddying of her drawers brings one drama to its disastrous conclusion, even as Versh’s implication within that drama invests the other with an unprecedented urgency (The Sound and the Fury, ed. Minter 226).

There are at least two ways to assess this urgency. As Diane Roberts suggests, the fact that Caddy is undressed by a black character before her brothers “goes to the very heart of southern sexual taboos,” and considered from the vantage point of Faulkner’s later novels, and particularly the triangle of Henry, Judith, and Bon, this childish exchange seems to be underwritten with the threat of miscegenation that will literally explode in Light in August and undergo successive refinement in Absalom, Absalom! and Go Down, Moses. A different and equally compelling story emerges, however, if we approach the scene from the perspective outlined above, in which we consider its implications in relation to the novels that Faulkner had already written, rather than the novels to come. In this scenario, Versh’s unbuttoning of Caddy’s dress is remarkable less because it “goes to the heart” of the southern sexual taboos that Faulkner will interrogate in his subsequent work, than because it pierces the heart of the trauma that erupts at the volatile center of *this* novel, thus involving Versh, and race relations more broadly, in the founding injury that points back to Elmer and reaches its culmination in Caddy’s soiled backside.

It is significant, in this regard, that Versh is literally coerced, blackmailed actually, into participating in the white siblings' exchange, for the detail underscores how black characters first begin to lose their innocence in Faulkner's imagination not by exhibiting any sexuality of their own, but rather by moving into the orbit of the white female body that is hemorrhaging at the core of Quentin's psyche. Considered from this angle, race relations do not emerge as the "cause" of Quentin's mental breakdown so much as they are caught in the fallout of his realization that Caddy's virginity "doesn't matter"—a truth that will ultimately yield deep and constitutive racial implications when Faulkner revisits Quentin in *Absalom, Absalom*, but which, at this point in his career, remains bound up in the "ties of blood" that come back to him not through the buried history of miscegenation, but rather through the immediate reality of menstruation, which, as we have seen, is everywhere rupturing this Quentin's mind from within.

What we witness in this scene is thus how the coming-to-fruiting of one, vital strain in Faulkner's imagination opens up, from *within* that dark flowering, a rich and previously unexplored dimension of southern race relations. I want to insist here that this breakthrough is not simply a question of technique: the stream-of-consciousness, interior-monologue certainly affords Faulkner with the necessary tools to represent the inner lives of his white subjects, but these narrative strategies are only groundbreaking insofar as they are put in service of excavating the psychic trauma before which Quentin's mind literally falls apart, thus creating the necessary imaginative conditions for race relations to become newly activated, transformed along with all the other "stable things" in Quentin's world, from something familiar and comforting to something "shadowy paradoxical," filled, like the menstruating body at its center, with the wrong or opposite meaning. It is only by taking into account this atmosphere of antic inversion, of familiar things rendered "inherent [...] with the denial of the significance they should have affirmed," that we can fully appreciate the implications of Versh's undressing of Caddy, for though immediately volatile when read within the context of southern sexual politics, this act is also consummately *familiar* within the context of the Compson children's lives, which, as every page of the chapter that contains the memory serves to remind us, are made up of innumerable moments of such physical intimacy. If, when Versh undresses Caddy, this touch begins to lose its domestic aspect, it is thus because he is framed, not only by Caddy's childish tactics of coercion but by Quentin's dawning realization that his sister's virginity is but "an outward suavity waiting for a touch to," a touch which Versh supplies. In so doing, he becomes mobilized within the current that sweeps Caddy away, transforming the "peaceful glinting of that branch" into the "dark, harsh flowing of time" and changing the entire landscape of Quentin's innocence into its shadowy antithesis. What we witness is thus not only Caddy's fall but Versh's, too, and with him, the childhood race relations that will never look quite the same again.

All of this, I am suggesting, occurs at the deepest level of Quentin and the novel's mind, but much as Quentin does not "see" Caddy's muddy drawers on the day of his suicide so much as he feels them in the repercussive aftershocks of memory that rupture his mind again and again, so do the unsettling implications of Versh's touch come back to him in oblique ways. Consider, for example, how Quentin's memory of hunting with Louis and Versh reveals a paradoxical underside by calling up Versh's story of the self-mutilating man, an episode that we have already

explored in relation to the psychosexual drama of the early career but which assumes a different aspect when considered in relation to the racial patterning that we have been tracing here:

When he called the dogs in he sounded just like the horn he carried slung on his shoulder and never used, but clearer, mellower, as though his voice were a part of the darkness and silence, coiling out of it, coiling into it again. WhoOoooo. WhoOoooo. *Have there been very many Caddy*

*I dont know too many will you look after Benjy and Father*

[...]

*I've got to marry somebody.* Versh told me about a man who mutilated himself. He went into the woods and did it with a razor, sitting in a ditch. A broken razor flinging them backward over his shoulder the same motion complete the jerked skein of blood backward not looping. But that's not it. It's not not having them. It's never to have had them then I could say O that That's Chinese I don't know Chinese. And Father said it's because you are a virgin: don't you see? Women are never virgins. Purity is a negative state and therefore contrary to nature. It's nature's hurting you not Caddy and I said That's just words and he said So is virginity and I said you don't know You cant know and he said Yes. On the instant when we come to realize that tragedy is second-hand. (115)

Like Quentin's hunting memory, this episode takes place in the woods, but everything about Versh's story works against the static tranquility of the earlier scene, from the ditch that scars the landscape, and that is bound to recall for Quentin the ditch where the buzzards "undressed Nancy," to the mutilated body of the man, himself, whose "broken razor" and "jerked skein of blood" tear the seamless unity of Louis's voice, even as it fails to sever the man from the desire that he puts physically behind him. We have already seen how the figure of the self-castrating man encapsulates for Quentin the impossibility of attaining the "pure blank serenity" that he longs for, but what interests us here is how the scene shows Quentin conceptualizing his own condition of ineradicable injury by appealing, internally, to a story that he has heard from a black character, a gesture that becomes all the more striking if we assume, as most readers do, that not only the teller but the *subject* of the story—that self-mutilating double in whom Quentin "sees" his own hurt and his own doom—is, himself, black. *Flags in the Dust* seems to offer a precursor to this moment in the bloody and mysterious murder of Simon Strother, which, as we have seen, subtly erodes the boundary between white injury and black integrity so carefully constructed in *Soldiers' Pay*. Even this episode does not truly prepare us, however, for the materialization of Versh's man, here, amidst the blood and the damage and the unsuturable hurt, at the heart of Quentin's confrontation with the fact that women are, as his father's voice reminds him in the passage above, "never virgins."

In assessing the significance of this presence it will be useful to recall Quentin's provocative and paradoxical proposition that black people "come into white lives [...] in sudden sharp black trickles that isolate white facts for an instant in unarguable truth like under a microscope," for it is precisely this sudden crystallization of Quentin's own truth that seems to occur before his mind's eye when Versh's story "comes into" his consciousness (170). As with

the scenario of a black male undressing a white girl before her brothers, the ambiguously raced, razor-wielding, self-castrating man who rises up from the depths of Quentin's mind seems to comprehend more psychic content than Quentin or the author, himself, can unpack at this moment, an impression that leads Philip Weinstein to characterize the image as a "latent strain" that "erupts" in Light in August where "[b]lack becomes an almost magic fomenter of sexual fantasies and male violence" (Cosmos 50). In order to appreciate how this happens, however, how Faulkner "gets" from what Pamela Rhodes describes as the "black picturesque" of Soldiers' Pay, in which, as I have argued, black people exist in quarantine from both the "rotten tricks" of desire and historical trauma, to the racial hysteria of Light in August, in which miscegenation explodes at the heart of a volatile nexus of sex and violence that reaches back through multiple generations into the southern past, we must read such moments not in terms of containment—a formulation that implies the existence of deep psychic content that comes to the surface only by displacing the conscious material that seeks to repress or sublimate it—but in terms of articulation, both in the loose sense of giving utterance, and in the narrower, more mechanical sense of forming a connection or joint. For as Quentin's analogy of the "black trickle" both describes and performs, it is only by explicitly confronting and, in a rather literal sense, "coming to terms" with, the physical reality of menstruation that Faulkner first begins to court the specter of miscegenation, thus exploiting the novel's menstrual economy in order to give shape to an emergent racial dis-ease that will not find its own flesh-and-blood avatar until the great breakthrough of Joe Christmas.

A compelling argument can be made that the imaginative connection between blood and miscegenation is so deep and so fundamental in Faulkner's southern imagination that in linking blackness and blood he simply confronts a connection that was, in a sense, already there and had underwritten his preoccupation with female blood, and the virginity that it undermines, from the start. But it is vital to recognize that this insight is, itself, *part of* the menstrual economy that frames the emergence of race as a subject in his writing, for, as we have already seen, the experience of belated realization—the sudden discovery of what-was-always-there-and-just-out-of-sight—defines the essence of what menstruation *is* to the Faulknerian male subject. Just as we had to resist the temptation to read menstruation back into the "ties of blood" that materialize between Elmer and Mosquitoes in order to appreciate how Caddy's muddy drawers formalize this "shock," and thus how menstruation acquires its capacity to undo the white male psyche at its foundations, so must we resist the urge to read miscegenation back into menstruation if we are to appreciate how the "black trickle" of Quentin's mind brings race to bear upon that founding injury in ways that simultaneously *exploit* its existing structure while also revising it from the ground up.

This slippage between menstruation and miscegenation, female blood and black blood, brings us to the central paradox at the heart of Faulknerian subjectivity as well as of my reading of the career up to this point, which is that even as race relations can be seen to move from the margins of Faulkner's imagination to its center—a horizontal trajectory that we have traced from Soldiers' Pay to Flags in the Dust, and then into Versh's "piercing" of the central trauma of Caddy's soiling—they also resurface, vertically speaking, from within the very core of that

world, which, reinstalled at the center of the white male psyche as the “world-in-me,” ruptures Quentin’s mind from the inside out. Put in slightly different terms, race relations become, from the chronological perspective that unfolds from novel to novel, “all mixed up” with the crisis of menstruation, but when considered from the psychological perspective assumed by the novel, itself, they are already “in” that trauma to begin with, insofar as Faulkner excavates them from Quentin’s past, and the deepest recesses of his memory. We would seem to have arrived at a muddle that can only be resolved by recognizing that the second plot trumps the first, the revelation that race relations pervade the white male psyche down to its founding trauma negating the possibility that they could become “mixed up” in it at any particular point. And yet it is precisely the tension between these two irreconcilable narratives that must be maintained if we are to fully comprehend how “black blood” gains an imaginative foothold in Faulkner’s writing amidst the hemorrhage that lays waste to Quentin’s mind, and what miscegenation comes to mean to Faulkner’s subsequent protagonists, including Quentin, himself, as he will be reincarnated in Absalom, Absalom!.

It would require full readings of Sanctuary and Light in August to flesh out this drama, but we need only glance forward to Horace’s private fantasy-nightmare of Temple Drake watching “something black and furious go roaring out of her pale body” (223), and its subsequent reworking into the public spectacle of Joe Christmas’s “black blood rush[ing] out of his pale body” to see the legacy of Quentin’s black trickle (465), and how miscegenation terrorizes the white male imagination from within a fear of female blood that it does not displace or explain, but rather *compounds*, creating a composite horror from which the white male subject can find no sanctuary precisely because it cannot be definitively framed and identified. As Greg Forster has argued, the peculiar horror of Sanctuary will depend upon its construction of “an apparently detached objectivity that has abandoned the modernist marks of subjective exploration...while nonetheless smearing the objective ‘eye’ with an unlocalizable subjectivity” (87), a middle-ground between inwardness and outwardness, identification and detachment that will prove central to Light in August and Absalom, Absalom!, and toward which Faulkner first begins to turn in the fourth chapter of The Sound and the Fury.

In order to appreciate this imaginative move, whereby the world-in-me becomes, in a sense, the me-in-the-world, a shift from introjection to projection that Forster explores through the trope of vomit that the novel literally “spit[s]...up in our eyes” (90), it is vital to recognize that the distinctly visual crisis of Sanctuary begins much earlier, in Quentin’s chapter, where all stable things, including the boundaries between black and white, begin to break down and dissolve before his mind’s eye. Once again, Quentin’s analogy of how black people “come into white lives [...] in sudden sharp black trickles that isolate white facts for an instant in unarguable truth like under a microscope” is clarifying. For if we think back to the racial composition of Soldiers’ Pay, where white subjects come into focus against a black backdrop, we can see how Quentin’s analogy seems to present a negative or inverse version of Faulkner’s first racial landscape, whiteness having been reconceived—and here we might envision Versh’s black hand on Caddy’s white body, or the materialization of Versh’s self-mutilating man against the screen of Quentin’s imagination—as the backdrop against which the black trickles pop into relief,

blackness, itself, becoming the subject that seeps up at the center. Whites, of course, remain the undeniable “subjects” of The Sound and the Fury, but what is captured in the optical trick of Quentin’s statement is the degree to which blacks are constitutive of that subjectivity, an “unarguable truth” that Faulkner only achieves, in a sense, by putting the hemorrhaging white male psyche under powerful magnification. In doing so, he simultaneously immerses us in the experience of dissolution while also revealing, up close, how, the unhinging of Quentin’s mind, its rendering of all stable things “shadowy, paradoxical,” enables blackness, itself, to become unmoored, loosened, in a sense, from its domestic associations.

We can detect symptoms of this activation in the semantic mobility of the term *black* in Quentin’s narrative, most strikingly in his oft-cited use of the term “blackguard” in reference to Caddy’s fiancée, Herbert Head. As critics have pointed out, the constant iteration of this term seems to possess racial undertones, what Richard Godden characterizes as a “verbal latency” that amounts to a “covert for[m] of blackface” (22). If we approach this word not for the buried racial anxieties that it unwittingly reveals, but rather for what it can teach us about how racial blackness first begins to “pop” into focus, and thus lose the static, familiar aspect that it possesses in Faulkner’s earlier writings, we can see how it signifies horizontally by creating semantic links within the broader visual field of Quentin’s narrative, a landscape that includes blackbirds, bootblacks, black glances, black hands, black ditches, black eyes and, of course, “black trickles,” some, but not all of which, are used in reference to black people. The connection between “blackguard” and “bootblack” is particularly relevant in this regard as the former actually carries the latter as an obscure connotation within itself, an association further reinforced when Quentin gives one of the bootblacks who approach him on the morning of his suicide a cigar, a prop that plays a significant role in his one, extended conversation that he recalls having with Caddy’s “blackguard” fiancée. What we see in this wordplay is how blackness becomes a kind of free radical in Quentin’s imagination, one that signifies by becoming, to borrow Forter’s term, *smear*d across the boundaries of race.

To be more precise, the breakdown of all meaningful boundaries in Quentin’s mind makes possible the startling convergence of connotations that Faulkner had kept under strict quarantine in his earlier writings. For if we look back at Soldiers’ Pay, we will recall that Faulkner had already begun to mine the myriad, contradictory implications of the color black by situating the Beardsleyean “blackness” of Margaret Powers, whose dark features and scar-like mouth belie a deep, troubled reserve of worldly knowledge and sexual trauma, against the novel’s racially black community, who, sequestered away from the vicissitudes of historical experience and desire, create a pastoral, black background that frames Margaret’s opacity by way of opposition. When blackness becomes mobile in Quentin’s mind, the quarantine begins to break down, thus bringing formerly irreconcilable elements into contact with one another not only, as in the moment when Versh unbuttons Caddy’s dress, by bringing black characters into the orbit of forces from which they have previously remained aloof, but also by bringing the myriad implications of blackness to bear upon one another.

It is precisely this sense convergence that gives Quentin’s encounter with the little Italian girl its peculiarly uncanny aura, for if everything about this child is, as Weinstein argues, “other,”

a “silent body, all whose engulfing motions are intently observed, as though they had an unspeakable connection with Quentin’s own fantasy life” (*Cosmos* 14), it is in part because she seems to incorporate aspects of that psychic life with the same indiscretion that enables her to passively receive, chew, and swallow the endless parade of sweets that he puts before her—a promiscuousness through which whiteness and blackness, but also blackness and blackness, become sweetly, but also unsettlingly blended. Showing a face like “a cup of milk dashed with coffee in the sweet warm emptiness” and eyes like “two currants floating motionless in a cup of weak coffee Land of the kike home of the wop,” her body is clearly linked to her status as a “furrener” who is not quite white, but also not quite black, an in-betweenness that is reflected in the town’s alternating dismissiveness and protectiveness toward her (125). If Quentin exhibits a similar ambivalence, offering her edibles in one moment and then running away from her in the next, it is because she presents him less with a liminal than a composite figure, in a Freudian dream sense, drawing together disparate aspects of his imaginative life that are rooted in Faulkner’s earlier writings. For from the moment that he calls this “little dirty child” by the name of “sister,” it is clear that she is, in his own mind, an avatar for Caddy, but in her mercurial eyes that are alternately “like a toy bear’s,” “friendly,” “still,” “unwinking,” “secret,” and “contemplative”—but invariably “black”—we can also detect elements of the two women upon whom Faulkner first cultivated the distinction between traumatic experience and pastoral innocence: Margaret Powers, with her “friendly, unsmiling glance” and “black eyes” that have “known disappointment,” and Emmy, the lower-class white woman whose eyes, “black and shallow as a toy animals” seem to align her with the novel’s racially black, and psychologically “flat,” community (207, 130, 116). By combining innocence and knowledge, sweetness and secrecy, flatness and concealment, the little Italian girl is thus an avatar not only for Caddy, but for the entire breakdown of meaningful boundaries that she embodies in his mind, and which leaves Quentin’s world, much like that “cup of milk dashed with coffee,” all mixed up.

This “dash” of darkness will prove far more dominant when, in Faulkner’s next novel, *Horace Benbow* literally vomits his coffee within an imaginative landscape in which everything is becoming subsumed into black. In Quentin’s chapter, it produces not a black out so much as a *tint*, in which whiteness, itself, begins to lose its white. Thus, for example, if we consider Quentin’s heightened attention to the color of hats in his environment—“new straw hats not yet unbleached” (89), “there was no nigger in this car, and the hats unbleached as yet” (94), “hats not unbleached and not hats” (95)—we can detect not only, as Noel Polk suggests, how he distinguishes between lower and upper-classmen based upon the whiteness of their hats (“Trying not to say” 151), but also his preoccupation with whiteness, itself, as a “bleaching” out of color, an idea that points clearly to Caddy’s soiled drawers, but also to Herbert Head, who, in addition to subconsciously motivating Quentin’s interest in headware, also fuels his preoccupation with shades of whiteness by presenting his “blackguard” identity from behind a “face full of teeth white but not smiling” (93). This rigid, toothed face is already familiar to us from Faulkner’s earlier writings, and by the time he writes *Absalom, Absalom!* its racial connotations will become manifest in his memory of the “first black man, slave” that Thomas Sutpen ever sees, his “mouth loud with laughing and full of teeth like tombstones” (182). What is striking about its



surfacing here, upon the features of Caddy's fiancée is how it becomes, in Quentin's mind, "celluloid, like a drummer," as if this "blackguard" is hawking himself under the false banner of his white grin (93).

The possibility that whiteness, itself, is a kind of celluloid mask seems to worry Quentin more explicitly in the figure of Dalton Ames, whose shirts "make his face so brown and his eyes so blue" and who "looks like he's made out of bronze" (92). Considered from the perspective of Joe Christmas, with his ambiguous parentage and "parchment" colored skin, Quentin's heightened sensitivity to the color of Caddy's suitors seems to tap into a deep anxiety over miscegenation, but if we consider it in relation to his earlier writings we can see how this disease gains a foothold in his mind as part of Faulkner's ongoing interrogation into the flesh-and-blood reality that corrupts the white male subject's internal ideal. That Ames does not appear white to Quentin is actually a symptom of his God-like status, for though he is Quentin's arch enemy, he is also—as Quentin's casting him in the same bronze that Narcissa had cast young Bayard Sartoris reveals—his masculine ideal. It is only when he realizes that the shirts he thinks are "army issue khaki" are actually "heavy Chinese silk or finest flannel," a revelation that transforms him into a "theatrical fixture. Just papier-mache, then touch. Oh. Asbestos. Not quite bronze," that his dark complexion begins to assume unsettling implications (92). Ames's bronze, it seems, is just brown, and as such it does not confirm Quentin's ideal of white masculinity so much as it undermines it, exposing it as "papier mache" and "asbestos," a hollow prop that should remind us, on the one hand, of Caddy's virginity which, when "touched," reveals a suave exterior filled with unspeakable filth, and on the other hand of Deacon, whose racial "clap trap" seems, in Quentin's eyes, to make "nigger" into nothing more than a "form of behavior." Whiteness, it seems, is no more real or stable than blackness. If we look even farther back to *Mosquitoes*, we find a precursor to Quentin's realization that Ames's bronze is just brown, a symptom not of his transcendence but his of-the-worldliness, in the image of Patricia's naked body, her "legs and arms [...] so tan that naked she appeared to wear a bathing suit of startling white" (164). The acknowledgment that whites aren't really white contributes, in *Mosquitoes*, to that novel's interrogation of an aesthetic integrity that seeks to amputate the ideal from the real, Patricia's suntanned arms and legs exposing the fraudulence of Gordon's art by reminding him that the startling whiteness of his marble torso—headless, armless, legless—depends upon the denial not only of the limbs, themselves, but of the "brown" that adheres to them as a symptom of their humanity.

When, in Quentin's chapter, this brown resurfaces amidst the general dissolution of stable boundaries in his world, including the boundaries between black and white, it assumes racial implications that are largely subordinated in *Mosquitoes*, but it does so, significantly, by *extending* and *revising* the central insights of that novel. For much as Patricia exposes Gordon's virgin ideal as a fraud by exhibiting a humanity that is as much Gordon's as her own, so does Ames expose the fraudulence of Quentin's masculine ideal not only by proving himself to be a flesh and blood man like any other, but also by exposing, from beneath his "theatrical" surface, an essential truth about Quentin's own being that is captured most strikingly in his feeling, as he passes out in Ames' arms, that he is looking at him "through a piece of colored glass" (161). We

have already seen how this metaphor taps into the novel's menstrual economy insofar as it is—like Jason's migraines, and experience of "seeing red"—a physical symptom of the blood that rushes into Quentin's head and lays him out flat, but if we consider it in relation to the myriad traces of black people that we have recovered from within that hemorrhage, the piece of colored glass acquires racial tones as well. For if its veiled allusion to Corinthians—"For now we see through a glass, darkly, but then face to face"—seems to refer, via Ames' darkened face, not only to the glass face of Quentin's watch, smeared with his own blood, but also to the white face of the little Italian girl, tinged by her "black looks," it is because it comprehends the "unarguable fact" embodied in the black trickle that seeps up within the whiteness of Quentin's mind: that to *be* is to be caught up from the earliest moment and at the deepest points, not only in the anonymous, blind forces of time and circumstance, but also in the intersubjective, interracial intimacies that make up the world that is "in" the self, and that mediate every aspect of the white subject's inner life.

In this respect, his metaphor of the black trickle under the microscope seems to include yet another implication that will come increasingly to the fore in the final chapter of The Sound and the Fury, and in Faulkner's subsequent novels, which is that black people "come into" white people's lives not (only) as the trickle but as the lens, that piece of colored glass that comes between the white subject and himself, "isolating" his truth only by dividing him internally. If we look forward to Absalom, Absalom!, we can see the legacy of this split in the crucial moment when, intercepted at the door to the big white house by a "monkey nigger," the young Thomas Sutpen feels that "something in him had escaped and—he unable to close the eyes of it—was looking out from within the balloon face" at his own body, a perspective that lays waste to his entire existence by making him see, for the first time, how "the rich man... must have been seeing them all the time—as cattle, creatures heavy and without grace, brutally evacuated into a world without hope or purpose for them" (190-191). Similarly, if we return to the scene that contains the seed of this dissertation, we see another permutation of this split perspective when Rosa attempts to gain access to Sutpen's Hundred only to confront Clytie's "coffee-colored face [...] barring the stairs," a face which seems, in her own mind, to "not loo[k] at her but through [her]" and to "project" or "shap[e] in the empty air between [them] that which [she] believed [she] had come to find"—namely the niece through whom she has vicariously loved Charles Bon (109-110). In both instants, the white subjects who seek self-confirmation—Thomas, through the plantation owner and Rosa through Judith—are turned back upon themselves by black subjects who make them know what Rosa describes as what she "could not, would not, must not believe" (112). The contents of these revelations are far too complex to unpack fully here, but what I want to underscore is how they build upon the structure of mediation that we have already explored through Quentin and Versh, for much as Versh comes between Quentin and Caddy in the critical episode of her soiling in the branch, and much as Quentin is only able to retroactively conceptualize the significance of that episode by going through Versh yet again, via the story of the self-mutilating man, so do Thomas and Rosa become—as Rosa's image of the twin-sistered fetuses joined by a "fierce rigid umbilical cord" makes so powerfully manifest—mixed up with

the black people who stand between them and their ideals, and *through whom* they confront the truth of their own conditions.

It will require *Sanctuary*, *As I Lay Dying*, and *Light in August* for Faulkner to get from the acute, inward crisis of Caddy's soiling to the experiences of full-blown social outrage that both Sutpen and Rosa suffer at the threshold to the big white house, but if we are to appreciate how each of these intervening novels interrogates the subject's relationship to the social world not in terms of external forces, but rather as intimate, internal injuries, and how the old hurt of menstruation yields up, without yielding to, the explosive confrontation with miscegenation, we must recognize the degree to which that social world continues to flesh out the psychosexual terrain of the early novels rather than supplanting it. For as evidenced in the fabricated history that Quentin and Shreve both unearth and create, Faulkner's "true ground" or "native soil" resides neither wholly within nor wholly without; part playground, part plantation, so to speak, it exists in between personal, regional, and national history, private fantasy and social reality, psychic projection and historical record. Of all his great subjects, none erodes the boundaries between these terrains more thoroughly than race, and it does so by exploiting and building out the psychic paths laid down in the early novels, paths that will ultimately break out of the circle of the family only by breaking further *into* the collective memory that lies in the deepest recesses of his characters' minds. As we turn toward the novels of the 1930s, we thus cannot turn our backs upon the earlier writings: in true Faulknerian form, the early work abides within the later, binding it, like that jerked skein of blood "backward not looping" to everything that the author, like his protagonists, cannot put behind him, the old wounds that will come to bear all the weight of a national history, but which will never lose the sense of personal injury and intimate outrage that they have held for Faulkner's earliest subjects.

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