

Building Yoknapatawpha:
Reading Space and the Plantation in William Faulkner

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Abstract.

This thesis is about the Southern plantation in Faulkner's Yoknapatawpha fiction: how it is represented and constructed, how it is narratively articulated and experienced as both space and symbol. But as its full title suggests, *Building Yoknapatawpha* is equally about narrative structures and spaces too: about how Yoknapatawpha textually fits together; about how this spreading oeuvre was constructed by Faulkner and how it may equally be reconstructed by the reader. It is about both the reading of space and the space of reading – about how the architectural spaces and social order of the Southern plantation and the narrative structures of the novel inform, complement, and challenge one another, and how their affinity may ultimately be used to generate a new “spatialized” model of literary reading.

Foregrounding tensions between narrative “details” and “design” and conceptions of “ruin” and “restoration”, this thesis explores how Faulkner's Yoknapatawpha novels function simultaneously as “open” and “closed”. It considers how *Absalom, Absalom!* (1936) attempts to recuperate the repressed historical connections present in *Flags in the Dust* (1929), only to erase them once more through death, destruction, and narrative closure. It considers how *Go Down, Moses* (1942) offers models of black domesticity that resist the oppressions of segregation and lynching – but which are dispersed through black diaspora and narrative exclusion. It considers how *The Mansion* (1959) revises and integrates details from earlier Yoknapatawpha texts to create a richly layered textual space – but which is in constant tension with the process of the historical “whitening” of the Southern post-plantation landscape which it ultimately depicts. *Building Yoknapatawpha* concludes by attempting to resolve these tensions into a new model of literary reading: deconstructing Yoknapatawpha to reassemble it as a layered “mapping” of multiple parallel narrative paths and connective links, which resist the mastery – and erasure – imposed by linearity and closure.

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Note on Texts and Abbreviations.

References to Faulkner's fiction are made in parenthesis within the text, and use the abbreviated titles accepted by *The Faulkner Journal* and *The Mississippi Quarterly*. The abbreviations used in this thesis are listed below:

AA	<i>Absalom, Absalom!</i>
CS	<i>Collected Stories of William Faulkner</i>
ESPL	<i>Essays, Speeches, and Public Letters</i> (rev. ed.)
FD	<i>Flags in the Dust</i>
GDM	<i>Go Down, Moses</i>
H	<i>The Hamlet</i>
ID	<i>Intruder in the Dust</i>
KG	<i>Knight's Gambit</i>
LA	<i>Light in August</i>
M	<i>The Mansion</i>
PF	<i>The Portable Faulkner</i>
RN	<i>Requiem for a Nun</i>
S	<i>Sanctuary</i> (1931 version)
SF	<i>The Sound & the Fury</i>
T	<i>The Town</i>
US	<i>The Uncollected Stories</i>
U	<i>The Unvanquished</i>

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A version of the discussion of lynching in Chapter 2 appears in the *Mississippi Quarterly*, issue 65.3 (Summer 2012); my thanks to the editors and anonymous readers for their highly productive comments and encouragement. Thanks are also due to Tom Gauld, who not only kindly gave permission to reproduce his cartoons but supplied high-definition versions.

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Introduction.

In the spring of 1930, William Faulkner purchased the Sheegog-Bailey place, a dilapidated plantation mansion on the outskirts of his hometown of Oxford, Mississippi. Faulkner was then 32, an author of four novels finally beginning to find his literary voice. In the two novels he had published the previous year – *Sartoris* and *The Sound and the Fury* – he had conceived and begun to develop his fictional county of Yoknapatawpha (at this point called “Yocona”), and made his first substantial venture into modernist experimentation. His novels had been critically well-received but without securing popular or financial success. His prospects as a professional author remained uncertain, but he had also recently acquired a family, marrying his childhood sweetheart, Estelle Oldham, and adopting her two children from her previous marriage. Necessity forced his hand: and so, although it strained the limits of his resources, Faulkner signed a house-deed on April 12 for \$6,000, at 6% interest, repayable at a rate of \$75 per month.¹

The house he chose, and later renamed Rowan Oak, was built in 1848 for local planter Robert Sheegog, and acquired by the Bailey family after the Civil War. With its white columns, neo-classical portico, and cedar-lined drive, it embodied the very image of the Southern plantation mansion, not least in its state of decay, the product of years of neglect. The mansion’s paintwork was peeled and its floor- and roof-beams rotten, and when the Faulkners took up residence in July, it still possessed neither working electrics nor running water. The initial repairs during that first summer alone cost \$400. Yet over the years that followed, at considerable personal and financial cost, Faulkner took pains to renovate and rebuild this semi-ruined mansion into both a family home and status symbol – a symbol, as his daughter Jill would later put it, “of being somebody”, of being the owner of a house that “had a certain substance and standing to it.”² (It also held a specific nostalgia resonance for Faulkner: as children, he and Estelle had played together in its decaying grounds.)

¹ Joseph L. Blotner, *Faulkner: A Biography*, (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2005), 257-259

² *Ibid*, 261



Fig.1 Rowan Oak, Oxford, Mississippi – July 2012

(Photo by Edward Clough)

Both practically and psychologically, Faulkner evidently found it necessary at this point in his life to purchase a house. Yet his specific choice of an antebellum plantation mansion – owned by slaveholders, and built by slaves – carries particular significance. His acquisition of Rowan Oak, as his daughter suggested, was at least partially motivated by a personal desire to engage directly with the prevailing mythologies and self-conceptions of the Southern planter class.³ It was a desire at odds, however, with his frequently hostile presentation of the plantation environment in his fiction. It is a paradox we are compelled to account for, in our reading of Faulkner: that throughout a career marked by intensive fictive violence inflicted on plantation mansions, he should also spend those same years renovating his own; that even as he depicted the cultural decline of the exhausted old planter class, he should also ape their manners, their aesthetics, at times even their attitudes. But such a paradox is, I believe, highly expressive of Faulkner's profoundly ambivalent response to the history-saturated South in which he lived – and moreover explains the complex layering of plantation site, system, and legacy that gradually evolved through his career-long writing and development of Yoknapatawpha.

It is a significant fact that Faulkner did not restore, but rather rebuilt and expanded, the mansion, and often did so using his own labor. Such actions suggest a response to the imaginative and tangible legacies of Southern history that was creative, and also far from uncritical. (A distancing signaled perhaps most clearly in Faulkner's renaming of the mansion, choosing the name from a Scottish custom he had read of in Sir James Frazer's *The Golden Bough*, of placing a rowan branch above the door to ward off evil spirits.) Faulkner's extensions of Rowan Oak both physically and metaphorically disrupted the original "lines" of the Sheegog mansion. They unbalanced the plotting of its floor-plan; they created additional layers, depths, and dwelling spaces, including the establishment of a downstairs study dedicated to Faulkner's writing (and on the walls of which, in the 1950s, he inscribed the plot outline for his WWI novel, *A Fable*). In short, Rowan Oak helped Faulkner redefine the Southern mansion as simultaneously an historical, creative, and familial site, as a space that

³ Faulkner's (male) ancestors, though prominent in local affairs, were not from the planter class; they were lawyers, bankers, and entrepreneurs, self-made men only peripherally active in the cotton industry. The middle-class houses of Faulkner's childhood, though large and comfortable, lacked the white columns, driveway, and other visual status symbols present in a mansion like Rowan Oak.

seemed to paradoxically affirm, critique, and resist the “pastoral myths” of white Southern history. It constituted, in a single gesture and space, an act of restoration and an act of radical reconfiguration.

Rowan Oak offers the most tangible of analogies for how Faulkner adapted the myths, aesthetics, and conceptual structures of the white planter elite, whose worldview formed the subject matter of most Southern literature prior to his own. It is the material correlative of his work, the twin product of his labor. As Joseph R. Urgo has put it, “Yoknapatawpha and Rowan Oak issue from one mind in parallel purpose”, creatively responding, over the same period of time, to the “matter” of Southern history. (It is surely no coincidence that Faulkner first named “Yoknapatawpha” in *As I Lay Dying*, in the same year that he purchased, and renamed, Rowan Oak.) Above all, both express a shared understanding of the US South as formed around spaces, sequences, and a sense of history that is peculiarly rooted in the material and the symbolic.⁴

The plantation mansion, as model for Faulkner’s writing: in many ways, it would be hard to find a more apt analogy. The complexity of its spaces – historical and present, mythic and personal – replicates the layers of Southern histories and cultural narratives present throughout Yoknapatawpha. As combined familial home and dominant “big house”, the mansion interweaves domestic structures with socio-economic order and iconic symbol, to form a multifaceted site of patriarchal power that functions not simply as a house, but rather as a component part of the larger structures of plantation site and plantation system.

As Faulkner extended and developed the spaces and identity of Rowan Oak over the years, he did so in parallel with an expansion and complication of his Yoknapatawpha world. And just as Rowan Oak built outward from the core of the Sheegog mansion, so his fiction built outward from the earlier generic patterns of

⁴ Joseph R. Urgo, “Introduction”, in *Faulkner & Material Culture: Faulkner & Yoknapatawpha*, 2004, ed. Joseph R. Urgo & Ann J. Abadie (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2007), xi-xii. For further discussion of the emergence of Yoknapatawpha, see Thomas L. McHaney, “First is Jefferson: Faulkner Shapes His Domain”, *Mississippi Quarterly* 57.4 (2004), 511-534. Throughout this thesis I use the term “Yoknapatawpha” to refer to both historical county and fictional oeuvre, to emphasize the ways space and text productively interact. Yoknapatawpha thus serves as both a definable geography (in its mappable aspect as a county) and an imaginative geography (in its function as a textual project).



Fig.2 Rowan Oak; rear-view, showing the extensions Faulkner added – July 2012

(Photo by Edward Clough)

Southern plantation literature.⁵ At the same time – through its revision, returns, and reimaginings – Faulkner’s fiction also built outward from his own earlier conceptions of plantation and mansion in the first Yoknapatawpha works. This expansion of his literary and intellectual world was performed, above all, through increasingly complex readings of the plantation site, often in tension with the plantation mansion. Time and again, throughout three decades of Yoknapatawpha, Faulkner returned to these crucial sites, until gradually but perceptibly the plantation and its mansion came to constitute the central narrative site, and organizational form and metaphor, of his fictional world. It came to embody, both literally and figuratively, the power dynamics, spatial order, and narrative shape of not only the South of his experience, but also of the literary

⁵ A tradition including both the critical vision of Harriet Beecher Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* (1852) and the conservatism of “anti-Tom” novelists like Caroline Lee Hentz, and which in its later developments would encompass a highly popular nostalgia tradition in US literature, from Thomas Nelson Page’s *In Ole Virginia* (1887), via Thomas Dixon, Jr.’s *The Clansman* (1905), to its apogee in works by Faulkner’s contemporaries, such as Stark Young’s *So Red the Rose* (1934) and most famously Margaret Mitchell’s *Gone With the Wind* (1936).

aesthetics of his time. It became the subject and the method of his Yoknapatawpha writing, and it is the significance of this connection, in particular, that this thesis explores.⁶

Building Yoknapatawpha explores the development of the plantation's role within Yoknapatawpha, as site and source of narrative design and narrative resistance. It begins at the birth of Yoknapatawpha in *Flags in the Dust*, with a fairly traditional conception of the plantation mansion as domestic, romanticized, and uncomplicated by connections to the plantation system and site, from which it is narratively separated. As Faulkner expanded and layered Yoknapatawpha over the years, however, such repressed connections became narratively reinstated. In works such as *Absalom, Absalom!* and *Go Down, Moses* in particular, the hitherto "domesticated" mansion becomes reconfigured as part of a larger system of geographic and economic connections, a larger mapping of shared cultural practices of patriarchal dominance and exploitation. This reconfiguration reveals the troubled and violent histories of the plantation system, and emphasizes how its disruptive and often traumatic legacies lingered long into the twentieth century. Yet it also carries with it a more positive narrative of recuperation and resistance, in which an emphasis on personalized details,

⁶ Spatial and architectural analysis of the plantation has been surprisingly neglected in Faulkner scholarship. For the strongest recent scholarship on other aspects of the plantation's legacy, see Thadious M. Davis, *Games of Property: Law, Race, Gender, and Faulkner's Go Down, Moses* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003) and Richard Godden, *Fictions of Labor: William Faulkner and the South's Long Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997) and *William Faulkner: An Economy of Complex Words* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007).

For treatments of architecture in Faulkner's writing, see James G. Watson, "Faulkner: The House of Fiction" in *Fifty Years of Yoknapatawpha: Faulkner and Yoknapatawpha 1979*, ed. Doreen Fowler & Ann J. Abadie (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1980), 134-158; William T. Ruzicka, *Faulkner's Fictive Architecture: The Meaning of Place in the Yoknapatawpha Novels* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Research Press, 1987); Thomas S. Hines, *William Faulkner and the Tangible Past: The Architecture of Yoknapatawpha* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996); Noel Polk, "Children of the Dark House" in *Children of the Dark House: Text and Context in Faulkner* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1996), 22-98; Joseph R. Urgo, "Faulkner's Real Estate: Land and Literary Speculation in *The Hamlet*", *Mississippi Quarterly* 48.3 (Summer 1995), 443-457; and Daniel Spoth, "The House That Time Built: Structure and History in Faulkner and Yeats", *European Journal of American Culture* 26.2 (2007), 109-126. Polk's treatment of Yoknapatawpha's buildings is the most thorough, but his approach differs from my own in its emphasis on Freudian analysis and its positioning of the courthouse and jail, rather than plantation and mansion, as the central sites of Yoknapatawpha (see "Children of the Dark House", 60-65, and "Making 'Something Which Did Not Exist Before': What Faulkner Gave Himself", in *Faulkner's Inheritance: Faulkner and Yoknapatawpha, 2005*, ed. Joseph R. Urgo & Ann J. Abadie (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2007), 3-17).

rather than monolithic design, “opens” both plantation and text to new possibilities of “reading”. Such approaches create, within both plantation and novel, spaces of expression for the very groups and individuals which the structures of those institutions aim to marginalize and exclude. (For Thadious Davis this is particularly the case with *Go Down, Moses*, when the novel’s “white” histories are read through the disruptive figure of the mixed-race Tomey’s Turl; and as I suggest in Chapter 1, a similar case may be argued for a reading of *Absalom, Absalom!* that concentrates on Judith and Clytie.⁷) It is important, however, to recognize that this resistance more often arises in potential rather than in practice: these narrative “openings” are typically resisted and undercut by narrative “closings” through death or destruction on the one hand, or through the structure of narrative endings on the other.

The last phase of Yoknapatawpha’s production – most especially in *The Mansion* – reveals this tension between “open” and “closed” readings, which is expressed as a complex of narrative “revisions” and intertextual references to earlier Yoknapatawpha works. These revisions, at times, threaten to displace or even erase the traces and spaces of earlier texts – a process emblemized by the transformation of the pluralistic physical plantation space into the singularized symbolic mansion site (and echoed, in Faulkner’s later years, by the conservative politics of the burgeoning Southern tourist industry). Yet in this plurality of details – with “original” and “revised” plotlines positioned as simultaneous and parallel – there is, I believe, considerable potential for an ethical reconfiguration of the practice of reading too: one anchored in an approach to details, resistance, and spatiality that we find modeled, perhaps surprisingly, in the site and system of the plantation.

Reading Space and the Birth of the Novel

This thesis is about “reading space”: about how we read space on the one hand, and about the space of reading on the other. The interaction between actual and textual space – especially on an imaginative, conceptual level – is crucial to my argument here, because both activities are linked not simply by shared terms, but also by shared dynamics. They are both, on their most fundamental level, about the practice of power and about power relations. Michel de Certeau, for example, notes that “narrative

⁷ Davis, *Games of Property*, 8-9

structures have the status of spatial syntaxes”, and that spatial ordering and organization likewise create “stories in the form of places put in linear or interlaced series.”⁸ Similarly, Bernard Tschumi has emphasized how the interaction between observer and architectural spatial sequence always conveys an “implied narrative” constructed around movement and memory. “To experience and to follow an architectural sequence,” Tschumi argues, “is to reflect upon events in order to place them into successive wholes” – a highly effective definition of the practice of “reading”.⁹ It is important to recognize that this sequence is not a neutral formulation, however, but one that works dynamically – one that functions on distinctions between design and detail, or between what I will shortly distinguish as the separable practices of “plotting” and “reading”.

Modern understandings of spatial-narrative relations have emerged out of the Enlightenment-era shifts toward categorization, subjectivity, and global expansion. The era’s profound social and intellectual changes were intimately related to new conceptualizations and formulations of space, from the institution (the asylum, the penitentiary, the museum) to the bourgeois home (private, domesticated, and gendered); from the social space of democracy to the colonial industrial order of the “new world” plantation. Such reconfigurations were underwritten by explicit narratives of progress and human advancement through reason and order, which are perhaps best understood as the establishment of hierarchical power dynamics; such narratives also helped establish secular scientific primacy over religious authority, and European primacy over non-European. (It was out of such impulses that the United States, one of the era’s most notable inventions, also emerged.)¹⁰

⁸ Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* [1980], trans. Steven Rendall (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 115

⁹ Bernard Tschumi, “Sequences”, in *Architecture and Disjunction* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1994), 163, 165-166. Tschumi defines this relationship through the formula “space/event/movement”.

¹⁰ Michel Foucault summarizes this conceptual shift in *The Order of Things* [1966] (London: Routledge, 2002). For discussions of specific aspects of this era, see also Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* [1975], trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Random House, 1977); Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society* [1962], trans. Thomas Burger (Cambridge: Polity, 1989); Michael McKeon, *Secret History of Domesticity: Public, Private, and the Division of Knowledge* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005); Patricia Meyer Spacks, *Privacy: Concealing the Eighteenth-Century Self* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003).

The Enlightenment's intellectual approach and progressive narratives are perhaps nowhere more clearly reflected than in the analytical "readings" of space in the reformed science of cartography. In medieval times, maps functioned less as accurate or usable depictions of topographies than as descriptive inventories of ownership. With the onset of the Enlightenment this changed: geometry replaced geography, and the function of maps and mapping shifted from the visualization of material ownership to the visualization of spatial relations. Maps served to illustrate a new mindset: a movement from the possession of power to the practice of power – to maps as dynamic, as depicting a new sense of space and place charted by ever more sophisticated surveying equipment. This mapped representation of space was far from neutral; freighted with an inherent political history, maps are always, as Eric Bulson notes, "built around selections, omissions, classifications, and hierarchies that are ideological."¹¹

It is no coincidence that we trace the birth of the novel proper in the English tradition at least – in the gendered spatial politics of Samuel Richardson's *Clarissa* (1748) and the colonial enterprises of Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* (1719) – from this historical-cultural moment. It was out of such intellectual ferment that the novel's structural form, its everyday concerns, and its function as a social institution took root, born out of new conceptions of personhood, privacy, and social order which it helped foster, and articulating a secularized worldview that was (socially) progressive rather than (religiously) timeless. Peter Brooks has suggested that this was particularly crucial in generating an idea of "narrative plot"; the theological concept of "eternity" was replaced by the concept of "historical narrative", emerging – with significant consequences – just as European imperialism became firmly established.¹²

¹¹ Eric Bulson, *Novels, Maps, Modernity: The Spatial Imagination, 1850-2000* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 41

¹² Peter Brooks, *Reading for the Plot: Design and Intention in Narrative* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984), 6. For discussion of the social, spatial, and institutional roots of the English novel, see in particular John Bender, *Imagining the Penitentiary: Fictions and the Architecture of Mind in Eighteenth-Century England* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987); Simon Varey, *Space and the Eighteenth-Century English Novel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990); Cynthia Sundberg Wall, *The Prose of Things: Transformations of Description in the Eighteenth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006). For discussion of how these spatial qualities have continued in nineteenth and twentieth century fiction, see in particular Marilyn R. Chandler, *Dwelling in the Text: Houses in American Fiction* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991); Judith Fryer, *Felicitous Space: The Imaginative*

Above all, it was the concrete application of various ideas of structure – in terms not only of sequence, but also of order and authority – that gave the emerging medium of the novel its distinctly spatialized quality. At the very moment in the eighteenth century that the English novel was conceptualized, the term “structure” became formalized as a distinct architectural idea. It emerged as an abstraction drawn in analogy to natural history, and it served, as Adrian Forty argues, “to free architects from the normalizing constraints of the word ‘construction’, the everyday practice of building.”¹³ To speak of “structure” from that point onward was to speak of the liberation of the building from the purely material, and to place it increasingly in the realms of artistic and expressive imagination. Yet it is revealing that the term also became increasingly applied to organizations, hierarchies, and classifications – in short, in the articulation of power discourses. The *OED*’s definitions prove revealing here, where structure is enacted as a process, a verb: “to give (someone or something) a place in a structure”; to “present or manipulate (a situation, etc.) in such a way as to elicit a desired response or effect.” The “order” encoded in structure is often a command, then; its element of “design” is often a design *upon* others.

From the beginning, the novel’s articulation of spatial and structural themes was never abstract, but always firmly tied to a concrete and experiential understanding of space’s material and architectural qualities. The medium’s development made explicit that narrative is not simply an articulation of people’s actions, but also an expression of the places in which they enact them (both spatially and in relation to one another). The novel foregrounded, as never before, questions of the spatial relation and positioning of author, narrating consciousness, narrated subject, and reader, a situation later summarized in Henry James’s celebrated analogy

Structures of Edith Wharton and Willa Cather (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1986); Nicole Reynolds, *Building Romanticism: Literature and Architecture in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2010); Victoria Rosner, *Modernism and the Architecture of Private Life* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005); Philippa Tristram, *Living Space in Fact and Fiction* (London: Routledge, 1989).

¹³ Adrian Forty, *Words and Buildings: A Vocabulary of Modern Architecture* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2000), 281. Etymologically, structure means “to build” – to place constituent parts or elements together to form a whole; to make a fabric, or more broadly to fabricate.

of the “house of fiction”, which defined narrative not simply through perspective, but also through an emphasis on the materially-spatialized distance of that perspective.¹⁴

Space informs fictional narrative in every aspect: in the sequential ordering of plotting, story, and narrating; in the structuring of rhetorical and lexical fields; in the articulation of both characterization and “character space” (to apply Alex Woloch’s term).¹⁵ The space-narrative connection informs the very definition of the term “plot”, much as it informed the term “structure”. Drawing on the *American Heritage Dictionary*, Peter Brooks has established four nuances of the term: 1) a space, piece of land, or measured lot; 2) an architectural ground plan, a chart, or a diagram; 3) a series of events outlining narrative or dramatic action; 4) a scheme or secret plan directed toward a hostile or illegal purpose. In short, Brook establishes plot as a measured space, a map, a narrative sequence, and a schemed “design”. “There may be a subterranean logic connecting these heterogeneous meanings,” Brooks suggests.

Common to the original sense of the word is the idea of boundedness, demarcation, the drawing of lines to mark off and order. This easily extends to the chart or diagram of the demarcated area, which in turn modulates to the outline of the literary work. From the organized space, plot becomes the organizing line, demarcating and diagramming that which was previously undifferentiated. We might think here of the geometrical expression, plotting points, or curves, on a graph by means of coordinates, as a way of locating something, perhaps oneself.

¹⁴ In James’s analogy, fiction constitutes a façade of many “possible windows”, created “by the need of the individual vision and by the pressure of the individual will”; see “Preface to ‘*The Portrait of a Lady*’” [1908], in *The Art of the Novel: Critical Prefaces by Henry James* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011), 46. In a similar vein, Joseph Kestner notes that, “[p]oint of view implies volume, if for no other reason than the point itself occupies and is surrounded by space”; see *The Spatiality of the Novel* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1978), 106. The implicit pun on “volume” is particularly telling.

¹⁵ Alex Woloch, *The One vs. the Many: Minor Characters and the Space of the Protagonist in the Realist Novel* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003), 13

Brooks argues that this fourth sense – the secret plan or scheme – is intrinsic to modern literature: that literary plot is generated by purposeful desire in tension with blockage and obstacles. “Plots are not simply organizing structures,” Brooks concludes: “they are also intentional structures, goal-oriented and forward-moving.”¹⁶

The Plantation: How the South was Built

Within such a conception, the Southern plantation – a site of deliberated order, production, and distribution – would seem to offer an exemplary narrative site, in physical, social, and literary terms. Historically, the plantation’s economic production and social order were underwritten by a definable “progressive” function as a “civilized” and “civilizing” structure on the frontier of settlement. It was the early nineteenth-century spread of the plantation that transformed (or in the parlance of the times, “redeemed”) the Mississippi valley from forested wilderness into “productive” land (a process Yoknapatawpha often depicts); and in the earliest stages of this process, the plantation also served as a means of educating and socializing transplanted African slaves. It has served as a site, in short, where all the spatial and ordering impulses of the post-Enlightenment mindset have found expression.

In practice, this function and identity of the Southern plantation has been inseparable from imaginative conceptions of the South; the plantation’s function as heterotopic site of power relations has offered a model for how the South’s “otherness” has been figured in relation to the larger US nation. Indeed, as Jennifer Rae Greeson has noted, the region’s very name – a geographic designation – places it in hierarchical relation to the “central” US nation, while also locating it within “the discourse of modern empire; it is a term that makes sense only in that broader Western ideological ordering of the globe.”¹⁷ As this association reveals, the spatial logic of the South is thus particularly tied up with notions of temporality and time, its conceptual “otherness” functioning in different historical moments as source of both stability and cultural decay in the face of modernity.¹⁸ When Faulkner purchased

¹⁶ Brooks, *Reading for the Plot*, 11-12

¹⁷ Jennifer Rae Greeson, *Our South: Geographic Fantasy and the Rise of National Literature* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010), 10

¹⁸ Leigh Anne Duck, *The Nation’s Region: Southern Modernism, Segregation, and U.S. Nationalism* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2006), 5-7. Elsewhere, Duck argues more insistently for the crucial

Rowan Oak and initiated his Yoknapatawpha project, idealized images of the pastoral South had been enjoying popular currency throughout the US, as a means of confronting the anxieties of industrial modernity and the instabilities of the Great Depression – much as, in the late nineteenth-century, the post-Civil War South served as a model for framing and intellectualizing the US’s expanding economic and cultural imperialism.¹⁹

The plantation landscape has been, quite literally, the ground on which dominant conceptualizations of the South have been built. It has endured in lingering but often relic traces on the Southern landscape, and in considerably more vital traces in the popular cultural imagination, despite its obsolescence as an economic and organizational model. The plantation’s conceptual value has, in fact, increased in direct relation to its physical absence, as industrialization, urbanization, and tourism have continued to transform the material spaces of the South into an avowedly “post-plantation” landscape.

The plantation’s impact has been so considerable that its presence remains even in recent attempts to expand the “South” beyond the isolated regionality of previous traditional discourses. Recent scholarly attempts to reposition Southern Studies within New World Studies, or to argue for “post-southern” identity created

role played by the plantation in the emergence of political, social, and economic modernity – and therefore also its central rather than peripheral role in the emergence of US national culture; see “Plantation/Empire”, *CR: the New Centennial Review* 10.1 (Spr. 2010), 78-79. Similarly, Elizabeth Anna Steeby has argued that, in its post-emancipation form, the enduring structure of “the neplantation was not an anachronism or an aberration but was instead key to twentieth-century formations of democracy and modernity.” See “Plantation States: Region, Race, and Sexuality in the Cultural Memory of the U.S. South, 1900-1945” (PhD Dissertation, University of San Diego, 2008), 8. This view of the plantation as modernist has by no means always been the scholarly consensus, especially in literary terms. As Matt Cohen notes, plantation-set fiction is “negatively marked in the critical imagination as nostalgic, provincial, and, frequently, racist,” and as a result has been typically “excluded from discussions of the aesthetic that the *fin-de-siècle* global political economy arguably produced and that we have come to call modernism.” See “Plantation Modernism”, *Mississippi Quarterly* 60.2 (2007), 385.

¹⁹ In addition to Greeson and Duck, see also Karen L. Cox, *Dreaming of Dixie: How the South Was Created in American Popular Culture* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011); Nina Silber, *The Romance of Reunion: Northerners and the South, 1865-1900* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993); and Harilaos Stecopoulos, *Reconstructing the World: Southern Fictions and U.S. Imperialism, 1898-1976* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2008). For a fascinating discussion of the impact of plantation imagery on US embassy and consulate architecture in the 1930s, see Ron Theodore Robin, *Enclaves of America: the Rhetoric of American Political Architecture Abroad, 1900-1965* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992), 76-94.

through reproduction and distribution of representations of the South, nonetheless remain rooted in core ideas that arise out of the plantation landscape and its attendant structures. The scholarly recontextualization of the South in relation to the circum-Atlantic world, the Caribbean, and Latin America has been sustained above all by a recognition of parallel plantation histories (and tellingly, often by an attempt to “globalize” readings of Faulkner’s fiction, too).²⁰ By emphasizing continuities rather than disparities between the plantations of Virginia and Barbados, or Louisiana and Haiti, such discourses have helped reemphasize the idea of a core plantation “model” that simultaneously orders physical and social, and geographic and cultural, space – the strategic design of what might be designated the “meta-plantation”.²¹ Travelling westward, and opening up plantation land in Alabama, Mississippi, or Arkansas, aspiring planters (typically the Carolina descendants of Caribbean émigrés) carried this ordered design with them “as an important item of cultural baggage.”²² In the process, they transmitted the idea of the plantation (its practical elements and its social hierarchies) as a reproducible form, as a form that demanded accurate reproduction rather than personalization; they transmitted the idea of the plantation design as a meta-plantation order.

²⁰ See in particular Édouard Glissant, *The Poetics of Relation* [1990], trans. Betsy Wing (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997), and *Faulkner, Mississippi* [1996], trans. Barbara Lewis & Thomas C. Spea (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1999); Michael Kreyling, *The South That Wasn’t There: Postsouthern Memory and History* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2010); Valérie Loichot, *Orphan Narratives: The Postplantation Literature of Faulkner, Glissant, Morrison, and Saint-Perse* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2009); Elizabeth Christine Russ, *The Plantation in the Postslavery Imagination* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009); Smith & Cohn, ed. *Look Away!: The U.S. South in New World Studies* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004). I apply the phrase “circum-Atlantic” following Joseph Roach’s usage in *Cities of the Dead: Circum-Atlantic Performance* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996).

²¹ Michael P. Bibler defines this useful term as “an abbreviation signifying [the] vertical system of paternalistic and patriarchal hierarchies that constitutes the core social structure of every individual plantation – whether it be slave or tenant, antebellum or modern.” *Cotton’s Queer Relations: Same-Sex Intimacy and the Literature of the Southern Plantation, 1936-1968* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2009), 6.

²² John Michael Vlach, *Back of the Big House: The Architecture of Plantation Slavery* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993), 5-6

Rival Geographies and Resistant Reading

Physically and socially, and also literarily, the plantation offers an exemplary narrative site. It combines, in its ideologically ordered spaces, two distinct yet interrelated discourses: the narrative “plotting” exercised in mapped designs, and the narrative “reading” articulated in spatial practices. This layering compels us, in turn, to recognize the plantation as both discrete and complex: as separable units, as a whole site, and as a component within a trans-geographical system. For William Gleason, focusing specifically on the plantation mansion and its porch-space (in Charles Waddell Chesnut’s plantation stories), the site’s architectural divisions exemplify how the “narrative features of architectural space” (the way in which floor-plans unfold like novel plots, for example) correlate directly to “the architectural features of narrative space”. The porch functions dually, as both setting and set-up – offering a “highly controlled and mediated social space where the inside and outside of the story (and the house) meet.”²³

Such a function exemplifies the larger narrative project which historians Dell Upton and John Michael Vlach have detected at the heart of the plantation’s spatial design, and which I draw on to help generate a new model for reading the textual spaces of Yoknapatawpha. Both Upton and Vlach read the plantation site through the narrative design it attempts to enforce (in terms that are strikingly similar to the narrative architectural discussions of De Certeau or Tschumi). For Upton, it constitutes an “articulated processional landscape”, where movement is directed; for Vlach, it offers a site of “threshold devices”, where individuals find themselves contained or placed.²⁴ Individuals working within or moving across the historical plantation landscape (most obviously the enslaved, but also whites of lower social status) found themselves guided by a master-narrative of the site. Yet at the same time – in the very

²³ William A. Gleason, *Sites Unseen: Architecture, Race, and American Literature* (New York: New York University Press, 2011), 26. Gleason is also careful to emphasize Vlach’s readings of the porch as a site of “creolized” architecture – an aspect of plantation architecture discussed later in this Introduction.

²⁴ Dell Upton, “White and Black Landscapes in Eighteenth-Century Virginia” [1985], in *Cabin, Quarter, Plantation: Architecture and Landscapes of North American Slavery*, ed. Clifton Ellis & Rebecca Ginsburg (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), 131 & 133; Vlach, *Back of the Big House*, 5. Upton has elsewhere argued (as Gleason notes) that “[a]rchitecture is an art of social storytelling, a means for shaping American society and culture and for ‘annotating’ social action by creating appropriate settings for it.” *Architecture in the United States* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 11.

fact that it literalized an oppressive ideology in physical structures, boundaries, and divisions – this articulated landscape also offered a radical means by which to subvert that ideology through resistant, transgressive, and individualistic navigation of the site.²⁵ That is to say: the “design” of the plantation was habitually undermined, in discreet but profound ways, by the “details” of everyday encounter. “By steady increments,” Vlach writes, “the official order set out by the planter on maps, documents, calendars, and schedules and expressed in the forms and locations of buildings, fields, fences, and roads was subtly but certainly turned aside.”²⁶

By refusing to recognize the planter’s site “design”, the enslaved denied him a part of his mastery, and refused to be absolutely “processed” by the plantation’s social machinery; and in that refusal, though still slaves, they became, to a significant degree, less enslaved. The plantation and its underlying system were revealed, through its very attempts at mastery, as malleable, fluid, and far more readily personalized than one might initially imagine. It exhibited the tension Michel de Certeau defines between *place* as a contained “stable” locale, and *space* as contested “practiced place” established by the movement of its “reading” by an individual.²⁷ It expressed, in short, what Bernard Tschumi identifies as the obscured reality at the root of architectural knowledge and experience:

Architecture’s inherent confrontation of space and use and the inevitable disjunction of the two terms means that architecture is constantly unstable, constantly on the verge of change. It is paradoxical that three thousand years of architectural ideology have tried to assert the very opposite: that architecture is about stability, solidity, and foundation.²⁸

In Upton and Vlach’s readings of the plantation site’s design, the master-narrative failed to exercise an uncontested dominance: it was, on the contrary,

²⁵ Vlach, *Back of the Big House* x-xi, 1-17, and 228-235

²⁶ *Ibid*, 235

²⁷ De Certeau, *Practice of Everyday Life, Vol.1*, 117, 77

²⁸ Tschumi, “Introduction”, *Architecture and Disjunction*, 19

constantly resisted and undermined by the creation of “rival geographies” of habit and usage, by the creation of “resistant readings”.²⁹ Such spatial practices proved equally effective for post-emancipation black Southerners negotiating a segregated post-plantation landscape; its principle and its functioning hold potential for the empowerment of any group marginalized by class, gender, racial, or economic politics. Yet it is important to recognize that such rival geographies cannot be mapped in the same ways that we might map the “master-geography” of the plantation, and not least because mapping, as a practice, has historically emerged to serve the already empowered, to articulate their possession, ownership, and social design. As a result, the more discreet cultural resistance articulated in rival geographies often relies on its invisibility to sustain itself. (Stephanie Camp, for example, defines such spatial practices as “characterized by motion: the movement of bodies, objects, and information with and around plantation space”³⁰). As Valérie Loichot argues, writing out of a postcolonial perspective that foregrounds questions of race, the eschewal of full representation can prove liberating. Suppressed or marginalized narratives – what Loichot terms “orphaned histories” – subvert the central authority of patriarchy or textuality precisely because they remain unarticulated, or at best inchoately expressed.³¹ Silence and absence may thus become desirable, empowering, even eloquent qualities, which resist the linguistic or visual power structures of the plantation, transgressing the site even as they refuse to engage with it, and thus overlaying its spaces with painfully articulated absences.³²

²⁹ The term “rival geographies”, which Stephanie Camp has applied to discussion of the enslaved plantation experience, was first used by Edward Said in *Culture and Imperialism* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1993), xxii-xxiii. It is worth noting a potential disparity between the terms “rival” and “resistant” here: the former seems to point toward a sense of agency and independence perhaps lacking in the latter. For a more general and expansive theorization of everyday resistance, see in particular James Scott, *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985).

³⁰ Stephanie M.H. Camp, *Closer to Freedom: Enslaved Women and Everyday Resistance in the Plantation South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 7

³¹ Loichot, *Orphan Narratives*, 1. Paul Gilroy has similarly discussed the assertion of black political agency in the historical “Black Atlantic” as operating through “lower frequencies”; see *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (New York: Verso, 1993), 37.

³² In drawing on this as an analogy for reading, it important to recognize the historical limitations of such rival geographies. The resistance enacted served to undermine mastery via practices; but it did not replace the plantation or meta-plantation with alternative structures, and its practices often proved

In Faulkner's writing, this resistance manifests itself particularly through silences and omissions, through readings which overlay and complicate specific sites: Loichot argues that "[t]he key to reading Faulkner lies in the absences of his texts – the unspoken, the disrespected, and the feared".³³ Minrose Gwin has offered an effective summary of what such a reading might look like (a strategy that Thadious Davis draws on in *Southscapes*, in order to situate Alice Walker, rather than Faulkner, at the center of Southern literature). Although she praises Faulkner's (perhaps surprisingly) sympathetic engagements with the dilemmas and limitations of "narrative space" faced by African-American women within *Go Down, Moses*, Gwin also qualifies that praise by noting what Faulkner equally elides, in the "fleeting" moments in which these black women "slip in and out of the space of this text":

I am still wondering what Tennie Beauchamp was thinking when she watched Hubert Beauchamp's unnamed mistress get sent packing down the road. I would like to learn what young Molly Beauchamp held in her mind when she was nursing those two babies, and whether Tomasina ever knew why her mother drowned herself. I want to know whether Nat ever got her porch and well. I want to know the "Delta Autumn" woman's name.³⁴

Gwin faults Faulkner for falling short of encompassing such moments. I would counter with the suggestion that Faulkner's recognition of this limitation – and his deliberate expression of the potential power of social and narrative silences – gives such strategic absences the eloquence of speech. His insistence on the instability of narrative, the subjectivity of perception, and the paradoxical function of power dynamics,

physically dangerous for slaves who enacted them. Yet as Camp emphasizes, it nonetheless held considerable value as an act of creative expression and communication, which helped sustain an important sense of community (*Closer to Freedom*, 7).

³³ Loichot, *Orphan Narratives*, 120

³⁴ Minrose C. Gwin, "Her Shape, His Hand: The Spaces of African American Women in *Go Down, Moses*", in *New Essays on Go Down, Moses*, ed. Linda Wagner-Martin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 96

foregrounds the empowering quality of silence and absence – and this is most clearly expressed through his use of narrative “revisions” to overlay narrative spaces (as with the development of the Compson family “history”, which I explore in Chapter 3).

Historical places, Michel de Certeau notes, appear pluralistic, but are actually the product of different heterogeneous places layered one on another.³⁵ This is true of the US South, as it has emerged from the core structure of the contested plantation site, and is equally true of Yoknapatawpha as it developed. It is an idea everywhere present in Faulkner’s work, but which finds particularly acute expression in “Was”, the opening story of *Go Down, Moses* (1942). Sophonsiba Beauchamp, an ambiguous figure of fun and sympathy, insists on calling her brother Hubert’s plantation “Warwick”, in reference to the English estate of which she claims (for reasons that remain unclear) that he “was probably the true earl” (*GDM*, 7). The rest of the community, meanwhile, insists on continuing to refer to it simply as Hubert Beauchamp’s place; and as a result, we are told, “it would sound like she and Mr Hubert owned two separate plantations covering the same area of ground, one on top of the other.” (9-10) The story reveals a multiplicity of plantations layering the site: the domestic spaces of Sophonsiba and the leisure space of Hubert are located in relation to the labored space of enslavement and the exploitative space of miscegenation insisted on by the presence of the mulatto slave “Tomey’s Turl” (half-brother to plantation owners Buck and Buddy McCaslin). And Faulkner offers still further conceptions of that same space later in *Go Down, Moses*, in “The Bear”: in the images of Hubert Beauchamp first cohabiting with his black cook, after Sophonsiba marries and leaves (224-225), then later living alone with an ancient male servant, until one day the bare decayed house, along with its inhabitants, is suddenly consumed by flames (226).

An analogy for this simultaneous fracturing and doubling can be drawn by combining what cultural historian Tara McPherson has called the South’s “lenticular logic”, and what Faulkner scholar John Matthews has described as a “stereoptical aesthetics” within Faulkner’s work. McPherson derives her concept from a form of

³⁵ De Certeau, *Practice of Everyday Life*, Vol.1, 201. Thadious Davis has also emphasized the Southern application of De Certeau’s observation, referencing this same passage; see *Southscapes: Geographies of Race, Region, and Literature* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011), 262.

souvenir card (“lenticular”) which shows two views – in her example, either a white Southern belle in front of a mansion, or else a grinning black “mammy” – dependent on its rotation. The card contains, yet also cannot show, both simultaneously: “the structural logic of the card makes joining the two images within one view difficult if not impossible, even as it conjoins them at a structural level.”³⁶ For McPherson, this offers the perfect metaphor of how the South exists within the popular imagination. “A lenticular logic is a monocular logic,” she argues,

a schema by which histories or images that are actually copresent get presented (structurally, ideologically) so that only one of the images can be seen at a time. Such an arrangement represses connection, allowing whiteness to float free from blackness, denying the long historical imbrications of racial markers and radical meanings in the South.³⁷

McPherson’s analogy conjures a South of visible and tangible division, of separation through blockage and denial, of disconnection in physical, intellectual, and moral senses.³⁸ In contrast, John Matthews applies a rival visual analogy – the “stereopticon” – to read Faulkner’s aesthetics in *Go Down, Moses*. Midway through “The Bear”, Faulkner uses the simile of a stereopticon “condens[ing] into one instantaneous field the myriad minutiae of its scope” to describe the way in which the McCaslin family ledgers conjure “the whole plantation in its mazed and intricate entirety – [...] that whole edifice intricate and complex” (220-221). This “condensation” serves as an organizational principle, overlaying the rival histories of plantation experience into a single complex space, and in the process reclaiming and embedding

³⁶ Tara McPherson, *Reconstructing Dixie: Race, Gender, and Nostalgia in the Imagined South* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), 7

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 26. McPherson uses this analogy to discuss the role of “the South” in the contemporary popular imagination, particularly through the enduringly popular romanticism embodied in *Gone with the Wind*; here, I am extending her analogy to apply it to a broader and enduring romanticized imagery of the plantation, to which Faulkner was responding in the 1930s in particular.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 249-250

all the denied details and repressed connections.³⁹ Where McPherson's analogy emphasizes division within a singular space, Matthews's asserts condensation as a means of recognizing depth and complexity. Both recognize the plantation's inherent doubleness (or better, multiplicity), and critique the fallacy of attempting to render it singular, stable, or orderly (as so much popular culture imagery suggests). Yet they also differ significantly as to their faith in how such multiplicity might be resolved: on the one hand, into division and separation; on the other, into depth and complexity. And it is my contention that Faulkner's plantation writing might productively be viewed as an attempt to understand, and to a degree reconcile, these two conceptual positions – of factual hybridity and factitious separation.

Passing: Darkened Plantation, Whitened Mansion

The tension between different conceptions of the plantation reaches its most intense aspect in the ambiguous (and also ambivalent) relation between “plantation” and “mansion”. It is through this slippery conceptual and spatial division that the racial politics of the plantation emerge most clearly, and are expressed most fully, in *Yoknapatawpha*. Édouard Glissant (whose reading of Faulkner begins, like my own, in an approach to Rowan Oak) emphasizes this centrality, when he writes that “the whole ensemble of [Faulkner's] work stands before you as though erected by an architect who constructed a monument around a secret to be known, pointing it out and hiding it all at the same time.”⁴⁰ This secret, Glissant suggests, is the evident yet obscured foundations on which the South – and likewise, the plantation culture of the Caribbean and Latin America – was built: on a system of slavery and exclusion that was nonetheless also a culture of liberation and hybridity. In consequence, Glissant's “Faulkner” is necessarily also a “creolized” one, whose *Yoknapatawpha* project is rooted in both the denials of the plantation mansion and the revelations of the plantation site.

White supremacist ideology and law of the nineteenth- and early twentieth-century South – along with the white literature and popular imagery which

³⁹ John T. Matthews, “Touching Race in *Go Down, Moses*” in *New Essays on Go Down, Moses*, ed. Linda Wagner-Martin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 27

⁴⁰ Glissant, *Faulkner, Mississippi*, 5

romanticized the plantation – were designed less to enforce racial and cultural separation (although they did, of course, perform that function), than to conceal a more deeply-rooted racial and cultural hybridity. The historical intermingling of European and African cultural traditions, and the psychic inter-reliance of white and black for mutual self-identity, ran too deep for any attempted separation to have a meaningful effect. The goal of such ideology and imagery was instead to obscure, through the *rhetoric* of separation, the already established and inexpugnable fact of Southern cultural hybridity – a hybridity which also might be termed, from different viewpoints, miscegenation, creolization, or symbiosis. The attempt to create a coherent, singular, imaginative geography of the “South” served not only to assert and maintain white supremacy in the present, then: by obscuring the region’s circum-Atlantic origins and dependencies, it also created a strategically “whitened” past, both blank and racially uncontested.⁴¹

One of the principal ways in which this denial of hybridity has been generated is through the plantation mansion’s conceptual separation from the plantation site upon which it was wholly reliant. It exists, in such discourses of separation, as a conceptually “white” space, but one nonetheless historically built and maintained, physically and economically, on exploited black labor, and which arguably even drew on African architectural traditions.⁴² In architectural and social terms, then, it might be argued that the mansion performs racial (and cultural) “passing”. Its state of simultaneous separation and inclusivity is expressed perhaps most clearly in the conflation and interchangeable use of the terms “plantation” and “plantation mansion”. The names of plantations – Sutpen’s Hundred in *Absalom, Absalom!*, for example – almost invariably refer both expansively to the whole site and exclusively to the “big house” at its

⁴¹ In using the term “creolized”, I point toward its sense as both racial and cultural hybridity in a “new world” context, rather than in reference to the more specific Francophone sense.

⁴² In *Swinging in Place: Porch Life in Southern Culture* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001), Jocelyn Hazelwood Donlon describes the Southern porch as “a hybrid, ‘creolized’ structure”, whose “very history bespeaks cultural miscegenation” (67). According to the arguments of Vlach (among others), the Southern porch radically combined European neo-classical aesthetics and African architectural traditions, and arose through the influence of free black immigrants from post-revolution Haiti during the early nineteenth century, when much of Mississippi and northern Louisiana was still being settled and initially planted. See John Michael Vlach, *By the Work of Their Hands: Studies in Afro-American Folklife* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1991), 186-201, and more generally *Back of the Big House*; see also Davis, *Southscapes*, 80-82.

center. The mansion thus operates as synecdoche of the plantation, and by extension of the imaginative geography of the US South. Yet this synecdoche produces an image that is undoubtedly iconic, but also often unrepresentative of the complexities of the actual histories of the South, an instability particularly revealed by the contemporary social narratives of “heritage tourism”. The mansion, as tourist site, becomes estranged from the plantation site of which it was an integral ideological and physical part. It disavows, by disassociation, the precise historical system that produced it. As Jessica Adams notes, in discussing the restored mansions of Natchez, Mississippi in particular, within such tourist narratives

[p]lantations are reduced to their interest as “dwellings” or “homes” and their value recalculated in terms of domestic pleasure. The point is, finally, to allow the “vanished era” to inhabit the present moment; and this is achieved in part by reducing the meaning of *plantation* to house alone, to the significance of architecture and furnishings. The land surrounding plantation houses thus become merely incidental space.⁴³

Narratives of white plantation leisure become emphasized over, and divorced from, suppressed narratives of black plantation labor, and in the process the plantation “passes” – conceptually and racially – from a site of industry and exploitation to a space of (white) pastoral domesticity.⁴⁴

⁴³ Jessica Adams, “Local Color: The Southern Plantation in Popular Culture”, *Cultural Critique* 42 (Spring 1999), 175

⁴⁴ For discussion of this dilemma within contemporary Southern tourism (to which I also return in both Chapter 3 and the Conclusion), see Adams, “Local Color” and *Wounds of Returning: Race, Memory, and Property on the Postslavery Plantation* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), and McPherson, *Reconstructing Dixie*, 42-44 and 253-256. For framing of the plantation as “Southern synecdoche”, see Adams, “Local Color”, 170-171, and Jeremy Wells, *Romances of the White Man’s Burden: Race, Empire, and the Plantation in American Literature, 1880-1936* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2011), 5. Despite this synecdochic function of the mansion, it is important to stress that perhaps as few as 1% of slaveholding families had the wealth and opulence to fit the “plantation stereotype” embodied in a cultural narrative like *Gone with the Wind*. Only 11,000 antebellum plantations in the whole South possessed more than 50 slaves, and of these only 2,300 could be termed “large-scale” plantations. The majority of planters across the Southern states (outside of particularly

The endurance of the term “plantation” has itself contributed significantly, if often subconsciously, to this dynamic. The word expresses an archaic image that privileges both agricultural pursuits and cultural colonialism. As Elizabeth Christine Russ notes, this contrasts striking with term “*ingenio*” used in the hispanophone Caribbean, which describes a complex including house, sugarcane fields, and processing mills. As Russ argues, the “rooted” sense of plantation is expanded here into an explicit acknowledgment of “the intimate relationship” between the sites’ “rural/agrarian and industrial/commercial nature.”⁴⁵ The term “plantation” encodes and enacts a conceptual evasion, which was heightened by the deliberateness with which so many planters named their plantations and mansions in reference to family history (as with Nottoway plantation in Louisiana, named for the Carolina town from which the owner’s family originated) or cultural heritage (as with plantations like Waverley in Natchez, Mississippi, referencing the works of Sir Walter Scott in order to accentuate the plantation’s role as “colony” of European culture, rather than as site of enslavement and industrial production.)

This displacement and separation is a defining fact of most plantation-set fiction prior to Faulkner’s, that yoked political concerns to the pre-existing domestic aesthetics of the nineteenth-century novel. In the earliest scholarly study of plantation as imaginative space, Francis Pendleton Gaines notes that such fiction typically eschews discussion of the economics and practical aspects of slaveholding (beyond discussing the threat of debt and economic ruin), while also ignoring “the actual beginnings of the plantation system, the first century of rather primitive existence. The tradition assumes a finished product, sprung full formed from the English life.”⁴⁶ (Here, once again, there is insistence on cultural colonialism.)

Writing in 1924, on the eve both of Faulkner’s career as a novelist and of the rise of US literary modernism, these omissions constituted a problem of accuracy,

wealthy regions, such as the Mississippi Delta or coastal South Carolina) preferred to reinvest their profits in the purchase of land or slaves, rather than in conspicuous consumption. See Vlach, *Back of the Big House*, 8-12; see also William Kauffman Scarborough, *Masters of the Big House: Elite Slaveholders of the Mid-Nineteenth-Century South* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2003).

⁴⁵ Russ, *The Plantation in the Postslavery Imagination*, 7

⁴⁶ Francis Pendleton Gaines, *The Southern Plantation: A Study in the Development and the Accuracy of a Tradition* [1924] (Gloucester, MA: Peter Smith, 1962), 147; see also 149-150

rather than ethics or aesthetics, for Gaines. “It is not surprising, to be sure,” he concludes, “that technical matters should find little representation in distinctly romantic themes; one does not expect in a cow-boy story a record of the economic evolution of ranching or a curve showing the fluctuation in the market at any given period.”⁴⁷ Gaines’s observation proves illuminating, by suggesting a direct connection between plantation structures and literary form. It is one of my main contentions that it was in direct response to such assumptions – that slaveholding and planter life were somehow conceptually, spatially, and narratively separable – that Faulkner was driven to produce the complex and powerful works that compose Yoknapatawpha. His writing increasingly works to restore such “technical matters” to representations of the plantation, and does so particularly through an aesthetic which recognizes the detail as a means of disrupting the powerful “design” articulated by conventional “romantic themes.”

Plotting and Reading: A Methodological Approach

Fiction – especially fiction as complex and difficult as Faulkner’s – has a particular practical value, in that it models the interaction present in actual social and spatial practices. That modeling functions best, I believe, when it is least contained by closure, when it is most radically opened to possibility and to subjective interpretation: in short, when it sustains a fictional world not of certainty, but of doubt. It is uncertainty that lets power function dynamically, that resists dominance and opens possibilities. And it is precisely because the plantation dramatizes the contestation of dominant and counter-narratives that it proves such a productive narrative space, in both social and literary senses.

My goal in this thesis is to explore the empowering possibilities of recuperative “reading” of the plantation sites of Yoknapatawpha, and to resist the force of erasure enacted in the “plotting” (the sequential progress and closure) of its component sites and stories. The plantation offers not only setting, but also model, for the enactment of a more spatialized and decentered approach to the reading of Yoknapatawpha (and potentially, of any text). This spatial approach, while emphasizing Yoknapatawpha’s wholeness, also insists on recognition of the fundamental units out of which that

⁴⁷ Ibid, 146

wholeness is built: not the separated designs of volumes and stories, but the moveable components of scenes, motifs, and details.

In this Introduction I have used the term “plotting” to refer to the authorial design of a fictional work; in this conception, “story” refers to the definable content (the occurrences undergone by characters), while “narrating” designates the plotting attempted by characters within the fiction (the subjective ordering of their experiential environment). Such distinctions are slippery: it is not always possible – or even necessarily productive or desirable – to separate plotting from story, especially given that story sometimes may only arise as a direct product of the processes of plotting or narrating. In general, though, I argue for “plotting” as a means of maintaining a certain politicized sequence of events, and “story” as the material used to support such a thesis-position. Peter Brooks’s definition of plotting proves useful here: “the design and intention of narrative, what shapes a story and gives it a certain direction or intent or meaning”.⁴⁸ Brooks also uses the term “interconnectedness” to define plotting, but here I want to use that term to make a distinction in my own terminology between “plotting” and “reading”. Throughout this thesis, plotting accords to authorial “design and intention”; reading, on the other hand, accords to the attentiveness with which a reader personalizes a text. Reading may reorients a text by using more discreet structures – details, objects, characters, single moments – to emphasize quite a different kind of interconnectedness to the “design” which the author may have intended. (We might usefully, as a result, term the space of a novel its “story-site”, and the plotting of a novel its “story-design”.)

In the process of reading, “plotting” is always anticipating, manipulating, or yielding to the power of “reading”; in much the same way, the plantation site attempts to anticipate, yet cannot wholly control, the movements of those living and working within its landscape. Reading likewise creates rival geographies of textual spaces, and by emphasizing the tension between “plotting” and “reading”, a new method of textual experience may emerge. Such a form of reading would emphasize detail over design, and establish the text as “spatialized” map of possibilities, rather than as a progressive linear sequence. The text becomes reconfigured as a series of potential details and moments, no longer authorially plotted but now freely read; in an oeuvre

⁴⁸ Brooks, *Reading for the Plot*, xi

like Yoknapatawpha, this also means that an individual moment may be used to create readings that resist the containing borders of individual stories, novels, or volumes. The reader becomes able to replot details, and create new patterns and structures through that plotting. The result would be a means of both aesthetically and ethically transforming Yoknapatawpha. For example, as I argue toward the end of Chapter 1, it would allow *Absalom, Absalom!* to become equally a novel about Judith Sutpen, a narrative possibility prohibited by the current sequencing of the novel, where the struggles of her life and death are marginally contained within Chapter VI, and subsequently become obscured by the dramatic revelations which occur in Chapters VII, VIII, and IX.

Details and Design: Chapter 1, The Plantation System

Denied details and repressed connections provide the key to Faulkner's treatment of the plantation and mansion; they constitute the dilemmas which he attempts to conceptually and aesthetically resolve. In describing Faulkner's literary landscape as "house-haunted", Noel Polk emphasizes how its material structures also constitute a "symbolic presence".⁴⁹ If Faulkner's plantation mansions often function as gothic spaces – and if his plantation landscapes appear as spectral sites – it is because they are troubled by the return of repressed connections to slaveholding, forcing an encounter not only with the violence of the plantation's past, but also with the creolized and hybridized nature of the culture it produced. Such connections, in their simultaneous presence and absence throughout Yoknapatawpha, necessarily appear ghostly, as the sites haunted by the specter of their denied hybridity.

It is the stubborn recurrence of inexpugnable details – in the past, in the everyday – that troubles Faulkner's plantation sites. Such details unsettle and disperse the stability of the plantation image and the apparent simplicity of its narratives, as when the more personal entries undo the order of the McCaslin ledgers, and the traces of his past undo Thomas Sutpen's "design" in *Absalom, Absalom!*. In Chapter 1, "The Plantation System; or, Judith and Clytie's Hundred", I use this position to explore the productive ways in which Faulkner's texts can be read against the grain for repressed connections rooted in their descriptive surfaces, an approach which Elaine

⁴⁹ Polk, "Children of the Dark House", 25

Freedgood in particular has theorized in *The Ideas in Things*. Specifically, the chapter explores the ways in which underdeveloped narrative details in Faulkner's first plantation-oriented novel, *Flags in the Dust* (1929), are deliberately and dramatically expanded in *Absalom, Absalom!* (1936) and *The Unvanquished* (1938). In the earlier work, the plantation mansion figures *only* as a mansion, as a domestic (and gendered) rather than socioeconomic site which, detached from its slaveholding legacy, is able to "pass" as wholly and unambiguously white. Yet the persistent presence of unaccounted-for Caribbean references and the suppression of African-American counter-narratives throughout *Flags in the Dust* reveal it to be a novel that is profoundly and visibly troubled by the effects of such denials and strategic repressions. As a result, its broadly realist "design" is encroached upon by the "details" of a modernist aesthetic of interruption and fragmentation, an aesthetic which finds full expression in *Absalom, Absalom!*.

Perhaps Faulkner's greatest gambit in *Absalom, Absalom!* is his attempt to recuperate the "vagrant" or "fugitive" connections (to use Elaine Freedgood's terms) passed over in his earlier works. It is also more broadly, as Eric Sundquist has noted, "an act of formal recuperation on Faulkner's part", a reflection on both earlier configurations of the US South and on the unifying power of design, the "numerous analogies and metaphors of design and reconstruction" in many ways aligning Sutpen with Faulkner himself.⁵⁰ It attempts – through Quentin's and Shreve's storytelling, and also more intriguingly through the alternative plantation structures that Sutpen's daughters Judith and Clytie attempt to establish – to recognize and reclaim the plantation South's creolized hybridity, along with the diasporic currents that both created it and trouble it, however destabilizing or ruinous the consequences.⁵¹ Faulkner creates a text that reaches beyond Yoknapatawpha County, and into New Orleans, Haiti, and Virginia, through a central plotline driven by suppressed histories of miscegenation and familial rejection and denial. He spatializes the text through a mapping that, because of its ambiguities of narrative and genealogical identity, is not only spatial but also layered. The novel's racial concerns serve as a striking allegory for

⁵⁰ Eric J. Sundquist, *Faulkner: The House Divided* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1983), 124

⁵¹ Elaine Freedgood, *The Ideas in Things: Fugitive Meaning in the Victorian Novel* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 4, 16

the dilemmas and dangers inherent in white Southern society's denial of its own "cultural creolization". In originally calling the manuscript of *Absalom, Absalom!* "Dark House", Faulkner was not simply pointing up the layers of gothic mystery and obfuscation which the narrative creates: he was also pointing out the impossibility of the mansion continuing to "pass" as solely and exclusively white.

Through Judith and Clytie's positive relationship – and most particularly through their attempt to integrate Charles Bon's son, Charles Etienne de Saint Valery, into their "alternative" plantation community – details are used to undermine the exclusive conservatism of Thomas Sutpen's design. The sisters reject the design by refusing to reproduce its hierarchical politics; and in a related element of the plot, the dangers present in Sutpen's slavish reproduction of the plantation model become evident when that model ultimately brings about his death at the hands of his poor white servant, Wash Jones. Judith and Clytie's communal model, which is so potentially redemptive in its racial politics, is also positive in its subversion of traditional Southern gender roles. Both women apparently refuse to become vessels of male reproduction, thereby refusing to reproduce the narrative of the meta-plantation in either political or biological terms. Yet ironically, it is their very refusal which also fatally limits their alternative structure. Their apparent refusal to reproduce creates a community that may be readily diminished, but not so easily extended – a community that as a result is particularly vulnerable to social and narrative erasure.

In *Absalom, Absalom!*'s concluding moments, when the "dark house" of Sutpen's Hundred is finally permitted to burn to the ground, Faulkner gestures toward what I believe to be *the* crucial themes of his final Yoknapatawpha works: the themes of autoeradication, restoration, and erasure. In this moment of destruction, the connections which the novel has raised become symbolically erased, in an act of closure that is absolute. There is a significant ethical consequence to this erasure: lost in the conflagration, Patricia Yaeger notes, are not simply the material traces of "Sutpen's dream" and his family's antebellum wealth, but also the tangible evidence of the labor of Sutpen's slaves.⁵² Also lost, I would argue, are the alternative plantation

⁵² Patricia Yaeger, "Dematerializing Culture: Faulkner's Trash Aesthetic", in *Faulkner and Material Culture: Faulkner and Yoknapatawpha, 2004*, ed. Joseph R. Urgo & Ann J. Abadie (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2007), 66

models, based in community rather than the patriarchal household, which Judith and Clytie tried yet ultimately failed to create. Daniel Spoth has characterized this consuming of slavery's traces (and also, clearly, of counter-patriarchal models) as "a calculated autoeradication", which allows Faulkner and his proxy narrators "to rebuild those very structures" that the novel ostensibly destroys.⁵³ As the vanished mansion becomes narratively and imaginatively rebuilt, in the absence of any material referent, it is opened to a selective approach to history. White Southern culture succeeds in once more making the mansion – and by extension, the plantation – come finally to "pass" as white.

Faulkner and the Everyday: Chapter 2, The Plantation Site

The "open" text of *Absalom, Absalom!* – in its freewheeling narrative uncertainty – is thus also, in other respects, a rigorously and conservatively "closed" text too. The loose and complex chronology and structure of *Go Down, Moses* (1942) might accordingly be read as an attempt to address this dilemma. Chapter 2, "The Plantation Site; or, White Maps, Black Routes" explores the consequences of this attempt, by examining the ways in which Faulkner roots the legacy of the plantation and resistance to its meta-narratives within everyday practices; a crucial theoretical reference point here is offered by Michel de Certeau.

The importance of the "everyday" is a crucial yet curiously neglected aspect of Faulkner's writing. Patricia Yaeger, for example, maintains that "[w]hat is missing from Faulkner's epic fiction but present in writers such as Alice Walker or Eudora Welty is a sense of the ways race functions in the nonepic everyday."⁵⁴ Yaeger's position reflects a certain wariness toward Faulkner's writing on the part of critics who approach him via "resistant" discourses (feminism, African-American theory, queer readings etc.). To some degree, the point is a valid one: Faulkner's canonicity and personal identity do

⁵³ Spoth, "The House that Time Built", 124

⁵⁴ Patricia Yaeger, *Dirt and Desire: Reconstructing Southern Women's Writing: 1930-1990* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), xv. Noel Polk makes a similar argument in the title essay of *Faulkner and Welty and the Southern Literary Tradition* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2008), 3-21. Although ostensibly challenging gender essentialism, Polk (like Yaeger) ultimately replicates such a position, by failing to emphasize here the strongly domestic nature of Faulkner's writing which he emphasizes elsewhere, particularly in "Testing Masculinity in the Snopes Trilogy" (44-68) in the same volume.

indeed seem to frame his writing as embodying many of the over-represented aspects of scholarship on the plantation in particular, and on American literature in general. Faulkner wrote, inescapably, from a perspective that was white and male, affluent and educated; he wrote in English, used an aesthetic drawn from the Eurocentric cultural “elitism” of both Romanticism and (High) Modernism, and expressed a clear sympathy for the nostalgic and white Southern exceptionalist myths of the Lost Cause. It is understandable that scholars such as Yaeger in *Dirt and Desire*, or Thadious Davis in *Southscapes*, should attempt to decenter Faulkner’s considerable position in Southern literature, and replace him with alternative models such as Eudora Welty or Alice Walker. Yaeger in particular argues that “[t]he endless, gorgeous machinery of Faulkner studies” has often led to other Southern writers – especially those who are female, black, or both – being “defined by negation”, framed as somehow deficient, lacking in grandeur, ambition, or scope, and as such as comparatively banal.⁵⁵

This perspective has led, from the 1980s onward, to an emphasis on the scholarly construction of a plurality of “other Faulkners”. Scholars have attempted to probe his texts for ways in which they might engage more actively with the marginalized, under-represented, or resistant voices, in a way more visibly represent in writers like Welty or Walker. The underlying implication here – that texts which articulate “central” or ostensibly “normative” positions also inevitably privilege and validate them, and are therefore fundamentally ethically “suspect” – is questionable, however. Such a position productively disrupts traditional patterns of dominance, yet nonetheless threatens to replace it with the assertion of different structures of exclusion. It creates not so much pluralities as other hierarchies instead, and this is a dilemma which my spatialized approach to Yoknapatawpha aims to resolve. As a result, I take the more balanced approach that Taylor Hagood (among others) suggests, and recognize that although Faulkner’s writing arises “from a codified position of empowerment” which it admittedly does privilege, it nonetheless also

⁵⁵ Yaeger, *Dirt and Desire*, 96. Yaeger’s critique of Faulkner’s centrality to Southern literature is both influenced by and echoed by a number of scholars. Of particular importance is Michael Kreyling’s earlier discussion of Faulkner in *Inventing Southern Literature* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1998), especially in “Southern Writing Under the Influence of William Faulkner”, 126-147. Kreyling highlights the considerable tensions between Faulkner’s identities as author and as person, as an obvious yet frequently neglected starting point for resisting ideas of a monolithic “Faulkner” at the heart of Southern writing.

articulates “the perspectives of the unempowered” within a constantly shifting dynamic.⁵⁶

This dynamic expresses itself nowhere more clearly in Yoknapatawpha than in the racialized domestic relations of the post-slavery plantation – that is to say, precisely in the everyday surfaces which Yaeger suggests are absent from Faulkner’s work. While not denying that Faulkner’s writing contains certain “epic” qualities, I would nonetheless argue (in agreement with Gwin or Roberts, for example, or with the many scholars who have recently offered material culture readings of Faulkner) that those qualities are always embedded within the everyday. The problematic legacies of slavery and patriarchy permeate every inch and fiber of the plantation’s site and structures. The everyday and the epic are ultimately as inseparable in his writing as the plantation site is from the plantation mansion, and to deny their central connection is to deny elements and singular details that will not be neatly contained within a design; it is to deny the expressive power Faulkner quite deliberately builds into the silences and absences of his work.

In particular, *Go Down, Moses* articulates a differentiation between the “domestic” and the “everyday”. Conventional uses of the term – as implied by Yaeger’s use of the phrase “nonepic everyday” – offer it as an antonym for “epic”, thereby imposing binary oppositions between common and elite, ordinary and exceptional, detail and design. There are clear inferences of class, gender, race – in short, of marginality – which underpin it (hence Yaeger’s introduction of Walker and Welty as counter-models to Faulkner).⁵⁷ Even in De Certeau’s formulation, the everyday as a site of practices of social resistance also establishes it as a site of abjection; it is defined by relation to the dominant “epic” structures that surround it. To use the term

⁵⁶ Taylor Hagood, *Faulkner’s Imperialism: Space, Place, and the Materiality of Myth* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2008), 5

⁵⁷ This tension between “epic” and “nonepic everyday” relates not only to the narrative prominence of certain characters and character types over others (see Woloch, *The One vs. The Many*). It also relates more abstractly to formal questions of design versus detail. In *Reading in Detail: Aesthetics and the Feminine* (London: Methuen, 1987), Naomi Schor highlights the historical gendering of this issue, where details and objects have been read as “effeminate”, and treatments of the everyday as “feminized”, in contrast to the “sublimity” of the epic whole (4). Schor also notes that this gendering has privileged the visual – in its alignment with the whole – over the material, which was more typically associated with “ephemeral” marginal detail (33). It is a sharp irony that, in such a conception, the material should be read as being quite so immaterial.

“domestic”, however, is to gesture toward a structure that is independent – yet that independent structure is a difficult one to construct: its emphasis on the home rather than on social interaction (as implied in “everyday”) creates a greater potential for individual agency, for self-determination that is not simply defined by resistance. Chapter 2 works to more fully articulate a crucial question first raised in Chapter 1: whether repressed details, encoded in the everyday, become recuperated to trace out impersonal narratives, or whether their functioning within domestic sites creates a greater sense of personal liberation and articulation.

The tension between independence and resistance is perhaps the crucial idea posed here. In *Culture and Imperialism*, Edward Said notes that “narratives of emancipation and enlightenment in their strongest form were also narratives of *integration* not separation, the stories of people who had been excluded from the main group but who were now fighting for a place in it.”⁵⁸ This is, for the most part, the form which resistance takes in Faulkner’s writing too: in Drusilla Hawk’s desire to ride with John Sartoris’s troops; or in Lucas Beauchamp’s and Charles Bon’s insistence on having the significance of their white heritage recognized. Such resistance ultimately serves to emphasize the marginality of the hitherto marginalized, over their self-determination and their capacity to produce structures that might operate independently of the normative and hegemonic. A greater resistance through independence thus emerges when the marginalized do *not* engage directly with the plantation site or the explicit narrative of the novel – at the points at which it is least visible articulated, is evinced most by silences and absences.

Chapter 2 reads *Go Down, Moses* for the counter-narratives it presents, particularly those offered by the alternative domestic models of the McCaslin twins and Lucas and Molly Beauchamp. One consequence of this is the production of a model through which black “home-space” may potentially serve as a means of resisting the disruptive and dehumanizing violence of segregation and lynching – particularly when set against Faulkner’s earlier treatments of the connections between domesticity and lynching, in “Dry September” (1930) and *Light in August* (1932). The chapter explores how the kinds of resistant plantation geography which Upton and Vlach theorize manifest themselves in the black Southern everyday (or perhaps, if

⁵⁸ Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, xxx

effective, in the domestic): in cabin decoration and the tending of hearth-fires, in yard-sweeping and the social etiquette of the meal-table. Another consequence of this search for counter-narratives (as Minrose Gwin in particular has noted) is the expressive power of unarticulated narratives in the novel, which quite deliberately replicates the exclusionary narrative structures of the McCaslin plantation ledgers at its center. If *Absalom, Absalom!* is a novel about the process of narrative production, then *Go Down, Moses* is surely Faulkner's most eloquent and effective demonstration of the dilemmas of narrative exclusion.⁵⁹

At the heart of this discussion is the theme raised by the resistant plantation geographies Vlach and Camp discussed, and by the models of articulation through silence that Loichot proposed. The reading of Faulkner's plantation sites here becomes about the tension between that which is legible and that which is illegible. Historically, this relationship has not simply served as an empowered-unempowered binary, of course. Legibility has just as often proved self-deconstructing, while illegibility has offered a protective space of concealment in which resistance and self-determination might occur. But at the same time, there is a considerable distance spanned – seemingly irresolvably – between the McCaslin ledgers as synecdoche of the South, and the community's African-American gravesites as social texts “which no white man could have read” (*GDM*, 102). There is a profound sense of division and separation which runs throughout *Go Down, Moses*, then, and which frames black-white relations (or the lack of) as ultimately sustained by communicative failure. This distance has the positive effect of creating spaces of self-determination and independence for hitherto unempowered African-Americans, but the sense of loss, and lack of viability for the future, is still more palpable. And it is a dilemma that Faulkner can only ultimately resolve through the mobilization of other, different forms of closure: geographic diaspora on the one hand, and universalization on the other.

Ruin and Restoration: Chapter 3, The Plantation Space

“Power,” Michel de Certeau notes, “is bound by its very visibility.”⁶⁰ *Absalom, Absalom!* and *Go Down, Moses* express this idea, in their depiction of the ways in

⁵⁹ Gwin, “Her Shape, His Hand”, esp. 80

⁶⁰ De Certeau, *Practice of Everyday Life, Vol.1*, 37

which the visible structures of the plantation – especially the hierarchy of its site – might be spatially, narratively, and socially resisted. But as *Go Down, Moses* in particular progressively revealed, the historical diminution of the plantation site disrupted conventional articulations of the meta-plantation, and thereby also limited the opportunity for direct confrontation. The resistance of the meta-plantation becomes threatened by a physical erasure of the plantation that is in some respects so total as to practically deny the existence of its contested material spaces in the first place.

What becomes established in its place, as Faulkner's later Yoknapatawpha writings explore, is an increasingly symbolic and iconic model of the plantation mansion. The mansion's shift from a domestic and material to an iconic and symbolic site means that the *conceptual* power of the meta-plantation's narratives is nonetheless sustained. This is evident, perhaps most profoundly, in the generalized power of ruins in *The Hamlet* (1940). This conceptual "return" to the mansion forms the central subject of *Building Yoknapatawpha's* concluding chapter – Chapter 3, "The Plantation Space; or, Loom of Her Father's Dreams". The discussion takes in the whole of Yoknapatawpha, and emphasizes reading it as a whole – although with a particular focus on Faulkner's penultimate, and chronologically climactic, Yoknapatawpha novel, *The Mansion* (1959) – through its intertextual narrative revisions and repeating motifs. I explore the recurrence and absence of pear trees in the various fictions centering on the Compson family (representing narrative paths), and the symbolism of rugs and weaving in *Absalom, Absalom!* and the Snopes fiction, particularly "Barn Burning" (1938) and *The Mansion* (representing the accumulation and patterning of narrative threads).

The essential argument in this final chapter is that Faulkner's post-1945 fiction attempts to establish Yoknapatawpha as a whole through textual revisions which create two simultaneous and paradoxical effects: they create a spatialized text through the generation of parallel narratives, but also potentially reaffirm the linearity of his narrative world through sequential erasure. This erasure is perhaps most in evidence in the ways that the reconfiguration of the mansion serves to displace its plantation past, as occurs in particular in *The Hamlet*, *The Mansion*, and "Knight's Gambit" (1949). With the social ascendancy of poor whites such as the Snopeses, and the appearance of

wealthy outsiders such as the bootlegger Harriss, the old planter families gradually become displaced from their position within the community. As a result, their plantation land is repurposed, and the history of the county – especially in Faulkner’s historical accounts in “Appendix – Compson: 1699-1945” (1946) and *Requiem for a Nun* (1951) – becomes reoriented to reflect a descent from pioneers rather than slaveholders. The result is that – in tandem with the diaspora of the Great Migration which is so clearly present yet so strategically undiscussed in *Go Down, Moses* and its sequel *Intruder in the Dust* (1948) – the presence of black Southerners, and the traces of black exploitation and social resistance, become effectively erased from the landscape of Yoknapatawpha. The plantation site becomes detached from the history of slavery, but is nevertheless used – through recentering questions of class rather than race – to paradoxically extend the logic of slaveholding mastery, as it becomes transformed into symbolic icons, tourist sites, or penitentiaries.

It was a dilemma which directly reflected the troubling developments of the South of Faulkner’s later years. It was also one to which Faulkner did not have a clear answer, and did not ultimately pretend to. Nonetheless, one of the particular achievements of his later works is that they did not simply absent racial questions from Yoknapatawpha during this era of heightened racial politics. Instead, Faulkner chose to deliberately draw attention to the process by which race became strategically absented from images and cultural narratives of Southern history. If these later works appear to troublingly return to an earlier conservative position which privileges the domestic and re-suppresses the plantation’s racially hybrid nature, then, it is precisely because this process itself is Faulkner’s subject. Though taxing racial questions are in many ways absent from Faulkner’s later writing, the intertextual functioning of Yoknapatawpha which it seems to actively promote surely insists that we see the presence of this absence in these texts: see it written “under erasure”, as it were – a final but significant late modernist gesture, and an apt conclusion to his work amid the twilight years of modernism.

Conclusions: Models for Spatialized Reading

As I have suggested throughout this Introduction, it is above all a question of reading perspective as to whether one finds in Yoknapatawpha a linear narrative of erasure. It

is equally possible – and, I would argue, infinitely preferable – to read Faulkner’s revisions and connections as a source of parallel narratives, which enrich rather than debilitate Yoknapatawpha through their contradictions. Such pluralized details create a Yoknapatawpha text that is layered rather than hierarchical, that is decentered and non-linear, and may be read productively for its lateral connections in a way that articulates the free orientation of a map rather than the constrained order of a narrative volume. This plurality would create a resistant method of reading which, in analogy to how the plantation site has historically functioned as a contested site, overlays the authorial “design” of Yoknapatawpha’s plotting with a myriad of personalized readings rooted in the counter-narratives generated by “details”.

It is a methodology particularly informed by the alternative reading models Franco Moretti suggests in both *Atlas of the European Novel* and *Graphs, Maps, Trees*. As Moretti argues, literary maps – which, in his understanding, are more accurately literary “diagrams” – do more than simply locate a narrative within a definable geography: they also extend far beyond it, to more abstractly map what he calls “the usual, and at bottom the only real issues of literary history: society, rhetoric, and their interaction.”⁶¹ They are, in the end, not really about defining location, but rather about expressing relation – about making visible the connections which other aspects of the text serve to obscure or repress. (The distinction between map and diagram is a useful one. Diagrams are abstractions, exploring possibilities; maps, on the other hand, are representations, concerned with definitions. The concrete visualization of maps carries with it an implicit authority which emphasizes its unspoken but inherent function as a tool of authority, of social order, of the power to subject – a function much less present in diagrams.)

Such a reading of Yoknapatawpha would draw on the spatiality of the plantation to re-create a text that is “open” rather than “closed”. In using such terminology, I deliberately engage with the terminology of Édouard Glissant, perhaps the central figure in discourses on the post-plantation Caribbean, and whose creolized readings of Faulkner’s work formed part of my discussion earlier in this Introduction. Glissant has argued that, following its ruination as a viable economic system (often accompanied by a more literal material ruin), the plantation in the Americas became a

⁶¹ Franco Moretti, *Atlas of the European Novel, 1800-1900* [1997] London: Verso, 2009), 7

“closed” space that existed in marked contrast to the “open” word which resisted it in the post-plantation literature that followed: “The place was closed but the word derived from it remains open.”⁶² My goal in this thesis is to trouble Glissant’s reading, and to suggest that on the contrary it is literature, with its enduring rootedness in the orders and hierarchies of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, which remains a fundamentally “closed” structure – and that paradoxically, it is the spatial “openness” of the resisted plantation site which offers a means of liberating the novel from its constraints of character hierarchy, plotting, and closure. (To claim that the plantation is now “closed” is also to imply that it functioned historically as a “closed” system – whereas in my reading, it always functioned as contested site that generated its own self-resistance.)

To describe the narrative of Faulkner’s plantations and mansions, is to describe the history of Yoknapatawpha itself as it emerged – built through fictive stories layered on architectural storeys, through narrative plots stretched over geographic plots, and through the ruinous violence of the earlier works that transmutes into restorative violence at the saga’s close. Together, the disruptive and ambiguous elements I’ve outlined here all help to potentially transform Yoknapatawpha’s plantations, from sites of mastery into spaces of marginal empowerment, expression and narrative resistance. By depicting the spatial and structural endurance of the plantation system as “meta-plantation”, Faulkner also depicts the processes by which it is resisted. He reveals the plantation to be a nexus of contested visions – a site which has never been stable but has always, on the contrary, been enacted. Framed at varying times as romantic or violent, realistic or fantasized, Faulkner’s plantations serve formally and thematically as hybrid spaces that are read and written, re-read and over-written (both through layering and through aesthetic excess). The plantation’s meanings and ownership are constantly contested by rival imaginative geographies and histories, which vie with one another throughout complex cycles of ruin, restoration, and resistance.

Yet the liberating quality of these details and these spatialized, resistant readings, are nonetheless always under threat from the conventions of Faulkner’s writing as formal stories and novels, and from his insistence on resolution and forms of closure that preclude future possibilities for resistance, through the erasure they

⁶² Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, 75

enact. His disruptive modernism – its linguistic invention, its expressive gaps and absences – strains against the narrative and textual structures that contain and constrain it. It is this formal tension between the structures and “anti-structures” of his writing on which the intellectual and aesthetic pursuit of this thesis is built – and through which it attempts, ultimately, to work toward alternative models of reading that might best articulate the generative possibilities of a spatialized view of literature. Such a re-creative reading allows “counter-plots” to arise, reorienting narrative design around detail; it reconfigures Yoknapatawpha as a continuous and dynamic mappable space, rather than one delimited by the division and closure of individual volumes. It is in such a way, I believe, that Yoknapatawpha may be most productively read and reread, built and rebuilt.

The Plantation System; or, Judith and Clytie's Hundred:
Fugitive Connections and Resistant Models in *Flags in the Dust*,
The Unvanquished, and *Absalom, Absalom!*

.!

Introduction: Maps & Thresholds

With one so lauded, and the other so quickly dismissed, it is easy to forget that *Absalom, Absalom!* and *The Unvanquished* issued from a single moment in Faulkner's career. They were written simultaneously, and produced in consciousness of one another, out of a shared moment of creative genesis in the spring of 1934. Although Faulkner dismissed *The Unvanquished's* stories as "trash" and a "pulp series", while deeming *Absalom, Absalom!* "the best novel yet written by an American" (evaluations echoed by many Faulkner scholars), such value judgments are surely of secondary importance to how the two works intersect and interact with one another.¹ They constitute complementary and parallel approaches to the same revisionist goal: the attempt to rework the themes and scenarios of the first Yoknapatawpha novel, *Flags in the Dust*. (Indeed, the functioning of *The Unvanquished* as both sequel and prequel to the earlier Sartoris novel makes its reworking particularly clear.)²

That reworking transforms the descriptive surfaces of *Flags in the Dust* into geographic and narrative connections in the later works, extending the reach of the novel's objects and details by activating and recovering what Elaine Freedgood would term their "fugitive meanings". For Freedgood, the object-surface of fiction does not simply offer a symbolic texture or a "reality effect" (as in Roland Barthes's famous reading). The objects are also offered literally, as generative points that might productively redirect readings of a novel away from its most visible levels of

¹ Blotner, *Faulkner*, 335, 364

² My discussion of these reworkings draws on Faulkner's original 1928 text of *Flags in the Dust* (as established by Noel Polk), rather than on the abridged form in which it was first published in 1929, as *Sartoris*.

characterization or plot. In Freedgood's interpretation, such objects work as metonym rather than metaphor, opening the novel to multiple rather than singular narrative possibilities. Yet as she also notes, this "apparently subversive ability to disrupt meaning, and to be endlessly vagrant and open ended, may be attended by an equally subversive ability to recuperate historical links that are anything but random."³

The extension of Yoknapatawpha through this revision also performs a similar simultaneous disruption and recuperation. Where *Flags in the Dust* centers on the mansion and its descriptive surfaces, *Absalom, Absalom!* and *The Unvanquished* expand outward from those retentive objects, recuperating larger cultural connections of plantation system and site. The correlations, once detected, become strikingly visible. Loosh's rejection of his enslavement in *The Unvanquished* extends the stillborn social rebellion of Caspey in *Flags in the Dust*; similarly, Thomas Sutpen's Haitian experiences in *Absalom, Absalom!* fulfill the unelaborated hints of global trade and expansion raised the earlier novel's histories of the Sartoris and Benbow families. These connections, whether repressed or recuperated, center in all three novels on structures of return – on homecoming, and on haunting – and it is because of this structure that the act of recuperation is also twinned with a sense of disruption, of loss and erasure.

The central protagonists of *Absalom, Absalom!* and *The Unvanquished* – Quentin Compson and Bayard Sartoris – attempt to leave, or at least distance themselves from, the plantation South, in contrast to the homecomings of young Bayard and Horace Benbow in *Flags in the Dust*. But it is not possible: the plantation's site, like its complicated history, proves ultimately too tangled to successfully escape without asserting some degree of containment or restoration. The need for closure, in both narrative and social senses, draws the central narrators back from physical geographies to imaginative ones. In the climax of *The Unvanquished*, Bayard is pulled away from university upstate in Oxford (embodying reality and the law), and back to the Sartoris mansion (embodying fiction and the mythos of Southern "honor"). In much the same way, in the second half of *Absalom, Absalom!*, Quentin becomes

³ Freedgood, *Ideas in Things*, 16. Freedgood concludes that the potential for such readings drops away with the transition from nineteenth century into twentieth (154-155), but I would argue that this connective power serves as an important part of Faulkner's modernist aesthetic.

psychically recalled, by the summons of his father's letter, from his Harvard dormitory amid the chill of "iron New England" winter, to the derelict haunted spaces of the Sutpen plantation amid the stifling dust of late Mississippi summer (AA, 144).

"We had ourselves a living map...": *The Unvanquished*

In both cases, the protagonists inhabit – or are drawn back into – a world constructed for the most part through representations; the stable material surfaces that were present in *Flags in the Dust* are displaced by far more fluid and ambiguous ones. The opening moments of *The Unvanquished* offer a vivid introduction to these concerns. "Behind the smokehouse that summer," Bayard narrates, "Ringo and I had a living map." (U, 321) Their childhood game, beyond its surface layers of play and innocence, is also more abstractly a moment of imaginative creation which initializes the novel's broader meditations on performance, representation, and the power of place and placeness.

The year, in this initial moment, is 1863. Thirteen-year-old Bayard Sartoris and his slave playmate Ringo have spent their summer together against the backdrop of the Civil War, playing out its crucial moments as they happen – here, recreating the famous Union siege of Vicksburg. Their map, modeled from wood-chips and a riverbed raked with a hoe and continually filled with well-water, "lives" for Bayard and Ringo despite its lack of accuracy and actuality. It lives because it possesses

even in miniature that ponderable though passive recalcitrance of topography which outweighs artillery, against which the most brilliant of victories and the most tragic of defeats are but the loud noises of a moment. (321)

As a map drawn in the same river-enriched Mississippi earth as Vicksburg, it has a certain verisimilitude in its inherent weight and solidity; it lives, too, through Bayard and Ringo's struggles to create a river upon the "sunimpacted ground" which "drinks" the water almost as fast as they can fetch it.

For Bayard the retrospective (and adult) narrator this struggle becomes significant. He retroactively recognizes in their game, their gestures, their map and

mapping, an unconscious yet intensely meaningful attempt “to hold intact the pattern of recapitulant mimic furious victory like a cloth, a shield between ourselves and reality, between us and fact and doom.” (321) There is, after all, far more than simply artifice at work here: there is a recognition, too, of the desire for – and perhaps even necessity of – such fabrication. Their herculean attempt to construct such a map at all – a “wellnigh hopeless ordeal” – enacts their (or at least Bayard’s) idealized view of the Confederate cultural project, of that stable and unchanging “South” it represents. A palpable nostalgia (for the antebellum era and the Confederacy) characterizes Bayard’s whole account; and given that the novel’s final story, “An Odor of Verbena”, is set in 1874 – amid the crumbling of Reconstruction and the consolidation of the post-Confederate mythos of the Lost Cause – it is not difficult to see the correspondent coloring of this era in the texture of Bayard’s recollections. That nostalgia is complicated, however, by knowledge of the personal moment of the novel’s ending, with Bayard’s refusal to avenge his father’s murder. In the final balance, his act refuses to restore his father’s antebellum world; instead, Bayard draws on that worldview selectively, in ways that here point toward a positive sense of social forgiveness as offering liberation from the trauma and burden of the past – but which elsewhere point more troublingly toward a sense of strategic forgetting and historical erasure.

Seeds of this complicated vision are already present within the novel’s opening scene, back in 1863. Ringo and Bayard eventually succeed in conveying sufficient water to at least create the semblance of a river, and their game begins – only to be immediately interrupted by the appearance of Ringo’s uncle, Loosh. The social destabilization of the Civil War – the absence of masters and the successes of the approaching Union army – has emboldened Loosh to articulate discontent with his enslaved lot. He looms above their imagined world, and ambushes their fantasy with knowledge of Union victories at Vicksburg and nearby Corinth. “What’s that?” he asks, looking at the “living map.” “Vicksburg,” Bayard replies – at which Loosh laughs, and sweeps the pile of wood-chips flat. “There’s your Vicksburg,” he says, walking off and leaving them looking upon the ruins of their game (322).

On the surface it seems a petty, even bullying, gesture; yet there is also a profound significance to it. The “living map” is as real to Loosh as it is to Ringo and Bayard. It is an expression of those who have the power to map and to impose order. It

is a representation of the way in which Loosh's life, confined within the rigid forms of the plantation site and system, has been subject to imaginative geographies as well as tangible ones – to projective designs and systems of measurement rooted in the Enlightenment-era formalizing and codifying of slavery, in which the body and being of the enslaved were mutually mapped. The frames and dimensions of the slaves were measured and valued, their selves transformed forcibly into a mapped unit, that they might more readily be inserted into the orderly design and functional order of the plantation machinery. And so when Loosh flattens their "living map", he does not strike only at a representation of the city of Vicksburg, a stronghold of white supremacy and a vital port in Mississippi's plantation trade network, but also strikes at the very idea of mapping as an expression of white social order, expansion and imperialism, and assumed privilege and supremacy. He strikes less at the map than at the structures that let it "live".

After Loosh departs, Bayard and Ringo look at one another in silence over the ruined map, no longer quite "living", yet at the same time somehow rendered more true to life. "What he mean?" Ringo asks. "Nothing," Bayard replies; he stands and "sets Vicksburg up again." "There it is," he says – as though "nothing" had happened (323). The scene thus establishes three levels of response to the mapped design of the plantation South: establishment, destructive resistance, and restoration. It is a specific kind of restoration that Bayard attempts in order to reduce Loosh's resistant act to "nothing": it is an attempt to use representation as a means of resisting, rather than depicting or replicating, reality. And as the novel progresses, this opening artifice becomes an ever more important, and ever more ominous, key to the unfolding action and politics depicted in *The Unvanquished*. This moment helps illustrate the power of familiar plantation models, which constrains the effectiveness of the attempts at resistance and independence offered by Ringo or by Loosh, or by Bayard's cousin Drusilla Hawk, a tomboy whose free-spirited response to the war's destruction is eventually crushed by the force of the community's conservative restoration.

It is doubly significant that this symbolic drama of the "living map" plays out behind the smokehouse, in the shadow of the plantation's physical structures. The smokehouse constitutes an ambivalent symbol: it embodies the plantation's function as a self-contained community, yet it also historically served as a site of power

contestation. As John Michael Vlach notes, its role was essentially threefold: “it symbolized the self-sufficiency of a plantation”; it “symbolized a planter’s mastery over his work force” through use of “food allotments [...] as means of social control”; and it served as an avenue of practical slave resistance through theft.⁴ Its layered role offers a synecdoche for the plantation as a contested model of social order, rooted in a very specific hierarchy of dominance, subservience, and paternalistic responsibility. The Sartoris mansion functions in a similar way in *The Unvanquished*. In contrast to its role in *Flags in the Dust*, which emphasizes its domestic, familial, and archival qualities, the mansion in *The Unvanquished* functions fluidly as part of the plantation site, particularly through Bayard and Ringo’s largely undifferentiating use of its sites, which also makes it, to a degree, less effectively and exclusively “white”. In the course of the novel, this fluid spatiality becomes disrupted when the mansion is burnt to the ground by the invading Union army; and when it is rebuilt in the wake of the war, amid the rise of the Lost Cause, it becomes a different place, already foreshadowing the site of domesticity and exclusion it will become by the year 1919, the year in which *Flags in the Dust* is set.

Building Sutpen’s Hundred: *Absalom, Absalom!*

Absalom, Absalom! also emerged out of the attempt to construct “imaginative geographies”, though its representation is recreated not in earth and woodchips but in words. Of course, as a novel *The Unvanquished* necessarily constructs its geographies from words too, but in *Absalom, Absalom!* the narrative process is considerably more explicit. The layers of narration surrounding Thomas Sutpen’s self-history (as offered in Chapter VII) present Haiti as both a physical referent and an abstract projection, as a location and a relation, and as network and as iconography. The same might also be said of the mansion of Sutpen’s Hundred, which fluctuates between physical structure and intangible symbol, as in the contrasting accounts of its construction offered in the novel’s opening: Quentin’s image of “*Be Sutpen’s Hundred* like the oldentime *Be Light*” (AA, 6), is presented alongside an account of its emergence “plank by plank and brick by brick out of the swamp where the clay and timber waited”, through the laborious efforts of Sutpen and his slaves, “working in the sun and heat of summer and mud and

⁴ Vlach, *Back of the Big House*, 64

ice of winter, with quiet and unflagging fury.” (30) This tension encapsulates the indeterminacy of the whole novel: its structural layering, its insistence on counter-narratives and parallel readings, its simultaneous presentation of concrete referents alongside substanceless abstractions, and stable production alongside perpetual process.

It is precisely in these terms that the mansion finally makes its direct appearance within Quentin’s narrative, in the novel’s final chapter. In this moment of encounter, it looms: outlined, dark, exaggerated. As Faulkner suggests, “looming” is not simply about scale, but also about an active process of encounter, and about the uncertainty of anticipation that is always “becoming”:

It loomed, bulked, square and enormous, with jagged half-topped chimneys, its roofline sagging a little; for an instant as they moved, hurried, toward it Quentin saw completely through it a ragged segment of sky with three hot stars in it as if the house were of one dimension, painted on a canvas curtain in which there was a tear[.] (301)

This is an unhomely vision, and a theatrical one; it is also a generalized, and thus iconic, one. The image is underwritten, in its role as symbol of the meta-plantation, by another sense of “looming” central to the novel, as articulated by Sutpen’s daughter Judith. In one of her few directly reported speeches (originally delivered to Quentin’s grandmother), Judith describes her experience of life as “like five or six people all trying to make a rug on the same loom only each one wants to weave his own pattern into the rug.” (105) There is considerable potential for personal agency offered within the analogy, which stresses act over outcome, and privileges the individual process of weaving over the resultant rug, pits detail against design. The question is thus whether “looming” may ultimately serve to express an individual (and independent) act of creation or a cultural act of reproduction. And the resonances couched in these terms (creation and reproduction) intersect with other more obscure meanings of “loom” offered in the *OED*: as an implement or tool (and by extension, a

penis); an alternative word for “heirloom” (an inheritance, a legacy); an open vessel of any kind (and by extension, a vagina or a womb).

Reading this moment in the novel, Philip Weinstein defines the “loom” as “Western patriarchal culture’s array of models for individual endeavor”, which is central to the process by which the Victorian values of imperial colonialism become transmuted, through the destabilization of modernity, into individualized expressive possibilities by the mid-twentieth century. Tying this notion particularly to the politicized aesthetic visions central to each historical moment, Weinstein argues that “[t]his loom is functional in realism, becomes dysfunctional in modernism, and is set up in other (non-Western) ways in postcolonialism.”⁵ In the final parts of this chapter, I extend Weinstein’s reading to suggest that Judith’s negative experience of this dominant design – as a system of plotted order which cannot, ultimately, be successfully resisted by individual reading – sets the template for failed models of resistance throughout the novel. In particular, I will argue that, although the fragmentation of central certainties initially seems to open up a space of resistance for the production of counter-narratives, the subsequent decay and dissipation of those counter-narratives (typically, into diaspora, destruction, or death) ultimately resolves the novel’s power dynamics back into a reestablished traditional order, an idea I theorize as “restorative violence”.

It is details, resurfacing, that undermine Sutpen’s design. That design – which is not a personal design but rather a generalized one – is undermined not by the presence of complex racial identity in his history, but rather by the destabilizing ways in which racial history presents itself in the everyday. It is figured as nuance, in Charles Bon’s character; as existential confusion, in his son Charles Etienne; as a (failed) model for female-centered communal redemption, through Clytie and Judith. All these characters insist on a personalization of Sutpen’s reproduction of the meta-plantation template, and attempt to dismantle his imaginative structures with their recuperation of repressed connections. (To a degree, this is also what the novel achieves formally, dismantling Sutpen through an articulation of his past in Virginia and Haiti.) Yet in its turn away from the mansion and toward the recuperation of the plantation’s

⁵ Philip Weinstein, “Cant Matter/Must Matter: Setting Up the Loom in Faulknerian and Postcolonial Fiction”, in *Look Away!* (2004), ed. Jon Smith & Deborah Cohn, 355

transnational and creolized roots, the novel also creates another sense of disconnection as a result.

Absalom, Absalom! has a reputation as a novel about blockage, and reasonably so, given the importance of barred doorways and thresholds within it. But I would argue that what more commonly occurs, as Édouard Glissant has suggested, is deferral.⁶ The novel's moments of blockage are atypical, and for the most part its narrative effects are achieved through delayed approach rather than open transgression and confrontation – a contrast to the clear spatial boundaries articulated in *Flags in the Dust*. We see this repeated in its interrupted narrative flow, particularly in the novel's second half, beginning with Chapter VI, which opens with a letter from Mr. Compson (144) that is not completed until the penultimate page (310). This parenthetically enclosed section itself contains smaller interrupting frames: Quentin and Miss Rosa's buggy ride to Sutpen's Hundred (145) that is only resumed in the final chapter (297); Wash Jones and Thomas Sutpen's foreshadowed deaths (147, 155) that do not occur until the climax of Chapter VII (238, 241); the reading of the Sutpen family headstones, disrupted by their histories (begun on page 156, but only completed on 174). Perhaps most dramatic of all is the bracketed interruption that opens on the third page of Chapter VI (146) and does not close until the chapter's final line (179) – so that the entire chapter seems a tangent, an aside, a deferral, in itself.

The construction of Chapter VI through parenthetical frames creates a sequencing which decenters and spreads the novel's narrative disclosure. It establishes a narrative structure that is rooted less in blockage – the failure to pass – than in the reluctance or inability to approach in the first place. An examination of the relative infrequency of the words “house”, “door”, and “room” in *Absalom, Absalom!*, in contrast to earlier works such as *Sanctuary* and *Light in August*, gives a clear illustration of this point (**Fig.3**).⁷ Although the word “house” occurs in *Absalom, Absalom!* with the same frequency (272 times) as it did in *Sanctuary* or *Light in August* (201 and 309 times, respectively), there is a pronounced decrease in occurrence of the

⁶ Glissant, *Faulkner, Mississippi*, 9

⁷ The figures I use here are those collated by Dirk Bork in “‘As If the Wood of which it was built were Flesh’: The House Motif in Faulkner” (PhD Dissertation, University of Osnabrück, 2007), 5. Bork typically uses this data in a quantitative rather than qualitative manner, although he does subsequently offer some qualification of the differences between types and contexts of these word occurrences (211).

Absalom is not inseminated by a single closed meaning or a discrete set of meanings, but must disseminate the seed, fostering a family of telling. This is a kind of play with the semantic properties of language, what Derrida has called a “hymenal” model of truth – hymenal not only because it celebrates or hymns apparent consummations of the text’s meanings, but also because the scattering of the seed paradoxically protects the “virginity” of the text.⁸

Matthews offers an intriguing proposition, whereby interpretative excess functions to shield the “truth”. It was certainly in this way that description functioned in *Flags in the Dust*, spreading the narrative in space through delay, expansion, and communicative dissemination. Matthews’s gendering terms helps emphasize what is more crucially at stake in *Absalom, Absalom!*’s very different approach to delay. The motif of the blocked doorway is not simply an evasion of the house: it also signals a movement away from the *invasive* “transgressive erotics” of domesticity in Faulkner’s earlier works (as depicted through Narcissa Benbow in *Flags in the Dust*, for example, and as I discuss in greater detail in Chapter 3). The novel establishes its female characters as virginal, its house as distanced and undomestic, and its plantation environment as strikingly desexualized. It is through this process that questions of gender, which troubled the earlier works, are transformed into questions of race, in an (ultimately failed) attempt to mutually resolve them.

By interweaving readings of these three novels, this chapter attempts to explore the productive interrelation between several themes crucial to Faulkner’s depiction of the plantation. It begins with a reading of *Flags in the Dust* as an ur-text of Yoknapatawpha, and examines the ways in which realist description and narrative structures of return root plantation history in the domestic model of the “white” plantation mansion. Yet that surface design is troubled by what its unelaborated details draw attention to: hinted histories of transnational trade, of miscegenation, and of slaveholding exploitation and oppression, which reveal the “creolized” nature of

⁸ John T. Matthews, *The Play of Faulkner’s Language* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1982), 152

the plantation site, in conflict with the romanticized image of the plantation mansion, which insistently attempts to “pass” as white.

At stake here is also the question of “reproduction”, in its broadest and interrelating senses. The notion of reproduction is core to the plantation vision, and expresses how the meta-plantation endures through both sexual and conceptual reproduction, and replication by both genealogical dynasty and physical design. Such reproduction maps the plantation as simultaneously an imaginative geography and a more tangibly experienced and enforced geography too. This includes a geographic ordering that objectifies and contains all women, poor or elite, black or white. This is evident in the presentation of Elnora and Narcissa in *Flags in the Dust*, and later Louvinia and Drusilla in *The Unvanquished*. But it is in the treatment of Clytie and Judith in *Absalom, Absalom!* that it finds its fullest – and most troubling – articulation, in their struggles with the mastery of the meta-plantation’s “cultural loom”.

As a result, both *Absalom, Absalom!* and *The Unvanquished* ultimately prove unsuccessful in resisting the plantation design through their insistence on individualized details. The models of resistance they present either serve to replicate the very systems they aim to resist, or else become dissipated, leaving the original system, strengthened, in its wake. The former can be seen in Ringo’s nostalgic illustration of the Sartoris mansion after it is burnt down, or in Thomas Sutpen’s recreation of Pettibone’s Virginia plantation model in Mississippi; the latter, in the gradual narrative reduction of the Sartoris plantation site to plantation mansion throughout *The Unvanquished*, or in the collapse of the alternative plantation environment Judith and Clytie attempt to build, prior to Judith’s untimely death. Yet we also see it more poignantly in smaller and more abstract moments too, moments which affirm the resistant power of details, even as depict and enact the dissipation and diffusal of that very power. It is present – encoded, even – in striking details and aesthetic gestures throughout all three novels, which articulate the inevitable decay of central meaning and order in a manner that also nonetheless, paradoxically, consolidates it in retrospect. We see it in the dismantling of the plantation site and the reduction of the mansion to smoke and ash; in the layering of history and its soil; in the fading ink and crumbling paper of old records and letters, and the indecipherability of

weather-shalowed letters, etched in the broken headstones of long-abandoned cemetery sites.

.II.

Mapping the Mansion: Repressed Connections in *Flags in the Dust*

In Medias Res: A Structure of Returns

Yoknapatawpha begins, in *Flags in the Dust*, not with beginnings but returns. The novel inaugurates Faulkner's narrative world *in medias res*. From its opening line ("As usual old man Falls had brought John Sartoris into the room with him, [...] fetching, like an odor, like the clean dusty smell of his faded overalls, the spirit of the dead man into that room where the dead man's son sat" [FD, 543]) the reader is thrust into a world at once recursive and paradoxical. Its singular moments are also habitual ("as usual"); its familiar moments are also, as yet, unfamiliar. Above all, this opening establishes the return of the past as palpably embedded within the everyday textures of the present day, circa 1919.

The past is embedded, almost overwhelmingly, in the novel's strongly domestic and highly archival mansions. The textual approaches to them are also, significantly, re-approaches: the depiction and description of journeys home. The opening part is framed by the return of troubled plantation heir Bayard Sartoris (great-grandson of the aforementioned John, "the Colonel"), who has been serving with the RAF in France. Later, the third part (of five) is similarly framed around the return of another member of the local white elite, Horace Benbow, who has also been serving in France, as a non-combatant member of the YMCA. Though Bayard and Horace never actually meet (a startling fact, given that Bayard later marries Horace's sister, Narcissa), the novel is sustained, narratively and formally, by their contrast and juxtaposition, especially regarding their diverging attitudes toward the psychic lodestone of the home. For Bayard, the return is both fatal and fatalistic, a reconnection with a legacy of quixotic and self-destructive family whose turbulent inheritance he seemingly cannot escape. History haunts him as it haunts the family mansion, penetrating the fibers of his being much as it lingers in the fibers of the wooden house. For Horace, however, the act of

returning is more sentimental and nostalgic, motivated by a faith in the mansion as pastoral idyll, as “the meaning of peace” (676).

These positions are not as polarized as they might initially appear. Both are rooted in the same core values: in an idea of “Southern identity” as residing in the white domestic spaces of the mansion, and emerging from a history that is tragic rather than traumatic (the loss of the Civil War, rather than the exploitations of slavery). The descriptions of both Sartoris and Benbow mansions echo the iconic image of the Southern mansion, which was enjoying broad cultural currency at the time Faulkner wrote *Flags in the Dust*. Donald Davidson, one of the Nashville Agrarians, spoke for many (white) Americans, north and South, when he wrote in 1925 that

[t]he South has always had a native architecture, adapted from classical models into something distinctly Southern; and nothing more clearly and satisfactorily belongs where it is, or better expresses the beauty and stability of an ordered life, than its old country homes, with their pillared porches, their simplicity of design, their sheltered groves, their walks bordered with boxwood shrubs.⁹

Davidson’s position installs a mythic history in the imaginative geography of the South that it centers the narrative of Southern history on mansion rather than plantation, and thus on white Confederate tragedy rather than the mutual trauma experienced by the descendants of both slaves and slaveholders. This narrative becomes intensified in *Flags in the Dust*, through the stylistic foregrounding of a descriptive realism that privileges these elements. However, it is one of the novel’s crucial aesthetic and political effects that it simultaneously destabilizes this worldview, asserting its “simplicity” of design while also offering the details through which such designs become profoundly complicated. Central to that conceptual tension is the sense of “homing” and “return”, which, though it ostensibly privileges the mansion, may be readily inverted. Recognition of the fact that returns are also rooted in absences, in the

⁹ Donald Davidson, “A Mirror for Artists”, in *I’ll Take My Stand: The South and the Agrarian Tradition*, by *Twelve Southerners* [1925] (Gloucester, MA: Peter Smith, 1976), 55

view from beyond and outside the mansion, effectively serves to relocate and redefine it within a larger social, and ultimately transnational, space.

These narratives of return help remind us that Yoknapatawpha extends far beyond Yoknapatawpha County.¹⁰ The characters' returns connect the seemingly self-contained and static Southern mansion into larger, obscured networks of cultural and economic exchange; in the process, they reemphasize the South's place in colonial and postcolonial social structures and practices. One particular way they achieve this is by helping suppress the potential significance of a third return in the novel – that of the Sartoris family's black servant Caspey Strother, who has also been serving in the army in France. Faulkner might have chosen to dedicate a separate chapter to detailing the consequence of each character's return: chapter one for Bayard, chapter two for Caspey, chapter three for Horace. By instead embedding Caspey's return within Bayard's – by framing it as an aspect of the young master's return – Faulkner underscores the novel's racial politics. But this evaded subplot has a larger importance, too: it helps position *Flags in the Dust* as the first of Faulkner's novels to explore (however inchoately) the tensions between domestic mansion and plantation complex.¹¹

By foregrounding ideas of return, the novel appears to center acutely on the home. But the actual effect of such narrative returns is to produce a spatial mapping of the novel that offers a series of concentric circles: the home within the Jefferson town community; Jefferson within the Southern microcosm of Yoknapatawpha; Yoknapatawpha within the circum-Atlantic world. These spatial connections thread throughout *Flags in the Dust*, and occur not on the level of narrative or plot, but rather on the level of descriptive detail of the mansion. Such details serve to work against the domestic design of Faulkner's novel, subversively spatializing the text through the

¹⁰ In *Flags in the Dust*, however, it is referred to as "Yocona County" – a name derived from the river that marks the Southern boundary of Faulkner's own home county, Lafayette. The word "Yoknapatawpha" first appears in *As I Lay Dying* in 1930, but is not used regularly until *Absalom, Absalom!* in 1936; as Thomas McHaney notes, it is in many ways a term retrospectively applied. ("First is Jefferson", 526)

¹¹ Arthur Kinney reads the comparison of these three returns, and particularly their varying levels of detailed description, as establishing relationships between three classes in Yoknapatawpha: the white planters (Bayard), the white middle class (Horace), and the black servant class (Caspey); see "*Flags in the Dust* and the Birth of a Poetics", in *Faulkner and Formalism: The Return of the Text – Faulkner and Yoknapatawpha*, 2008, ed. Annette Trefzer & Ann J. Abadie (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2012), 3-19.

intrusions and disruptions of an inferred larger social history. In the process they introduce, into what is in many ways a deeply conservative novel, the earliest seeds of Faulkner's major preoccupation in his powerful midcareer works like *Absalom, Absalom!* in particular: how details function to undermine, subvert, and resist, the dominion of design.

Revenant Spaces: Old Bayard's House-Tour

Faulkner foreshadows the narratively major returns of Bayard and Horace (but not Caspey) with a seemingly more minor one: tracking the movements of Bayard's grandfather, "old Bayard", as he returns home from a day at the bank of which he is president (and where, in the novel's opening moments, the returning spirit of old Bayard's father, the Colonel, intruded). Though this return does little to advance the novel's plot, it nonetheless does a considerable amount to frame and expand its larger thematic and formal concerns. Just as *Flags in the Dust* introduces Yoknapatawpha, so this opening journey from Jefferson to the Sartoris plantation introduces the plantation mansion in Faulkner's writing. The reader follows old Bayard as he passes up the driveway and through the hallways and formal rooms, processionally touring the mansion in both physical space and memorial time, and offering, in the process, a form of readerly initiation. The richly described mansion becomes synecdochic of the larger novel, constructed through accumulated detail which discloses and narrows at the same time as it spatializes and defers.

On the simplest level, this is effected by a schema that divides the mansion between the rooms old Bayard enters and those he avoids. His movements create an archive of the mansion's history which apportions its spaces not simply between private upstairs and public downstairs, but more specifically between the living (dining-room, kitchen, office, and the bedrooms of old Bayard and his aunt Miss Jenny) and the dead (formal parlor, attic, and the bedrooms of young Bayard and his deceased twin, John). This division frames the house through familial, rather than cultural, history: certain rooms take longer for characters to enter, and for the novel to encompass, because the encounter is too personally painful, too raw. It is not until midway through the second chapter, for example, that old Bayard enters the mansion's attic, to inscribe the earlier deaths of young Bayard's twin brother John,

wife Caroline, and unnamed infant, in the family Bible (616).¹² And it is not until the end of the third chapter, a hundred and fifty pages after his return, that young Bayard finally enters the room he and his brother John used to share, to examine – and ultimately burn – the personal, and now painful, objects from their childhood (723-724). During old Bayard’s initial tour of the house, he does briefly look in on the room in which young Bayard’s wife and son died – spurred, no doubt, by the expectation of young Bayard’s return. He looks in on its blind-shuttered gloom, its “breathless tranquility of unoccupation” since her death – but he does not cross the threshold, and leaves its unquiet atmosphere undisturbed until his grandson’s eventual return (556).

One of the first objects old Bayard encounters after entering the mansion is a “chandelier of crystal prisms and shades” (547), and it provides an apt symbol for how his observations and recollections illuminate and obscure, expand and suppress, the history encoded in the mansion. With each resonant object he encounters, the narrative pace and direction slows and fragments like light passing through prismatic glass, as detailed description provokes detailed memory. (Indeed, the novel opens with such a moment, when old man Falls hands Bayard the Colonel’s old pipe [543] – with its imprinted bite-marks serving, as Owen Robinson puts it, as “the first of many written texts” in Yoknapatawpha.¹³) The further old Bayard moves into the mansion’s physical and memorial depths, the greater this narrative resistance becomes, as a consequence of the politics of aesthetics. As W.J.T. Mitchell has put it, drawing on the observations of narratologist Gérard Genette:

[d]escription might be thought of as the moment in narration when the technology of memory threatens to collapse into the materiality of its means. Description typically ‘stops’ or arrests the temporal movement through the narrative; it “spreads out the narrative in space”, according to Genette.¹⁴

¹² Faulkner originally opened the novel with this scene; see Blotner, *Faulkner*, 194.

¹³ Owen Robinson, *Creating Yoknapatawpha: Readers and Writers in Faulkner’s Novels* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 46

¹⁴ Mitchell, “Narrative, Memory and Slavery”, in *Picture Theory: Essays on Verbal and Visual Representation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 194; see also Gérard Genette, “Frontiers of

Although Mitchell specifically discusses this idea in terms of textual images and *ekphrasis*, it has clear spatial implications too. This attempt to “arrest motion” (which Faulkner elsewhere described as one of the central tasks of the writer¹⁵) has effects that are particularly architectural: it transforms domestic space into “place” by investing it with personalized significance, yet it also spatializes that place by connecting and expanding it into other, distant sites. Precisely such an effect is created (aptly enough) by the “vari-colored glass” window of the upstairs front balcony. The glass was the Colonel’s deathbed legacy from his mother, which Miss Jenny “brought from Carolina in a straw-hamper in ’69” (548), and this knowledge in turn prismatically evokes further memories and anecdotes for Bayard. a long story of his namesake uncle’s death in a quixotic attempt to steal Union anchovies in northern Virginia during the Civil War, frames the scene of a family Christmas dinner in which the story is related, and which gives incidental mentions to other events in the past – of a ball in Baltimore in 1858 (556), and of the Colonel’s meeting a Scottish railroad engineer in Mexico in 1845 (550). These uncontextualized, additional details, already separated from the present moment within a frame, threaten to produce a further fragmentation of narrative through the prism of old Bayard’s memory. If attended to, they would not so much pause the narrative progress of plotting, as disruptively frustrate it, dissipating its central focus across both space and time, and evoking further histories that are narratively absent. (We never learn more of this ball at Baltimore, where Miss Jenny “danced a valse” with General “Jeb” Stuart; and are offered still less clue as to what the Colonel (or the engineer, for that matter) were engaged in down in Mexico.)

Through reference to Baltimore and Virginia and Carolina, Scotland and Mexico, the implicit rather than explicit spatialization of *Flags in the Dust* even within this single moment becomes considerable, extending the Sartoris mansion dramatically beyond its Mississippi setting into a vast imaginative geography. For old

Narrative”, in *Figures of Literary Discourse*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), 136

¹⁵ Jean Stein, “Interview with William Faulkner” in *Writers at Work: The Paris Review Interviews*, selected by Kay Dick (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972), 33

Bayard, no object is without significance: all are richly embedded with memories, if only they can be recalled – as with the lengthy description of the contents of his study:

The room was lined with bookcases containing rows of heavy legal tomes bound in dun calf and emanating an atmosphere of dusty and undisturbed meditation, and a miscellany of fiction of the historical romantic-school [...] and a collection of indiscriminate objects – small packets of seeds, old rusted spurs and bits and harness buckles, brochures on animal and vegetable diseases, ornate tobacco containers which people had given him on various occasions and anniversaries and which he had never used, inexplicable bits of rock and desiccated roots and grain pods – all collected one at a time and for reasons which had long since escaped his memory, yet preserved just the same. The room contained an enormous closet with a padlocked door, and a big table littered with yet more casual objects, and a locked roll-top desk (keys and locks were an obsession with him) and a sofa and three big leather chairs. (568)

The sly mention of “old rusted spurs”, in connection to his eschewal of law books for historical romance (Dumas, we are told, is his author of choice), plays on the knightly connotations of his name to establish old Bayard, on the surface, as a Don Quixote-like figure in retreat from the world. Yet this description also textually enacts this evasion in its combination of disconnected excess and marginalized detail. Old Bayard’s obsession with keys and locks (mentioned parenthetically) helps to make sense of this list, by emphasizing how the connections that are articulated, are paralleled by other connections that, if not denied, are certainly concealed, evaded, or forgotten. It is by no means incidental either that these are elements that emphasize mastery and control: that assert the *kinds* of dominance of a slaveholder, but without any express mention of slaveholding. (The references elsewhere to John Sartoris, whose presiding

spirit haunts the mansion, likewise carefully frame him as a figure of Southern romance, as a Confederate adventurer, rather than a domineering slaveholder.)

It is in this way that the novel often gestures at its own subversion, opening up gaps and marginal spaces in a way that Faulkner perhaps did not entirely intend here, but which I believe he actively pursued in later works. This function of the mansion as “memory palace” creates an expansive text that also is nonetheless also a “closed” one. It fragments the mansion into prisms (articulated connections) and shades (connections that are repressed), revealing not only the instability and subjectivity of old Bayard’s perceptions – he does operate, after all, from within a (highly symbolic) “walled serene tower” of deafness (569, 572) – but also the mansion’s foundations on an implicit policy of political and narrative fragmentation and suppression. The mansion’s trace-narratives constitute, as Frederick Karl puts it, “act[s] of retrieval”, yet ones which are framed by a novel that functions “through concealment, withdrawal, withholding, silence.”¹⁶ The stories left unexpressed in these details offer possibilities, but they also mark the points at which details are sacrificed to the novel’s (and the meta-plantation’s) larger design – within an aesthetic that is rooted not simply in conservative racial politics, but also in the conservative formal conventions of the novel’s privilege of plotted trajectories over readerly possibilities.

The Sartoris mansion is initially described (as the Benbow mansion later is) in iconic and idyllic terms that recall Donald Davidson’s description: its “white simplicity [...] dreamed unbroken among ancient sunshot trees”, Faulkner omnisciently tells us, its structure “still and serenely benignant” (547). Its surrounding contextual details, however, immediately disrupt that idyllic frame. Prior to this description, the mansion is referred to as “the house John Sartoris had built and rebuilt”; the mention of a nearby “bed of salvia where a Yankee patrol had halted”, coupled with a later anecdote about the Colonel escaping Union troops who came to the house, hint at events which Faulkner would make explicit a decade later in *The Unvanquished*. Far

¹⁶ Frederick R. Karl, *William Faulkner: American Writer – A Biography* (London: Faber & Faber, 1989), 297 & 304-5; see also Kinney, “Birth of a Poetics”, 16

from existing in an “unbroken” dream, the mansion has been “rebuilt” following its punitive destruction during the Civil War.¹⁷

Throughout the opening chapter, the Civil War constantly intrudes upon old Bayard’s experience of his father’s house, much as it violently intruded on this ostensible idyll earlier in time. Much of that descriptive intrusion, as I’ve suggested, is designed to maintain the mansion’s aura of romance, particularly in the descriptions of the formal parlor, “opened but seldom now”, but in frequent use during the Colonel’s day for dinner parties and balls: “the folding doors between it and the dining room thrown open and three negroes with stringed instruments on the stairway” (586). This is a scene haunted, in Miss Jenny’s mind, by spirits of a lost era lingering “as actors stand within the wings beside the waiting stage, figures in crinoline and hooped muslin and silk; in stocks and flowing coats; in gray too, with crimson sashes and sabred in gallant sheathed repose” (588). But it is therefore also a scene in which white figures are evoked as “actors”, while black figures simply form part of the setting, the décor, marginalized as much within memory as they were within the original festivities. Throughout *Flags in the Dust*, the violence and the antislavery motives of the Civil War – both of which Faulkner would go on to discuss more fully in *The Unvanquished* – are suppressed behind romantic stories of dancing with Jeb Stuart and stealing Union anchovies (555-556). They are also concealed behind the mansion’s “unbroken” white façade, which equally masks the mansion’s history as the center of an exploitative plantation complex. Its contemporary role as a sharecropping plantation is mentioned in passing, during cotton harvest (779), but the description of this enduring system is rapidly displaced by the interjection of a paean to “the saga of the mule and of his place in the South”, “[m]isunderstood even by that creature (the nigger who drives him) whose impulses and mental processes most closely resemble his” (780). Where discussion of racial politics does occur, then, it is framed as racial essentialism, rather than the specific product of slaveholding history (this perspective perhaps first becomes questioned in Faulkner’s work by Quentin Compson’s reflections on the “nigger” as “not a person so much as a form of behavior” [*SF*, 943]).

¹⁷ In “There Was a Queen” (1933) however, Faulkner describes the Sartoris estate as lying “somnolent, peaceful, as they had lain for almost a hundred years, since John Sartoris had come from Carolina and built it.” (*CS*, 727) The traces of the Civil War are erased there, in favour of concentration on a greater familial continuity.

On the page following the first depiction of the Sartoris mansion, old Bayard speaks with the family's housekeeper, Elnora. She is described, in passing, as a "mulatto" (*FD*, 548). In the context of her conversation with Bayard, and amid the surrounding density of description and anecdote Bayard evokes, it is easy to miss the racial implications here; one might even think that either Bayard or Faulkner actively suppress them. Indeed, this is how we become compelled to read this moment, if we read *Flags in the Dust* through the lens of the later Sartoris story "There Was a Queen" (1933) – in which we learn that Elnora is in fact Bayard's half-sister ("though possibly but not probably neither of them knew it, including Bayard's father" [*CS*, 727]). Although these two texts need not necessarily be read in relation to one another, the word "mulatto" still is a disruptive presence in each, especially in its suppression. This suppression is particularly significant given that Elnora's ostensible father, Simon Strother, is simply described as "black", while Elnora's mother is notable in her absence altogether. There is also the troubling suggestion that John Sartoris was unaware of this relation, which is difficult to account for other than as an indication of a concerted and deliberate policy of repression and denial on the family's part. It is striking, then, how the detail of Elnora's mixed-race heritage in *Flags in the Dust* becomes a repressed or evaded connection – concealed behind the façade of her "pleasant yellow face" (548).

It is equally possible, therefore, to see the spatial divisions of the Sartoris mansion as articulating a racialized division – particularly given how the formal dining-room is physically and socially distanced from the kitchen world of Elnora and her black family (and as occurs still more clearly with Dilsey and her family, in the final section of *The Sound and the Fury*).¹⁸ And indeed, even before old Bayard enters the mansion, Faulkner offers what might be read as a palpable symbol of this, in his description of the veranda's floral ornaments:

¹⁸ Though many mansions had internal kitchens in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries, during the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries mansion and kitchen were almost always separated. As John Michael Vlach notes, this separation aimed not simply to diminish odors, noise, and the always prevalent threat of fire: it also "established a clearer separation between those who served and were served", as part of the period's "more rigid form of chattel slavery" (*Back of the Big House*, 43).

Wistaria mounting one end of the veranda had bloomed and fallen, and a faint drift of shattered petals lay palely about the dark roots of it and about the roots of a rose trained onto the same frame. The rose was slowly but steadily choking the other vine, and it bloomed now thickly with buds no bigger than a thumbnail and blown flowers no larger than silver dollars, myriad, odorless and unpickable. (547)

If the wistaria “bloomed and fallen” seems like an image of nostalgia for the Lost Cause and the antebellum days, then the image of a vine with “dark roots” being “steadily chok[ed]” by a romantic “rose” seems to connote something entirely different – especially coming less than a page before the mention of Elnora’s “mulatto” identity. The mention of “silver dollars” here, as a product of that “stead[y] choking” is also intriguing, and it is not difficult to read into this symbolic description a whole history of plantation social and economic exploitation – even though the surface narrative of the novel ostensibly resists such readings.

The Doll’s House: The Benbow Mansion

The same repressed connections are also present in the Benbow mansion, which appears midway through the novel, when Horace Benbow finally returns to Jefferson. Horace’s return contrasts to young Bayard’s: rather than prematurely jumping off the train to walk across the countryside, as Bayard does, Horace alights at the town station, where he is met by his sister Narcissa. Their drive home offers a detailed description of Jefferson – the first, and perhaps fullest, in Faulkner’s work. (Thomas Hines has even called it “the ultimate statement of Faulkner on architecture, on urban design, and on the look and layout of Jefferson”; and while he is right to assert its importance, it is also worth remembering that Faulkner’s conception of Jefferson clearly continued to evolve over his fiction of the next thirty years.¹⁹)

Bayard and Narcissa’s journey encompasses commercial outskirts and courthouse and “negro stores”, new-built bungalows and tree-lined streets and older, more imposing houses (673-676). It offers, in effect, a spatio-temporal mapping of the

¹⁹ Hines, *Tangible Past*, 122

town, an introductory journey through the local sites of Jefferson's history. The closer Horace and Narcissa come to their home, nestled in the wealthier section of town, the more the houses (to Horace's eyes) "emanate a gracious and benign peace, steadfast as a windless afternoon in a world without motion or sound." Looking around him, Horace reflects: "Perhaps this is the reason for wars [...] The meaning of peace." (675-676) Once again, such reflections might have sprung directly from the pens of the Nashville Agrarians; yet there are subtle tones of skepticism in Faulkner's writing here, too. Horace's naivety is emphasized in the description of the Benbow mansion as a "brick doll's house" (677); a faint aura of unreality cocoons it, in its elevated detachment above the town's streets, nestling at the top of its drive's ascent.

The Benbow mansion is not a *plantation* mansion, however: it has (apparently) never been part of a plantation landscape, and it by no means resembles the classical columned "model" embodied by the Sartoris mansion (or by Rowan Oak). Yet at the same time, it is evidently a mansion in which a member of the local antebellum elite – necessarily a slaveholder – would have lived, and thus articulates the same meta-plantation structures. It was designed, we are told, by "an English architect of the '40s, who had built the house (with the minor concession of a veranda) in the funereal light tudor which the young Victoria had sanctioned"; its ornamentation includes "mullioned casements brought out from England", and nearby stands a lantana tree with "clotted wounds" that one Francis Benbow (presumably the grandfather or great-uncle of Horace and Narcissa) "brought home from Barbados in a tophat-box in '71." (676-677) These references to postures of "Englishness" in the Benbow family history, which do not appear elsewhere, serve to re-locate the Benbow mansion at the intersection of international economic and cultural exchange – and also, through the oblique but haunting mention of the "clotted wounds" (especially given Faulkner's symbolic use of nature), to imperialism and to the labor exploitation on which that circum-Atlantic world was founded.

The material culture of the Benbow house expresses much that Faulkner leaves unsaid: connections and contacts are asserted not simply with England, but with the Caribbean colony of Barbados. Although by 1871 the island's slaves had been long since emancipated, and the island itself had long since slipped from its economic prominence in the British Empire, Barbados was still an important site of sugar

production. In more historical terms, however, it was a place of considerable significance in the development of both slavery and the plantation in the “New World”. It was here that the integrated slave plantation was first developed into a formalized structure, an economic site situated in the shadow of an ostentatious “big house” built to rival those of English country estates.²⁰ It was also from here in particular that many of the earliest planters of South Carolina originated, pursuing the possibilities offered by the largely unsettled mainland of North America.²¹

The precise nature of these connections between the Benbows and Barbados is left unclear and unexplored by Faulkner, and it holds no immediate consequences for the narrative of *Flags in the Dust*. On the level of subtext, however, the consequences of the Caribbean connections are more considerable: they help, however indirectly, to disassociate the Benbow family from Southern slaveholding. The history of slavery is, as I have suggested, largely absent from *Flags in the Dust*, except through oblique inference. The “exoticism” of these English and Barbadian details emphasizes the European-oriented culture and refinement of the Benbow family, while also serving to downplay the family’s “Southernness”. Or to put matters another way: the “English” details of the mansion are stressed, but any potential “African” ones are neglected. The house is generalized into a mansion (albeit not quite a plantation one), and only “minor concessions” are made to the larger social, economic, and geographic context from which it arose. The veranda is indeed a telling “minor concession”: as John Michael Vlach and others have argued, its origins lie not only in the demands of the Southern climate, but also in the influence of West African architecture. As such, it constitutes a combination of vernacular American, African, and neo-classical aesthetics

²⁰ See, for example, Russell R. Menard, *Slavery and Plantation Agriculture in Early Barbados* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2006), 16-17 & 94.

²¹ As Matthew Parker writes, Barbadian emigrants to South Carolina included many “younger sons of the island’s big planter families, such as the Sandifords and Halls. [...] From the Caribbean they brought with them slaves, the plantation system and ‘mentality’, a slave code, speech patterns and architectural styles. In all, Barbadians had a decisive role in shaping the new colony, creating a slave-based plantation society more similar to the islands than to the rest of North America. [...] [B]etween 1669 and 1737, nearly half of the governors of South Carolina had lived in the West Indies or were sons of islanders. Seven of the early Carolina governors had Barbados backgrounds.” See *The Sugar Barons: Family, Corruption, Empire and War* (London: Windmill Books, 2011), 148-149.

– a space of not merely of generalized liminality, but of a specific “creolized” hybridity.²²

The connections to slaveholding and international trade, which would place the mansion amid a complex and vibrant network (and at the very least, be understood as being “built” both physically and economically on slave labor, rather than simply by an “English architect”), are obscured by Horace’s insistence on the mansion’s peace and stasis. There is a paradox at work here, then, in the description of the Benbow mansion: a wealth of details, describing a seemingly sourceless wealth. Yet in this combination of detailed description and precise omission, in its emphasis on ornament over interpretation, *Flags in the Dust* reveals its clear affinity to the romantic tendencies of the nineteenth-century realist tradition in general, and its sentimental domestic strain in particular. As Franco Moretti points out, this attempted disconnection between wealth and source was a particular feature of much (early) nineteenth-century writing, that worked to marginalize colonial networks within the narrative’s frame. In a novel like *Mansfield Park*, for example, Jane Austen uses Jamaican plantations to

remove the production of wealth to faraway worlds, in whose effective reality most nineteenth-century readers were probably not ‘at all interested’ (like Fanny’s cousins: see *Mansfield Park*, 21). The way in which colonial fortunes are introduced – a few hasty commonplaces, period – is itself a good cue to the real state of affairs[.]²³

The family’s displaced wealth becomes exotic, fantastic; it is constantly exhibited, but never defined or sourced. It is “a wealth that is not really reproduced (nothing is ever said of work in the colonies), but magically ‘found’ overseas whenever a novel needs it.”²⁴ A consequence of this, which Edward Said emphasizes in reading

²² Vlach, *Work of Their Hands*, 186-201; Donlon, *Swinging in Place*; Davis, *Southscapes*, 80-82

²³ Moretti, *Atlas of the European Novel*, 27. Moretti’s reading is itself a response to Edward Said’s discussion of Austen in *Culture and Imperialism*.

²⁴ *Ibid*, 27

the same element of Austen's novel, is the obscuring of connections in the very moment they are made, by transforming their point of external reference into an abstract rather than represented aspect. This, then, is also the effect of the unelaborated references in the descriptions of Sartoris and Benbow mansions. They exclude what Francis Pendleton Gaines called "technical matters" from their discussion, and thereby neatly exclude the inseparable sociopolitical matters underlying it too.²⁵ They collapse the transatlantic into the exotic, and diminish network into nexus, thereby offering up a simplification of slavery, economics, social hierarchies, and land order that resolves and represses all its issues into a simple mapping of domestic affairs.

Lost Return: Caspey's Failed Resistance

It is perhaps in the marginalization of Caspey Strother, however, that the novel most fully demonstrates its politics of repression and exclusion, its refusal to encompass the plantation site as a multiracial or creolized space. The subplot of this black servant (Elnora's brother) – returned, like Bayard and Horace, from France – reveals a counter-narrative absented, a resistant narrative suppressed. His experiences in France, and the reflections they engender on possible social structures beyond those he has known in Mississippi, are reduced to posturing, exaggerated tall-tales. Caspey is framed as the stereotypical "lazy negro" with airs above his station, whose experiences of European society and military service have been "rather to his future detriment." When he returns to Yoknapatawpha, he is, the narrator opines, "a total loss, sociologically speaking, with a definite disinclination toward labor, honest or otherwise". (588)

It makes for uncomfortable reading: it is one of the few occasions in Faulkner's fiction where his authorial position seems unambiguously racist. Whatever irony Faulkner might have intended (and it is not clear that he intended any at all), by framing Caspey's actions within such comments he denies the plausibility of Caspey's attitudes. Caspey argues that "[i]f us cullud folks is good enough ter save France fum de Germans, den us is good enough ter have de same rights de Germans is." Contributing to a war of liberation has, he quite reasonably feels, given "the black man [...] de right to talk." (589) But if Faulkner's authorial comments have not already

²⁵ Gaines, *The Southern Plantation*, 146

undermined this position, then Caspey's subsequent exercise of this "right" – in clownish stories (apparently believed by his family) where he kills hundreds of "eight foot tall" Germans single-handed, and is awarded a medal (actually "a florid plated medal of Porto Rican origin" [590]) – heavy-handedly implies its fallacy. In a final (and deeply troubling) twist, Faulkner has Caspey brag of sleeping with white women: "I got my white in France, and I'm gwine get it here, too," he asserts (592).

Faulkner does not limit the narrative's racial critique to Caspey's behavior, however: he also frames it with the racist actions of his white characters, actions he implicitly condones. Caspey's bragging is immediately followed by Miss Jenny's (again, seemingly unironized) criticism of "the fool [...] who thought of putting niggers into the same uniform with white men". "Mr Vardaman knew better," she adds; "he told those fools at Washington at the time that it wouldn't do." (592) The reference to the Mississippi Governor and US Senator James K. Vardaman, a populist demagogue, white supremacist, and lynching advocate, serves to further limit Caspey's self-expression, by depersonalizing (perhaps even dehumanizing) him into a representative "type". He is used here to symbolize the destabilizing effects of black ambition, imagination, and desire on the white supremacist South – a threat neutralized first through ridicule, and then through violence at the hands of his "master", old Bayard. It is telling, incidentally, that Caspey's actual experiences in France proved far from liberating – or even equalizing – in themselves. His accounts of unloading boats, dodging military police patrols while roaming the countryside on forged passes, playing dice, and spending time in jail, together create both a pastiche and a partial factual summary of the clichés of black Southern life before and after Emancipation from slavery, one of the effects of which is to reveal how little Southern social order had changed in the subsequent fifty years.

Caspey's final attempt at confrontation with old Bayard makes for a pitiful scene. He cravenly treats his master (for he is never framed merely as an employer) with "sullen insolence", and insults him "just behind Bayard's deafness" (607). When Old Bayard subsequently beats him with a stick of stove wood, Caspey's defiance evaporates. "I kep' tellin' you dem new-fangled war notions of yo'n wa'nt gwine ter work on dis place," his father Simon berates him; he tells him to "save dat nigger freedom talk fer townfolks", and asks "What us niggers want ter be free fer, anyhow?"

Aint we go ez many white folks now ez we kin suppo't?" (608) The scene – and Caspey's career of resistance – ends on this broadly comic and deeply conservative note; Caspey offers no word of response either to old Bayard's assault, or to Simon's comments. His silence is not defiant or rebuking, however – it is simply a negation of his self, as he slips back into his traditional and allotted role, and effectively vanishes from the novel thereafter. He appears in one further lengthy scene, where he and his docile nephew Isom accompany Bayard and Narcissa possum hunting (782-788). The two black servants, by this point, function interchangeably; they say and do nothing to distinguish themselves from one another, or even to distinguish themselves as individuals rather than servants. They are articulated essentially as elements within a landscape, obedient appendages of the white masters. Further encounters with Caspey only more deeply cement this: in the final sections of the novel, he appears only in glimpses, in tableau. He becomes conflated as a figure of black labor, named but not differentiated, as he works alongside Isom on the estate, a figure texturing the background (867).

If all the resistant narrative possibilities offered by *Flags in the Dust* had been as effectively suppressed and dismantled as those offered by Caspey, it would offer an impoverished text indeed. But the connections it raises – in its descriptive details that are excessive in both senses – leave enormous amounts still to account for once the narrative has ended. In this way, it offers means of its own deconstruction, a way in which its structures may be decentered and dismantled. It offers ways in which it may be narratively extended, and over the following decade this is precisely what Faulkner did. In a sense, all of Yoknapatawpha arises here: it is all embryonically present in this first work. In "There Was a Queen", he made explicit the suppressed narrative of miscegenation hovering over Elnora – histories of miscegenation which would later find their fullest articulation in *Absalom, Absalom!* and *Go Down, Moses*. In the figure of Loosh in *The Unvanquished*, and also in the alternative community offered by Clytie in *Absalom, Absalom!* and the resistant behavior and homespace of Lucas Beauchamp in *Go Down, Moses*, Faulkner recuperated what was lost in the suppression of Caspey's rebellion. In these later works, then – especially *Absalom, Absalom!* – Faulkner turns toward expanding the world outward, to make these connections become a means of transforming the nexus of the mansion into the network of the plantation.

Loosh's assertions in particular are striking in their effort to rewrite the failure of Caspey's rebellion. The destruction of the living map was merely their pettiest assertion; later on, midway through the novel, he resists John Sartoris's mastery by revealing to the Union troops where the family's silver has been hidden. When Granny challenges his right to give away the Colonel's belongings, Loosh responds by refuting his own status as a possession. "Let God ax John Sartoris who the man name that give me to him," he retorts. "Let the man that buried me in the black dark ax that of the man what dug me free." (*U*, 369-370) It is, as Barbara Ladd points out, a key moment in Faulkner's writing:

In directing the slaveholder to examine his conscience, Loosh gives voice to the most central question of his life: who gave the slaveholder the right to take his humanity, to bury him "in the black dark"? "Why?" Loosh is thus the first black character in Faulkner's work to articulate the moral imperative that will face the white man in *Go Down, Moses*.²⁶

Yet Faulkner does not narratively articulate the consequences of Loosh's realization and self-assertion. He depicts Loosh only in a state of rebellion, and not in a state of independence. In consequence, beyond the empowerment of these moments, Loosh's resistance ultimately becomes as narratively marginalized as Caspey's. After he says his piece, he disappears from the narrative, leading his family "into misery and starvation" (370), according to the beliefs of Bayard's grandmother Rosa Millard, who has the final word here, much as Miss Jenny and Bayard do in *Flags in the Dust*. And with that final word, which restores the image of white order and black dependence, the detail of his resistance becomes, in effect, erased from the novel's larger design.

²⁶ Barbara Ladd, "Race as Fact and Fiction in William Faulkner", in *A Companion to William Faulkner*, ed. Richard Moreland (Oxford: Blackwell, 2007), 139

“So I went to the West Indies”:

Recuperated Details & Reproduced Designs in *Absalom, Absalom!*

Mapping *Absalom, Absalom!*

On June 28 2012, accompanying an article on *Absalom, Absalom!* by John Jeremiah Sullivan, *The New York Times* website carried a sequence of illustrations by British cartoonist Tom Gauld.²⁷ Although presented almost as a decorative feature, Gauld’s illustrations actually attempt something quite considerable: the ambitious task of visually summarizing Faulkner’s novel (**Fig.4**). In three regular and parallel panel-strips (which, in the physical magazine version, were separated one to a page), Gauld depicts three of the novel’s major plotlines with an economy that is as impressive as it is evocative. In the panel which the online version places as the middle one, aspiring planter Thomas Sutpen is shown journeying from Haiti to Mississippi, to build his dream plantation “design”, centered around the mansion of Sutpen’s Hundred. In the panel positioned below it, Gauld depicts the ambiguous scene of Sutpen’s white son Henry killing Charles Bon, his apparently mixed-race Haitian half-brother (Sutpen’s child by his spurned first wife, Eulalia). At the top, in this arrangement, is the image of Southerner Quentin Compson and his Canadian roommate Shreve McCannon retelling and reimagining the Sutpen family history, in their dormitory room at Harvard University, in Cambridge, Massachusetts, some half a century later.

The juxtaposition of illustrations and article is curious; while the one offers an introduction for the uninitiated, the other is surely dependent on a nuanced knowledge of *Absalom, Absalom!* for its effects. Belying its surface simplicity, Gauld’s illustrations actually offer a sophisticated interpretative reading of Faulkner’s novel, and one that works precisely because Gauld capitalizes on the expressive possibilities of his graphic medium. (Faulkner was himself a skilled amateur artist with a distinctive style, and before he turned from poetry to fiction in his late twenties he often

²⁷ The article, entitled “How William Faulkner Tackled Race – and Freed the South from Itself”, was adapted from Sullivan’s foreword to a new Modern Library edition of *Absalom, Absalom!*. A version of the article was printed in *The New York Times* “Sunday Magazine” (July 1, 2012), page MM45, under the title “The ‘Ulysses’ of Mississippi”.

accompanied his texts with lavish illustrations.²⁸) Translating the narrative and linguistic complexities of *Absalom, Absalom!* into three panel-strips, Gauld helps emphasize the vital importance of spatiality and sequence, and framing and perspective, within the reading experience of Faulkner’s novel. At the same time, his panel composition further emphasizes the ambiguity with which that sequencing and use of perspective functions in Faulkner’s writing, because it touches on the limits of knowledge and presentation – not least in how the images combine and productively blur the formal characteristics of illustration, comics, and maps.

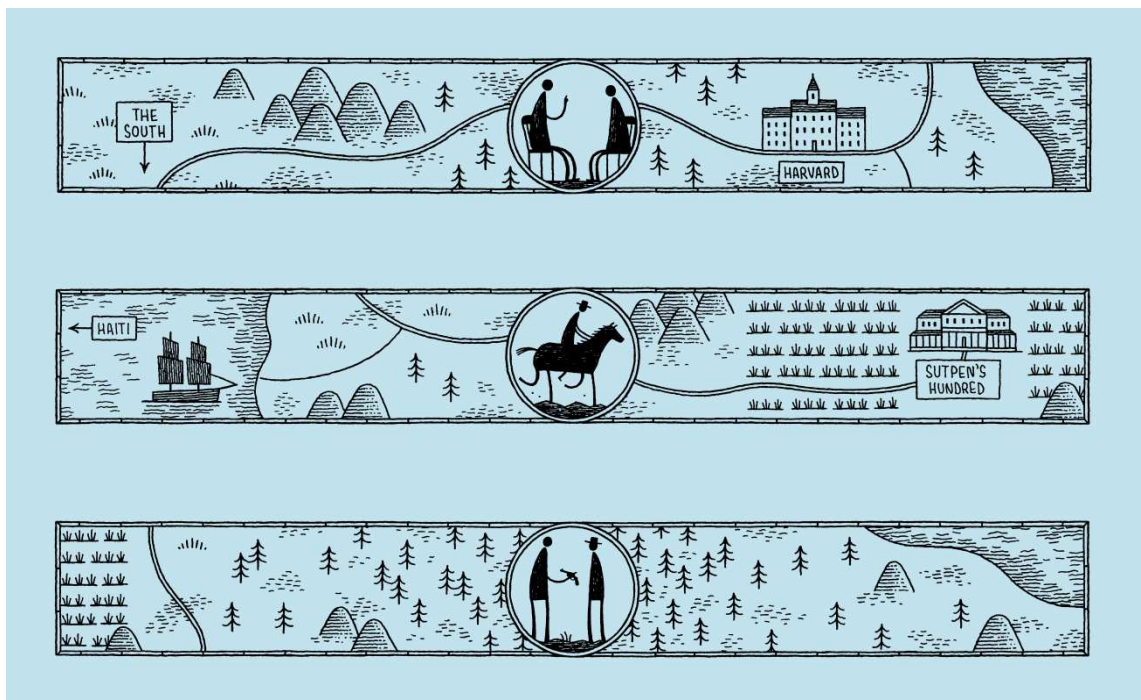


Fig.4 Tom Gauld, untitled illustration of *Absalom, Absalom!*, *The New York Times*, Jun. 28 2012
(Permission courtesy of Tom Gauld)

The composition of the panels, ambiguously divided by central circular insets, subtly resists linear reading. Its spatial possibilities are demonstrated by the decision of different editors at *The New York Times* to reproduce the illustrations as a singular image in the online edition of the magazine, and as three separate illustrations not

²⁸ See Faulkner, *Early Prose and Poetry*. For parallels between comics and Faulkner’s work, see M. Thomas Inge, “Faulkner Reads the Funny Papers”, in *Faulkner and Humor: Faulkner and Yoknapatawpha*, 1984, ed. Doreen Fowler & Ann J. Abadie (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1986), 153-190.

even necessarily in sequence in the magazine’s print-version. The reader is thus permitted considerable freedom in their decision to read the panels as parallel or as adjacent, as simultaneous or as sequential. Each illustration may even be further deconstructed to serve as sequence of panels itself, depending on whether the circular inset in each is read as functioning as the illustration’s core, or as a superimposed image functioning at a remove from it. As a result, the illustrations raise crucial questions as to what constitutes a visual narrative, a theme Gauld has also explored elsewhere, as in “Controls for ‘Rhett Butler; the Videogame” (Fig.5).

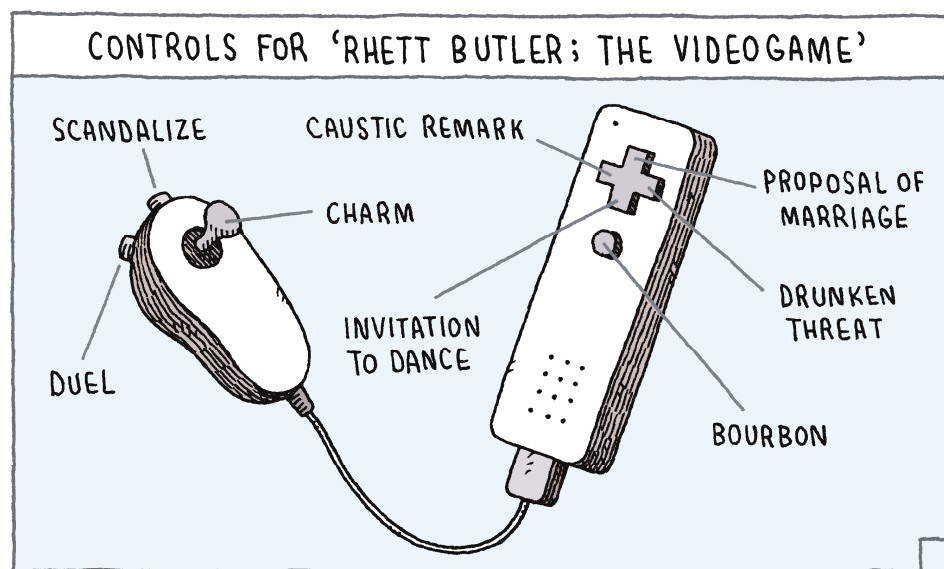


Fig.5 Tom Gauld, “Controls for ‘Rhett Butler; the Videogame” (2010)
 (Permission courtesy of Tom Gauld)

The handset for this (sadly fictitious) game would let the player enact the part of Rhett Butler from *Gone with the Wind*, inhabiting him gesturally in a projective space that is also a physical narrative one. And just as the traditional boundaries of gameplay become blurred in the use of such handsets, so too are the boundaries of narrative broken down in the illustration, which offers no specific narrative path for reading the labeling annotation. The narrative is not exhausted through climax: it ends instead simply when all its data has been accounted for. In much the same way, Gauld’s illustration of *Absalom, Absalom!* also lets us read in a manner that is simultaneous and non-linear – the narratives of Sutpen, his sons, and Quentin and

Shreve all working in parallel, as they do in the novel itself. The content of each panel-illustration suggests this non-linear approach, too, the highly stylized landscapes and descriptive labels indicating that this illustration is also a map, a mapping of the novel's sense of space and connection. It offers, in Franco Moretti's phrase, "connections made visible."²⁹ That spatial sense is complex, and blurs the division between physical and imaginative geographies. On the right side of the top and middle panels of the online version, Gauld depicts the physical geographies of "Harvard" and "Sutpen's Hundred", labeled with static markers. On the left side of those panels, he gestures toward the imaginative geographies of "Haiti" and "The South", indicated with arrows directed beyond the confines of the frame, beyond the limits of representation and delineation. Gauld is careful to frame these elements connectively, relationally, through the threads of roads, which link sites and which lead beyond the edges of the frame, into a world at once abstract and material yet also offstage.

The position of the illustration's circular insets can thus be read as both illustrative and actual. Through their storytelling, Quentin and Shreve create an abstract space that is removed from "Harvard" (and reality) yet also distanced from "The South" (both projective and imaginative); it is a state framed as road, as process, as state between. (Significantly, the inset could also show Mr Compson relating Sutpen's history to Quentin.) The inset of Thomas Sutpen on horseback similarly depicts him poised between "Haiti" and "Sutpen's Hundred", between a future he cannot quite attain and a past he cannot entirely shed – between the actualization of his abstract design and the seeds of its physical collapse. It also positions him as an essentially liminal figure between the domestic goal of the plantation mansion and the troubled roots of the plantation system. The bottom inset (which, intriguingly, draws on a late moment in the novel, to read Bon's death as a suicidal gesture, with Bon pressing the gun on a reluctant Henry [AA, 294]) extends this ambiguity into a space that is almost entirely devoid of context, occupying some indeterminate place between wooded wilderness (on the right, and around them) and ordered cotton plantation (on the left).

In sum, these insets present the action of the novel as fundamentally unfulfilled, as suspended between disclosure and deferral, on the limits of knowledge

²⁹ Moretti, *Atlas of the European Novel*, 3

and representation. The illustration also helps emphasize how many of the novel's occurrences do not, strictly speaking, occur – taking place instead in an offstage world, in narrative ellipses that resemble the function of the white space of gutters in comics, projectively filled by the reader's mind. The comics analogy enables the novel's narrative to be presented as emerging consequentially, as a part and product of a sequence, a process, a mapping – and thus in clear distinction from the clean descriptive surfaces of *Flags in the Dust* with their repressed connections. In short, Gauld's illustration presents the novel's geography as simultaneously imaginative and physical, its landscape one of ideology, desire, and cultural reproduction, and its plantation poised midway between the goal of its disconnected mansion and the repressed site of its violent roots.

The layering of Gauld's illustration, by emphasizing the affinities of novels, comics, and maps, also serves more broadly to emphasize the sequential and narrative nature of spatial order. The encounter of such narratives of connection lies at the heart of *Absalom, Absalom!*: it opens, after all, with Faulkner's Yoknapatawpha map, contextualizing the Sutpen family history, before it has even been told, into the larger texture of Yoknapatawpha.³⁰ As Sean Latham notes, it is fitting that a map – a symbol of expansion and connection, of dominance and idealized representation – should usher in a new period in Faulkner's fiction in general, and treatment of the plantation in particular. It marks the origins of a “transformative engagement with the aftermath not of the Civil War, but of the original colonization of the Americas.”³¹ As such, it emphasizes how Southern plantation structures are rooted in codes of dominance that lie at the core of Western civilization, codes which modernist aesthetics and politics often worked productively to dismantle.

The “mapping” aesthetic of *Absalom, Absalom!* serves to establish the evaded or under-developed connections of *Flags in the Dust*, in both conceptual and intertextual expansion. It places Sutpen's venture in Mississippi within a larger

³⁰ As Pamela Dalziel notes, “Sutpen's presence has dominated all the preceding *Absalom* narratives, but on the map his family appears as just one of many, his plantation is reduced to a mere dot, and he is himself mentioned in only two of the five *Absalom* allusions.” See “*Absalom, Absalom!*: The Extension of Dialogic Form”, *Mississippi Quarterly* 45.3 (1992), 293

³¹ Sean Latham, “An Impossible Resignation: William Faulkner's Post-Colonial Imagination”, in *A Companion to William Faulkner*, ed. Richard Moreland (Oxford: Blackwell, 2007), 253

geography reaching to Virginia and the Caribbean, and a larger history incorporating families like the Sartorises and the Compsons. In both cases, the connections map the power of the meta-plantation as an economic and social system, yet also reveal the tensions at work throughout the novel between physical and imaginative geographies (a tension Gauld so effectively depicted in his representation of “Haiti” and “The South” via indicative arrows rather than immediate images). In the process, these socio-geographic connections further reveal the way in which the plantation system maintained itself through reproduction of a core design. For all his individualism and drive, Thomas Sutpen is nonetheless framed as representative of a tradition, and his mansion serves the novel in precisely the same way. Faulkner (like Gauld, in his map-like illustration) makes the mansion as generalized as possible: its descriptions are impressionistic, its shape unbounded by architectural specificities. The mansion becomes, in its individual re-creation by each narrator, a site without a singular being; yet it is precisely these aspects which destabilize it as a cultural nexus and mute its hegemonic domestic power. A tension is established between the representational and the representative: between the artistic attempts to personalize and create, and the cultural impulse to replicate and reproduce.

This tension is central to how *Absalom, Absalom!* offers, yet often falls short of, a recuperation of the kinds of connections narratively repressed in *Flags in the Dust*: its links to the Caribbean and to Europe; its articulation of multiple histories and cultural creolization; its engagement with narrative form and narrative power. The passing details of the Benbow family’s Barbadian connections become transformed into Sutpen’s career in Haiti; the hints of miscegenation in Elnora’s description become transformed not only into the explicit mixed-race identity of Clytie, but also the troubled racial identity of three generations of Bons: Eulalia, Charles, and Charles Etienne de Saint Valery. *Absalom, Absalom!* is also preoccupied with exploring what it *means* to suppress these connections in the first place – exploring the problematic, or even fatal, consequences of that evasion, that denial, that erasure. This is a particularly important consideration given that the novel ends on Shreve’s assertion that “the Jim Bonds are going to conquer the western hemisphere” (311) – that is to say, on a recognition of the complete collapse of racial division, and a total acceptance of the undeniable creolization of the Americas. And this is something that Gauld’s illustration

captures perfectly (though it is perhaps more a product of his style, than of specific deliberation). Though the five figures depicted are all male (in itself perhaps a problem, in its absencing of Rosa, Judith, and Clytie in particular), they are not differentiated in any other respect. They are offered in iconic silhouette: their features undelineated, their familial – or racial – heritage impossible to distinguish; their identities racially neutralized, with Shreve's vision blurred into an accomplished fact.

Pettibone's Shoes: Reading Sutpen's Reproduction in Virginia and Haiti

It is reproduction that undoes Thomas Sutpen in the end, and not simply because the conflicts and counter-narratives of his children assault his design from all sides. He is also undone by reproduction in a cultural sense: he reads too closely, and replicates too completely, the plantation order that both inspired and provoked him (it is this, through the subsequent actions of Wash Jones, that literally brings about his own demise). Like so many others, Sutpen comes to western Mississippi burdened by cultural baggage among his personal hopes. In Yoknapatawpha, he reproduces not simply the physical architecture he has seen in Virginia (and doubtless elsewhere on his travels), but also the social architecture he experienced both there and in the Caribbean. His mansion, built according to an iconic, traditional design, also reproduces the hierarchies that underlie its form and iconicity.

The revelation that Sutpen's activities may constitute reproduction rather than creation – may be purely generic, rather than highly personalized – comes in the course of his history, as related by Quentin in Chapter VII. It is a chapter which, for many readers, has become the novel's fulcrum, and the moment where Sutpen seems to emerge most clearly. Yet this more immediate encounter, paradoxically, has the result of de-individualizing him into a representative figure. The chapter links Virginia, Haiti, and Mississippi within one system, and flattens their differences into a single, generalized image of the plantation in the Americas, most of all by rendering them impressionistically. The distancing that the multiple frame-narrators establish around the account of Sutpen's history ensures that the reader cannot experience these sites realistically; they emerge as imaginative rather than physical geographies. This tension between the imaginative and physical is foregrounded at the start of Quentin's narration, when Shreve pedantically interjects that Sutpen could not have been born in

“West Virginia”, because the state did not exist until the Civil War (182-183). The paradox not only establishes Sutpen as, in a sense, bereft of origins, sprung from nowhere when his birthplace becomes (in legal and cartographic senses) erased. It also lends a crucial sense of unreality – of physical unmappability – to the accounts that follow.

Sutpen’s story is a narrative of environments rather than places, of contexts that build character rather than have complex identities themselves. When he is ten, his family moves from the Appalachian mountains down to Tidewater Virginia, to work on a plantation. They move, we are told, into “a cabin that was almost a replica of the mountain one” (188), in much the same way that they themselves constitute a replica of “probably a hundred families like his which had come and lived [...] and vanished and left no trace, nothing, not even rags and broken crockery” (199). The planter Pettibone and his plantation, for all their importance within the local environment, are flattened into a series of representative trans-plantation details: a portico (190), a white door (192), a master glimpsed lying in a hammock, waited on by slaves (188). This representativeness is precisely to the point: Sutpen’s childhood experience of a social snub at Pettibone’s front door is merely the last in a series of revelations that serve to dismantle his innocent view of the world, and which compel him instead to see it as a system of strict order, organization, and division. (As Richard Moreland suggests, this reduction to a singular “primal scene” serves as “an oversimplifying, focusing repetition.”³²) Growing up in the mountains, “he had never even heard of, never imagined, a place, a land divided neatly up,” nor even countenanced the notion of “people living on it all divided and fixed and neat because of what color their skins happened to be and what they happened to own.” (183) The scene where Pettibone’s black butler tells him “never to come to the front door again but to go around to the back” (192) acquires its force as the climax of encounters with these spatial and social divisions.

It is banal images, everyday details, that trouble Sutpen the most: the sight of his father being ejected from a tavern by “a huge bull of a nigger” (186); the impression of dust raised by the “proud delicate wheels” of a carriage that nearly runs

³² Richard C Moreland, *Faulkner and Modernism: Rereading and Rewriting* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1990), 101

down Sutpen and his sister (191); the spectacle of a planter “in a barrel stave hammock between two trees, with his shoes off and a nigger [...] who did nothing else but fan him and bring him drinks.” (188)³³ They are no longer the innocuous surface details that characterized *Flags in the Dust*: they now provoke responses. This last image particularly fuels Sutpen’s imagination as a child: later, he recalls that he would spend all afternoon “watching that man who not only had shoes in the summertime too, but didn’t even have to wear them.” (189) “He coveted the shoes”, we are told (189). Shoes become, for him, a crucial marker of class, a discreet yet visible point of division between labor and leisure, between the vulnerability of agrarian poverty and the protections of domestic wealth. During his rejection at Pettibone’s door – his literal denial of access to those domestic comforts – he becomes acutely aware of the connection which underlies this division: he is acutely conscious, amid the general impoverishment of his appearance, of his “splayed bare feet”, his own lack of shoes (194).

Sutpen’s response is not one of material desire, though; he does not covet the markers of Pettibone’s wealth as things to be possessed, but rather as articulations of the power *to* possess. In this moment he understands the world of material things as pieces maneuvered through the spatial and social practices of power. He subsequently heads to Haiti, according to his account, as a means to an end: and so it is surely no surprise to find that the place of Haiti in the novel is, as Jeff Karem puts it, “both overdetermined and under-represented at the same time.”³⁴

Though *Absalom, Absalom!* is technically a historical novel, Faulkner offers no historical recreation; instead, Karem argues, Faulkner “actively repress[es] vital historical connections between the United States and the Black Atlantic”, in an attempt to frame Mississippi and Virginia as more civilized forms of plantation mastery (in much the same disconnective sense that, in Franco Moretti’s reading, Jane Austen used Antigua in *Mansfield Park*). I would suggest, however, that the effect is actually

³³ Richard Godden emphasizes the significance of this moment with the carriage: he argues that Sutpen perceives the dust, the dirt, as “that which will make him its thing, least among its many things (lumpen labor).” (*Fictions of Labor*, 62)

³⁴ Jeff Karem, “Fear of a Black Atlantic?: African Passages in *Absalom, Absalom!* and *The Last Slaver*”, in *Faulkner and Globalization: Faulkner and Yoknapatawpha, 2008*, ed. Annette Trefzer & Ann J. Abadie (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2012), 162

the reverse: the impressionistic depiction of Haiti renders it all the more effectively part of an undifferentiated transnational plantation system. Faulkner's dehistoricizing of Haiti can accordingly be read as an attempt to reflect the symbolic mindset of the times, in which the Caribbean loomed far larger as symbol of wealth (and corruption) than as site of actual habitation.

The novel's specific references to "Haiti" prove revealing. Though several critics have made its appearance central to their interpretations of the novel (Kreyling in his discussion of US imperialism, for example, or Godden in his treatment of labor), the word "Haiti" only appears eleven times – twice in the Chronology, three times in the Genealogy, and a mere six times in the remaining more than 300 pages of the novel.³⁵ Of these six textual references, four constitute Shreve's naming of the place, while the other two express Quentin's attempt to characterize it. Quentin speaks of a "besieged Haitian room" (203), of Sutpen and his employer (and future father-in-law) discharging their guns "at no enemy but at the Haitian night itself" (209). It becomes almost an abstract adjective – a kind of room and night – symbolizing the qualities of violence and instability which Haiti (the "volcano" [208]) had long been understood to connote, particularly in the Southern imagination. Faulkner's image of Haiti is so unspecific that it might just as readily be any other Caribbean island, all of which were characterized by periodic violence (albeit to a less extreme degree than Haiti). Shreve emphasizes this idea (which is also clearly related to a decidedly parochial North American view of the region), by talking of "Porto Rico or Haiti or wherever" (246); and indeed, later references to Sutpen in Faulkner's work do not mention Haiti at all. In *Requiem for a Nun*, for example, the reader is told that Sutpen's slaves did not speak English "but instead what Compson, who had visited New Orleans, said was the Carib-Spanish-French of the Sugar Islands." (RN, 498) This detail is a revision, to be sure, but it nonetheless points toward a preference for the symbolic rather than specific in Faulkner's overall view of "Haiti".

Carib-Spanish-French constituted a creolized tongue, for a creolized culture. The family Sutpen marries into is mixed French and "Spanish" – and also, according to Quentin and Shreve's persuasive if creative reconstruction, part African. What is being

³⁵ Michael Kreyling, "Haiti: Phantom Southern Memory in Faulkner and Madison Smartt Bell" in *The South That Wasn't There* (2010), 117-148, and Godden, *Fictions of Labor*, esp. chapters 2 and 4.

asserted here is not a positive and productive hybridity, however, but an imbalanced cultural mixture in which some connections are emphasized and others repressed or denied. Far more frequently than it refers to “Haiti”, the novel refers to “the West Indies” – fourteen times within some thirteen pages.³⁶ The term Caribbean is not used at all; and although the term “West Indies” is more appropriate to the era in which the novel is set, the inferences of European empire, of geographic division, and of white supremacy, are inescapable. The use of this term, more than any other single element, helps emphasize the ultimate goal of this section of the novel: to uncover, as Sean Latham puts it, “the ideological structures of a European model of imperialism which has been effaced from the surface of an American national consciousness that understands slavery as its own peculiar institution” – which white Southern culture has “repressed, though not erased.”³⁷ It is unsurprising that the novel treats Haiti as a symbolic space; indeed, it would be more startling if it did not.

The “West Indies” exists in Sutpen’s narrative only as a destination, as somewhere Sutpen “went” – as the end of a passage in his life, a voyage both physical and imaginative. Sutpen speaks of the first time he heard of it, as “a place called the West Indies to which poor men went in ships and became rich, it didn’t matter how, so long as that man was clever and courageous” (200). Sutpen’s “West Indies” is not a space of representation, but rather a representative space. His account – and therefore, also the novel’s account – “cites” rather than “sites” the region. One reason for this – which helps to explain the tension between the broad geographic scope of the reported narrative (Virginia, New Orleans, Haiti) and the constricted local scope of the present action (the office, the porch, the dorm-room) – is the ideological constraint of Sutpen’s design. As Paul Giles notes, Sutpen’s insistence on racial purity makes his

³⁶ Once on pages 197, 199, 201, 203 and 205; twice on pages 200, 202, and 204; and three times on page 198 – in an episode of the novel which stretches only from page 197 to page 211.

³⁷ Sean Latham, “Jim Bond’s America: Denaturalizing the Logic of Slavery in *Absalom, Absalom!*”, *Mississippi Quarterly* 51.3 (Summer 1998), 456, 462. Latham also notes elsewhere that the map which opens *Absalom, Absalom!* supports separation between the representable Mississippi and the imaginative geography of the Caribbean which exceeds such depiction. In depicting “Yoknapatawpha County” rather than the fuller “Yoknapatawpha” imaginative cosmos beyond the borders of that single Mississippi county, Faulkner absents locales such as New Orleans and Haiti – absents, in short, those sites “most powerfully charged with meaning” in the novel. In Latham’s view, it is “as if Faulkner were somehow trying to constrain the vast and terrifying reach of the novel within the imaginative lands bound by the Yoknapatawpha and Tallahatchie rivers.” (“An Impossible Resignation”, 252)

narrative – intellectually and culturally speaking – far more geographically localized than it appears. His design cannot conceptually incorporate the hybrid identities and racial attitudes of the Caribbean, and so the narrative design built around them cannot fully incorporate them either. However, as Giles also emphasizes, it is this attempt and failure at separation – the impossible attempt of absolute racial essentialism – which fuels not only Sutpen’s obsessive design, but also Faulkner’s profoundly paradoxical fiction as a whole:³⁸

Faulkner’s imagination is always most fired by the twisting of conventional categories: how the prim white woman is sexually attracted to the “negro”, how the defeated are in fact “the unvanquished”. [...] The structural paradox of Faulkner’s writing is that, though it needs a compressed and constricted notion of space to lend the narratives any kind of epistemological coherence, such space is always represented textually in self-dissolving terms.³⁹

It is perhaps also as a consequence of this that Sutpen’s career elsewhere is so ill-defined. The skeletal details of the Chronology reveal that Sutpen leaves Haiti in 1831, and arrives in Mississippi in 1833 (312). Where does he wander, in those two narratively unaccounted years? What other West Indian or Southern vistas does he take in? What takes him so long, and what compels him so forcefully away from the West Indies in the first place – driving him back to the US South, where he finally arrives looking gaunt, hardened, world-worn at the age of 25? The recuperation of repressed connections is rendered flawed, unfulfilled – not only in its abstract depictions, but also in the narrative gaps and uncertainties that surround those established connections. It generates a series of connections that firmly establish a plantation system, rooted in the reproducible sites and logic of the meta-plantation’s values. Yet it also occludes the complex *functioning* of that system, mapping it only in

³⁸ Paul Giles, *The Global Remapping of American Literature* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2011), 213

³⁹ *Ibid*, 215

terms of its sites of power, and not its practices. The novel confronts this idea by focusing, through the reported actions of Clytie and Judith in Chapter VI, on the plantation site as an intermediate and communal space, between the domestic exclusion of the plantation mansion and the abstract dominance of the plantation system. This alternative vision is ultimately unsuccessful, and not least because it is positioned in the novel ahead of Sutpen's history, which retrospectively nullifies it. It is also perhaps unsuccessful because – unlike the treatment of similar alternative communities in *Go Down, Moses* – it is profoundly troubled by the attempt to deal with the gendered, racial, and sexual politics of the meta-plantation all at the same time.

.IV.

“...something that might make a mark on something that was once”:

The Alternative Patterns of Judith's Loom

Eulalia's Silence: The Space of Female Communities

Eulalia Bon is an absence at the heart of *Absalom, Absalom!*. She is less a character than a function, and less an individual than a symbolic embodiment. She serves to define the harsh consequences of patriarchal gender values, of white supremacist politics and the “one-drop rule”, and of US assumptions of privilege and superiority over neighboring communities in the Latin America, South America, and the Caribbean. She functions as a tragic figure, fated to be spurned by Sutpen in order to generate his downfall, and fated to be marginalized by a narrative form that cannot encompass rendering her Haitian life as representable rather than abstract.

Things need not necessarily have been so. The Chronology tells us that Sutpen “married first wife in Haiti” in 1827; that their son Charles was born in 1831 (312).⁴⁰ Sutpen “repudiates” her later that same year – but only after three years of marriage have been shared. We cannot know what the course of Sutpen's life might have been,

⁴⁰ It is intriguing that she is not mentioned by name in the Chronology, only in the Genealogy – a fact which supports Pamela Dalziel's contention that we should read these as paratexts to the novel, further interpretations potentially offered by separate narrators (“The Extension of Dialogic Form”, 279).

had he never found cause, in his mind, to reject Eulalia; information is provided only as to why he left, not why he stayed. "I found that she was not and could never be, through no fault of her own, adjunctive or incremental to the design which I had in mind," Sutpen relates, "so I provided for her and put her aside." (199) No further information is forthcoming: no express reason for that rejection (although Quentin and Shreve readily create one), and no clear statement of Thomas Sutpen and Eulalia's personal relationship that preceded this moment.

Their marriage – considerably more than a thing of a moment – surely demands closer examination, and a passing detail arising from Sutpen's account offers an unexpected way in. In the course of his history, a curious personal trait of Sutpen's is deliberately stated: that he was unable to stand the scent of sugar, after watching the canefields of Haiti burn (206). The fires were part of a failed rebellion that set the seal upon Sutpen's fortune: it was through his mastery of the situation that he was apparently able to marry Eulalia, the daughter of his employer (who before "that first night of the attack he had possibly not seen [...] as much as a dozen times" [208]), though he was only an overseer. Sutpen is sickened by the scent of sugar, in which he comes to smell "the hatred and the implacability, the thousand secret dark years which had created the hatred and implacability" (205-206): sickened by it in a land where canes covered the landscape and built great fortunes, and where their sickly-sweet scent permeated the air; discomforted too by the harsh climate, the unfamiliar customs, the brutality of the system – and yet, Sutpen remained. The attraction of Eulalia – as heiress, or perhaps as an individual – must surely have been great: or else why would he have stayed, and married her in that place? He could readily have acquired the necessary wealth to leave and better pursue his "design", if he believed it in then, elsewhere.

The novel offers no explicit solutions to these thinly-veiled gaps it yields: but we are also free to read its silences. We can draw out details, to shape the narrative absence, and to form some picture at least as to this young couple's relations during those three early, and childless, years of marriage. They would have been long years, surely, for Sutpen: for a man so desperate for an heir, a man if not necessarily passionate then certainly highly potent. He would have been different as a younger man. The trial periods he proposes for Rosa Coldfield and enforces on Milly Jones,

where the interest is expressly in reproduction of a male child, evidently would not have applied to Eulalia. The couple experienced three years of childless marriage, during which Sutpen stayed with Eulalia through months of apparently faltering or stalled fertility; perhaps he even shared with her the pain of miscarriage or infant mortality (it is not too great a conjecture, surely, especially for those times). He was a virgin when he married her (205): calloused by exposure to both poverty and slavery no doubt, but still young, and still clinging to his “innocence”. Noel Polk (drawing more fully on earlier suggestions raised by Cleanth Brooks and Dirk Kuyk) conjectures that Eulalia, in contrast, knew other men before Sutpen; perhaps Sutpen would have found this refined, and in many ways worldlier, woman intoxicating.⁴¹ (Perhaps he even loved her; perhaps he would have stayed, had he not learnt the “truth” of her racial identity. But that surely does not explain his later relation to Clytie; and such paradoxes, in the end, prove unresolvable.)

Why does Faulkner offer these prolonged gaps in Sutpen’s history? Most likely, it is an indication of the strength of Sutpen’s character, specifically his patience, willpower, and determination. But it also surely has the effect of making the reader appreciate the considerable weight of time and social pressure burdening the women who are contained within this patriarchal model. It is telling that we should know enough of Sutpen to make conjectures, but know nothing (except in Quentin and Shreve’s imaginings in Chapter VIII) of Eulalia’s life beyond her function within Sutpen’s. She exists, in his account, much like Eula Varner will later in *The Hamlet*: as an object of barter between a father and his employee, and as a sexual object for reproduction. Eulalia’s reproductive power ultimately damages Sutpen’s design rather than fulfills it, when its product – Charles Bon – follows Sutpen to Mississippi to demand recognition. But what makes her story particularly poignant is surely those three years that are narratively absent in the novel, and only emerge in outline in the Chronology: those three years during which, in my reading anyway, she struggled, perhaps painfully, with her reproductive “failures”, and her failure to fulfill her assigned and allotted “role”.

Such readings are purely conjectural. But the significance here is that the novel compels the reader toward such conjectures on Sutpen’s life, but offers no comparable

⁴¹ Polk, “The Artist as Cuckold” [1995], in *Children of the Dark House*, 140

means of insight into Eulalia's. She exists either as symbolic or absent (which are perhaps, in the end, similar things). She becomes a representative figure, an object of desire and reproduction contained and constrained by the normative narrative of the meta-plantation, to which she is a conceptual prop. And more than that: she also becomes emblematic of how questions of gender are pushed to the margins in this novel by questions of race. Eulalia holds significance because her (probably) mixed race identity destabilizes Sutpen's plan; the question of miscegenation trumps any question of sexual exploitation or gender inequalities, and this is true on a larger scale for the novel as a whole. (It is another way in which Gauld's illustration proves particularly acute: in its representation of the novel's key themes and action, the undifferentiated silhouette figures are nonetheless conspicuously male.) There is thus a negative outcome from the expansive framing of the plantation system in *Absalom, Absalom!*. In its turn away from the mansion, it also negates the ways in which female subjectivity might resist the dominance of the plantation's patriarchal design. In the case of Clytie and Judith in particular, their counter-model of plantation order is left underrepresented and unfulfilled as a result – lapsing into arbitrary death and destruction, narratively displaced and then narratively erased.

The possibilities of female community were already present in Faulkner's earlier attempt to write the Sutpen family history, in "Evangeline" (1931). There, the last remaining descendants of the family's slaves, grouped around a matriarch who would later be developed into Clytie, "live in a cabin about a half mile from the house – two rooms and an open hall full of children and grandchildren and greatgrandchildren, all women. Not a man over eleven years old in the house." (*US*, 585) Despite the negative terminology – a lack of men as an abnormality and deficiency – Faulkner also recognizes a potential for positive social organization here, that might circumvent many of the destructive and divisive impulses that inhere in more traditional patriarchal structures.

The alternative community Clytie and Judith attempt to create at Sutpen's Hundred, in a resistant attempt to reconfigure rather than preserve Thomas Sutpen's "design", is a crucial moment in Faulkner's writing. It marks the point at which gender and racial hierarchies exist at their most deconstructed. It is a moment of hope, that emerges out of the violence and oppression of the embattled Southern women of

Faulkner's earlier work. It "speaks" for the females figures elsewhere who are oppressively confined within the mansion; who are driven from the community for exploring their subjective sexuality; who respond to the twin damages of slaveholding and the Civil War with the attempt to build something based on compassion and acceptance, rather than order and exclusion. Judith emerges in this moment as a transformation of the symbolic Southern belle, as a reworking of Narcissa Benbow, while Clytie offers a new model of the black housekeeper as builder, rather than as the ruined or passive figure it had constituted in Elnora or Dilsey. Yet Judith and Clytie's alternative plantation model lasts only as a moment, because its containment within the novel leaves no scope for expansion in biological, social, or narrative terms. To an extent, this is merely a reflection of what did, in fact, occur in the post-Civil War South: the collapse of the possibilities of liberal Reconstruction into the conservative nostalgia of white supremacist "Redemption" – a trajectory Faulkner reveals starkly in *The Unvanquished*, through the regressive transformation of the free-spirited Drusilla Hawk into a template Southern belle. As I will ultimately discuss, however, the novel's structures risk replicating rather than critiquing the social failures of this historical period, in particular by normalizing them within conventional narrative structures.

Caryatids: The Burden of Southern Womanhood

The "counter-model" of the plantation community established by Judith and Clytie operates forever in direct tension with their allotted roles as two of the iconic pillars of the plantation image: the Southern belle and the loyal black housekeeper. Faulkner was acutely conscious of the ways in which such gender roles sustained the meta-plantation's structure, in direct relation to the mansion. In "There Was a Queen", the sequel to *Flags in the Dust*, those two iconic roles are explicitly paralleled through a shared simile: the caryatid. The black housekeeper Elnora is described as standing behind the wheelchair of the house's mistress, Miss Jenny Du Pre, "motionless too and erect as a caryatid" (CS, 731). (As the story reveals Elnora to be John Sartoris's daughter, this also makes Elnora Miss Jenny's niece.) Later, Miss Jenny watches Narcissa, the widow of her great-nephew young Bayard, walking toward her with "something about her of that heroic quality of statuary [...], her white dress flowing slowly, heroic, like a caryatid from a temple façade come to life." (738) The repetition

of this architectural image demands we take note of it; and its implications are perhaps even further reaching than Faulkner intended.⁴²

In *De Architectura* – for many centuries considered the most authoritative text on classical architecture – the Roman writer Vitruvius discusses the remarkable architectural feature of the “caryatids”, columns carved in the form of women. (The caryatids on the Erechtheum porch of the Athenian Acropolis are perhaps the most famous.) Vitruvius asserts that such columns were conceived following the Persian Wars in the late fifth century B.C., as a means of displaying the punishment inflicted on the citizens of Caryae, who betrayed their Athenian allies by siding with the Persian invaders. When the Athenians emerged victorious, the Caryae women were subjected to enslavement, and to make public their shame (Vitruvius claims) the fate of these women was memorialized in public architecture, “in order that the sin and the punishment of the people of Caryae might be known and handed down even to posterity.”⁴³

Scholars have since refuted Vitruvius’s claims: Joseph Rykwert, for example, notes the recorded existence of caryatids that antedate the Persian wars, and concludes instead that these ornate columns mark instances of an unusually literal expression of the widespread classical analogy between column and body (which Hellenic architects, favoring abstractions, typically eschewed.)⁴⁴ George Hersey, meanwhile, suggests a number of possible alternative sources, which ultimately conflate the cult of Artemis at Caryae with the story of Erechtheus, the mythical Athenian king, whose daughters sacrificed themselves to save Athens, and were (by this account) later memorialized in the Erechtheum porch.⁴⁵ The cult of Artemis at

⁴² A parallel image of support occurs in *The Unvanquished*, when the Sartoris family housekeeper Louvinia is described as “like a bolster case, taller than a bolster case in her nightgown” (U, 347). The *OED* gives two definitions for “bolster”: firstly, “a long narrow pillow or cushion”; and secondly, “to support, to prop up with or as if with a long narrow pillow or cushion.”

⁴³ Vitruvius, *Ten Books on Architecture*, trans. Ingrid D. Rowland (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 22

⁴⁴ Joseph Rykwert, *The Dancing Column: On Order in Architecture* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1996), 133-138.

⁴⁵ George Hersey, *The Lost Meaning of Classical Architecture: Speculations on Ornament from Vitruvius to Venturi* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1988), 69-75. Hersey stresses that contemporary sources only ever refer to the Erechtheum statues as “korai” (maidens); the term “caryatids” appears to have been retrospectively applied.

Caryae emerged from a similar moment of female sacrifice: the town was said to be named after Caryae, daughter of King Dion of Laconia, who rejected the god Dionysus's advances, and was turned into a walnut tree as punishment. In literalizing this already inchoate connection between the column and the sacred tree, tribute is paid to the core attribute of Artemis: her virginhood. "It was Caryae's chastity, her refusal to be suborned by a god that led Caryae to honor Artemis," Hersey notes.⁴⁶ (It is possible then, Hersey adds, that the figures are thus only incidentally supportive: during worship of Artemis at Caryae, votives danced around a statue of the goddess in a sacred grove, arms raised above their heads.⁴⁷)

The interpretations of the caryatids are polarized: on the one hand, they can be read as memorials to betrayal, enslavement, and female exploitation; on the other, they are positioned as tributes to the nobility of female chastity and sacrifice. In both senses, however, they may be read as didactic, patriarchal texts promoting submissive female behavior. It is this complex association of ideas that underlies Faulkner's representation of women within the plantation's structures in "There Was a Queen", and in other texts too. As embodied in Elnora and Narcissa, they constitute figures who are supportive, sacrificial, and objectified, and who are enslaved to an exclusionary social role. These statues are also integral conceptual parts of the mansion, offering a means by which it is held up and thus sustained, and from which they are thus inseparable.

The backstory of Elnora and Narcissa is crucial here. It is necessary to understand that Elnora has lived as a self-effacing servant, denied recognition as a member of the family due to the suppression of their history of miscegenation, in order to see the history of her mother's family's enslavement encoded in this image of her as caryatid. It is equally important to remember that Narcissa has been subjected to sustained sexual harassment throughout *Flags in the Dust*, through Byron Snopes's obscene letters and stalking; the central plot of "There Was a Queen" revolves around the revelation that she subsequently gives herself sexually to a federal agent in order to retrieve those letters and protect her reputation, along with her young son's. Both

⁴⁶ Ibid, 72

⁴⁷ Hersey locates near-contemporary evidence of this practice in a fragment from the playwright Lyncaeus.

characters, in their different ways, have their bodies and their being sacrificed to traditional ideas of Southern femininity that do not protect or serve the women themselves, but serve to perpetuate white patriarchal structures.

Focusing on the description of Elnora as a caryatid, and drawing on the Vitruvian legend of the enslaved women of Caryae, John Matthews argues that “Faulkner could hardly have found a better word to convey the function of slaves and some women in plantation dynasties.” The oddness of the classical reference is, Matthews suggests, crucial: it readily becomes a term “in which a long history of bondage is secreted away, and whose very obscurity mimics the difficulty, especially for those who have profited from it, of reading slavery’s scandals”.⁴⁸ (We might conclude by this point that this is a standard device of Faulkner’s: to embed profound but suppressed social narratives and dilemmas in anomalous details that compel the reader to pause and consider them.) I would extend Matthews’s observation, however, to suggest that still more is going on here. It is not simply Elnora, but rather Elnora *and* Narcissa who are described as caryatids together. The shared description connects ideas of sacrificial virginhood and sexual subjection arising out of warfare, and helps underscore how Southern discourses on female vulnerability and chastity became intensified as a direct result of the Civil War.

As my earlier comparison of word occurrence in *Sanctuary*, *Light in August*, and *Absalom, Absalom!* made clear, the repeated use of the words “door” and “room” in the earlier novels frames space as confining and enclosed. It emphasizes thresholds and boundaries, and the constant attempts to transgress those thresholds in Faulkner’s work in many instances serves to align the house with the sexualized female body. (The forced intrusion on female spaces and bodies is in stark contrast to the boundaries of racial space and contact, which are far more rigorously and obediently observed.) Both Temple Drake and Joanna Burden experience sexual violation that is spatially charged, and Narcissa Benbow’s experiences mark the earliest point in Yoknapatawpha of this gendered spatial violence. Byron Snopes’s escalating harassments intrude on her personal space not only through the obscene letters she stores in her bedroom, or in his voyeuristic watching through her window, but ultimately in his actual violation of her private space when he enters her bedroom in

⁴⁸ John T. Matthews, *William Faulkner: Seeing Through the South* (Chicester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 17

her absence to recover those letters. Byron's actions constitute, as Kathryn Lee Seidel puts it, "a rape that never physically occurs":

Byron uses a long pole to climb onto the balcony, slashes the screen door with his knife, enters Narcissa's room, lies down on her bed, and writhes and moans as if he were raping her. He then removes the letters from her drawer and buries his face in her underclothes.⁴⁹

Seidel argues that there is a distinct "class" element to the scene, given Byron's poor white roots; yet the moment essentially repeats the imagery used in the description of young Bayard's effect upon Narcissa during what passes for their courtship. Bayard's advances are described as "like a trampling of heavy feet in those cool corridors of hers", his approach to her "doubling the sense of violation by the act of repulsing him and by the necessity for it". In a final, brutally military metaphor, the reader is told that "despite her armed sentinels, he still crashed with that hot violence of his through the bastions and thundered at the very inmost citadels of her being." (*FD*, 661-662)

The military tenor of this language recalls the psychological effect of invasion during the Civil War on white Southern women. Left largely unprotected on the home front, many women experienced violence against their property when Union troops arrived, particularly through house invasion, an act designed to degrade the inhabitants by contravening social codes of property and private ownership. Because such invasions were experienced only at a distance by the mostly absent male owners, but were experienced immediately by the female members of their families, such invasions were highly gendered – especially in contrast to the burning of mansions, which was more broadly symbolic. As Megan Kate Nelson notes,

[r]ifling through people's belongings and destroying their possessions, all while entering their homes without permission or invitation, were violent and gendered acts of power,

⁴⁹ Kathryn Lee Seidel, *The Southern Belle in the American Novel* (Gainesville: University Presses of Florida, 1985), 101

communicating to inhabitants that they no longer had control over their private spaces.⁵⁰

The violation of their homes – their thresholds – was experienced by Southern women as a violation of their selves, and at times became literally conflated into acts of rape committed by Union troops. “Southern white women felt the threat of sexual violence most when soldiers invaded their private spaces to search for contraband or to plunder,” Crystal Feimster notes; or as Nelson puts it more starkly, “rape was not only a metaphor for home invasion in Southern accounts; it was a realistic component of them.”⁵¹

It was understandable, then, that many Southern women should lose faith in the “codes” of the males who had failed to protect them – whose wartime absence had not simply left them vulnerable, but had actively brought violence to their unprotected thresholds. The result of this destabilization of gender roles was twofold. At one extreme, (elite) Southern women became more liberated and independent, better able to move beyond the confines of the mansion and into public service (particularly through memorialization and Lost Cause organizations). At the other extreme, many felt a sense of physical vulnerability, which became intensified by and projected onto newly freed black males. In considerable part, this situation arose as a result of white male manipulation of such fears, in order to generate a rape hysteria that would socially restrict both white women and Southern blacks, and thereby restore the destabilized status quo (a theme I treat in greater depth in Chapter 2). As Feimster concludes, “postbellum rape hysteria cannot be fully understood without a serious consideration of the sexual vulnerability and violation that women have experienced in all wars, and which the Civil War in particular marked for Southern women.”⁵²

⁵⁰ Megan Kate Nelson, *Ruin Nation: Destruction and the American Civil War* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2012), 75

⁵¹ Crystal Nicole Feimster, *Southern Horrors: Women and the Politics of Rape and Lynching* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009), 23; Nelson, *Ruin Nation*, 79

⁵² Feimster, *Southern Horrors*, 27. Although as Feimster notes, many elite women took advantage of this widespread cultural hysteria, and used it in the cause of women’s rights; perhaps most effective was Rebecca Latimer Felton of Georgia, who was elected the first female U.S. Senator on the basis of her staunch advocacy of lynching as a means of protecting white womanhood.

This dual situation is present in how Judith, Clytie, and Rosa experience and respond to the Civil War. During the conflict, all three live together, sharing space and resources for company and for material survival, and also potentially for protection from the returning embittered troops, who Rosa describes as

transformed [...] into the likeness of that man who abuses from very despair and pity the beloved wife or mistress who in his absence has been raped. We were afraid. We fed them; we gave them what and all we had and we would have assumed their wounds and left them whole again if we could. But we were afraid of them. (AA, 130)

(At the same time, it is also worth stressing that the house itself is never subject to invasion, looting, or other violence by the Union army: Rosa describes it as “marked by no bullet nor soldier’s iron heel but rather [...] reserved for something more: some desolation more profound than ruin” [112].) The women are established as caryatid-like, in Rosa’s conception: as sacrificial, offering themselves up for the very men who would abuse them. They engage actively with the care of these men; even before Rosa comes, Judith tends to them alongside the other women of Yoknapatawpha, in an improvised hospital in Jefferson where (according to Mr. Compson’s account) “they cleaned and dressed the self-fouled bodies of strange injured and dead and made lint of the window curtains and sheets and linens of the houses in which they had been born[.]” (104) However, the motives for Judith and for Rosa here are evidently different, given their subsequent actions. While Rosa’s care for the returning soldiers is presumably tied up with the Confederate cause, given her subsequent role as Lost Cause poetess (8), Judith does not subsequently commit herself in any way to Confederate memorialization after the war. We might read her actions at the hospitals as arising more simply out of compassion – and we might arrive at this conclusion by considering her response to the devastation and violence of both war and family affairs.

Aunt Judith: Forming Judith and Clytie's Hundred

It has been common to read Judith as existing in a state of mourning for her fiancé Charles Bon, and as guardian of the memories of her male relations. As Diane Roberts notes, in many superficial respects she fulfills the stereotype of the "Confederate Woman":

the distant belle before the war; the stoic, enduring woman during it; the patient 'bride-widow of a lost cause' after it. She is a dutiful daughter, faithful sister, forgiving lover, surrogate mother, and nurse, living and dying on the father's land: a tribute to the plantation patriarchy.⁵³

She is figured as so passive "that she almost seems a statue, the preferred form for the Confederate Woman's body."⁵⁴ This is certainly how the narrators actively present her, but this is not necessarily how the novel constructs her. "Despite the narrators' repeated attempts to define Judith as a spinster, the term never seems to fit a woman as self-possessed, as independent, as intimidating as Judith", Jaime Harker argues (though as I will suggest, Judith *is* spinster – but with a very specific consequence to that suggested here).⁵⁵ The details of her character do not bear out this apparent passive characterization. She watches with "cold and attentive interest" as a child while the slaves wrestle one another and her father, and while her brother Henry vomits in shock (99); she urges her father's coachman to drive the horses at full gallop all the way to church (20); she fights with Clytie, and sometimes with Henry too (116). In the narrators' accounts, she shifts from this strength of character (she is said to physically and temperamentally resemble her father [100-101]) to an "empty vessel" into which others might pour their "illusions": as a "woman vessel" through which Bon might consummate his love with Henry (89), a projective space for "all the abortive

⁵³ Diane Roberts, *Faulkner and Southern Womanhood* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1994), 25

⁵⁴ *Ibid*, 26

⁵⁵ Jaime Harker, "'And You Too, Sister, Sister?': Lesbian Sexuality, *Absalom, Absalom!*, and the Reconstruction of the Southern Family", in *Faulkner's Sexualities: Faulkner and Yoknapatawpha, 2007*, ed. Annette Trefzer & Ann J. Abadie (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2010), 45

dreams and delusions” of Rosa’s “own doomed and frustrated youth.” (59) But as Noel Polk notes, “none of the narrators seem at all interested in Judith’s feelings in the matters of her own heart”; and as a result, one can’t help feeling, in Mr. Compson’s phrase, that “something is missing” – that it just “does not explain” (83).⁵⁶

Even readings that have recognized Judith’s core compassion have nonetheless framed it fatalistically. Cleanth Brooks, for example, calls her “one of Faulkner’s finest characters of endurance [...] doomed by misfortunes not of her making, but she is not warped and twisted by them. Her humanity survives them.”⁵⁷ It is my contention, however, that Judith does not react passively to the Civil War, but rather resistantly. Building outward from the community of women she, Clytie, and Rosa momentarily form during the war (albeit reliant on help from the equally marginalized poor white Wash Jones [129]), Judith and Clytie construct a tentative alternative model of plantation society. Neither of them marry or reproduce, and their enduring “spinsterhood” is crucial. Judith’s analogy of the loom lets us take this idea in two separate yet similar directions: as an effort at a meaningful existence, within a fatalistic life; or as an effort at a coherent domestic experience, within the ruins of patriarchal designs. Warwick Wadlington argues that the novel’s formal aesthetic “memorably expresses that impulse to creative elaboration at the cultural loom by making the major represented action one of collaborative embellishment, revision, and reweaving.”⁵⁸ In a more literal sense, and drawing on my discussion of Vlach’s and Upton’s readings of rival geographies on the plantation, I want to suggest that this is precisely what Judith and Clytie together hope to achieve, in their maintenance of the Sutpen plantation after their father’s death. Their recuperation of estranged family connections reclaims a lineage on the “distaff”: a connection to a creolized plantation community (that of Haiti and the West Indies) descended through the female line of Eulalia Bon, which Sutpen rejects. The term “distaff” usefully draws together all three elements: the displacement of a tangential family lineage; the spinning of threads of

⁵⁶ Polk, “Testing Masculinity”, 45

⁵⁷ Cleanth Brooks, *William Faulkner: The Yoknapatawpha Country* [1963] (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1990), 319

⁵⁸ Warwick Wadlington, *Reading Faulknerian Tragedy* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1987), 188

narrative and destiny (a distaff is the symbol of the Fates); and the creative feminine power rooted in the practice of housekeeping.⁵⁹

The rejection of reproduction – in both structural and biological senses – is crucial to the goals of Judith and Clytie’s counter-design. It rejects the sexual valuation of women in Sutpen’s world in quite an explicit way: the three most prominent female characters in the novel – Judith, Clytie, and Rosa – are all apparently virgins when they die. (“Apparently he [Bon] paid Judith the dubious compliment of not even trying to ruin her,” Mr. Compson notes – something he finds surprising, given Bon’s louche reputation [82].) The refusals of these women render Sutpen’s design untenable, his plantation site – for all its fecund earth – curiously infertile. (It is perhaps telling that what rises out of the Sutpen plantation’s earth is not, primarily, cotton: in the first instance, it is Sutpen’s mansion, the symbol of the meta-plantation, that is born out of the soil.)

It is in consequence of this rejection of normative female reproductive and sexual roles, however, that Judith and Clytie in particular acquire a considerable transgressive and disruptive power within the text, which destabilizes the plantation’s meta-narrative, and which the textual narrative struggles to negotiate and contain. As Deborah Clarke notes, because “literal mothers are curiously absent” from the novel, then “[m]aternal power is eerily transformed into a far more pervasive force, reaching beyond mothers and, for the first time in Faulkner’s work, beyond white women as well.”⁶⁰ Faulkner called *Absalom, Absalom!* a book about a man “who wanted a son” but “got too many”, and those sons subsequently “destroyed one another and then him.”⁶¹ Warwick Wadlington has suggested, however, that on the contrary Sutpen’s design perhaps suffers most on account of his daughters. Even in a traditional sense, daughters always threaten the coherence of a father’s dominance: through marriage and reproduction, they open the closed boundaries of the patriarchal design to

⁵⁹ For a more general discussion of “distaff” in these terms, not specifically linked to Faulkner and *Absalom, Absalom!*, see Ann Romines, *The Home Plot: Women, Writing, and Domestic Ritual* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1992), 5.

⁶⁰ Deborah Clarke, *Robbing the Mother: Women in Faulkner* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1994), 126

⁶¹ Frederick Gwynn & Joseph Blotner, ed. *Faulkner in the University* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1959), 35

transformation by outside elements.⁶² And this sense actually becomes intensified rather than lessened by the fact that the daughters do not reproduce in a biological sense: they deny Sutpen his claim to a dynastic design beyond the spurned Bons, and thus to a legacy that will last.

Judith and Clytie, as mistresses of the plantation after Sutpen's death, reverse his ruthless and highly normative design, by embracing feminine community and by recuperating the familial and racial links Sutpen has attempted to deny. In the former case here, Jaime Harker suggests that this transforms Sutpen's Hundred into "Judith's Hundred, a queer contact zone, one both within and outside of Southern patriarchal structures."⁶³ Its alternative community structure is particularly valuable because it avoids the ways by which sexuality enforces hierarchy, oppresses individualism through "rape, abandonment, exploitation, commodification", and "perverts sexual expression". Such a queer contact zone would also break down what Rosa calls "*the eggshell shibboleth of color and caste*" (AA, 115).⁶⁴ But irrespective of the possibility of any degree of homosexual connection between Judith or Clytie or Rosa, this queering in the broad sense nonetheless attempts to generate an equalized sense of community in which racial hierarchy is negated. (This parity is raised in the image of sleeping space Judith and Clytie share in childhood. As Diane Roberts notes, just as during childhood Clytie "sleeps sometimes in Judith's bed and sometimes with Judith on the floor pallet", so too in adult life she "oscillates from high to low, white to black."⁶⁵)

Clytie's black identity complicates and extends the possibilities of their alternative community beyond questions of gender and sexual reproduction, into parallel questions of race and social reproduction. The relationship between Clytie and

⁶² Wadlington, *Reading Faulknerian Tragedy*, 179-181

⁶³ Harker, "And You Too, Sister, Sister?", 41. Harker also suggests that, in addition to offering a domestic and social organization counter to Sutpen's, a Judith-Clytie relationship "provides a nontragic alternative to the homosexual panic that invades the Bon/Henry, Quentin/Shreve dyads." (42) Harker's reading of Rosa's lesbian impulses seem to me less convincing, however; for one thing, because Rosa explicit says, referring to the time all three women lived together in the mansion, that "*sex was some forgotten atrophy*" (AA, 128).

⁶⁴ Ibid, 45

⁶⁵ Roberts, *Faulkner and Southern Womanhood*, 89; see AA, 116. Thadious Davis makes a similar point in *Faulkner's Negro: Art and the Southern Context* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1983), although her suggest that the relationship between Clytie and Judith is "self-contained" (202) threatens to turn it a space of exclusivity which it by no means need be.

Judith, Thadious Davis has argued, offers “a model of sibling cooperation and harmony in the novel, and by extension it suggests the possibility of a different order of social interaction between races in the South.”⁶⁶ And indeed, what the plantation becomes might equally be termed “Clytie’s Hundred”: after all, it is just as likely she as Judith who makes the crucial step to extend their resistance of Sutpen’s design into the reclaiming of the family links that Sutpen denied.

The details of their alternative community come in Chapter VI (as Quentin relays his father’s accounts to Shreve). Judith writes to Bon’s “octoroon” wife in 1870, and that summer she visits Bon’s grave, with Bon’s eleven-year-old son, Charles Etienne de Saint Valery Bon (160). Judith attends to them (according to Mr. Compson’s account, which he heard from his father) with a “face like a mask or like marble” (161); it is impossible to know her thoughts, her feelings. Later, in December of 1871, Clytie travels to New Orleans to take charge of Charles, after the death of his mother – although it is never known whether it was Clytie or Judith who maintained communication, or who made the decision to bring Charles Etienne back to Sutpen’s Hundred (162).

It is impossible to know if either sister is aware that Bon is Sutpen’s son; Quentin’s suggestion that Judith asked Charles Etienne to call her “Aunt Judith” might be read either as affirmation or denial (173). On the one hand, it might be out of duty to a man Judith loved; on the other, it might be out of care for an orphan nephew, and also out of an attempt to resist – or even to atone for – the ruthless design of their father. This latter option strikes me as particularly attractive, and there is sufficient textual basis for such a reading. It becomes truly Judith’s (and Clytie’s) Hundred, a queer contact zone amid a larger sense of recuperated margins.

Initially, Charles Etienne’s obsession with his racial identity threatens to destroy this fragile alternative community, just as his father’s identity crucially destabilized Sutpen’s design. His insistence on the social acceptance of his partial blackness (in an inverse echo of Joe Christmas’s actions in *Light in August*) proves volatile. He embroils himself in a knife-fight at a black dance, and is compelled to leave Yoknapatawpha (168-169); during the year of his absence, before his return, he continues viciously brawling with both black and white men, both of whom misread his ancestry:

⁶⁶ Davis, *Faulkner’s Negro*, 201

the negro stevedores and deckhands on steamboats or in city honky-tonks who thought he was a white man and believed it only the more strongly when he denied it; the white men who, when he said he was a negro, believed that he lied in order to save his skin, or worse: from sheer besotment of sexual perversion. (171)

A year later, Charles returns with severe bruising and a wife described by Mr. Compson as “coal black and ape-like” (170). Marriage, it appears, transforms him. He comes to terms with his black heritage by rooting himself in domestic structures and in the land. He lives in “one of the dilapidated slave cabins which he rebuilt after renting his parcel of land from Judith” (170); he farms “on shares a portion of the Sutpen plantation, farmed it pretty well, with solitary and steady husbandry within his physical limitations” (173). A son is born there, who will later be known as Jim Bond. He becomes, after much struggle, restored to the community of family; his resistance breaks down, and he is finally persuaded to call Judith not “Miss Sutpen” but “Aunt Judith” (172-173).⁶⁷

Weaving/Unraveling: Judith’s Ill-Fated Resistance

If we read this naming as a recognition of familial relation, then it marks a rare moment of fulfillment and connection in the history of the Sutpen family, and in the text too. We move from Sutpen’s Hundred to Judith’s (and Clytie’s) Hundred: from a model of mastery and exclusion to one of recuperation, of community. Yet the novel refuses to structure the transformation in this way. Judith and Clytie’s attempted community is articulated in Chapter VI; their father’s design, though temporally

⁶⁷ There is a sense in which we might consider this term tinged by racial passing on Judith’s part too. John Duvall persuasively argues that Quentin objects to Shreve’s casual reference to Rosa as “Aunt Rosa” because of the racial connotations so often carried by the honorific terms “Aunt” and “Uncle” in the South of Faulkner’s day. See *Race and White Identity in Southern Fiction: From Faulkner to Morrison* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 50-51. Although Duvall perhaps overstates the racial significance of this term (there is no real sense in which Uncle Buck or Uncle Buddy in *Go Down, Moses* may be said to “pass”, for example) the point is certainly worth considering here, given the racial politics underlying the community Judith and Clytie create.

preceding it, is not articulated until the chapter which follows. The novel's narrative construction, in reaching back toward root moments in its search for "truth", obscures and denies the other moments and layers of the past in between. This is the case because of the arbitrary way in which Faulkner dismantles this alternative community: through Jim Bond's mental backwardness, and through Judith and Charles Etienne's sudden deaths by yellow fever in 1884 (a cruelly symbolic death, given the latter's skin tone). Their world is (literally) ill-fated because it is self-contained: it relies, as a community, on the integrity of its own members, not only for physical continuity, but for narrative recognition too.

In consequence, it is all lost. It is lost to the insurmountable struggles of poverty Judith is never able to overcome, and to the dissipation of narratorial disinterest and authorial structuring. It is also lost to the untimely accident of yellow fever, that resolves the potential transgressiveness of Judith in that most conservative of literary means: in premature death. And most of all, what Judith and Clytie attempt is lost because of the incomprehension of those who narrate their lives – by Miss Rosa, at the time; by Mr Compson, in later years; by Quentin and Shreve, in their detachment, and their pursuit of a central truth rather than of pluralized truths. They refuse to let her escape the template of the Southern belle – in much the same way that *The Unvanquished* ultimately moves to constrain the transgressive individuality of Bayard's cousin, Drusilla Hawk. Drusilla's response to the death of her fiancé (*U*, 379) and the destruction of her environment is liberatory. "Who wants to sleep now, with so much happening, so much to see?" she asks, in a remarkable impassioned speech that in many ways recalls Judith's speech on the "loom" in *Absalom, Absalom!*. Drusilla sees in the war the potential to break the dull cycles of antebellum planter life – its tired marriages that replicate the generation before; its preplanned female life of marriage and birthing with little else. "Stupid, you see," she says. But once the plantations have been dispersed of slaves, their property looted and houses burnt, she is freed from "getting children on [her] body". "Thank God for nothing," she concludes, embracing the liberating newness of ruin (387). Yet in the final story of *The Unvanquished*, with the war long over and the antebellum world has become imaginatively and nostalgically restored, Drusilla becomes transformed into a stereotypical Southern

belle, who demands that Bayard, too, replicate those old plantation structures, by violently avenging his father's death.

Judith, like Drusilla, is constrained in the end because the narrative confines her to the mansion. She remains a textually and expressive "prisoner" (AA, 115) of the house which, in Rosa's mind, comes to "speak" through her (117). Having projected her desire into the earlier part of Judith's life, Rosa can only see in Judith's later years the relics and ruins of Sutpen's design. She can only see Judith attached to *his* mansion. (This is because, as Richard Godden quite rightly notes, Rosa has never sought to "bring down the mansion of Patriarchy (self, phallus, and signifier)", but rather has aspired "to live in a planter's house."⁶⁸) She cannot fathom what Judith and Clytie might be attempting – morally, socially, or symbolically – in bringing Charles Bon's son to Sutpen's Hundred. And so, in the end, it is all lost: all erased beneath the headstone which Rosa has erected over Judith's grave. The inscription she "decreed" reads: "*Suffered the Indignities and Travails of this World for 42 Years, 4 Months, 9 Days, and went to Rest at Last February 12, 1884. Pause, Mortal; Remember Vanity and Folly and Beware*" (174). Judith's death, nursing Charles Etienne through yellow fever, is one last tragic – rather than compassionate or recuperative – moment, in a life which, in the cruelly blinkered view of others, is characterized by tragedy alone. Molded by the narrative visions of others, and denied the fullness of her own self-expression, her character remains indistinct to the last, lifted only by brief moments of clarity, like the raindrops picking out the letters of her name, and dates, and legend, on the faded inscription of her headstone (174).

In many ways, Judith's struggles (to a greater extent even than Clytie's) emblemize the power of narrative perspective to submerge crucial details within subjective designs, and similarly to transform potentially "major" characters into "minor" ones (in the terminology of Alex Woloch, who defines this interaction of different magnitudes of characters as "competition").⁶⁹ There is enough personal substance to Judith for *Absalom, Absalom!* to potentially have been *her* story. But

⁶⁸ Godden, *Fictions of Labor*, 92. As Godden concedes this "scenario is at considerable odds with current critical response to Rosa Coldfield [...] as a heroine designed by French cultural and feminist theory." (91)

⁶⁹ Woloch, *The One vs. the Many*, esp. 29-37

because there is not enough *narrative* substance allotted to Judith – because she is placed distantly, on the margins – she is thus relegated from “major” to “minor”. This aspect of the novel’s power dynamics would come to interest Faulkner particularly in *Go Down, Moses*, where the majority of the female characters – as with Eulalia Bon in *Absalom, Absalom!* – are primarily defined by their narrative absence rather than marginality; this recognition thus allowed Faulkner to pose the important question of whether silence is more effective than marginal speech.

Judith cannot quite dismantle the loom (as I argue in Chapter 3, Linda Snopes in contrast proves more effective). The best she can offer is to confront her father’s dominant “strategies” (to apply De Certeau’s vocabulary) with her own resistant “tactics”: from stripping the mansion’s rich linens down to bandages, to offering up a portion of its land to Sutpen’s denied grandson Charles Etienne, whom she openly recognizes as her nephew. All the while, she struggles with her productive actions in conflict with the fatalism of her beliefs; she struggles between the views that “it cant matter”, or else life would have more meaningful shape, “and yet it must matter because you keep on trying or having to keep on trying”. Judith is acutely aware of the mortality of being. She realizes that all that will be left are small traces – the names scratched into headstones, the letters scrawled on scraps of paper. And yet, for her, that “something” is perhaps enough: the effort, the shaping or creation, of “something, something that might make a mark on something that *was* once for the reason that it can die someday” (105).

What Judith leaves within the novel – and which is indelible, despite the narrators’ designs – is a trace, as clearly defined and meaningful as a personalized footpath crossing the land counter to its plotted landscaped design. Her model of looming, though it is framed as struggle, nonetheless also points out what happens within weaving, which is not simply the spinning of yarns or the unspooling of threads. The weave, the material, is made by the intersection and overcrossing of those threads, those yarns, by the meshing of their warp and weft into a network, from which a fabric, by accumulation, takes its form. This is also, structurally speaking, how a text – especially one as layered and complex as *Absalom, Absalom!* – is formed. “Text,” as J. Hillis Miller points out, “comes from *texere*, to weave. Writing lays fabric in a hymenal stitching, joining or breaking, transgressing a line or frontier, tracing on the

woven pattern another pattern, coarse or fine.”⁷⁰ For Miller, writing is “a form of dividing, sieving, sifting, or discrimination” – but a text, a book, “is made of ‘gatherings’ or ‘folds’ bringing the divided back together”, thereby recuperating the connections that have been, hitherto, silenced and repressed. (In my own schema I would redefine his terms a little: what Miller defines as “writing” I see instead as “plotting”, and the assembly of textual possibility which he discusses as a “book” I would argue is actually better suited to the non-contained process of pluralized “readings”, rather than to the constrained and ordered volume that Miller here suggests.)

.V.

Resolving/Dissolving: Narrative Resistance and Autoeradiction

Ringo’s Sketchbook

In *The Unvanquished*, Union troops punitively burn the mansions of the Sartoris family, their neighbors, and their cousins the Hawks. In his narration, Bayard notes “the same mound of ashes, the same four chimneys standing gaunt and blackened in the sun like the chimneys at home.” (*U*, 377) The destruction is total, yet it is also left undepicted. As the Sartoris house is set alight, and the family takes flight from it, the word “fire” is never used, the image of flames never depicted. The house is, instead, both consumed by, and transformed into, smoke: “yellow and slow and turning coppercolored in the sunset like dust; it was like dust from a road above the feet that made it and then went on, boiling up slow and hanging and waiting to die away.” (370) The mansions are turned to ash and dust: atomized back to the raw material from which they were formed.

The Sartoris mansion is not ruined by the war: it is erased by it. It is destroyed in the closing moments of the novel’s second story, “Retreat”. Later, midway through the novel’s fourth story, “Riposte in Tertio”, Faulkner returns the reader to its site through an indirect description of Ringo making a drawing. Bayard and Ringo note a glint of metal in the distance, indicating that Union troops are approaching the plantation; “but this time Ringo didn’t even move, [...] just quit drawing and looked up

⁷⁰ J. Hillis Miller, *Ariadne’s Thread: Story Lines* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1992), 8

from the paper” (414). The approaching soldiers interrupt his drawing *in medias res*, and displace it to the margins of the scene – a situation Faulkner accomplishes with a deftness that is almost imperceptible. The contents of Ringo’s drawing are never narratively described by Bayard; instead, they are slowly revealed through Ringo’s mildly belligerent conversation with a Union lieutenant. In response to the officer’s inquiry, Ringo tells him his picture is of a house; and from the officer’s reaction, it is clear that Ringo has been drawing (somewhat crudely, it seems) the old Sartoris mansion – with its walls and roof, columns and portico, restored intact:

He looked at Ringo’s picture. Then he looked up the grove to where the chimneys rose out of the pile of rubble and ashes. Grass and weeds had come up out of the ashes now and unless you knew better, all you saw was the four chimneys. [...] “Oh,” the officer said. “I see you. You’re drawing it like it used to be.”

“Co-rect,” Ringo said. “What I wanter draw hit like hit is now for? I can walk down here ten times a day and look at hit like hit is now.” (415)

“Unless you knew better”: the hint of moral valuation and nostalgia encoded in the word “better” helps reveal the complexity of Ringo’s performance here. On one level, he is a manifestation of a stock character from plantation literature: the former slave who obliquely “pleads the cause of his former master” by longing for the restoration of an idyllic antebellum order.⁷¹ He recalls Sam in Thomas Nelson Page’s famous story “Marse Chan”, who infamously remarks: “Dem wuz good ole times, marster – de bes’ Sam ever see!”⁷² Ringo is hostile to his ostensible liberators, the Union army, and protective of the family who, though raising him to servitude, also raised him in privileged security. Bayard later reflects that Ringo possessed “outrageous assurance gained from too long and too close association with white

⁷¹ Lucinda Hardwick MacKethan, *The Dream of Arcady: Place and Time in Southern Literature* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1980), 11-12

⁷² Thomas Nelson Page, *In Ole Virginia, or, Marse Chan and Other Stories* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1895), 10

people” (467) Throughout the novel, the two children are often conflated – leading Bayard to reflect at one early point that “maybe he wasn’t a nigger anymore or maybe I wasn’t a white boy anymore” (323), and a Union colonel to speak in passing of Granny’s “two grandsons” (341) (Ringo has been raised to call Bayard’s grandmother “Granny”). And so on another level, Ringo is also effectively divested of racial identity: he is simply a child using the act of drawing to resist the traumatic destruction of his home.

“Ruin pleasure must be at one remove, softened by art,” Rose Macaulay has written. “Ruin must be a fantasy, veiled by the mind’s dark imaginings.”⁷³ The ruined object must cease, in other words, to be ruined: it must become imaginatively reinvested, recreated, resurrected. On a more abstracted level, Ringo’s drawing also serves to make a point about the relationship between art and absence, one which deepens the resonances of the image of a “living map” with which the novel opened. Ringo has learned to draw as a result of pragmatics: somebody needed to draw a map of the surrounding area, so that Granny could keep track of their fraudulent mule-trading with the Union army (acquiring contraband mules through forged requisition notes and then selling them back to the same army). It falls to Ringo to draw the map – who, in Bayard’s account, “had learned to draw immediately by merely taking up the pen, who had no affinity for it and never denied he had not but learned to draw simply because somebody had to.” (404) As part of the same necessity, Ringo also learns to copy Colonel Dick’s handwriting, at which he excels to the point where Bayard reflects that he “dont believe that Dick himself could have told the different” (406).

Ringo’s act of drawing locates art as something at once reproductive and restorative, extending the life of the lost object it responds to and memorializes. Faulkner’s decision not to describe the drawing, but to instead articulate only the *act* of drawing and the absent mansion it refers to, is a significant one. Ringo’s action parallels his mocking conversation with the Union officer: his drawing enacts imaginative resistance, not simply to the realities of the present, but more abstractly to the overwhelming power of the social upheaval and devastation and loss that surrounds him. Within the stable, delimited borders of the sheet of paper, Ringo creates a Sartoris mansion no longer subject to the same violence suffered by its

⁷³ Rose Macaulay, *Pleasure of Ruins* [1953] (London: Thames & Hudson, 1984), 454

original. Though the paper itself may subsequently be lost, burnt, destroyed, it is the recuperative artistic action that is significant, and that creates the mansion anew in an intangible, and so untaintable, imaginative reality. Although the officer's reactions indicate that Ringo's illustration is clearly a crude one, it may yet be all the more resonant for that – eloquent, and resilient, in its generalized iconic state.

Between the two of them, Ringo and his uncle Loosh embody the range of ambivalence sure which must have been felt by many slaves who witnessed the destruction of the plantation South in physical rather than purely conceptual terms. As Megan Kate Nelson notes, “on the one hand, the ruination of their masters’ property must have given them a sense of grim satisfaction and retributive justice. On the other hand, they had helped to build those houses and had domesticated their own.”⁷⁴ There was sufficient ambivalence, in the complex emotional responses of slaves and ex-slaves like Ringo, to turn this rootedness in place into a restorative impulse. And in the nostalgic and white supremacist literature of Reconstruction and “Reunion”, this helped create an imaginative restoration of ruin, which “focused the memory of the war on the assault on the Southern home, with its innocent, strong white women and its loyal slaves standing on the piazza, defending their ‘inner sanctums’ and then rebuilding them together when they fall.”⁷⁵

The Burning of Sutpen's Hundred

A house, reduced to smoke and ash – and through this, resurrected in memory and imagination, its unstable materiality transmuted in the process into a more stable symbolism. Such destruction allows the house to become iconic, and thus less bound to a specific history. It creates a renewal and a simplification of its design – but this makes its resistance more difficult, without the existence of details to unpick that design. Daniel Spoth has described this effect, which I term “restorative violence”, as “a calculated autoeradication” of plantation structures, which allows the authors, and their proxy narrators and characters, “to rebuild those very structures”.⁷⁶ Spoth focuses particularly on how this process works in *Absalom, Absalom!*, and emphasizes

⁷⁴ Nelson, *Ruin Nation*, 101

⁷⁵ *Ibid*, 101-102

⁷⁶ Spoth, “The House that Time Built”, 124

the anthropomorphic qualities which the mansion accordingly acquires, its decay “into muscular, skeletal and intellectual decrepitude, senility, a kind of wasting disease of brick and mortar.”⁷⁷ There is a tension established, then, between the mansion’s physical state and its imaginative reproduction, which reveals precisely what is lost in this process of autoeradication.

Absalom, Absalom! foregrounds trace and loss in its dual accounts of the construction of Sutpen’s Hundred: its structural and narrative fluctuation, as I noted at the beginning of this chapter, between a house made of light (“*Be Sutpen’s Hundred*”) and out of sweat and soil (the labor of slaves, dragging it violently from the swamps). Like the fragmenting effect of prisms and shades in the Sartoris mansion, this creative act reveals the plurality of Sutpen’s Hundred. Although the mansion’s destruction permits it to become *narratively* pluralized, that destruction also prevents it from being pluralized in its physical actuality. This is in clear contrast to what is emphasized in the novel’s opening moment, however. The novel’s imagery of dust motes in light beams insists instead on the inseparability of imagination and reality; and later, Miss Rosa returns to this image to make the connection explicit, using the scent of wistaria carried by the dust motes to define remembrance as tangibly sensory: “*there is no such thing as memory: the brain recalls just what the muscles grope for*” (118). The same idea is present in the mansion’s reduction to smoke, to a fluid, almost intangible substance (as when Sutpen, in Mr. Compson’s telling, imagines his design “come down like it had been built out of smoke” [221]), which nonetheless has a physical substance. (We might draw parallels here to the ambiguous tangibility of the “living map” behind the “smokehouse” in the opening of *The Unvanquished*).

This tension finds a particularly poignant expression in the climactic burning of the mansion, enacting what Patricia Yaeger calls “double melancholia”, but which might equally be called double erasure:

First, he limns Sutpen’s Hundred’s emptiness – its role as a stage set or a façade giving us a figure of hollowness, flatness. But this decayed house is also flesh (it has a ‘smell of desolation and decay as if the wood of which it was built were flesh’).

⁷⁷ Ibid, 122

When it disappears, it is not just Ellen's shopping or Sutpen's dream that goes up in ash, but the generational labours of Afro-Haitians, still covered in mud, and their children. These are bodies Quentin Compson breathes in with the dust motes around him.⁷⁸

The climactic burning of the mansion is framed in the narrative as a moment of closure and destruction; in reality, it functions more as a moment of obfuscation and burial. Although the mansion may burn, its soil remains, like Haiti's, manured with the "black blood" of "oppression and exploitation"; its fecund earth offers forth rich crops tainted by the connection, "as if nature held a balance and kept a book and offered a recompense for the torn limbs and outraged hearts even if man did not" (207). History makes labor inseparable from the earth. Faulkner goes so far (via Quentin Compson) as to describe plantation agriculture as "the planting of men too: the yet intact bones and brains in which the old unsleeping blood that had vanished into the earth they trod still cried out for vengeance." (207) The torn limbs, the muscular groping, and the corpse-planted earth in the shadow of the mansion that is a "skeleton", all emphasize the plantation site as *physically* exploitative. Yet when it burns, as Yaeger notes, these bodily traces are dissipated, and the plantation's history is released to the winds.

It is particularly troubling, then, that it is Clytie who serves as the ultimate instrument of autoeradication. Her motives are never made entirely clear. It may be that she acts to protect Henry out of loyalty to her father's patriarchal design, or out of assertion of the inviolate nature of her own model of community. Alternatively, it might be that she acts to eradicate the last of Sutpen's design altogether – including herself, as a product of that design's integral sexual and racial exploitation. Thadious Davis has argued that Clytie's burning of the mansion "is a desperate attempt to preserve the house and the family from violation by outsiders because the Sutpens have earned that right."⁷⁹ Jana Evans Braziel, on the other hand, argues that this

⁷⁸ Yaeger, "Dematerializing Culture", 66. Yaeger quotes here from page 301, during the novel's last chapter, when Quentin's visual and imaginative sense of the house has – for the first time – been confronted with its sheer physical reality, as he finally enters it.

⁷⁹ Davis, *Faulkner's Negro*, 201

ending is liberating for Clytie, both as an individual and as a representative figure. Clytie frees herself not simply from the material confines of the house, but also from “the nefarious ‘designs’ of ‘new’ American worlds, those culturally constructed hierarchical racial relations grounded in power and in social, political inequities that define the plantation economy of the Americas, connecting Haiti to Mississippi[.]” It is an act, Braziel believes, that actually resists and “refuses the erasure of blackness within Sutpen’s hybridized genealogy.”⁸⁰

While this is certainly true of Clytie’s efforts, it is perhaps less true of their effects. If the burning of the mansion is liberating and preservative, the closure it creates also generates an erasure through autoeradication that permits rebuilding on privileged white terms. Moreover, it offers a means of narratively restoring Clytie to a non-transgressive role as black housekeeper, by aligning her with a specific cultural idea of Southern ruin. As guardian of the house (she is described by Rosa as being like Cerberus) she watches over their sacred ruins, and is thus strongly aligned not only to the passive figure of the Sartoris housekeeper Elnora, but also to the Compson housekeeper Dilsey. Dilsey’s very body is made inseparable from the fate of the Compson mansion: her skeleton “like a ruin or landmark above the somnolent and impervious guts” (*SF*, 1081), in relation to symbolic standing over “the fallen ruins of the family like a ruined chimney, gaunt, patient, and indomitable” (*ESPL*, 294).⁸¹

The specific image of a chimney or landmark is by no means incidental: the ruined chimneys of burnt plantation mansions, known as “Sherman’s Sentinels”, became one of “the central icons of the Lost Cause narrative”. They stand proud against the horizon in such narratives, like petrified pillars of smoke, or some last unbroken lance tilting at the sky. A considerable number of them haunt the landscape throughout *The Unvanquished*, including the Sartoris and Hawkhurst mansions (“the

⁸⁰ Jana Evans Braziel, “Antillean Detours Through the American South: Édouard Glissant’s and Jamaica Kincaid’s Textual Returns to William Faulkner”, in *Just Below South: Intercultural Performance in the Caribbean and the U.S. South*, ed. Jessica Adams, Michael P. Bibler, & Cécile Accilien (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2005), 250

⁸¹ Diane Roberts has extended this reading to discuss Dilsey’s specific function as Southern “mammy”. “The fat, milky mammy signified the plenty of the plantation – plenty for the whites who received the wealth, anyway,” Roberts argues. “Dilsey’s bony outside, her appearance as an impressive architectural ruin, signifies the Compson house (and the House of Compson): reduced, once grand, undernourished, and dying.” (*Faulkner and Southern Womanhood*, 61)

same four chimneys standing gaunt and blackened in the sun like the chimneys at home" [377]).⁸² Does Clytie preserve Sutpen's design, by her act of destruction – becoming solely, and exclusively, the keeper of his house? Or does she only succeed in destroying the details of her resistance, the traces of slaveholding which that design aimed to repress? These questions are troubling, and only become more so when we reflect on how the narrative structure of the novel may be complicit in this "restorative violence" of erasure.

Ink Marks and Grave Markers: Writing and Self-Erasure

The mansion, already ruined at the narrative's beginning, and already burnt at the midway point of Chapter VI, when Quentin and Shreve's dual narration begins, is slowly erased throughout the novel as tangible and personalized site. Even when it is encountered, it is as a shell: stripped of its ornate furnishings (some during the war; some during its subsequent impoverished decline), it contains no "chandelier of crystal prisms and shades" (*FD*, 547) like the Sartoris mansion, no prismatic means of slowing and spreading its narrative through recoverable connections. In the end, its specificity is erased, and it is this erasure which finally comes to characterize the novel's flawed narrative reconstructions. "The long trajectory of building and destruction will then be complete," Marilyn Chandler argues:

an idea bodied forth in house and formal gardens and sprawling plantation, passed from hand to hand, sold piecemeal, diminished, and finally burned, becomes a story to be written and sold for money, [Rosa] suggests, that might serve to furnish Quentin's own house someday.⁸³

Chandler's reference here is to Rosa's remark that the story she tells Quentin may later be of literary use, affording Quentin an opportunity when "perhaps your wife will want a new gown or a new chair for the house and you can write and submit it to the

⁸² Nelson, *Ruin Nation*, 101

⁸³ Chandler, *Dwelling in the Text*, 248

magazines.” (AA, 7) It is, as a result, another kind of reproduction – and one that transforms the mansion into literary currency.

Rosa’s comment highlights not only *Absalom, Absalom!*’s intense preoccupation with the process of storytelling and historical construction; but also reveals how such narrative processes create containment that may be equated to, and to a degree is dependent upon, the violent closure of destruction and erasure. To agree with Chandler’s position here, is to be led to the logical conclusion that the conventions of literary narrative create a certain displacement and erasure of physical source material – a process that is greatly facilitated by physical ruin, which transmutes specific structures into symbolic, generalized ones. What this amounts to, in short, is a recognition that the very form of *Absalom, Absalom!* creates a closure that its surface aesthetic would seem to refute. The novel recuperates connections and generates narrative and social possibilities in its telling – but its ending and its linear order serves to reinforce the importance of “plotting” rather than “reading”. As Quentin and Shreve and Mr. Compson and Rosa each talk through the histories of the Sutpen and Bon families, they make selections; they sift, reject, revise their view of what “happened” through the exclusion of other possibilities that thereby could *not* have “happened”. They continually reassert a design rooted, ultimately, in the structures of the meta-plantation and the normative patriarchal politics of the plantation site. *Absalom, Absalom!*’s presentation of a more equalized expressive and interpretative “openness” proves as flawed as Judith and Clytie’s: it leads, in the end, only toward restoration of a linearly contained and plotted design.

This is a narrative dilemma that would continue to trouble Faulkner, and led to his later formal experimentation – to the visible fragmentation of *Go Down, Moses*, in both narrative and socio-spatial senses; and to the less immediately visible layered pluralities of his later Yoknapatawpha works, works which appear stable and conservative but which are, I will continue to suggest, radically “open” beyond their surface aesthetics. This dilemma is present at the beginnings of Yoknapatawpha in *Flags in the Dust*, where the memorial effort to record and retain is also figured as a process of erasure. This process of erasure is expressed not only in the novel’s treatment of objects and material surfaces, but is also presented in a more literal sense, too, in the histories recorded in the Sartoris family bible.

This family record, kept locked in the attic, has a similar effect to objects and details elsewhere in the novel. As I have discussed, the novel's connections reach back to places like the Carolinas and Barbados, but do not articulate the root causes of slavery, colonialism, and exploitation that might be found there. And in the fading ink of the family bible, listing the lineage of the Sartorises, the erasure of these connections becomes literally and visibly – or rather, invisibly – expressed:

Beginning near the bottom of the final blank page, a column of names and dates rose in stark, fading simplicity, growing fainter and fainter where time had lain upon them. At the top they were still legible, as they were at the foot of the preceding page. But halfway up this page they ceased, and from there on the sheet was blank save for the faint soft mottlings of time and an occasional brownish penstroke, significant but without meaning. (*FD*, 615)

In contrast to the McCaslin family ledgers – which Faulkner would use so crucially to reveal the trauma and abuses of slavery and miscegenation in *Go Down, Moses* – the Sartoris family records, with self-preserving discretion, erase themselves, foreshadowing the autoeradication of *Absalom, Absalom!*. It is an act of preservative erasure, of restorative violence in which a narratively selected past, made present, obliterates the traces of its “actual” history. And indeed, the novel itself ends on precisely such a moment of selection and restoration: on a domestic tableau of Miss Jenny, Narcissa, and her infant son Benbow. The conclusion of the final sentence reads: “beyond the window evening was a windless lilac dream, foster-dam of quietude and peace.” (875)

This narrative erasure, which so naturally twins with the consideration of mortality, finds echo in one of *Absalom, Absalom!*'s most striking (and perhaps also critically neglected) moments – a moment that Faulkner deftly anticipates and sets up during Judith's discussion of the loom, when she reflects that “all of a sudden it's all over and all you have left is a black of stone with scratches on it” (*AA*, 105). Near the beginning of Quentin and Shreve's night of storytelling, which constitutes the second

half of the novel (Chapters VI-IX), Quentin recalls a quail hunt, during which he and his father sheltered in the rain beside the Sutpen family cemetery. Their approach to the Sutpen estate is indirect; with his “head lowered against the drizzle” Quentin was “not aware yet of just where they were”

until he looked up the slope before them where the wet yellow sedge died upward into the rain like melting gold and saw the grove, the clump of cedars on the crest of the hill dissolving into the rain as if the trees had been drawn in ink on a wet blotter – the cedars beyond which, beyond the ruined fields beyond which, would be the oak grove and the gray huge rotting deserted house half a mile away. (155)

There is so much to apprehend here – the trees, sketched but dissolving; the yellow sedge melting around them; the house looming in physical scale but invisible in physical presence – yet also so much distance between the imaginative geographies we know, and the physical ones we now fleetingly encounter. Sheltering beneath the cedars, Quentin looks over the grave-markers of Sutpen and Ellen (156), of Bon and his son (158), and of Judith (174). The lush description continues, focusing in, from the landscape, the trees, down onto the headstones themselves:

It was dark among the cedars, the light more dark than gray even, the quiet rain, the faint pearly globules, materializing on the gun barrels and the five headstones like drops of not-quite-congealing meltings from cold candles on the marble: the two flat heavy vaulted slabs, the other three headstones leaning a little awry, with here and there a carved letter or even an entire word momentary and legible in the faint light which the raindrops brought particle by particle into the gloom and released[.] (156)

This is an astoundingly vivid image – one which also encapsulates the profound hope and failure, and the immense reproductive strain, of Faulkner’s work itself. Though John Matthews suggests that the scene offers “an invitation to an initiation”, wherein Mr. Compson teaches Quentin the power of narrative “to reanimate that meaningless past with love and imagination,” it also – and more profoundly, I would argue – emphasizes the ultimate power of erasure.⁸⁴ All is impermanence, as Judith reflects: “and it rains on it and the sun shines on it and after a while they dont even remember the name and what the scratches were trying to tell” (105). It is this, finally, that defeats her efforts against both the experience of mortality and the experience of social life. She cannot help feeling that it “cant matter” because agency is so limited, and so constrained by the ultimate closure of death and decay – and that the best one can achieve, in such a state of affairs, is to make “a mark on something”, however slight, that at least “would be something just because it would have happened” (105). This is perhaps the most profound articulation, in all of Yoknapatawpha, of the dilemmas of erasure – of the problem of sustaining and retaining possibility which would preoccupy Faulkner throughout the rest of Yoknapatawpha’s writing and its exploration of the South’s plantation past. And given that this dilemma of meaning is so intimately tied to articulation and to words, and to the formal and narrative struggles in Faulkner’s work, it is particularly apt that the specific “mark” Judith offers up should take the form of the written word, in a letter Charles Bon wrote to her, and which she gives to Mrs. Compson. It is a letter whose material significance has already been foreshadowed by Mr. Compson’s description of old letters, “the paper old and faded and falling to pieces, the writing faded, almost indecipherable, yet meaningful, familiar” (83), and which Quentin will later hold in his hand, as one of the few tangible traces of Sutpen family history:

[its] faint spidery script not like something impressed upon the paper by a once-living hand but like a shadow cast upon it which had resolved on the paper the instant before he looked at it and which might fade, vanish, at any instant while he still did[.] (106)

⁸⁴ Matthews, *Play of Faulkner’s Language*, 142

The Plantation Community; or, White Maps, Black Routes:
Violence and the Post-Plantation Everyday in *Go Down, Moses*



Shadow of the Plantation: Black-White Division and the Everyday in *Go Down, Moses*

The Bed, the Table: Marking Domestic Dynamics

Throughout his mid-career works, Faulkner repeatedly returned to the same scene: a black and a white child, raised together, come to sense their racial, and thus social, difference. Their intimacy is broken, and with it their innocence, and the two become irrevocably estranged. This discovery of racial difference marks the end of childhood, and its loss haunts Faulkner's white protagonists, much as it clearly haunted his own mind. Again and again – in *The Unvanquished*, in *Intruder in the Dust*, in his semi-fictional article “Mississippi” – Faulkner re-enacted this primal rupture, as though compelled by some nostalgia for childhood, for some lost security of home. The depiction of such ruptures serves as a means, too, of foregrounding social dilemmas that are central to Faulkner's writing: questions of racial identity and racial essentialism; of the plantation social order as a broader social practice; of the past as an idealized site of innocence and of loss. Yet Faulkner directly depicted this as a single, definable moment of rupture only once, in the *Go Down, Moses* story “The Fire and the Hearth”, where it resonates with particular poignancy amid the novel's larger themes of possession and dispersal.

Roth Edmonds, the son of white planter Zack Edmonds, and Henry Beauchamp, the son of black tenant-farmer Lucas Beauchamp, have been raised together as “foster-brothers”, nursed together at Henry's mother's breast, following the death of Roth's mother in childbirth. They are also, as a result of their mutual ancestor LQC “Carothers” McCaslin's rape of his slaves, distant kinsmen. (This relationship reveals the underlying dilemma of how to embrace a hybrid identity that has its roots not only in a miscegenation that is denied, but in a history of sexual exploitation that remains hidden.) Roth and Henry hunt together, share food at the same table and sleep in the

same beds; they treat one another's homes as "interchangeable" (*GDM*, 85). In particular, Roth loves the hearth in Henry's family's cabin, with its open fire that Henry's father, Lucas, has kept burning since his wedding-night, and in which Roth finds a source of "centering" order, a source of life.

One day, at the age of seven, Roth suddenly becomes aware of their racial "difference". We are told that "the old curse of his fathers, the old haught ancestral pride based not on any value but on an accident of geography, stemmed not from courage and honor but from wrong and shame, descended to him." (86) He becomes aware not of biological ethnicity, but of the social history of race and racism; although the abruptness and apparently unmotivated nature of this awareness makes Faulkner's explanation for this shift difficult to read (it might be taken as racial essentialism, or as critique of such a position). Whatever its cause, Roth's actions are clear: when the two boys share his bedroom that night, he takes the bed, and makes Henry sleep on a pallet on the floor.

When Roth awakes the next morning, wracked with a "shame he would not admit", he finds the pallet empty; Henry has wordlessly departed. "They never slept in the same room again and never again ate at the same table," Faulkner writes, "because he admitted to himself it was shame now" (87). For a month Roth distances himself from Henry until eventually, wracked with guilt and shame that he cannot adequately articulate, he finally visits Henry's home. In a clumsy attempt to undo his actions, Roth tells Henry's family that he is staying for dinner – and for a brief, blissful few moments, he is able to believe that his relationship with Henry has been restored, that "it was as if it had never happened at all." (87) But when he is called for dinner, he finds that Henry's family has already eaten separately, and the table has been laid for him alone. "Are you ashamed to eat when I eat?" Roth asks, as he tearfully confronts Henry. "I aint shamed of nobody," is Henry's mild, but devastating, reply. "Not even me." (88) This, then, is Roth's real moment of loss: the loss not simply of childhood innocence and friendship, but also of the illusory racial superiority for which he has abandoned them. (Crucially, as Eric Sundquist notes, it is a loss that is inalterable, a grief and shame that is irreversible.¹) At the same time, there is also a less sentimental impulse for Roth's shame: he recognizes, as Richard Godden argues, the way in which

¹ Sundquist, *House Divided*, 136

his meal is the product of black labor supporting and sustaining whites. “What is on the table [...] is the mammy and her place (the supportive body of black social practices), recast in abstract form as products of labor, available to the presumption of a white child,” Godden argues; and there is perhaps a considerable part of Roth’s “shame” that arises from his recognition of white dependency on black as a necessary, and debilitating, correlative of white power over black. What Roth loses is not simply a childlike pre-racial state: it is also, more complexly, a sense “that his life was fuller lived within the double articulation of felt hybridity.”²

The episode’s power arises through Faulkner’s depiction of the fragmenting of the stable plantation hierarchy into two separate worlds, through a shocked recognition on Roth’s part that black Southern life exists not as a component of and complement to white life, but as a separate structure beyond it. The loss of innocence and stability is also at the same time the creation of order, and the intimate and seemingly neutral spaces of domesticity – the bed, the meal-table, the hearth – are reconstituted not in scenes of instruction, but as highly political divisions between private and social. By forcing Henry to sleep alone on the pallet below, Roth vertically asserts his new hierarchical social consciousness. Yet by eating the same food at the same table as Roth, but at different times, Henry’s family horizontally undermines this same hierarchy – quite literally turning the tables on him. Through their “unanticipated sleight of hand”, as Thadious Davis calls it, the Beauchamps instead assert (in De Certeau’s terminology) gestures and spaces of racially-differentiated domestic privacy, self-identity, and dignity.³ “[Roth] is made to feel his race as otherness,” Davis notes; he is made conscious, for the first time, “that there is a price to pay for his exercise of white privilege.”⁴ There, racial segregation offers a curious equality, an unexpected potential for agency that is both highly liberating and deeply problematic (the episode occurs around the year 1905, at the height of Jim Crow segregation and possibly the nadir of black political, social, and economic agency in the South).⁵ The Beauchamps

² Godden, *Economy of Complex Words*, 85-86

³ Davis, *Games of Property*, 204; see also De Certeau et al., *Practice of Everyday Life*, Vol.2, 141

⁴ Davis, *Games of Property*, 206

⁵ This symbolism is also present elsewhere: in *The Unvanquished*, for example, Ringo and Bayard stop sharing a bed at the point “Father rebuilt the house” (*U*, 467) – in both a literal and symbolic sense, given the novel’s depiction of post-Confederate resistance to federal Reconstruction in its later stories.

may occupy an inferior social place to Roth, but within their own private place, their domestic space, they nonetheless prove their own masters. And yet, that “mastery” is potentially undercut by the fact that it does not emerge creatively and naturally, but rather in opposition and resistance: black agency here requires a context of white mastery to make it meaningful.

Throughout *Go Down, Moses*, this tension repeats itself, presenting plantation-based black domesticity as at once a means of creative self-identity and self-definition, yet also as a means of political self-assertion. As in bell hooks’ conceptualization of the “homeplace”, private possession and self-possession are framed as means of compensation for broader social dispossession. Bed and meal-table, hearth and swept yard, constitute elements within the controlled environment of black domesticity, that serve as crucial means of resisting the (sometimes violent) oppressions of segregation. At the same time, there is the dilemma that this resistance may be founded in a tacit condoning of white privilege, and also of patriarchal household models. It is with a consciousness of these issues that Faulkner constructs a complex interplay of black and white homespace and hearthspace in *Go Down, Moses*.

Faulkner’s novel addresses the plantation site and legacy as a means of asserting resistant black selfhood through manipulation of its spatialized narrative structures. It insists on precisely the kinds of resistant plantation geographies which Upton and Vlach have discussed: yet it is also troubled by a sense that a negotiation of the plantation’s structures, however empowering, nonetheless operates within the confines and boundaries of those structures. It is a paradox of simultaneous empowering and constraint which is particularly present in the operations of material bricolage within black domesticity, depicted throughout *Go Down, Moses*. The *OED* defines the French root, *bricoler*, as “to do small chores” or “to fix ingeniously”, and it is with these resonances in mind that I apply the word here. That bricolage is fundamentally an act of homemaking, of construction, is emphasized by its etymological connections to the word “brick”. Yet that word itself is derived from the Old French for “fragments”, “pieces”, or “debris”, and as such perhaps also presents bricolage as inherently abject and diminished, as arising as surplus to a larger (and implicitly superior) culture, rather than generative and independent in itself.

Patricia Yaeger has located in Faulkner's fiction – and also, more acutely, in the work of black authors such as Ralph Ellison or Toni Morrison, who are equally preoccupied with the legacies of slaveholding and the plantation – a kind of “trash aesthetic”, a use of waste materials as a source of both symbolic and tangible creativity and resistance.⁶ Yaeger's phrase reveals the tension between an adaptation that reproduces and a mode of construction that is self-determined. It is no coincidence that, given the concept's origins in the sociology of Claude Lévi-Strauss, a considerable part of its trickiness arises from the creation of binary oppositions rather than fluid interplay, the assertion of rival rather than hybrid narratives and “creolized” identities. Faulkner's final response to the dilemma of black-white division and the complex socio-spatial legacy of the plantation's narratives rests not in direct solutions, but rather in dissolution – in diaspora and the dispersal of tensions (a solution not without its advantages, but also clearly not without its problems either).

This chapter explores the consequences of Faulkner's shift of focus, mid-career, from the plantation as system in *Absalom, Absalom!* to the plantation as site in *Go Down, Moses*. The latter novel offers, once again, an attempt to recuperate lost connections, this time, those lost through the abstractions and generalized reproductions of the plantation site. At the conclusion of the previous chapter, I noted Yaeger's assertion that it is not simply Sutpen's design or his family's domestic possessions that are destroyed by the burning of Sutpen's Hundred: the fire also erases the traces of African-American labor, the material evidence of both their exploitation and their productivity on the plantation site. The erasure is perhaps rendered doubly, because the novel gives so little attention to the everyday workings of Sutpen's plantation as an industrial and also communal site. It shifts between mansion and system, and excludes the more practically practiced space in between.

Go Down, Moses expresses an attempt to recuperate this sense of the plantation as a layered site of contested experiences. It foregrounds, to a greater degree than any other Yoknapatawpha text, the social practices and everyday experience of the plantation site. Spanning almost a century, from antebellum times to the final years of the Depression, it maps both the evolution and the continuities of plantation structures and relations. It depicts the site as layered, and maps this in its

⁶ Yaeger, “De-materializing Culture”

narrative structure too. Where *Absalom, Absalom!* articulates a structural movement from fragmentation toward holistic “truth”, *Go Down, Moses* disperses a singular narrative into smaller personalized stories and episodes. Faulkner achieves this creatively by foregrounding narrative exclusion and the failure of closure as central components of the text. Where *Flags in the Dust* was textured by unelaborated details, and *Absalom, Absalom!* worked to expand such details into narratives, *Go Down, Moses* is more concerned with exploring the motives and consequences of that process and the aesthetics of exclusion. As my reading of the relationship between Henry and Roth in “The Fire and the Hearth” suggests, this is particularly achieved by emphasizing the material objects and experience of the everyday, in a manner strikingly different from *Flags in the Dust*. In that earlier novel, details served as innocuous moments within a larger texture, primarily directed toward a reality effect that “fleshed out” the novel’s characters in the present. In *Go Down, Moses*, however, Faulkner foregrounds the minutiae of everyday behavior: the small details of food preparation and eating, of home-making and house-keeping.

There is a striking moment at the beginning of the story “Pantaloon in Black”, where Faulkner offers the description of a grave in a black cemetery. The grave is one of many lined with “shards of pottery and broken bottles and old brick, and other objects insignificant to sight, but actually of a profound meaning and fatal to touch, which no white man could have read.” (*GDM*, 102) The description suggests, in short, an alternative model of reading, which Faulkner’s novel does not explicitly articulate, but which it nonetheless potentially contains. It is a model that extends Minrose Gwin’s discussion of the unarticulated narratives present in *Go Down, Moses* (“what Tennie Beauchamp was thinking when she watched Hubert Beauchamp’s unnamed mistress get sent packing down the road”; “whether Tomasina ever knew why her mother drowned herself”⁷) in order to consider what it means to exclude or silence these narrative possibilities, and what it might achieve to recuperate and restore them.

⁷ Gwin, “Her Shape, His Hand”, 96

Legible and Illegible: the McCaslin Plantation Order

In the course of *The Unvanquished*, Faulkner offers a conceptualization of three distinct plantation models: those of John Sartoris, of Thomas Sutpen, and of the McCaslin twins Theophilus (known as Uncle Buck) and Amodeus (known as Uncle Buddy). The former are already familiar from earlier Yoknapatawpha texts – and also from the conventionality with which each man reproduces and sustains a certain core idea of patriarchal planter mastery. There is every reason to assume that the Sartoris and Sutpen plantations mirror one another, in both layout and in general economic and social practices. The same claim, however, cannot be made for the McCaslin plantation, as run by Buck and Buddy, who create an alternative plantation structure which on the surface seems every bit as radical – yet also much more practically effective – than the resistant model offered by Judith and Clytie in *Absalom, Absalom!*.

The contrast established in *The Unvanquished* between these three models, when examined closely, reveals a particular disparity between the individual mastery of Sutpen and the more socially-conscious management of the McCaslin twins. Indeed, Bayard Sartoris seems quite deliberately to frame Sutpen as an embodiment of the past, and the McCaslins as an embodiment of the future: their model is “ahead of their time” (*U*, 351), while Sutpen’s exists only as a dream that “is just Sutpen” (471). Although Sutpen’s design is explicitly contrasted to John Sartoris’s plan for Southern “redemption”, trying to “raise [it] by its bootstraps” (471), in a larger sense the contrast works more effectively between Sutpen and McCaslin. Where Sutpen maintains his plantation through brute force – it is “torn violently” (*AA*, 6) in its creation, and sustained by the physical wrestling of slaves (23) – the McCaslins maintain theirs through contract, through a “game with rules” they engage in with their slaves. (Their games are not sporting feats of strength, but rather ones of strategy; the contrast between the mastery of Sutpen’s hunting in *Absalom, Absalom!* and the more subtle interplay of dynamics in the hunts of *Go Down, Moses*, is particularly striking.) The McCaslin twins live in a two-room log cabin, while their slaves live in the big house which their father, Carothers, built. (In *The Unvanquished* it is described as “one of the finest houses in the country when they inherited it” [*U*, 350]; in *Go Down, Moses*, however, it is a “tremendous abortive edifice scarcely yet out of embryo, as if even old Carothers had paused aghast at the concrete indication of his

own vanity's boundless conceiving" [*GDM*, 194]). According to the rules of this game – which in *Go Down, Moses* becomes termed an “unspoken gentleman’s agreement” (*GDM*, 194) – each evening one of the twins ceremonially secures the front door. The slaves, however, are free to leave the mansion via the back, provided they are all present again behind the mansion’s front door when it is opened again in the morning (*U*, 350; *GDM*, 194).

This situation offers the slaves a more casual lifestyle, but it by no means makes them more liberated. The master-slave relationship is maintained, undiminished. The locking of the door, although symbolic, is also actual; the “agreement” is an act of possession, given that only one side of this accord could be defined as “gentlemen”, and thus possess the power to proffer such an agreement in the first place. The slaves’ state of “possession” remains intact: their agreement merely replaces mastery by contact with mastery by contract, a process by which the slaves become tacitly complicit in their own enslavement, and not simply through their nighttime activities. John Sartoris called the twins “ahead of their time” for their belief “that land did not belong to people but that people belonged to land”. Their idea was that the slaves should commit to earning their own freedom not in wages from Buck and Buddy but in “work from the plantation.” (*U*, 351) It is a piece of sophistry, to be sure. Such a contract, although theoretically equalizing the slaves with the poor whites who are also consolidated within the McCaslin plantation complex, ultimately reasserts their slavehood by confining them within the ledgers as economic units, as surely as the mansion contains them as chattel.

What this freer sense of movement experienced by the slaves *does* achieve, however, is a destabilizing of the plantation as site bounded by the master’s design – an extreme form of disruption of its “threshold devices” and “processional landscapes” (to reiterate Vlach’s and Upton’s terms). When Faulkner expanded the details of this “gentleman’s agreement” in *Go Down, Moses*, he included a piece of crucial information absent from the earlier account: that the slaves leave the mansion at night not simply to “escape”, but rather “to visit other plantations” (*GDM*, 194). This simple phrase gives direction to their movements, and reveals – as the events of the novel’s opening story “Was” also do – the existence of rival black geographies that exceed the more visibly mapped white geographies of the plantation community. This inter-

plantation traffic marks the presence of what Anthony Kaye has termed “slave neighborhoods”, spatial communities established by the enslaved that transcended the spatial order of the plantation. Such neighborhoods existed as space, practice, and unit: as “the arena for activities of every type; a set of people, bonds and solidarities; a collective identity.”⁸ The very existence of such networks offers a more tangible – and more independently creative – means of resistance than those offered by other aspects of the everyday (such as those based in bricolage). Thadious Davis claims that the slaves become socially elevated “partners” in this agreement, and that the McCaslin twins “dismantle and deny” their father’s models of mastery.⁹ I would question the fullness of these conclusions, but I would nonetheless agree with the assertion that the slaves’ freer sense of movement – especially the establishment of slave neighborhoods – “enables them to function, and to be seen to function, as agents troubling the white slaveholding community’s established rules of conduct and expectations for slaves.”¹⁰

The same might be argued of Tomey’s Turl – and indeed, for Davis he is *the* key disruptive figure in the novel, the point of origin from which the novel’s narrative discussion of race relations departs:

He is a figure of transgression and hybridity closely linked to the problems inherent in property in persons. Tomey’s Turl’s hybridity – his status as both black and white, as both within and without familial structures – combines with his willful transgression of cultural constrictions, social domination, and political economy to open a critical space for reading *Go Down, Moses* as a miscegenated text, one whose form and logic resist containment and defy boundaries.¹¹

⁸ Anthony E. Kaye, *Joining Places: Slave Neighborhoods in the Old South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 5

⁹ Davis, *Games of Property*, 48-50

¹⁰ *Ibid*, 50

¹¹ *Ibid*, 11

It is apt, then, that the novel begins with “Was”, a story where Tomez’s Turl ambiguously shifts between the center and the margins of the narrative. Whenever he can manage to slip off, “about twice a year”, Tomez’s Turl runs from the McCaslin plantation to Hubert Beauchamp’s place in the neighboring county, “to hang around Mr Hubert’s girl, Tennie, until somebody came and got him.” (6-7) That “somebody” is habitually Uncle Buck; and the whole encounter is ritualized into a regular “game with rules” like the “gentleman’s agreement” concerning the McCaslin mansion. But this game is complicated on two counts. First, in “Was”, this game is manipulate to form part of an attempt to entrap Uncle Buck into marrying Sophonsiba Beauchamp. And secondly, the power dynamics enacted in this game are considerably complicated by the fact that Tomez’s Turl is Buck and Buddy’s half-brother. This relationship is almost openly discussed, when Hubert Beauchamp calls Tomez’s Turl a “damn white half-McCaslin” (7); while Cass Edmonds, who relates the tale, slyly notes that “Tomez’s Turl had been running off from Uncle Buck for so long that he had even got used to running away like a white man would do it.” (9)

It becomes troubling, in consequence, to read the jocular, hunt-like discourse in which the attempt to “retrieve” Tomez’s Turl is described, and the way in which, at all times, Buck’s mastery and Tomez’s Turl’s social inferiority are emphasized. In the end, his resistance itself becomes ambiguous, too. By engaging with the “rules of the game”, Tomez’s Turl accepts the condition of his own enslavement – just as his name records it, by obscuring the open secret of his patrimony (linking him to his mother Tomasina, not his father Carothers).¹² Tomez’s Turl articulates the limits of his own freedom and agency not only through this game, but also through his acceptance that he must rely on Sophonsiba’s “protection” to improve his lot and gain Tennie (12). Yet by helping manipulate his brother-master – and more crucially by affirming a larger “slave community”, through use of which he is eventually able to marry Tennie, despite the separation of the two plantations – Tomez’s Turl proves the value of the black routes of resistance in negotiating the white map of plantation mastery. (As Davis further notes, by putting on a white Sunday shirt for his “run” to Tennie, Tomez’s

¹² For Davis, “[t]hat absence is what must be reinserted into the relationship structure in order to read the core discourses of the text. The son’s name bears witness to Tomasina and the crime against her, so that the silence forced on the mother gives way to the verbal testimony of the son’s name.” (*Games of Property*, 12)

Turl is “dressing ‘white’, [...] transforming himself into a ‘gentleman’”; by such means, “Turl calculates the effect of whitening himself further and demonstrates the porous nature of racial barriers and caste, class, and economic boundaries.”¹³)

The spaces into which Tomey’s Turl and the other McCaslin slaves venture mark the limits of plantation power, and the arbitrary and finite nature of social order. The plantation, though it lies at the center of *Go Down, Moses*, is always limned by the wilderness that surrounds it, the woodlands which seem to defy order and description, “bigger and older than any recorded document” (140). This bounding, though literal, is also highly symbolic – a division between the recorded and owned, and the unrecorded and independent, which reflects the novel’s central tensions between the written and unwritten, the legible and illegible, the articulated and the inscribed. The rival geography created by the McCaslin slaves, when they establish slave communities between plantations, is an example of something which is articulated; the McCaslin mastery that underlies their “gentleman’s agreement”, in contrast, is something which is inscribed. It is inscribed because it is an organizational, rather than resistant mode; it is inscribed above all because it has a basis in economics and in records. It may well be that the liberating promise of the black community – and also of the wilderness – may have power only to the extent they resist description and definition, to the extent they remain largely illegible to acquisitive and mastering white eyes. The moment that either becomes defined by supremacist ideology and codification, it becomes contained and subsumed: the models of black resistance constrained by reasserted boundaries; the unbounded woodlands bound into a quantified timber reserve.

This tension is embodied in the pages of the McCaslin plantation ledgers, the texts themselves contained within the plantation commissary which extends and materializes their archival and ordering function. In “The Bear”, Faulkner makes this containment quite explicit: the commissary is described as “not the heart perhaps but certainly the solar-plexus” of the plantation (188). It is the nerve-center, valuing its workers not in terms of empathy but in terms of information. It holds them “in thrall ‘65 or no” because it is able to seamlessly transform an economics of mastery into an economics of consumption. Faulkner takes pains to point out that its walls are

¹³ Ibid, 53

paraded over with advertisements for snuff and cures for chills and salves and potions manufactured and sold by white men to bleach the pigment and straighten the hair of negroes that they might resemble the very race which for two hundred years had held them in bondage and from which for another hundred years not even a bloody civil war would have set them completely free[.] (188)

Such details are at a considerable aesthetic distance from the surfaces of *Flags in the Dust*: every object here has an immediate function that is locally locatable. The list of foodstuffs and medicines and farm equipment that follows does not so much describe the commissary's appearance, as express what function it serves: it is a conduit that controls, practically speaking, each everyday aspect of the plantation's tenants' and sharecroppers' lives. Although Ike McCaslin will later choose to focus on the ledgers as an archive of the past, they are, more properly and functionally, an archive of the present: an enumeration of debts, of possession, of power. They record

the slow outward trickle of food and supplies and equipment which returned each fall as cotton made and ginned and sold (two threads frail as truth and impalpable as equators yet cable-strong to bind for life them who made the cotton to land their sweat fell on) [189].

This is an astonishingly concise image, and one which Faulkner later deliberately and precisely repeats (217). The description vividly presents the plantation as mappable space, as layered and systemic, as existing in "its mazed and intricate entirety" (221). For Faulkner, such socioeconomic relations are what gives the plantation its shape – and so by extension, what builds and shapes and sustains the South. The ledgers ("that chronicle which was a whole land in miniature, which multiplied and compounded was the entire South" [217]) condense, like a stereopticon, the myriad aspects of the plantation into a single one. This helps Ike to see the reprehensible ways its "whole edifice" has been "founded upon injustice and

erected by ruthless rapacity and carried on even yet with at times downright savagery". But it equally helps Ike to see it as "solvent and efficient and, more than that: not only still intact but enlarged, increased" (221). In such a conception, where all its complexity is reduced down to a socioeconomic mapping, the plantation becomes stable and singular; it loses its plurality through the overlaying of new conceptions upon old, and through that displacement it loses the potential for the resistant reassertion of silenced narratives.

This is what the ledgers, as symbol and as synecdoche, seem to offer. But once again, it is through details that the plantation's ordering design becomes undone: in the details it must record, but cannot adequately account for or contain. When Ike first reads the ledgers, as an adolescent in the mid-1880s, he believes all he will find there is "records": a chronicle general and depersonalizing in scope, broadly representative and "doubtless tedious", and mostly certainly "fixed immutably, finished, unalterable, harmless." (198) What he actually finds, though, is far from tedious, or harmless, or even past. Within and between the ledger's lines, inscribed yet hauntingly uninscribed, he finds two conflicting narratives: of the white expression of possession, and the black experience of possession. Reconstructing the horrors of his grandfather Carothers' acts of rape and incest inflicted upon his slaves and their children, Ike also uncovers glimpses of the uninscribed – the articulated, and for the most part socially illegible – struggle of those slaves' daily lives, amid the stark records of births and deaths and profits.

The crucial moment comes when Ike attempts to fill a narrative hole: to imagine how the connection between Carothers and his slave mistress, Tomasina, emerged. In Ike's imagined narrative, the aging widower Carothers "sent for her at first out of loneliness, to have a young voice and movement in the house, [...] bade her mother send her each morning to sweep the floors and make the beds" (199-200). Ike frames her, in short, as the keeper of a white house. But midway through his reading, Ike suddenly comes to a powerful and horrific epiphany, which stops him in his narrative tracks. Recalling that Carothers went all the way to New Orleans specifically to purchase Tomasina's mother, Eunice, he can only conclude that Carothers bought her as a mistress – which would mean that Carothers made mistresses of both mother and daughter: his *own* daughter. (Although as Richard Godden, writing with Noel Polk,

notes, there is nothing in the text which explicitly supports Ike's interpretations of his uncle Buddy's ledger entries. "[I]n terms of the evidence of the novel," Godden and Polk argue, "family lore has it *only* that L.Q.C. fathers Turl from Tomasina. Isaac alone will have it that he also fathered Tomasina from Eunice."¹⁴)

The (apparent) history of incest, though painful and actual, is also symbolic. It emphasizes the recurrent cycles of exploitation that sustained slavery as a system, cycles based in exploitative reproduction. As Thadious Davis notes, for women such as Eunice and Tomasina, "to reproduce is not just to duplicate themselves as property but to reproduce the image of the owner. 'Reproduction,' master-slave intercourse leading to offspring or issue, is a narcissistic act, in addition to being a declaration of the legal authority of patriarchy (the law of the father) and the law of the land."¹⁵ Yet the real revelation Ike experiences is perhaps not so much the evidence of such exploitation, as the ways in which these women do *not* stand only, in the end, as figures of reproduction.

What troubles Ike more even than the apparent details of incest and sexual exploitation, is the way in which Eunice and Tomasina emerge so vividly from these accounts, despite – or perhaps rather because of – their absence. He comes to realize that the ledgers and plantation, which seemed spaces of containment, on the contrary offer spaces of liberation. The ledgers are revealed, as Minrose Gwin notes, as ultimately "too small a space to contain, in all their cultural and historical implications, the outrageousness of old Carothers McCaslin's crimes and the tragic stories of Eunice and Tomasina."¹⁶ The stable narratives about Carothers, which Ike attempts to reconstruct, collapse – and he is left with a narrative of Eunice's anguish which he is unable to process, the consequences of which he is unable to encompass within any meaningful social response:

[A]nd looking down at the yellowed page spread beneath the yellow glow of the lantern smoking and stinking in that rank chill midnight room fifty years later, he seemed to see her

¹⁴ Godden, *Economy of Complex Words*, 144-145, 147

¹⁵ Davis, *Games of Property*, 11

¹⁶ Gwin, "Her Shape, His Hand", 90

actually walking into the icy creek on that Christmas day six months before her daughter's and her lover's (*Her first lover's* he thought. *Her first*) child was born, solitary, inflexible, griefless, ceremonial, in formal and succinct repudiation of grief and despair who had already had to repudiate belief and hope[.] (200)

In the end, it is not the sexual violation, or even the objectification and human possession at work here that truly unsettles Ike – it is rather his inability to narratively contain what he learns, and to make it meaningful or comprehensible. He finds himself unable to conceive of a social world, or a social structure, in which the pain of Eunice's suffering can not only be encompassed, but productively recuperated. In the ledgers he reaches the limits of his understanding, and of his imagination (perhaps the same might be argued of Faulkner). Ike relinquishes his plantation to his cousin Cass Edmonds – just as Faulkner subsequently turned away, after the strain of this novel, toward models of Southern history and society that did not rest on the irresolvable trauma of slaveholding. Implicitly, Faulkner faults Ike for the way in which his repudiation serves as a negation rather than a productive response: the recurrent cycles of sexual possession which resurface in *Go Down, Moses's* penultimate (and in some respects, concluding) tale, "Delta Autumn", make this explicitly the case. And perhaps, in the process, Faulkner preemptively faults himself too – for helplessly turning, in the final phase of his career, toward narratives that attempt to circumvent, rather than resolve, the legacy of plantation slavery.

The Failed Hearths of Mr. Hubert and Uncle Ike

Ike's home-life suffers as a consequence of his repudiation: the relinquishment brings him little stability or warmth. His (unnamed) wife, who married him assuming that he would subsequently claim his inheritance, quickly becomes bitterly disappointed. After failing to seduce him into reclaiming it, she thereafter withholds her body, and with it any warmth and tenderness, from him. "And that's all", she tells him, laughing bitterly, after what is apparently their single moment of marital coupling. "That's all from me." (233-234) The connection of repudiation and domestic unsettlement arguably defines

practically all the models of white domesticity in the novel. Zack Edmonds, Roth Edmonds, and Hubert Beauchamp all seem to be searching to recover some connection to black domesticity and black femininity. But they are caught, irresolvably, between social codes that enforce the domestic separation of black and white: caught too by a legacy of sexual and domestic exploitation that taints, a priori, any potential relationship between white men and black women. (Just as, with Joanna Burden and Joe Christmas in *Light in August*, it taints relationships between “black” men and white women, too.)

Warmthless home-lives haunt the Edmondses. They are solitary men, who seem fated to die early, leaving only a single heir; whose unnamed wives die earlier still, with a regularity that is tantamount to a family curse. They die, much like the Sartoris wives, behind the scenes, between the lines – much like Ellen Sutpen, who dies (in Mr Compson’s description):

“[a] substanceless shell, [a] shade impervious to any alteration or dissolution because of its very weightlessness: no body to be buried: just the shape, the recollection, translated on some peaceful afternoon without bell or catafalque into that cedar grove, to lie in power-light paradox beneath the thousand pounds of marble monument.” (AA, 104)

Indeed, when Zack Edmonds’s unnamed wife dies in childbirth, Faulkner recasts this sentiment still more starkly: it seems not as though she had quitted the house, but as though “she had never existed – the object which they buried in the orchard two days later [...] a thing of no moment, unsanctified, nothing.” (GDM, 36) In one sense, what is being articulated here is the kind of erasure that maintains patriarchal control, “eliminating the presence and influence of black and white women in the text through their deaths in childbirth.”¹⁷ Yet the situation becomes more complex, when domestic absences are filled by close relationships between white men and black women. As a result, the planters of *Go Down, Moses* attempt to appropriate some quality of warmth from the models of black domesticity around them: when Zack Edmonds takes Molly

¹⁷ Gwin, “Her Shape, His Hand”, 90

Beauchamp into his home; when Roth Edmonds takes up with a black mistress (whom he later jilts once she has a baby, and to whom it also turns out he is distantly related through her descent from James Beauchamp, Lucas's brother). The fullest attempt at integrating black and white domesticity, however, comes through Hubert Beauchamp, who cohabits with his black housekeeper after his sister Sophonsiba moves out.

Whatever the possibilities of this arrangement, it is precluded, both by narrative absence and by the intervention of Sophonsiba. The negative imagery framing this episode pushes us toward reading it as another instance of planter degeneration, because it occurs amid an estate that is "shabby and overgrown", in a house that appears to grow in size simply because it progressively contains less furniture, as Hubert sells it off despite Sophonsiba's "tearful lamentations" (224). In the moment of confrontation, following which the unnamed cook is ejected from the mansion, Sophonsiba shrilly protests not only at the cook's presence "defiling" her old home, but that she wears "Even my dress!" (224-225). She will not listen to Hubert's weak, but perhaps poignant, protest that "They're free now! They're folks too just like we are!"; indeed, I would argue that is her consciousness of this that makes her insist all the more strongly on ideals of social and sexual separation.

Equally poignant here – and crucially, the moment which closes the episode – is the response of Tennie, one of the Beauchamps' former slaves, earlier described, in terms ambiguously implying strikingly different degrees of possession, as "Mr Hubert's girl". (7) Certainly, Hubert seems particularly unhappy at Tomey's Turl's pursuit of Tennie, although it is again unclear precisely what he means when he says "he wouldn't have that damn white half-McCaslin on his place even as a free gift" (7); he seems quite willing to part with her in the hands of cards he later plays with the McCaslin twins (20). But as he watches Tennie watch Hubert's cook and probable mistress leave the house, Ike feels there is something in the impression that is unforgettable: Tennie's "inscrutable face at the broken shutterless window of the bare room"; the cook departing with her face only glimpsed for a moment, wearing Sophonsiba's dress and what is quite probably Hubert's coat. The cook is described as "routed and in retreat true enough and in the empty lane solitary young-looking and forlorn yet withal still exciting and evocative and wearing still the silken banner captured inside the very citadel of respectability, and unforgettable." (225) And so we

are left entirely free to conjecture quite what it is that the illegible Tennie is thinking: whether it is racial pride and solidarity, or the contempt of a house-servant for a usurper; whether there is envy or hurt love or pity present in her thoughts – or if she even feels anything significant at all. Little wonder, then, that Minrose Gwin should mark this passage as one of the crucial moments in her reading of the novel, a key if fleeting moment where black women “slip in and out of the space of this text”.¹⁸

It is integral to *Go Down, Moses* that we never do know what Tennie is thinking; just as we never know the precise nature of Hubert’s cohabitation, or what, left unconstrained, it might have been. The novel never allows such possibilities to emerge, and only offers instead the description of Hubert’s domestic decline: his habitation centered on a “cold unswept hearth in which the very bricks themselves were crumbling into a litter of soot and dust and mortar and the droppings of chimney-sweeps” (225). The remainder of his shrunken life is lived out with only the companionship of Tennie’s “great-grandfather”, until one day the whole edifice – his father’s mansion, containing his attempts at creolized redemption – goes up in smoke. It is a fuller act of autoeradication even than in *Absalom, Absalom!*. The mansion burns not through any deliberate action, but through “a tranquil instantaneous sourceless unanimity of combustion”, leaving only “four blackened and smokeless chimneys” above “a light white powder of ashes and a few charred ends of planks” (226). It burns into an iconic form: the resilient chimneys of the Lost Cause, the white ashes that erase all further possibility of intrusive traces of hybridity, and preclude all further resistant narratives. Yet at the same time, it nonetheless leaves a space for models of family resilience that is at least partially fulfilled by the black domesticity elsewhere present in *Go Down, Moses* – and which, I want to suggest, offers a means of resistance that is not merely symbolic, but in fact highly practical and quite literally life-affirming and life-saving.

¹⁸ Gwin, “Her Shape, His Hand”, 96

.II.

Violence and the Hearth:

Lynching Practices and Black Domesticity in *Light in August* and *Go Down, Moses*

Violent Suspension: Southern Lynching Culture

Midway through “Dry September”, his first fictional treatment of lynching, Faulkner vividly depicts the emptied streets of Jefferson on one fateful late summer evening:

[T]he sparse lights, insect-swirled, glared in rigid and violent suspension in the lifeless air. The day had died in a pall of dust; above the darkened square, shrouded by the spent dust, the sky was as clear as the inside of a brass bell. (CS, 175)

Of all the phrases in this evocative description, perhaps most ominous is the image of “violent suspension in the lifeless air.”¹⁹ The phrase projects – and also suspends – the haunting image of lynching: as simultaneously present and absent, elided like so much of the violence in Faulkner’s writing. It foreshadows the narrative violence Faulkner creates in the story (as in other fiction of this period) through stark interplay between the eruption of physical violence and its strategic narrative suspension and withholding. But in a more general and pervasive sense, the phrase also offers a means to reflect on the various degrees of social suspension enacted within lynching practices: the suspension not simply of bodies, but of rights and subjectivity, too.

Lynching functioned in Southern culture as a threat perpetually suspended over the heads of male black Southerners, leaving them never “at home” in communal spaces, but always somehow outside, othered, and socially surplus – as social waste, as

¹⁹ One September night in 1908, a black man named Nelse Patton was lynched in Faulkner’s hometown of Oxford, Mississippi, a few hundred yards from the ten-year-old Faulkner’s home. According to historian Joel Williamson’s account, “Nelse Patton’s body swung through the night – suspended from a ‘telephone pole’ that probably also carried the electrical wires that had lighted the homes of the city for the first time only four days before.” See *Faulkner and Southern History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 159. It is troubling to read, then, in “That Evening Sun” – set around 1900 and revolving around black sexuality and violence, and touching on white female “rape hysteria” – Faulkner’s description of the newly installed telephone poles as “bearing clusters of bloated and ghostly and bloodless grapes” (CS, 289).

excess, as trash. The threat was a very real one: although there is disagreement over precise figures, in the approximately 3,000 lynchings recorded in the ten states of the former Confederacy between 1880 and 1930 (538 of which occurred in Mississippi alone), almost four-fifths of the victims were African-American males.²⁰ Such figures account only for the extra-legal executions that left violent visible traces; a considerable (and hauntingly unknowable) number of lynching victims must, like Will Mayes in “Dry September”, have simply “disappeared”. Lynching was not something which intermittently erupted in response to political rhetoric or localized crimes and tensions: it was instead a widely functioning practice profoundly rooted in, and often arising from, the textures of everyday Southern life. Lynching’s material and spatial aspects have typically been read as secondary to its political and visual ones, but as cultural historian Sandy Alexandre has emphasized, there are multiple senses of place, possession, and belonging that are profoundly expressed and enacted in lynching practices.

Lynching was not simply an act of violence, Alexandre argues: it was also an act of dispossession. As both discourse and physical action, it constituted a process by which whites suspended blacks “gradually away not only from life but also further and further away from the very solid ground on which they could have staked a political, social, or economic claim.”²¹ For Southern blacks, ownership offered a means to self-ownership; for Southern whites, this constituted a dual threat to their established hierarchy, which lynching acted to neutralize. The lynching of black Southerners only became widespread as a practice after Emancipation, once blacks came to be self-possessed owners of their own persons. During slavery, black lynching would have meant the destruction of white property, but after Emancipation it came to offer an effective means of re-establishing the submissive place of black Southerners within a white supremacist economy. As Alexandre concludes, through public display, outdoor

²⁰ For an overview of different statistics, drawn from a combination of NAACP records, contemporary newspapers, and personal research by the respective authors, compare Arthur F. Raper, *The Tragedy of Lynching* [1933] (Montclair, NJ: Patterson Smith, 1969), 471-484; W. Fitzhugh Brundage, *Lynching in the New South: Georgia and Virginia, 1880-1930* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993), 8; and Stewart E. Tolnay & E.M. Beck, *A Festival of Violence: An Analysis of Southern Lynching, 1882-1930* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1995), 260, 269-275.

²¹ Sandy Alexandre, “Out: on a limb – the Spatial Politics of Lynching Photography”, *Mississippi Quarterly* 61.1/2 (2008), 74

setting, and denial of due legal process, lynching worked to suspend black rights to privacy, property, and subjectivity, and to violently “unhome” and objectify the black individual into a symbol of communal black victimhood.²² It enacted “a profound sense of homelessness and displacement”; it was fundamentally “unsettling, in multiple meanings of that term.”²³

The crucial part played by conceptions of “home and hearth” in Faulkner’s readings of lynching reflects its central ideological importance in Southern culture of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Domestic discourses also figured more centrally and volubly in the conception, and the conceptual confinement, of white Southern womanhood. White rhetoric frequently presented lynch mobs as acting to defend “home and hearth” – in essence a euphemism for white womanhood – from the perceived threat of sexually predatory black men. In actuality, lynching was statistically more likely to arise from an accusation of murder than rape (to say nothing of an actual *occurrence* of it), but such overheated and emotive rhetoric proved so compelling that between the 1890s and 1920s it routinely featured in populist political campaigns.²⁴

As I discussed in Chapter 1, a considerable part of this dilemma arose from the impact of the Civil War: from the emancipation of black Southerners on the one hand, and the domestic unsettlement or violation experienced by white women on the other.²⁵ This first situation is reflected symbolically in Faulkner’s recurrent narrative of black and white childhood separation: the moment of rupture stands in, in part, for the estrangement generated by the post-emancipation drift away from the centralized plantation. (This separation is dramatized perhaps most poignantly in the final story of *The Unvanquished*, “An Odor of Verbena”, in the distanced relationship between the

²² Ibid, 102-105

²³ Ibid, 83

²⁴ Murder was reported as the justification in 37.3% of cases throughout the South and 38.7% in the “Deep South”, whereas rape was the reported justification in 29.2% and 28.7% of cases respectively; see Tolnay & Beck, *Festival of Violence*, 92. An extreme, but not untypical, example of populist rhetoric can be found in the arguments of James K. Vardaman, sometime Mississippi governor and senator, who maintained: “We would be justified in slaughtering every Ethiop on the earth to preserve unsullied the honor of one Caucasian home.” Quoted in Albert D. Kirwan, *Revolt of the Rednecks: Mississippi Politics, 1876-1925* (New York: Harper & Row, 1965), 146-147.

²⁵ See Nelson, *Ruin Nation*, 75-80 and Feimster, *Southern Horrors*, passim

formerly inseparable Ringo and Bayard, as they cross into adulthood at the same moment that their community is crossing into a more complex post-slavery social organization. Where before the two went together to avenge Granny's death, by killing Grumby, now Bayard refuses Ringo's company, and goes alone to confront his father's killer, Redmond.) The act of Emancipation – in essence, the transformation of black slaves into black Southerners – came with a specific, and ultimately destabilizing, cultural cost: a greater social and geographic distance between black and white. Edward Ayers has suggested that this loss of intimacy was directly attended by a growth in mistrust, ignorance, and fear that greatly contributed to the volatility of Southern lynching practices which subsequently emerged.²⁶

To reassert their authority, elite white males needed to address the spatial politics of their community. One particular means which emerged was the promotion of rape hysteria and lynching culture, arising out of the long-established idealization of the white Southern home. The rhetoric surrounding these discourses intensified the sense of physical and domestic violation many white women had felt during the Civil War, and reconfigured the threat posed then by Union troops, into a threat posed now by newly "liberated" black men as potential rapists. By introducing charged imagery of "home and hearth" into public discourses, white Southern politicians were able to manipulate and escalate widespread concerns into a cultural "rape hysteria". Lynching rhetoric and practices offered a means through which to reassert both white supremacy and male supremacy, in order to fill the power vacuum left by the transition between traditions of household patriarchy during slavery, and the emerging state of paternalism of the "New South."²⁷ By promoting the image of white males as chivalrous defenders of "home and hearth", and framing white female chastity as a "room" which "black hyper-sexuality" was perpetually threatening to "enter", such arguments socially marginalized both black men and white women, while also helping to obscure the fundamental economic tensions underlying Southern racism.²⁸ Lynching

²⁶ Edward L. Ayers, *Vengeance and Justice: Crime and Punishment in the Nineteenth Century American South* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), 240-241

²⁷ Peter W. Bardaglio, *Reconstructing the Household: Families, Sex and the Law in the Nineteenth-Century South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995), 224

²⁸ Alexandre, "Out: on a limb", 105

enacted white supremacist social narratives in direct relation to architectural and domestic spaces – spaces (often in distinction from “places”) centered on exclusion, concealment, absence, or privacy – and articulated the kind of black-white difference and distance that is clearly present throughout Faulkner’s earlier stories that feature lynching. Yet what the rhetoric also drew attention to was the broken state of the *white* Southern home: homes that, in Faulkner’s writing, so often appear embattled, warmthless, and fragmented.

Such ideas of suspension, paranoia, violence, and “unhoming” dominate Faulkner’s early Yoknapatawpha fiction, particularly “Dry September” (1931), *Sanctuary* (1931), and *Light in August* (1932). In each case (as in a controversial and implicitly pro-lynching letter he wrote to the Memphis *Commercial Appeal* around this time) Faulkner typically read lynching as a white phenomenon and practice, as a communal and exclusionary act.²⁹ The white community is symbolically purified through bodily removal (“Dry September”), burning (*Sanctuary*), or castration (*Light in August*). The ignorance, misunderstandings, and ambiguity surrounding each lynching do not serve to condemn the lynchers, so much as to frame their action as social ritual. “What the hell difference does it make?” the mob leader McLendon says, in “Dry September”. “Are you going to let the black sons get away with it until one really does it?” (171-172).

The figures involved become entirely depersonalized, transformed into representative symbolic figures; when the victim Will Mayes attempts to assert personal connections by calling on members of the mob by name, they quickly beat him into silence, restoring the anonymity of the ritual. Beyond this brief outburst, Mayes’s perspective on the lynching and its surrounding events is omitted. In the same way, it is telling that Lee Goodwin, the lynch victim in *Sanctuary*, is an outsider and a

²⁹ The letter, printed on February 15, 1931 – a month after the publication of “Dry September” – offers a confused argument, condemning the brutality of lynching while at the same time ultimately condoning its social role. After working through various anti-government, anti-“Yankee”, and racial-essentialist positions, Faulkner arrives at his disturbing summary statement: that lynch mobs, “[l]ike our juries, [...] have a way of being right.” (*ESPL*, 343) It is, as Noel Polk has pointed out, “astonishing” that Faulkner could express such sentiments at a moment when he was writing “Dry September” and *Light in August*, works that “flatly contradict the argument of his letter – so flatly it’s hard to believe that the same man could be responsible for all of them.” (“Man in the Middle: Faulkner and the Southern White Moderate” [1987], in *Children of the Dark House*, 235) These publications do nonetheless have the common trait, as I note, of treating lynching in terms of white practice, rather than black experience.

bootlegger who dies “offstage”, and that the ambiguously raced Joe Christmas in *Light in August* vanishes from the novel as a focalizing consciousness precisely at the moment he is judged and hunted as a “negro” murderer. (A similar case can be made for the exclusion of the experience of the female victims: for Minnie Cooper in “Dry September”, who is dismissed as a hysteric, or for Joanna Burden, the northern “niggerlover” who becomes transmuted into an iconic white Southern woman in her moment of death.)

When Faulkner returned to the theme of lynching a decade later in *Go Down, Moses* and *Intruder in the Dust*, he dramatically reversed his earlier position, and presented lynching as a fundamentally black experience. This shift is directly informed by the reconception of the plantation site which had been expressed in his intervening works: without the contested physical and narrative space of the plantation in *Absalom, Absalom!* in particular, we surely would not have the contested social and narrative space of lynching practices in *Go Down, Moses*. This shift might also be read as evidence of Faulkner’s growing interest in details not as inert traces but as politically vital aspects of the everyday. This politics manifests itself most of all through acute reading of the textures of domestic life that emerge in the often stripped down narratives and settings of *Go Down, Moses*: in the acts of eating and cooking, homemaking and burial rites. A contrast accordingly emerges – between a white domesticity which extends the exclusion, absence, and constraint of his earlier work, and a more attentively conceived model of black domesticity, based not simply in resistance and bricolage, but also in the creative self-assertion of privacy and independence. Yet the roots of this shift are first visible in the complex and troubled life of Joe Christmas in *Light in August*.

In Lena’s Shoes: Everyday Identity in *Light in August*

As John Matthews notes, *Light in August* “depicts a crisis of unhoming”, wherein the act of possession is continually suspended or displaced.³⁰ Both metaphorically and literally, its characters are seldom “at home”, and in “The Philosophy of Furniture”, Jay Watson offers one explanation for this, by emphasizing the centrality of sawmills to the novel’s action. Sawmills symbolize the community, violently transmuting the raw

³⁰ Matthews, *Seeing Through the South*, 159-160

material of the wild forest into planed, shaped, and categorized planks ready for construction. The regulatory discipline of this banal violence, Watson argues, becomes encoded in the surfaces of everyday life, and the normalization and order enacted in the more spectacular violence of lynching is in actuality merely a shadowy extension of these everyday regulatory practices.³¹ Sawmills also embody the economic force that drove early twentieth-century Mississippi: not the cotton industry and the plantation, but the timber industry and the woodland reserve. The whole post-plantation South, in short, is depicted in the process of being destabilized, uprooted, and dispersed, with profound consequences for the social and imaginative composition of Southern culture by midcentury.

It is in a similar vein that Matthews also suggests that Joe Christmas's experiences with Joanna Burden, despite being "the closest he comes to being settled", nonetheless ultimately "reinforce [his] conviction that homes are the factories where stereotypes are reproduced."³² (In a larger textual sense, this unsettlement is reflected formally in the struggle to "contain" Christmas's story in a novel which "he threatens to tear into dispersed fragments".³³) It is within the texture of everyday life, amid its material surfaces and practices, that Christmas experiences the charge of race most profoundly. During the course of his manhunt by the police, following the discovery of Joanna Burden's body, Christmas marks out the social and racial boundaries of the Yoknapatawpha community, as he crosses and re-crosses them – literalizing, in his fugitive path, the troubling of the color line that his ambiguous identity has already enacted.³⁴ The ineffectual posse struggles to follow his trail, as it winds through the unfamiliar environment of the black countryside community. The failure of both men and dogs to read Christmas's tracks (to render

³¹ Jay Watson, "The Philosophy of Furniture, or *Light in August* and the Material Unconsciousness", in *Faulkner and Material Culture: Faulkner and Yoknapatawpha*, 2004, ed. Joseph R. Urgo & Ann J. Abadie (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2007), 26-29

³² Matthews, *Seeing Through the South*, 166

³³ Sundquist, *House Divided*, 73

³⁴ His fugitive act, in running, mark him still more definitively as "black", in Southern social terms; while the posse, in their resemblance to patrollers hunting runaway slaves or paramilitary groups such as the Ku Klux Klan, asserts an historical connection to the symbolic "mastery" of hunting among the Southern planter class; see Nicholas W. Proctor, *Bathed in Blood: Hunting and Mastery in the Old South* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 2002), 170.

them legible) is mirrored in the inscrutability with which the black community, focalized always through white perspectives, is presented throughout the novel. Everyday moments are offered up as fragments that do not cohere, as illegible patterns that resist white reading. The most profound symbol of this, however, comes in the shoes Christmas trades with a black woman – her husband’s old brogans, which she is wearing – in order to evade the pursuing bloodhounds (*LA*, 642).

In changing shoes, Christmas shifts identity, evades definition, slips seamlessly from white world to black. His action recalls the opening of *Light in August*, which describes the country-girl Lena Grove’s insistence on wearing shoes and walking rather than riding into town on her family’s intermittent visits, “because she believed that the people who saw her and whom she passed on foot would believe that she lived in the town too.” (401) The shoes, in her mind at least, mark her as integrated within the community – just as Christmas evades tracking by swapping an anonymous farmer’s shoes for the “crack, dusty, townshaped shoes” he has worn since his arrival (565). Shoes – as for the young Thomas Sutpen – mark place, in a dual sense. They mark “belonging”; they permit transportation and escape, even if it is only an illusion (as in the doubt hinted in Lena’s case by the word “believed”). They also draw attention to an outsider status, too, to a desire or need to belong. What impressed Sutpen most was not Pettibone’s ownership of expensive shoes, but rather the fact that he “didn’t even have to wear them” (*AA*, 189), that he “belongs” so totally that he no longer needs such arbitrary markers. And so while standing on Pettibone’s porch, it is only natural that Sutpen should become, in that instant, so painfully conscious of his own lack of shoes.

Like Lena putting on her shoes, Christmas’s actions are always determined and defined by those around him: by their expectations and demands of appearance, by their consciousness that the conceptual barriers that mark and shape the community are as vital as the walls that separate inside from outside, as the leather that separates the foot from the dusty ground. Yet it is Christmas’s tragedy that he is never quite able, figuratively speaking, to find himself in Lena’s shoes; he is never able to understand that placeness is a matter of bodily adjustment and conceptual compromise. It is the placeless dilemma of Christmas (as individual, and as disruptive narrative element)

always to pass over or transgress, and never to sufficiently dwell or belong, forever swapping shoes.

I want to suggest that this is not simply because Christmas cannot satisfactorily settle in to a comfortable sense of racial identity or self-identity; instead, it is because he cannot settle into a satisfying domestic environment. His discontent comes less from his racial ambiguity than from his fraught relationships with women and his refusal to allow himself to feel “at home” with any of those who enter his life. (Later, in *Absalom, Absalom!*, Charles Etienne de Saint Valery Bon resolves this problem, coming to terms with his racial unsettlement by finding domestic settlement – which the novel then starkly dissipates through the cruelly ironic fate of yellow fever.) The racial tensions that surface in Christmas’s volatile relationships, though always sexually charged, nonetheless seem to center on eating and the meal-table: from the promiscuous dietitian who catches him eating toothpaste, to his affair with Bobbie the waitress and his ambiguous cohabitation with Joanna Burden. A refusal of domestic consumption also lies at the center of his relationship with his foster mother Mrs McEachern, in his rejection of her kindness, dumping the food she brings in the corner of his bedroom, only to eat it later once she has left: kneeling and with his hands, “like a savage, like a dog.” (LA, 513) Food becomes an index to his needs and desire, a gauge of his fluctuation between “animalistic” and “civilized” behavior, and thus also a measure of his engagement with social codes.

This nexus of race, sex, and food reaches its most intense point in Christmas’s relationship with Joanna Burden, who uses her privileged position as a white property-owner to assert herself in response to his attempts at sexual domination. “Through the small but significant gestures of a locked door and a food dish,” Laura Bush notes, “she exercises her own race/class position in the American South by putting him in *his* subordinate place as a ‘black’ man.”³⁵ Avak Hasratian also notes how Joanna uses “‘black people’s food’ to incorporate Christmas into the black body she secretly desires”, not least by limiting him to the servant-space of the kitchen. “For Joanna food and sex are, respectively, a creation and transgression of boundaries

³⁵ Laura L. Bush, “A Very American Power Struggle: the Color of Rape in *Light in August*”, *Mississippi Quarterly* 51.3 (1998), 494

rather than their dissolution”, Hasratian summarizes.³⁶ The communality of eating becomes an act of gift-giving within the privacy of the home, an offering that empowers the giver and obligates the receiver – asserting a hierarchical dynamic that Faulkner would later use to markedly different, yet equally powerful, effect in his later treatment of lynching politics in *Intruder in the Dust*.

Eating satisfies more than simple biochemical needs: it also satisfies social needs too. As Martin Jones argues, it is an act of communication that works in a narrative and linguistic manner, governed by codes and conventions, which defines an individual's place within social relations.³⁷ As a result, the idea of “feasting” can carry broader social significance than simple culinary consumption, especially in a strongly communal culture like the post-emancipation rural South of the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century. Observing that burnings in mass mob lynchings were described as “barbecues”, sociologist Orlando Patterson has drawn on Claude Lévi-Strauss’s raw/cooked distinction to infer a ritual of both neutralization and civilization: “the cooked Negro, properly roasted, has been tamed and culturally transformed.”³⁸ Communal lunching, like communal lynching, thus offers a powerful metaphor for social unity – or in Christmas’s case, the alienation from such unity. (“One sign of being graceful, of being inside a community,” J. Hillis Miller asserts, “is the ability to accept hospitality. Christmas can’t do that.”³⁹) His refusal to socialize or to eat socially, like his inability to settle on a racial definition, frames him as an outsider in need of “regulation”. It is significant, then, that the novel’s climax should combine the “regulatory practices” of both white domesticity and white lynching to “recast” Christmas’s identity in a more socially consumable form.

Joanna Burden uses “home and hearth” to do violence to Christmas’s subjectivity, manipulating the popular myths of Southern rape and violence to master him. Like Roth Edmonds during his moment of childhood rupture, Joe Christmas has his racial identity vividly impressed upon him via moments at the kitchen table. And so

³⁶ Avak Hasratian, “The Death of Difference in *Light in August*”, *Criticism* 49.1 (2007), 72

³⁷ Martin Jones, *Feast: Why Human Share Food* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 8, 79

³⁸ Orlando Patterson, *Rituals of Blood: Consequences of Slavery in Two American Centuries* (New York: Basic Civitas, 1998), 200

³⁹ Julian Wolfreys, “Why Literature? A Profession: An Interview with J. Hillis Miller”, in *The J. Hillis Miller Reader*, ed. Julian Wolfreys (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2005), 408

it seems bleakly apt that, when Christmas's violent end arrives, he is crouched behind the kitchen table in Reverend Hightower's house, gunshot and awaiting butchering. The descriptions of the (absent) narrator Gavin Stevens and the action of lyncher Percy Grimm frame Christmas's death as social sacrifice: in the rituals of Stevens's narrative and Grimm's sacrificial violence, Christmas becomes transformed as though he had been "cooked". His identity is defined and his story prepared into a more readily consumable object – as fully as raw timber fed through a planing mill. Standing above him, castrating knife in hand, and ready to cast Christmas forever and unequivocally as black rapist in the community's consciousness, Percy Grimm proclaims with grim triumph: "'Now you'll let white women alone, even in hell[!]" (742)

This is not to say that Joanna Burden's own situation is any simpler. In her final conversation in the novel, she tells Christmas "[m]aybe it would be better if we both were dead" (604); and as far as the community is concerned, this is certainly the case. In life, she is a "nigger-lover", but in death the community that previously shunned her is now able to reincorporate her: she is transformed into the very symbol of chaste white Southern womanhood. This transformation responds directly to her past identity – her pursuit of black civil rights, and her descent from abolitionists – in order to contain and overwrite it. Just as Joanna and Christmas apparently need the physical and social boundaries surrounding them to heighten their sexual satisfaction, so the white community needs knowledge of Joanna's transgressive behavior to establish an iconic model of her in contrast. In both cases, this is strongly related to an eroticizing of the confining spaces and symbolism of the mansion, an expression of what we might, drawing on Georges Bataille, term "transgressive erotics".⁴⁰

"The transgression does not deny the taboo but transcends it and completes it," Bataille argues; it "opens the door into what lies beyond the limits usually observed, but it maintains these limits just the same."⁴¹ Excess and denial – or in a

⁴⁰ Much the same occurs with Temple Drake's spatial and social confinement in *Sanctuary*, though without the racial complications. For discussion of the narrative effects of Temple's sexual abuse – which I mention only in passing here and in Chapter 3 – see in particular Laura S. Patterson, "Ellipsis, Ritual, and 'Real Time': Rethinking the Rape Complex in Southern Novels", *Mississippi Quarterly* 54.1 (2000), 37-58, and Sabine Sielke, *Reading Rape: The Rhetoric of Sexual Violence in American Literature and Culture, 1790-1990* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2002), 76 in relation to Sielke's earlier discussion of the "narrativization" of rape.

⁴¹ Georges Bataille, *Eroticism* [1957] trans. Mary Dalwood (London: Penguin, 2001), 63, 67

narrative sense, the depiction and ellipsis – are thus inextricably linked: on a sensual level between anticipation and satisfaction, and on a social level between the personal and the communal, the act of deviation and the act of conformity. Rather than asserting any hierarchies or moral criteria, the word “transgressive” is productive here because it designates the passing of boundaries that are at once conceptual and structural, social and materially spatial. In literal terms, it establishes the boundaries of a sexualized site, at once erotic and violent (and thus, by extension, erotically violent too). It is precisely in the penetration – or we might also, from a different perspective, say “passing” – of these boundaries, in their transformation into thresholds or points of exchange like porous membranes, that eroticism is created in *Light in August*.⁴² Yet the novel ultimately moves to constrain Joanna Burden’s transgressiveness, to contain it: within her death and its framing narrative ellipsis, and also within her transformed social identity and the burning of her mansion’s transgressed spaces (its “autoeradication”, clearing the way for the “restorative violence” of her new social identity). The mansion and its mistress only become of value to the community in their moment of destruction; the smoke above her burning mansion, which introduces it to the novel, conceptually solidifies as a “column” (420) and a “monument” (434), as its mistress takes on a caryatid-like burden in the community’s discourse. Both mansion and mistress, in their moment of destruction, also thereby become iconically “white”: she transgresses only to “pass” right back into a normalizing role, both socially and textually contained.

Tracing Resistance: Sweeping the Yard, Lining the Grave

The woman who trades shoes with Joe Christmas lives in a shabby dwelling; it is immediately identifiable not simply as a cabin, but as a “negro” one (though precisely what creates this distinction is never expressed). It is an empty, unhomely space, at least in the brief description offered through the eyes of the white posse: a bleak space, with a “stark naked” child sitting “in the cold ashes on the hearth, eating something.” (642) That the child is ungendered here is telling: its racial identity

⁴² For a compelling extension of Bataille’s philosophy into architectural terms, see Tschumi “Architecture and Transgression” (1976) and “Violence of Architecture” (1981), in *Architecture and Disjuncture*, 65-78 and 120-137 respectively.

seemingly removes all other need for specificity or differentiation. These similar descriptions, too, in *The Sound and Fury*, of black cabins with their yards “littered with broken things, bricks, planks, crockery, things of a once utilitarian value”, dotted with “trees that partook also of the foul desiccation which surrounded the houses” (*SF*, 1101). In contrast to the forlorn blossom of the pear trees elsewhere in the novel (which I discuss in Chapter 3), these trees are “the sad and stubborn remnant of September, as if even spring had passed them by”. Like the “ruin” of Dilsey’s body (1081), they augur no hope or chance of renewal, depict only stagnating decline.

Such descriptions constitute one extreme of the black domestic experience to which Faulkner was apparently drawn. The desiccation of these environments contrasts sharply with the model of impoverished dignity expressed in *Flags in the Dust*, when young Bayard Sartoris joins a black family for Christmas day. Wandering the countryside, after causing his grandfather’s death in a car accident, Bayard comes upon a black cabin at night. The owner warily lets him spend the night in his barn; Bayard awakes the next morning – Christmas morning – and joins the family for their meal. As he closes the door and enters the room “warmth and rich, stale rankness envelop[s] him like a drug.” (*FD*, 841) Although the language is negative, in keeping with the rest of the novel’s racial attitudes – the children (“pickaninnies”) described as “animals”, their Christmas gifts “frugal and sorry gewgaws and filthy candy” (843) – there is nonetheless something warming that overcomes the impoverished conditions in which the family lives. Bayard and the black couple drink together “amicably, a little diffidently – two opposed concepts antipathetic by race, blood, nature and environment, touching for a moment and fused within an illusion” (843). Yet the very conditions which create this moment of connection, and let us see this glimpse of black domesticity, also disperse it: it is Christmas day, and so the festive occasion separates it from the commonality of the everyday. As Thadious Davis notes, “Bayard senses communal effort and security. The fire for heating and cooking on their broken hearth reflects not merely the simplicity of their lives, but also their bond of love.” However, because of the politics and aesthetics of *Flags in the Dust*, and its compulsion toward simplicity and the repression of connection, the moment is lost: it “goes unrealized because it cannot be included in the larger picture of Bayard’s life as

Faulkner presents it in this novel.”⁴³ It serves instead as a precursor to the scenes of meaningful hearth-fires and creative black domesticity to which Faulkner would turn in *Go Down, Moses*; but for the time being, this vision – like so many others in that novel – is merely glimpsed then lost. Riding away in a wagon, “his depleted jug between his feet”, Bayard casts a single glance back toward the cabin – “at the woman standing in the door and a pale windless drift of smoke above its chimney” (843) – before it passes out of his life, and the novel, for good.

When *Go Down, Moses* recuperates this domestic model, however, Faulkner also transforms the home-space into a site of resistance, and does so by drawing on the hostility to white spatial practices and order articulated in “That Evening Sun” (1934). This latter tale engages with the cultural of racialized violence surrounding, but not directly involved in, lynching practices. The story centers on the Compson family’s part-time servant Nancy, who has a sideline in prostitution. One particularly stark page describes a violent beating she receives after confronting a white client, the Baptist deacon Mr. Stovall; this beating is immediately succeeded by her failed attempt to hang herself in the town jail, following her discovering that she is pregnant (CS, 291). The bulk of the story thereafter relates Nancy’s fear of the return of her estranged husband Jesus, whom she believes will murder her for carrying someone else’s “watermelon” on her “vine” – worst of all, a white man’s (292). Mrs. Compson, however, fuelled by the rape hysteria of the era (the story is set around 1900), views matters from a distinctly different perspective, and protests when Mr. Compson agrees to walk Nancy home to her cabin for protection. “You’ll leave me alone, to take Nancy home?” she complains. “Is her safety more precious to you than mine?” (293) When she reiterates this complaint (“I must wait here alone in this big house while you take a Negro woman home”), Mr. Compson quite reasonably points out that Mrs. Compson at least knows he is “not lying outside with a razor.” (299) But logic and reason have no meaningful place in a culture of fear that has little concern for the wellbeing (emotional, sexual, or physical) of black women.

Jesus constitutes, in effect, a negative reflection of the figures of black manhood that will later be offered by Rider and Lucas Beauchamp in *Go Down, Moses*. He is “a short black man, with a razor scar down his face” (290), which is subsequently

⁴³ Davis, *Faulkner’s Negro*, 69

described, in the single scene in which he actually appears, as marking his face “like a piece of dirty string.” (292) This seemingly banal description of the scar takes on a distinctly more ominous tone a few pages later, when Nancy speaks fearfully of “[t]hat razor on that string down his back, inside his shirt.” (295) He is a man who lives with constant violence (as Rider in “Pantaloon in Black” will be, before his redemption through domesticity); his razor is readily and actively to hand. Jesus’s life is unsettled, but his understanding of that unsettlement reaches beyond his personal violence, and acutely critiques the spatial inequalities of Southern racial politics:

“I can’t hang around white man’s kitchen,” Jesus said. “But white man can hang around mine. White man can come in my house, but I can’t stop him. When white man want to come in my house, I aint got no house. I cant stop him, but he can kick me outen it. He can do that.” (292)

Later, in *Go Down, Moses*, Lucas Beauchamp will reach a realization of the same limits. “How to God can a black man ask a white man to please not lay down with his black wife?” Lucas asks himself. “And even if he could ask it, how to God can the white man promise he wont?” (*GDM*, 46) (This observation is deeply complicated following Ike McCaslin’s recovery of his grandfather Carothers’s miscegenation and incest, first with the slave Eunice and then with her daughter Tomasina; Ike’s attempt to believe in Carothers’s actions as innocent homemaking – that he “sent for her at first out of loneliness, to have a young voice and movement in the house, [...] bade her mother send her each morning to sweep the floors and make the beds” [199-200] – quickly collapses.) It is this same fear, coupling marital and material property, that preoccupies and enrages Jesus, and that places him within the razor-wielding continuum of Joe Christmas, Rider, and Lucas Beauchamp. And this idea accounts in part for Mrs. Compson’s concern: she fears her husband being alone with Nancy, with nothing to prevent him from “laying down with her”.

“That Evening Sun” reveals the importance of stable domesticity in black Southern life. The story’s violence, abuse, and fear are all generated by domestic unsettlement, and *Go Down, Moses* builds on this connection of violence and the

hearth by placing it alongside depictions which recall the more positive model offered in *Flags in the Dust*. *Go Down, Moses* offers a synthetic view of black domesticity, then, which frames its value as an everyday site in terms that may be read (to apply Michel de Certeau's terms) as expressions of aesthetic, polemical, and ethical power (to use De Certeau's terms).⁴⁴ And it does so by framing the stable and resistant qualities of black domesticity in direct contrast to the warmthless white hearths and domestic failures of Ike McCaslin or Hubert Beauchamp, of the widower Zack Edmonds or his bachelor son Roth.

The hearth, in presence or absence, forms the center of these domestic settings. In "Pantaloon in Black", when Rider lights his cabin's fire on the day he marries Mannie, and keeps it burning continually thereafter, he does so in conscious emulation of Lucas and Molly Beauchamp (104-105). (Unlike Lucas, Rider is apparently not kin to the McCaslin or Edmonds families, nor even a tenant; he merely rents a cabin from Roth Edmonds, while working "off-land" in the sawmill [103].) Rejecting his past loose living, Rider marries Mannie and they set about building a home. He repairs the cabin's broken roof and porch, and buys a stove; she in turn, through smaller yet deeply significant touches, endows the cabin with a spirit of domesticity and warmth. And so when Mannie dies, suddenly and inexplicably, Rider finds his prop, his source of self-identity and self-possession, snatched from him. So strong is Mannie's domestic spirit – or rather, the want of it – that Rider finds himself dissociated from his home's previously most intimate sites, its "hearth and stove and bed all part of the memory of somebody else." (103) This loss even extends to the surrounding environment of their cabin, "his body breathing the air her body had vacated, his eyes touching the objects – post and tree and field and house and hill – her eyes had lost." (103)⁴⁵

These objects lose their warmth but gain narrative resonance; retention and loss are held in impossible paradox. Indeed, this retention proves every bit as

⁴⁴ Michel de Certeau et al., *The Practice of Everyday Life, Vol.2: Living and Cooking* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998), 254-255

⁴⁵ This is land that he has "claimed", as in Vlach's model of resistance, through his own bodily usage and experience; there are clear parallels between how slaves undermined the "processional landscape" of the plantation by not following its paths, and how Rider asserts his sense of "belonging" within the environment, by crossing fields and roads, and stepping across fences, as he returns home from the cemetery (102-103).

overwhelming for Rider as the loss, the memories of their brief marriage overflowing the cabin, “until there was no space left for air to breathe, crammed and crowded about the hearth” (105). Layers of memories overflow the environs of the cabin, too: returning there after burying Mannie, Rider sees “the narrow, splay-toed prints of his wife’s bare feet” alongside “his own prints”, “vanished but not gone, fixed and held in the annealing dust” (103). Rider’s sense of loss is a tangible, bodily sensation; memory resurrects and re-embodies her (to remember proving, in the strongest of senses, to “re-member”). Far from being “a thing of no moment”, like Zack Edmonds’s wife, Mannie was what gave the cabin’s objects their “moment”, their warmth; and in the hopelessness of grief, Rider allows the fire in their hearth to fail and die, falling to “a dry, light soilure of dead ashes.” (105)

While Rider’s grief, and the story’s resultant violence, clearly express his deep romantic love for Mannie, there is also a tangible, material aspect to Rider’s loss. As Benjamin Ogden argues, “the text itself suggests that it may be not only love that is the impetus for Rider’s despair but also the loss of self-identity constructed through property and money that marriage makes possible.”⁴⁶ John T. Matthews goes further, arguing that Mannie haunts the story “as the phantom of unrealized social and economic entitlement. She represents a life for Southern blacks first deferred and then denied” – and so she can do nothing other than simply vanish, “her absence suggesting indirectly the space of equality foreclosed by white vigilance.”⁴⁷ Having lost his domestic and psychic centering, Rider becomes unsettled and displaced once more, and is driven outside his home in his attempt to restore a partial sense of self-possession. He resorts to his former reckless living, and confronts a white night-watchman who cheats him in a dice-game, killing him with a deft razor stroke when the white man draws a gun on him. The next day, Rider’s body is found lynched nearby, hanging “from the bell-rope of a black schoolhouse” (116), a warning to the black community at large.⁴⁸

⁴⁶ Benjamin H. Ogden, “Rethinking Rider’s Love: The Less Romantic Logic of Property and Space in ‘Pantaloons in Black’”, *Mississippi Quarterly* 61.3 (2008), 381

⁴⁷ Matthews “Touching Race”, 29

⁴⁸ As Matthews puts it, “[v]iolence performs blood segregation; social prohibitions against touch guard against equal competition. Rider’s disciplined blood has been remanded to the negro schoolhouse, where it is left to proclaim the only lesson worth learning.” (Ibid, 30)

The white deputy who, in the second part of "Pantaloon in Black", relates and comments on these events, finds Rider's actions irrational and meaningless: "them damn niggers aint human," he concludes (116). But he himself lives in a home heated only by his wife's "choleric" disposition, and this domestic distance translates accordingly into interpretive distance. (We might also recall McLendon's home in "Dry September", a "birdcage" in which he beats his wife [CS, 182].) "I wish you would [...] Take him out of my kitchen, anyway," his wife protests at his telling of Rider's tale, expressing an inversion of Joe Christmas's dilemma (117). The significance of both Rider and the deputy's struggle to comprehend what has occurred, as well as the deputy's attempts to engage in comfortable domesticity, are tersely dismissed by his spouse. "And what do you think of that?" the deputy asks, at the end of his account. "I think if you eat any supper in this house you'll do it in the next five minutes," she replies, speaking to him, as throughout much of his telling, from the physical separation of a different room: "I'm going to clear this table then, and I'm going to the picture show." (120)

Noel Polk has suggested that the center of this story lies in the white deputy's gestures toward knowledge, his attempts "to make sense of his actual experience of Rider, which has made that magnificent black man something devastatingly different from the stereotype he has always presumed to think he knew."⁴⁹ Polk sees in the deputy a genuine attempt to understand; but I would argue that Faulkner purposefully dramatizes this apparent social, physical, and psychological gap between black and white, paralleling it here to a marriage that has become spatially divided, above all, through the failure and refusal to communicate. Domestic ritual is reduced to habit, and fails to maintain any sense of homely stability. In much the same way, the deputy cannot detect the invisible patterns inscribed between the lines of Rider's actions, cannot see how Rider's death stems from his domestic loss, or how Rider has consciously, rather than blindly, used the threat of lynching to reassert it. In part this is because the deputy apparently has no personal frame of reference which he can apply. (Richard Moreland has called this a story about "a crisis in interracial literacy."⁵⁰) Faulkner summarizes this dissonance between black actions and white understanding,

⁴⁹ Polk, "Man in the Middle", 240

⁵⁰ Moreland, *Faulkner and Modernism*, 171

between black and white needs, in the story's opening description of Mannie's grave: a grave like any other in the black cemetery, lined with "shards of pottery and broken bottles and old brick, and other objects insignificant to sight, but actually of a profound meaning and fatal to touch, which no white man could have read." (102) (This is in stark contrast to how Faulkner apparently dismisses the same grave-sites a decade earlier, in *Flags in the Dust*: graves "bordered with tedious rows of broken gaudy bits of crockery and of colored glass" that contrast unfavorably with the "stark and peaceful simplicity" of the white "cemetery proper." [FD, 868])

This sense of domesticity as a source of empowerment in the face of racial oppression and cultural silencing can equally be applied to "The Fire and the Hearth", and my own reading frames the two texts as companion pieces about black resistance to the threat of white violence. I began this chapter by discussing a particular scene of resistance in "The Fire and the Hearth", located in the childhood estrangement between Roth Edmonds and Henry Beauchamp, and that episode is linked, in narrative composition and character histories, to the more violent estrangement between their fathers, Zack and Lucas. During their childhood and youth, these men too lived "almost as brothers" (GDM, 43), sharing intimate domestic spaces, but their intimacy finally collapses following the death of Zack's wife in childbirth, when Lucas's young wife Molly is taken into Zack's house as wet-nurse for his newborn son, Roth. Molly stays for six months, unsettling the rhythms and order of Lucas's home-life, and leading him to suspect that she is not only tending to the baby's general needs, but to the widower Zack's needs too. Indeed, Lucas finds Molly wearing Zack's wife's footwear – quite literally filling the dead woman's shoes (40). Lucas is on the verge of dowsing out the hearth-fire in their cabin – the fire's retentive warmth, as for Rider, apparently unable to overcome the sense of domestic loss – when he regains his composure, and realizes he must confront Zack to regain both wife and self-identity, though it may cost him his life.

Lucas walks into Zack's house and demands Molly's return. They argue over whether she has been serving as Zack's mistress; Zack insists that she has not, saying "I never thought to ever pass my oath to a nigger. But I will swear –" (37). His demand made, Lucas walks back to the fields and continues plowing; he does not look over to his cabin, so he does not see the fresh woodsmoke rising when Molly returns and

begins preparing his lunch. It is only after the noon bell rings, and he finds the dinner-pail she has left for him in the corner of a field, that he knows she has come home. This association is telling in that the moment in which Lucas learns of Molly's return is framed by the sound of the plantation bell, with its "flat, musical, deliberate clangs" (37). He is still living within a routine controlled by the plantation landscape and by Zack Edmonds's plantation order. As with the "gentleman's agreement" offered by Buck and Buddy, Lucas is conscious that his relationship with Zack Edmonds remains unequal: that his racial identity prevent him asking Zack not to lay with his "black wife" (46).

Their struggle is not yet ended: there is still the issue of Lucas and Zack's personal contest at stake; Molly is still wearing Zack's dead wife's shoes. And so that same evening, while Molly and the children are asleep in the cabin, Lucas takes out his money from a brick behind the hearth, leaves it wrapped in a rag in one of the shoes, and heads to Zack's mansion, razor in hand. He enters by the "front door" (40); earlier, Faulkner tells us that Lucas has only once gone to the backdoor since Roth was born, and that "he would never do it again as long as he lived" (35). (It is an important statement of equality, especially coming after Thomas Sutpen's experiences.) Inside the mansion, Lucas stands over Zack's bed – the bed he suspects Molly has been sharing – with a razor held to Zack's neck. "You thought that because I am a nigger I wouldn't even mind," he challenges Zack (41). It is this same refusal of conformity to a lesser status which will see Lucas later threatened with lynching in *Intruder in the Dust*, but here he makes his attitude absolutely clear. "You tried to beat me," he tells Zack. "And you won't never, not even when I am hanging dead from the limb this time tomorrow with the coal oil still burning, you won't never." (41) It is precisely by facing and accepting the possibility – the inevitability, even – of lynching that Lucas asserts his manhood, his self-possession, his self-determined place. White Southern rhetoric framed lynching as a defense of white home and hearth; here, in a boldly empowering reversal, it is equally enlisted in the defense of black home and hearth.

Ultimately, Lucas does not kill Zack; Lucas throws away his razor, and the two grapple like duelists for a gun, which Lucas presses against Zack's side, but which

subsequently misfires (44).⁵¹ More importantly, Zack seems to accept Lucas's position, and even his own culpability (and perhaps shame) – and certainly, as Lucas notes, the next day Molly “didn't wear the white woman's shoes now” (45). No lynching actually occurs; and yet, in holding a knife to Zack, Lucas willingly faces the potential consequences of his actions, just as Rider did when he drew a knife on the white night-watchman (it is perhaps the one moment in the story where Rider seems actually in control). By instead making the prospect of lynching a compulsion toward self-determined action, as well as a defense of personal and domestic rights, Lucas and Rider cease to be passive victims, or objects, at all.

These black male domestic rights are nonetheless strongly predicated on the exclusion of female ones. The actions of both Lucas and Zack present Molly as an object, either as a marker of status and possession, or as an interchangeable item of domestic machinery who may quite literally fill Zack's anonymous wife's shoes. She has only limited agency within this specific struggle between the two masterful men in her life.⁵² The domestic models at work here arise out of a determined value placed in the sanctity and significance of marriage. As Thadious Davis notes, this is one of the particular ways in which Tomey's Turl may be read as the central figure in *Go Down, Moses*: his regular escapes from the McCaslin plantation to the Beauchamp plantation are motivated not only by desire for Tennie, but also by a desire to manipulate their masters into a position where marriage will become possible. “Tomey's Turl's run,” Davis argues, “culminating not in the freedom plot but in the marriage plot, constitutes the willful institution of a legally recognized black family within an economic stake in the social order and with a traceable genealogy.”⁵³ For Lucas and Molly, post-Emancipation, marriage becomes still more important, offering a crucial means of publicly asserting the legal subjecthood of black Southerners, a state of equality before

⁵¹ As Martha Banta has noted (and as I have earlier implied) the choice of weapons here is clearly racialized: the razor framed as a black weapon, the pistol framed as a white. Joe Christmas, asserting his “blackness”, uses a razor rather than a pistol to kill Joanna Burden. In discarding the razor, then, Lucas is emphasizing his common descent with Zack from Carothers McCaslin – and thus his equality with him. See “The Razor, the Pistol, and the Ideology of Race Etiquette” in *Faulkner and Ideology: Faulkner and Yoknapatawpha, 1992*, ed. Donald M. Kartiganer & Ann J. Abadie (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1995), 172-216.

⁵² See in particular Davis, *Games of Property* (2003), 143

⁵³ *Ibid*, 143

the law.⁵⁴ In the climax of “The Fire and the Hearth”, it is in fact the legal equality invested in marriage contracts which helps Molly overcome the social inequality so often enacted in marriage practices. Lucas, in old age, becomes obsessed with treasure-hunting; by threatening to divorce Lucas, Molly aims to draw him out of his obsessive behavior. Yet at the same time, she also forces him toward another, more significant, action too: she forces Lucas to recognize her equal right to selfhood and agency, which his actions have so often casually denied.

Faulkner describes the Edmonds family as descended from Carothers McCaslin on the “distaff”, which is to say the feminine line (5, 34). But given the word’s homely and creative roots (from spinning), it seems more fitting to view the Beauchamps instead as a “distaff” family: it is they who, along with Rider and Mannie, offer the novel’s most convincing creation of homeliness. There is an obvious risk in equating domesticity with femininity, and by extension of equating blackness with femininity in their mutual marginalization. But to a degree, this is precisely the point: Southern white patriarchy *did* equate, and marginalize, black and female experience in similar spatial and political terms, and so it is unsurprising that black Southerners were often compelled to articulate their self-determination and self-possession in domestic terms. Historians including Elizabeth Fox-Genovese and Deborah Gray White have stressed domesticity’s importance in how enslaved black women drew on domestic acts and rituals to maintain a sense of dignity and selfhood.⁵⁵ By extending this attention to domesticity into the post-slavery era, Thavolia Glymph has suggested ways in which such rituals helped “transform” the idea of the plantation household to something which could also help articulate a newfound sense of “liberty” too. For black Southerners, the purchasing of household items and clothing, rather than receiving them as “gifts” from white people, constituted “a small but central part of freedom’s making, of demonstrated control over one’s life.”⁵⁶ Such acts suggest a vital way in

⁵⁴ Ibid, 139

⁵⁵ Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, *Within the Plantation Household: Black and White Women of the Old South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988); Deborah Gray White, *Ar’n’t I a Woman: Female Slaves in the Plantation South*, rev. ed. (New York: W.W. Norton, 1999).

⁵⁶ Thavolia Glymph, *Out of the House of Bondage: The Transformation of the Plantation Household* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 205-206

which domestic stability and liberty might help resist the inequalities, uncertainties, and even violent threats of public life in the postbellum South.

Faulkner offers a compelling symbol of triumph through domesticity in Molly's daily sweeping of their poor grassless yard "with a broom of bound willow twigs, sweeping the clean dust into curving intricate patterns among the flower-beds outlined with broken brick and bottles and shards of china and colored glass." (38) Whitney Battle-Baptiste has stressed the centrality of yard-sweeping in black American culture, particularly within the context of slavery.⁵⁷ Through the quietly political act of sweeping, an act of clearing and defining, black Southerners transformed their "yardspace", post-slavery, into something akin to the "homeplace" site of resistance about which bell hooks has written, spaces "where all black people could strive to be subjects, not objects".⁵⁸ As Battle-Baptiste asserts, "[t]he sweeping and decorating of yards has never been simply for decoration or upkeep. The repetitive practice of sweeping, tying, binding, protecting becomes a way in which African-Americans transform spaces into their own."⁵⁹ In consequence, "the sweeping of the yard in many ways was both a social and political act, even an act of resistance", and the creation of "spaces for black cultural production to survive."⁶⁰ Yard-sweeping constituted a fundamental act of home-making and ownership – and so it is doubly significant that later in "The Fire and the Hearth", when visiting his daughter Nat's new home, Lucas takes especial note of "the light dust swept into the intricate and curving patterns which Molly had taught Nat." (59)⁶¹

⁵⁷ I am grateful to Rebecca J. Fraser for directing me toward Battle-Baptiste's work.

⁵⁸ bell hooks, "Homeplace: A Site of Resistance", in *Yearning: Race, Gender, and Cultural Politics* (Boston, MA: South End Press, 1990), 42

⁵⁹ Whitney Battle-Baptiste [as Whitney Lutricia Battle], "A Yard to Sweep: Race, Gender and the Enslaved Landscape" (PhD Dissertation, University of Texas at Austin, 2004), 112

⁶⁰ Whitney Battle-Baptiste, "Sweepin' Spirits: Power and Transformation on the Plantation Landscape", in *Archaeology and Preservation of Gendered Landscapes*, ed. Sherene Baugher & Suzanne Spencer-Wood (New York: Springer, 2010), 88-90

⁶¹ This method of brushing is not uniquely African-American, of course: Richard Bushman notes that, in uncarpeted houses pre-1800, "the most meticulous housekeepers scattered sand and swept it into patterns with brooms made of twigs bound in sticks." See *The Refinement of America: Persons, Houses, Cities* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1992), 265. But in the context of the segregated, post-slavery South, such acts surely carry a particularly resistant significance.

These beautiful, mysterious patterns – framed by the same “trash” elements which framed Mannie’s grave in “Pantaloon in Black” – exude a black domestic warmth equal to Lucas’s hearth-fire (the domestic spirit Zack Edmonds apparently thought that, being a “nigger”, Lucas “wouldn’t even mind” losing). Far from signifying poverty or waste, the broken pottery serves to delineate the contours of black domestic self-determination, and mark it as a site of empowering self-inscription, that contrasts strikingly with the “nothingness” of the grave in which Zack Edmonds’s unnamed wife was buried.⁶² This pottery, collected and carefully arranged by black families, also stands in marked contrast to the objectifying images of pottery found elsewhere: the seeping, cracked, sexualized urns of Joe Christmas’s imagination (*LA*, 538), or the pure, largely asexual urns of Ike McCaslin’s romanticism, too. The pottery’s shards, and dust patterns swept around them, far from being insignificant, offer sources of order and identity. They are subtle yet powerful examples of a “trash aesthetic” which embodies how black Southerners salvaged beauty and order in the midst of oppression, indignity, and violence. They serve as further intricate, almost invisible patterns of black life “which no white man could have read”. So it is perhaps not insignificant that, the single time in “The Fire and the Hearth” that Roth Edmonds visits Lucas and Molly’s cabin, it is night-time. He can make out “the rock path neatly bordered with broken brick and upended bottles and such set into the earth” (91), but the dust patterns themselves lie hidden in the dark, invisible to sight, passed over unread.

⁶² Although Faulkner was probably unaware of it, this use of broken pottery for decoration has roots in religious practices in the Congo/Angola regions of Africa. This sense of a “trash aesthetic” – at once a commentary on American society and a continuation of African tradition – has also found expression in African-American “outsider” art throughout the twentieth century. For an overview of this area, see Robert Farris Thompson, *Flash of the Spirit: African and Afro-American Art and Philosophy* (New York: Vintage Book, 1984), 132-158; see also Patricia Yaeger, “Trash as Archive, Trash as Enlightenment”, in *Culture and Waste: The Creation and Destruction of Value*, ed. Gay Hawkins & Stephen Muecke (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2003), 103.

Passing Possibilities: Black-White Relations after *Go Down, Moses*

***Intruder in the Dust* and the Great Migration**

This same path re-appears in *Go Down, Moses's* loose sequel, *Intruder in the Dust*. After falling in a creek while hunting, twelve-year-old Charles "Chick" Mallison is gruffly invited into Lucas's cabin, to eat supper while his clothes dry in front of the hearth-fire. Walking toward the house, Chick notes the "intricate series of whorls and overlapping loops" swept in the dust, between the borders of "tin cans and empty bottles and shards of china and earthenware set into the ground" (*ID*, 289). Lucas's cabin is still recognizably the same place as in "The Fire and the Hearth", and so it comes as no surprise when Chick, like Roth Edmonds before him, receives a sharp lesson in racial and social etiquette at Lucas's table.

Though grateful to Lucas for rescuing him from the creek, it is as a result of Lucas's hospitality that Chick actually becomes indebted. The unusually detailed description of Lucas's home creates the unmistakable picture of Lucas and Molly as avowedly self-possessed – not least through the description of their actual picture, a portrait photograph for which Lucas made Molly removed her headrag, arguing that he "didn't want no field nigger picture in the house" (294). The house is described as sitting at the top of the tended pathway "as the carven ailanthus leaves are the Greek column's capital" (289), allowing a deft parallel here to the grandeur of the iconic Greek Revival plantation big house (and also, more obliquely, to the caryatids too). The analogy serves to emphasize Lucas's pride in his inheritance, and his view that only Carothers McCaslin, rather than any of his Edmonds descendants, is Lucas's true kin and equal. In "The Fire and the Hearth", Lucas views the aggrandizing alterations that have transformed the McCaslin house into the Edmonds mansion as actually a series of diminutions (*GDM*, 34-35), and later in *Intruder in the Dust*, when he is called a "goddamn biggity stiffnecked stinking burrheaded Edmonds sonofabitch", Lucas responds simply: "I aint a Edmonds. I dont belong to these new folks. I belongs to the old lot. I'm a McCaslin." (*ID*, 297) And by "belong", Lucas means a very specific thing, a familial and rooted connection, rather than a servile and retained one.

Having received Lucas's hospitality, Chick endeavors to overcome his sense of obligation by paying Lucas eighty-five cents. Lucas wordlessly rejects the gesture, "not flinging the coins but spurning them downward ringing onto the bare floor" (294). This symbolic moment of debt, contest, and humiliation drives the subsequent narrative. In his efforts to pay off his debt by helping prove Lucas innocent of the murder of white hill-farmer Vinson Gowrie – and thereby escape almost certain lynching at the hands of Gowrie's family and friends – Chick comes to understand how this localized and personal sense of responsibility may serve as a model for a broader sense of social and historical responsibility. It is significant, then, that Faulkner roots this model of social relations within a debt arising out of the politics of domesticity and hospitality.

On the surface, *Intruder in the Dust* appears to be – and has often been read as – a critique of the northern capitalist models that were transforming the landscape of Southern states such as Mississippi around this time (it appears to be set in the 1930s). Indeed, such a reading is readily reinforced by Faulkner's repeated use of analogies to the Confederacy and the Lost Cause – including one his most famous passages, in which Gavin Stevens describes the imaginative availability, "[f]or every Southern boy fourteen years old, not once but whenever he wants it," (430) of the moment of Confederate defeat prior to Pickett's Charge at Gettysburg, in July 1863. (The event itself goes unnamed; Faulkner apparently assumed the date alone would be sufficient).⁶³ The murder of which Lucas is accused turns out to be a case of fratricide, both literally and symbolically – symbolically, in that it is "fratricide deriving not from forces indigenous to the South," Ticien Marie Sassoubre argues, "but from the depersonalizing effect of the market."⁶⁴ The strong assertion of North-South tensions, in such a reading, would indeed serve to displace black-white tensions. In "Pantaloons in Black", Sassoubre argues, it was both possible and productive to read Rider's resistance as "an inarticulate protest against an economic regime stacked against black

⁶³ Pickett's Charge, with its bravery and recklessness at enormous cost to poor white lives, marked the symbolic high-point and endpoint of the Confederate cause. The casualties sustained by Lee's Army of Northern Virginia on that final day of the Battle of Gettysburg, of 6,555 killed, wounded, or captured, amounted to over 55%; the Confederate military was dealt a blow from which it was never subsequently able to recover. See Earl J. Hess, *Pickett's Charge: The Last Attack at Gettysburg* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 335.

⁶⁴ Ticien Marie Sassoubre, "Avoiding Adjudication in William Faulkner: *Go Down, Moses* and *Intruder in the Dust*", *Criticism* 49.2 (2008), 203-204

labor.”⁶⁵ For Sassoubre, *Intruder in the Dust* reorients Rider’s rebellion retroactively; the meaning of his lynching instead becomes, like all lynchings, merely a side-effect of “the dehumanization of both blacks and whites in an economy of exploitation and consumerism imposed by the North.”⁶⁶ It is acutely ironic, then, that the decline of popular support for lynching within the South can, to a large degree, be attributed to pragmatic, economic interventions arising from outside. As scholars such as Tolnay and Beck have pointed out, lynching drove away both the local black workforce and external white business-partners, and thus became economically untenable.⁶⁷

There is some validity to Sassoubre’s position: one need only consider Faulkner’s description of the group that gathers around Joanna Burden’s body in *Light in August*, “the casual Yankees and the poor whites and even the Southerners who had lived for a while in the north.” (LA, 611) But I would nonetheless contend that such readings risk minimizing the importance of Lucas’s place within *Intruder in the Dust*, and neglect the power of the opening impression of Lucas and Molly’s domesticity, a power and importance that Faulkner takes pains to construct.

When Lucas is constrained within the town jail for the majority of the novel, permitting Chick an active opportunity for social redemption, it is perhaps less to marginalize him as a character than to symbolize the loss of a certain kind of black domesticity which Faulkner lamented. In *Intruder in the Dust*’s second chapter, we are told that – in the four years which have passed since Chick’s first encounter with Lucas – Molly has died, their married daughter (presumably meaning the same Nat from “The Fire and the Hearth”) has “moved with her husband to Detroit”, leaving Lucas “living alone in the house, solitary kinless and intractable, apparently not only without friends even in his own race but proud of it.” (ID, 301) Later in the novel, passing through the countryside, Chick notes an eerie absence of blacks (394-395) – a detail which recalls the absence in “Dry September”, on the evening of Will Mayes’s lynching, of a single black face on the streets of Jefferson (CS, 181). In 1931, this was still plausible as a response to lynching; but by 1948 – with lynching considerably diminished as a Southern social practice – this absence of blacks from the countryside,

⁶⁵ Ibid, 195

⁶⁶ Ibid, 190

⁶⁷ Tolnay & Beck, *Festival of Violence*, 214, 241-243

in relation to the disintegration of the Beauchamp home-place, perhaps signifies something larger, too: a reflection, as Karl Zender has suggested, of the black movement north, to cities such as Detroit, during the Great Migration.⁶⁸ (The demographic impact of this population migration was considerable: as John Duvall notes, “[a]t the beginning of the 1890s, the decade Faulkner was born, 90 percent of African Americans lived in the South; by the 1960s, the decade Faulkner died, only 10 percent of the African American population lived in the South.”⁶⁹) Here and elsewhere, Faulkner does not simply neglect to mention the causes of this outmigration: he neglects to mention it at all. But it is crucial to stress that it stemmed less from the specific persecution of lynching than from the general persecutions of segregation, that severely constrained black opportunities for self-determination, social mobility, and property ownership. In heading north, black Southerners widened their possibilities; in leaving their spatial place, they shed their social “place”.

It is important, then, to recognize Lucas’s actions in context in *Go Down, Moses* – and in consequence, to place his resistance on the plantation site, and also his decision (perhaps born of pride) to stay, in contrast to the actions of his siblings: his brother James, who flees north (Ike McCaslin, in detective mode, loses James’s trail in Tennessee [*GDM*, 201-202]), and his sister Fonsiba, who marries and heads to Arkansas (in contrast, too, to the three other siblings, children of Tennie and Tomey’s Turl, who die within the year of their birth [201]). We never really learn how James made out, beyond the evidence of his granddaughter, who turns up as Roth Edmonds’s mistress in “Delta Autumn”, but we see Fonsiba’s domestic arrangements in detail. Her home-life is a stark contrast to the stability offered by Lucas’s hearth and Molly’s homemaking. Fonsiba marries a northern black man in 1886, presented as clownish and arrogant, and too incompetent and lazy even to profit as a carpetbagger. When Ike McCaslin visits their farm in the appropriately named Midnight, Arkansas, in order to pay Fonsiba her \$1,000 inheritance from Carothers McCaslin’s will, he finds matters in a sorry state. There is no farm to speak of, only “a single log edifice with a clay chimney which seemed in process of being flattened by the rain to nameless and valueless

⁶⁸ Karl F. Zender, *The Crossing of the Ways: William Faulkner, the South, and the Modern World* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1989), 128-130

⁶⁹ Duvall, *Race and White Identity*, 8

rubble of dissolution in that roadless and even pathless waste of unfelled fallow and wilderness jungle – no barn, no stable, not so much as a hen-coop.” (205) It is “a farm only in embryo”, existing fragile and rootless on the uncultivated and uncared for surface of the land.

Ike finds Fonsiba sitting in the shabby kitchen, “crouched into the wall’s angle behind a crude table”, near a bare hearth where “not even a fire for cooking burned.” (205) To Ike’s mind, she has repudiated her white heritage, by so wholly embracing the black: she has become “completely inheritor” of a history of slavery and its resistance, rather than the plantation and its community. “Fonsiba. Are you all right?” Ike asks. She looks back at him, he believes, “without alarm, without recognition, without hope”: “I’m free,” she says (207). It seems a bleak moment, and a hollow reply. It makes us rethink the value of the black plantation domestic that has gone before, too; it makes us reflect on the difficulties of freedom not from material conditions, but rather from a history that hurts, that scars. Fonsiba is not allowed to be “free” on her own terms: the inheritance that Carothers left her ties her firmly to the plantation past and asserts her abjectness in relation to a mastery that may bestow a bequest on her. If we miss this fact, then Ike is there to reassert it with his heavy-handed good intentions: without consulting her, he deposits the money in a local bank (run by a former soldier of Nathan Bedford Forrest, of Ku Klux Klan fame) and arranges that Fonsiba be paid no more than three dollars of it a week, enough to scrape by for the next twenty-eight years, should her husband’s support fail (83, 208).

Lost with the decline of the old plantation system, Ike believes, is a system of caring. He cannot but repudiate his family’s slaveholding past for the exploitation and suffering it caused. But he cannot entirely relinquish a nostalgic, romanticized view of the plantation world too, with his visions of the wives and daughters of planters who tended sick slaves with food; who when they were very sick “had them carried into the big house itself into the company room itself maybe and nursed them there” (211). The care arises from ownership, to be sure: it is what “the white man would have done too for any other of his cattle that was sick”, where in the same place “the man who hired one from a livery wouldn’t have.” The word “other” is particularly troubling here, but for Ike this relationship is redeemed by the sense of care and responsibility.

The problem with this social formulation is that it leaves little space even to consider black independence; the assumption of “care”, however well-intentioned or mutually beneficial, is nonetheless the imposition of white choice. In Rider and in Lucas, *Go Down, Moses* does indeed present some possibilities for black independent action, however limited. Yet because their resistance is always framed, physically and conceptually, within the plantation’s structures, such resistance offers only a limited degree of “escape”. The endurance of these structures also allows for Lucas, in *Intruder in the Dust*, to be integrated into the community – and thus, to perhaps serve as a means by which discourses on lynching revert to a focus on white practices rather than black subversion.

It may be that Faulkner’s return to the dilemmas of white responsibility was in direct response to the shifting social climate of America in the late-1940s; it might also be that the death of his beloved “mammy”, Caroline Barr, in 1940, heightened his sense of familial responsibility on the one hand and (possibly sentimental) nostalgia on the other. Certainly, in the dynamic between Roth and Henry, with which I began this chapter, Faulkner’s sympathy to Henry’s resistance is always overshadowed by a keener recognition of and identification with Roth’s nostalgic loss. And this is perhaps why, though he troubles norms and challenges conventions in his relations with Gavin Stevens and Chick Mallison, Lucas ultimately constitutes a conservative force in *Intruder in the Dust*. From his perspective, the system “debt” between black and white can never be resolved. In the novel’s final moment, as he requests his “receipt” for payment of Gavin Stevens’s services, Lucas appears to be making gestures toward recognition of black and white equality (*ID*, 470). Yet the irresolvable dilemma here is that such recognition is always clearly contingent on separation and on *a priori* acceptance of racial difference. In Lucas’s model of social relations, white and black can be bound by contract, or else by friendship – but never by both.

Building the Courthouse: “Go Down, Moses” and *Requiem for a Nun*

Go Down, Moses marks an extreme point in Faulkner’s attempt at a direct aesthetics of recuperation through narrative fragmentation. Its domestic models are effective on a personal level, but unsustainable on a larger social one; they offer a ready means of discussing pluralized Souths, but present considerably less means for discussing a more

interrelated sense of a collective South (as distinct from a “singular South”). *Go Down, Moses* reveals Faulkner’s awareness of this before the novel is over, in its final story, “Go Down, Moses”. Although it bears the novel’s title, the story feels more like an epilogue than a conclusion, or as a bridge toward *Intruder in the Dust*. “Go Down, Moses” points away from the themes and tensions of the novel, and toward the possibilities offered by the town community of Jefferson, rather than the plantation site. The difference is suggested by the introduction of two main characters (Gavin Stevens and Miss Worsham) and several minor who are associated firmly with the town rather than the plantation.

Stevens and Miss Worsham (a version of whom appears in *Intruder in the Dust* as Miss Habersham) resist the social disintegration threatened by black Southern outmigration, by affirming a sense of communal connection between black and white. Miss Worsham in particular is valuable as a means of tying Molly Beauchamp (here spelt “Mollie”; the alternative naming seems revealing of a shift) to the town community. Mollie’s parents were slaves of Miss Worsham’s grandfather, and continued as the family’s servants; Mollie’s brother Hamp still remains with Miss Worsham as her retainer. Miss Worsham tells Stevens that she and Mollie “were born in the same month” and “grew up together as sisters would.” (*GDM*, 274) *Intruder in the Dust* reiterates this connection, asserting that Miss Habersham and Molly were “born in the same week and both suckled at Molly’s mother’s breast”, and growing up “almost inextricably like sisters, like twins, sleeping in the same room, the white girl in the bed, the Negro girl on a cot at the foot of it almost until Molly and Lucas married” (*ID*, 349). The distancing created by the use of simile, however, is key: Mollie and Miss Worsham can never share the equality of actual sisters. Their closeness is far from the symbiosis offered by Clytie and Judith, biological sisters who also shared the same bed.

In this sense, Faulkner returns to the stable model of community of *Flags in the Dust*, but roots it more firmly in the town of Jefferson. Gavin Stevens’s attempts to persuade members of the white community to help pay for the return of Mollie’s grandson Samuel’s body for burial (he has been executed in Illinois, for murdering a policeman) offers a reversal of diasporic out-migration, in which the town lawyer also displaces Roth Edmond’s traditional plantation role by offering professional rather than paternalist assistance to Mollie. (This is by no means to say that Stevens’s

attitudes are free from attitudes of white paternalism, though.) The displacement of Edmonds by Stevens is also a displacement of plantation by town. This transference of power centers on the courthouse square (where Stevens has his offices) and the courthouse itself as hub of the community, much as the commissary (and ledgers) severed as nexus of the plantation. Although the coffin is being transported for burial at the McCaslin plantation, some seventeen miles outside of Jefferson, the story is confined to the town. Stevens follows the funeral as it leaves the station and negotiates the square, “circling the Confederate monument and the courthouse” under the watchful eyes of the white community; he follows it out to just beyond the sign stating “Jefferson. Corporate Limit”, and then cuts the engine, turns, and heads back toward the town. The story ends on an ambiguous note of both connection and separation: maintaining the independence of black rituals (especially funeral ones, as with Rider and Mannie) but connecting black life more firmly into a centered sense of community. It marks a transition in Faulkner’s writing, then, and points the way toward the last phase of Yoknapatawpha, in which Faulkner would emphasize the ways in which communal histories are established, through layering which at times can also become a displacement or erasure.

This transition is perhaps most effectively demonstrated in the distinction between Thomas Sutpen’s roles in *Absalom, Absalom!* and *Requiem for a Nun*. Sutpen’s design, as I discussed in the opening of this chapter, is sustained through a highly physical cult of personality. Even though his plantation is a reproduction, in practice it appears highly personalized, because Sutpen places himself so aggressively at its center. Where the Sartoris or McCaslin plantations draw their names from the family, Sutpen’s draws its name from an expression of his power. “Sutpen’s Hundred” expresses possession: the “hundred” refers not to the specific acreage but rather to an administrative unit used in colonial government. Its name asserts him not only as master, but as authority; it asserts his person as the site of all power, legal and otherwise.

Sutpen’s land is his self; beyond it, in narrative terms, he lacks social function or being. When he returns from war in 1865, what little communal sense he possessed – rallying to the common cause – seems to have been completely extinguished. He turns his energy toward “*the restoration of his own land*”, rejecting the overtures of former

comrades as they form groups of “night riders” (AA, 134). For Bayard Sartoris, in “An Odor of Verbena”, there is something impressive in this resilient idealism, even though it turns so singularly on Sutpen’s sense of self. “[Y]et he came home and set out singlehanded to rebuild his plantation,” Bayard recalls. “He had no friends to borrow from and he had nobody to leave it to and he was past sixty years old, yet he set out to rebuild his place like it used to be”. He repeats his attitude from *Absalom, Absalom!*: “I’m for my land [...] If every man of you would rehabilitate his own land, the country would take care of itself.” (U, 471)

The distinction between “restoration” and “rehabilitation” reveals a crucial difference between the two novels, and indicates the shift in Faulkner’s conception of the plantation community that developed between the publication of *Absalom, Absalom!* in 1936 and of *The Unvanquished* in 1938. The distinction, though framed around Sutpen, reveals more about Bayard, whose use of such terminology foreshadows his rejection of familial violence in order to move from the ostensible insularity of the plantation to the inclusivity of the community. This shift away from Sutpen’s model of mastery – exclusive, white, patriarchal, physically violent – culminates in his final appearance in Faulkner’s work in *Requiem for a Nun* in 1951. Sutpen is still framed in the same uncompromising manner, as “a big gaunt friendless passionworn untalkative man who walked in a fading aura of anonymity and violence like a man just entered a warm room or at least a shelter, out of a blizzard” (RN, 497). But by this point in Faulkner’s conception of Yoknapatawpha, his aura is, indeed, faded; and the central figure in the construction of the estate becomes, instead, the architect – “promoted” now from a Martinican to a “Parisian”.

In *Absalom, Absalom!*, the architect cut a pitiable figure: culturally isolated, physically worn, disparaged and enslaved. Even in his moment of surest resistance, in flight from Sutpen’s estate, he is tracked like an animal by Sutpen’s slaves, and brought to ground in a hole. His technical training and his professional skills – though he turns them to good use in “architecting” (AA, 198) himself from tree to tree (in one of Faulkner’s most striking linguistic coinages) – do not liberate him: he is not permitted to escape the plantation site (211). In *Requiem for a Nun*, he is cast as quite a different figure, however. It is he who teaches the founders of the settlement of Jefferson how to mold bricks, who designs their kiln, and who physically plots out the shape of the

town around its central courthouse square (*RN*, 498-499). It is he, in effect, who gives birth to the community, giving form to the nascent town and thereby transforming idea into entity (much as he materializes Sutpen's extravagant "design" in the more practically attainable shape of "Sutpen's Hundred"). The architect's idea of communal order ultimately masters and displaces Sutpen's idea of plantation order, thereby replicating the reconfigurations performed by Faulkner's own narrative architecture, in the Yoknapatawpha map that opens *Absalom, Absalom!*. Both Faulkner and the architect place the center firmly in the communal rather than the individual, and in the process marginalize Sutpen and the mastery he embodies within Yoknapatawpha's history, reducing Sutpen's design, his monstrous dream, "to a mere dot."⁷⁰

The separation of the architect not only from Sutpen but also from Sutpen's plantation design is emblematic of a larger shift away from plantation and toward community, which has the result of reconfiguring Yoknapatawpha's depiction of Southern history. It creates – as I will discuss in Chapter 3 – a kind of narrative and conceptual "passing", a process of autoeradication where the social structures of the meta-plantation are retained and sustained, but are also freed from most of the specific legacies of slaveholding. The emphasis on the architect over the planter repositions slaveholding as merely one activity among many, perhaps even an anomalous one, in Southern history. This repositioning is artificial and problematically selective, to be sure, but Faulkner uses it toward two specific, although very different, ends. He uses it to draw attention to the dangers inherent in the erasure of history through modernization, but also *as* a means of erasure, in order to gesture toward a more positive sense of community through which Southern society – with its enduring problems of violence, racism, poverty, and ignorance – might be "redeemed". If these two aims seem paradoxical and contrary, it is because they decidedly are – and this is both the dilemma, and yet also ultimately the strength, of Faulkner's later Yoknapatawpha works.

This sense of "passing" is most clearly articulated in the opening prose section of *Requiem for a Nun*, a history of the initial settlement and construction of the Jefferson. Retrospectively reaching back to the founding moments of the community, plantation culture is framed as an unnatural dispersal, an anomaly. The central figure

⁷⁰ Dalziel, "The Extension of Dialogic Form", 293

is, instead, the courthouse: constructed, like all the plantations, by slave labor – but, unlike the plantations, not *only* by slave labor.

The courthouse becomes Faulkner's symbol of communal redemption, a structure in which black and white Southerners, irrespective of their troubled history, have a common stake. Although the majority of the courthouse's construction is performed by slaves, a considerable part is also performed by white men, who take up tools "unbidden or unreproved either since there was none present with the right to order to deny" (RN, 501). All the (male) members of the community contribute to the building of the courthouse: "black and white, free and unfree, shoulder to shoulder in the same aim and hope". Even the more openly racist poor whites come to a clearer understanding of the humanity of the black slaves as a result of this shared endeavor: perceiving (in their view) that "the slave's simple child's mind had fired at once with the thought that he was helping to build not only the biggest edifice in the country, but probably the biggest he had ever seen". It is a communal monument

because it was theirs, bigger than any because it was the sum of all and, being the sum of all, it must raise all of their hopes and aspirations level with its own aspiration and soaring cupola, so that, sweating and tireless and unflagging, they would look about at one another a little shyly, a little amazed, with something like humility too, as if they were realizing, or were for a moment at least capable of believing, that men, all men, including themselves, were a little better, purer maybe even, than they had thought, expected, or even needed to be.
(501)

The pains, cruelties, failures and injustices of Southern history all become retroactively dissipated in this moment of narrative absolution. By reaching back to the community's origins, this narrative image redeems, through the erasure of reversal, all that has come before. It rewinds (to use a favorite image of Faulkner's) the threads of time onto its spool, offering a new narrative chronology that may displace Yoknapatawpha's temporal chronology. This, Faulkner seems to say, is the moment of

spiritual kinship, of cultural hybridity, that we (as Southerners) should have built from: a better moment, surely, even in its imperfections – although it seems already to hold within the seeds of its undoing. When ten-year-old Sarty Snopes in “Barn Burning” describes the de Spain mansion, in wonderment, as “*big as a courthouse*” (CS, 10), it emphasizes a shared architecture that is not just physical but also conceptual. It asserts that the mansion is as important as the courthouse, and that it possesses a parallel, or maybe complementary, legal and authoritarian function. This ordering function is continually asserted elsewhere too: through the violence of Sutpen’s design; through Colonel Sartoris’s interventions in community politics (especially in *The Unvanquished* story “Skirmish at Sartoris”); through the contractual mastery of the McCaslins’s labor system or the economic mastery of their ledgers. But for the first time here, the courthouse is allowed to emerge as a structure in its own right, not as a comparable element or as background (as in Benjy Compson’s carriage rides [SF, 1124]). The courthouse, in contradistinction, becomes as big as the plantation and its symbolic mansion: bigger, even, and seemingly endowed with social possibilities which the plantation site does not – and simply *cannot* – possess.

It is not only the violence and exploitation of the plantation system that is dispersed here. The optimistic moment of construction also retroactively redeems the community: redeems it from the violence that has clouded the street and square, courthouse and its environs. In this moment of hope, we forget the cars that will circle it over a century later, threateningly, while Lucas Beauchamp awaits his would-be lynchers in jail (ID, 320); forget the crowds gathered to hunt down Joe Christmas, to abduct and murder Willie Mayes, to drag Lee Goodwin from the jail and burn him with kerosene, concluding the ugly pantomime of his unjust trial. We forget the racist laws the courthouse will perpetuate and enshrine; we forget, too, the patriarchal politics of gender exploitation it will implicitly condone and tacitly promote. It is a moment that places its faith in social betterment, even out of inequality; in humane ideals of human comradeship and community, which might offer possibilities, however faint, to lift the South above the downward tug of its grosser histories.

The courthouse becomes a site that attempts to displace the dilemmas of the plantation site and its legacy, by replacing independence with interdependence, and illegibility with legibility. Yet its incorporation also carries with it a greater power of

exclusion: by displacing sites of mastery, it also erases sites of resistance. It removes the empowerment of illegible – or rather, covertly legible – spaces, by imposing both erasure and closure. A single phrase, amid the description of the courthouse's construction, already foreshadows its failure: that its actualization of such hopes exists only "for a moment". After the building work is done, its process of production becomes merely one moment amid a developing narrative. The courthouse will be left standing, but its community of builders will be dispersed; its power to unite will cease to be practical, and become merely symbolic. The white men will return to their mansions, and the black men to their cabins and enslavement, and all will be as it has always been: as though that hope had never arisen; as though that "moment" were no more than a dreamy instant, and its monumental promise no more clear than shallow words on a headstone – momentarily picked out, then dissolving, in the rain.

The Plantation Space; or, Loom of Her Father's Dreams:
Passing and Restorative Violence in the Snopes and Compson Fiction



Ruin & Restoration: Passing and the Mansion

The Many Mansions of *The Mansion*

In the penultimate chapter of *The Mansion*, Mink and Flem Snopes face one another in the office of Flem's house, over the barrel of Mink's gun (*M*, 702-703). An enmity has existed between the cousins for decades, stemming from Flem's refusal to support Mink during his murder trial (the hotheaded Mink had shot his wealthy neighbor, Houston, after Houston impounded Mink's cow). Fearing Mink's vengeance, Flem arranges with another incarcerated cousin, Montgomery Ward Snopes, to trick Mink into attempting an escape from prison, extending Mink's sentence and thwarts his hopes of early release. When Mink is finally released, following his subsequent good behavior and the lobbying efforts of Flem's daughter, Linda, he has spent almost four decades in prison. Yet during all that time his murderous resentment toward Flem has remained unabated. Following his release, he detours only long enough to earn the money to purchase a gun in Memphis, before heading to Jefferson with the intent of killing Flem.

This scene of confrontation climaxes a narrative that has been unfolding since *The Hamlet*, published nineteen years earlier (*H*, 1043). It also marks the chronological narrative endpoint both of the Snopes narrative and of Yoknapatawpha itself – the two begun, in the same moment, in the uncompleted and unpublished fragment "Father Abraham" (1925-26).¹ Thirty-eight years of Mink's imprisonment (1908-1946), and thirty-four years of the development of Yoknapatawpha and the Snopeses (1925-1959): the near reciprocity is surely by no means coincidental. And indeed, Faulkner

¹ Blotner, *Faulkner*, 192-193. Flem receives his first published mention in *Flags in the Dust*, as "the first Snopes", who "appeared unheralded one day", and who brought his country kin into the town of Jefferson "like Abraham of old." (*FD*, 678)

uses Mink's narrative confinement and return in *The Mansion* as a means of foregrounding the passing of those years (most crucially, of the 1930s and 1940s), which saw the South's slow entry into modernity.

Much had changed, for both South and nation, during those early twentieth-century decades. They had brought with them the impoverishment of the Great Depression, the northward and westward population movement of the Great Migration, and a significant increase in local intervention by the federal government through sociological studies, public works programs, and attempts at civil rights legislation. (Those same years had also seen the social rise of Faulkner the writer, from obscure regional modernist to global spokesman, a rise attended by the development of Yoknapatawpha into an increasingly universalized space.) Such events had a profound impact on the South's place within the nation and had a transformative effect on the role of the Southern plantation, not least in the outmigration of considerable numbers of black Southerners, and in the progressive reconception of the South's historically agricultural landscape as a geography of tourism.² Mink's sense of alienation as he travels toward Jefferson reflects the impact of these social changes, much as his confinement in the Mississippi State Penitentiary of Parchman Farm offers a parallel reflection and reminder of the "stable" communal order which, in the process, had been lost.

Though *The Mansion's* title may seem anodyne, there is a quiet brilliance to Faulkner's choice. Central to the historical cultural transformation the novel depicts is an acute, if understated, consideration of the shifting roles of plantation and plantation mansion. The generality of the title directs the reader beyond the specific of Flem's mansion, and toward the "mansion" as an abstract social idea and a symbolic seat of power and aspiration. The novel is, in effect, a book of many reconfigured mansions and transformed plantation sites, including the final chronological depictions of the Compson Estate (converted into housing developments), the Backus-Harriss plantation (rebuilt as country house and horse farm), and the plantation prison of

² For an excellent and varied consideration of the relationship between history and contemporary Southern tourism, see Karen L. Cox, ed. *Destination Dixie: Tourism and Southern History* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2012); for a specific focus on slaveholding in relation to Southern tourism, see James Oliver Horton and Lois E. Horton, ed. *Slavery and Public History: The Tough Stuff of American Memory* (New York: The New Press, 2006), and also Jessica Adams, *Wounds of Returning* (2007).

Parchman Farm. There is even, if we follow a line of reading suggested by Noel Polk, a possible reappearance in the novel's final pages of Yoknapatawpha's most enduring architectural ruin, the Old Frenchman place. The climactic confrontation between Mink and Flem comes, in effect, to embody the confrontation between these differing models of the mansion, too, framing it as site of class-conflict, historical tension, and social transformation.

The interaction between different conceptions of mansion and plantation forms the basis of my readings in this final chapter. The conflicts which *The Mansion* raises on a narrative level – pitting Flem, in different ways, against Gavin Stevens, Jason Compson, the De Spain family, Mink, and his own daughter Linda – represent a range of cultural responses to the legacy of the plantation. These responses are specific to their contexts, but can also be directly connected to conceptual ideas of ruin, passing, and restorative violence. The value of these interactions is that they offer two distinct ways in which Yoknapatawpha might be read: as a linear narrative which expresses continuity through erasure, or as an accumulative narrative which develops through possibilities, parallels, and pluralities.

Post-structural Structures: Ruin & Restorative Violence

Faulkner knew ruins: he had grown up among them, in a Mississippi still belatedly recovering, both psychologically and socio-economically, from the violence and impoverishment of the Civil War. In his late twenties, when travelling in Europe in 1925, Faulkner was even able to experience the rawness of recent ruin firsthand, on the former battlefields of the Somme and Marne in northern France: the stubborn, lingering devastation of a war already seven years passed. “[I]t looks as if a cyclone had passed over the whole world at about 6 feet from the ground,” he wrote to his mother. “Stubs of trees, and along the main road are piles of shell cases and unexploded shells and wire and bones that the farmers dig up.”³

Such ruins were not the traces left after a process of decay, but the remnants of violent fragmentation. The ruination that engendered them created a world of alien decontextualized objects, depersonalized and generalized into a symbolic state, and in which the past violence which created that ruin still lingers. Its history is raw, not dead

³ William Faulkner, *Selected Letters*, ed. Joseph Blotner (New York: Random House, 1977), 28

or inert; such objects lie close to the surface, both literally and figurative “unexploded shells”, still carrying a charge. Yoknapatawpha, in its layered and textured surfaces, also presents such a landscape. It bears the ruin-marks not only of the Civil War, but also of a range of localized civic conflicts stemming from threat of the fragmentation of plantation and meta-plantation order. Ruin is, in a specific sense, a profound condition of Yoknapatawpha’s narrative “order”.

Lisa Klarr has described the decayed environment of Yoknapatawpha as “post-structural”. “[W]here there was once structure, a closed system, a kind of perceptible totality, there is now fragmentation,” Klarr argues, and she suggests that this fragmentation “is felt most palpably through encounters with ruinous plantation houses.” Klarr’s point is an important one: it is indeed through an emblematic material decay (as with the Compson mansion, for example) that such structures are “divested of their structuring power”, and thereby also become more socially and narratively “open”.⁴ The ruin of Sutpen’s Hundred, as I have suggested, creates spaces for alternative narratives that may challenge or undermine the dominant models of patriarchy and mastery. But as Daniel Spoth’s reading of “autoeradication” points out, if this ruin is extended to an absolute point, and its traces erased, then it potentially creates space for the restoration of a closed system, too.⁵ The paradox of ruin is thus a narrative duality: it is at once “post-structural” yet a source of “post-structural structures.”

We might think of the paradox of ruin as a tension between the fragmentation of decay it presents, and the wholeness of restoration it evokes. Decay, as fragmentation, animates details and makes the whole structure radically opened to multiple interpretations. As the brick crumbles, we see the origin dust that formed it; as the beam rots to its constituent wood, we see its fibers, its component inner portions.⁶ What we might call “restorative ruin”, in contrast, emphasize the whole over

⁴ Spoth, “The House that Time Built”, 124

⁵ Lisa Klarr, “Decaying Spaces: Faulkner’s Gothic and the Construction of the National Real”, conference paper, July 2011. <http://www.berfrois.com/2011/09/lisa-klarr-gothic-yoknapatawpha/>. Uploaded Sept 7, 2011. Accessed Dec 8, 2011.

⁶ Robert Ginsberg has highlighted this sudden “selfhood” in ruined bricks: “Broken, it reveals a new texture, more tangible and exciting, a new color, brighter and more alert, a new density, more buoyant and lighter.” *The Aesthetics of Ruin* (Amsterdam: Rodolphi, 2009), 4

the detail; rather than simply revealing a process of construction, it psychically demands, through its articulated sense of absence, the reconstruction of the entire design. It creates cleansed, generalized, and conceptually “whole” surfaces that erase spaces of specificity and narratives of resistance. The ruin’s “voice”, in such a perspective, becomes singular and absolute (as, for example, with Ringo’s sketch of the burnt Sartoris mansion).

It is a question of perception, then, as to how the ruin is narrativized. It is easy to think of ruin as representative, as symbolic and metaphoric, to read its deconstruction as a loss of individuality and specificity. As Elaine Freedgood notes, in her discussion of the metaphoric and metonymic function of narrative objects, “[o]bjects become metaphorical (and meaningful) through a loss of many of their specific qualities”, retaining “only those that illuminate something about the predicate to which they must yield.”⁷ This is what occurs with Faulkner’s plantations and mansions throughout Yoknapatawpha, as they progressively attain a greater function as sites of ruin. Ruin generalizes them, and thereby heightens their social power as a direct result of dereliction. They become reinvested with meaning in exact proportion to their material decline, and serve as a means by which the mansion may be prepared for a process of “restorative violence” – wherein all traces of its creolized identity are erased and it comes to “pass” as wholly, exclusively, and forever white. The mansions’ “shells”, like those Faulkner encountered in post-war France, remain “unexploded”: their ideological value is preserved in structures that are materially destroyed but conceptually undissolved, and that serve to obscure the more organic traces of ruin that surround them – the shallow-buried traces of skeletons and bones amid the soil-manure of black blood, lying just beneath the smoothed over surface of the richly layered land.

In the later Yoknapatawpha texts – most fully in *The Mansion* (1959), but also in key sections of “Appendix – Compson: 1699-1945” (1946), *Knight’s Gambit* (1949), and *Requiem for a Nun* (1951) – Faulkner displaces discussion of the slaveholding past by the expedient of removing its historical sites, either through destruction or transformation. The ruin of the plantation, particularly when succeeded by a process of restoration which effects restorative violence, creates a sense of historical, cultural,

⁷ Freedgood, *Ideas in Things*, 10

and racial passing, in both narrative and architectural terms. This is an aspect of Yoknapatawpha which becomes more readily apparent when the histories of its fictional plantation sites are visually mapped out and rearranged, reconfigured as table-charts (**Fig.6**) or diagrammatic literary maps (**Figs.7 & 8**).

These visualizations of Yoknapatawpha's plantation past depict a broad, and progressively linear, narrative history (its linearity revealed not least in the clearly definable top-left to bottom-right diagonal trajectory of **Fig.6**, leading from decay and destruction in the earlier works, to ruination and transformation in the later ones). This linear narrative of linear progress functions through rupture and erasure: later structures do not simply overlay, but entirely displace, older structures that occupy the same sites. The map becomes a single layer of the present, with only highly selective reference to the past. Its historical process can be seen particularly clearly in the development depicted in **Fig.8**, between 1850 and 1940, adapted from the map of **Fig.7**. By circa 1940, all antebellum mansions (i.e., those with direct connections to slaveholding) have been removed – destroyed by fire, modified or appropriated by outsiders (such as Flem, or the New Orleans bootlegger Harriss), or else simply vanished from the landscape, as is the case with the Benbow mansion and the De Spain plantation of “Barn Burning”.

In *The Mansion*, “removal” and “displacement” is repeatedly emphasized: in Flem's transformation of the old De Spain mansion; in Gavin Steven's possession of the former Backus-Harris plantation of Rose Hill; and in the replacement of the Compson Mile with a new 1940s housing development. In each case, the historical and narrative layers which compose each site are obscured or erased, at best distilled into a simplified surface narrative. In consequence, we are left with artificial and historically-detached structures that actively deny the complexity, hybridity, and plurality present in the plantation sites of *Absalom, Absalom!* and *Go Down, Moses*. In the later Yoknapatawpha works, the framing of that construction is selective to the point of erasure – and occludes any space for potential resistances and counter-narratives. The past, made restoratively present, serves to obliterate the troubling aspects of its own history.

<u>Mansion</u>	<u>Intact</u>	<u>Decayed</u>	<u>Ruined</u>	<u>Burnt</u>	<u>First Built</u>	<u>Restored</u>	<u>Modified</u>	<u>New Owner</u>
Sartoris (FD)	•							
Benbow (FD)	•							
Compson (SF)		•						
Old Frenchman Place (S)			•					
Sartoris (S)	•							
Benbow (S)	•							
Burden (LA)				•				
Sartoris ("TWAQ")	•							
Compson ("TES")	•							
Sutpen (AA)		•	•	•	•			
Compson (AA)	•							
Sartoris (U)				•		•		
Sutpen (U)		•						
McCaslin (U)	•						•	
De Spain Plantation ("BB")	•							
Old Frenchman Place (H)			•					•
Beauchamp (GDM)		•		•				
McCaslin-Edmonds (GDM)	•				•		•	
De Spain Plantation ("SNP")	•							
Compson ("Appendix")		•		•	•			•
Rose Hill (Backus-Harris) (KG)							•	
Old Frenchman Place (RN)					•			
Sutpen (RN)					•			
Snopes (De Spain mansion) (T)							•	•
Snopes (De Spain mansion) (M)								•
Compson (M)								•
Rose Hill (Backus-Harriss) (M)								•
Old Frenchman Place (M)?			•					

Fig. 6 - Fates of Yoknapatawpha plantations and mansions, by chronology

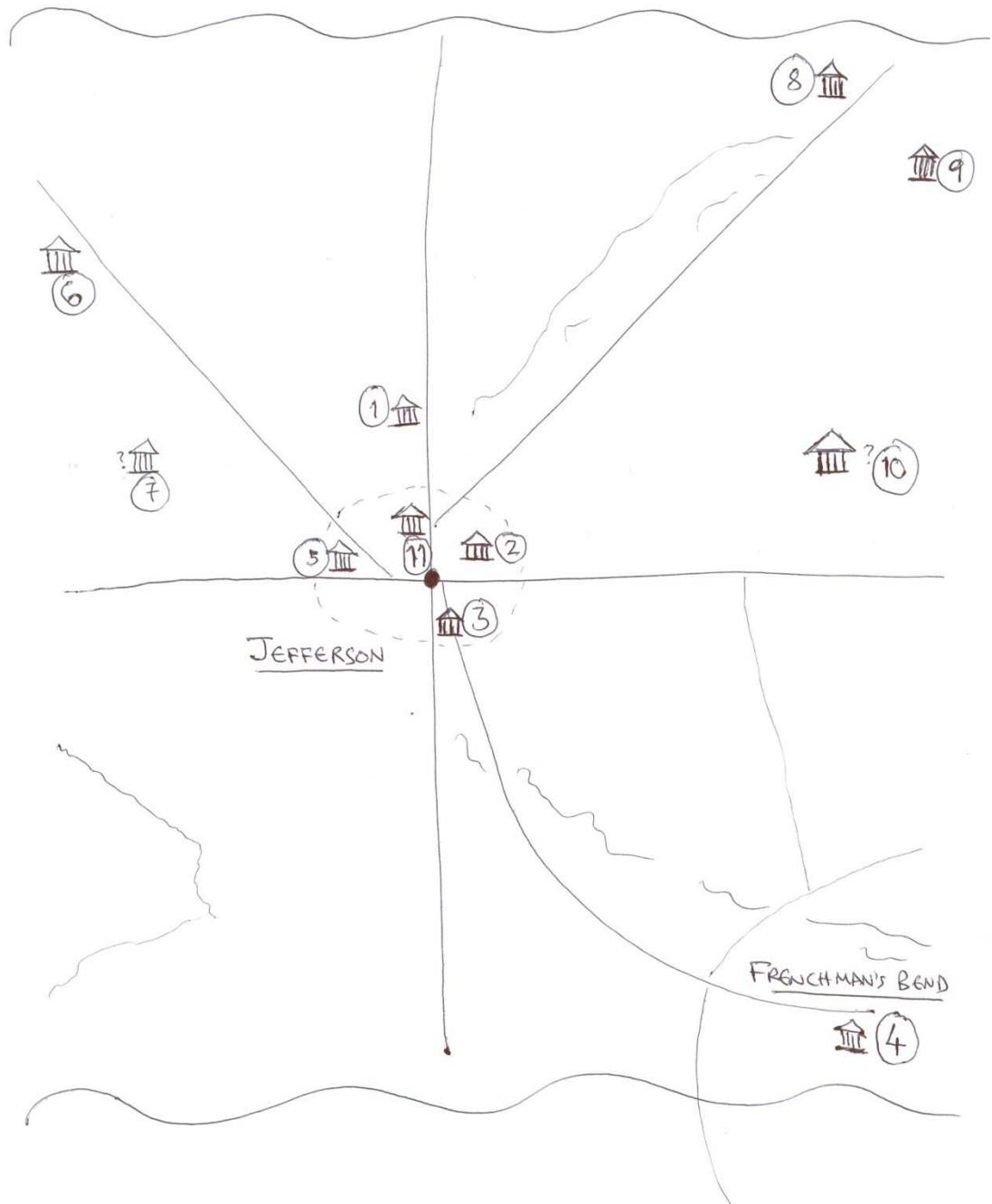


Fig.7 Approximate locations of Yoknapatawpha mansions/plantations

- | | |
|------------------------|---------------------------------------------|
| 1. Sartoris | 7. De Spain plantation (approximate) |
| 2. Benbow | 8. McCaslin |
| 3. Compson | 9. Beauchamp (approximate) |
| 4. Old Frenchman Place | 10. Backus-Harris/"Rose Hill" (approximate) |
| 5. Burden | 11. Snopes/De Spain (approximate) |
| 6. Sutpen's Hundred | |

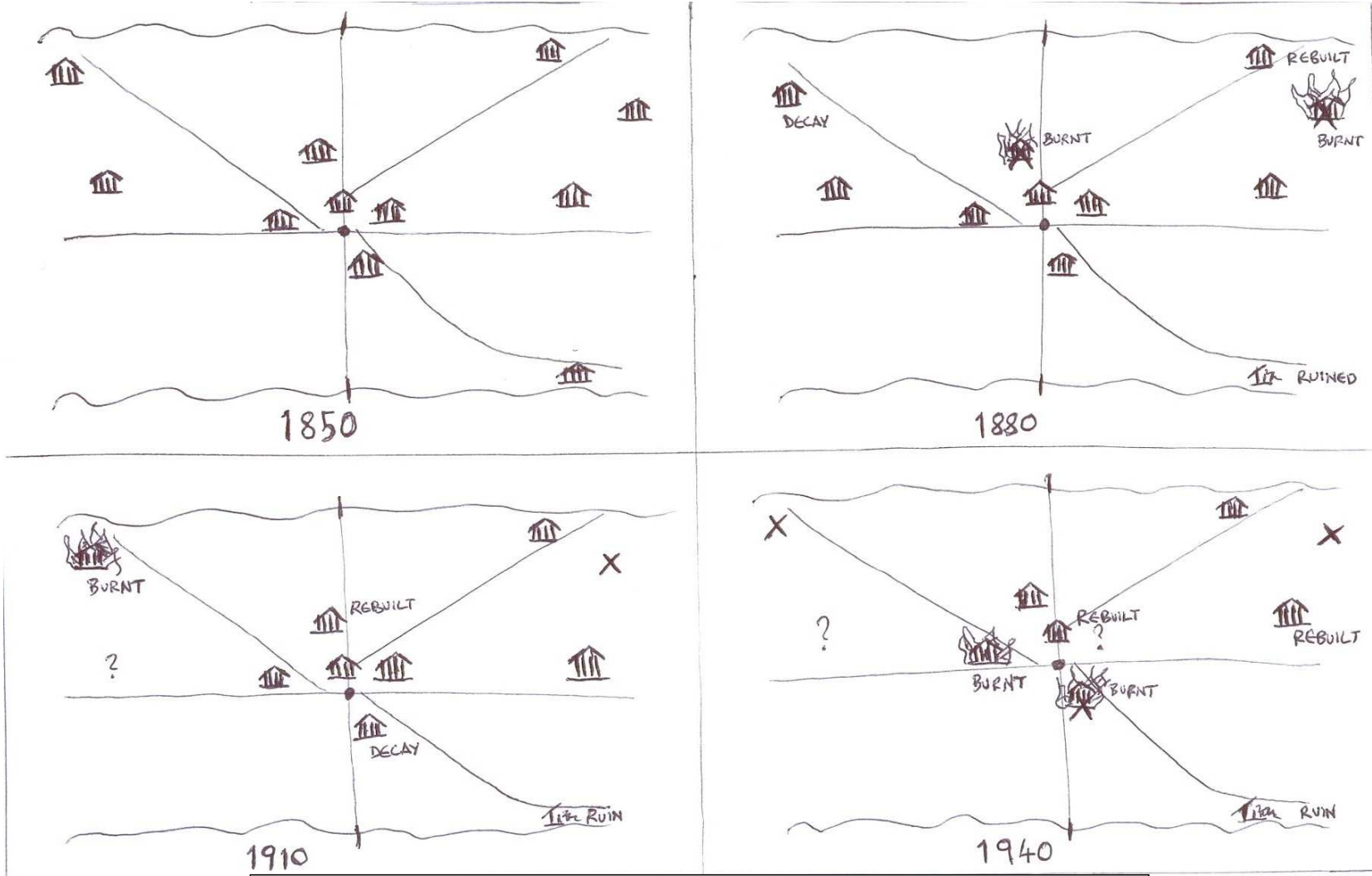


Fig.8 Map of Faulkner's fictional plantations and manions (approximate locations)

This erasure is achieved particularly through concentration on the plantation as mansion rather than as site or system, a reflection of the South's economic shift from agriculture to tourism. The mansion offered a crucial means of obscuring the troubling history of slavery at its roots site, because, as Jessica Adams notes, it transforms the surrounding, historically functional site, into a neutral background of "incidental space".⁸ Slaveholding is framed as something excludable from, and therefore implicitly anomalous to, Southern history. Such a transformation has also been aided by an increased emphasis on national rather than local narratives, on a subtle separation of such plantation sites from sites of Confederate memory. As a result historic houses, particularly in places like Natchez, Mississippi, are placed in the same lineage as Andrew Jackson's The Hermitage, Jefferson's Monticello, and Washington's Mount Vernon, sites at which slaveholding history becomes secondary to narratives of (white-centric) national progress and unity.⁹ It comes as no surprise, then, to find a similar narrative visibly present in Faulkner's later Yoknapatawpha works, which look back to the origins of the county in order to emphasize town community over plantation, and to frame its first settlers as "founders", and as pioneers rather than planters. Slaveholding becomes reframed as an anomaly, and is replaced by class conflict; and the consequence is to slowly remove slavery and its legacy from the social narrative of Yoknapatawpha (and the South), by emphasizing direct continuities between the moment of foundation and the present of the 1940s and 1950s (for example, through the clear links between the "original" Jason Compson and his later namesake, as emphasized in the "Appendix").

It remains unclear why Faulkner chose to depict this process of erasure. It is possible that he condoned it, out of nostalgia or out of a hope for greater racial stability in the present. It is equally possible that he may simply have depicted it to critique the dangerous way in which romantic perspectives on history were erasing

⁸ Adams, "Local Color", 175; see also Adams, *Wounds of Returning*, and McPherson, *Reconstructing Dixie*, 44. Both scholars foreground the strategic "feminizing" of the mansion through this emphasis on the domestic nature of the plantation mansion.

⁹ Though Monticello is still dominated by a focus on "Jefferson", there is nonetheless some significant acknowledgment of the site's slaveholding past in the tours of the black community of Mulberry Row. See Lois E. Horton, "Avoiding History: Thomas Jefferson, Sally Hemmings, and the Uncomfortable Public Conversation on Slavery", in *Slavery and Public History*, ed. James & Lois Horton (2006), 135-149.

accountability for the South's slaveholding past. In my own reading of Yoknapatawpha, it is the latter perspective which holds particular interest, most of all because it emphasizes a considerable ethical problem with linear narrative approaches – a problem which an alternative approach to Yoknapatawpha, also visibly present in *The Mansion*, might work effectively to counter.

Paths and Threads: Shaping Yoknapatawpha

Among the many revealing distinctions between Faulkner's 1936 and 1945 Yoknapatawpha maps, perhaps none is more striking than the degree of authorial attribution each expressly denotes. On the former, which served as the frontispiece for *Absalom, Absalom!*, Faulkner describes himself as "William Faulkner, sole owner and proprietor"; on the latter, from *The Portable Faulkner*, the inscription simply reads "Surveyed and mapped for this volume by William Faulkner."¹⁰ In part, this may be taken as evidence of an authorial detachment from the second map, which he had produced expressly for Malcolm Cowley's anthology. It may also be read as an attempt, similar to that performed as the reconfiguration of the mansion in his later work, to diminish his authorial responsibility while nonetheless continuing to exercise authorial control. (One can hardly be held responsible for the history of land one does not own, but merely surveys.) I would like to suggest, however, that it may equally be read as a gesture, inspired by Cowley's "authoring" of what was in effect a personalized "new Yoknapatawpha", toward recognition of the fluid, decentered nature of narratives, and the possibilities of more equal author-reader relations.

In the course of this final – and in many ways concluding – chapter, I want to explore the comparable possibilities of reading Yoknapatawpha as linear narrative and as decentered textual space, as summative rewriting and as expansive continuation. These approaches correlate not only to the fluctuating role of narrative focalization or material details and motifs: they also correlate directly to the framing of plantation as decaying, ruined, or restored. We can trace the impact of this framing through the

¹⁰ Thomas McHaney has argued that the former can be understood as an attempt to advertise the scope and future potential of Yoknapatawpha to his new publishers, Random House, while the latter can similarly be understood as an effort to give unfamiliar readers of *The Portable Faulkner* a central standpoint from which to view his decidedly protean output ("First is Jefferson", 521, 526). Yet this change in legend also reveals a shift in Faulkner's ethics on ownership, mapping, and recording.

alternative narrative “paths” it offers – as I do in the second section of this chapter, reading the presence and absence of pear trees in the Compson fiction and *The Hamlet* for what each reveals about patriarchal sexual exploitation across Yoknapatawpha. We can trace its impact in the interaction of narrative “threads” – as in the third section, which traces how the imagery of rugs and weaving contributes to the centrality of poor whites and non-slaveholding “pioneers” in the building of Yoknapatawpha (it is a thread which helps emphasize the “whitening” of Yoknapatawpha too). Or we can consider, as in the fourth and final section, the contrasting models of order offered by the post-plantation penitentiary and by the post-plantation community church.

The narrative “revisions” that emerge when following these paths and threads offer, at one and the same time, a depiction of historical and narrative erasure *and* an expression of historical coexistence and multiplicity. Together, they reveal a tension at the heart of Yoknapatawpha that is emblemized, on a different level, by the contrasting images of the singular symbolic plantation mansion and the pluralistic decentered plantation site. Following these motifs across Yoknapatawpha maps how, through Faulkner’s craft and creativity, Yoknapatawpha was authorially built. But at the same time it also offers insight, through the “new” textual structures it generates, into the possibilities of how Yoknapatawpha might be creatively rebuilt by the individual reader too. In the chapter’s final section, which examines the role performed in *The Mansion* by Mink Snopes, I attempt to evaluate the consequence of these parallel narrative approaches.

.II.

The Vanishing Pear Tree: Ruin & Desire

The Pear Tree and the Rainpipe: Cowley’s Dilemma

Between 1944 and 1946, Faulkner exchanged a series of letters with the critic and editor Malcolm Cowley, in preparation for the compiling of *The Portable Faulkner*. Cowley intended the anthology to offer an overview of Yoknapatawpha, and to emphasize the wholeness and accumulative power of that oeuvre. Faulkner was highly receptive to the idea. “By all means let us make a Golden Book of my apocryphal

county,” he wrote, early in their correspondence. “I have thought of spending my old age doing something of that nature: an alphabetical, rambling genealogy of the people, father to son to son.”¹¹ Yet while seeking to celebrate Yoknapatawpha’s scope, Cowley was eager that such an assembled history should exhibit a consistency sometimes apparently absent from Faulkner’s writing. “I wish you had time to go back over your earlier work and fix up a few factual discrepancies,” Cowley wrote in the summer of 1945, midway through the project’s development.¹² In response, Faulkner suggested that Cowley should note and forward to him any “discrepancies which are too glaring to leave in and which you dont want to correct yourself.”¹³

For the most part, Faulkner conceded to Cowley’s corrections of names and timescales, even suggesting that they make dates “as vague as possible”.¹⁴ But he resisted on one particular – and seemingly trivial – point. In *The Sound and the Fury*, when Caddy’s daughter Quentin makes her escape from the Compson mansion, Benjy and Luster watch her descend a pear tree beside her window (*SF*, 933). Yet in the “Appendix – Compson: 1699-1945”, which Faulkner wrote sixteen years later expressly for Cowley’s anthology, Quentin is instead recorded as descending a “rainpipe” (1131).¹⁵ When Cowley questioned this, Faulkner responded creatively: he maintained that the “narrator” of the “Appendix” had relied only on local oral accounts, and such discrepancies were an inevitable – and by no means necessarily negative – result.¹⁶ Unconvinced, Cowley persisted in his pursuit of consistency. “Quentin in the novel climbed down a pear tree, not the rain spout,” he maintained. “Shouldn’t I change this?” In response, Faulkner once again insisted on the subjectivity of the narrator, “whose soul is one inviolable literary cliché. He would insist on ‘gutter’.”¹⁷ Cowley

¹¹ Malcolm Cowley, *The Faulkner-Cowley File: Letters and Memories, 1944-1962* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1966), 25

¹² *Ibid*, 23

¹³ *Ibid*, 36

¹⁴ *Ibid*, 54

¹⁵ Although for citation references I use the Library of America text edited by Noel Polk, which incorporates “Appendix – Compson: 1699-1945” as part of *The Sound and the Fury* novel, I do not view this relationship unproblematically. As my argument suggests, I read the “Appendix” less as a simple extension, and more as a fresh re-working of earlier material.

¹⁶ Cowley, *Faulkner-Cowley File*, 43-35

¹⁷ *Ibid*, 57

conceded the point, and accepted this “new” version of events – although it was only later that he finally came to recognize that “Faulkner’s creative power was so unflinching that he could not tell a story twice without transforming one detail after another”.¹⁸

This pear tree/rainpipe discrepancy could be dismissed as a slip of memory on Faulkner’s part, one only natural after a sixteen year interval (Faulkner seems to have almost never reread his own novels after publication). But Cowley and Faulkner’s disagreement raises narrative questions that carry considerable significance beyond Yoknapatawpha: questions not simply about consistency, but also about narrative continuity. Does the Compson house (both site and social unit) of the “Appendix” necessarily need to correspond precisely, in details or dimensions or history, to the Compson house of the earlier novel? Or should these houses more properly be read as wholly separate constructions, parallel but distinct, overlaying but not displacing one another – and as such, functioning within Yoknapatawpha as simultaneous counter-narratives? What is achieved or lost, moreover, when seemingly trivial details, such as a pear tree, are “transformed”? How do we narratively map the absences of Caddy or the pear tree in the novel and in its sequels, and why is it important (as I shall argue that it surely is) that she is connected across Faulkner’s writing to Eula Varner Snopes and to Eunice McCaslin? The overall question, in short, is whether we read Yoknapatawpha for its singularities and divergences (as Faulkner implied), or for its comprehensive scope (as Cowley’s anthology argues) – what Heather O’Donnell has described as the “ongoing tension, in Faulkner’s texts and in Cowley’s accounts of them, between master narratives and those marginal narratives which punctuate and disrupt the authorized telling of a tale”: the tension between everyday details and meta-plantation design.¹⁹

The Sound and the Fury, and especially Benjy’s section, holds in embryonic form the seeds of its own narrative evolution. Its layering of textual repetitions and subjective perceptions constantly threatens to exhaust the linear narrative that strains to contain them. It is a text perpetually in the process of liberating itself into greater

¹⁸ Ibid, 45-46

¹⁹ Heather O’Donnell, “Limiting the Dixie Limited: Teaching Through *The Portable Faulkner*”, *Mississippi Quarterly* 51.3 (Summer 1998), 576

spatial dimensions – and so it is unsurprising that Faulkner returned to the Compson family and home-place throughout his career: in “A Justice” (1931) and “That Evening Sun” (1931), in *Absalom, Absalom!* (1936) and “The Bear” (1942) and the “Appendix” (1945), in *Requiem for a Nun* (1951) and *The Mansion* (1959). Each return constitutes a parallel rather than revised account, and reflects the development of Faulkner’s view of Southern history and narrative form, rooted particularly in the evolving role of the plantation. Over the course of his career, Faulkner shifted the emphasis of the Compson family history, from a centering on Caddy and the “vanishing” pear tree, to Jason and the “vanishing” plantation land.

As a central symbol, the pear tree connotes both loss and liberty within the Compson world; it is both a symbolic object (of lost innocence, of sexual objectification, of death) and a conceptual pathway (toward and away from the containing structures of the meta-plantation). As a symbol, it is particularly associated with Caddy, and with Benjy’s repeated (and curious) assertions that she “smelled like trees”, which he uses to gauge her loss of sexual innocence, her entry into adulthood, and ultimately her physical absence.²⁰ It also forms the physical core of two key narrative moments – when Caddy ascends it to look in on Damuddy’s deathbed, and when Caddy’s daughter Quentin descends it years later to run away from home. The emotional impact and gender dynamics of the novel are built around this pairing of images: an ambiguous loss of innocence, and an equally ambiguous moral descent. (As Richard Godden asserts, it “points two ways. Its odors are sweet and stale.”²¹) That a *pear* tree, its fruit resembling a pregnant body, is also telling: the image comes to emphasize not simply female sexuality, but also the female body as a tool or vessel of patriarchal reproduction.²²

²⁰ Benjy repeats this phrase some seven times (881, 883, 891, 909, 911, 914, 932), with a crucial variation coming when he sees the already pregnant Caddy on her wedding day: “Caddy put her arms around me, and her shining veil, and I couldn’t smell trees anymore and I began to cry.” (908) As John Matthews notes, this occurs because Benjy associates the scent “contradictorily – both with Caddy’s virginal innocence and with the onset of her sexual betrayal”; as a result, “at the heart of his memory of her full presence is already the trace of her disappearance.” See *Play of Faulkner’s Language*, 68.

²¹ Godden, *Fictions of Labor*, 13

²² Matthew Sivils discusses this symbolism of pear trees in Hurston’s *Their Eyes Were Watching God* in “Reading Trees in Southern Literature”, *Southern Quarterly* 44.1 (Fall 2006), 95; see also Peter Hays, “Chaucer and Faulkner’s Pear Trees: An Arboreal Discussion”, *English Language Notes* 38.4 (2001), 57-64.

Faulkner would later call the image of the “muddy seat of [Caddy’s] drawers” as she ascends the tree “perhaps the only thing in literature which would ever move me very much” (*ESPL*, 299). The loss of sexual innocence suggested by the muddied underwear twins with the loss of childhood innocence posed by Caddy’s glimpse of death which, crucially, occurs beyond Benjy’s perceptual threshold, in a narrative absence that exceeds the image’s frame. It is here, amid the branches of a liminal space that is neither quite nature nor quite mansion, that Caddy begins her transformation into a symbolic body of female sexuality constrained and commoditized by a patriarchal economy. It is a transformation away from the innocence of Benjy’s view, and toward the corruption of Jason’s.

For both Caddy and her daughter Quentin, the pear tree’s liminal positioning also allows it to embody possible structures of thought and being that exist outside to the physical space and social structure of the mansion. The pear tree exists as a threshold – and indeed, as a means of access – between the constrained sexuality of the meta-plantation and the symbolic liberation of the woods. It is an idea which obsesses Caddy’s brother Quentin (for whom her daughter will be named, following his suicide). “*Why wont you bring him to the house, Caddy?*” Quentin recalls (or, more likely, imagines himself) confronting Caddy. “*Why must you do like nigger women do in the pasture the ditches the dark woods hot hidden furious in the dark woods.*” (*SF*, 947) It is a fear of unconstrained female sexuality that their brother Jason later echoes, when angrily confronting his niece Quentin: “Are you hiding out in the woods with one of those damn slick-headed jellybeans?” (1018)

Quentin’s descent of the pear tree, in escape from the confinement and enforced chastity of her locked bedroom, proves, in consequence, a highly ambiguous action. While enabling Quentin to perform an act of physical and social liberation, the tree and her descent are nonetheless also framed negatively through their association with her mother’s tragic experiences, and through imagery that emphasizes the transgressive aspects of unconstrained female sexuality. Though Benjy observes Quentin’s descent with relative neutrality (933), the authorial narrator of the novel’s final section suggests a far more critical perspective. The description of Quentin’s room on the morning after her escape – an “anonymous” room exuding the “dead and stereotyped transience of rooms in assignation houses”, with a “soiled undergarment

of cheap silk a little too pink” lying discarded on the floor – finally settles on the open window and the pear tree beyond. “It was in bloom,” we are told, “and the branches scraped and rasped against the house and the myriad air, driving in the window, brought into the room the forlorn scent of the blossom.” (1094) The diction here – “scraped”, “rasped”; “forlorn” alongside “blossom” and “bloom” – creates an unmistakable sense of foreboding, of tragic sexualized doom that (particularly through “scent”) irresistibly renders Quentin a fatalistic repetition of her mother. Sympathy is evoked – but we are nonetheless directed to believe Quentin irredeemably corrupted. It comes curiously close to fulfilling Mrs. Compson’s prophecy, when she recoiled from raising Quentin in Caddy’s old room, fearing she might become “contaminated by that atmosphere” (1029), by the corruption that lingers in the house’s structure and structural decay.

By removing the pear tree in the “Appendix”, however, Faulkner detaches these layers of symbolism from the tale. Without the pear tree’s resonance, Quentin’s escape in the “Appendix” – via the rainpipe – no longer foreshadows repetition of her mother’s fate. It becomes, instead, an act of finality that closes off the aspects of the Compson family history which center on Caddy and her brother Quentin, and allows – in relation to the other sections of the “Appendix” – for that history to be reconceived around Jason as the central figure. Yet the resonances of lost innocence and embattled female sexuality and selfhood which the pear tree carries are also intensified in the interval between the two texts – when Faulkner compounded its symbolism (especially for Yoknapatawpha as a whole), by employing the pear tree in *The Hamlet*, in relation to the heavily sexualized Eula Varner and her intimate relation to the ruined mansion known as the Old Frenchman place.

Full and Frosty Bloom: Eula, White Trash Desire, and the Old Frenchman Place

The Hamlet’s pastoral surfaces have obscured, for many readers, its deeper concerns with the legacy of the plantation and the endurance of the meta-plantation’s social structures. The novel opens and closes, after all, on the “guttled shell” of the Old Frenchman place (*H*, 731). Its current owner, wealthy farmer Will Varner, views it as an archaic oddity, and often sits out on its porch “trying to find out what it must have felt

like to be the fool that would need all this [...] just to eat and sleep in.” (734)²³ The overarching narrative of the novel – in its detailing of Flem Snopes’s social ascent – is structured throughout by this mansion’s appearances: midway, when it reappears as the dowry given to Flem for marrying Varner’s daughter Eula, and at the novel’s conclusion, when Flem skillfully sells the ruin, in a crucial moment in his progress toward eventual ownership of a non-ruined mansion in Jefferson. As Noel Polk puts it, simply, “everything turns on [it].”²⁴

Though Sutpen’s Hundred is the more striking and animate, it is the Old Frenchman place which holds the most enduring position as ruined mansion in the Yoknapatawpha landscape. (Its construction is mentioned in *Requiem for a Nun*, but not described; it makes no direct appearance in Yoknapatawpha in a state that is not ruined.) Throughout its history, which bridges the timespan of Yoknapatawpha, it is owned and inhabited by a cross-section of society. Its first owner is its “builder”, the “anonymous Frenchman” (later, in other stories, he is named as Louis Grenier) after whom it gains its popular name. At some uncertain point after the Civil War, the plantation lands are acquired by Will Varner, who later gives the shell of the seemingly worthless mansion in dowry to Flem Snopes. Flem, in turn, trades it with the farmers Odum Bookwright and Henry Armstid and the sewing-machine salesman V.K. Ratliff for cash and a stake in a restaurant in Jefferson. Eventually (as depicted in *Sanctuary*), the abandoned house is appropriated by a crew of Memphis bootleggers, until their leader Popeye commits murder and rape on the property, for which their local agent Lee Goodwin is violently lynched – and the house is thereafter left, untenanted, to the elements.

In its first narrative appearance in Yoknapatawpha, in *Sanctuary* (which is, chronologically speaking, also probably its last), the Old Frenchman place is introduced as a landmark trace of an earlier time. It is a derelict structure, set amid an enjungled landscape, far detached from evidence of its plantation history and environment. Yet its legend still lingers: it is also set amid enduring rumors of the Frenchman’s buried

²³ Although as Owen Robinson notes, “we might speculate as to who is the bigger fool: at least the Frenchman ate and slept in the house, had some practical use for it”, unlike Varner (*Creating Yoknapatawpha*, 77).

²⁴ Polk, “Children of the Dark House”, 26

treasure. The mansion is described twice, from two approaches, in parallel introductions: once through the eyes of lawyer Horace Benbow, and later through the eyes of Temple Drake, the flighty student who will be sexually violated there. (Temple is both aptly and ironically named, as few Faulkner scholars have failed to point out, given her relation to the mansion, her role as a supporting “prop” of the meta-plantation ideology, and her symbolism of purity and innocence.)

Both characters see the mansion in iconic terms. For Horace, it is stable and monumental, “lift[ing] its stark square bulk against the failing sky”:

The house was a gutted ruin rising gaunt and stark out of a grove of unpruned cedar trees. It was a landmark, known as the Old Frenchman place, built before the Civil War; a plantation house set in the middle of a tract of land; of cotton fields and gardens and laws long since gone back to jungle, which the people of the neighbourhood had been pulling down piecemeal for firewood for fifty years or digging with secret and sporadic optimism for the gold which the builder was reputed to have buried somewhere about the place when Grant came through the county on his Vicksburg campaign. (S, 184)

Its gothic aspects render it “gutted”, “gaunt”, and “stark”, but its enduring aura of wealth – sustained particularly by the legend of buried treasure – emphasizes its stature (to the romantically-inclined Horace), as expressed through words like “lift” and “rising”. In contrast, its description as focalized through Temple anticipates her violation, and renders it iconic in a different sense, as a nexus of exploitative power and gendered inequality:

The house came into sight, above the cedar grove beyond whose black interstices an apple orchard flaunted in the sunny afternoon. It was set in a ruined lawn, surrounded by abandoned grounds and fallen outbuildings. But nowhere was any sign of husbandry – plow or tool; in no direction was a

planted field in sight – only a gaunt weather-stained ruin in a sombre grove through which the breeze drew with a sad, murmurous sound. (S, 206)

“Ruined”, “fallen”, “abandoned”, “stained”, “sombre” – these are all words that anticipate Temple’s subsequent painful experiences, and that emphasize both her lack of agency and her lack of protection. In part, Temple suffers sexual and social “ruin” because, like the mansion, she is subjected to a failure of the “chivalric” codes of Southern manhood. Far from constituting a landmark, the plantation here becomes marked land through the absence of “husbandry”, and a decline of productive labor that is also a decline of social – and ultimately, moral – order.

When the Old Frenchman place “reappears” in Yoknapatawpha, in *The Hamlet*, it comes layered with these associations. Though Faulkner never alludes in that novel to Temple’s sexual assault – which takes place many years after the events of *The Hamlet* – the mansion cannot be freed from its taint, and this inevitably colors its function in the chronologically later (though temporally earlier) novel. Its primary narrative function in *The Hamlet* – as a dowry given by Varner to Flem, in return for marrying the impregnated and jilted Eula (H, 861, 866) – makes this association particularly significant. Flem is offered an architectural ruin in return for forestalling a social one, and in the process the mansion’s mythic values are restored in relation to its patriarchal ones. Both Flem and Varner understand the terms of Eula’s dowry as equating a ruined mansion (property possession) and a “ruined” woman (sexual possession): she is objectified by a market valuation, and valued – or devalued – as “damaged goods”. And indeed, Flem’s explicit and exploitative understanding of this sexual valuation is integral to the course of his social ascent, during which he will condone her adultery with Manfred de Spain in order to help him gain not only the vice-presidency of a bank, but also his end-goal of a non-ruined mansion in Jefferson, finally acquired toward the end of *The Town*.

It is within this overarching narrative connection of property and female sexuality that the associations of Eula and pear trees occur in *The Hamlet*, in the chapter preceding Flem’s “offloading” of the Old Frenchman place to Bookwright, Armstid, and Ratliff, and shortly after Flem and Eula have returned from honeymoon in

Texas. (The honeymoon has been protracted to allow Eula's baby to grow to an ambiguous enough size that it will not reveal the disparity between the dates of marriage and impregnation.) The association is made twice: the second allusion, juxtaposed with the moonlit image of Eula on her balcony – “perhaps not even doomed: just damned” (1017) – recreates much of the tragic sexualized symbolism of Caddy and Quentin. But it is the first description, positioned earlier in the chapter, that is the more striking and resonant:

The pear tree across the road opposite was now in full and frosty bloom, the twigs and branches springing not outward from the limbs but standing motionless and perpendicular above the horizontal boughs like the separate and upstreaming hair of a drowned woman sleeping upon the uttermost floor of the windless and tideless sea. (989)²⁵

Full and frosty bloom: an apt description for the overtly sexualized yet emotionally detached Eula. Yet the unsettling image of a “drowned woman” is what really captures the attention, especially when read in the context of Eula's suicide in *The Town* (the direct end-result of Flem's exploitation of her sexuality). In literary terms, female suicide through drowning has long been a familiar trope (the connections to Ophelia in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, given Faulkner's title, are striking); and in the nineteenth century (*The Hamlet* appears to be set around 1890) it served to narratively contain sexually or socially transgressive femininity.²⁶ An attentive (non-chronological) reading of Yoknapatawpha generates a haunting connection at this point, to the novel which followed *The Hamlet: Go Down, Moses*.

²⁵ This striking image has received surprisingly little comment. Cleanth Brooks notes this description, but only in the context of an attempt to establish connections between the imagery of Faulkner's early poetry and the contents of his later novels. Brooks does not contextualize the image within *The Hamlet*, but instead dismissing it as a “natural scene weirdly beautiful under the moonlight.” See *William Faulkner: Toward Yoknapatawpha and Beyond* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1978), 24.

²⁶ Elaine Showalter argues this point in relation to Kate Chopin's *The Awakening*: “Readers of the 1890s were well accustomed to drowning as the fictional punishment for female transgression against morality, and most contemporary critics of *The Awakening* thus automatically interpreted Edna's suicide as the wages of sin[.]” See “Tradition and Female Talent”, in *New Essays on “The Awakening”*, ed. Wendy Martin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 52.

Amid the accumulated entries of the McCaslin plantation ledgers, Ike McCaslin finds mention of the death of a slave – Eunice, the mother of Tomasina and grandmother of Tamey’s Turl – “*Drownd in Crick Cristmas Day 1832.*” (GDM, 197) “*Drownd herself,*” Buddy McCaslin writes in response to his twin Buck’s entry (marking the first time Ike has encountered Buddy’s writing in the ledgers). “*Who in hell ever heard of a niger drownding him self*”, Ike’s father Buck retorts – to which Buddy replies a few days later, “with a complete finality”, repeating: “*Drownd herself*” (198). “*But why? But why*” Ike finds himself asking. The answer he finds, in his bleak interpretation of the surrounding ledger entries – detailing, for the most part, the births, deaths, and cost of slaves and freed slaves – speaks once again to the sexual economics of the meta-plantation. Ike comes to believe not only that Eunice was bought by his grandfather, Carothers, as a concubine slave, but that, when their child Tomasina came of age, Carothers rejected the mother in favor of the daughter – taking his own daughter as his new mistress.

Though Ike’s interpretation of these events serves as his primary evidence for the immorality of slaveholding – and leads to an attempt to renounce his inheritance – the subtle connection established by the imagery of drowning amid the details of Eula’s sexual exploitation and eventual suicide emphasizes that Eunice’s tragedy is threefold. As a black woman, it is her fate to suffer possession through slavery and sexual exploitation. But as an enslaved mother, it is also her lot to suffer helpless despair, watching her daughter subjected to the same exploitation, perpetrated by the very man who fathered her. Eunice becomes aligned with Eula as another poignant victim of an economy rooted in plantation patriarchy, which equates women with objects and possessions, and leaves mothers helpless to protect their daughters. Later in *The Town*, Eula will further cement this connection to Eunice, by taking her own life out of a despair that is, in large part, maternal: motivated by the desire to free her daughter, Linda, from the social stigma of her irrevocably tainted reputation.

The poignant imagery of brutal exploitation surrounding pear tree and plantation mansion becomes obscured in *The Hamlet* by the class-conflict enacted in Varner and Flem’s struggle. For Varner, who cannot comprehend “what it must have felt like to be the fool that would need all this [...] just to eat and sleep in” (734), the ruin of the Old Frenchman place is a symbol of class division. Despite their comparable

wealth, he and the “anonymous Frenchman” live in distinctly separate social and imaginative worlds. Flem is able to profit from his ownership of the mansion, however, because unlike Varner he understands it as a symbol of class mobility, a site of poor white aspiration. It is, like the female body, framed as an object of desire. He understands that its primary function is not “just to eat and sleep in” – that its value as social status symbol far exceeds its significance as a domestic site. As Owen Robinson argues, Flem also reactivates its iconic power, turning its dormant power as “monument” into active power as “footprint” on his course of progress.²⁷

One owns a mansion, Flem perceives, to mark one’s place, and to achieve and maintain that place by making others desire its material markers. His greatest insight, however, is his recognition that, perhaps counter-intuitively, a state of ruination actually heightens the symbolic resonance of objects. As a ruin, the mansion becomes less personalized and domestic, and more generalized and iconic, thus more valuable in terms of social and material capital. In particular, the ruined mansion satisfies nostalgic desire by offering only a selection and abstraction of the past – a version that offers wealth and grandeur, but without the complications of slaveholding. The same can be argued for Eula, too: her “ruined” reputation is, paradoxically, her source of value to Flem.

Flem’s manipulation of symbols works produces two distinct and interrelated results. It re-establishes the patriarchal structures of the mansion, while also satisfying a white Southern desire for a historical abstraction tantamount to erasure. It is only by achieving both these effects – in his exploitation of Eula and his manipulation of Armstid, Bookwright, and Ratliff – that Flem is able to move to Jefferson. He uses the mansion’s shell in a kind of “shell game” of misdirection; gifted conman that he is, he knows how to weave a (cultural) narrative, how to ply its threads to his advantage and let the three men seduce themselves with their own romantic projections. (It is not only laziness, I would suggest, that prevents the inhabitants of Frenchman’s Bend from entirely stripping the ruined mansion for firewood: there is surely a sense of reverence too, a sense of awe for its scale, its aura, and its history.)

In the largest sense, then, Flem demonstrates the fundamental connection between narrative and property. As Joseph Urgo argues, Flem’s role as “speculator” in

²⁷ Robinson, *Creating Yoknapatawpha*, 70

The Hamlet “demonstrates the essential capitalistic linkage between storytelling and property value, or real estate. Land becomes valuable only once it is invested with narrative significance, and someone who buys land buys a story as well [...] Narrative alone transforms land into property.”²⁸ (“Varner could not fathom the person who needed all that land,” Uργο concludes. “Flem, in essence, tells him: you need all that land so that you can sell it to someone else.”²⁹) But Flem also speculates on Eula too: on what is known and said about her, on the desire that she generates within the meta-plantation value system. He is able to speculate on her because the others are blind to the connection between Eula and the symbolic pear tree which the novel’s more acute narrator emphasizes. They do not perceive that to possess her is to use – and misuse – her, and that such gendered exploitation risks leading to her death. They see, instead, only the shells and surfaces of things.

The Loss of the Pear Tree: “Appendix – Compson: 1699-1945”

The pear tree, in Eula’s world, becomes a starker symbol of sex and death than it was even for Caddy or Quentin, foreshadowing her sexual exploitation, her tragic death, and her narrative marginalization and silencing. Its recurrence as a symbol also lifts the associations between Eula and pear tree out of their localized setting in *The Hamlet* – where they are obscured among other imagery – and helps to generate a rich network of connections across Yoknapatawpha. This network illuminatingly links together the surprisingly parallel narratives of Caddy and Quentin, Eula and Linda, and Eunice and Tomasina, within a larger narrative thread of female exploitation on the plantation and post-plantation sites. In the process, these connections offer a model of lateral rather than linear reading; indeed, at certain points they *need* these non-linear connections for the individual moments themselves to fully function. But this narrative approach necessarily leads back to the question with which I began this section: what happens when the pear tree is substituted by a rainpipe, as in the “Appendix”?

By having Quentin descend a rainpipe rather than a pear tree, Faulkner achieves two things. Removing the attendant symbolism of the pear tree from the narrative, he thereby allows it to become less about gender exploitation. A

²⁸ Uργο, “Faulkner’s Real Estate”, 445, 452

²⁹ Ibid, 457

considerable web of emotional and narrative connections is lost, when the pear tree is removed; yet Quentin is also freed from the foreboding which such connections impose upon her. In this new narrative frame, her escape no longer foreshadows repetition of her mother's fate, but instead helps reorient the Compson family house beyond Caddy. The result is a reconceived history centered on the figure of Jason, and on questions of land-use and community rather than family and female subjugation. There is also a significant analogy of form to be drawn here. In both accounts, Quentin's flight liberates her not simply from the physical mansion, but also from the monocultural narrative of the meta-plantation which lies embedded in its frame and spaces, its retentive wood and walls. Yet it is only in the "Appendix" that she is freed from the negative symbolism of the pear tree, and from narrative containment too. Despite the implied moral judgment of the narrator, without the pear tree her "doom" becomes less certain; and so it is only in the "Appendix" that she enters a space of narrative possibility, an unwritten future into which she simply "vanishes" (*SF*, 1141).

The replacement of the pear tree by the rainpipe is a localized effect. It does not displace the pear tree's presence and significance in *The Sound and the Fury*; and crucially, the connections between the plantation and gender exploitation which it helps establish are continued throughout Eula and Linda Snopes's narratives in *The Town* and *The Mansion*. What occurs in the "Appendix", then, is less a narrative revision than a narrative branching. It is acceptance and foregrounding of narrative discrepancy, it marks a shift from the singular to the plural, from the definitive to the possible. The "Appendix" does not so much complete the earlier novel as complement it. It offers, as Thadious Davis puts it, "[a]t once an act of memory (the recollection of the novel) and an act of invention (the extension of the novel proper)" which thereby parallels but does not displace the earlier work.³⁰

A model for this narrative approach – structured on parallel pathways – can be found, both aptly and ironically, in Franco Moretti's theorization of diagrammatic trees as literary structures in *Graphs, Maps, Trees*. Building on Darwinian models of divergence and natural selection, Moretti uses "morphological diagrams" to offer models for reading literary history (he charts, as examples, the evolution of the detective genre and of free indirect style in modern narrative). Although Moretti's

³⁰ Davis, *Games of Property*, 240

scientific analogy implies that certain narratives come to supersede others – that certain threads result in narrative “dead ends” – we need not necessarily read the diagrams in this way, however. If we treat them more as maps charting spatial pathways, rather than as depictions of linear narrative developments, then we are free to read all moments simultaneously. While Moretti’s specific interest lies in developing quantitative methods for literature, there are also ways it can be used in qualitative readings too, to consider the evolution of a single narrative. The pear tree/rainpipe distinction marks a useful point of divergence in the Compson family history because it alters where that story leads. It lets us read it, simultaneously and non-exclusively, as a narrative centered on sexual exploitation and planter decline, or as a narrative centered on the endurance and transformation of the meta-plantation structures and the plantation site.

.III.

The Vanishing Plantation: Restorative Violence and the Rug

Ruin & Passing: “Wash” and “Barn Burning”

In his struggles with Varner and his neighbors, his aspirational trajectory, and his exploitation of poor white desire, Flem Snopes becomes a figure of class conflict in *The Hamlet*. It is a role he continues still more complexly throughout *The Town* and *The Mansion*, through a continued engaged with and manipulation of patriarchal gender politics and social hierarchies. Flem embodies the tensions of a destabilized post-plantation society through the fluidity of his identity: as social heir to both planters *and* plantation workers, to both white elite and African-American underclass. He is described at one point in *The Hamlet* as a “native parrot-taught headman in an African outpost”, who is “acquiring the virtues of civilization fast” (*H*, 786). The image, though certainly an odd one, is also a richly telling one. It locates Flem within narratives of circum-Atlantic imperialism, within the meta-narratives of Western “modernity”; it constructs him simultaneously as pioneer of “civilization” and as embodiment of a counter-culture, as social outsider and as indigenous figure. He serves, in short, as one of the central means by which racial tensions become subsumed within class tensions.

When pioneers are made to replace planters, and poor whites replace black slaves and their descendants, there is a physical transformation of the plantation site. Its hybrid history is denied; it passes as white. In part, this transformation is reflected in Yoknapatawpha through the struggles of poor white characters against planter figures: Wash Jones against Sutpen in "Wash", Ab Snopes against Major de Spain in "Barn Burning", or Mink Snopes against his cousin Flem or against Houston. As with black characters such as Lucas Beauchamp or Rider, these social struggles are framed in terms of domestic competition; the bare floors of white cabins are contrasted starkly with the carpeted floors of white mansions. Alongside this class conflict there is also a second reconfiguration of the plantation landscape through a different narrative of modernity, that of frontier development and pioneer progress. By presenting the South's origins in abstract westward expansion rather than capitalist extension, the plantation and slaveholding are placed within a larger historical and conceptual frame. They become, instead, almost anomalous moments on a progression of land use, from forested "wilderness" to horse-farms and housing developments, a trajectory first suggested in the "Appendix" and narratively concluded in *The Mansion*.

Shreve calls Wash Jones (in a *Hamlet* reference), "the voice of the faithful grave-digger, who opened the play and would close it" (AA, 231). "Close it" he most certainly does, at least as far as Thomas Sutpen's life is concerned – killing him with a scythe, after Sutpen spurns Wash's granddaughter, with whom Sutpen has just had a child (a girl, to whom Sutpen is callously indifferent). In both the story "Wash" (despite its title) and in the novel which developed from it, Wash's personal history is included only insofar as it relates to Sutpen, and to Wash's ultimate "destiny" as Sutpen's killer. His life is a prologue to the climactic episode of the "master's" death. Indeed, in *Absalom, Absalom!*, references to the death in Chapter VI (155) come long before Quentin Compson's imagining of Wash's history in Chapter VII (238); and that history is, moreover, framed as the conclusion of a chapter charting Sutpen's history as a representative planter. We never learn of any wife or marital life Wash might have had; learn nothing of his daughter, save the rumor that she died in a Memphis brothel (315); learn nothing of his granddaughter, beyond her brief victimhood at Sutpen's hands, and the pained tenderness with which Wash kills her with his own (240). Beyond this death-drama, the novel mentions Wash only as a handyman, who tends to

and cares for the women of the Sutpen family, who nonetheless reject him (71, 219). There is apparently no space for him in their alternative community; and perhaps this is one reason, among others, why it ultimately fails, and why he becomes instead a prototypical figure of class conflict and conceptual “passing” on the whitened plantation.

It seems to have been in the writing of “Wash” that Faulkner’s imagination was fired, that he became enabled to develop the embryonic material of “Evangeline” into the grander scale of *Absalom, Absalom!* (as Godden notes, “from the first, Faulkner thinks about Sutpen through the issue of the binding and unbinding of labor”).³¹ Faulkner’s new approach in “Wash” expanded the scope of the Sutpen family history, from insular questions of race and gender within family relations, to questions of class and social hierarchies. This expansion is, in turn, developed more fully in *Absalom, Absalom!*, through the additional framing of Sutpen’s own backstory. In many ways, Wash resembles Sutpen’s poor white father; certainly, he reiterates the impoverished and abject condition of Sutpen’s childhood. In a sense, what kills Sutpen in the end is less his denial of his progeny than his denial of his roots. Wash murders Sutpen, abstractly speaking, because Sutpen has failed to recognize the humanity of his poor white neighbors: he has reproduced Pettibone’s design too exactly, replicating even the very flaws that made Sutpen himself resist it in the first place.

It is as a figure of class conflict that Wash plays a profoundly significant role not only in *Absalom, Absalom!* but also in the trajectory of Faulkner’s plantation writing. In helping to frame the collapse of Sutpen’s design as a product of class rather than race, Wash functions as a means by which the plantation becomes “whitened”. Reiterating Sutpen’s roots, Wash connects Sutpen’s career in Mississippi directly to his childhood experiences in Virginia, effectively circumventing and excluding Sutpen’s experiences in the West Indies, which in this new narrative trajectory become irrelevant tangents. The plantation is retroactively recreated as a site of white class struggle, within which blacks are present only as possessions or as economic competition for poor whites. The creolization of Sutpen’s plantation is effectively denied, and the elements that reveal those repressed connections are altogether erased.

³¹ Godden, *Fictions of Labor*, 132

The parallel is made through the comparable experiences of Wash and Sutpen at the mansion door (we might also recall the moment when Sutpen's drunk father is ejected from a tavern by "a huge bull of a nigger" [186]). For the most part, Wash is barred from entering Sutpen's house by custom rather than direct prohibition. Wash takes pride in the fact that he has never requested entry, and so may believe that Sutpen would never have refused it. The amendment Faulkner made when incorporating this moment into *Absalom, Absalom!* reveals its underlying significance. In "Wash", he believes "Sutpen would have received him, permitted him" (CS, 537); but in *Absalom, Absalom!*, Mr Compson suggests that Wash believes "Sutpen would not have let them repulse him" (AA, 232). The distinction is crucial, and plays out in the subtly different conclusions Wash is able to draw. In "Wash", he concludes: "I ain't going to give no black nigger the chance to tell me I can't go nowhere [...] I ain't even going to give Kernel the chance to have to cuss a nigger on my account." (CS, 537-538) In *Absalom, Absalom!*, on the other hand, Quentin suggests it is

like (Father said) he might have said to himself *The reason I wont try it aint that I refuse to give any black nigger the chance to tell I cant but because I aint going to force Mister Tom to have to cuss a nigger or take a cussing from his wife on my account [.]* (AA, 232)

In the first case, the power relationship is between Wash, as "white trash", and the Sutpen slaves; Wash refers less to a specific place or situation than to a general sense of spatial empowerment, that of being "above" having a "black nigger" tell him that he "can't go nowhere." In the second case, however, the relationship is directly between Wash and Sutpen: the slaves are denied any agency, while Sutpen is made – in this, at least – the equal of Wash, a helpless victim of social conventions and structures. "I aint going to force," Wash reflects, in an attempt to empower himself. Yet it is the phrase "black nigger", which occurs in both cases, that asserts Wash's fundamental abjection. The phrase implies a colored hierarchy of "niggers" which frames the term as social rather than racial. Within this hierarchy are not only less "black" mulattos like Clytie, but also "white niggers" like Wash himself. "Who him,

calling us nigger?" Sutpen's slaves say in "Wash", scorning him for possessing "nothing else but dat shack down yon dat Cunnel wouldn't *let* none of us live in." (CS, 537) This underclass struggle, however, serves to emphasize Wash's commonality with the slaves, and thereby suggests his potential to narratively displace them too.

The relationship between Wash and Sutpen helps obscure the core social dynamics of slaveholding by centering the plantation's activities on sites away from the cotton fields: the scuppernong arbor, the stables, and the mansion. It turns a site of agricultural production into a site of abstract social hierarchies, maintained by symbolic and literal thresholds. When Wash is finally permitted to enter the mansion, in the years after the war, it is to carry the whiskey-stupored Sutpen up to bed, to act like a servant in carrying him, and in some ways like a "mammy" in tending to him. Though in "Wash" he lets "his burden sprawl onto the bed" (CS, 540), in *Absalom, Absalom!* Wash puts Sutpen "into bed like a baby", before lying down on the floor beside Sutpen's bed, like the black servants and companions elsewhere in Yoknapatawpha.

The racial displacement implied here is closely related to the decay of the mansion from its original state. Wash is only able to enter here because the stable sequence of those thresholds has collapsed. The mansion's "formal entrance", "velvet carpet", and "formal stairs" across which he progresses in "Wash", like the hierarchical grandeur they embodied, have become degraded and decayed through the losses of the war, the dwindling of Sutpen's wealth and status, the disappearance of his slaves. The velvet carpet's nap has faded; the formal stairs "now but a fading ghost of bare boards between two strips of fading paint." Even the fanlight above the entrance, "imported piece by piece from Europe" now has a missing pane, its gap covered roughly with a board (CS, 540). The material details of this decay are absent from Quentin's more abstract mental recreation of the same moment in the novel, though the general atmosphere of faded glory remains the same (AA, 153); but as a result, one telling detail is missing. Where the threshold doorway in the novel is described as merely "paintless" (153), the story's formal entrance is described as "once white" (CS, 540) – and there is a world of meaning held in those two words, as the "white trash" Wash, the "white nigger", goes inside.

Judith Sutpen spoke of life as working at a loom set up by the Fates, with life figured as a state of continual conflict between “weavers”, where “each one wants to weave his own pattern into the rug.” (AA, 105) The analogy relies on a material referent that places it within a specific world of Western production, industry, and consumerism, a world determined by structures, among which inferences of gender and class figure strongly. Judith speaks of a deliberate agency, a design, when she refers to “the Fates” or “whoever set it up”. Her life plays out as a negotiation of various imposed social identities and roles; in consequence it is not much of an extension to figure the loom in her analogy as the embodying structure of the meta-plantation, and to figure the rug produced as representing the plantation site as both spatial practice and material geography.

The analogy of the plantation as rug repeats itself surprisingly often in Yoknapatawpha. The wealth of the Sutpen house is gauged by its rugs and carpeting, the family’s decline expressed through the mansion’s bare stairs and the faded nap of its carpets, the mansion giving of itself to the doomed Confederate cause “in slow dribblets of furniture and carpet, linen and silver” (AA, 109-11). It is this symbolic quality of rugs as an index to social and economic place that Faulkner brings to the fore in the prologue to his Snopes trilogy, “Barn Burning” (1939). (There are clear parallels between the action of “Barn Burning” and Sutpen’s and Wash’s dilemmas with thresholds, to the extent that, as Richard Moreland has argued, the later story constitutes a deliberate reworking of key themes.³²) The class conflict between the planter Major de Spain and the poor white Ab Snopes is encapsulated most powerfully not in the acts of arson to which the title directs the reader, but in the defilement of a rug that marks Ab’s introduction to his new landlord.

The story is set around 1890, at a point when both sharecropping and segregation had reached maturity as social structures. It is possible to approximate this date from the fact that Ab’s Civil War injury occurred “thirty years ago” (CS, 5). The

³² Moreland, *Faulkner and Modernism*, 7-8. The action of “Barn Burning” is itself further reiterated in the beginning of *The Hamlet*, where it loses its focalization through the perceptions of Ab’s ten-year-old son “Sarty”, and becomes one among the store of comic local tales related by travelling salesman V.K. Ratliff. As a result, Moreland notes, it becomes an instance not of “compulsive repetition”, but rather of “humorous appreciation and elaboration as an exemplary scene of critical escape from reductive and oppressive social categories and oppositions, a scene that points a way out for others without pretending to point the one new way.” (9)

bulk of the story's action centers on class conflicts that are rooted in legal dispute and domestic contrast; a considerable part of "Barn Burning" is given over to description of the Snopes's house-moving routine. Their possessions are the "sorry residue" of a "dozen or more movings" which Sarty can recall: "the battered stove, the broken beds and chairs, the clock inlaid with mother-of-pearl, which would not run" (6). At the end of each move there is "always a house of sorts waiting for them [...] a paintless two-room house identical almost with the dozen others" (7-8). It is precisely the same condition of unhomely plantation tenancy, of temporary occupation rather than dwelling, that Thomas Sutpen reflected upon in Tidewater Virginia (AA, 188); in *The Hamlet*, the tenant-cabin's "barren yard" is described as "littered with the rubbish – the ashes, the shards of pottery and tin cans – of its last tenants." (H, 747) There is no bricolage here, comparable to that practiced by the Beauchamps in *Go Down, Moses*; there is only a sense of disconnection from property, and of alienation from the environment. The specific details of the house do not merit description: it is a typical, representative structure, built and maintained without individualization, and all but actively hostile to individualization by its inhabitants. Yet what seems to be "shiftlessness" also marks a certain resilience and familial strength, as V.K. Ratliff stresses in his retelling of this story in the opening of *The Hamlet*: the family's moving routine is "[c]areless and yet good, too, tight, like they was used to moving and not having no big help at it" (H, 741).

Among the few items described among their possession, Faulkner specifically mentions "a worn broom" (CS, 9). The detail marks their sharecropper world as one of bare floors, in the absence of carpets and rugs; it marks their poverty as framed by the perpetual intrusion of dirt into the domestic, and frames their domestic site as inseparable from the site of physical labor in the fields. We can read their tenant-cabin, in its contrast to De Spain's mansion with its rich rugs, within a class hierarchy of comfort and consumption that Richard Bushman locates at the heart of the emergence of late-nineteenth-century American modernity. Technological developments in carpeting production from the 1830s onwards, in parallel with the social dissemination of values of "refinement" into a larger demographic of society around the same time, reconfigured the space and status of the home, Bushman argues. "[C]arpeted floor was a fitting surface for a gentleman's fine shoe, not for a farmer's boot", and served

to mark a qualitative differentiation of space; as a result, “[t]he farmer, as a workman wearing muddy boots, was not at home in his own house. In the name of taste and cultivation, an artificial barrier had been erected at the door of his parlor.”³³ In this distinction, then, carpets mark a separation of labor and domestic that is also a separation of laboring class and bourgeoisie – and thus, for the South, of plantation site from plantation mansion.

Though Major de Spain is evidently a wealthy plantation owner, there is no direct evidence of economic labor in his home, with its “pendant glitter of chandeliers” and “mute gleam of gold frames”, its expensive French rug and “suave turn of carpeted stair” (11-12). When Sarty gazes at the white edifice of the mansion, he sees only an impressive structure as “*big as a courthouse*”, embodying not only law and order but “*peace and dignity*” too (10). His father Ab, however, sees it as the embodiment of a much more material, much less abstract, kind of order: the oppressive meta-plantation system, with its economic peonage, rigid hierarchies, and ingrained injustices (although as John Duvall notes, “Ab’s racism is the only thing that prevents him from fully recognizing that he in fact is an artificial Negro.”³⁴) “Pretty and white, ain’t it?” he says to Sarty. “That’s sweat. Nigger sweat. Maybe it ain’t white enough yet to suit him. Maybe he wants to mix some white sweat with it.” (12) (The effort of labor is present too in the description of Ab’s cabin in *The Hamlet*, “sagging” and “broken-backed”, its gate lying in the grass and weeds “like the ribs of a forgotten skeleton” [*H*, 746].)

Ab challenges this social order by walking through a pile of fresh horse droppings, and pushing aside the black butler who tells him to wipe his besmirched foot, before wiping it across De Spain’s pale, blond, expensive French rug. He quite deliberately creates a “mess” – the willed intrusion, as David Trotter notes, of disorder into a stable system, the unsettling of a design.³⁵ In his soiling of the rug, Ab expresses an earthiness that is of the soil, that inheres in those made to till it for the profit of others. He embodies a subterranean threat; in *The Hamlet*, Ab’s new landlord

³³ Bushman, *Refinement of America*, 265

³⁴ Duvall, *Race and White Identity*, 13

³⁵ David Trotter, *Cooking with Mud: The Idea of Mess in Nineteenth-Century Art and Fiction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 27-28

Will Varner approaches the cabin of his troublesome tenant like “a man approaching a dud howitzer shell.” (746) His bricolage, in contrast to the black families of *Go Down, Moses*, is destructive rather than constructive: he makes use of what is at hand to damage or destroy what is at hand. His actions are not “conditions” of an existing system, but an independent and unpremeditated disruption of it.³⁶

Ab drags the dirt of reality, the excess byproducts of social relations, across the threshold of De Spain’s mansion: his intrusion makes it less hermetically white, less disconnected from the labor which produces and sustains it. (Ab even has his daughters further ruin the rug, when De Spain insists he clean it, by scrubbing it with “homemade” lye.) Ab asserts this challenge of its “whiteness” on two levels: as an expression of class conflict exterior to plantation slavery and racial history, and as a displacement of African-Americans from the spaces of plantation discourse. The first aspect relates to Ab and De Spain’s involvement in the Civil War; the second relates to Ab’s ambiguous social “whiteness”, wherein his identity and narrative role becomes similar to that performed by Wash Jones in *Absalom, Absalom!*.

Both Ab and De Spain appear to have served in the Civil War: and though Ab worked as a horse-thief and trader, rather than in Colonel Sartoris’s cavalry as he claims (*CS*, 7, 24), he is nonetheless a representative of poor white resentment at the devastating cost of that “rich man’s war”. His injured foot, though wounded by “a Confederate provost’s man’s musket ball” when he was escaping on a stolen horse (5), can also be read as emblematic of the wounds suffered by the poor whites who made up the bulk of the Confederate army, and who fought to protect the property and institutions of wealthy planter-officers like De Spain. The story even contains a hint that we should read Ab in this way, in the deliberate description of his family’s broken clock, with the hands “stopped at some fourteen minutes past two o’clock of a dead and forgotten day and time” (6) – that is, at the moment of Pickett’s Charge during the Battle of Gettysburg.³⁷ By making it explicitly Ab’s “stiff” war-injured foot that defiles

³⁶ Ibid, 20-21

³⁷ Kenneth G. Johnston, “Time of Decline: Pickett’s Charge and the Broken Clock in Faulkner’s ‘Barn Burning’”, *Studies in Short Fiction* 11 (1974), 434-436. Johnston creatively links this symbolic broken clock to the “clocklike finality” (*CS*, 11) and “clocklike deliberation” (15) with which Ab’s footsteps fall on De Spain’s porch.

De Spain's rug, Faulkner implies something of this Civil War connection (although this nuance is absent from the scene's retelling in *The Hamlet*).

At the same time, Ab's darkening of a "pale" and "blond" rug within a mansion that is "pretty and white" (11-12) reveals his role as "white trash". His intrusion into De Spain's property, through an act of "trashing", performs on a small scale the disruption enacted by his social identity as "white trash". This very name, as Matt Wray notes, creates disorder by placing in paradoxical proximity "the sacred and the profane, purity and impurity, morality and immorality, cleanliness and dirt. [...] *White trash* names a people whose very existence seems to threaten the symbolic and social order."³⁸ For John Duvall, this "figurative blackness" present in Ab effectively marks him as an "artificial nigger". Duvall points particularly to the moment in the story's opening, where Ab's former neighbor Harris tells of a "strange nigger" who collects Ab's impounded pig from him and delivers a message: "He say to tell you wood and hay kin burn." (4) Duvall suggests that this mysterious figure is Ab himself in blackface: "strange" not only because unfamiliar, but also because he takes on a persona.³⁹ This moment finds echo, in Ratliff's retelling of the story in *The Hamlet*, when De Spain shoots at the figures he sees retreating from his burning barn. "[H]e got there in time to find something else already there that he felt entitled to consider enough of a foreign element to justify shooting at it," Ratliff notes (*H*, 744).

This transformation, from "strange nigger" into "foreign element", enacts a displacement of racial stability by class intrusion, which allows poor black to be displaced from Southern history by poor white. In *The Hamlet*, Ab's son Flem transmutes the "foreignness" of poor white identity into something "native", in his rise from store clerk to general factotum and eventually son-in-law of wealthy landowner Will Varner. (Frenchman's Bend is, conveniently, an intensely white community: we are told that "there was not one negro landowner" and that "[s]trange negroes would absolutely refuse to pass through it after dark." [733]) In one particularly striking moment which I have noted earlier, Flem and Varner are described as resembling "the white trader and his native parrot-taught headman in an African outpost"; and

³⁸ Matt Wray, *Not Quite White: White Trash and the Boundaries of Whiteness* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006), 2

³⁹ Duvall, *Race and White Identity*, 14

Faulkner notes that the headman is “acquiring the virtues of civilization fast.” (786) The racialized imagery once again positions “poor whites” as “white niggers”, but Flem’s successful social ascent reveals the deeper politics at work. In putting on metaphorical blackface in such moments, poor whites like Wash Jones and Ab and Flem Snopes offer a means for the plantation site to do precisely the opposite: to “pass” as exclusively and inherently white. Flem follows this trajectory to its fullest extent, by pursuing ownership of a mansion. In the process, he excludes black Southerners from social competition with planters, and transforms the plantation into a site of white class conflict and economic competition.

In the final moments of *The Hamlet*, Flem is pictured driving his family toward Jefferson; on the way, he breaks their journey to pause and watch Henry Armstid still digging for the treasure Flem has tricked him into believing lies buried on the Old Frenchman place. In convincing Armstid, along with Ratliff and Bookwright, of this lie, Flem transforms the plantation mansion into a site of white desire and aspiration, and of abstract and romantic wealth. He converts it, in its ruined state, into a stable and whitened space. Sitting in his wagon, Flem watches Armstid for a while, then jerks his reins, and concludes the novel with the words – ostensibly directed to the horses – “Come up.” He himself, in this particular moment, is certainly “come up”: poised before the threshold of his first entry into town, his first taste of independent ownership. His property has been acquired not simply through gender exploitation, but through labor exploitation too, as Armstid’s feverish digging makes clear. But that ownership and labor relation also signals African-American exclusion: exclusion not simply from present economic and social opportunities, but also retroactively from the narrative spaces of Southern history. And so if the novel ends on a triumphant moment of “come up, Snopes”, it also ends on a traumatic moment of “go down, Moses”.

Picking the Anonymous Bones: Writing Pioneers

Flem’s entry into town marks him, symbolically if not actually, as a pioneer. In continuing his social ascent in Jefferson, Flem will engage with the spirit and values of the founders of Yoknapatawpha, and contribute to the larger reframing of the Yoknapatawpha landscape which occurs in Faulkner’s later writing. The continuity of

that particular dilemma of history is visibly present throughout the story collection *Knight's Gambit*. Though ostensibly a collection of detective stories centering on Gavin Stevens, the volume also contains a number of details and moments which expand Yoknapatawpha as a whole; and its composition, which draws together tales written between 1930 and 1949, offers an interesting and perspective on Yoknapatawpha's narrative development.

The stories in *Knight's Gambit* feature four different plantations. There is the 2,000-acre Mardis-Holland farm in "Smoke"; the state penitentiary of Parchman Farm in "Monk" (its first appearance in Yoknapatawpha); the last remnants of the Grenier estate in "Hand Upon the Waters"; and finally, and most significantly, the Backus-Harriss place in "Knight's Gambit" (it is not yet called "Rose Hill"). In each case, these former plantation spaces become possessed, in one sense or another, by poor whites or outsiders, who displace the planter class, and in the process subtly erase traces of slaveholding history. The opening story, "Smoke" (written in 1930; published in 1932), might be considered the earliest manifestation of this tendency in Faulkner's writing, contained in the narrative margins, in the backstory of the murder victim Anselm Holland. Holland's sketched history, relayed by the communal narrator which Faulkner often favored at this point in his career ("we in Jefferson") opens the story, and foreshadows Thomas Sutpen's career.

Holland arrives in Yoknapatawpha around 1890; "[w]here from, no one knew":

But he was a young man then and a man of parts, or of presence at least, because within three years he had married the only daughter of a man who owned two thousand acres of some of the best land in the country, and he went to live in his father-in-law's house, where two years later his wife bore him twin sons and where a few years later still the father-in-law died and left Holland in full possession of the property, which was now in his wife's name. (KG, 7)

Like Sutpen, he "abrupts" upon the country, and makes his way through ambition and personal determination; but again like Sutpen, he is always viewed as an outsider.

Holland is held in contempt by “we in Jefferson” for “talking a trifle more than loudly of ‘my land, my crops’”; treated coldly by “those of us whose fathers and grandfathers had been bred here”; looked upon “a little askance” for his ruthless dealings with his tenants, black and white, and for the violence in his nature (7). He is tolerated for the sake of his in-laws, the Mardis family, who were considerable landowners (their holdings were double that of Grenier, according to the evidence of “Hand Upon the Waters” [48]) – an old established family, who by 1930 have “five generations” buried beneath the cedar trees in their family cemetery (11).

Five generations and two thousand acres: these Mardises were evidently plantation owners, who would have held a considerable number of slaves. The anonymous narrator makes reference at one point to “the few remaining Negroes”, with the suggestion being that they are the last remaining descendants of slave retainers (11). Yet at no point does the story expressly refer to plantations or slavery. The Mardis-Holland place is always termed a “farm”, and the historical sins of the slaveholding Mardises are ignored entirely, displaced by the apparently greater sin that Anse Holland commits in “mistreat[ing]” the land, by never having “done justice” to it as a farmer (9). He lets it go to ruin, “year by year the good broad fields [...] going back to jungle and gully”, with the house (not the “mansion”) “falling down about his head” (11). Holland does not only displace the Mardis family from their house, their holdings, and their place in local history, however: in a curious, macabre twist, he quite literally displaces the Mardises themselves from the land. The community learns that, in his old age, Holland has turned to “digging up the graves in the family cemetery where his wife’s people rested, among them the grave in which his wife had lain for thirty years.” (7) We are led to believe that this is a kind of madness, an act of “crazed, hate-ridden” violence on his part. His motive in this is never sufficiently explained; it is simply dismissed as an “unpardonable outrage” (7). But its usefulness as metaphor for the narrative displacement of slaveholding planters from Yoknapatawpha is striking – is almost, once detected, unavoidable.

A less macabre (though perhaps equally gothic) device is used to displace planter ownership of land later in *Knight’s Gambit*, in “Hand Upon the Waters”. There, Faulkner introduces, in death, the sole remaining descendant of the original owner and titular founder of the Old Frenchman place. Lonnie Grinnup’s name is a corruption of

“Louis Grenier” (a “decay” evidently produced by Yoknapatawpha’s predominantly oral, rather than textual, culture). This passage naming the “Frenchman” was lifted from its earlier use in “The Peasants”, the draft version of *The Hamlet* on which Faulkner was working in 1938-39. This excision – which allows Grenier to remain an “anonymous Frenchman” in *The Hamlet* – reveals Faulkner developing his Yoknapatawpha saga in two simultaneous directions: toward a local history of oral lore and a cultural narrative of generalized myth. (It is perhaps unsurprising that Faulkner used the more explicit material in the short story which he sold to the popular *Saturday Evening Post* for \$1,000.⁴⁰) In both cases, however, the end-goal is the same: to circumvent the history of slaveholding, by rooting the values and community of Yoknapatawpha County in a history of nation-building pioneers.

It is “Hand Upon the Waters”, perhaps a little surprisingly, that contains the first mention of the legend of Yoknapatawpha’s founding – a story Faulkner would later return to in greater detail, in “Appendix: Compson, 1699-1945” and in the opening section of *Requiem for a Nun*. According to “Hand Upon the Waters”, Yoknapatawpha was founded “not by one pioneer but by three simultaneous ones.” (48) These three founders – Holston, Grenier, Stevens – are named, yet also conflated. “They came together on horseback,” we are told, “through the Cumberland Gap from the Carolinas, when Jefferson was still a Chickasaw Agency post, and bought land in the Indian patent and established families and flourished and vanished[.]” (48) Their point of origin (the Carolinas) and their activities (purchase of land) mark them with certainty as planters – and, moreover, as part of the circum-Atlantic plantation system. But the term “planter” is never used, the connection denied; nor, more to the point, is there any mention of their possession of slaves. These founders are offered simply as the abstract record of a founding moment, contained within a larger historical sweep.

The ending of the Holston line in the nineteenth century, and of the Grenier family with Lonnie Grinnup, leaves Gavin Stevens as the final representative of the community’s founders (in this version of Yoknapatawpha’s founding, anyway). The legacy of the founders is visibly erased: Lonnie Grinnup “had never even known he was Louis Grenier.” Though he lived his life amid “the thousand and more acres his ancestors had once owned [...] he never knew it.” (48) In fact, Stevens mentally notes

⁴⁰ Blotner, *Faulkner*, 409-410

that Grinnup “would not have cared, would have declined to accept the idea that any one man could or should own that much of the earth which belongs to all, to every man for his use and pleasure”. (Faulkner reiterates this description of Grinnup in *Intruder in the Dust* [340].)

Grinnup’s renunciation is not a conscious act, as Ike McCaslin’s was in *Go Down, Moses* – although as with Ike, the historical sin is framed as possession and exploitation of land, rather than possession and exploitation of human bodies. Grinnup, a “feeb”, does not struggle with his slaveholding heritage, but is made innocent through ignorance. By making this last of the Greniers a “feeb”, Faulkner continues the portrayal of planter degeneration, previously expressed through the figures of Benjy Compson in *The Sound and the Fury* and Jim Bond in *Absalom, Absalom!*, a process which usefully closes off the dilemma of planter inheritance by ending familial lines. (This process also makes these final heirs unaccountable, removing the consequences of a slaveholding past.)

Such strategic use of enfeebled and non-reproductive inheritors parallels Faulkner’s use of pioneer rather than slaveholding founders, which he begins here in “Hand Upon the Waters”, develops in *Intruder in the Dust*, and extends in *Requiem for a Nun* into his fullest reworking of Grenier, his most thorough picking over of the Frenchman’s “anonymous bones.” In the last of these works, in listing the three “founders”, Faulkner replaces the “first Stevens” with Dr. Habersham – detaching Gavin Stevens still further from the legacy of slaveholding – and transforms the first “Holston” into the doctor’s servant (in *Intruder in the Dust*, however, he is a still primarily a “tavern keeper” [ID, 340]). Though Grenier remains one of this founding troika, his role as a planter is emphasized to distinguish and separate him from Habersham and Holston; though all three are founders of Yoknapatawpha, *Requiem for a Nun* makes clear that Habersham and Holston founded the town of Jefferson (the community), while Grenier founded the county’s plantation regime.⁴¹ It is Grenier “who brought the first slaves into the country and was granted the first big land patent

⁴¹ This is, intriguingly, in marked contrast to the history Grenier is given in *Intruder in the Dust*, where he is described as an “*élégante*” and “*dilettante*”, a “Paris-educated architect who had practiced a little of law but had spent most of his time as a planter and painter (and more amateur as a raiser of food and cotton than with canvas and brush)” – more evidence, if it were needed, of Yoknapatawpha’s layered plurality (ID, 340).

and so became the first cotton planter”, while Habersham, in contrast, “became the settlement itself”, which is even originally named “Habersham’s” or “Habersham” (*RN*, 478). (The refined Miss Habersham of “Go Down, Moses” and *Intruder in the Dust* is not, then, a descendant of the planter class, but rather of a pioneer of township, of community.) Grenier enters the Yoknapatawpha saga only to be excluded from it. He has “a settlement of his own on his vast plantation, half of which was not even in Yoknapatawpha County, and the settlement [i.e., what will become Jefferson] rarely saw him.” (479). It is a neat sleight-of-hand: the culpability for introducing slavery into what will become Yoknapatawpha is isolated and excised, centered firmly in a man who, despite his founding state, is doubly figured as an outsider – a Frenchman and a resident external not simply to the town, but also in part to the county. This culpability is, moreover, placed in a character who is, apart from these brief and wordless glimpses in *Requiem for a Nun*, absent from the Yoknapatawpha saga to the point of anonymity.

Finally, the history of Grenier is separated from the history of the plantation mansion within Yoknapatawpha. *Requiem for a Nun* offers descriptions of the Compson and Sutpen mansions as they are built, but the Grenier place is narratively ruined in the very moment of its descriptive creation:

his manor, his kitchens and stables and kennels and slave quarters and gardens and promenades and fields which a hundred years later will have vanished, his name and his blood too, leaving nothing but the name of his plantation and his own fading corrupted legend like a thin layer of the native ephemeral yet invictable dust on a section of country surrounding a little lost paintless crossroads store[.] (495)

Grenier’s plantation is always already ruined; and when it is directly described in other works, such as *Sanctuary* and *The Hamlet*, his name is not even appended to it. In *The Hamlet* he is simply a man who “had quite possibly been a foreigner, though not necessarily French”; whose planter’s “dream” has long since been diminished into “small shiftless mortgaged farms”, until

all that remained of him was the river bed which his slaves had straightened for almost ten miles to keep his land from flooding, and the skeleton of the tremendous house which his heirs-at-large had been pulling down and chopping up – walnut newel posts and stair spindles, oak floors which fifty years later would have been almost priceless, the very clapboards themselves – for thirty years now for firewood. (*H*, 731-732)

His house is now a “gutted shell”; the boundaries of his once-grand estate now exist only “on old faded records in the Chancery Clerk’s office”, and much of his cleared plantation land has “long since reverted to the cane-and-cypress jungle” from which he first “hewed them” (731). He exists simply as a nameless legend surrounded by the purlieu of wealth lingering in “the stubborn tale of the money he buried somewhere about the place when Grant over-ran the country on his way to Vicksburg.” (732)

In writing these different accounts, as with the evolving Compson family history, Faulkner presents history as a collaborative process. The most visible evidence of this composite construction lies in the disconnection between the specific legend of Grenier’s plantation and the generalized myth of the Old Frenchman place, mirroring the disparity between the mansion’s material ruin and iconic wholeness. These narratives create places spatially overlaid on a single site – as with Miss Sophonsiba’s vision of the Beauchamp place as “Warwick” in the opening of *Go Down, Moses*. It is precisely this idealized state that Flem Snopes uses to his benefit in *The Hamlet*, and it is the same means Faulkner employs in the titular novella which closes *Knight’s Gambit* to approach one move closer to the removal of plantation legacy from plantation land.

“Knight’s Gambit” (first published in 1949, but existing in an earlier form since 1942) takes this displacement of planter history to its fullest extent. Contained within a formal detective narrative, and comprising approximately a quarter of the story’s length, is a considerable digression describing the evolving use of the Backus plantation land (95-109). This digression tells of how an ordinary cotton plantation was transformed during the 1920s into a “landmark”: how “a once-simple country house” was “transmogrified now into something a little smaller than a Before-the-War

Hollywood set.” (90) The story reveals the process of how a representative space is turned into a space of representation, of how the typical becomes the iconic, as the imaginative displaces the material.

The plantation was originally owned by the Backus family: the place “old”, the mansion modest, the land “good”. There, the last male Backus “farmed his heritage”, living a near-solitary life of whiskey drinking and “reading in Latin the Roman poets”, alongside “a few Negro servants” and a lonely, passive daughter, Melisandre (96). Backus treats her distantly; he has apparently never forgiven her for the death of his beloved wife in childbirth. Out of a sense of self-sacrifice, Melisandre gives herself in marriage to a New Orleans bootlegger named Harriss, “in order to lift the mortgage on the homestead” (99). Following Backus’s death, Harriss at first casually leases the land to black tenants, disinterested in the economic potential of the farmland; “he was making the money himself,” we are told, “and to have stopped merely to run a modest cotton-plantation even for one year would have been like the hot horse-player quitting the tracks in midseason to run a milk-route.” (101)

But Harriss does have grand designs for the old plantation: a plan to rebuild the house from scratch, and to convert the cotton fields into the paddocks of a horse farm. He modernizes the house until “there wasn’t anything at all of the old owner left”; he transforms the land “so even the Negroes who had lived and dropped their sweat on the old place longer than she was old, were gone now” (103). Most arresting of all is the new house which Harriss constructs, “occupy[ing] the same ground the old one would have covered if there had been four of them just alike nailed together.” (104) The single-storey house, with its modest front porch, is replaced by something “like the Southern mansion in the moving picture, only about five times as big and ten times as Southern.” (104) A “tourist” perspective is articulated here: a tension between the South as imagined and real, in which the imagined vision emerges as more “real”, with greater power to overlay the fragile traces of the actual. The plantation land, meanwhile, is converted into a horse farm; later, when this story is repeated in *The Town* and *The Mansion*, it becomes refined into a horse farm of a specific kind, “like a cross between a Kentucky country club and a Long Island race track” (*T*, 157), “a Virginia or Long Island horse farm” (*M*, 507). The allusions to Kentucky and Virginia – “old South” states – are not arbitrary: they emphasize an aspect of Southern culture,

centered on horse-breeding, that is rural yet refined, and which helps direct Southern land-use and history away from the legacies of slaveholding which necessarily inhere in the plantation site.

Yet as with Ringo's sketching in *The Unvanquished*, the erasure of this old plantation world is imaginative resisted. Melisandre, who has spent many years abroad in Europe, spends the duration of World War II in South America. She writes to several women in Jefferson, including the sister of her childhood fiancée Gavin Stevens, whom she rejected in order to marry Harriss and save her father from economic ruin. Melisandre's letters are full of reference to "home": "not the monstrosity Harriss had changed it into, but as it had been before, as if, seeing again its site in space, she remembered its shape in time; and, absent from it, it existed intact again as though it had merely bided and waited for that" (KG, 109). It is in this way, too, that Stevens perceives the landscape, when he finally travels out to the Harriss mansion at the conclusion of "Knight's Gambit", before he is finally reunited with Melisandre. Stevens's physical approach is also a psychic return, an imaginative recreation and selection of the history that lies behind and beneath the gaudy new structure Harriss has built ("like something between a gargantuan bride's cake and a freshly whitewashed circus tent" [162]). Stevens follows the old road up through the hills, the road "older than gravel too, running back into the old time of simple dirt", "niggard in width" to accommodate the maximum corn and cotton from the rich earth (157). He perceives in its dusty surface the imprints of the past: the prints of hooves, of carriage and wagon wheels; he recalls the acres unbounded by fences, the yard "innocent of shears and pruners", the "house which was just a house to back a front gallery" and the

garden which was just a garden, overgrown, shabby too, of old permanent perennial things: nameless roses and lilac bushes and daisies and phlox and the hard durable dusty bloom of fall, itself in the tradition of the diluted whiskey and the Horatian odes: unassertive, enduring. (157)

The vocabulary (focalized through Stevens's nephew Chick Mallison, who accompanies him) serves to recreate (or perhaps conjure) a nostalgic era: one that was "simple", "innocent", and "unassertive", when things were "just" what they were; an era whose structures were "permanent", "durable", and "enduring", governed by the temporal structures of the "perennial" natural seasons on the one hand, and by "tradition" on the other. It is this aspect which Stevens and Melisandre imaginatively restore to the plantation, in their selective historicizing. Harriss's reconstruction is crucial in erasing the slaveholding past, but it is incomplete: it requires the fuller, more local restoration that a character like Stevens can offer, and without which its restoration is merely another kind of ruination. Once his task in physically erasing the old plantation has been achieved, however, Harriss very conveniently dies, allowing Stevens to marry Melisandre. Through the imaginative restoration Stevens and Melisandre bring, plantation order is retained, but freed of plantation guilt. The past, made restoratively present, obliterates its own history: and in that passing from one state to another, the symbolic mansion enacts an architectural version of racial "passing", when the sites built on and built by the bodily exploitation of black Southerners are rebuilt as exclusively white.

Later, when Faulkner retells portions of "Knight's Gambit" in *The Mansion* – specifically Harriss' transformation of the Backus place (*M*, 506-509), and Stevens's marriage to Melisandre (560-562) – he is for once careful not to alter or revise any details. This is an uncharacteristic approach that foregrounds the context of this retelling above the content; it underscores that Faulkner's creative gesture lies not in a rethinking of Stevens's relationship with "Rose Hill", but in a reorienting of that relationship so that it parallels the actions and experiences of Flem Snopes. In the final reference to Rose Hill featured in *The Mansion*, Stevens is pictured with Melisandre in its idyllic setting as "the squire and his dame among his new ancestral white fences and electric-lit stables" (562). This observation, made by Stevens's nephew Chick, has a note of mocking irony. But it nonetheless emphasizes how, through Stevens's influence, the plantation has been "redeemed" into a paradoxical state of a (whitened) "new ancestral" space.

The Rest is Silence: Flem, Linda, and Erasure in *The Mansion*

The vanishing of the pear tree and its replacement with the rainpipe are representative of the larger conceptual alterations offered by the “Appendix”. Together they emphasize, as I’ve noted, a shift in the role of the Compson Mile as historical plantation site, which occurs in relation to the shift in characterization and narrative significance of Jason Compson (Jason IV). Throughout its various sections, the chronological history of the “Appendix” narratively restores the Compson house (both family and dwelling) to its earlier grandeur. The emphasis is no longer on individuals but rather on land-use, a modification clearly foreshadowed by Flem Snopes’s actions in *The Hamlet*. “Its most obsessive subject,” Thadious Davis argues, “is ownership, property, and masculine enterprises of competitive exchange.”⁴² The family’s property is reframed in terms of exchange rather than stasis or decay, commerce rather than planting or slavery. By foregrounding the role of the first Compson in Yoknapatawpha – Jason Lycurgus (Jason I), a self-made man who arrives without resources in 1811, and builds his own fortune – the family is recast as descended not from planters but from pioneers. As a result, the representative Compson figure in the present shifts from Caddy or her brother Quentin, to Jason IV, who takes on his earlier namesake’s mantle, and is transformed from financial failure in *The Sound and the Fury* into a successful cotton-grader in the “Appendix” (1137-1138).

Most crucially, in keeping with the pioneer trend I have outlined, no mention is made of the source of Jason Lycurgus’s wealth. His land holdings are simply described as a grand formal estate carved out of the wilderness, with no mention of farming, cotton cultivation, or plantation structures, physical or otherwise (1129). The erasure of the Compsons’ earlier role as archetypal planters is completed in the “Appendix” when Jason IV sells the last of the family property, and moves into an apartment overlooking the town square – moving, like Flem, from the familial plantation to the communal town. (The Compson land eventually becomes an estate of “row after row of small crowded jerrybuilt individually owned demiurban bungalows.” [1131]) On the occasion of his resettlement in a bachelor apartment, Jason IV is reported as remarking that “In 1865 [...] Abe Lincoln freed the niggers from the Compsons. In 1933, Jason Compson freed the Compsons from the niggers.” (1139) By forging a connection with

⁴² Davis, *Games of Property*, 240

pioneers rather than planters, the reimagined Jason thereby helps “free” the family of its slaveholding past. Indeed, this is the concluding point of the legend for the Compson estate on the 1945 map, which reads: “Compson Mile for which Jason I swapped Ikkemotubbe a race horse & the last fragment of which Jason IV sold in order to become free.”

The end of this trajectory is not finally achieved until *The Mansion*, however, where Flem Snopes is inserted into the narrative as the purchaser of the last of the Compson land. Elsewhere in that novel, Faulkner offers two other models of transformative erasure: in the overlaying of Rose Hill plantation by a horse-farm and new mansion, and in the retrofitting of Flem’s town mansion (formerly owned by the De Spains) by the addition of pseudo-classical columns and portico. Both perform gestures of restorative violence, which erase the presence of the slaveholding past while at the same time restoring its meta-plantation structures and values. These acts find echo in the final evolution of the Compson land, which Jason tricks Flem into buying as a military airfield (*M*, 619), but which Flem nonetheless profits from, subsequently reselling the land, after the First World War, for veterans’ bungalows (629). As part of the deal, Jason asks Flem to name the property “Compson Fields”, but Flem reenacts his old understanding of property economies. In a move that draws the Compson place, in its final appearance, back to its earlier narratives of female exploitation, Flem provocatively renames the land, bought with wealth partly generated by exploitation of his wife, as “Eula Acres” – or as Chick Mallison calls it, “Eula’s Uxorious Nest-place” (629).

Flem is able to achieve this dual function in Yoknapatawpha – as transformative yet sustaining – above all because he does not generate his own models, or even build his own mansion. Instead, he repurposes and remodels those which already exist. In contrast to Sutpen, whom he in many ways resembles, Flem is interested in the practice rather than the consolidation of power. Flem is an inheritor rather than a creator; the first novel of his ascent, *The Hamlet*, begins, after all, by emphasizing those who have come after the “anonymous Frenchman” (*H*, 732). In this regard, Flem’s sexual impotence – revealed in *The Town* – seems neither incidental nor accidental, but instead tellingly symbolic. As John T. Matthews argues, Flem’s power derives from “his strict conformance to the conventions of the society as it exists. Flem

is less a character [...] than a reflection of the deathly impersonal conditions of play.”⁴³ Given Flem’s outsider position, this also means that following Flem’s death at Mink’s hands, when the mansion is restored to the De Spain family, it has in a sense become ritually cleansed by his process of habitation, and displaced from its connections to the slaveholding past.

The mansion Flem acquires from the De Spain family, and remodels through the fixture of columns and portico, is not paralleled to a courthouse (as in his brother Sarty’s analogy in “Barn Burning”) but instead to “the Union Depot in Memphis” (415), to a depersonalized site of social transfer. (His cousin Mink will sleep in that very depot, on the night before purchasing a gun and beginning his journey back to Jefferson to murder Flem [589-590].) It is significant, too, that the mansion is a town-house, rather than part of an original plantation site – even though Flem is eager to make it fit the iconography of the plantation mansion. “[I]t was going to have colyums across the front now,” V.K. Ratliff relates:

I mean the extry big ones so even a feller that never seen colyums before wouldn’t have no doubt a-tall what they was, like in the photographs where the Confederit sweetheart in a hoop skirt and a magnolia is saying goodbye to her Confederit beau jest before he rides off to finish tending to General Grant[.] (T, 306)

The image is icon, and particularly attuned to poor white desire, to a symbolism so grandly overt that it becomes legible to even the most ignorant or innocent. And this is precisely its effect upon Mink, whose prison-term has left him in very much this state. Arriving at the mansion with the intent of murdering Flem, Mink nonetheless pauses to look “at the vast white columned edifice with something like pride that someone named Snopes owned it; a complete and absolute unjealousy: at another time, tomorrow [...] he would have said proudly to a stranger: ‘My cousin lives there. He owns it.’” (M, 699)

⁴³ Matthews, *Play of Faulkner’s Language*, 169

The mansion is iconic in Flem's manipulation of it because he also divests it of all its familial and homely qualities. We are repeatedly told that the domestic design of Flem's home is pre-bought, artificial, reproduced precisely from a furniture showroom. The clean, generic surfaces help the mansion pass as representative, and frame Flem as "divested of all traces of social particularity, of the visible underclass lifestyle of his cousins and of the conspicuous sexuality of his wife."⁴⁴ As a result, what is created is an iconic image that is domestic in theme rather than actuality. (It creates, to reiterate Tara McPherson's terminology, a site that is lenticular, in its disconnection between layers.⁴⁵) And in his very moment of death Flem disappears among his furnishings. After Mink shoots him, Flem's body makes "a curious half-stifled convulsive surge which in another moment was going to carry the whole chair over" (703); in the remainder of the paragraph, there is only the chair finally crashing to the floor, and a door which lies beyond the chair – but there is no further mention of Flem's body after this "convulsive surge". When Mink shoots him, Flem apparently quite literally ceases to be; a single empty chair clatters to the floor, and the rest is silence.

Even in his downfall and death, Flem serves as a figure of preservation and stability. His mansion is described, in the perceptions of his daughter Linda (in actuality really his step-daughter), as the "home-made columned loom of her father's dreams" (*M*, 652). It is difficult not to hear echoes of Judith Sutpen's analogy of the loom in this phrase, her reflections on life in which the structure of the loom embodied the meta-plantation's social structures, and in which the process of loom-weaving represented a system of physical and social confinement that thwarted individual (and especially female) self-expression (*AA*, 105). Like Judith, Linda makes efforts to resist her father's "loom", in both presence and design. Yet Flem performs such a conservative function, in society and the novel, that even Linda's resistance to him becomes only a further means of preservation through autoeradication.

Much of *The Mansion* is given over to the telling of Linda's attempts to take vengeance on Flem, whom she holds responsible for her mother Eula's suicide. Subtly but resolutely, she attempts to ruin his reputation while using it as a shield, becoming

⁴⁴ Mauri Skinfill, "The American Interior: Identity and Commercial Culture in Faulkner's Late Novels", *Faulkner Journal* 21.1/2 (Fall 2005/2006), 142

⁴⁵ McPherson, *Reconstructing Dixie*, 7

first a communist and then an advocate for black civil rights. The response, in early-twentieth century Mississippi, is predictable. The epithet “*Nigger Lover*” is “scrawled huge in chalk on the sidewalk in front of the mansion” (*M*, 534); on another occasion “a crude cross soaked in gasoline blazed suddenly on the lawn” (535). More effectively, Linda also plots for the release of her father’s cousin Mink, in the hope that he will murder Flem, and deliver the vengeance they both seek.

Linda seems on the surface to be positioned as an empowered figure of avenging femininity, against her father’s symbolic function and specific sins. Evelyn Jaffe Schreiber argues that Linda’s actions “reveal a strength and independence that rejects her culture’s dominant values: she lives with a man outside of wedlock, becomes a Communist, drives an ambulance, works in the shipyards like a man, and educates blacks.”⁴⁶ As a result, Schreiber suggests, she serves as a crucial female voice “that undermine[s] hegemony in order to crack patriarchy’s order”, an example of “how women, constricted in their position as objects of male desire, progress to a posture of subject through their own assessment of their object status.”⁴⁷ This is certainly so: and yet, because her narrative ultimately devolves into one driven by vengeance even more than resistance – because her assaults on Flem’s respectability seem so precisely defined by his own efforts – the broader possibilities of her iconoclastic activism becomes subsumed and diffused within the narrow frame of her relations with her father. Like Wash Jones, in many ways she comes in the end to serve only as functionary of the master’s fate.

Perhaps most telling, given the larger trajectory of racial displacement which characterizes *The Mansion*, are the results of her failed advocacy of black rights. Her “meddling with the Negroes” (531) ultimately leads to the Principal of the local black high school pleading with Gavin Stevens to restrain her from attempting to help them today social equality. “[Y]ou are not ready for it yet,” the Principal tells Stevens, as representative of the white community, “and neither are we.” “Not many of your race will agree with you,” Stevens responds; a sentiment the Principal accepts, by recalling that “none of them agreed when Mr Washington said it”, or “Mr Carver” either (532).

⁴⁶ Evelyn Jaffe Schreiber, *Subversive Voices: Eroticizing the Other in William Faulkner and Toni Morrison* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2002), 48

⁴⁷ *Ibid*, 51

The Principal's subsequent speech – informed heavily, as his comments suggest, by the earlier gradualism sentiments of Booker T. Washington and his disciple George Washington Carver – offers the only substantial voicing of black opinion in the novel. It also constitutes, in effect, a wholesale removal of any non-white stake in Southern society – despite the fact that, as the Principal himself concedes, it is almost certainly not a viewpoint shared by most black Southerners. The Principal tells Stevens that black Southerners are not ready for equality:

we have got to make the white people need us first. In the old days your people did need us, in your economy if not your culture, to make your cotton and tobacco and indigo. But that was the wrong need, bad and evil in itself. So it couldn't last. It had to go. So now you dont need us. There is no place for us now in your culture or economy either. (532)

It is an important moment in both the novel and in the evolving racial politics of Yoknapatawpha, consigning slavery to the past (the word itself is never used), and framing racial equality as a specifically black, rather than communal, responsibility. It maintains the subservient position of Southern blacks, and also removes once and for all the possibilities of black and white interrelations; it positions the black community, represented through the Principal, as enacting a kind of auto-eradication too. And it finds echo elsewhere in *The Mansion*, as Linda's attempts at resisting her father's "loom" prove, in some respects, self-defeating. In the end, her assault destroys only the specific "rug" Flem himself produces, while leaving the larger cultural loom he maintains – the larger acceptance and enduring practices of the meta-plantation's values – ideologically speaking still weaving. After his death, the house is returned to the De Spain family – and although they now consist only of "a bed-ridden old woman living in Los Angeles with her spinster daughter of sixty, the retired principal of a suburban Los Angeles grammar school" (708), the abstract politics of this restoration, which the displaced character of these inheritors helps to actively obscure, is nonetheless maintained. The continuance of inheritance stresses an underlying

assumption of the absolute right to land, to property, to ownership even of a tainted history.

Yet as I have suggested throughout this chapter, perhaps the clearest act of restoration comes in the conflict between Mink and Flem, which frames the novel, and constitutes its climactic moments. As they face each other over the barrel of Mink's gun in Flem's mansion office, the two become the embodiment of a class conflict that is also rooted in a racial and cultural commonality which effectively excludes Southern women or Southern blacks. This confrontation recreates, resolves, and displaces one of the central conflicts in Faulkner's plantation writing, what Richard Godden has called the "primal scene of bound Southern labor – that unthinkable and productive episode during which the master both recognizes and represses the fact that since his mastery is slave-made, he and his are blacks in whiteface."⁴⁸ The dilemmas of this "primal scene", which so haunted *Absalom, Absalom!* and *Go Down, Moses* in particular, are here diffused by Flem's complex role as both heir to planter pioneers and heir to black plantation labor. In his simultaneous conflict and affinity with Mink, Flem performs a complex combination of "minstrelsy" and "passing", which illustrates, as John Duvall argues, "that whiteness is not so much a race but actually a metaphysics of class privilege [...] meaning that cultural blackness may reattach itself to racial whiteness."⁴⁹

By association with the mansion, Flem becomes a stand-in for the planters; by association with homelessness and abjectness, Mink becomes a stand-in for the propertyless black workforce; and by association with each other, the two cousins articulate a "figurative blackness" as "artificial niggers".⁵⁰ There is no visual sense in which they are black, yet they are nonetheless socially and metaphysically "blackened". They internalize, and perform, a Southern sense of blackness that is both abject and resistant. "If white identity knows itself in relation to the foil of blackness, what happens when African Americans migrated from the rural South to escape its violent racism?" John Duvall asks. His answer: "In terms of Southern epistemology, there became a need for someone to stand in for the useful category of the vanishing rural Negro. This need is doubled in the realm of economics." And that "someone"

⁴⁸ Godden, *Fictions of Labor*, 4

⁴⁹ Duvall, *Race and White Identity*, 60

⁵⁰ *Ibid*, 7

was, of course, the poor white – as *The Mansion* perhaps reveals most of all through its depiction of Mink’s time laboring on the neo-plantation of the Mississippi State Penitentiary of Parchman Farm.⁵¹

.IV.

Redemptive Sentences & the Ends of the Yoknapatawpha

Transported: The Othered Space of Parchman Farm

In the bottom right of the 1945 Yoknapatawpha map, across the river from Varner’s Crossroads and the unlabeled community of Frenchman’s Bend, Faulkner inserts a surprising legend: “OLD MAN. Here was born the convict & grew a man & sinned & was transported for the rest of his life to pay for it.” The term that intrigues here, given that the character known as the Tall Convict ends up in the state penitentiary, is “transported”. The curious sense of perpetual movement that is implied speaks to dislocation and displacement, the transgression of a boundary that precludes redemption or return. It also touches upon the history of a British colonial activity based in class conflict which was distinct from the circum-Atlantic slave system. (We would not read, surely, of a black Southerner being transported: it seems too historically connected to the poor white convict experience.) As a result, the term simultaneously locates the *If I Forget Thee Jerusalem* narrative of “Old Man” within Yoknapatawpha boundaries, yet also lifts it beyond that text; it places Yoknapatawpha in relation to judicial and carceral (and also colonial) networks, yet frames the space of the penitentiary (which is here unnamed, abstracted) as a place absolutely removed.

This sense of mapping, familiar from my earlier discussions of Yoknapatawpha (particularly of the function of maps and space in *Absalom, Absalom!*), is contrasted later in *The Mansion* with Mink’s sense of movement once he is finally released from Parchman and begins his journey back to Yoknapatawpha County. It contrasts with an alternative spatial and structural model Mink encounters along the way, provided by the Reverend Goodyhay’s church. The space of the prison in Yoknapatawpha asserts continuity, dominance, exclusion; it is a structure of progress, of linear transformation,

⁵¹ Ibid, 9

of closure. Its plantation routine – and also its role as a destination to be “transported” to – mark it as part of an enduring meta-plantation order. The physical space of Goodyhay’s church, however, is much less clearly defined: in the process of its construction, it gathers materials from a range of sources, without discrimination. In the building’s design at least it is a structure that promotes fragmentation, recuperation, and inclusivity; it is a structure of expansion, of possibility and openness. Though the same claim cannot be made for Goodyhay’s church as a community (its military order, created by the ex-marine sergeant, has distinctive institutional traces), the building itself provides, in contrast to the prison, a useful structural metaphor for the reading of Yoknapatawpha as a layered site, articulating an accumulated history. The prison structure, in sustaining but altering the plantation model, offers the most extreme example of the whitening of the plantation legacy in the later Yoknapatawpha works. But Goodyhay’s church, though perhaps failing to offer an alternative communal order, nonetheless offers an analogy of assembly, that parallels the alternative narrative structures I have discussed, particularly those offered by the connective web of the pear tree and rainpipe, the threads of rugs and looming, and the layered histories and politics of the spatial plantation sites.

David Oshinsky has suggested that Parchman Farm, the Mississippi State Penitentiary, serves a dual function in Faulkner’s writing, as a refuge from the modern world in two senses: “a throwback to slave times and an escape from the pain and responsibility of the modern world.”⁵² It is a means by which Faulkner critiques modernity, especially its socioeconomic aspects: its acquisitive materialism; its complacent overreliance on technology; its lack of communality and mutual social responsibility, fostered by systems such as sharecropping. The penitentiary also offers one of the most complex modes through which Faulkner explores the legacy of the plantation, as he frames Southern agrarian industry as class exploitation, rather than a system rooted in exploitation of gender or race. When Faulkner first introduces it as a literary setting in the story “Monk” (1937), later collected in *Knight’s Gambit*, the as-yet-unnamed prison offers this kind of refuge for its titular poor white character. The

⁵² David M. Oshinsky, *Worse Than Slavery: Parchman Farm and the Ordeal of Jim Crow Justice* (New York: Free Press, 1996), 226. Likewise, Joel Williamson links Mink’s experience at Parchman to life among a community of monks – an apt parallel, given Parchman enters Yoknapatawpha through a story entitled “Monk”; see *Faulkner and Southern History*, 427-428.

mentally handicapped and innately gentle Monk finds that when he is due for release, he “did not want to leave”; he remains and sweeps the warden’s house “as a woman would have” (36). The prison is somewhere that accommodates and offers asylum for the weak, the losers. “No champion at anything would ever be here because only failures wound up here,” Mink Snopes will later reflect: “the failures at killing and stealing and lying.” (*M*, 412) But the prison is not only a protective space: it is also a place of meditative retreat for Mink, because its heterotopic state, outside of society’s conventional structures, allows for a closer connection between man and earth that is (to his perception) uncomplicated by competition or economics.

Though Faulkner at first calls Parchman Mink’s “doom” (374), his actual presentation of it makes it seem pastoral, almost bucolic. The year of Mink’s failed escape attempt, 1923, produces a particularly fine crop:

[a]s though back there in the spring the ground itself had said, *All right, for once let’s confederate instead of fighting* – the ground, the dirt which any and every tenant-farmer and share-cropper knew to be his sworn foe and mortal enemy – the hard implacable land which wore out his youth and his tools and then his body itself. (413)

His experience with the land, unmediated by landlords and planters, brings Mink to see not only that “[p]eople of his kind never had owned even temporarily the land which they believed they had rented” but that “[i]t was the land itself which owned them, and not just from a planting to its harvest but in perpetuity” (414). It is a simplification that liberates him from plantation economics:

No more now to go to a commissary store every Saturday morning to battle with the landlord for every gram of the cheap bad meat and meal and molasses and the tumbler of snuff which was his and his wife’s one spendthrift orgy. No more to battle with the landlord for every niggard sack of fertilizer, then gather the poor crop which suffered from that niggard lack and

still have to battle the landlord for his niggard insufficient share
of it. (414)

The word “niggard”, in the discussion of poor whites and plantation economics, cannot help but conjure its near homophone, “nigger”. (The same effect is created when the word is used in “Knight’s Gambit” and especially in “Barn Burning”.⁵³) Its consequence is to render the condition of poor whites emotive by framing them as debased as “niggers”, while at the same time excluding actual rather than symbolic black Southerners. Though Faulkner refers to “any and every tenant-farmer and share-cropper”, the phrase “people of his kind” is surely designed to make us think only of the poor whites, the “white niggers”, whom Mink is made to typify. The ultimate effect, paradoxically, is an implicit condoning and restoration of plantation slavery. The implication underlying Faulkner’s critique of tenancy is that Mink is better off in a state that is, technically speaking, less free; that he is better off belonging to the absolute authority of “the government, the State of Mississippi” (the term “belong” is insisted upon here), than to the landlords “who evacuated them from one worthless rental in November, onto the public roads to seek desperately another similar worthless one two miles or ten miles or two counties or ten counties away before time to see the next crop in March” (414).

By displacing the penitentiary in both space and time, Faulkner makes a contrast between tenancy and slaveholding; and he is able to do so particularly because Southern plantation and Southern penitentiary so closely resembled one another. When Karl Zender argues that “Faulkner’s career can be described with a fair degree of accuracy as an exploration of two settings: the mansion or plantation house and the jail or prison”, it is because these settings overlap to such a degree.⁵⁴ The plantation “big house” and the “big house” of the penitentiary were effectively identical structures in the South of Faulkner’s time; the descriptions of Mink’s labor gangs resemble nothing so much as antebellum plantation labor:

⁵³ Godden, *Fictions of Labor*, 127-128; Duvall, *Race and White Identity*, 13

⁵⁴ Zender, *Crossing of the Ways*, 141-142

He worked now – gangs of them – in the rich black cotton-land while men on horses with shotguns across the pommels watched them, doing the only work he knew how to do, had done all his life, in a crop which would never be his for the rest of his life [...] (375)

Indeed, Mink's entire independence of character is subsumed by the system; he becomes docile and obedient in order that he might have a chance at freedom in twenty to twenty-five years, though sentenced to life. "[H]e was in the hands of the Law now," we are told, "and as long as he obeyed the four rules set down by the Law for his side, the Law would have to obey its single rule of twenty-five years or maybe even just twenty." (375). It is the same reframing of mastery that the McCaslin twins formulated: mastery by contract, by the subject's complicity in turning themselves into an object. Mink yields up his liberty, his autonomy, his self. He becomes, effectively, like a slave: tending mechanically to his allotted task, and counting toward the future dream of release following good service.

This link between plantation and prison is one that Thadious Davis finds at the core of Ernest J. Gaines's writing about Louisiana, (in many ways, the histories of Angola State Prison in Louisiana and Parchman Farm in Mississippi are parallel.) "Whether in preemancipation or postslavery settings," Davis writes, "Gaines connects the literal prison with the metaphorical incarceration manifested in his representation of the plantation and its force in the lives of its inhabitants."⁵⁵

Plantation and prison function inextricably together as an amalgam of public sphere and private domain, the collapsed space of living and dying for black people. The landscape of the plantation functions as prison and as the prism through which to ascertain the values of the people. Gaines's emphasis is on the constrictive nature of plantation culture and the relationships that form in opposition to its structures.⁵⁶

⁵⁵ Davis, *Southscapes*, 293

⁵⁶ *Ibid*, 305

The phrase “for black people” is a reminder that there is more at stake than the parallel functioning of two sites. The site and structure of Parchman and Angola were modeled, precisely and deliberately, on the Deep South plantation. They were designed in this way because their primary function was racialized social control. When populist governor James K. Vardaman founded Parchman Farm in 1904, it was expressly as a means of forcibly socializing black Mississippians. It was intended to perform the dual role of protecting white Southerners from black “criminality” (especially the threat of rape) and paternalistically protecting black Southerners from exploitation in the system of convict leasing. In both cases, the perceived inability of black Southerners to care for and independently control themselves was primary. Throughout its functioning during Faulkner’s lifetime, its inmate population was overwhelmingly black. (By 1915, only 10% of the prison population was white; by the 1930s, despite the impact of bootlegging convictions, the figure was still only 30%.⁵⁷) Paternalism also served to rearticulate the economic mastery of the plantation too: as a working cotton plantation built on rich Mississippi Delta land, Parchman provided considerable revenue for the state, and during its first year of operation in 1905 it turned a profit of \$185,000. For many years, its warden was appointed not for his ability to manage a penal institution, but rather for his ability “to make a good crop”.⁵⁸

Yet whenever he writes about Parchman, Faulkner ignores its racial aspects altogether. Its convict population seems to be exclusively white. The Tall Convict, Monk, Mink, Monty Snopes – at no point is there a single direct mention of a nonwhite inmate (although one reason is that the labor gangs and prison dwellings would have been segregated, a right which Southern whites, even as convicts, were not be denied). In his presentation of Parchman, Faulkner whitens the plantation by removing even traces of the negative stereotype of black criminality from Yoknapatawpha, and transforming a site designed for black “socialization” into a white nostalgic retreat from modernity. Its inmates become “transported” not only in their social removal, but in their entry to a world that is “othered” temporally as well as spatially.

⁵⁷ Oshinsky, *Worse Than Slavery*, 162, 164

⁵⁸ *Ibid*, 139

Mink's Return: Lost Paths & Derelict Structures

Though Mink's function as an inmate of the whitened plantation space of Parchman Farm is crucial to Faulkner's working-through of the plantation's structures and legacy, it is only incidental to Mink's purpose in *The Mansion*. In purely technical terms, his incarceration is narratively useful only to the extent that it places Mink in a state of isolation and stasis. Parchman isolates Mink in a pre-modern antebellum plantation world for almost four decades: it is here that he rides out, unawares, the seismic impact of the Great Depression, the Great Migration, the burgeoning civil rights movement, and the increasing encroachment of first industrial and then suburban modernity. It allows Faulkner to use Mink's return as a means to critique modernity, while at the same time re-engaging with his roots. For Mink's journey marks not simply his return, but the return of the "return": it re-engages with the literal returns that inaugurated Yoknapatawpha in *Flags in the Dust*, and the narrative returns that extended it throughout Faulkner's whole body of work.

Mink is twenty-five when he is imprisoned; when he is released thirty-eight years later, in 1946, he is sixty-three (*M*, 428). He is transported, once again, to a different world. (On the road toward Memphis, he sees a P.O.W. camp that reminds him of Parchman, but he does not know of the war that has been fought: the only ones he remembers are the Spanish-American War and the Great War, the frame-of-reference of *Flags in the Dust* [427].) When he is first taken to Parchman, the surrounding land is still a "vast flat alluvial swamp of cypress and gum and brake and thicket lurked with bear and deer and panthers and snakes, out of which man was still hewing savagely and violently the rich ragged fields in which cotton stalks grew ranker and taller than a man on a horse" (374). When he leaves, the hewing is long done; the swamps and wild woods, as depicting in "The Bear" and "Delta Autumn", have been diminished and tamed. The paths through them are no longer trails formed simply by use; in place of the dirt roads that he knew, worn by the soles of mules and iron rims of wagon-wheels, there are now paved highways, "as smooth and hard as a floor", with "cars and trucks rushing past" (425). When he walks on concrete rather than "soft dirt", his feet hurt, and "his bones and muscles ached all the way up to his skull" (566).

Mink's return to Jefferson describes three distinct stages: his sense of alienation at socio-economic changes and the urban transformation of Memphis (a

“vast concrete mass” with its river now eerily empty of traffic [586-587]); his sense of physical nostalgia, as his body refamiliarizes itself to the rural landscape of Yoknapatawpha; and between these two, the lengthy episode where Mink stays with the Reverend Goodyhay and helps him in the (symbolic) building of his chapel. In the backyard of Goodyhay’s house, Mink finds broken pieces of houses lying in piles: “a jumble of beams, joists, window- and door-frames and even still-intact sections of siding” (569). According to the arrangement, Mink and the other unemployed drifters staying with Goodyhay will be paid \$1 a day plus board, in return for salvaging and reassembling the piece into a community chapel. It is to be a church of resurrected wreckage: a body of different parts, assembled together into a crude kind of harmony. “Save all the sound pieces,” Goodyhay tells Mink, as he sets him to work (570).

What is offered here seems to be a model for social redemption through bricolage, that draws on materials from a multitude of sources and previous structures – including, in one particularly significant moment, the “dismembered walls” taken from “a big place, domain, plantation”, perhaps from old cabins, or perhaps from a demolished big house itself (577). Yet the fields on this plantation are described as “still white for the pickers” – the color of cotton, and the color of mastery; while the “reclaimed planks” lie in Goodyhay’s yard in an “indiscriminate jumble of walls and windows and doors” (572). We may read in Goodyhay’s assembled timber an analogy for a new community that recognizes hybridity and deconstructs past structures, and unlike the plantation does not hide or deny its composite composition. But its potential is nonetheless still flawed. Though it deconstructs the plantation, it leaves its economic and social functioning untouched (as with Linda’s model of resistance); it attempts to reclaim “spoiled fragments”, but cannot assemble them into anything meaningful, and leaves the functioning of the sites from which they were drawn untouched. The trouble, as Mink’s fellow laborer Dad points out, is that Goodyhay “aint got a master carpenter yet to nail it together into a church”; and so he is left helplessly waiting, “straining folks through this backyard until somebody comes up that knows how to nail that church together when we get enough boards and planks and window-frames ripped aloose and stacked up.”(572). But as I will suggest in the Conclusion, there is still the possibility of a narrative analogy retained here that offers a space of reclamation, even if a material and physical space never ultimately emerges.

It may be that it is the reader who ultimately becomes the “master carpenter” of Yoknapatawpha, and who has learned “how to nail that church together” from all the boards and planks and window-frames and other details ripped aloose that Yoknapatawpha has stacked up.

Part of the trouble here, though, is that Mink cannot engage with this communal model. He is psychologically unprejudiced, due to his fierce independence, and he is narratively prohibited, due to his larger function in the novel. Faulkner contains Mink’s possibilities for growth or revelation; he constrains him as a singularly driven character, unable to ever transcend his social abjectness or to ever feel “at home”. Not long after he leaves Goodyhay’s, Mink pauses *en route* to Jefferson at a black tenant-farm, to earn six bits, dinner, and a bed, by helping to pick cotton. But that night, he sleeps out under the stars in a cotton truck, rather than in the house, and eats his meal that evening alone in the kitchen (in echo of Roth Edmonds’s experience in “The Fire and the Hearth”, and in failed fulfillment of the potential model of racial connection that Bayard Sartoris raised in *Flags in the Dust*). As he eats, it is as though “[t]he family had vanished, the house itself might have been empty”; once he has finished, Mink enters the front room, and it is only then that “the wife and the oldest girl rose and went back to the kitchen to set the meal for the family.” (689) Like Joe Christmas, he cannot adequately break bread with others.

Another part of the trouble is that, by the end of the Snopes trilogy, Mink has become more of a function than a character, his value increasingly framed in terms of his cousin Flem’s doom (in a clear parallel to Wash Jones). Mink’s fate consigns him to that single meaningful moment where he faces Flem over the barrel of a gun: the cheap pistol purchased in a Memphis pawnshop. The moment has been forty years coming – and startlingly, it is only here, in the almost 1,100 pages of the trilogy, that the cousins actually meet (their lives parallel and separate like Bayard Sartoris and Horace Benbow in *Flags in the Dust*; a relatively easy feat to sustain, given Mink’s prolonged incarceration.)

In this moment of meeting and collision, Flem dies: killed by the vengeful return of his repressed poor white origins, just as Sutpen was killed by Wash Jones, who so strongly resembled Sutpen’s “white trash” father. Mink, through his labors on the plantation of Parchman, is symbolizes poor white abjection; Flem, through his

mansion ownership, is constructed as the symbol of exploitative class politics. The novel seems, in this end moment, in balance in its politics and in its restorative violence (although Flem's apparent acceptance of death is ambiguous; Frances Nichols suggests that Flem "willingly gives up his life to maintain his reputation by appearing to be a victim of Mink's contempt", in a "gambit to protect his civic virtue in the eyes of the community"⁵⁹). Particularly striking is the self-determination couched in Mink's vengeance: that he is willing to sacrifice his liberty and life, for a sense of self-actualization, in an action that insists that others recognize the significance and power of his being. His vengeance resembles Wash Jones confronting and killing Sutpen, and also Lucas Beauchamp confronting and attempting to shoot Zack Edmonds: there, as here, there was a click and a misfire (*GDM*, 44; *M*, 702), although, unlike Lucas, Mink actually follows through. "Just let me go long enough to reach Jefferson and have ten minutes and I will come back myself and you can hang me," Mink earlier reflected, from Parchman (415), and the terms in this sentiment are not so far detached from Lucas's in his insistence that Zack won't beat him, "not even when I am hanging dead from the limb this time tomorrow with the coal oil still burning" (*GDM*, 41).

It is a mark of self-determination. But it is also another way in which Mink takes on the social role of Southern blacks, exploited by planters – just as earlier, in *The Hamlet*, Flem displaced Southern blacks from their place within a system of social aspiration and ascent. The end product of these various displacements (which also include the retrofitting of white columns) is that Flem serves to restore the mansion, "cleansing" it of its history. He transforms a mansion built on the labor of slaves and profits and privilege of slaveholding into simply a house: recalculated first into domestic terms, and then further into iconic ones. But this transformation finds its fullest expression in the final moments of the novel, where Gavin Stevens and V.K. Ratliff travel out to locate the fugitive Mink, who is hiding out in the cellar of a ruined house.

Though Stevens and Ratliff's conversation is ambiguous, it seems probable that the house to which they are referring is Mink's old home. They drive into the hills, "a section of small worn-out farms tilted and precarious among the eroded folds like

⁵⁹ Frances Louisa Nichols, "Flem Snopes's Knack for Verisimilitude in Faulkner's Snopes Trilogy", *Mississippi Quarterly* 51.3 (Summer 1998), 503

scraps of paper.” (704) For Ratliff, Mink’s return there seems inevitable: “Where else would he be?” he asks. “Where else has he got to go? [...] What else has he got but home?” Mink barely has even that, however: the house itself has been taken apart, the “shell” stripped for firewood except “[p]art of the roof, and what was left of the walls above the height convenient to pull off for firewood.” (705) What is left is the “cellar” under that shell – which although Stevens dismisses it as “a den like an animal”, Ratliff recognizes as having an essential value as somewhere “jest to lay down in the dark and the quiet”.

The location to which they head (the hills), and the terms of their conversation, make Mink’s old cabin seem his most likely destination. Noel Polk, however, makes a forceful case that this ruined house is a final, and unnamed, reappearance of the Old Frenchman place:

It *must* be the Old Frenchman place, because that would be the only house in Frenchman’s Bend to have a cellar; certainly Mink’s old sharecropper cabin of nearly a half-century earlier would have long since disappeared, and in any case its walls would not have a “foundation”[.]⁶⁰

Polk’s argument is appealing in other respects too. The terms used to describe the house – the “shell” left with its only surviving wood above reaching height; its approach road “graded and scraped up” by folk dragging the kindling away (705) – clearly recall the descriptions of the Old Frenchman place from both *The Hamlet* and *Sanctuary*. When they finally arrive at the house, Stevens looks up clear through the roof at a cedar – in a way which, Polk notes, also echoes Horace Benbow’s initial description of the mansion.⁶¹ Stevens and Ratliff then approach the cellar itself: “in a crumbling slant downward into, through, what had been the wall’s old foundation, an orifice, a black and crumbled aperture yawned at their feet as if the ruined house itself had gaped at them.” (717)

⁶⁰ Polk, “Children of the Dark House”, 96-97

⁶¹ *Ibid*, 97

Polk's reading provides a neatness both to the novel and to Yoknapatawpha as a whole (this is, chronologically speaking, the saga's final temporal moment), even though this endurance of ruin seems anomalous alongside the fates of other Yoknapatawpha mansions (see **Fig.6**; p.179). Polk finds, in the reappearance of this mansion, a symbolic "return to the site of the original Faulknerian trauma", and given that we have just witnessed Flem's death through the symbolic return of his repressed poor white origins, it is certainly appealing to follow such a reading.⁶² Yet Polk's readings appear to be contradicted by the text itself: Ratliff and Stevens very clearly drive up into the hills, to a locale where no mansion would be located, and far from where a consensus of Yoknapatawpha's geography would place the Old Frenchman place.

What occurs at the end of *The Mansion* is a moment that, despite its description of material traces, nonetheless transcends realistic representational space. The ambiguity present here reveals the importance of the *idea* of house or shelter here; it is not a specific structure but ultimately the idea of it that provides Mink with comfort in this moment. The descriptions offer nothing concrete, beyond oblique mentions of cellar-space and echoes of descriptions from earlier in Yoknapatawpha; it is almost as though it is the ghost of all the past houses of Yoknapatawpha that is made present here. The ruined structure that shelters Mink is an exemplary instance of literary architecture, imaginative architecture: it is at once both tenant-cabin *and* mansion, a structure generalized to the point of universality. It becomes detached from any fraught history of racial, gender, or economic exploitation, and serves instead only in the most fundamental roles of houses.

Lying in the cellar's womb-like soil – enacting the kind of childlike home-associations which Gaston Bachelard has argued are fundamental to our comprehension of space – Mink finds comfort in universals that serve to essentialize houses as shelters rather than as sites of power relations: shelters not only from the weather, but also from mortality.⁶³ Indeed, Mink has reflected on this theme earlier, when lying in the black tenant-farmer's cotton truck: "[t]he very moment you were born out of your mother's body, the power and drag of the earth was already at work

⁶² Ibid, 98

⁶³ Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space* [1958], trans. Maria Jolas (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969), 14-16

on you” (690). Here, on *The Mansion’s* penultimate page, Mink expands his reflections to encompass the scope of human endeavor:

[E]ven back when they said man lived in caves, he would raise up a bank of dirt to at least keep him that far off the ground while he slept, until he invented wood floors to protect him and at last beds too, raising the floors storey by storey until they would be laying a hundred and even a thousand feet up in the air to be safe from the earth. (720)

Storey by storey, or novel by novel – in the end, a concentration on this viewpoint would indeed let Faulkner to build away from the dilemmas of history, which in the South have been particularly dilemmas of the exploited earth and landscape and those who toil and till it. There retreat into the universal at the end of Yoknapatawpha potentially threatens to resolve, and thereby absolve, the specific into the abstract. Faulkner seems, here, to transmute political questions about power, into philosophical questions about being. What has seemed socially determined in Yoknapatawpha becomes, in its final moments, universalized. In the end, perhaps all Faulkner’s explorations of social practices – and the ways in which discourse constructs reality – resolve into “the old verities and truths of the heart, the old universal truths lacking which any story is ephemeral and doomed.” (*ESPL*, 120)

Perhaps Faulkner’s goal was to address the over-determining of the plantation and slaveholding in Southern history, in which struggles were more complex and situational and elemental, are were marked yet by no means solely determined by the plantation’s structure. The suggestion is that, despite its complexity, the meta-plantation serves only as another (albeit highly significant) layer within Southern history and culture: another storey among storeys. And so although *The Mansion* seems to end in closure that obscures the specific beneath the universal, it also establishes a layering of space and culture that directs us backward – that compels us to return in our reading, and reconsider Yoknapatawpha in retrospect – that gives us pause to reconsider (as I do the Conclusion that follows) the base on which our readings have been, or might yet be, built.

Deconstructing Yoknapatawpha, Expanding Yoknapatawpha: Spatial Reading and the Possibilities of Narrative

Decentering and Difference: The Potential of Resistant Reading

Yoknapatawpha's narrative development – from vanished pear trees, to vanished plantation landscapes – creates a layering of sites, through interplay of design, resistance, and adaption. Throughout this thesis, I have proposed a method of “decentered” reading that, rather than framing details within overarching “designs”, uses those details to form the connective threads of alternative narrative designs. Such a method of reading offers a means of resisting the power dynamics of the postplantation South, in both its physical and imaginative landscapes. It argues for a right to value detail in itself, as a source of both reader pleasure and political empowerment and critique.

This model of reading relies not on comprehensiveness and coherence, but instead on the way in which Yoknapatawpha emerges precisely through its fragmentation. The difference and distance between master narratives and marginal narratives generates the power of Yoknapatawpha as a text. Reading it requires interplay between repetition and variation, between returns and rethinking, parallel and alternative narratives. Yoknapatawpha is constructed through its “replayed scenes” which, as John Matthews notes, “slight discrepancies to produce significance through bivalence.”¹ It thus functions, to adapt Franco Moretti's biological analogy, as a narrative “tree” of both divergence *and* convergence, in which “discrepancies” are part of its richness, rather than signs of inconsistency, as Malcolm Cowley initially deemed them.² The “vanishing” of the pear tree, which I discussed in Chapter 3, offers

¹ Matthews, “Touching Race”, 28. This is similar to the distinction Richard Moreland has made between “revisionary repetition” and “compulsive repetition”, wherein revisionary repetition “repeats some structured event, in order somehow to alter that structure and its continuing power, especially by opening a critical space for what the subject might *learn* about that structure in the different context of a changing present or a more distant or different past.” For Moreland, this revisionary impulse is the fundamental characteristic of Faulkner's work, which made of Yoknapatawpha “an ongoing critical project” devised to explore and expose “certain dominant structures”. (*Faulkner and Modernism*, 4)

² Franco Moretti, *Graphs, Maps, Trees: Abstract Models for Literary History* [2005] (London: Verso, 2009), 78-80

an apt model: it reveals how Yoknapatawpha grew, through its branching paths, from a social narrative into a meta-narrative about the processes by which such narratives are produced, and about the social consequences of that production. The spaces between the vanishing of the pear tree, the appearance of the rainpipe, and their mutual absence on the post-plantation site, tell a story about how history is written, re-written, and erased, through a tension between dominant history and counter-narrative histories. As the preceding chapters have shown, the structural tensions of Yoknapatawpha emerge above all through analogy to the contestation, reconfiguration, and evolution of the Southern plantation landscape. Its aesthetic construction of plural plantation spaces is also the political construction of multiple Souths, multiple histories. This Conclusion offers a consideration of how, in closer analogy to the navigation of that plantation, a detail-based resistant reading experience of Yoknapatawpha might be enacted.

Faulkner prefaces the opening of *The Mansion* with an authorial note, part apology and part defense. He calls the novel “the final chapter of, and the summation of, a work conceived and begun in 1925”; in consequence, he concedes to his awareness of the presence of “discrepancies and contradictions”. Faulkner’s tone is ambivalent, partly troubled by these inconsistencies, yet also eager to embrace them as markers of Yoknapatawpha’s development. He explains the changes as evidence that he “knows the characters in this chronicle better than he did” in earlier years (and also, he claims, that he has learned “more about the human heart and its dilemmas”). Yet because “‘living’ is motion”, Faulkner also implicitly argues that his alterations should not be considered final or definitive, despite his use of the word “summation” to describe the novel’s work. (Yoknapatawpha continued to develop in Faulkner’s subsequent – and, as fate would have it, final – novel, 1962’s *The Reivers*.) His discussion of the “thirty-four-year progress of this particular chronicle” should be understood broadly in terms of expansion, rather than narrowly in terms of revision.

In a lecture at the University of Virginia in 1958, Faulkner drew on the suggestion of one of the students to offer an analogy for how this narrative expansion works in *Absalom, Absalom!*:

It was, as you say, thirteen ways of looking at a blackbird. But the truth, I would like to think, comes out, that when the reader has read all these thirteen different ways of looking at the blackbird, the reader has his own fourteenth image of that blackbird, which I would like to think is the true one.³

Such an approach has the particular value of valorizing “mistakes”, emphasizing the importance of the interpretative process of “reading”. It suggests a way in which Faulkner’s fiction works toward abstract “truth” through narrative uncertainties and multiple possibilities. It also highlights the place of readerly selection and imaginative assemblage at the center of the act of engaged reading.

While retaining a faith in an attainable sense of “truth”, Faulkner nonetheless defines it as always pluralized, always collaborative, always constructed from a combination of viewpoints which in themselves are personalized and subjective, but are valuable precisely because of these qualities. These “detail” readings resist the authority of narrative design, and thereby also resist what Judith Fetterley, in her feminist re-readings of American literature, has called the “posture of the apolitical”:

the pretense that literature speaks universal truths through forms from which all the merely personal, the purely subjective, has been burned away or at least transformed through the medium of art into the representative.⁴

Fetterley’s reading is finely attuned to how “universal” worldviews maintain invisible ingrained assumptions by singularizing, by creating a position in which “only one reality is encouraged, legitimized, and transmitted”, and in which it is sustained because it “endlessly insists on its comprehensiveness.” And indeed, as I have insisted throughout this thesis, the question of “intention” should be recognized as entirely subjective, in terms of both authorial plans and character schemes: authorial intention

³ Gwynn & Blotner, *Faulkner in the University*, 273

⁴ Judith Fetterley, *The Resistant Reader: A Feminist Approach to American Fiction* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1978), xi

correlates only to the practices of authorial “plotting”, and by no means necessarily to the practice of “reading”.

Fetterley’s objection is that “the female reader is co-opted into participation in an experience from which she is explicitly excluded: she is asked to identify with a selfhood that defines itself in opposition to her; she is required to identify against herself.”⁵ As a result, Fetterley concludes, “the first act of the feminist critic must be to become a resisting rather than an assenting reader and, by this refusal to assent, to begin the process of exorcizing the male mind that has been implanted in us.”⁶ Fetterley’s position may be profitably adapted – without diminishing the value of its specific effort – and applied analogously to inform other kinds of “resistant reading”. Fetterley feels that “women obviously cannot rewrite literary works so that they become ours by virtue of reflecting our reality”, but that they can nonetheless “accurately name the reality they do reflect and so change literary criticism from a closed conversation to an active dialogue.”⁷ In essence, what I have suggested in the reading of Yoknapatawpha is an extension of this function: to attempt the “impossibility” Fetterley notes, and argue that we can, in fact, make the effort to productively rewrite and personalize literary works to expand their possible readings and “realities”.

Faulkner’s strategic altering of details, like the transformation of pear tree into rainpipe, creates a “spatialization” of narrative which resists the erasure of linear narrative progression. The preceding chapters have demonstrated what is excluded, lost, or erased by the process of linear readings, which affirm hierarchies and deny simultaneity. Spatialized narratives help to generate layered parallel texts rather than texts that constitute revisions. They offer, instead, “re-visions” in a sense that Adrienne Rich has theorized: “the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction”, an act of adaptation that, for feminists such as Rich, constitutes “an act of survival”.⁸ Spatialized reading creates a

⁵ Ibid, xii

⁶ Ibid, xxii

⁷ Ibid, xxiii

⁸ Adrienne Rich, “When We Dead Awaken: Writing as Re-Vision” [1971], in *On Lies, Secrets, and Silence: Selected Prose 1966-1978* (London: Virago, 1980), 35

layering of the text which at the same time dismantles it and decenters its authority and singular certainties, leaving it radically open to reassembly by the reader.

Reading by dismantling and reassembly compels us to atomize Faulkner's writing, and reconsider its possible fundamental units: the motif or the object, the detail or the episode, the scene or the singular image. It affords the reader the opportunity to reflect on the fundamental ways in which texts are prepared, conveyed, and received, and in consequence generates multiple possible texts, a plurality of differently assembled Yoknapatawphas. These considerations would reorient our reading so as to leave the structures and climaxes of individual texts intact, but remove the dominance of their progress and end-closure in the larger terms of Yoknapatawpha as an oeuvre. "We cannot, of course, be denied an end," Frank Kermode has argued; "it is one of the great charms of books that they have to end."⁹ But it is equally one of their virtues that, in a larger sense, they never end: they may always be re-opened and subjected to re-reading. They exist not as static texts but as active encounters; they "live" through the engaged process of reading, and this is especially true for a "book" on the scale of Yoknapatawpha.

Models for Reading: Maps, Cut-Ups, and Hypertext

This expansive and layered quality of Yoknapatawpha is present in Faulkner's literary maps, printed in *Absalom, Absalom!* in 1936 and *The Portable Faulkner* in 1945. The distinction between these mappings suggests a growing, although never explicitly stated, awareness of the possibilities of "spatial reading" on Faulkner's part. Among the many differences, perhaps most noteworthy is the substitution of geographic details by textual labels.¹⁰ In the 1936 version, we are offered measurements and distances and topographical illustrations of the region's pine hills. The key tells us that the county is 2400 square miles, with a population of "6,298 whites" and "9,313 Negroes". The labels, meanwhile, tells us that it is 12 miles to Sutpen's Hundred and 4

⁹ Frank Kermode, *The Sense of an Ending: Studies in the Theory of Fiction* [1967] (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 23

¹⁰ The differences are mostly practical, removing or including details in relation to their relevance to the texts included in *The Portable Faulkner*; mention of the Bundrens and the Benbows are omitted because they are not featured within the anthology, and the same happens to references to Flem Snopes's career included on the earlier map.

miles to the Sartoris Plantation & Gin, distances measured from the center-point of Jefferson. It is, in short, a map of “Jefferson, Yoknapatawpha Co., Mississippi”, whereas the 1945 map is of “Jefferson *and* Yoknapatawpha County / Mississippi” (emphasis in original).¹¹ In the 1945 version, these measurements and illustrations vanish, and are replaced by the titles of Faulkner’s novels and stories overlaid onto the landscape. These titles help to visually locate each story or section within *The Portable Faulkner*, but they also make visible a spatial and historical layering of space that is absent from the 1936 version. They emphasize a shift, then, from location toward relation, further heightened by the exclusion of “real-world” references.

In the top left, adjacent to the site marked “Sutpen’s Hundred”, Faulkner includes the titles of four stories on the land labeled Issetibbha’s Chickasaw Patent: “Wash”, “The Bear”, “A Justice”, “Red Leaves”. The names cascade onto one another, connecting these stories across history and oeuvre. The result is that the map insists, as the texts in their current print forms do not, that we read all these “historical” moments connectively, even simultaneously. It insists that “A Justice” is inseparable from “Wash”, and that both are inseparable from “Red Leaves” and “The Bear”. It insists that we read Yoknapatawpha as a whole – and then read, in a spatial and nonlinear manner, for the localized details within it. Such a method would not only diminish the “separateness” of individual Yoknapatawpha stories and novels: it would also establish a way in which they might most effectively work to depict and establish a “creolized”, racially-hybrid narrative of the South (especially given the prominence afford the more typically marginalized Native Americans).

This diagrammatic function of literary maps parallels the workings of “rival geographies” (as outlined in the Introduction), where resistant practices and bodily “readings” of the plantation site and spaces work counter to the dominant plantation “design”. Such gestures assert not simply agency, but empowerment through a kind of “ownership” by personalization of space. While the agency exercised by textual readers is obviously considerably greater than that available to those negotiating the physical plantation site and system, the analogy between textual and spatial reading

¹¹ McHaney notes that, between 1929 and 1942, Faulkner more typically focused on Jefferson: the word appears 110 times in *Light in August*, for example, while Yoknapatawpha is not referred to at all. In Faulkner’s fiction from 1945 onward, however, this trend is reversed, for reasons that have much to do with Faulkner’s turn toward communal social models during the Cold War (“First is Jefferson”, 511-519).

nonetheless offers an effective way of revealing the “narrative structures” common to both. It reveals how resistant “reading” can alter the meaning and experience of a text, and thereby offer a means of “owning” it in at least some sense. The analogy also has the additional value of pointing towards the limitations of textual readings which nonetheless preserve the integrity of the text that is being resisted. As a result, it suggests the need for a process of creative reading that enacts not only deconstruction of an existing form, but also *re*-construction into an alternative formulation.

The method of practically enacting this “spatialized” reading necessitates a kind of “cut-up” of Faulkner’s texts – perhaps in a literal sense. As with traditional forms of cut-up, such an approach would emphasize dismantling followed by reinvention; but rather than emphasizing chance, randomness, and intertextuality (as, for example, in the writing of William S. Burroughs), this “cutting” of Faulkner’s writing would establish simultaneity and decentering. In discussing Faulkner’s novels, Malcolm Cowley once noted that “most of them [are] composed of stories, which is their greatest structural fault.”¹² I would counter that this actually allows for their greatest narrative possibility, by permitting a simultaneous layering of stories; this “structural fault” might instead serve as a line along which to shatter the sometimes oppressive integrity of the enclosed and bounded text, and disrupt the dominance of singular narrative chronologies. In his preparation of *The Portable Faulkner*, Cowley was compelled to cut the episodes from each of Faulkner text with a razorblade, before submitting the composites to the linotypers (such was the technology of the times). So acute was Faulkner’s popular neglect by the mid-1940s that, despite scouring bookstores and advertising in trade papers, Cowley was unable to find a sufficient number of spare copies of Faulkner’s novels, and was eventually reduced to carving up some of his own first-editions – feeling, as he put it, “like a vandal in the public library”.¹³ But perhaps what we all need, as readers of Yoknapatawpha, in order to resist the arbitrary closure and order of the text, is precisely to channel our inner vandal, take up the editing blade, and separate its moments out.

But cutting is only half the solution: there is also the need for a method of reassembly. Perhaps the most practical means at present of generating a non-linear

¹² Cowley, *Faulkner-Cowley File*, 33

¹³ *Ibid*, 47

and parallel textual space is offered by hypertext, the digital linking of nonsequential pages through connection rather than definitive order. Hypertext versions of Faulkner's texts have been attempted, including the 2003 University of Saskatchewan hypertextual *The Sound and the Fury*, which explored the possibilities of integrated notes, narrative reorderings, and diagrammatic mappings. Such projects constitute the beginning point of a highly fruitful creative path offered by digitization, for considering how virtual space can profoundly alter and expand the possibilities and experiences of reading.

A digital text of Yoknapatawpha, comprised of hypertextual rather than physical pages, would productively blur the line between text, paratext, and what Gérard Genette terms "epitext": items "not materially appended to the text within the same volume but circulating, as it were, freely, in a virtually limitless physical and social space."¹⁴ Digitization creates a specific forum for actively enacting the possibilities of text as epitext as a process of more engaged and creative reading. And it also helps resist the conservative and restrictive tendencies of mapping, which might support the more traditional scholarly attempts to conflate Faulkner's home county of Lafayette with his fictive country of Yoknapatawpha.

Though I opened this thesis with a "reading" of Rowan Oak, that reading was intended more as analogy than explicit connection. To confuse Yoknapatawpha with an actual, tangible geography is to risk denying much of its narrative potential. As Paul Giles (drawing on Édouard Glissant) has argued, the tendency in certain areas of Southern Studies "to treat Yoknapatawpha as though it were a real place" implies a stability that is clearly undermined by the uncertainties and ambiguities of Faulkner's writing. Such a viewpoint "tends to overlook Glissant's incisive insight that Faulkner's work is predicated on the notion of a "failed foundation", of the radical "'impossibility' of establishing a territorial foundation".¹⁵

Recent Faulkner scholarship has increasingly been characterized by the attempt to recognize, and resist, this conservative viewpoint. Numerous scholars have applied the tools of resistant discourses such as feminism, queer theory, postcolonialism, or

¹⁴ Gérard Genette, *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation* [1987] trans. Jane E. Lewin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 344

¹⁵ Giles, *Global Remapping of American Literature*, 215; see also Glissant, *Faulkner, Mississippi*, 121, 116

deconstructivism to complicate what Jaime Harker has described as the “simple, two-dimensional map” imposed onto “the multilayered excavations of Faulkner’s fictions, a map of *the* Southern experience, with an ideology, and an ending, we already know.”¹⁶ The decentered logic underpinning these discourses offers a means of accentuating the instability of Faulkner’s texts, to recuperate and recognize the power of counter-readings that voice the margins. What I propose here is a method of reading which enacts this resistance not simply on the level of interpretation, but rather within the actual, physical moment of reading.

Hypertext, as a means of reconfiguring and “opening” Yoknapatawpha’s narrative sequence, would productively reorient and spatialize Yoknapatawpha, embracing the ways in which hypertext by its very nature spreads and decenters texts, while at the same time demanding self-conscious readerly interaction.¹⁷ After all, as Espen Aarseth points out, this formal interplay of fragmentation and connection is simply a heightening of tendencies intrinsic to most texts (Aarseth cites textual precedents including the *I Ching* and encyclopedias). “Texts have always had need to refer the reader to other sections of themselves or to other texts,” Aarseth argues, “and digital hypertexts make this structure much more convenient to organize and use.”¹⁸

The nonlinearity of hypertext, which spatializes information like maps, would help emphasize Yoknapatawpha’s function as a network of parallel readings, or rather rereadings. The motif of the return is so crucial to Yoknapatawpha because its richness as a textual body comes less from first encounters than from re-encounters. Rereading is vital to how its textual layering functions. In the process of rereading, the linear developmental structures so crucial to initial readings (and which the text has previously appeared to insist upon) break down. Previous readings, evoked and recalled, create an additional layer (or better, web) of intertexts which destabilize and deconstruct the narrative’s ostensibly linear flow. A view of text as “hypertext” reveals

¹⁶ Harker, ““And You, Too, Sister, Sister?””, 39. Examples of such “resistant” readings of Faulkner would include (among many others) the work of many scholars discussed in this thesis, including Thadious Davis, Édouard Glissant, and Minrose Gwin,

¹⁷ Alice Bell, *The Possible Worlds of Hypertext Fiction* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 15-18

¹⁸ Espen Aarseth, “Narrative Literature in the Turing Universe”, in *The Novel: Volume 2, Forms and Themes*, ed. Franco Moretti (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006), 858

the potential in all texts to exist not as singular and bounded, but as plural and radically open. It reveals, as in hypertext, that narrative order is ultimately only a “temporary construction.”¹⁹ Accordingly, a hypertext Yoknapatawpha, where the reader is free to assemble and move laterally rather than linearly within and across the “map” of Faulkner’s texts, would offer a more interactive and interpretively open reading experience, one that would also give considerable insight into the nature and concealed power-politics of “traditional” narrative construction. Rather than functioning as “lenticular” or “stereoptical”, then, this reassembled Yoknapatawpha would function similar to Wolfgang Iser’s “viewfinder”, the literary “kaleidoscope of perspectives, preintentions, recollections.” In Iser’s model of reading, each sentence offers “a preview of the next and forms a kind of view-finder for what is to come; and this in turn changes the ‘preview’ and so becomes ‘viewfinder’ for what has been read.” For Iser, this offers a means for reorienting the reader when they encounter disruptions, ellipses, unexpected turns; accordingly, from a different perspective, it would offer a means of straying from prescribed narrative pathways, yet keeping a sense of orientation while creating new, personalized paths of readerly desire.²⁰

Such an approach would radically decenter Faulkner’s texts, foregrounding resistant and rival readings, and recognizing the present but unacknowledged creative gesture that is already inherent at the heart of critical readings, which are always also personalized readings. It would acknowledge more fully the important role of reader as co-builder in the creation of Yoknapatawpha (as Faulkner almost self-reflexively depicts in *Absalom, Absalom!*); for as Owen Robinson puts it, “[t]o read and write Yoknapatawpha is not just to perceive a world, it is to build one.”²¹ This spatializing approach would thus help transcend one of the final unbroken taboos of Faulkner scholarship in particular, and of literary criticism in general: the sacrosanct integrity of the individual text (especially, in Faulkner’s case, in its primacy above the connections of Yoknapatawpha’s whole). It would let us more readily explore, in all Faulkner’s

¹⁹ Bell, *Hypertext Fiction*, 19

²⁰ Wolfgang Iser, “The Reading Process: a Phenomenological Approach”, in *The Implied Reader* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974), 279-280. My thanks to Tim Jones for suggesting how Iser’s “viewfinder” might productively be applied to readings of Yoknapatawpha.

²¹ Robinson, *Creating Yoknapatawpha*, 199, 212

work, what Minrose Gwin has sought in the narrative spaces of *Go Down, Moses*: the possibility of finding in texts “something different from what they ‘intended’”, as Michel de Certeau argues – and thus, of combining their fragments to create “something un-known in the space organized by their capacity for allowing an indefinite plurality of meanings.”²² There is a particular value in reorienting characterization and “character space” too, which would remove what Alex Woloch has called the implicit “asymmetric” hierarchies of valuation which the novel (despite the radical innovations of the twentieth century) continues to create, where, in the expression of a highly normalizing social practice, some individuals become endowed with greater significance and social “meaning” than others.²³ Without the accumulative progress of linear narrative, or the novel’s clearly defined sense of narrative space, relations and interactions between characters would thus become less competitive and more equal, leading to a dissolution of the distinction between “major” and “minor” characters. As a result, there would no longer be “voices from the margins” of which to speak, but parallel and simultaneous viewpoints given equal weight.

Yoknapatawpha and the View on Southern Spaces

These dilemmas of Yoknapatawpha’s construction and function also carry a practical significance: they model the ways in which the US South itself continues to be read (and often promoted) as an imaginative geography, its physical landscape profoundly overlaid with myth. As I have suggested at various points in this thesis, the connection between literature and the narratives conveyed at Southern tourist sites is considerable. Michel de Certeau has observed that restoration “tends to transform these heterodoxies into a new cultural orthodoxy. There is a logic to conservation.”²⁴ In the historical remembrance of slaveholding in the South, and most particularly the Deep South, the logic of this new orthodoxy remains dominated by a singular, romanticized perspective, which typically focuses on the domestic life of the mansion and obscures the labor, dominance, and exploitation underlying it.

²² De Certeau, *Practice of Everyday Life, Vol.1*, 169

²³ Woloch, *The One vs. the Many*, 27-31

²⁴ De Certeau et al., *The Practice of Everyday Life, Vol.2*, 138.

The “heritage” on display in postplantation sites – such as Longwood in Natchez, Mississippi, or Nottoway in White Castle, Louisiana – is overwhelmingly white. By and large, the predominantly white visitors expect, and receive, the romanticism of *Gone with the Wind*, rather than the harsher details of history. The tour-guides, often dressed in hoop-skirts like Southern belles, tell nostalgic stories of the planter families, amid their richly furnished interiors. Looking out through the mansion’s windows, you see, in most cases, beautifully ordered gardens or parkland, the peaceful settings for the hotels or museums which these houses now so often are. On occasion, however, one may glimpse rundown cabins amid that parkland, the last traces of the larger plantation, of which the remaining “big house” was only a small, and dreamlike, part.

Since the 1990s, there have been efforts to address this imbalance of the relationship between mansion and slave quarters, led in particular by the Mulberry Row tours at Monticello, and by a gradual but distinct growth in both black heritage tourism and “dark tourism” focused on the history of slavery.²⁵ And yet the dominant narrative of Southern tourism, driven as much by economic imperatives as by political desire, continues to privilege white antebellum nostalgia and the tragedy of planter loss, especially in the Deep South of Mississippi and Louisiana. The white planters endure on these sites as voiced history, while the greater part of human experience which went on their – in the cabins and fields and work-buildings – remains starkly unvoiced.²⁶ Visiting Nottoway in the 1980s, Édouard Glissant reflected on the absence of slavery’s traces, on the way “[e]verything has been cleaned, sanitized, pasteurized.”²⁷ Visiting Oak Alley, not far from Nottoway, in the late 1990s, Jessica Adams observed slave cabins that had simply “disintegrated and fallen down”, in contrast to the meticulously restored big house; Adams reports that her tour guide

²⁵ For a discussion of Monticello, see Horton, “Avoiding History”, 135-149; for discussion of black heritage tourism, see Lisa Woolfork, “Slave Tourism and Rememory”, in *Embodying American Slavery* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2009), 98-131.

²⁶ For examples of the enduring tensions of Southern tourism, see Ethan J. Kyle & Blain Roberts, “‘Is It Okay to Talk about Slaves?’: Segregating the Past in Historic Charleston”, in *Destination Dixie*, ed. Karen Cox (2012): 137-159; Adams, *Wounds of Returning*, 54-85; Horton, “Avoiding History”; and McPherson, *Reconstructing Dixie*, 39-47.

²⁷ Glissant, *Faulkner, Mississippi*, 11

dismissed such cabins as “just a part of American history that is no more.”²⁸ Visiting these same sites in 2012, I found little to conflict with what Glissant and Adams had seen earlier. A whole history – not just of exploitation, but also of resistance and endurance – continues to be obscured (and sometimes even denied) through a singularized narrative of Southern history, a narrative which marginalizes black Southern history, and severely restricts the space of its expression within these tourist plantation sites. Southern plantations are often rumored to be haunted, but largely (according to tour guides) by the apparitions of tragic white women. With the cabins vanished and planting fields transformed, there is precious little space left, now, for African-American history to linger, or for African-American ghosts to haunt.

The enduring politics of Southern historical remembrance, so bound up with the imaginative narratives of Southern tourism, make it all the more important to provide models for enacting resistant readings, both in literature and in cultural experience. The politics of plantation tourism reveal the importance of recognizing that master narratives are perpetuated most effectively through the invisible power of normalization rather than the visible power of physical force. Such sites reveal, *via negativa*, the power of details to personalize and disrupt, and to serve as a source for resistant counter-narratives.

Reading Yoknapatawpha, we see how cultural narratives come to overlay histories of production, as the hybrid plantation site comes to “pass” as the whitened plantation mansion. But everywhere within this design, there are details which break the surface, which refuse to cohere, which offer up loose threads by which the meta-plantation’s loomed design might be unpicked and rewoven. These threads offer multiple pathways that are not self-erasing, but instead are infinitely adaptable – because no single thread will constitute a singular point of origin, a conclusive ending, or a definitive design.

“I am not yet convinced that the ideology or the structure of *Go Down, Moses* or that the cultural work of decentering textual spheres of influence and strongholds of power will displace cultural hegemony and racial supremacy,” Thadious Davis has written. “Yet I know that necessarily inscribed within my attention to *Go Down, Moses*,

²⁸ Adams, *Wounds of Returning*, 59

is my own continued stake in the power of literature and the efficacy of words.”²⁹ In this thesis, I have shared both Davis’s hesitancy and her optimism, although my own faith perhaps lies less in the efficacy of words than in the counter-active power of structures. Glissant argued that the structure of the “closed” plantation has, in postcolonial theory, been confronted by the “open” word.³⁰ Yet a structural reassembly of Yoknapatawpha, in order to resist the closure of many of its linear narratives, is essential to maintaining the expansive and liberating power of the word. To resist the power of structures, it is always necessary to dismantle, rather than critique, their construction; such resistance calls for creative and practical, rather than simply critical and theoretical, reading. Only then can the enforced closure, erasure, and normative restoration of narrative order and mastery be avoided, and the text become truly “open”.

²⁹ Davis, *Games of Property*, 9

³⁰ Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, 75

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