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William Faulkner's Use of Myth

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ABSTRACT

William Faulkner's use of myth denotes United States' history fractured by the events of the Civil War and its aftermath, reverberating through the twentieth century into the present. I identify areas of specific Faulknerian myth working within an overarching, recursive version of history, proving that mythology is essential to the enduring creation of Southern identities in wider critical discussion in relation to Faulkner's role as an authorial mythmaker and observer of his South, and the impact of one South within many.

Faulkner and the Myth of the Lost Cause analyses the South's most dangerous myth: the Lost Cause. I assess how inherited mythology operates within Faulkner's life and fiction.

The *Mythos* of *Absalom, Absalom!* investigates Faulkner's hereditary narratives of delayed decoding and invented histories, determined by generational allegiance to the Lost Cause.

Faulkner and the Myth of Racial Inferiority establishes how mythologised racial inferiority affects the South's non-white population, stemming from enforcement of white supremacy as a tool of control.

***Light in August* and the Myth of Race** investigates further how the contaminant threat of miscegenation suffuses Faulkner's examinations of racial passing, and its perceived threat to white society.

Faulkner and the Controlling Myths of Southern Womanhood evaluates how women renege against the expectations of post-Civil War society, endorsed or regulated by remnants of the Lost Cause.

Conducting this research extrapolates how Faulkner synthesises fiction and non-fiction, history and imagination, to form a new version of the South working within and reneging

against mythologies. My analysis asserts that issues surrounding race, the aftermath of the Confederacy, and the topic of freedoms reflect ever-growing civil unrest and racialised tensions within America. I determine that overcorrection and mythologisation of history are entirely embedded within the creation of myth itself, and inherited Lost Cause ideology. These tensions have created further iterations of the political and social climates Faulkner's works reflect, ensuring enduring relevance to discussions of women's rights, race, and the ideological parameters of the South.

LAY SUMMARY

William Faulkner (1897 – 1962) was an author based in Mississippi, USA. Common themes in his writing include racial difference, the land of the American South, and generational family sagas.

Faulkner's notable works include *The Sound and the Fury* (1929), *As I Lay Dying* (1930), *Light in August* (1932), and *Absalom, Absalom!* (1936). He was awarded the 1949 Nobel Prize for Literature, due in part for his modernist style and experimental form of writing.

'William Faulkner's Use of Myth' identifies five key research areas, which have created mythologies both in the South, and in Faulkner's works. These areas are identified as the following:

- The Myth of the Lost Cause
- The *Mythos* of *Absalom, Absalom!*
- The Myth of Racial Inferiority
- *Light in August* and the Myth of Race
- The Controlling Myths of Southern Womanhood

This thesis encompasses discussion of the American Civil War (1861-65) between 'Union' and 'Confederate' forces after certain states seceded from the Union to protect the system of slavery. The period in the war's aftermath was known as Reconstruction (1865-77), when the myth of the 'Lost Cause' became popular after the Confederate forces' defeat in 1865 – a narrative that it was God's will for the South to lose to allegedly-overwhelming Union forces. This damaging myth endured into the twentieth century through public discourse, and led to white supremacism and false histories gaining popularity.

I discuss the practice and abolition of slavery in the United States, and assess the racial climate of the twentieth century predicated upon perceived non-white 'inferiority.'

This work also evaluates the changing roles of women after the Civil War, and after World War I, as women were expected to conform to male-dominated control.

Each of these myths work together in narrative creation, and reflect history within Faulkner's use of myth. I assess the role of the South within mythmaking, and various forms of Southern ideologies: the manipulation of history becomes apparent in the formation of myth, and subsequent mythification within history.

For my Grandmas

"In books lies the soul of the whole past time."

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AA!	*Absalom, Absalom!*
Absalom!	*Absalom, Absalom!*
AILD	*As I Lay Dying*
"ES"	"That Evening Sun"
"DS"	"Dry September"
Flags	*Flags in the Dust*
LIA	*Light in August*
"MV"	"Mountain Victory"
Requiem	*Requiem for a Nun*
"RL"	"Red Leaves"
S&F	*The Sound and the Fury*
SP	*Soldiers' Pay*
UDC	United Daughters of the Confederacy
University	*Faulkner in the University*
WP	*The Wild Palms [If I Forget Thee, Jerusalem]*

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INTRODUCTION

"TELL ABOUT THE SOUTH"

1.1 William Faulkner's Use of Myth

William Faulkner's use of myth denotes United States' history fractured by the events of the Civil War and its aftermath, reverberating through the twentieth century into the present. My research demonstrates that Faulkner's creation of 'Yoknapatawpha County,' Mississippi, allowed him to create an authorial vision, and a re-centring of historical events in the American South, including a great degree of emphasis on the Civil War. I identify areas of specific Faulknerian myth working within an overarching, recursive version of history, proving that mythification is essential to the enduring creation of Southern identities; public narratives; and expected behaviours.

'Myth' is not necessarily fabrication, but can be amplified into a mediated use of language and history, "an intellectual construction that fuses concept and emotion into an image" for cultural reception. (Henry Nash Smith xi) I assess Faulkner's use of myth, using creations of mythification to synthesise aspects of his Mississippi, and a perception of the South. As a whole, Faulkner's characters defy the bounds of their respective stories, and become part of a wider orchestrated *mythos* and multi-faceted legend themselves. In *Sartoris* (1929) Faulkner expressed a wish that "some Homer of the cotton fields should sing the saga of the mule and of his place in the South." (226) Faulkner inherits the mantle of this bardic legacy, as well as perpetuating its influence, by using myth to assess the inheritance of the South itself in the epic cycle of his characters. External aspects of Faulkner's authorial persona include works of non-fiction, essays, personal letters, and public speeches – these offer new dimensions when considering Faulkner's fiction.

My methodology applies a series of interlocking myths to Faulkner's works, to examine where these mythologies are introduced; maintained; and deconstructed. My research hypothesis is that the overwhelming influence of 'the myth of the Lost Cause' plays a role within each specific myth in turn. I analyse the Lost Cause as a phenomenon underwriting events in the twentieth century, long after the end of the Civil War and the 'Confederate States of America,' taken as spanning from 1861 to 1865.[1]

<u>1.2 The Inheritance of Myth</u>

Faulkner has become known for his vision of Yoknapatawpha, with its main town of Jefferson, surrounded by areas including Frenchman's Bend, the Compson Mile, and Sutpen's Hundred. Based on Faulkner's own environs of Oxford, in Lafayette County, Yoknapatawpha becomes a mythic place for multiple possibilities, over which the author was "sole owner & proprietor," as inscribed on the legend of his map drawn in 1936 for the flyleaf of *Absalom, Absalom!* (*AA!*). Faulkner combines truth with fabrication to create various forms of mythification, using history as an apparatus to sublimate fact into fiction.

Faulkner claimed in his 1955 essay, "On Privacy (The American Dream: What Happened to It?)" that the concept of the American dream is inherently tied to a Southern history of the inescapable past, appearing Janus-like in looking to the future and the past himself. I take the title of my first chapter from this conception of an American Dream already prescribed for the next generation:

> The dream, the hope, the condition which our forefathers did not bequeath to us, their heirs and assigns, but rather bequeathed us, their successors, to the dream and the hope. We were not even given the chance then to accept or decline the dream, for the reason that the dream already owned and possessed us at birth. *It was not our heritage because we were its.*
> ("Privacy" 63; emphasis mine)

[1] South Carolina did secede in late 1860. However, the commonly-accepted period of the Civil War is dated from the first shot fired at Fort Sumter in Charleston, SC on 12 April 1861.

Acting in tandem with this heritage of the American Dream, in *Absalom, Absalom!* (1936), Shrevlin 'Shreve' McCannon exhorts to "*tell about the South. What's it like there. What do they do there. Why do they live there. Why do they live at all.*" (174; italics Faulkner's) Speaking to Quentin Compson on one level – Shreve a Canadian foil to Quentin's Southern heritage – Shreve's order also provides the impetus for my discussion on Faulkner's use of myth. As an entirely Southern author, Faulkner is working with the creation of the Lost Cause, and the urge to "tell about the South" combines with his inescapable heritage. Faulkner's urge to create the mythologies that reinforce the South, endorsing it even whilst resisting it have now become part of Southern legacy themselves. Faulkner's mythologies overlap, reinforcing each other like "something else: an appendix or anyway appendage; a legend to or within or behind the actual or original or initial legend; apocryphal's apocrypha." (*Knight's Gambit* 144)

Mapped onto Faulkner's motives, the compulsion of select Southerners to understand the South is almost foreign to Shreve, because the history

> Is something my people haven't got. Or if we have got it, it all happened so long ago across the water and so now there aint anything to look at every day to remind us of it. *We dont live among defeated grandfathers and freed slaves* (or have I got it backward and was it your folks that are free and the n–s that lost?), and bullets in the dining room table and such, *to be always reminding us to never forget.* What is it? something you live and breathe in like air? *a kind of vacuum filled with wraithlike and indomitable anger and pride and glory* at and in happenings that occurred and ceased fifty years ago?
> (361; emphasis mine)

Faulkner is a seminal part of the South himself, mapping his legacy and work onto Southern heritage. Throughout his works, as *Absalom!* demonstrates, there is a driving purpose "to be always reminding us to never forget." Faulkner's use of myth becomes "a kind of vacuum filled with wraithlike and indomitable anger and pride and glory," immutable in the past but casting its shadow onto the present. (361)

By upholding the South's mythifications, including the fabricated rhetoric of the Lost Cause, Faulkner is also reinforcing negative aspects of control. As Julian Murphet observes, the Confederacy's "indefensible basis in slavery (which not even the oldest of chivalric romance forms would endorse) could thus durably be screened by the very pathos of the lost cause." (22) By utilising the myth of the Lost Cause to such an extent in his fiction, as my first two chapters identify, Faulkner corroborates the paradoxical veracity of mythification, through demonstrated public allegiance to ephemeral mythification made absolute through rhetoric, public adherence, and "a peculiar American condition of historical amnesia." (David Blight, "For Something" 1171) My research identifies that Faulkner presents issues surrounding an overcorrection of history; a sense of racial inferiority for those who are non-white, and the dissolution of female autonomy under male control. These mythologies were themselves reinforced by the myth of the Lost Cause, creating an inescapable reinforcement of mythification – and, by virtue of Faulkner's reinforcement, also endorsement.

Through fictionalisation within literature, the myth of the Lost Cause can be assessed and amplified, "rendering out of this regional epic a meaning which is national in implication" and impact. (Francis Garvin Davenport 96) To "tell about the South" is to define a region which resists definition, occupied by people who equally resist history in favour of a series of mythologies which do not always serve their best interests. (*AA!* 174) Faulkner has created a fictionalised, mythologised version of Mississippi which is both recognisable and subtle in its use as a guiding framework. I identify how these originary mythologies have been created, in order to demonstrate that Faulkner is reacting to an inherited heritage that he works against, but also promotes and upholds by maintaining mythologies in fictional narratives reflecting history itself. I claim that this binary is a result of inescapable heritage, amplified by adherence to the myth of the Lost Cause as a seminal factor in the psyche of the South and select Southerners, as demonstrated throughout Faulkner's works.

Use of myth is wholly integrated into Faulkner's fiction: he frequently makes reference to classical, Biblical, literary, medieval, and popular legends. The use of literature as a medium allows for amplification of mythification to the point of absurdity, whilst exposing the premise of mythification as a dangerous and controlling exercise in social context. In his 1919-20 juvenilia, the poetic persona of "To a Co-ed" declares that "I could have turned unmoved from Helen's brow," reimagining the cause of the Trojan War, and the ability of a mythicised Faulknerian Paris of Troy to resist Helen's renowned charms. (line 9) As early as 1926, Faulkner self-produced the novella *Mayday*, with its chivalric protagonist 'Sir Galwyn of Arthgyl.'[2] Later in *The Town* (1958), Faulkner integrates the following series of mythologies and legendary figures: Homer's *Iliad* with another reference to Helen and Paris; military figures Attila, Genghis Khan, Tamerlane; Kings Richard Lion-heart and Godfrey de Bouillon; religious figures Lilith, Tancred, Semiramis; Tristram, Isolde, Launcelot and Guinevere of medieval myth; Roman legends Julius Caesar and Messalina; Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet.[3] Faulkner's use of established, accepted myth is therefore readily apparent throughout his works, providing a basis for a concurrent mythologisation of the South, couched within narratives referencing the famed and sometime-fictional figures above, and insidious in its presentation of veracity in contrast.

Faulkner encompasses regional and semi-national constructions of identity as a space to explore desire, race, and gender through the inhabitants of Yoknapatawpha. Faulkner achieves this perspective of his land by finding a voice within modernism, and ironic boundaryless language "trying to say it all in one sentence, between one Cap and one period." ("To Malcolm Cowley," Nov. 1944, 185) In keeping with the creation of mythic possibilities through language, Faulkner's use of language is idiosyncratic and varied. He

[2] For more on *Mayday*, see James Watson, 40-43.
[3] In *The Town* Major de Spain alone is "the Godfrey de Bouillon, the Tancred, the Jefferson Richard Lion-heart of the twentieth century;" the potentiality of the Snopes family is a new "Genghis Khan or Tamerlane or Atilla;" and Eula Snopes's allure makes her a "Frenchman's Bend Helen." (15, 34, 42)

uses italics for long sections of his works, crafts extensive run-on sentences which can run for pages, uses ellipses, and frequently omits punctuation markers including apostrophes.[4] [5] Faulkner knows that "I'm still trying, to put it all, if possible, on one pinhead. I dont know how to do it. All I know to do is keep on trying in a new way." (185) For Faulkner, the depiction of the past – and the form in which he chose to depict its rupture – are an important formal decision resulting in *Absalom!*'s structural idiosyncrasies. Faulkner's technique is placed in the wider whole by virtue of a break with the past itself, despite the claims of Lost Cause mythology. In terms of modernism, Jay Watson explains that

> To feel this break with the past acutely, as a primary aspect of one's everyday life, is to feel modern, to live under the sign of rupture, with its resulting emphasis on both the promise and the danger of the new.
> (*Modernity* 2)

Faulkner's works demonstrate this seminal break with (and within) the past, with particular reference to the Civil War and its devastating rupture of the 'United' States. Most pertinently, *Absalom!* is a modernist display of narrative delay before eventual revelation: the plot is continuously deferred, with frequent cries of "wait. Wait," "for God's sake, wait" emphasising the convocation of narrative strands. (*AA!* 176, 216, 247) By developing this technique as a method of relaying information, Faulkner himself ruptures the staid tenets of tradition and expectation.

Assessing Faulkner's impact in the mid-twentieth century, in 1945 Malcolm Cowley collated Faulkner's works in *The Portable Faulkner*, proving a contemporaneous perspective of Faulkner's

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[4] In a letter written to his editor, Ben Wasson, Faulkner laments the need for italics to convey his sense of meaning in *The Sound and the Fury*, as "I wish publishing was advanced enough to use colored ink for such." ("To Ben Wasson" 44) Furthermore, *Requiem for a Nun*'s "The Jail" consists of two sentences: one is thirty-two words, the other is forty-two pages.

[5] I indicate if I have emphasised particular elements of quotations. Any other unique elements will be Faulkner's own, in direct citation. In addition, Faulkner often uses pejorative language: I indicate this with a dash rather than quote the language itself.

> Labor of imagination that has not been equaled in our time, and a double labor: first, to invent a Mississippi county that was *like a mythical kingdom*, but it was complete and living in all its details; second, to make his story of Yoknapatawpha County stand as a parable or legend of all the Deep South.
> (viii; emphasis mine)

I agree that Faulkner's "work has become a myth or legend of the South," "parable or legend of all the Deep South" signified in its wider impact, yet in turn the author represents myth in his own writing – creating a duality in perpetuity between honing the myth of the South itself, and depicting how the South was forged upon mythification. (Cowley xx, vii)

Peter Burian explains that "myth is subject to interpretation and revision, but not to complete overturn, because it is also history." (185) Faulkner's combined use of myth and history reverberates into the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, particularly through the concomitant use of modernism as a form of rupture and renewal – Faulkner exposes the underlying formation of mythification, in order to observe and contribute to its subsequent demise. Although a period of over 150 years has passed since the end of the Confederacy and the existence of the Confederate States of America, the effects of secession and the Civil War are resonating throughout the American South. From the Potomac River down to the Mississippi Gulf Coast, the seemingly-disparate states of 'the South' are defined by a history ostensibly ending in April 1865. Except the myth of the Lost Cause grew out of defeat, redefining history in the formation of myth and public narrative, and a social adherence to feigned amnesia. Instead, victory was defined by who could control the narrative after the fact, and the South reacted with alacrity to establish Lost Cause mythology throughout schools and newspapers, membership of societies, and public memorial dedications – becoming "print, oratory, and granite" edifications of Lost Cause mythology. (Blight, "For Something" 1167) My first chapter expands upon these areas of public control and public memory throughout the South, as relevant to Faulkner's childhood in Mississippi.

Faulkner's depiction of more home-grown Mississippian heroes – and the myths both surrounding and centring them – mirrors the inheritance of ameliorated public memory, as I discuss in my first and second chapters for Colonel John Sartoris and Colonel Thomas Sutpen respectively. Various mythologies have been crafted around Confederate men, despite their "odious" treason. (Andrew Johnson XLV) Robert E. Lee – Confederate General and Commander – became a mythicised figure for North and South alike. Despite Lee's surrender of the Northern Army of Virginia, leading to the end of war, he still "presented the perfect embodiment of lost manhood" in a sense of lost promise and the Lost Cause. (Nina Silber 195) By leveraging Lee's legacy over Confederate President Jefferson Davis's ignominy, ex-Confederate Southerners were able to diminish political discussion in favour of raising military prowess to mythologised standards, particularly post Confederate collapse. In Lee's quondam apotheosis, Paul Buck argues that "few scenes are more inspiring than that of the hero of the Confederacy, the pathos of the Lost Cause centering in him." (251) Herein, the myth of the Lost Cause is embodied in the reality of Lee, creating mythologised "scenes" within the crafted reality of public memory.

A sense of predetermination and the weight of historical possession weaves throughout Faulkner's works: Faulkner's perspective of his South emphasises that "we were not even given the chance then to accept or decline the dream, for the reason that the dream already owned and possessed us at birth." ("Privacy" 63). Coming of age in the South in the early twentieth century, Faulkner was the recipient of a torqued American Dream, which may be better described – particularly in the state of Mississippi where Faulkner spent the majority of his life – as more of 'the Confederate Dream,' with a legacy of disunion and strife echoing from Vicksburg to Corinth.

Creating linguistic mythification, Faulkner orated a succinct trajectory of his own work upon accepting the Nobel Prize for Literature. Speaking in 1950, he stated an authorial interest in "the old verities and truths of the heart, the old universal truths lacking which

any story is ephemeral and doomed – love and honor and pity and pride and compassion and sacrifice." ("Address upon Receiving the Nobel Prize" 120) It is clear that these "old universal truths" are also a key to examining Faulkner's works within his establishment of myth and Southern mythification. My research analyses that Faulkner's works encompass a range of "love and honor and pity and pride and compassion and sacrifice" within their pages, reverberating within the various mythologies they inform.

I extrapolate "love" in my fifth chapter into a study of Faulkner's modern women, caught within freedoms of modernity versus the antebellum vestiges of 'propriety.' "Honor and pity and pride" can only be mapped onto a delineation of Confederate heroism, as seen in my first chapter on the veneration of the cult of the Lost Cause in Faulkner's fiction, and the development of *Absalom!* in my second chapter. "Pride" is also misinterpreted into white supremacism in my third chapter, with its concomitant dishonouring of those who were non-white throughout the South. "Compassion and sacrifice" have been coded to represent Confederate forces only; I discuss perceptions of the Union and the Confederacy in my first and fourth chapters. Though Faulkner was speaking under the spectre of the Cold War and its threat to man, these "old verities" are inherently timeless. "Love and honor and pity and pride and compassion and sacrifice" weave pathways throughout Faulkner's works, all coalescing within his use of myth.

1.3 Definition of Key Terms

An early Faulknerian critic, Walter Brylowski, supposes that "perhaps the ever-present association of the word 'myth' with the history of the South has led to the rather loose transference of the word to Faulkner's works." (16) Therefore, when demonstrating Faulkner's use of myth, it is essential to define my argument's use of key terms. I use 'myth', 'mythology,' 'mythification,' and '*mythos*' (pl. *mythoi*) in order to represent differing aspects of Faulkner's use of myth, to pinpoint Faulkner's use of myth within discrete, clear

terminology. These specific terms are representative of constructed uses of language. Adherence to myth becomes a guiding framework; Faulkner's works enter the development of myth as passed on by Homer in classical epic; to medieval influence; on to Sir Walter Scott, for Faulkner to create specifically-modern myths of the South's own making.

Francis Garvin Davenport argues that "myth is not synonymous with 'fiction': it simply denotes one particular kind of perception." (5) I use 'myth' to refer to a set of specific myths functioning within Faulkner's works. Most pertinently, I have chosen to refer to the 'myth' of the Lost Cause specifically, to draw appropriate attention to the interpretation of the Lost Cause as a series of public perceptions and propaganda – supported by both select Northerners and Southerners, in the spirit of reconciliation, remembrance and cultural elision. 'The Lost Cause' is an established term when discussing the history of the Civil War for the Confederate forces, first popularised by the work of Virginian historian Edward Pollard as early as 1866.. Pollard's usage, however, acknowledges the cause of the Confederacy as 'lost,' in the sense of accepting defeat. Now, the myth of the Lost Cause more embodies the formation of legend and false histories, as my work will discuss. By as early as 1868, Pollard claimed that, regarding the 'Lost Cause', "the words have since been permanently incorporated in the common language of the people." (*Regained* 13) In the subsequent distance from the formless immediacy of the Lost Cause as a concept, it has become legend – differing from myth within its scope of public acceptance, and the hushed tones of allegiance or disregard for a mythification that had once dominated more contemporaneous white Southern thought, for those who had underwritten and believed in the power of their myth. Faulkner's fiction has become integrated with the myth of the South and its landscape; both imagined and actual.

The specific 'myth' of the Lost Cause is the narrative claimed in the post-war climate by organisations and individuals interpreting history to console their defeat, because "myth has moved armies, nationals and civilizations and thus cannot be disregarded as a factor in the

shaping of society." (Davenport 5-6) For these individuals, the cause had been lost because of variables such as superior forces, numbers, and divine preordination: my first chapter primarily assesses these claims. A large number of Faulkner's works are situated within the nascent years of Lost Cause mythology and the critical field flourishing in the post-war and post-Reconstruction years, as I focus on in my first and second chapters. Pollard foresaw the Reconstruction period as a "hideous programme" that would "be the occasion of immeasurable chaos and interminable anarchy." (*LC* 743) Political scientist William Dunning made the argument in 1904 that "the war had been waged by the North," gaining some success. (102) Later in the twentieth century, 'Twelve Southerners' and their 1930 manifesto would argue for the return to an agricultural utopia in the South, casting spurious claims about white supremacism and racial hierarchy whilst doing so. These areas within the critical field have contributed to the formation of Southern post-war myth, and interlocking narratives of mythification, perhaps because – in the case of Faulkner's contemporaries – "for a time, at least, these men in the interwar years showed a public need for the myth of the South." (O'Brien 27)

'Mythification' is used as the action of creating a myth through narrative. Further to my interpretation of the use of 'myth' and 'mythification,' I also use '*mythos*,' with particular reference to *Absalom, Absalom!* in my second chapter, dedicated solely to this work. '*Mythos*' could also be used to depict a classical influence, particularly given my preservation of the original Graeco-Roman language without translation (though with transliteration). In my interpretation and usage, '*mythos*' refers to the creation of legend and plot, particularly to create a concomitant narrative of mythology.

In Ancient Greek, μῦθος or *mûthos* is delineated as "utterance, speech, discourse, *tale, narrative, fiction, legend*." (Merriam-Webster; emphasis mine) Whilst considering Faulkner's usage of *mythos* specifically, my interpretation is elucidated by explanation from Aristotle,

and the commonly-accepted translation of '*mythos*' in his *Poetics* as "the action, the plot, by which I mean the ordering of the particular actions." (*1450a5-7*) [6] Elizabeth Belfiore explicates that "Aristotle defines *mythos* (plot) as 'the composition of the events,'" and "sharply distinguishes plot from *ethos*, which alone makes the composition of events into an intentional, goal- oriented structure." (45) Herein, *ethos* is translated as "character." I have analysed how Faulkner's creation of *mythos* works to sustain various mythologies surrounding characters and events in his fiction. *Absalom!* combines legend with plot in a text that defies simple classification.

Finally, 'mythology' refers to a more literary sense of a series of narratives. Given the content of his works and recorded interviews, Faulkner was versed in a background of Greek and Roman classical mythologies, as well as an inheritance of Biblical stories. The idea of myth can encompass these classical and Biblical influences, in an aspect of the literary idea of 'mythology' as a story or narrative to be told. 'Mythology' is deployed to depict Faulkner's authorial creation of individual characters themselves. Mythology is primarily witnessed in the veneration of John Sartoris in *The Unvanquished*; Thomas Sutpen in *Absalom!*; and *Light in August*'s Joe Christmas, in Chapters One, Two, and Four respectively. These specific characters each possess an innate mythology surrounding their origins, achievements, and fatal outcomes. In the quasi-Greek Chorus of the townspeople in Jefferson, these mythologies are also amplified into legend.

1.4 Key Areas of Faulknerian Myth

When conducting this research I have extrapolated the ways in which Faulkner's works synthesise fiction and non-fiction, history and imagination, to form a version of the South entirely embedded within the creation of myth itself. As Irving Howe posited in 1951,

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[6] Bekker numbers are used when discussing *Poetics.*

however, “the Southern myth, like any other myth, is less an attempt at historical description than a voicing of the collective imagination, perhaps of the collective will.” (361)

Furthermore, Michael O’Brien has observed, in imagery of the South as a refractive prism for multiplicities of interpretation,

> The Southern idea was but the prism itself, flickering and mobile, both defined by the lights and changing with them: periodically, its facets would be recut and its rays differently disposed. The function of the myth was complicated. Its ability to absorb many rays was its strength, even though rendering it enigmatic.
> (223)

The results of my research demonstrate that issues surrounding race, the aftermath of the Confederacy, and the topic of freedoms represent growing civil unrest and racialised tensions within America. These tensions indicate developing facets of O’Brien’s prismatic “Southern idea”, and continue to create new iterations of the political and social climate Faulkner’s works reflect. When considering Faulkner’s use of myth, I have identified how these dominant myths are created, and analysed how they interact as forms of behaviour, public memory, and control.

1.5 Chapter One: “It Was Not Our Heritage Because We Were Its”: Faulkner and the Myth of the Lost Cause

My first chapter analyses one of the most dangerous myths in the South: the Lost Cause. I examine how inherited mythology operates within Faulkner’s fiction and his life. I give a comprehensive study of the myth of the Lost Cause and how it works within Faulkner’s writing, including the legacy of Civil War history Faulkner inherited. I argue that Faulkner stood at a crossroads between centuries, with the lure of the Confederacy and the recreated past permeating his authorship, despite a modern viewpoint from the perspective of the twentieth century, and Faulkner’s key role as a modernist author.

As John Crowe Ransom reflected upon the Southerner, "his fierce devotion is to a lost cause – though it grieves me that his contemporaries are so sure it is lost." (2) Faulkner's works therefore exploit a generative – or progenitive – myth of the South, in the stubbornness of unreconstructed white Southerners. The defeat of the Civil War, and the subsequent era of Reconstruction, were manipulated into narrative by white Southerners, to create the overarching myth of the Lost Cause. For this particular subset of Southerners, who were often both white and male – though not solely – their South required a myth to explain the collapse of the Confederacy. Faulkner's fictionalised knowledge of a specifically-Southern mindset, and defeated *ethos*, has created a series of subversions of myth, all of which I propose are encompassed within the myth of the Lost Cause. If, as Gregory Lucente writes, "at the hinges of history we find myth," then by viewing the Lost Cause as an inescapable heritage, Faulkner demonstrates how history and myth work within his writing. (53) The myth of the Lost Cause is undermined and resisted, though it cannot be entirely ignored – contained within Faulkner's premise that "'it was not our heritage because we were its." ("Privacy" 63)

Using Jefferson and its environs to focus narrative attention, Faulkner ensures the townspeople are as ingrained in the foundations of Yoknapatawpha as the buildings themselves. The majority of Faulkner's characters are staunch Southerners, feeling the pressures exerted upon them by the past, their heritage, and a war occupying living memory. Herein, Faulkner represents facets of myth including the domination of the myth of the Lost Cause for Southerners who underwrote it, as the Civil War and its permutations cast a long shadow over the memory of the South.

As this chapter demonstrates, Faulkner's inheritance of the history of the South informs his works, in that the foundations of the Lost Cause are present throughout a number of texts. This chapter discusses the following works: *The Unvanquished* (1938), *Flags in the Dust*

(1973), and *Sartoris* (1929). These interconnected texts form a perspective of the Lost Cause through the creation of the storyline following Colonel John Sartoris.

1.6 Chapter Two: The *Mythos* of *Absalom, Absalom!*

Next, I apply the enduring *mythos* of the Lost Cause to Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom!*, including creating other senses of *mythoi* and demonstrating a clear classical influence. As discussed, my argument must primarily be understood by translating *mythos* into 'myth or legend' in duality with its meaning of 'plot,' in accordance with its usage in Aristotle's *Poetics* and the framework of "utterance, speech, discourse, tale, narrative, fiction, legend." (Merriam-Webster)

In *Absalom!*, Faulkner weaves a narrative of delayed decoding and invented histories, akin to the legacy of the Confederate forces themselves, and an idea of predestination; predetermination; and 'overwhelming' forces. These aspects are displayed by Faulkner at the granular level of plot and character. The Lost Cause weaves its way throughout *Absalom!*, as ideas of divine sanction and predestination create an insidious climate of inherited, inescapable history. Focusing on *Absalom!* enables me to assess both the myth of the Lost Cause, and the myth of racial inferiority which repeatedly spread across the South, enduring through a number of time periods. Corroborated by Brylowski's assessment of Faulkner's works, "Faulkner's use of myth becomes thematic, and, as in *Absalom*!, become integrated with the 'myth' in the sense of plot." (12) The *mythos* of *Absalom, Absalom!* therefore incorporates narrative strands to create a repository for narrative creation itself.

In Faulkner's literary firmament, *Absalom!* stands as a relic of the Civil War, and the next generation of those caught in its chequered heritage. Additionally, I claim that individual characters in this work are representative vessels of myth. The created character of Thomas Sutpen acts as another embodiment of the myth of the Lost Cause, and its corresponding dominance over those in Yoknapatawpha. *Absalom!* addresses the Lost Cause through

characters and situations, both pre- and post-Civil War. Sutpen creates a mythology of origin, subscribing to his own narrative of mythification and duping those around him.

Faulkner uses the pressures of Southern heritage as a contaminative force upon characters such as Quentin Compson, neurotic figurehead of historicity and the pressures of legacy. Revivified after suicide to further serve Faulkner's purposes, Quentin is a repository of mythology, and a bastion of the protective values of the Old South, which itself was dead before he was even born. Representing a myriad of myths, Quentin is inherently a Faulknerian keystone. Whether Quentin is semi-chivalrously protecting his sister's virginity; engaging in a quest narrative; or occupying a liminal space as both the New and the Old South, he is a distillation of Faulkner's mythology, and of the overarching significance of Southern belief in the myth of the Lost Cause.

1.7 Chapter Three: Faulkner and the Myth of Racial Inferiority

In this chapter on the 'myth of racial inferiority,' I argue that the myth of the Lost Cause has specifically informed a concurrent reading of non-white people as inferior; a mythologised corollary of white supremacy. I propose an examination of the role played or expected from Black people in Faulkner's works, and the treatment of those in Yoknapatawpha who are non-white – I focus part of this study on the Indigenous population of the Mississippi Delta. Entrenched within the myth of the Lost Cause is a culture of blame surrounding the Black and/or non-white population, as a result of the white Southerners' own nexus of guilt and the fall of the system of slavery.

Defined by defeat, the South underwent occupation and the process of Reconstruction, before reacting with vengeance towards the Black population once Northern forces had left each of the original seceding states by 1877. Emancipation from 1863 onwards had ended the practice of slavery, and had indeed "touched the whole question of racial equality and not merely the more local question of slavery," across the Union as a precarious whole, yet

the South had certainly *not* finished subjugating others. (Michael O'Brien 5) The Confederate South's loss of the Civil War provided new reasons to blame Black inhabitants of the South, whose fate was therefore intimately bound to the myth of the Lost Cause. As Faulkner progressed to focus on the twentieth century, his characters reflect a constant preoccupation with race, racial inferiority, and the specific, baseless fears of miscegenation which preoccupy a number of Faulkner's works and characters. Faulkner's personal letters also demonstrate a keen interaction with current civil rights issues, but not necessarily from a place of aid or understanding. Some of this correspondence has become infamous, including Faulkner's exhortation to "go slow now" in matters of segregation and liberty. ("Letter to a Northern Editor" 87; "A Letter to the Leaders in the Negro Race" 108)

The works covered in this chapter are primarily short stories, notably some of Faulkner's lesser-studied texts: "Red Leaves", "Dry September", "That Evening Sun" and "Mountain Victory." The myth of racial inferiority and racial 'Othering' is perpetuated within the bounds of Yoknapatawpha, reflecting Faulkner's South as a whole. This chapter also addresses the presence of the Indigenous population in Yoknapatawpha. In "Red Leaves", Faulkner fictionalises the Chickasaw's perspectives on the actions and customs of white men, including their cross-racial legacy of slavery.

1.8 Chapter Four: *Light in August* and the Myth of Race

Light in August (1932) further investigates how the contaminant threat of miscegenation suffuses Faulkner's examinations of racial passing, and its perceived threat to white society. Argumentative focus on *Light in August* continues my claim that the myth of racial inferiority affected society on every level, particularly within Faulkner's fictionalised South. A Faulkner scholar herself, Toni Morrison's perspective in *Playing in the Dark* lends itself to interpretation of Faulkner's works. Furthermore, James Baldwin's "The White Man's Guilt" presents perspectives of white racial passing and the threat of miscegenation –

a threat perceived by a white audience, and one which plays out in Faulkner's Jefferson to fatal results for his protagonist Joe Christmas.

The threat of miscegenation as a social catalyst for reinforcing white supremacism is exacerbated by the violent presence of Christmas as a central character. Joe incites views of white primacy, provokes violence, and creates perceived inferiority through his racial liminality. Focusing on this text reinforces my argument through depictions of belief in the myth of racial inferiority, due to Faulkner's sustained examination into miscegenation and racial classification in Jefferson. *Light in August* has gained prominence as Faulkner's most overtly-racialised work. Joe Christmas is a liminal figure, neither Black nor white, yet he is also both. The threat of miscegenation disrupted the Black-White binary which had structured the South before the Civil War. In the aftermath of Reconstruction, Black Codes and 'Jim Crow' laws of segregation, Christmas is a pressurised victim of the racial thought of the time. 'Jim Crow' is not an adequate term due to its flippant derivation from minstrelsy downplaying violence and subjugation, but has been endorsed in modern usage.[7]

1.9 Chapter Five: Faulkner and the Controlling Myths of Southern Womanhood

My final chapter evaluates how Faulkner's fiction depicts women reneging against the expectations of post-war society. I examine the various forms of womanhood endorsed or regulated by remnants of the myth of the Lost Cause – remnants that have endured due to white male control.

Post-Civil War, there was an insistence on a code of antebellum 'propriety' and expected behaviour, even during the encroachment of modernity and a new post-war societal landscape that had moved beyond the Civil War in civic memory. My chapter primarily discusses the following works: *As I Lay Dying* (1930), *Absalom, Absalom!*, *Light in August*,

[7] See F.J. Davis 51-52. For the subsequent evolution of 'Jim Crow' laws, see Michelle Alexander.

Soldiers' Pay (1926), *The Sound and the Fury* (1929), and *The Wild Palms* [*If I Forget Thee, Jerusalem*] (1939). Some of these works have attracted more critical attention than others, but all have elements of Faulkner's interplay with modernism which complements ideas of modernity, and how rules are applied to women in particular. For example, language in *As I Lay Dying* exposes the futility of representing motherhood within the coding of language itself, culminating in linguistic breakdown.

Patriarchal Southern culture created the ideal environment for female control. Faulkner's treatment of female characters reflects the focus on women as objects in the South, aligned with the context of slavery. The myth of the Lost Cause inherently contributed to the endemic rise of controlling myths of Southern womanhood, as a form of protection of 'virtue' and manufactured veneration. In turn, this rise corroborated the myth of racial inferiority: both Black people and white women were able to be controlled under the retaining umbrella of white, male-dominated supremacy.

Faulkner's characters consistently subvert societal expectations of womanhood, femininity, and chastity. The main locus of Yoknapatawpha allows for a recognition of the narrow field for Southern femininity, outside of the expectations for 'chaste Southern belles' represented in popular literature. Faulkner's women compete against this framework of popular culture – and the influence of fictional women like Margaret Mitchell's Scarlett O'Hara in *Gone with the Wind* (1936). The defeat of the Confederate States of America in the Civil War created a new Southern society after the fact; one in which women could access their own agency and were no longer beholden to a male protector. However, this nascent freedom was stymied by white Southern men, who invented and implemented new restrictions on white women to reclaim their own 'pride' and status after the Confederate forces' defeat.

For the majority of Faulkner's privileged white women, the lost culture of the American South had raised them to stand on a pedestal, yet simultaneously cast them aside for the

bodies of female slaves: they could no longer hold a defined place within society. Veneration of Southern womanhood was reserved for white women only, as were organisations such as the United Daughters of the Confederacy, and Ladies' Memorial Associations. The entire climate of the South was pervaded by memorial associations, monument dedications, and control of the public landscape to reinforce the myth of the Lost Cause in daily life. By the turn of the new century, and particularly after the United States' involvement in World War I, women were looking for ways to escape the memory of a war that had affected their parents and grandparents, but had not necessarily affected themselves – except for in forms of control.

Faulkner's women are often trapped in the ideological cage of Southern womanhood – a cult-like expectation which leaves them sexless virgins or beatified mothers. Otherwise, Faulkner's women are thoroughly modern: drinking, smoking, sexually free, sometimes divorced or widowed, but also brought back down to reality by World War I or the need for an abortion. In this way, Faulkner is able to examine the various forms of womanhood controlled by the mythicised legacy of the Lost Cause.

1.10 *"Tell about the South."*

By analysing perceptions of interlocking Faulknerian mythologies, I define the ways in which various mythifications can be worked against. Faulkner's use of myth is not merely a blind adherence to Lost Cause values showing a society that had inherited the Civil War, or the subsequent trauma of World War I, though he does endorse mythification in places, as a by-product of white Southern heritage. I delineate how Faulkner's fiction is working against structural mythologies, particularly by extrapolating how these myths are introduced and maintained, and by whom.

The critical field has turned from a study of the veracity of Lost Cause mythology in the South – as popularised by sympathetic voices like Pollard and Dunning – into questioning

the endurance of Southern authors at all. Faulkner is not an observer of the South from provincial Oxford, Mississippi; he has played an integral part in crafting the Southern landscape for subsequent authors. Faulkner's legacy included receiving the Nobel Prize for Literature, serving as a U.N. Ambassador to Japan, and redefining the literary landscape at the seminal moment of modernism, as can be retroactively defined from the vantage point of the twenty-first century. My research explains Faulkner's marshalling refrain to "*tell about the South. What's it like there. What do they do there. Why do they live there. Why do they live at all*" – a South which had been dominated by white males like Faulkner himself, but who lacked the self-awareness to understand the weight of their legacy, and the failure of the American Dream. (*AA!* 174) Perhaps the American Dream was always an aspiration with no real hope of achievement, or perhaps the spectre of the Civil War caused the death of the nascent Dream before it could begin.

Issues surrounding an overcorrection of history; a sense of racial inferiority for those who are non-white; and the dissolution of women's rights pervade the current climate of America, as they have been reflected in Faulkner's fiction.

My research addresses the areas within William Faulkner's works primarily dealing with the embedded structure of mythologies. Various representations of the Southern myth of the Lost Cause; dominant racial tensions; the expected role of women as objects and benign recipients of chivalric ideals all coalesce within Faulkner's works. As an overarching framework, my argument addresses these Faulknerian areas of myth, in which history and fiction blend due to the enduring myth of the Lost Cause informing Faulkner's works, and the climate in which they are studied. These mythifications are textually and socially realised though Faulkner's perceptions of his South.

CHAPTER ONE

"IT WAS NOT OUR HERITAGE BECAUSE WE WERE ITS": FAULKNER AND THE MYTH OF THE LOST CAUSE

2.1 Creating and Inheriting the Lost Cause

William Faulkner's fiction and non-fiction reflect the contaminative phenomenon of the myth of the Lost Cause, and the legacy of the Civil War and Reconstruction in the American South. Faulkner's works – including essays and speeches – are representative of an era that altered the landscape of history, as well as the earth of the Southern states. This chapter establishes the parameters of the myth of the Lost Cause: how did this dominant mythology emerge after the Civil War, how was it upheld, and who benefitted from doing so? Faulkner's works assess the value of the Lost Cause, demonstrating its fallibility whilst also reinforcing some aspects of it. I will situate Faulkner within the context of the early-twentieth-century South, before discussing his works which most overtly address the immediacy of the Civil War and the Confederacy in Mississippi: *Sartoris*, published posthumously unabridged as *Flags in the Dust* in 1973, *The Unvanquished* (1938), and the essay "Mississippi" (1954). As my assessment claims, the myth of the Lost Cause was also intimately tied to the concurrent myth of racial inferiority, and female control. It is via this pathway that the myth of the Lost Cause became the most dangerous myth of the South.

By virtue of his own Southern heritage, Faulkner inherited the myth of the Lost Cause, and weaves it throughout his fiction. Characters are directly affected by the Civil War itself; the aftermath of Reconstruction and nascent Lost Cause ideology; or an inescapable history which they are born into, and which dominates their lives. Therefore, the myth of the Lost Cause becomes a narrative in itself. I argue that the mythification of the Lost Cause via the

Confederacy's defeat in the Civil War is the most insidious and damaging myth, from which other controlling mythologies originate and are upheld. From the Lost Cause, forms of racial and sexual control could be rigidified. Faulkner's use of myth can be pinpointed to this singularity: the myth of the Lost Cause dominated his life as much as his fiction.

According to Faulkner, in the bequeathment of the American Dream, "we were not even given the chance then to accept or decline the dream, for the reason that the dream already owned and possessed us at birth. *It was not our heritage because we were its.*" ("Privacy" 63; emphasis mine) My analysis builds upon Faulkner's idea of repetitive heritage. "It was not our heritage because we were its" captures the sense of the inescapable past, recursive in its reach for men like Faulkner who had come of age after the close of the Civil War and the Reconstruction period, yet who were closely influenced by the rise of the myth of the Lost Cause. Faulkner's lifetime spent in Mississippi became an integral part of his writing, which often included a semi-autobiographical focus, as I discuss with regards to his essay "Mississippi".[8] Faulkner believed that "I am simply trying to state, with compassion and grief, a condition, tragic, in the country where I was born and which I love, despite its faults." ("To Harold Ober" 393)

Many of Faulkner's works are informed by a childhood formation of the knowledge of the myth of the Lost Cause, which permeated the fabric of Southern society to a dangerously large degree, even after the turn of the century. Influenced by his environment, and by the persistence of the myth of the Lost Cause, Faulkner addresses the Civil War and the era of Reconstruction in his fiction. Faulkner exposes and endorses aspects of this mythology, allowing for a degree of cynicism as he simultaneously venerates Jefferson's war-dead, and fictionalises reminiscences of his own childhood in the aftermath of the Civil War. Faulkner

[8] Though he had travelled to New Orleans as a young writer; Paris to make his way in Europe; Stockholm to accept the Nobel Prize for Literature; and Japan as an ambassador, Faulkner is most closely-associated with his home state of Mississippi.

frequently uses the focalisation of children to assess the heroic proportions of their elders: like Bayard Sartoris, Quentin Compson, and Chick Mallison.[9] By doing so, Faulkner is drawing upon his own experience, coming of age in a defiant South. This fictionalisation recurs throughout Faulkner's works: in motifs of "unsurrendered," indignant Southern women, and ordinary men elevated to the status of heroes despite the intensity of their defeat. (*Requiem for a Nun* 202) Through Faulkner's works of non-fiction, it is clear that the legacy of the Civil War continued within Faulkner's environment.

To understand the legacy and impact of the Civil War upon Faulkner, it is essential to understand the culture of the South, with its focus on patriotism, pride, and heritage – and the concurrent legacy of the Civil War for the eleven 'Confederate States of America.' To understand Faulkner is to understand the dominant draw of the construction and geographic delineation of 'the South,' and then to understand its reciprocal pull upon Faulkner himself.

2.2 Upholding Mythologies

The Lost Cause was an enduring myth through which most white Southerners believed the Civil War had been lost as a form of predestination and noble sacrifice, or the result of overwhelming Union forces and resources that could have been defeated. The pre-war South has also been enshrined in myth, helped in part by literature and romantic perceptions of persecution. In reality, the Confederate forces had been defeated following Lee's surrender of his forces at Appomattox on 9 April 1865, coming swiftly after the fall of Richmond, VA, the Confederate capital. From this point, the war was effectively over.

The harsh era of Reconstruction and Southern federal occupation were penury for four years of conflict. Caroline Janney speculates that "the immediate aftermath of Appomattox

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[9] I will refer to Sartoris's perspective in *The Unvanquished* specifically. Compson's is a regular voice, whose narrative mantle is taken on by Mallison in later works including *Intruder in the Dust* (1948), and *Knight's Gambit* (1949).

confirmed that a deep and abiding commitment to the Confederacy had not ended with the surrender. In some ways, it had only begun." (*Ends* 6) The South's "deep and abiding commitment" became mapped onto mythification of the Lost Cause narrative via faithful Southerners' manipulated rhetoric, and subsequently made its way into Faulkner's works.

Michael Gorra speculates that the post-war South became "a region defined not by what had happened, but by what was going to. The North could afford to forget the war, but in the South its scars endured." (*SW* 322) Therefore, "in that South the Confederacy stood as a fixed point, and the war became the still and violent center of time itself." (322) The mythology of the Lost Cause developed from this originary point, as a way for the South to reclaim the war's narrative after defeat. In order to understand Faulkner's deployment of the Lost Cause as a narrative device, we must understand the post-war formation of the myth itself, before Faulkner made it his own. In the years after the Civil War, the nascently-reformed United States instituted a period of Reconstruction and sustained federal occupation in the South until 1877, as a way to assess loyalty to the tenets of reunification. Reconstruction – lasting three times longer than the war itself – was then followed by an era of self-governance and self-rule, under which new laws and 'Black Codes' were formed to curtail the rights of the non-white population once more. This backwards step demonstrates that the former-Confederate South was defiant, proclaiming itself 'unreconstructed.' According to the mood of the South, blame for Reconstruction particularly lay at the feet of Northerners or Yankees, 'carpet-baggers,' 'scalawags,' and manumitted slaves.[10]

After the collapse of the Confederacy, the South was left without an infrastructure, or a cause to unite behind. In the maelstrom of the Civil War and the longer period of Reconstruction, most Southerners were seen to cling to the idea of the Lost Cause. The

[10] 'Carpet-baggers' were commonly from the North, whereas 'scalawags' were Northern-aligned Southerners.

former Confederate states had been devastated by the warfare on their own land, and the meagre provisions of a defeated agrarian society. The myth of the Lost Cause became a way for the South to absolve themselves of defeat or blame, whilst continuing to express hatred towards the North. O'Brien surmises that "the idea of the South was strengthened, ironically, by the destruction of its political expression, the Confederacy." (5) The influence of a system of government and a set of political beliefs which disappeared almost overnight led to an ironic juxtaposition of the resurgence of belief in the strength of the South. Lee's disbanding of the Army of Northern Virginia at Appomattox was viewed as the noble and necessary choice, yet the years that followed did not help 'Rebel–Yankee' relations.

After Appomattox, the South became more insular under the weight of its perceived oppression: Pollard foresaw the South's "*people lose the virtue of endurance*." (*LC* 133; italics Pollard's) Intertwined with the narrative of promise out of defeat, some Southerners also believed in a generalised reasoning: Confederate forces had been defeated by an excess of Yankee resources. If it had not been so, the South would have been victorious. In this way, Lee's surrender of his troops was framed as the result of overwhelming Union advantage, yet it did not entirely signify defeat, and left an ideological vacuum for the rise of the myth of the Lost Cause.[11] Speaking on 10 April 1865, a day after surrender, Lee declared that, "after four years of arduous service, marked by unsurpassed courage and fortitude, the Army of Northern Virginia has been *compelled to yield to overwhelming numbers and resources*." ("April 10, 1865"; emphasis mine) Contemporaneously, Pollard commented upon Lee's "Roman manhood yet about him," already quasi-apotheosing him as early as 1866. (*LC* 711) [12] As Janney explains, in Lee's final speech,

[11] Even Winston Churchill was "encouraged to enter upon an absurd speculation" by ruminating upon permutations of history in his 1930 piece, "If Lee Had Not Won the Battle of Gettysburg."
[12] Surprisingly, however, Pollard disputes Lee's rhetoric, see *LC* 727.

> Reference to "overwhelming numbers" conjured images of mercenaries and foreign hirelings who had fought not for some righteous cause but for money, while "resources" called to mind the industrial might of the North…in juxtaposition to the agrarian South, whose soldiers had "remained steadfast to the last."
> (*Ends* 56)

Lee's prevarication gave hope to a susceptible South: their defeat could be explained away by "overwhelming numbers and resources" – leaving open the unsaid supposition that if the South had had more of both, they would have been victorious.

2.3 Public Memory, Public Myths

The mythicised Lost Cause continued to be of importance in the South through the perseverance of institutions that were formed to regulate its mythology and perpetuate its narrative. The myth's endurance influenced Faulkner's authorship to a great degree, growing into the Lost Cause.

Elizabeth Varon observes that Appomattox "forms one of the most significant moments in the story Americans tell themselves about the meaning and legacy of the Civil War. Unfortunately, *it is a myth.*" (1; emphasis mine) Belief in the Confederacy after its downfall became a form of controlled nostalgia: it transformed itself after defeat into an era of neo-Confederacy, ex-Confederacy, and a nation undertaking an exercise of national reconciliation and denial. The Lost Cause myth became the measurement for all proceeding history, in a climate of contradiction. David Holman writes that "the past of the South is tragic and complete, and the present and the future are measured by the idea of the Lost Cause." (17) Memory itself became "measured" by institutions, and the narrative of the myth of the Lost Cause was perpetuated throughout Southern society. Schools, societies, and the formation of new communities promoted its mythology; including the use of women to temper the message of the ex-Confederacy still raging in the Southern states, in the face of perceived Union oppression. The formation of organisations such as Ladies' Memorial Associations, United Daughters of the Confederacy (UDC), and Sons of Confederate

Veterans assisted in promoting the message of the Lost Cause, and redefining the narrative of the Old South. In the UDC, women "raised the stakes of the Lost Cause by making it a movement about vindication, as well as memorialization." (Karen Cox 1) Echoing Lee at Appomattox, the language of Lost Cause mythology searched for reason in warfare, and meaning in defeat.

The redefined collective memory of the mythologised 'Old South' was created as a counterpart to the trials of Reconstruction, and the onset of industrialisation in the formerly-agrarian South. Staunch critics of the re-created Union promoted their visions of the Old South: women were pure and chaste, the slave was happy with his lot, and Confederate forces lost due to the Union's overwhelming resources. In actuality, the New South was an improvement for those who had been cast out of the patriarchal, white-dominated society of the early nineteenth century. Women were finding new independence after the Civil War had destroyed the structure of the old ways of life, and emancipation paved the way for Black empowerment, at least for a little while.[13] The staid social structure of the South was mutating, becoming unrecognisably different to the white male plantocracy dominating its structure in the antebellum years. The schism between North and South was widened by the insistence on the Lost Cause. Clearly, in the course of a lifetime, the Old South had been irrevocably lost, and the myth of the Lost Cause emerged as a dominant consolation narrative for those who had lost everything they had stood for. Economically and socially, the South was ruined by its own making. The freedom of enslaved people had crippled the cotton and agricultural industries. Additionally, much of the warfare had taken place in the South, at places such as Vicksburg in Mississippi; General William Sherman's destructive march through Georgia from Atlanta to the sea; and the liminal, contested territory of northern Virginia.

[13] Varon records that "southern blacks celebrated Lee's surrender as a day of jubilee," in contrast to white perceptions of persecution. (169)

Towards the end of the nineteenth century, the endurance of the public myth of the Lost Cause was affected by the changing social climate, and a new era of national cooperation. As the dawn of a new century changed the populace's ideas of progress, the message of the Lost Cause was used to excuse prominent issues within the South: growing racial inequality, segregation laws, the rise of the Ku Klux Klan, and a sense of enduring patriotism for a cause effectively 'lost' since 1865. Furthermore, in the blinkered spirit of national reconciliation, the myth of the Lost Cause now encompassed falsifications of the antebellum South within its remit, permitted by the North's desire for reconciliation. Silber observes that

> Northerners, too, were caught up in the creation of this regional iconography in the post-Civil War period and used this romanticized image to reinforce the mawkish and sentimental view of reunion. But it would be misleading to suggest that northerners completely accepted the South's lost cause ideology.
> (5)

Prominent Southerners such as the 'Southern Agrarians' would advocate for a 'new' form of the Old South, focused on the land and avoiding the onset of industrialisation, with a wistfulness for pre-war culture and order. Eventually, the dawn of a new era would spread the myth of the Lost Cause across the entirety of the United States, changing the history of the victor to a narrative controlled by the South's defeat, upheld by the white Southern populace. Couched within the Lost Cause was also the act of racial 'Othering', which allowed for the rise of white supremacy in the South, with violence witnessed against Black, Indigenous, and otherwise 'foreign' inhabitants. Heather Cox Richardson saw that "it was simply a question of time until the estranged sections of the country would have to begin to build a new postwar nation." (*West* 8) Building a postwar nation also meant constructing new mythologies to ensure the white-based premise of the *status quo*.

2.4 The "Civil" War

The collapse of the Confederate government and its forces reinforced the inter-state allegiances of the South. In turn, mythification was prevalent in the post-war South, in both literature and daily life. The legacy of the Civil War was in a series of engagements and seminal battles without common, unifying names or reference points between North and South, fought over the abolition of slavery under the guise of protecting the 'rights' of those states that had seceded from the Union. The contentious nature of names such as "the War of the Rebellion" and "the War Between the States" were mediated by the joint public acceptance of "Civil War" as an acceptable nominalisation for the historical event.[14]

Cody Marrs observes that "perhaps the greatest irony of looking at the Civil War through literature is this: the South, after losing the conflict, largely won the fight over its memory." (97) Literature allows for the redefinition of narratives and edification of mythic ideals through fictionalisation, as Faulkner's work later demonstrates. In 1865, the secession documents of South Carolina and Mississippi became a complementary form of fictionalisation, in their reasons for secession.

As a resultant effect of the myth of the Lost Cause, the true history of the war had been rewritten and obscured by the new name of "the Civil War," and the South became on more-equal terms with the North. Gaines Foster writes that using "'Civil War' promoted reconciliation, deemphasized the role of slavery and allowed both sides to hold on to their interpretation of the conflict, thereby helping obscure the war's meaning." ("Name" 416) Coinciding with the myth of the Lost Cause, then, Southerners were able to control the legacy of the so-called "War of the Rebellion." No longer rebels seceding from the United States, the Confederacy had been an equal side in a "Civil War." Usage of the term "Civil

[14] Though later, as Michael LeMahieu writes, "the name 'The War of Northern Aggression' enters the record not in 1865 but in 1955." (14)

War" to delineate this period of warfare gained popularity heading into the twentieth century.[15] Now that there was no incendiary, politically-loaded name for the war as a way to apportion blame, the former-Confederate South could continue with their narrative of the Lost Cause as the injured party in a *civil* war, not a partisan effort to preserve the institution of slavery and suppress the progression of civil rights. Bipartisan acceptance of the term "Civil War" was a seminal moment in the narrative construction of the Lost Cause.

Using the medium of the written word, the chain of state secession was started in December 1860 by South Carolina, in a secession document arguing *for* the curtailing of states' rights: protesting against the states that had exercised too great an authority over the Southern states, and stood to limit the respective rights of the South. As South Carolina proclaimed, the fault lay with Northern states who had acted beyond their respective stations. South Carolina also took affront to "frequent violations of the Constitution of the United States, by the Federal Government, and its encroachments upon the reserved rights of the States." ("Declaration…South Carolina") Actions at the state and federal levels caused South Carolina to secede in protest, as upon a new party taking power in government, "the guaranties of the Constitution will then no longer exist; the equal rights of the States will be lost." ("Declaration…South Carolina") In terms of the secession document's incendiary language, according to Buck, "the Civil War like all modern wars had been waged as much by propaganda as by armies in the field." (4) The enduring myth of the Lost Cause meant that "neo-Confederates were able to rewrite the history of the Civil War" though the propagation of misinformation, including clouding the argument over the verity of states' rights. (James Loewen and Edward Sebesta 25) As Loewen and Sebesta clarify, "South Carolina was not *for* states' rights, but *against* them," due to the perceived inequality of the

[15] When tracked using Google Books Ngram Viewer, the usage of 'Civil War' spiked during the 1920s. Using the same tracking data, 'The Lost Cause' saw a stratospheric peak in 1870, when limited to the 150-year period of 1860 – 2010. See Appendix A for visual representation of these points plotted in two graphs.

new governmental party set to take control in 1861. (15) The South Carolinian secession document states that

> On the 4th day of March next, this party will take possession of the Government. It has announced that the South shall be excluded from the common territory…and that a war must be waged against slavery until it shall cease throughout the United States.

Indeed, South Carolina had identified the root cause of the war's outbreak: "a war must be waged against slavery." However, it was insistence on preserving the institution of slavery which led to the Civil War. Much has been made of 'states' rights' and economic reasons for the war, but the crux of it was a refusal to relinquish human property because although the transatlantic slave trade had ended, the domestic slave trade was still integral to the agricultural South.

Strategically, South Carolina's act of secession led to other states' secession in succession – beginning with Mississippi on 9 January 1861 – and then led onto the Civil War.[16] Afterwards, in the post-war South, the controlled narrative of the Lost Cause was manipulated into a situation through which "now neo-Confederates claimed that secession had been misunderstood all along: South Carolina and the other Southern states had seceded *for* states' rights." (Loewen and Sebesta 25) Therefore, South Carolina's secession document becomes an exercise in mythification, through interpretation of mediated narrative manipulation and propaganda.

In contrast to South Carolina's secession document apparently being open to post-war (mis)interpretation, the state of Mississippi's declaration of the causes for secession includes specific references to the economy of slavery: "our position is thoroughly identified with the

[16] The eleven states that seceded were, in order: South Carolina, Mississippi, Florida, Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana, Texas – all in early 1861. Virginia, Arkansas, Tennessee and North Carolina seceded in April and May 1861, after the Battle of Fort Sumter, SC. These states formed the Confederate States of America. Delaware, Maryland, Kentucky and Missouri did not secede, but supported slavery. See the Library of Congress' timeline for "1861".

institution of slavery – the greatest material interest of the world." ("Declaration…Mississippi") Mississippi's belief was that, in disapproving of federal rule, "there was no choice left us but submission to the mandates of abolition, or a dissolution of the Union, whose principles had been subverted to work out our ruin."

Mississippi's perception of "ruin" created the opportunity for mythification in controlled narrative for public dissemination and belief. After Union victory, the South turned to the creation of narrative as a coping mechanism, in which the South was divinely-sanctioned to lose as a form of noble sacrifice. Through the lens of fiction, *The Unvanquished*'s Granny Millard petitions God for a reason why the South "had given their sons to a holy cause, even though You have seen fit to make it a lost cause." (103) The alternative to divine sanction was evidence of invoking God's wrath for the South's sins. David Goldfield posits that "from the white southerners' perspective, their defeat was more than a lost war; they had evidently fallen out of favor with God." (18) [17] The communal mythology of the Lost Cause created a sense of nobility in defeat, compounded by the penury of Reconstruction. Paul Buck delineates Reconstruction in romantic terms:

> Not glory but pathos encompassed the Southerner's first adjustment to the new regime. Lost were the dreams of greatness. Yet ruin, poverty, and defeat could not altogether destroy memory of the aspiration. The yearning for the vanished beauty of the past became a part of the Southern heart.
> (33)

The enduring myth of the Lost Cause is demonstrated in Buck's biased "yearning for the vanished beauty of the past." However, Silber posits that "as time passed, northerners suspected that they had not tapped into a genuine sentiment of reunion at all. Rather, they feared they had only uncovered a sham and hypocritical show on the part of many southerners," who perhaps foregrounded the necessity of the myth of the Lost Cause over

[17] I expand upon Faulkner's specific portrayal of divine sanction, see 3.5.

reunion. (46) Furthermore, "although the southern myth had strong antebellum roots…the sectional conflict severely qualified and limited the impact of this myth in northern ideology." (Silber 198) In these ways, the myth of the Lost Cause which Faulkner was to inherit was labile and permeable: ironically, the only absolute appeared to be that the South had won the "Civil" War by losing it.

The Lost Cause denoted the transmutation of failure into more of a triumph, to venerate the days of the Old South, during which "a sentimental rubric took hold of the reunion process." (Silber 3) [18] It is pertinent to note the public 'need' for a common myth, in which Southerners transformed the outcome of the war to better suit their narrative, and to adequately recognise the extent of their sacrifice. The crux of Lost Cause mythology is that "defeat had not rendered their cause immoral or its soldiers less than heroic." (Janney, *Ends* 57) Pollard's contemporaneity corroborates that, in Lee's surrender, "the public mind of the South was fully represented," as "the people had become convinced that the Confederate cause was lost." (*LC* 742, 743) Therefore, aspects of the myth which Faulkner stood to inherit were in motion, including the myth of the righteous nature of secession; the contentious issues of slavery and ownership; and a history Faulkner spent his lifetime attempting to reflect.

2.5 Southerners' Lost Causes

The myth of the Lost Cause took hold amongst the population of the South as a land devastated by warfare. In a speech given in 1955, "To the Youth of Japan," Faulkner demonstrates the influence of a childhood spent under the persistent shadow of defeat: "my side, the South, lost that war, the battles of which were fought not on neutral ground in the waste of the ocean, but in our own homes, our gardens, our farms." ("Youth" 82) For the South, the war was geographically close and personal. Southerners' 'Lost Causes' varied:

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[18] Part of this veneration was in statues and monuments, see 2.14.

Northern aggression, antebellum mythologisation, or the falsified 'happy slave' narrative. With this structure of history in place, including Mississippi's legacy of secession and animosity, it is clear that Faulkner was unable to escape the suffusive mythification of the Lost Cause.

Stephen Marche argues that "America has lived for 160 years with a half-settled myth of unity. All such myths are fragile." (9) The relative absurdity of the Lost Cause narrative found a strong foothold throughout the South, due to the devastation of loss. Livelihoods and families had been destroyed by the Civil War, and the Lost Cause provided a solidly unifying mythology in which the South had *not* lost, but was instead fulfilling its destiny. With the North turning a blind eye, ending federal rule after the period of Reconstruction, the governance of Mississippi had passed back into its own hands. Therefore, a new generation could be trained to believe in the myth. Children were indoctrinated, beginning in their schoolbooks. It would not be an absurd claim that young Faulkner was influenced during this time period, particularly by the UDC, who "maintained a constant presence in the South's white public schools between 1894 and 1919." (K. Cox 127) Furthermore, Donald Yacovone's study on textbooks and education in the South demonstrates that "statewide education boards controlled the textbook adoption process and favored texts that white-dominated public opinion insisted on." (205-06) Lost Cause propaganda in education was promoted by institutions like the UDC, who

> Insisted that any texts used must conform to the tenets of the Lost Cause: secession was provoked by a constitutional dispute; Confederate soldiers fought admirably and honorably against insurmountable odds; and the South fought for self-government, not slavery.
> (Janney, *Burying* 172)

Young William Faulkner, born in 1897 and coming of age in the early 1900s, would have surely been exposed to such overt recreations of the South's history.

The cowed South had had to rebuild itself as a stronger entity, reinforcing fidelity to the Lost Cause myth as an overarching explanation for defeat. For historian W.J. Cash, the South's reasoning is clear: Southerners were made "far more aware of their differences and of the line which divided what was Southern from what was not," and as a result had to "hold fast to their own, to maintain their divergences, to remain what they had been and were." (104) Faulkner was to inherit a fierce sense of Southern pride, and the consciousness of a geographic nationality. By the close of the nineteenth century, the wrenching loss of the Civil War in the South had turned to a more benign entity: as Foster argues, "the heroes no longer served as symbols with which to revitalize Confederate culture; rather, they became important role models for society and especially the young." (*Ghosts* 121) The false narrative of the Lost Cause had survived the immediate post-war period, and could now contaminate another generation of Southerners like young Faulkner.

Southerners' Lost Causes pervaded the early twentieth century. Dunning's early-1900s research proposed that the war was for the "avowed purpose of suppressing an insurrection of individuals, and with no idea of interfering with the rights of the states." (102) According to Dunning, Reconstruction was an era of achievement, progress, and rehabilitation – yet the personal cost of warfare was clear upon Southern individuals. Dunning's hypotheses expose the increasingly-prevalent fear of the white population against an influx of manumitted slaves, indicative of how and why the ideology of the Lost Cause was attractive to the white Southern population.

Cornelia Branch Stone, a prominent member of the UDC, wrote a defence of slavery in 1912. In this narrative, the apparent joys of the institution were disseminated to other like-minded white women through the *Confederate Veteran* magazine. Stone depicts the idyllic land of the Old South and its enslaved people, before the perceived horrors of emancipation severed such allegedly-contented ties between white and Black:

> In the cabin or in the field their hearts and voices were full of song, and in looking back they seemed to me to have been the happiest people I have ever known, free of all responsibility or care. With plenty to eat and wear, to them there was nothing more to be desired.
> (569)

Such tone-deaf propaganda provided fodder for audiences already blinded to the fallacies of the Old South, and who had subscribed to its re-creation through the myth of the Lost Cause. Stone depicts the South's prevarication on the subject of slavery, and its alleged lack of importance in the incitement of the Civil War. Echoing the language of South Carolina's secession document, Stone claims

> The people of my dear Southland have been misjudged and misunderstood in dealing with that problem of wrong which was inherited at the formation of this government and in which all of the thirteen colonies became participants by signing…the Constitution of the United States, which recognized negroes as property and left the settlement of this question to each one of the States.
> (569)

Stone is one of many voices which blindly accepted the moral rectitude of the Southern states' secession, and continued to perpetuate the myth of the Lost Cause. The Lost Cause allowed for Southerners to recast their lot as a mere 'misunderstanding', and a 'misjudgement' of their aims in preserving the institution of slavery.

In the mid-twentieth century, Lost Causes were represented by the Southern Agrarians, whose clarion cry, *I'll Take My Stand: The South and the Agrarian Tradition*, was published in 1930. 'Twelve Southerners' associated with Vanderbilt University, TN, were connected by a burning passion for the land of the South, and a desire to prevent the onset of a society of industrialisation.[19] Faulkner speculates in his essay "Mississippi" that the farming heritage of the South was predicated on the seminal, apocryphal moment when "someone gave a Natchez doctor a Mexican cotton seed (maybe with the boll-weevil already in it since, like the Snopes, he too has taken over the southern earth.)" (14) Faulkner's incipient boll-weevil

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[19] See 4.9 for discussion of the Agrarians' specifically-racist perspectives.

becomes indicative of man's presence upon the lands of the South, stretching from the Atlantic shoreline to an indefinite point wherein the fierce ideology of the South becomes the promise of the West. Intrinsically linked to the myth of the Lost Cause and Faulkner's "southern earth," the Agrarians state their cases for the veneration of the Old South, with its primarily-agricultural focus and reliance on revisionist history. Works like *I'll Take My Stand* are the result of men who were not born during the Civil War, but who had inherited the South's struggle, and were forging the narrative of the Lost Cause to equally ensure the endurance of the structure of white supremacy. Faulkner's works take a different trajectory, though his indoctrination period of the myth of the Lost Cause occurred at the same time, under similar circumstances and influence.

I'll Take My Stand begins with a statement of intent demonstrating the extent of perceived Northern oppression, asking "how far shall the South surrender its moral, social, and economic autonomy to the victorious principle of Union?" ("Introduction" xlii) The myth of the Lost Cause endured into the twentieth century precisely for these principles – the protection of "moral, social, and economic autonomy" for Southerners that could only be provided by themselves, and not the perils of the Union or the insidious oppression of the North. As I have argued, the history of the South is one of perpetual reflection, a harkening back to the days of the mythologised Old South. Susan Donaldson considers that, "confronted with instability without and within, the Southern Agrarians naturally retreated to reassuring images of the past and tradition." ("Introduction" xviii) Echoing the Lost Cause's founding tenets, the Agrarians advocated for the preservation of their shared history. Ransom ponders the existence of the "unreconstructed Southerner, who persists in his regard for a certain terrain, a certain history, and a certain inherited way of living." (1) The persistence of the "unreconstructed Southerner," and their correspondent fidelity to the myth of the Lost Cause, is one Faulkner examines throughout his works; the manifestation of a history marred by defeat, but persistent in its reclaiming of a new narrative as "a certain

inherited way of living." For Ransom, the Southerner's "fierce devotion is to *a lost cause* – though it grieves me that his contemporaries are so sure it is lost." (2; emphasis mine) The South's enduring devotion to *the* Lost Cause is admirable in its longevity, yet inherently excludes those on the periphery.

Agrarian Stark Young's closing piece draws parallels with Faulkner's own *ethos*; both men were born in Mississippi, and demonstrate a similarly-fierce love for their native state. As Young demonstrates, the voices of reason in the South must balance the old with the new, foregrounding a redefined love of the South in a new era:

> If anything is clear, it is that we can never go back, and neither this essay nor any intelligent person that I know in the South desires a literal restoration of the old Southern life, even if that were possible; dead days are gone, and if by some chance they should return, we should find them intolerable. But out of any epoch in civilization there may arise things worth while, that are the flowers of it. (328)

"A literal restoration of the old Southern life" may have been temporally beyond the reach of the Agrarians, and those who supported the myth of the Lost Cause and the Old South, yet it did not prevent its appeal for those in the twentieth century to cultivate "the flowers of it." The basis of belief in the South – even after the defeat of the Civil War and Reconstruction – lies in the premise that, for Young, "I am not sure that one of the deep mysteries, one of the great, as it were, natural beauties of the heart, does not lie in one's love for his own land." (345) Similarly, in "Mississippi", Faulkner opines that the draw of the South is in "loving all of it even while he had to hate some of it because he knows now that you dont love because: you love despite; not for the virtues, but despite the faults." (42-43)

The faults of the South are plenty: the defeat of the Civil War; a racist infrastructure and protection of slavery to the detriment of the Black populace; a refusal to let go of the past and create a new future. Young does recognise that "this personal honorable, fantastic pride may also have a mad price," seen in the Southern need for memorialisation and vindication.

(352) For Faulkner, the heritage of the South took the good with the bad – to have the South without its history was unimaginable. Pride in the South lay in its legacy, despite the "mad price" of its destructive qualities. White Southerners' various 'Lost Causes' ensured the endurance of *the* Lost Cause's mythologisation, influencing Faulkner through association.

2.6 Faulkner's Souths

Cash claims that "if it can be said there are many Souths, the fact remains that there is also one South." (vii) Faulkner's experience of the unity of "one South" informed his earliest years and, subsequently, his fiction. It would be impossible to claim Faulkner came of age in a historical vacuum, untouched by Southern society's reminiscence of the Civil War, and the threatening shadow of World War I. For Faulkner, the myths and culture of the South became fictionalisations, and therefore mediums to address his heritage. Informed by the myth of the Lost Cause, the idea of Cash's "one South" created a form of enduring solidarity, reaching from the antebellum past into the present. Yet a paradox is also inherent in the idea of a single Faulknerian South, for Faulkner's works represent differing ways in which to view the South. Faulkner's created locus of Yoknapatawpha offers a way to view the South – primarily in the state of Mississippi – through a mediated lens of fictionalisation. Yoknapatawpha and Jefferson are based on Faulkner's familiarity with Oxford, in Lafayette County, and Jefferson's layout is loosely based on Oxford itself. Faulkner's plurality of Souths also reaches down to the Gulf of Mexico and across to the Atlantic Ocean, in novels such as *Soldiers' Pay* (1926) and *Mosquitoes* (1927), taking place near Atlanta and New Orleans respectively.

Faulkner's South becomes yet another form of the South itself, adding its number to the legends and myths that had spawned around the concept of 'the South': an interpretation of which could be one South in many, or an ironic representation of the United States' belief in

the unionised power of "*E Pluribus Unum.*" "During Faulkner's life," as John Matthews observes, "America grew from a disorganized second-rate federation of regions into a modern centralized economic empire and international political giant." (*Faulkner* 2) There was, however, still a sharp divide between North and South. More insidious than mere geographic pride, the myth of the Lost Cause has permeated the South and warped history to its own ends. As much as Faulkner is able to acutely observe the impact of the Lost Cause in his own narratives, he had also spent the majority of his lifetime deeply within the social climate of the South. Born in New Albany, MS, the Falkner family moved to Ripley before settling in Oxford. A young pilot, William 'Faulkner' (né Falkner) entered training in July 1918, having "accepted the 'u'" in misspellings of his name and "glad of such an easy way to strike out for myself." ("To Malcolm Cowley," Dec. 1945, 212) From birth, Faulkner was imbued with the history of his state – even stints in New Orleans and Paris could not prevent him from returning, buying the old Greek Revival mansion 'Rowan Oak' around the corner from his parents' home, and settling into the life of a quasi-yeoman farmer.

2.7 Faulkner's Childhood

Faulkner was born in 1897: too late for the state secessions and battles which were to define earlier generations. Yet Faulkner *did* witness the enduring myth of the Lost Cause through 'Memorial Days' and Southern venerations of the Confederacy in its new forms, reflecting Foster's identified "important role models" for the behaviour of the next generation. (*Ghosts* 121) For Faulkner, the appeal of the Civil War lay in the heritage and sense of a legacy passed down to him from his forebears, which he transformed into his own narrative.

As a young man in Mississippi, Faulkner was surrounded by the relics of the Civil War, the ageing role models of Confederate soldiers, and the collective public memory of the Old South. Later, Faulkner was to speak and write of this influence upon his formative years,

and his sense of geographic independence – for the South has a clear separation from other various areas of the United States. As Faulkner posits, the halcyon days of the Old South were consigned to the past: "the South, as Chicago is the Middlewest and New York the East, is dead, killed by the Civil War. There is a thing known whimsically as the New South to be sure, but it is not the south." ("Introduction…1933" 291) The land that represented the best days of the region, filled with promise, had become ephemeral after the war as a result of the South's defeat. The myth of the Lost Cause both held on to the days of the past, and created new legends and memories of a time that had not existed. Faulkner's writing exposes the admirable and disgraceful qualities of the South; the glory of promising young revolution, seen by *The Unvanquished*'s portrayal of dashing John Sartoris, and also the tarnished shine of the beaten Confederacy in laboured Rebel cries.

Faulkner's sense of regionality is clear; the New South is a pale facsimile of the Old, a form of the South he had been born too late for, but represented throughout his works. Faulkner's depiction of the transient South is clearly delineated: it is the square mileage of Yoknapatawpha, and the inhabitants of the town of Jefferson. By focusing on writing about his one South, though ironically through a sprawling web of interconnected stories and lineages, Faulkner had fears of 'selling out' his heritage. Accordingly, his first foray into writing novels focuses on Louisiana and Georgia – still the South, but not as close to home. Later, Faulkner will expose the reality of his own state – the state desperate to follow South Carolina's lead in secession, the first to curb Black people's rights again after Reconstruction, staunchly supporting racial segregation in schools and universities. Faulkner was to inherit the myth of the Lost Cause through a definitive tie to Mississippi itself – he addresses the earth and the *ethos* of the state. Faulkner's world may have only been, apocryphally, a "little postage stamp of native soil," yet Mississippi teems with the past: in Faulkner's present, the author is "sublimating the actual into the apocryphal," and

an uncertain future. ("The Paris Review Interview" 373) Clearly, Faulkner's blend of fictionalisation and fact into myth suffuses his entire body of work.

By evaluating Faulkner's non-fiction works, it becomes apparent that the legacy of the Civil War was one of burden and loss, juxtaposed with a fierce sense of pride within the following generations. Through a series of lectures at the University of Virginia in 1956-57, Faulkner's perspectives have been recorded. Furthermore, James Meriwether's compilation of Faulkner's *Essays, Speeches and Public Letters* allows access to Faulkner the man, as well as Faulkner the author. When studied in tandem, a clear image of Faulkner emerges, including his personal viewpoints of the various legacies of the Civil War. Growing from a young boy in Mississippi to a renowned author, the South and its history never left Faulkner. The experience of a defeated South permeated his childhood: the Old South may have been dead, but its long shadow remained. Influenced by his inherited past, Faulkner echoes the retribution and blame of Reconstruction, leading to the Southern viewpoint that

> Our land, our homes were invaded by a conqueror who remained after we were defeated; we were not only devastated by the battles which we lost, the conqueror spent the next ten years after our defeat and surrender despoiling us of what little war had left.
> ("Japan" 82)

Significantly, Faulkner uses "we," lexically signifying a sense of affinity with the South, and the defeated Confederate cause. The seeds of the myth of the Lost Cause were sown by the indignity and trials of Reconstruction. The Civil War had touched every home in the South, in the battlefields which had once been cottonfields worked by enslaved labourers.

The legacy of the Lost Cause is witnessed as a sense of the weight of responsibility for young Southern men to represent the best hopes of the next generations, and to make the most of their inherited land – which had been fought for, and lost. Faulkner inherited the history of the South, and a history particular to Mississippi. Each of the eleven seceding states had come to separately reckon with their history, and had taken their own pathways

through Reconstruction and readmission to the Union. One of Faulkner's enduring memories of his childhood was that

> I was five-six-seven years old around 1904-5-6 and 7, old enough to understand, to listen. They didn't talk much about that war, I had got that from the maiden spinster aunts which had never surrendered. But I can remember the old men, and they would get out the old shabby grey uniforms and get out the old battle flag on Decoration, Memorial Day.
> (*Faulkner in the University* 249)

The public preservation of the myth of the Lost Cause remembered the sacrifice of soldiers who were no more than young farmhands or landowners. This sacrifice was not to be ignored as the South benignly accepted defeat and the dashed hopes of preserving slavery: these men required public adoration, memorials, annual days of recognition. The endurance of the Lost Cause myth is evidenced in the continuation of Memorial Day in America; now recognised on the last Monday in May, and formerly known as "Decoration Day." The North held memorial days for their Union dead, yet the dominant strength of memorialisation was conducted by the South.[20] These celebrations were a legacy of the Civil War, held to honour the dead; yet they became the stage for orators to bend their rhetoric to create new versions of the Lost Cause, and reinforce its *ethos.*[21] Imbued with local pride, the young William Faulkner who was "old enough to understand, to listen" became old enough to write about his experience, turning from the local to the apocryphal within the county bounds of his Yoknapatawpha. The "old shabby grey uniforms" and "the old battle flag" were representative of a period which Faulkner had missed by around thirty years, yet he was reminded of at every turn, through the legacy of heritage and the burden of being a

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[20] Echoing the connective Mississippi dirt for Bayard and Ringo, Buck notes that "the origin of Memorial Day, like everything that grows from common clay, is a development from obscure beginnings." (116)
[21] Alternatively, as Blight examines, abolitionist Frederick Douglass "angrily disavowed the sectional reconciliation that had swept the country," urging Memorial Day audiences "to resist the Lost Cause by arguing for an opposite and…deeper cultural myth – the abolitionist conception of the Civil War, black emancipation as the source of national regeneration." ("For Something" 1177, 1175)

man in the New South, living after the glory days of the Confederacy and its failed promise. (*University* 249)

Faulkner's texts work together to create a sense of the South through sustained imagery and narrative, addressing the Lost Cause and portraying the altered legacy of the Confederacy he had inherited in his youth. This aspect of history is seen most prominently in *Sartoris*, *Flags in the Dust* and *The Unvanquished*, enclosed within the framework of Faulkner's 1954 essay "Mississippi".

2.8 "Mississippi"

Faulkner's "Mississippi" reveals a fictionalised version of the author's innermost thoughts about the legacy of the South, and the liminal era in which he entered adulthood. Demonstrating clear parallels with *The Unvanquished*, both texts narrate the events of young boys coming of age in Mississippi, amongst the ghosts of the Civil War, and use a mitigated children's perspective to engender mythification. Semi-autobiographical, "Mississippi" provides a viewpoint of the history of Faulkner's state, changing from small towns to metropolises due to the onset of progress in the form of modernisation, with his character developing in tandem. In "Mississippi", Faulkner addresses aspects of the Lost Cause he has inherited, as well as creating a sense of literary artifice; Faulkner's perspective from 1954 was cognisant of his success, and a life spent attempting to tell the story of the South.

The Unvanquished focuses on Bayard Sartoris and Ringo, his childhood friend and almost-brother, separated by race, "but that didn't count" to them. (58) [22] Both idolise Bayard's father John Sartoris, the Confederate general whose actions become close to legend. "Mississippi" is an interplay of mediated fact and fiction, echoing the action of *The*

[22] A keen equestrian, Faulkner's naming of 'Bayard' echoes the magic horse of European legend, also used by Geoffrey Chaucer in *Troilus and Criseyde* Bk. I (1380s), and Scott in *Kenilworth* (1821). John Sartoris's office houses "a complete Walter Scott." (*Unvanquished* 15)

Unvanquished in its own depiction of two boys, like Bayard and Ringo, who have also inherited the South's past in their shared Yoknapatawpha childhood, coming of age together under the shadow of the Civil War approaching Mississippi. "Mississippi" can be read as an extension to Faulkner's claim of inheriting the South, for "it was not our heritage because we were its." ("Privacy" 63) The dominant ideology of the South Faulkner inherited was one of hope and promise, yet it was also a paradox: the South hoped and believed in the power of the defeated Confederacy, and an Old South which had never truly existed.

Faulkner's Mississippi is a state of ghosts and revisions of histories, a quaint, fabricated land "dotted with little towns concentric about the ghosts of the horses and mules once tethered to the hitch-rail enclosing the county courthouse." ("Mississippi" 11) According to Faulkner, "Mississippi begins in the lobby of a Memphis, Tennessee hotel and extends south to the Gulf of Mexico," situating the state firmly within the South, crossing the state line north to Tennessee and Memphis as the nearest nucleus of progress to Oxford, as well as the site of debauchery Faulkner's works often depict. (11) [23] Now progress has come to Mississippi, yet it is affected by the retrospective mythologies of the Confederacy and the Lost Cause haunting diminutive "little towns" resistant to progress and reality. (11) The author himself is "the middleaging," observing the environment of Mississippi altering almost daily, and struggling to keep up with the changing times. (35) Progressing through history, Faulkner oversees the inception of the state itself, from "the alluvial swamps" of history to the "diminishing wilderness" and modern-day progress of motor-cars and "what he remembered as dense river bottom jungle and rich farm land, is now an artificial lake twenty-five miles long." (11, 13, 35) The modernisation of the South is intertwined with a persistent retrospection, as has endured in the determined mythification of the Lost Cause. "Mississippi" depicts the might of Southern women: "the women, the indomitable, the

[23] For example, in *Sartoris, The Sound and the Fury, Sanctuary.*

undefeated, who never surrendered, refusing to allow the Yankee *minie* balls to be dug out of the portico column or mantlepiece or lintel." (15) The remnants of the war were more permanent to these women, who recur throughout Faulkner's works. It is clear that the bulk of public remembrance was constructed by women similar to Faulkner's depictions, as my research will go on to assess, in contrast to sycophantic opportunists.

Faulkner's "Mississippi" defies categorisation, as a representation of fictional fact, and factual fiction. As Meriwether notes, "Mississippi" is "not exactly a historical essay – there is too much autobiography and too much fiction in it." ("Faulkner's 'Mississippi'" 16) In "Mississippi", Faulkner combines personal experience with fictionalisation and state-specific history. Small-town Mississippi had a history of the great names of nearby battlegrounds, and a war-scarred countryside continuing to recover during Faulkner's early childhood. As Faulkner reminisces in the third-person, "even in the boy's time the boy himself knowing about Vicksburg and Corinth and exactly where his grandfather's regiment had been at First Manassas before he remembered hearing very much about Santa Claus." ("Mississippi" 15-16) For a young child in Mississippi, we can perceive that the warfare was more of a compelling reality and a tale for children than Santa Claus himself – once more "not our heritage because we were its" in the legacy of grandfathers and heroes. ("Privacy" 63)

The legacy of the Civil War was present in the "resilient earth" of Mississippi itself. (*Unvanquished* 161) Combining autobiography with fiction, echoes of *The Unvanquished* are seen as Faulkner depicts a memory of "playing over again in miniature the War, the old irredeemable battles – Shiloh and Vicksburg, and Brice's Crossroads which was not far from where the child (both of them) had been born." ("Mississippi" 17) Shiloh, Vicksburg, and Brice's Crossroads have become locations in children's play. Faulkner's inheritance of Mississippi was one of close proximity to the memories of seminal battles which had an everlasting legacy on the joint memory of the South. The distance between New Albany – where Faulkner spent his first five years – and the site of the battle of Brice's Crossroads is

a mere fifteen miles as the crow flies. The importance of Brice's Crossroads in reimagined Confederate history corroborates the early years of Lost Cause rhetoric. Mississippi politician John Rankin's speech at Brice's Crossroads in June 1925 became a mediation upon the myth of the Lost Cause. Addressing the audience whilst commemorating Nathan Bedford Forrest's 1864 victory at the battle site, Rankin observes that

> It seems to me that it would be quite Improper to refer to you, or to address you, as veterans of the "lost cause." The cause for which you fought and sacrificed was not lost; it was the cause of civilization. It is as much alive today as it was in sixty-one, and it will live as long as our free American institutions shall endure. It will be lost only when the ideals of our race shall have vanished from the earth.
> (291) [24]

In a few short decades, the myth of the Lost Cause had permeated common culture, forging a message of heroism, righteousness, and the protection of a noble set of "ideals," though these were forged to exclude the non-white population. The roots of the Lost Cause were now designated as "the cause of civilization" and part of the "free American institutions" enshrined in the nation's culture from its re-conception in 1776. Jefferson Davis, the sole President of the Confederacy, was a Mississippian, though he had been born in Todd County, KY, just a few short miles and months apart from Abraham Lincoln. The Lincolns would move to Illinois, the Davis family to Mississippi, forging the pathway for the two men to become polar-opposite Presidents.[25] The mythology of the Lost Cause had now endured to 1925, orated by Rankin as political 'fact' at the crossroads that had defined Faulkner's childhood.

Mississippi's status in the firmament of the Confederate South influenced Faulkner to a great degree. Faulkner had inherited a state where the prestige of battles for places such as Brice's Crossroads and Vicksburg were ingrained into the prevailing rhetoric of the next generation. Echoing Bayard and Ringo's play in *The Unvanquished*, Faulkner's childhood

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[24] See 4.12 for extended discussion on the loaded terms of Forrest's mythologised legacy.
[25] Jefferson Davis's legacy became so tied to Mississippi that his commemorative statue in the U.S. Capitol's National Statuary Hall is one of two sponsored by Mississippi, and not the state of his birth.

becomes part of his works, as young boys fight over who will be Confederate Lieutenant - General John Pemberton, and who will be Union-commanding Ulysses Grant. In "Mississippi", Faulkner depicts facsimiles of Ringo and Bayard, in a Black child "born in the same week with the white child," and "suckled at the same black breast." ("Mississippi" 17) In their shared childhood, "the boy because he was white arrogating to himself the right to be the Confederate General – Pemberton or Johnston or Forrest." (17) Mirrored in *The Unvanquished*, Bayard and Ringo are "born in the same month and had both fed at the same breast," and Bayard "would be General Pemberton twice in succession" to Ringo's once. (9)

Faulkner would have been one of many boys inspired by mythic promise in the South, according to Cash, who "now had continually before his eyes the vision, and heard always in his ears the clamorous hoofbeats, of a glorious swashbuckler," and a legacy "forever charging the cannon's mouth with the Southern battle flag." (121) The honour and heroism of the Confederate forces captured a corresponding zeitgeist: the idolisation of soldiers by young boys, who were to grow up during the heyday of belief in the myth of the Lost Cause, aspiring to be Pemberton, mapped onto the idolisation created by childhood legend. In "Mississippi", Faulkner combines his own fictional characters with his childhood, in that

> The people the boy crept with were the descendants of the Sartorises and De Spains and Compsons who had commanded the Manassas and Sharpsburg and Shiloh and Chickamauga regiments, and the McCaslins and Ewells and Holstons and Hogganbecks whose fathers and grandfathers had manned them.
> ("Mississippi" 12) [26]

The importance Faulkner places on remembering family heritage is clear. In both his own life and in his fictional works, Faulkner emphasises the legacy of the Civil War on each subsequent generation, preserving the heroism of their "fathers and grandfathers" who had created myths around themselves for young, impressionable children. Coming of age in the

[26] As with much in Faulkner's works, there are echoes of previous characters and short stories: each of these names are integral to Jefferson, outlined most comprehensively in *Requiem for a Nun.*

South created a sense of identity forged by present memories of warfare. Therefore, "Mississippi" provides a mediated insight into Faulkner's impressions of a childhood suffused by inheriting the myth of the Lost Cause, and echoes his fiction in *The Unvanquished.*

2.9 *Sartoris, Flags in the Dust* and *The Unvanquished* Working Together

In *Sartoris*, *Flags in the Dust* and *The Unvanquished*, Faulkner is at his most overt in directly depicting the spectacle of the Civil War, and the years that followed. These works have a particular focus on the Sartoris family, and its eminent patriarch, Colonel John Sartoris.

Faulkner's creation of Jefferson and Yoknapatawpha allowed for the extended depiction of different family bloodlines, such as Compson, Sartoris, and Sutpen who appear in *The Sound and the Fury*, the Sartoris Saga, and *Absalom, Absalom!* respectively. Throughout *The Unvanquished*, Faulkner recedes in his narrative timeline to present a viewpoint of Bayard and Ringo playing their part in the belligerent Sartoris legacy. In *Sartoris*, the legacy of warfare is mediated through the sense of futility in the historic mirror of World War I. The later republication of *Sartoris* as *Flags in the Dust* contains Faulkner's unabridged authorship, in which he develops Horace Benbow as the voice of peacetime reconciliation, counterposed against the younger Bayard Sartoris's cynicism and furious fatality. The re-United States were to enter a war on the world stage; no longer confined to a relatively-local arena, the advent of World War I allowed for a newer generation of young men to prove their relative worth for the health of the nation. The U.S. had also been involved in the Spanish-American War of 1898, yet the sheer scale of World War I allows Faulkner to write an extended depiction of the realities of warfare – and a war which, this time, he had lived through himself. Faulkner witnesses this change in climate following World War I,

both in his own youth and in Bayard Sartoris III's experience of his watershed war.[27] When studied in triplicate, *The Unvanquished*, *Sartoris* and *Flags in the Dust* offer Faulkner's most clear viewpoint of the Civil War, the effects of later warfare, and the enduring effects of the myth of the Lost Cause in Yoknapatawpha.

2.10 "The First Seconds of Fall Always Seem Like Soar"

Echoing "Mississippi", *The Unvanquished* is Faulkner's imagined childhood of Bayard Sartoris and Ringo, joined at the hip in their idolisation of John Sartoris, and their experience of Yankee soldiers in their own Mississippi backyard. The contextually-important marker of racial difference is ignored by the children, as they do not yet understand the weight of the Civil War's potential outcomes. Yet both boys understand the importance of the battles happening close by, with invincible, besieged Vicksburg in Mississippi's southwest falling to Yankee threat, metonymic of the Confederacy as a whole in its totemic, mythic ideal, after Corinth in the north has fallen too. The might of the Confederacy is teetering, and "the destiny of the land, the nation, the South, the state, the county, was already whirling into the plunge of its precipice, not that the state and the South knew it, *because the first seconds of fall always seem like soar.*" (*Requiem* 193; emphasis mine)

War is creeping closer and closer to two boys playing in Yoknapatawpha County, Mississippi: as Philip Weinstein describes, "for a year and a half it remained a 'distant' war, but the battle of Corinth (October 1862) signaled change. Grant and Sherman, driving South after Shiloh, were bent on capturing Vicksburg." (11) Travelling from Shiloh in Tennessee to Vicksburg's point on the Mississippi River bordering Louisiana, Bayard and Ringo have been passed by the Union forces – indeed, they will soon have to confront

[27] Later, Faulkner would return to World War I in *A Fable* (1950), set in the arena of wartime France, not Yoknapatawpha.

soldiers in the narrative themselves. Setting up his permutations of the Lost Cause, Faulkner depicts the war through children's eyes, as Bayard and Ringo create

> A living map. Although Vicksburg was just a handful of chips from the woodpile and the River a trench scraped into the packed earth with the point of a hoe, it (river, city, and terrain) lived, possessing 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.
> (*Unvanquished* 7)

Mythification is created through the media of the earth itself, in "the moment of smashed progress – the moment of the Lost Cause" itself literally embodied before Ringo and Bayard, brought into mythicised being by "the point of a hoe," "possessed in miniature". (Davenport 105; *Unvanquished* 7) The land of the South has a permanence: it can outweigh the slings and arrows of civic warfare, and will survive long after the last Union soldiers have left in "the loud noises of a moment." (7) The boys play in the same conjunctive Mississippi earth where Vicksburg has been defeated – surrendering after a six-week siege in July 1863, and providing a turning point in the war, to the misfortune of Confederate forces. Here, "the South is less an abiding substance than an unstable, dynamic moment." (Murphet 15) Later, however, Faulkner emphasises the relative connective strength of the dirt: "it was more than Sartoris earth; it was Vicksburg earth too: the yelling was in it, the embattled, the iron-worn, the supremely invincible." (41) The Mississippi soil is therefore "allied with a spatial practice that shapes the environment itself" – the two boys are bonded to the earth, and the shared heritage it contains. (Murphet 117)

In *Requiem for a Nun* (1951), Faulkner addresses the fate of the Mississippi earth once more. The land is "static *in quo*, rumoured, murmured of war only as from a great and incredible dreamy distance, like far summer thunder: until…the once-vast fixed impalpable increaseless and threatless earth [was] now one omnivorous roar of rock." (*Requiem* 194) Once a benign entity, the Mississippi earth has become harbinger for the encroaching

battles of the Civil War: ones held at "a great and incredible dreamy distance," but not for much longer. For those in Jefferson and Yoknapatawpha, the reliability of the earth has been an "increaseless and threatless" entity, now carrying the indomitable message of warfare in mythic media of connectivity – both before the act, and for years afterwards. By creating their "living map," Bayard and Ringo feel intensely connected to the land. (*Unvanquished* 7) Mississippi and its men would become "supremely invincible" in the perpetuation of the myth of the Lost Cause. (41) For the two young boys, the idea of Vicksburg falling to the Union is incomprehensible: as Ringo asks, "Vicksburg *fell*? Do he mean hit fell off in the River? With Ginrul Pemberton in hit too?" (16) The idea of a Confederate defeat is as unlikely as the city falling into the Mississippi River, refracted through the prism of childlike awe and incomprehension. As their childhood progresses, the boys will come to accept more in the face of continued loss, with their South "whirling into the precipice" of defeat. (*Requiem* 193)

2.11 Heroic John Sartoris

Colonel John Sartoris is a character ingrained in the foundations of Jeffersonian legend: he is the first to display the Confederate uniform, appearing clad in the grey cloth that comes to permeate the town's history, and raising Jefferson's first regiment. Sartoris's legacy must be forged together with heritage: for Bayard in *The Unvanquished*, his father's dream is "not something which he possessed but something which he had bequeathed us which we could never forget," inherently tied to Faulkner's perception of the American Dream's heritage which "already owned and possessed us at birth." (*Unvanquished* 174; "Privacy" 63)

Faulkner's *Sartoris* examines the legacy and effect of warfare upon several generations, emphasised by the youth of Bayard Sartoris III, and the heroic augmentation of his great-

grandfather.[28] The myth of the Lost Cause is reinforced by Sartoris's actions, as Yoknapatawpha's home-grown war-hero. Later in 1936, Faulkner will recreate the effects of the Civil War in *Absalom, Absalom!*, and use Thomas Sutpen as an anti-hero. For now, however, Sartoris is a manifestation and local accumulation of the heroes of the Confederacy. In *Requiem for a Nun* – significant for its framing narrative explaining previously-unknown parts of Jefferson's history – Sartoris is representative of

> A soar, an apex, the South's own apotheosis of its destiny and its pride, Mississippi and Yoknapatawpha County not last in this, Mississippi among the first of the eleven to ratify secession, the regiment of infantry which John Sartoris raised and organized with Jefferson for its headquarters.
> (193)

Sartoris has become a legend, yet the fate of Jefferson, and of Mississippi, is teetering on Faulkner's precipice. Ingrained within the "South's own apotheosis," Sartoris becomes inherently representative of the "destiny" of the South itself, and the legendary promise in store for those who believe in the myth of the Lost Cause. Ward Miner contends that "it is true in Faulkner occasionally that the Civil War nostalgia is so real and so strong as to make that war seem the most unreal of all wars." (107) The world of the Civil War South has become "unreal," with John Sartoris as its aleatory, mythicised figurehead. Yet Sartoris is murdered at the end of *The Unvanquished*: the soar turns into a fall, and the promise of the Confederacy transforms into the myth of the Lost Cause.

2.12 *The Unvanquished*'s Confederate Dream

In *The Unvanquished*, Faulkner mediates between boyhood veneration of the heroes of the Confederacy, and a subliminal exposition of the faults and fissures within a conception

[28] For clarity, Young Bayard's father, John Sartoris II, is elided from Faulkner's narrative. Colonel John Sartoris is the father of Old Bayard, who was a child in *The Unvanquished*. Now in *Sartoris*, Young Bayard is the third of his name, twin to John Sartoris III.

of the Confederate dream itself. John Sartoris's faults are uncovered, and Bayard's faith in the Confederate forces falters for a second.

Whilst Bayard and Ringo are witnessing the war "as from a great and incredible dreamy distance," Sartoris has been leading his men like an epic hero, a more-modern Homeric Odysseus or Virgilian Aeneas. (*Requiem* 194) Meeting his father during the war's presence in Mississippi, Bayard notices

> That odour in his clothes and beard and flesh too which I believed was the smell of powder and glory, the elected victorious but know better now: know now to have only been the will to endure, a sardonic and even humorous declining of self-delusion.
> (*Unvanquished* 11)

The hero of Bayard's childhood has been diminished, and boys like Bayard "know better now" that their inheritance is "self-delusion." As the South was to discover during Reconstruction, the "will to endure" assisted belief in the myth of the Lost Cause, as a form of public "self-delusion" allowing for transference of blame and guilt. Faulkner depicts the Civil War through the eyes of those who did not fight on the battlefield – Jefferson is the stage for the returning soldiers, encompassing prolepsis in Bayard's statement that "this was to be the last time we would see any uniforms at all except as the walking symbols of defeated men's pride and indomitable unregret, but we didn't know that now." (98) The myth of the Lost Cause was a form of social acceptance – ironically manifested in the South's *lack* of acceptance – of "indomitable unregret." Therefore, the dominance of the myth of the Lost Cause lasted far longer than the Confederacy itself.

Bayard, face to face with a Yankee soldier, claims that "I remember thinking 'He looks just like a man.'" (21) The boys also come across an ordinary group of Confederate soldiers on their way out of town; a group conspicuously also "just like" men, and a rag-tag bunch of the former heroes of the war effort. Through Bayard's childlike gaze, "their uniforms were not grey any more now; they were almost the colour of dead leaves." (35) The heroes of the

Confederate forces are equivalent to "dead leaves," in their deadened promise of heroism. These men, "even though they had surrendered and said they were whipped, were still soldiers." (130) His father Sartoris, however, could never be so quotidian.

Faulkner's representation of the war years in *The Unvanquished* leads to a recognition of the liminal state of Reconstruction, and the paradoxical uncertainty of defeat. Bayard recalls that "they were strange times then. For four years we had lived for just one thing, even the women and children who could not fight: to get Yankee troops out of the country; we thought that when that happened, it would be all over." (137)

However, "now the land and the time too are changing." (159) The venerable South conformed to the will of Yankee governance, and dreams of independence vanished under the yoke of economic failure and oppression. Concurrently, there was a logical rise in the myth of the Lost Cause, as Southerners clung to the narrative of triumph in defeat. Loewen and Sebesta note wryly that "Confederate conduct during the Civil War became more stainless as time went by," when Southern nostalgia and sentimentalism were on the rise. (210) The days of the Old South were looked back upon as idyllic and idealised, as the moral questions of slavery and states' rights were ignored.

2.13 "A Savage Nostalgia": The Renewed Lost Cause

Faulkner conveys the endurance of the Lost Cause in the Southern mindset during the twentieth century through the generations of the Sartoris family, and "a state of savage nostalgia" permeating the narrative. (*Sartoris* 27) Colonel John Sartoris decorates himself with honours and Civil War glory as a small-town revolutionary, while *Sartoris*'s Young Bayard Sartoris struggles to accept the wartime death of his twin, John, and searches for an equally-fatal apex of hedonism.

Sartoris, Faulkner's third novel, is set later in the Sartoris storyline than *The Unvanquished*, though it was published first.[29] Faulkner bypasses a generation, and his focus becomes Young Bayard Sartoris; doomed airman, surviving twin. *Sartoris* depicts the life of Young Bayard, after he returns from the war and marries Narcissa Benbow before chasing death, killing Old Bayard in doing so. Narcissa gives birth to the next generation of Sartorises on the day of Young Bayard's death – she reneges against such loaded heritage by naming her son Benbow Sartoris, under the stern eye of the aged matriarch Miss Virginia 'Jenny' Du Pre, sister to Colonel John. *Flags in the Dust* was published forty-four years after *Sartoris*, posthumously restored to Faulkner's original vision.

Sartoris and *The Unvanquished* form a dual perspective upon the lives of the Sartoris family. The legendary figure of John Sartoris creates Faulkner's heroic Confederate idol. For the youngest Bayard Sartoris, however, World War I has come and gone, taking his twin brother, and leaving him with a cynical worldview that can only be vanquished through his subsequent, futile death. By situating the action of *Sartoris* in the twentieth century, Faulkner demonstrates a facet of the now-dual heritage young men would inherit: that of the Civil War, and World War I.

Sartoris presents the futility of warfare, as Faulkner imagines a viewpoint of the gallant Confederacy. Young soldiers, under the direction of 'Jeb' Stuart, "sat in the poignance of spring and youth's immemorial sadness, forgetting travail and glory, remembering instead other Virginian evenings." (*Flags* 12-13) [30] The human effects of the war are clear; "the name 'Stuart' speeding from picket to picket had peopled the blossoming peaceful woods with gray phantoms." (14) The nascent stirrings of *Absalom, Absalom!*'s "bright gallant deluded blood and flesh dressed in a martial glitter" are evident herein, as Faulkner exposes

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[29] Nine years separate these works, from 1929 to 1938. Faulkner's sprawling authorial vision is such that *The Unvanquished* cannot be reliably delineated as 'prequel' to *Sartoris*.
[30] Faulkner refers to Stuart as 'Jeb', not the styling of J.E.B.

the frail humanity underneath heroism. (*AA!* 122) Belief in the myth of the Lost Cause worked to venerate these "gray phantoms" who had given their lives for the South. Faulkner elevates the areas of battlefields whose names became metonymies for those who had fallen, to later become signs scratched by a stick in the Mississippi dirt in the opening scenes of *The Unvanquished.* Faulkner's non-fiction also demonstrates the weight of history and the myths of the Civil War upon later generations, venerating

> Our grandfathers who fought at First and Second Manassas and Sharpsburg and Shiloh and Franklin and Chickamauga and Chancellorsville and the Wilderness; let alone those who survived that and had the additional and even greater courage and endurance to resist and survive Reconstruction, and so preserved to us something of our present heritage.
> ("On Fear" 101)

These battles took place from 1861-64 across the South. Echoing the linguistic prevarication of 'the Civil War,' as I have discussed, Faulkner uses specifically-Confederate or Southern names for some of these battles: "Manassas" for Bull Run, and "Sharpsburg" for Antietam. The shadow of the Civil War permeated the South, as faith in the Confederacy endured. Young boys absorbed the tales of the days of the Old South, which were before their time but endured as their "present heritage." ("On Fear" 101)

In *Flags in the Dust*, Faulkner shows empathy in his depiction of Will 'Old Man' Falls, who loses himself in reminiscence to a memory "quietly retrospective, reliving in the company of men now dust with the dust for which they had, unwittingly perhaps, fought, those gallant, pinch-bellied days into which few who now trod that earth could enter with him." (*Flags* 232) Will Falls represents another facet of the Old South, one which has been lost into the "dust" of recollection, and the death of the Confederacy and its soldiers, as well as "the unlaid ghost of old disputes." (Buck 24) For Falls, "his voice trailed away among ancient phantoms of the soul's and body's tribulations, into those regions of glamorous and useless strivings where such ghosts abide." (*Flags* 229) Falls preserves the memory of Colonel John in his repeated tales of adventure, reflecting him to the point where "for a moment old

Bayard saw, as through a cloudy glass, that arrogant and familiar shape" of his father in Falls's body, "to immolate and preserve in the vacuum of his own abnegated self." (*Sartoris* 194) Falls is a home-grown protector of the Lost Cause, focused on the glory of one man, Sartoris. Though Sartoris cannot enter the action like in *The Unvanquished*, due to his death, his ghostly legacy is an "arrogant shade which dominated the whole house and the life that went on there," relentlessly preserving his myth for his son and great-grandson as well as Falls. (103)

In the passage of time, the reasons for the war have become unclear, as Bayard and Falls discuss:

> "Will," he said, "what the devil were you folks fighting about, anyhow?"
> "Bayard," Old Man Falls answered, "be damned ef I ever did know."
> (187)

Demonstrated by Sartoris's ghost, who permeates the text's opening pages as he haunts Jefferson's Bank, the hope and promise of the Confederacy has become no more than the signification of a plot in the cemetery wherein "John Sartoris slept among martial cherubim and the useless vain-glory of whatever God he did not scorn to recognise." (*Flags* 41)

The eventual death of Old Bayard is a similarly poignant reminder of the fate of young men like Faulkner himself, caught between a number of wars. Miss Jenny observes that

> Old Bayard's headstone was simple too, having been born as he had, too late for one war and too soon for the next, and she thought what a joke They had played on him: forbidding him opportunities for swashbuckling and then denying him the privilege of being buried by men *who would have invented vainglory for him.*
> (398; emphasis mine)

Old Bayard had "somehow flouted them all, had committed lese majesty toward his ancestors and the lusty glamour of the family doom." (*Sartoris* 283) As a fictional parallel to the rising myth of the Lost Cause, Miss Jenny identifies "the privilege" of the South's continued belief in its heroes: those who "have invented vainglory" as a way to cope with

their defeat, and the ignominy of the Reconstruction period for white Southerners who had lost everything they had known. (*Flags* 398) Michael LeMahieu argues that by "making use of the revisionary nostalgia of literary genres such as pastoral elegy and the chivalric romance, Confederate memory was asserted as fact." (15) The mythic invention of romantic "vainglory" parallels the invention of the Lost Cause narrative as a whole; in that the Confederacy was ironically, posthumously, decorated with honours after its defeat.

Contrasting with the echoes of the Civil War in the text, *Sartoris* also addresses World War I.[31] John Sartoris has died in an aeroplane accident whilst fighting German forces – a death more sensible than his brother's accident testing an unqualified aircraft in Dayton, OH. The Sartoris legacy's expectations are too forceful to endure; Bayard's only escape is in death. Young Bayard parallels the talk of Will Falls and Old Bayard, reminiscing about his war and speaking "not of combat, but rather of a life peopled by young men like fallen angels, and of a meteoric violence like that of fallen angels, beyond heaven or hell and partaking of both: doomed immortality and immortal doom." (*Sartoris* 113) The myth of the Lost Cause was predicated on the "doomed immortality" of a generation of young men, extending to World War I. Now Bayard has entered these ranks, trying to lose himself but trapped within the memory of his dying twin. Horace Benbow, the benign glass-blowing poet, contrasts in his wartime experience. Horace views the Sartorises as a "funny family. Always going to wars, and always getting killed." (143) Instead, Horace considers, "'perhaps this is the reason for wars," in seeing "the meaning of peace." (*Flags* 163)

Sartoris assesses the value of Lost Cause mythology, depicting "a glamorous fatality, like silver pennons downrushing at sunset, or a dying fall of horns along the road to Roncevaux." (*Sartoris* 303) [32] Here, the myth coincides with "the ghosts of glamorous and

[31] My discussion of Faulkner's World War I works continues with particular focus on *Soldiers' Pay*, see 6.13.
[32] Faulkner refers to the actions of legendary figure Roland in medieval mythology, and the battle of Roncevaux Pass.

old disastrous things." (302) *Sartoris* presents a duality in warfare and memorial – the narrative looks back in the Sartoris lineage via the spectre of John Sartoris's heroic shadow, whilst Young Bayard apotheosises his twin.

2.14 Mythologised Commemoration

Belief in Lost Cause mythology led to an influx of statues and memorials being erected in small Southern towns: these were facsimiles of the common foot-soldier, not of the war's more prominent figureheads.[33] The Lost Cause became ingrained in the Southern landscape, venerating common soldiers under the new narrative of triumph in defeat. The localisation of these memorials emphasised the human loss of the Civil War: an aspect Faulkner echoes in Yoknapatawpha's memorialisation of its own war-dead. In Jefferson, two effigies represent the town's belief in their men. In the main town square a statue of a Confederate soldier stands by the courthouse, as was tradition throughout the South. Elsewhere, a statue honours John Sartoris alone.

In *Requiem*, Faulkner extends his vision of Jefferson's origins, and its collective memory of the town monument's dedication in

> Illusion of motion, facing irreconcilably backward toward the old lost battles, the old aborted cause, the old four ruined years whose very physical scars ten and twenty and twenty-five changes of season had annealed back into the earth; twenty-five and then thirty-five years; not only a century and an age, but a way of thinking died; the town itself wrote the epilogue and epitaph: 1900, on Confederate Decoration Day, Mrs Virginia Depre, Colonel Sartoris's sister, twitched a lanyard…leaving the marble effigy – the stone infantryman on his stone pedestal.
> (*Requiem* 201)

Echoing the importance of the Southern earth in the opening of *The Unvanquished*, Faulkner envisions the healing of the "physical scars" that had eventually "annealed back into the earth," as the town closes its ranks against outsiders and engages in a ceremony for its own

[33] In the reality of the 2020s, these monuments are being removed across the South, now present in their absence across locations from New Orleans to Richmond, VA.

civic gratification: a smaller representation of the overarching values of the Lost Cause. Blight observes that,

> As Southerners began to unveil their local soldiers' monuments, and as their victory over Reconstruction became part of their narrative of Confederate heritage, Lost Cause orators moved from mournful to more triumphant tones.
> (*Race* 265)

In 1900, Jefferson believed in the pomp and ceremony of honouring the Confederacy. The dedication of the statue is marred with inefficiency, however, as

> Apparently neither the U.D.C. ladies who instigated and bought the monument, nor the architect who designed it nor the masons who erected it, had noticed that the marble eyes under the shading marble palm stared not toward the north and the enemy, but toward the south, toward (if anything) his own rear.
> (*Requiem* 202)

Faulkner is mocking the perception that the Everyman soldier conventionally looks towards the *North*, not the South.[34] Faulkner's depiction of the stone soldier was

> Looking perhaps, the wits said (could say now, with the old war thirty-five years past and you could even joke about it – except the women, the ladies, the unsurrendered, the irreconcilable, who even after another thirty-five years would still get up and stalk out of picture houses showing *Gone with the Wind*), for reinforcements.
> (202)

When dedicating Jefferson's monument "not only a century and an age, but a way of thinking died." (201) John Sartoris, however, still represents an older, mythologised time. In the quieter area of the town cemetery, a statue of Sartoris quietly presides over his family plot, "in pompous effigy" according to the younger Bayard, representing changing generational attitudes towards the soldiers of a long-forgotten war in the minds of the young. (*Flags* 117) Sartoris's ghost may suffuse the parlour of the Jefferson bank for Old

[34] Statues' facing directions vary. In Oxford, MS, the courthouse soldier statue faces South. In Jackson, MS, a similar soldier statue faces West. In Anderson, SC, the city's soldier statue faces East, overlooking the courthouse.

Bayard and Will Falls – "far more palpable than the two old men" – but his statue fails to have the same effect on the scornful minds of the living. (*Sartoris* 19)

In Faulkner's fictionalised actuality, the legacy of the first Jefferson regiment, led by Sartoris, are now "old men in the grey and braided coats" who "tottered into the sunlight and fired shotguns at the bland sky and raised their cracked quavering voices" in a muted demonstration of their former glory. (*Requiem* 201) Faulkner contrasts commemoration of heroes with reality, although fictionalised, much like the myth of the Lost Cause itself.

2.15 "The Old Deathless Lost Cause"

The myth of the Lost Cause was allowed to thrive, perhaps due to Faulkner's observation in *The Unvanquished* that "there is a limit to what a child can accept, assimilate; not to what it can believe because a child can believe anything, given time, but to what it can accept, a limit in time, in the very time which nourishes *the believing of the incredible*." (*Unvanquished* 48; emphasis mine) "The believing of the incredible" encapsulates Lost Cause mythification, and in *Sartoris* and *Flags in the Dust* Faulkner offers a retrospective glimpse of the Civil War's effects upon a later generation, equally scarred by World War I.

John Sartoris's ghost is still somehow larger than life: he feels so close to Old Bayard that "it seemed to him that he could hear his father's breathing." (*Flags* 3) Yet *Flags* and *Sartoris* are set in the twentieth century, and the old battles of the Civil War have been partially-eclipsed by World War I, particularly for the brash younger generation. For Old Bayard, however, the might of his father – demonstrated throughout *The Unvanquished* – has been diminished to the contents of the Sartoris family chest. The great Colonel is reducible to a set of belongings consisting metonymically of "a frogged and braided coat of Confederate gray and a gown of sprigged muslin scented faintly of lavender and evocative of old formal minuets and drifting honeysuckle among steady candle flames." (*Unvanquished* 89) Faulkner's evocation of the Old South is inherent in the relic of the grey uniform, lying

effectively dormant since the fall of the Confederacy in 1865, and only brought out afterwards for the more muted celebration of "Confederate Decoration Day." (*Requiem* 201) Similarly, *Light in August*'s Reverend Hightower admires his grandfather's uniform as a child of eight, lying "in a trunk in the attic. It stayed there for twenty-five years, until one day his son opened the trunk and took it out and spread out the careful folds in which it had been arranged by hands that were now dead." (347) For Hightower, like Old Bayard, the uniform

> Seemed unbelievably huge, as though made for a giant; as though merely from having been worn by one of them, the cloth itself had assumed the properties of those phantoms who loomed heroic and tremendous against a background of thunder and smoke and torn flags.
> (348)

The fall of the Old South has finally made way for the New, and the onset of industrialisation has replaced the whimsical and idealised "drifting honeysuckle among steady candle flames," signifying the Old South through sensual evocation of a bygone era. (*Flags* 89) At the close of *Sartoris*, the spectre of the Civil War appears to have been laid to rest; in Jefferson's dusk "of glamorous and old disastrous things," the shadows of the South's defeat have been vanquished in the name of progress, and the glamour of the Confederacy has been consigned to the faded past. (*Sartoris* 302)

Eventually, Faulkner demonstrates from a mid-century perspective that

> At last even the last old sapless indomitable unvanquished widow or maiden aunt had died and the old deathless Lost Cause had become a faded (though still select) social club or caste, or form of behaviour when you remembered to observe it.
> (*Requiem* 207)

The rote "form of behavior" of the Lost Cause is representative of its cult value. The creation of the myth of the Lost Cause allowed Southerners to create their own *ethos*, when antebellum days were looked back upon as the true glory of the South. Confederate defeat was creatively repositioned to be divine sanction, upheld by the brave men who fought

against overwhelming odds, though the truth of the comparative ratio between the Confederate and Union forces was not as extreme as the South's new history had promoted. In the years following the Civil War, the advent of Reconstruction provided a dual purpose. By harkening back to 'better' times, the myth of the Lost Cause allowed Southerners to re-create the Old South in the New, and continue to control the domination of white supremacy by narrowing the narrative to blame manumitted slaves, some of whom were now occupying positions of power. The pride of the South had been damaged, first in defeat, and then by the rise of racial equality – soon stymied by the introduction of new laws and forms of suppression. As Goldfield posits, "the Old South, recast into the New, served as a behavioral primer, a model for living life in a changed time so that time would not seem changed at all." (25) In the hybridity of the Old–New South, women and Black people remained oppressed, and white men maintained the upper hand. For Janney, "the disbanding of the Army of Northern Virginia had not marked the end of the nation's division. It was only the beginning, foreshadowing much of what would play out in the decades to come." (*Ends* 256-57)

My argument has demonstrated the importance of the Lost Cause in Faulkner's description of inheritance, inescapably bound to the South as "it was not our heritage because we were its." ("Privacy" 63) The myth of the Lost Cause allowed the Civil War generation to mediate their loss, and the collapse of the Confederacy, into a form of shared veneration for their fallen soldiers. Throughout the Southern states, the population could mourn for their losses, and commiserate the defeat and hardship of Reconstruction. This mediated veneration was passed on to Faulkner through a series of indoctrinations and redefinitions of narrative, as the South created a history that endured through the decades and generations following the Civil War.

My following chapter extends my discussion of the Lost Cause, examining the ways in which the myth works within *Absalom, Absalom!*. The Civil War and its aftermath cast a shadow, aiding construction of the *mythos* of Thomas Sutpen, in a heritage tortured by many pasts.

CHAPTER TWO

THE *MYTHOS* OF *ABSALOM, ABSALOM!*

3.1 The *Mythos* of *Absalom, Absalom!*

Absalom, Absalom! synthesises the myth of the Lost Cause with the creation of individual legend. Utilising the term *mythos* inherently informs my reading of this work, as a structure to organise Faulkner's sprawling plot and creative narrative seen through the focalisation of Quentin Compson and Shrevlin 'Shreve' McCannon. My argument for the *mythos* of *Absalom!* encompasses the duality of translating *mythos* into 'myth or legend' in synchrony with 'plot,' in accordance with its usage in Aristotle's *Poetics* and the framework of "tale, narrative, fiction, legend." (Merriam-Webster) In my interpretation, '*mythos*' referring to plot creates a concomitant narrative of 'mythology'.

In terms of *mythos*, Aristotle considers "what the arrangement of the particular actions should be like, since that is the prime and most important element of tragedy." (*1450b23-25*) During one generative night in a Massachusetts dormitory, Quentin and Shreve's multifaceted narrative creation unveils the *mythos* of a Yoknapatawphan legend, Colonel Thomas Sutpen. The ghosts of the Civil War haunt the narrative despite the New England environs, with Shreve's understanding as a non-Southerner contraposed against Quentin Compson of Compson's Mile, Jefferson, Yoknapatawpha, Mississippi. The myth of the Lost Cause, which I have discussed in my preceding chapter, is inescapable, even outside Mississippi's bounds. Quentin and Shreve's engagement in narrative creation blurs the lines between 'fact' and speculation within the apocryphal sphere of Yoknapatawpha's history.[35]

[35] In another aspect of narrative creation, the timeline for *Absalom!* is itself blurred. Quentin, protagonist of Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury*, has committed suicide on "June Second, 1910." (*S&F* 76) However, in *Absalom!*'s "Chronology", Sutpen's Hundred burns in December 1910. (*AA!* 381) Furthermore, Miss Rosa dies

Absalom!'s narrative revelation hinges on speculation; a depiction of the essence of Faulkner's South, and the narrative confines of Yoknapatawpha under the spectre of the Civil War. Faulkner brings together formal and thematic considerations, drawing from the influences of the past whilst also creating a work that can primarily – retroactively – be labelled as modernist. Aligning with Aristotle, "the arrangement of tragedy at its best should be complex, not simple." (*1452b31-32*) *Absalom!*'s structure is inimically recursive, hinging around perceptions of two main myths: the Lost Cause, and racial inferiority.[36] The Sutpen family assess the limits of identity and race, brought out of the narrative shadows by Quentin and Shreve.

My discussion of the *mythos* of *Absalom!* assesses the legend of Sutpen himself, including his dynamic with classical mythologies, and belief in the myth of racial inferiority to the point of rejecting his firstborn son, Charles Bon, for racial indeterminacy. Bon aides in the formation of legend, as does outraged Rosa Coldfield, and the fratricide perpetrated by its "echo but not the shot." (*AA!* 150) Sutpen's single-minded adherence to his "compelling dream" and the role of Fate contribute to the *mythoi* surrounding events Quentin has inherited, by virtue of being a Southerner born too late into history. (166)

Therefore, the myth of the Lost Cause inherently informs *Absalom!* through a narrative thread of "stubborn, back-looking ghosts," whose shades directly emphasise Faulkner's own heritage of the antebellum South, and the corresponding *mythos* subsuming recalcitrant Southerners into the twentieth century. (12) Faulkner displays the war's damage in Jefferson, and the legacy left in its wake. The *mythos* of *Absalom!* is symbiotic with the dawn of the Civil War, and the amplification of ordinary men into wartime heroes, yet with the

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in 1910, "*buried yesterday*" according to Jason Compson III's letter dated "*Jan 10 1910*." (173) In my analysis, I privilege the action of the main text over the "Chronology". I also assess the paradoxical veracity of *Absalom!*'s "Chronology" and "Genealogy" later, see 3.12.

[36] I discuss 'the myth of racial inferiority' comprehensively in my following chapters.

concomitant fall of the Confederacy, and a power vacuum perceived To negate the role of white men in its stead.

3.2 *Mythos* and Faulkner's Narrative Creation

Faulkner's creation of *mythos* works to sustain various mythologies surrounding characters and events. The *mythos* of *Absalom!* is recursive and predetermined, using Quentin as a channel to uncover Civil War histories. *Absalom!* encompasses themes of narrative creation; Biblical influence; the classical meaning of tragedy; and a central character whose epic legend precedes him. Faulkner could not have successfully conveyed narrative depth without the fractured *mythos* of *Absalom!* and its structure encompassing delayed decoding, spiralling narration and a plot which is never entirely revealed.[37] Rosa Coldfield reveals one extent of the plot or *mythos* in the text's opening pages, recursively reiterated in a number of permutations throughout the remainder. Rosa's narrative 'creates' Sutpen by immediate mythification, emerging "as though by outraged recapitulation evoked, quiet inattentive and harmless, out of the biding and dreamy and victorious dust." (*AA!* 8) Faulkner's creation of legend is an enduring authorial theme: in *Absalom!* the act of creation has a precise focus around Sutpen as a Protean creator of legend and *mythos* surrounding his own conception and creation into being – a foundational event which only happened when he was the age of twenty-five.[38]

Faulkner uses a plurality of *mythoi* to complement his structure and his characters, as *Absalom!* cannot withstand the interrogation of one without the corresponding other. Faulkner does not tell a linear narrative: by disrupting expectations he mirrors the abrupted lives of his protagonists. *Absalom!* and its iteration of characters can only exist if the work

[37] Ian Watt proposed 'delayed decoding' as a technique in which the reader is placed "in the position of being an immediate witness of each step in the process whereby the semantic gap between the sensations aroused by the individual by an object or event, and their actual cause or meaning, was slowly closed." (270)
[38] Herein, I am informed by the shape-shifting actions of Proteus in Homer's *Odyssey* Bk. IV: Sutpen can 'change' his shape and design as it suits his audience, or his benefit.

itself is a fragmented structure of delay and repetition, as evidenced by Faulkner's introduction of a number of narrators and perspectives. Each of these narrative layers reinforce *Absalom!*'s *mythos* through speculation, generation, and superimposing narrative. The formal structure of *Absalom!* is a study in modernism, though I apply the concept retroactively to Faulkner's experimentation in the early 1930s. The structure of *Absalom!* is such that the reader is persistently on the back foot, making suppositions and filling in the blank parts of the storyline like the citizens of Jefferson must have done when Sutpen first entered their town in the 1830s. Quentin and Shreve frenetically work together to engender narrative to make sense of the events of late 1909, and further into the past. Therefore, the reader becomes recipient of "an awful lot of information awful quick." (266)

Absalom! opens with a succinct explanation of its plot, which is then amplified and expanded for the duration of the narrative. In one explanation of events, Rosa beckons Quentin Compson to hear her tale of the "demon" Thomas Sutpen, who had been married to her late sister Ellen before attempting to marry Rosa herself. (9) Sutpen's daughter Judith had been betrothed to Charles Bon, a Louisianan friend of her brother Henry. However, Bon is murdered by Henry for reasons unknown, and Henry has fled. Rosa is telling Quentin to preserve her version of the Sutpen legend, though Sutpen has been dead for thirty years. Quentin, already a repository for the heritage of the Lost Cause, relays this tale to Shreve.

Sutpen is already a Yoknapatawphan legend, alluded to throughout Faulkner's works. Sutpen had arrived in Jefferson with a number of slaves and a French architect, before acquiring one hundred acres of land and erecting a mansion, 'Sutpen's Hundred.' The outbreak of civil war could not put an end to Colonel Sutpen, but he is murdered by his man-servant, Wash Jones, after his return. In another explanation of events, young Thomas Sutpen travels through the foothills of Appalachia, unaware of his low socioeconomic status until he is turned away from a mansion door by a Black butler. Sutpen reneges against racial

demarcation, yet paradoxically becomes fanatical about upholding racial barriers to the point of denying his son (but not Clytaemnestra or 'Clytie,' his mixed-race daughter). Charles Bon is rejected, and befriends Henry Sutpen to force their father into recognition, before the Civil War encroaches upon his plans.

As these narrative variations demonstrate, the *mythos* of *Absalom!* defies easy explanation, and is an act of narrative creation akin to Sutpen forming his domain by "creating the Sutpen's Hundred, the *Be Sutpen's Hundred* like the oldentime *Be Light*." (9) Upon examination, there are six primary narrative creators, in addition to secondary voices providing insight elsewhere. For explication, I surmise that these primary voices are Thomas Sutpen, Jason Compson II (Quentin's grandfather), Jason Compson III (Quentin's father), Rosa Coldfield, Quentin Compson and Shreve McCannon. Some of these secondary voices are the unnamed midwife who delivered Milly Jones's daughter fathered by Sutpen, and part of the tale that "came through the Negroes." (79) The impact of these voices varies as the design veers off course, and Quentin and Shreve conjure the majority of *mythos* through memory, exaggeration, and legend. Sometimes Shreve's narrative *mythos* is so procreative that often Quentin can only, impotently, reply "yes." (176, 178, 181) [39]

Absalom!'s narrative impetus is derived from repeated instances of revelation, which do not lose their potency despite repetition. In the fugue state of narrative creation, it becomes unclear which events occurred, and which characters are aware of the developments. Providing a sustained amplification of the differing aspects of narrative creation, we are unaware of the text's oxymoronic verisimilitude. For Faulkner, Jacques Pothier argues, "memory is not a tool to understand the present, an accumulative resource of experience that helps man make sense of the world, but a burden that weighs him down." (189) I argue

[39] The mythification of the Lost Cause was also amplified by Northerners, and was not simply an inward-looking mythification for Southerners. See 2.3.

that the Lost Cause works as collective mythologised memory within the text as "burden" and refrain, creating its *mythos* through complexity of revelation.

3.3 Sutpen's "Compelling Dream" and Fate

Faulkner uses the classical conception of *hubris* – feeling greater than the gods themselves – alongside Fate and Biblical influence throughout *Absalom!* to aid in narrative creation, particularly in the figure of Sutpen.

In a letter dating from around February 1934, Faulkner records the progress of his latest piece:

> The one I am writing now will be called DARK HOUSE or something of that nature. It is the more or less violent breakup of a household or family from 1860 to about 1910. It is not as heavy as it sounds. The story is an anecdote which occurred during and right after the civil war, the climax is another anecdote which happened about 1910 and which explains the story. Roughly, the theme is a man who outraged the land, and the land then turned and destroyed the man's family.
> ("To Harrison Smith" 78-79)

Insidious Gothic influence permeates the text, echoing "DARK HOUSE" and primarily witnessed through Sutpen's creation of legend, with a concomitant horror at his ruthless, stubborn dream.[40] Faulkner's original title appropriately conjures images of the Gothic inspiration behind the edifice of 'Sutpen's Hundred,' and ideas of the so-called "demon" who lives within. (*AA!* 9) [41]

By publication, Faulkner had changed this focus to a Biblical representation of the narrative of King David, and a lineage destroyed by avarice. King David cries for "O my son Absalom! My son, my son Absalom! If only I had died instead of you – O Absalom, my son, my son!" (*Holy Bible: NIV*, 2 Sam. 18.33) No longer content with the vague promise of "DARK

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[40] In *Requiem for a Nun*, Faulkner describes Sutpen's Hundred's influence from "the Paris architect who was creating at Sutpen's Hundred something like a wing of Versailles glimpsed in a Lilliput's Gothic nightmare." (38) "Gothic nightmare" abounds within the text.
[41] Brylowski observes that "the house waits to lay its final role in the cycle of the myth, the final and ultimate catastrophe." (42)

HOUSE," Faulkner drew inspiration from the influence of the Old Testament, as a formation of an early type of legend. Faulkner recalled that his inspiration and the Biblical intimations of King David's lament were "simultaneous. As soon as I thought of the idea of the man who wanted sons and the sons destroyed him, then I thought of the title." (*University* 76) Faulkner was influenced by the pull of the past, in the legends of proto-Christianity found in the Old Testament, as King David is one of the most prevalent figures in the creation of Christianity and legend. For Faulkner,

> To me the New Testament is full of ideas and I don't know much about ideas. The Old Testament is full of people, perfectly ordinary normal heroes and blackguards just like everybody else nowadays…it's full of people, not ideas. It's people all trying to get something for nothing or…to be braver than they are – just ordinary everyday folks, people.
> (167)

To transpose this quotation from Faulkner on to a reading of *Absalom!*, Sutpen may be the hero of his own narrative, yet he remains a "normal hero" and an "ordinary" person, occupied with petty squabbles in his hundred acres of land. It is Quentin's narrative that amplifies Sutpen to mythic proportions, similar to young Bayard Sartoris apotheosising his father in *The Unvanquished.*[42] Sutpen and the South are equally joined in fall – for Cowley, "it was not all in his character, but rather in his fate, that Sutpen became emblematic of the South." ("Introduction" xxi) The *mythos* of legend surrounding Sutpen is intimately tied to *Absalom!*'s plot – man and myth coalesce within the text's structure, and the acts of narrative creation forged by Quentin and Shreve reciprocate "Sutpen's own legend in the country." (*Requiem* 38)

Faulkner has a clear influence from the schools of thought of classical and Biblical *mythoi*, informing my use of *mythos* as a key to understanding. *Absalom!*'s focal point coalesces

[42] Faulkner contrasts Sutpen and Sartoris throughout his works. Both are legendary men, occupied by the mundane. Bayard's cousin Drusilla derides Sutpen because "his dream is just Sutpen. John's is not," but both men *are* killed as a result of their dreams. (*Unvanquished* 153)

around adherence to Greek myth. Applying a mythological framework, Sutpen's actions draw parallels to Aeschylus's tripartite *Oresteia*, and the specific action of *Agamemnon*. Fittingly, Sutpen's own daughter is 'Clytaemnestra,' and also a modern-day foreseeing Cassandra.[43] Perhaps Quentin may be a reimagined prophetic Tiresias, fashioning a form of the future from beyond his own grave. In *Absalom!*, Sutpen's dynastic threat is exerted on Rosa to "find instead of a widowed Agamemnon to her Cassandra an ancient stiff-jointed Pyramus to her eager though untried Thisbe." (*AA!* 177) [44] Echoing classical mythology, Sutpen bestows names upon his children, "naming with his own mouth his own ironic fecundity of dragon's teeth." (62) [45] Burian observes that "the plots of Greek tragedies were drawn largely from a limited repertoire of legends, the great cycles in which the Greeks came to terms with their own past— the stories of 'a few families', as Aristotle says." (178) The *mythos* of *Absalom!* is reinforced by these classical parallels, adding to the immersion into Faulkner's fictionalised history. In turn, the mythologisation of Yoknapatawpha is reinforced by "the stories of 'a few families'": Sutpen, Compson, Sartoris.

Furthermore, Faulkner has created tragedy in the oldest sense. Sutpen is entirely indicative of *hubris*, again in the original classical tone. Faulkner's knowledge of classical myth is clear throughout the composition of *Absalom!*: Faulkner alluded many times to his general classical knowledge, and the permutations of Fate occupying his works. Creating ideas of *mythos* in a more generalised scope, Faulkner thinks "that a man's free will functions against a Greek background of fate, that he has the free will to choose and the courage, the fortitude to die for his choice, is my conception of man, is why I believe that man will endure." (*University* 38) In *Absalom!* specifically, Sutpen's fault is that "the fates took revenge on him. That's what the story was." (35) Summarising the plot, or a facet of the text's *mythos*,

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[43] Some elements of the mythic framework do differ: Clytaemnestra was King Agamemnon's wife, Cassandra his concubine.
[44] For these myths, see Ovid, Bks. III and IV respectively.
[45] In Greek mythology, the *Spartoi* soldiers sprung from sowing dragon's teeth. This myth is told in various forms: see Euripides's *Medea*, or Ovid, Bk. III.

Faulkner's view of Sutpen is that "the Greeks destroyed him, the old Greek concept of tragedy. He wanted a son which symbolized this ideal, and then he got too many sons – his sons destroyed one another and then him." (35)

Most pertinently, Faulkner has recorded a clear idea of his authorial creation of tragedy, taking inspiration from Aristotle:

> Tragedy, as Aristotle saw it, it's…the same conception of tragedy that all writers have: *it's man wishing to be braver than he is, in combat with his heart or with his fellows or with his environment*, and how he fails, that the splendor, the courage of his failure, and the trappings of royalty, of kingship, are simply trappings to make him more splendid so that he was worthy of being selected by the gods, by Olympus, as an opponent, that man couldn't cope with him so it would take a god to do it, to cast him down.
> (51; emphasis mine)

In relation to Sutpen, Faulkner presents a "man wishing to be braver than he is, in combat with his heart or with his fellows or with his environment." Although Sutpen has created his surrounding *mythos*, at the heart of it he remains a mortal man with an exceptional design. This, as the reader witnesses, will be his downfall. Sutpen is consumed by his design, and "*if he was mad, it was only his* compelling dream *which was insane and not his methods*." (*AA!* 166; emphasis mine; italics Faulkner's) The idea of Sutpen's design is a "compelling dream," driving him forward in the pursuit of revenge against his own past.

3.4 "The Demon" and "the Devil": Sutpen Himself

Sutpen's larger-than-life legend acts as a point of coalescence for the *mythos* of *Absalom!*. Unlike Faulkner's other legends, however, Sutpen's is a history of mystery, and *Absalom!* focuses partially upon decoding the differing narratives Sutpen – and Faulkner – present.

Requiem for a Nun reveals that Jefferson

> Even had an instrument available and waiting, like providence almost: a man named Sutpen who had come into the settlement that same spring – a big gaunt friendless passion-worn untalkative man who walked in a fading aura of anonymity and violence.
> (35)

Sutpen appears in the woven *mythos* of *Absalom!* "like providence almost," and according to Faulkner, the impetus of *Absalom!* was therefore to tell a tale in which

> The central character is Sutpen, yes. The story of a man who wanted a son and got too many, got so many that they destroyed him. It's incidentally the story of Quentin Compson's hatred of the bad qualities in the country he loves. But the central character is Sutpen, the story of a man who wanted sons.
> (*University* 71)

If we are to take Faulkner at his word, then the central character is indeed Sutpen. However, the actual *figure* of Sutpen remains elusive throughout the text, testament to its recursive structure. Faulkner's comments reveal that the story is also inherently bound to Quentin, and his understanding of a narrative that ended before he was born. Given the work's fractured structure, one cannot understand Sutpen without also understanding Quentin, and vice versa.

Repeating the crux of *Absalom!*, Faulkner brings Quentin back from the dead to listen to a story he has been doomed to hear before, and to hear again.[46] Listening to Rosa within the mythological trope of oral epic storytelling and repeated narrative,

> Part of it, the first part of it, Quentin already knew. It was a part of his twenty years' heritage of breathing the same air and hearing his father talk about the man Sutpen; a part of the town's – Jefferson's – eighty years' heritage of the same air which the man himself had breathed between this September afternoon in 1909 and that Sunday morning in June in 1833 when he first rode into town *out of no discernible past.*
> (*AA!* 11; emphasis mine)

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[46] According to Faulkner's letters, *The Sound and the Fury* was originally written as 'Twilight,' a title emphasising liminality through connotations with time, and in Quentin's character. See Blotner 40n2, *Selected Letters.*

Ironically, in a work preoccupied with heritage, Sutpen mythically appears "out of no discernible past." Quentin and Sutpen are so intimately linked, and the climate of Faulkner's Yoknapatawpha is so pervasive, that they are capable of breathing the same air. Quentin is used to frame Sutpen; the two are symbiotic, despite never having met. In the quotation above, the two men share the same air, hear the same church bells in Jefferson, and both possess an aleatory quality placing them above the permanence of an earthly presence. Quentin is dead before the novel begins, and Sutpen is murdered before the action of 1909 comes into being.[47] These echoic qualities pervade the legendary *mythos* surrounding Sutpen, and therefore equally surrounding Quentin by association. Dream imagery is also prevalent throughout *Absalom!*; most often used by Quentin as a sign of his equally-liminal status, with reference to his own impending suicide. In the opening pages, Quentin feels that Rosa's narrative is as if "it (the talking, the telling) seemed (to him, to Quentin) to partake of that logic- and reason-flouting quality of a dream." (22) The narrative's aleatory quality has a direct correlation to the manic behaviour – and appeal – of Sutpen's design, and the creation of *mythos*.

Faulkner explains his intentional tone of tragic heroism, stating that "although man is not always matched with his finest hour, I'm convinced that the hour, the need finds the men it requires." (*University* 204) For Sutpen, however, "the tragedy is the man who didn't find his hour, didn't find his chance to be what he could have been and might have been – he's tragic." (205) The *mythos* of *Absalom!*, therefore, is a creation of legend with its mirror in tragedy. Like classical precursors to modern tragedy, Sutpen is a victim of his own *hubris*, in a life beginning in anonymous poverty, and a "compelling dream" of superiority ending in ignominy. (*AA!* 166) Yet within the trajectory of Sutpen's life he had managed to create a legend for himself, and the fruits of a design which could have prospered as easily as it failed

[47] Quentin is demarcated in *Absalom!*'s "Genealogy" as "grandson of Thomas Sutpen's first Yoknapatawpha County friend," further linking him with Sutpen's *mythos*. (384)

– predicated as it was on the tenets of racial purity that were his downfall, yet also a depiction of ingrained societal influence. Sutpen is entirely invincible within the narratorial protective aura of his self-created *mythos*. As Rosa bemoans, even during the bloodiest warfare in history on American soil, Sutpen improbably endures: “he, fiend blackguard and devil, in Virginia fighting, where the chances of the earth’s being rid of him were the best anywhere under the sun, yet Ellen and I both knowing he would return.” (15) Focalised through Rosa’s narration to Quentin, the “ogre-face” of Sutpen comes into relief: he is ephemeral, aleatory, non-existent – later drawing parallels to his son, Charles Bon, and a coffin’s weightless body buried in Sutpen’s Hundred. (62) Shreve takes up Rosa’s narrative mantle – Sutpen is a djinn, “the demon.” (280) Rosa’s distorted perception of Sutpen’s existence is

> Like the mask in Greek tragedy, interchangeable not only from scene to scene, but from actor to actor and behind which the events and occasions took place without chronology or sequence, leaving her actually incapable of saying how many separate times she had seen him.
> (62)

Sutpen is untouchable, and hyperbolic within his awesome legend “*because he was not articulated in this world. He was a walking shadow.*” (171) Sutpen’s “shadow” falls upon Quentin, listening to Rosa and reckoning with his own heritage.

3.5 Ghosts of the Lost Cause

Framing Faulkner’s work through in-text narrative creation, Quentin Compson is indicative of the South’s legacy of the ghosts of the Civil War, and the cause lost before he was even born. Quentin is a ghost himself, brought back to life to construct the *mythos* of Sutpen, and Faulkner’s connection point between the myth of the Lost Cause and the modern-day South. An overt manifestation of the generation succeeding the defeat of the Confederacy, Quentin is unavoidably fated as a result.

In *Absalom!* Quentin is claustrophobically pressured by the weight of the past: he becomes representative of "the deep South dead since 1865 and peopled with garrulous outraged baffled ghosts." (*AA!* 9) If we take it to be true that "the essence of the lost-cause ideology is a forgetting within remembering, an amnesia necessary to have a morally coherent history," then *Absalom!* is the logical extension of the myth of the Lost Cause. (Marche 152) Contained within the narrative is a tale haunted by ghosts: Sutpen, Quentin, and the very spectre of the Civil War itself.

Refusing to exhume ghosts, Rosa's narrative perspective is integral to an understanding of the coalescent strands of *Absalom*!'s constructed *mythos*. Rosa has created her own series of events, torturing herself long after Sutpen's death, as she "has had forty-four years in which to get her story straight." (Richard Godden 31) Rosa's is the first voice to enter the text, indoctrinating Quentin from the outset as she believes that "Northern people have already seen to it that there is little left in the South for a young man." (*AA!* 9) Immediately, the reader is aware of Rosa harkening back to the Civil War as the seminal schism between North and South, in the year 1909 when new generations have come to the fore. Rosa's contest may appear to lie with the destruction of the South under Northern aggression, but the real target of *her* aggression is Sutpen; haunting her from beyond the grave he went down to four decades previously in 1869.

Rosa's narrative is entirely recursion and repetition, "aware that the very words with which she tells her story come to her second and third hand, having been occupied by others." (Godden 33) Rosa is also able to tell the entirety of *Absalom!*'s *mythos* succinctly,

> *Because she wants it told*, he [Quentin] thought, *so that people whom she will never see and whose names she will never hear and who have never heard her name nor seen her face will read it and know at last why God let us lose the War: that only through the blood of our men and the tears of our women could He stay this demon and efface his name and lineage from the earth.*
> (*AA!* 11)

Echoing the text's focus upon legacy, it is important to note Quentin's initial emphasis on Sutpen's "name and lineage" as a demarcation of his relative reaches of power, with the power of the Sutpen name acting as a metonymy for the "demon" himself.

Considering the effects of Faulkner's recursive structure, how different the narrative might have been if we had heard a chronological version, or Bon's voice first, or Sutpen's. Rosa's narrative, however, is full of inconsistencies, and we are attuned to the limitations of how much she is aware. Rosa mirrors Quentin, in that she is equally as doomed to repeat the past, and to live within it. Rosa is guilty of creating her own *mythos*, even to the extent that she labels Sutpen with linguistic appellations of legend: Sutpen becomes "the ogre-shape" with "two half-ogre children" and a house "the stronghold of an ogre or a djinn." (13, 23) Rosa's narrative also feeds into the ancient narratives of a tragic predestination echoing *Absalom!*'s overarching *mythos*, and an exertion upon the Sutpen-Coldfield families "as though there were a fatality and curse on our family." (21) Rosa speculates that, in this "curse,"

> God Himself were seeing to it that it was performed and discharged to the last drop and dreg. Yes, fatality and curse on the South and on our family as though because some ancestor of ours had elected to establish his descent in a land primed for fatality and already cursed with it.
> (21) [48]

Sutpen's Hundred's "cursed" earth is "primed for fatality" from the outset, and can only be cleansed by fire, as will occur in the night of December 1909.

In contrast to Rosa, Faulkner viewed Quentin as an essential protagonist for *Absalom!*, who

> Tells it, or ties it together; he is the protagonist so that it is not complete apocrypha. I use him because it is just before he is about to commit suicide because of his sister, and I use his bitterness which he has projected on the South in the form of hatred of it and its people to get more out of the story itself than a historical novel would be. ("To Harrison Smith" 79)

[48] Rosa's diatribe also echoes the earth of Mississippi under discussion in Chapter One, see 2.10.

Quentin's role is, therefore, to avoid the formation of "complete apocrypha." He can ground the legend of Sutpen, and provide the "bitterness which he has projected on the South in the form of hatred of it." Tellingly, of course, Quentin responds to Shreve's final question ("Why do you hate the South?") at the end the narrative with his own seminal cry, like King David in II Samuel:

> "I dont hate it," Quentin said, quickly, at once, immediately; "I dont hate it," he said. *I dont hate it* he thought, panting in the cold air, the iron New England dark; *I dont. I dont! I dont hate it! I dont hate it!*
> (*AA!* 378)

Quentin's psychological stress is readily apparent, forced by the legacy of his Compson name to be "the Quentin Compson who was still too young to deserve yet to be a ghost, but nevertheless having to be one for all that, since he was born and bred in the deep South." (9) Quentin is shared between the history of the South: he is a product of history, and the post-war generation who have had to bear the burden of their most recent ancestors, paralleling young Faulkner himself. Quentin is a repository for ghosts of the past: "his childhood was full of them; his very body was an empty hall echoing with sonorous defeated names; he was not a being, an entity, he was a commonwealth." (12) Quentin's very being becomes representative of the South's long-lasting Confederate history:

> He was a barracks filled with stubborn, back-looking ghosts still recovering, even forty-three years afterward, from the fever which had cured the disease, waking from the fever without even knowing that it had been the fever itself which they had fought against and not the sickness.
> (12)

The South was forged anew by the defeat of the Confederacy in the Civil War, and its corresponding legacy. In turn, the entirety of *Absalom!* is tainted by the history of the War, and – therefore – also by the myth of the Lost Cause. As Quentin queries Rosa's motives in the opening pages, it is time to discover "*at last why God let us lose the War*." (11) The action spans the tumultuous years of the Civil War from antebellum Southern society and the

practice of slavery; to civil unrest and secession; the period of warfare on Yoknapatawpha's doorstep; and the growing tragedy of the post-war years and the defeated South. Through the figure of Sutpen, the bluster and promise of the Confederacy turns into the reality of a destitute shop-owner, and Quentin is the doomed inheritor of the Lost Cause's ghosts.

The myth of the Lost Cause is referenced throughout *Absalom!* as a justification for certain behaviours and attitudes, pervading the text as it encroached on Southern history. The promise of the Confederacy is mostly revered, yet Faulkner does depict Henry and Bon's suffering whilst in the uniform of Confederate grey.[49] Charles Bon's love-letter to Judith becomes metonymic for the status of the Confederacy: "within this sheet of paper you now hold the best of the old South which is dead." (131-32) The letter is written on a "sheet of notepaper with, as you can see, the best of French watermarks dated seventy years ago, salvaged (stolen if you will)…and written upon in the best of stove polish manufactured not twelve months ago in a New England factory." (129) For James Watson, in Bon's letter "the transmission of the letters is a paradigm for the transmission of the narrative." (116) With this epistle, Bon fuses together North and South, becoming representative of the broken compact between the 'united' states. Mostly a shadow like his father, Bon's letter makes him more present in the text, layered within the act of writing itself.

Another of Faulkner's Biblical references clarifies the impact of the Civil War on the South: Quentin is aware – with the benefit of hindsight – that the South had been "drifting closer and closer to a doomed and fatal war," in which there would be a period of reckoning

> On that day when the South would realize that it was now paying the price for having erected its economic edifice not on the rock of stern morality but on the shifting sands of opportunism and moral brigandage.
> (*AA!* 260)

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[49] There are some discrepancies with Faulkner's usage of 'grey' and 'gray,' using "the Grays in the main text, the Greys in the genealogy." (Jay Watson, "Endpapers" 120)

The moral rectitude of the South building their commerce on the human labour of slaves is akin to the Biblical assertion that the foundations of a strong house cannot be built on shifting sand. (Mat. 7.24-27) The delineation of the Lost Cause operates within the framework of religion, as an explanation for the divine treatment of the fallen Confederacy, or as a condemnation of the South's abandonment by God. Echoes of contextual validation for belief in the Lost Cause are prevalent throughout. Bon recognises that the Confederate soldiers are left without "*God; evidently we have done without Him for four years, only He just didn't think to notify us.*" (*AA!* 349) As Rosa asks, however, "is it any wonder that Heaven saw fit to let us lose?" (20) Bon's half-brother Henry Sutpen is prescient, as "maybe he knew that the South would be whipped and then there wouldn't be anything left that mattered that much," anything "worth protesting against or suffering for or dying for or even living for," anticipating his disappearance after killing Bon. (270) The myth of the Lost Cause worked to uphold the sense of "dying for" a certain purpose, yet Faulkner's fictional perspectives accentuate futility.

Faulkner addresses the idea of recursive points, in his narrative of such varying pasts. For Faulkner's overarching narrator in *Absalom!*, ideas of the past and history are incomprehensible, and ancestors possess a history which they

> Dont explain and we are not supposed to know. We have a few old mouth-to-mouth tales; we exhume from old trunks and boxes and drawers letters without salutation or signature, in which men and women who once lived and breathed are now merely initials or nicknames out of some now incomprehensible affection which sound to us like Sanskrit or Choctaw; we see dimly people, the people in whose living blood and seed we ourselves lay dormant and waiting, *in this shadowy attenuation of time possessing now heroic proportions*, performing their acts of simple passion and simple violence, impervious to time and inexplicable.
> (100-01; emphasis mine)

Quentin and Shreve's creation of narrative epitomises Faulkner's "shadowy attenuation of time possessing now heroic proportions." Geographically separated from the South, Quentin is alienated from his environment as a true repository of specifically-Southern history,

transplanted to the North above the Mason-Dixon line. Shreve, a Canadian, is equally unaware of his American environs. Although Quentin has taken the mantle of storytelling for Faulkner, encompassing prescient knowledge and tragedy in his short life before his suicide and "older at twenty than a lot of people who have died," it is Shreve who endures as a lasting symbol of the reception of knowledge. (377) For Faulkner, comparing the two storytellers, "probably his friend McCannon had a much truer picture of Sutpen from what Quentin told him than Quentin himself did." (*University* 274) Quentin is inherently too close to his subject, but Shreve is protected by virtue of a completely different heritage, "born half a continent apart," but linked to Quentin by virtue of the Mississippi River's "Continental Trough." (*AA!* 258) It is Shreve who provides Quentin's impetus, exhorting to "*tell about the South. What's it like there. What do they do there. Why do they live there. Why do they live at all.*" (174) The heritage of the South has been amplified, much like the romanticisation of frontier exploration, or the promise of the Wild West. Shreve's "*they*" are Quentin's family, tied to the region dating from the flight of their Compson ancestor, Quentin MacLachan Compson.[50] Mocking the South's predication on myth and interwoven lineage, Shreve also queries Rosa's relation to Quentin, as she is "actually one Southern Bayard or Guinevere who was no kin to you?" (174)

Shreve is the pragmatic foil to Quentin's aleatory inconsistencies. J. Miller extrapolates that Shreve "is the reader's representative. He is the outsider who wants to understand the South," and "his survival is evidence that it is possible to know about Southern ideology and not be destroyed by it." (207) For Faulkner,

[50] As recorded in Faulkner's "Appendix: The Compsons, 1699-1945." Romanticising Scottish history, Quentin MacLachan Compson "fled to Carolina from Culloden Moor with a claymore and the tartan he wore." (705) The ancestor who finally reaches Mississippi specifically is Jason Lycurgus Compson.

> Shreve was the commentator that held the thing to something of reality. If Quentin had been alone to tell it, it would have become completely unreal. It had to have a solvent to keep it real, to keep it believable, creditable, otherwise it would have vanished into smoke and fury.
> (*University* 75)

The two young men, therefore, recreate a version of Quentin's South that has never existed – much like the myth of the Lost Cause, though with the grounding force of Shreve to keep it from becoming "completely unreal." Shreve struggles, however, to grasp the history of the South, as it is "something my people haven't got." (*AA!* 361) Shreve may wryly query the Southerner's heritage of nothing "but a descendant of a long line of colonels killed in Pickett's charge at Manassas," but, as Quentin replies, Pickett's Charge was actually at Gettysburg, demonstrating that "you cant understand it. You would have to be born there." (361) Shreve may be *au fait* with the formation of West Virginia, but he dismisses the interchangeable action of battles that Quentin, "a barracks filled with stubborn, back-looking ghosts still recovering," can never be permitted to forget. (12)

By the close of the text, the joint act of creation has resulted in an uncertainty over the roles of speaker and listener; both men occupy the space of both, and also neither. In the long New England night,

> It was Shreve speaking, though save for the slight difference which the intervening latitudes had inculcated in them (differences not in tone or pitch but of turns of phrase and usage of words), it might have been either of them and was in a sense both: both thinking as one, the voice which happened to be speaking the thought only the thinking become audible, vocal; *the two of them creating between them, out of the rag-tag and bob-ends of old tales and talking, people who perhaps never existed at all anywhere*, who, shadows, were shadows not of flesh and blood which had lived and died but shadows in turn of what were (to one of them at least, to Shreve) shades too, quiet as the visible murmur of their vaporizing breath.
> (303; emphasis mine)

Quentin and Shreve are proponents of the epic-style of storytelling, and the acts of creation and relation that have characterised the passing on of narratives for millennia. Through the deliberate creation of voices, and the motivations of characters which can never be proven,

Quentin and Shreve are Faulknerian manifestations of bardic figures, adding to the *mythoi* of Sutpen and *Absalom!* through narrative experimentation. As a result, myth and reality intertwine.

It is notable, however, that the two young men are more concerned with the re-enactment of the similar dynamic between Henry and Bon. Events reach a frenetic fever pitch with the imagined eventual revelation of Bon's lineage and the encounter with Henry in the grounds of Sutpen's Hundred. Through Quentin and Shreve's fantastic reconstruction, they combine with the past, eliding to form "four of them and then just two – Charles-Shreve and Quentin-Henry." (334) In a fugue of Faulknerian delay, abrupting at the close of a typically-frenzied presentation of information in the form of a continual sentence,

> Shreve ceased. That is, for all the two of them, Shreve and Quentin, knew he had stopped, since for all the two of them knew he had never begun, since it did not matter (and possibly neither of them were conscious of the distinction) which one had been doing the talking.
> (333-34) [51]

Shreve becomes a perfect foil for Quentin; he is a *tabula rasa* for Quentin to project his perceptions of his home state, and the mysterious dealings of Yoknapatawpha. Shreve may initially interject, yet Quentin is free to fashion his own versions of events. Wanda Raiford speculates upon "Faulkner's use of incessant talk and bothersome interruption to create a space of ignorance where fantastical events become plausible and the absence of recorded events slips by unquestioned." (104) Later, however, Shreve becomes puppeteer of Quentin's crafted characters and incorporation of fantasy; he inserts his own biases into the narrative, calling into question the basis of facts. Together, Quentin and Shreve form a perspective of the Sutpen saga, notable for its strength of conception, particularly for scenarios otherwise hazy in the text. As Rosa narrates, "*No. If I had been there I could not have seen it this plain.*"

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[51] Quentin and Shreve's frenzied re-creation of information was discussing Bon's wish for recognition from his father, in which he is also turned from the door. See *AA!* 332-33.

(*AA!* 190) Sutpen's *mythos* is amplified by Quentin and Shreve, with input from Quentin's father and grandfather, who help to develop his legend.

3.6 Sutpen's *Mythos*

Sutpen's individual *mythos* is an exercise in mystification, clouding the judgement of those whose opinions will be of most use to him. His scheme works, as "it was General Compson, who seemed to have known him well enough to offer to lend him seed cotton for his start, who knew any better, to whom Sutpen ever told anything about his past," and he gains Ellen as a reputable wife from Goodhue Coldfield after building Sutpen's Hundred. (*AA!* 41) Sutpen has created a shroud of *mythos* around himself, gaining respectability begrudgingly from Jefferson. Strangers are barely tolerated in Yoknapatawpha, yet Sutpen gains notoriety: in Biblical terms, he has entered like a whirlwind, but must reap what he has sown in the initial anger and bafflement of the townspeople. (Hos. 8.7) As Rosa hyperbolically decries, Sutpen emerges out of history as a full-formed legend: oxymoronically "out of quiet thunderclap he would abrupt (man-horse-demon)." (*AA!* 8) Sutpen leaves a mark most tellingly indelible on Rosa, still looking into the past and outraged after all of the other players in the narrative have died.

Almost insidiously, Sutpen is permitted to remain on the acres of his ill-gotten land taken from Chief Ikkemotubbe in a mysterious transaction, paid for by suspicious blood-money. After building the edifice of his domain, Sutpen then lies in waiting for three years – enough a part of Jefferson now to remain practically undisturbed. Echoing a tone of familial legacy Sutpen has created out of nothing, his land is representative of legend and legacy: he "still called it Sutpen's Hundred as if it had been a king's grant in unbroken perpetuity from his great grandfather." (16) Yet Sutpen's family lineage is deliberately *new*, in a town that has a collective dignity stemming from the past of its ancestral claims, and an overweening pride

in lineage.[52] Collecting a hoard of treasure to serve as a quasi-dowry, however, Sutpen becomes a sly trickster, manipulating Coldfield for the hand of his daughter. So far, the rise of Sutpen is presented like the heroic rags-to-riches tales of legend, or a form of "the American Dream of success." (Davenport 99) [53]

The effects of Sutpen's aura of improbability lends him a certain notoriety amongst those in Jefferson. In a contrast to the established heritages of families such as the Compsons and Sartorises, Sutpen is a blank slate – and initially an outsider to be shunned and feared. In an echo of Graeco-Roman mythological origins, and Greek dramatic convention, Sutpen's first appearance in Jefferson in June 1833 is marked by an echoing Chorus: "the stranger's name went back and forth among the places of business and of idleness and among the residences in steady strophe and antistrophe: *Sutpen. Sutpen. Sutpen. Sutpen.*" (32) [54] The townspeople of Jefferson, therefore, appear throughout the text as a Chorus to pass comment upon Sutpen's actions, and record judgement upon them according to the *mores* of Southern society. Aristotle's *Poetics* outlines that "one should regard the chorus too as one of the actors, and as a part of the whole and taking part in the action." (*1456a25-27*) Sutpen's created narrative is passed on, reinforcing the *mythos* of oral legend and amplifying the classical role of the Chorus to provide external perspective on the plot itself.

Sutpen's vicious notoriety is known throughout Jefferson as a result of his tenacious design: "It was in his face; that was where his power lay, your grandfather said: that anyone could look at him and say, *Given the occasion and the need, this man can and will do anything.*" (*AA!* 46) The diminutive figure of the French architect has to curb Sutpen's magnificent dreams: he "vanquished Sutpen's fierce and overweening vanity or desire for magnificence or for

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[52] Faulkner's creation of Jefferson's lineage is most-extensively displayed in *Requiem*'s "The Courthouse (A Name for the City)", 7-44.
[53] This aspect of Sutpen's success also echoes my discussion of Faulkner's American Dream in terms of self-betterment specifically, see 1.2.
[54] Strophe and antistrophe were directions for choral movement in Greek drama.

vindication or whatever it was." (38) Couched within the limiting remit of the architect, Sutpen's grandiose motivations are clear: he is building a house as large as his own legend.[55] Sutpen aims to build a house of fantastical proportions, a "dream of grim and castlelike magnificence at which Sutpen obviously aimed, since the place as Sutpen planned it would have been almost as large as Jefferson itself at the time." (38) Sutpen's Hundred becomes symbolic of Sutpen's overweening *hubris.* The *mythos* surrounding Sutpen is already coalescing at the very start of his presence in Jefferson, in "the Spartan shell of the largest edifice in the county" serving as his message to the injustices of his past treatment, a sterile Gothic monolith soon to be haunted by ghosts. (39)

Risen from nothing, furnished by plundered Haitian treasure, Sutpen's Hundred is the fruition of "*the bombast of a madman who creates within his very coffin walls his fabulous immeasurable Camelots and Carcassonnes.*" (160) [56] Sutpen "very likely looted his Caribbean father-in-law's plantation when he married the daughter," therefore, the house is built on the shifting sands of theft and retribution. (*University* 46) The "grim and castlelike magnificence" Sutpen had dreamt of has been achieved, with a new family to fill it and achieve his design. (*AA!* 38) Later, after the destruction of his design and his lineage, Sutpen toils in "*that first furious period while the demon believed he could restore by sheer indomitable willing the Sutpen's Hundred which he remembered and had lost.*" (184) Yet "sheer indomitable willing" will not return the South to its pre-lapsarian state, with the plantation owner firmly at the top of the social hierarchy, nor will it return Sutpen's dead and lost sons.

[55] Sutpen is also seeking revenge on his past, as I go on to discuss.
[56] Camelot is the mythic setting for King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table: see Thomas Malory's *Le Morte Darthur.* The French city of Carcassonne held a point of fascination for Faulkner, including the short story "Carcassonne" published in *These 13* (1931).

3.7 The Trouble of Innocence

The concept of Fate informs Sutpen's design: it is Sutpen's belief that "there was something about a man's destiny (or about the man) that caused the destiny to shape itself to him like his clothes did." (*AA!* 245-46) Sutpen's motivations until this point have appeared hubristic, couched in mystery. Quentin's grandfather, however, fills in the narrative gaps like his grandson.

Sutpen had apparently been raised in ignorance of colour and land-ownership: his "trouble was innocence," Mr Compson superficially retells. (220) Even when Faulkner finally unveils the history of his secretive protagonist, it remains unclear:

> "He was born in West Virginia, in the mountains –" ("Not in West Virginia," Shreve said. – "What?" Quentin said. "Not in West Virginia," Shreve said. "Because if he was twenty-five years old in Mississippi in 1833, he was born in 1808. And there wasn't any West Virginia in 1808 because –" "All right," Quentin said. "—West Virginia wasn't admitted –" "All right all right," Quentin said. "—Into the United States until –" "All right all right all right," Quentin said.)
> (220-21)

As Shreve's interjection makes clear, Sutpen's life has the quality of an enduring legend, created primarily through Sutpen's own revelations to Quentin's Grandfather.[57] Sutpen is able to shape his own narrative, couching a version of the truth in hyperbole and obfuscation. Grandfather Compson is a willing aural participant in the Sutpen legend during a hunt for the absconded French architect, when Sutpen:

> Was telling a story. He was not bragging about something that he had done; he was just telling a story about something a man named Thomas Sutpen had experienced, which would still have been the same story if the man had had no name at all, if it had been told about any man or no man over whiskey that night.
> (247)

In the above excerpt, Faulkner's approach to narrative creation in *Absalom!* appears to be a feigned carelessness, which underscores the reality of his narratives and their narrators.

[57] Shreve is attempting to point out that 'West Virginia' was only admitted into the Union on 20 June 1863. (Battlefields of the Civil War)

The legend of Sutpen is passed through the Compson line: Quentin's father explains the enduring narrative as "something your grandfather let drop one day and which he doubtless had from Sutpen himself in the same accidental fashion." (53) The attitude of studied carelessness belies Jefferson's obsession with Sutpen, therefore, the "story" of Sutpen is a construction which could never possibly have been the "same story if the man had no name at all." (247)

Once Faulkner's narrative deigns to provide Sutpen's history, his overwhelming "desire for magnificence" is arguably more understandable. (38) Echoing originary mythologies, Young Sutpen does not even know his own birthdate: "he did not know within a year on either side just how old he was. So he knew neither where he had come from nor where he was nor why. He was just there." (227) Sutpen's father is an itinerant drunk, and Sutpen's family hold an aleatory quality of mythic timelessness in their Appalachian wanderings:

> They not progressing parallel in time but descending perpendicularly through temperature and climate – a (you couldn't call it a period because as he remembered it or as he told Grandfather he did, it didn't have either a definite beginning or a definite ending. Maybe attenuation is better.) An attenuation from a kind of furious inertness and patient immobility.
> (224)

Sutpen is an inert recipient of his family's history: he has older brothers and sisters, the family passive recipients of their journey from the mountains down to a world of racial and economic boundaries in "dreamy and destinationless locomotion." (224) The Sutpen coterie "did not seem to progress at all but just to hang suspended while the earth itself altered, flattened and broadened out of the mountain cove where they had all been born." (224-25) When the family settle in the grounds of Pettibone's Tidewater mansion, Sutpen becomes aware of racial boundaries; he may be white, but he is of low social standing.

Sutpen had been raised in ignorance – and innocence – of his social status. It takes rejection by Pettibone's Black butler at the front door to forge Sutpen's clear-cut sense of racial

injustice and inconstancies; young Sutpen ought to "go around the back door." (233) For Sutpen, this seminal moment of rejection meant that "he had learned the difference not only between white man and black ones, but he was learning that there was a difference between white men and white men." (226) Humiliation becomes catalyst and origin for Sutpen's subsequent actions, enforced by a lack of social understanding: the landscape is delineated by hierarchical owners, and poor white children are not supposed to approach a mansion by the front door. Families like the Sutpens are at the mercy of those higher than them, even without the added complication of race and subordination. In terms of 'class,' Sutpen's rejection "brings him into existence as a subject. From then on he belongs to the class of poor whites." (Miller 201) Therefore, Sutpen wishes "to put himself in the place of the white plantation owner. He wants to treat those beneath him, black and white alike, as he has been treated." (201) Sutpen wants to get back at the "monkey dressed n— butler[s]" of the world by having a "broadcloth monkey" of his own. (*AA!* 231, 228) He hates – yet envies – plantation owners; men with dominions reigning over "n—s working in the fields while white men sat on fine horses and watched them." (225) Hence the edifice of Sutpen's Hundred, and Sutpen's slaves of his own brought from Haiti.

Sutpen "had not only lost the innocence yet, he had not yet discovered that he possessed it." (228) Sutpen had perhaps lost his "innocence," but it is subjugated to a single-minded design reliant on racial difference and revenge – upholding the colour-line so rigidly that he also rejects his own son.[58]

[58] See 5.2 for further discussion on the 'colour-line.'

3.8 Slavery in *Absalom, Absalom!*, and Haiti as a Site for Sutpen's Rebellion

After Sutpen is rejected from the mansion door, he travels to the West Indies. The representation of slavery becomes a gap within *Absalom!*, even as Sutpen's vengeful design takes him on to Haiti – a historic site of slave rebellion.

At the age of fourteen, Sutpen struck out for the West Indies, in a *Bildungsroman* quest narrative which ends with him gaining a wife, Eulalia; a son, Charles Bon; and a fortune.[59] Young Sutpen then travels to Haiti, which had become a place to be feared in the mid-nineteenth century as a locale of slave rebellion, and a demographic of untrustworthy Black insurrection. Returning from Haiti and ending up in Jefferson, Sutpen now possesses "his band of wild n—s like beasts half tamed to walk upright with men," having cast aside his first family because they did not fit his design. (*AA!* 8) [60] Faulkner describes the slippery quality of Sutpen's relationship to the Black people with whom he shares the land, particularly in his nascent innocence of racial boundaries:

> You knew that you could hit them, he told Grandfather, and they would not hit back or even resist. But you did not want to, because they (the n—s) were not it, not what you wanted to hit; that you knew when you hit them you would just be hitting a child's toy balloon with a face painted on it.
> (230)

Sutpen fears the shadowy figures behind the balloon, who have the power to "burst into laughing," and designate the social hierarchy above him. (230) The Sutpen line has ostensibly stemmed from Colonel Thomas himself, reinventing himself anew in the promise of a new state, and the building of his designed empire. Ignoring the existence of his own drunkard father, and though he had been born into poverty, Sutpen appoints himself as the

[59] Sutpen's first wife is Eulalia Bon, only named in the endpapers, apparently not worth a name in the body of the text itself. See *AA!* 382.
[60] I examine the linguistic Othering of "beasts half tamed to walk upright with men," see 4.11.

fountainhead of a new dynasty. Luckily for Sutpen's design, the results of his first 'mistaken' family can be left in Haiti, and he is able to continue the path of his Protean reinvention.

The Sutpen line, however, is bifurcated by Sutpen's decision: Charles Bon continues to exist despite Sutpen's studious ignorance, and Bon forges his own lineage, even as Sutpen begins again and creates Judith and Henry in his image, God-like in his quest for creation. Clytie Sutpen is the outlier in the Sutpen dynasty, the result of Sutpen bringing two narratively-interchangeable Haitian women to Mississippi, one of whom is her mother. In a culture with such an emphasis on heredity and lineage, Clytie's maternity is unimportant, and her status is more slave than daughter. Clytie has apparently been "tamed" by her inclusion of Sutpen blood. According to Rosa's narrow-minded views on racial propriety, Clytie is "*wild: half untamed black, half Sutpen blood: and if 'untamed' be synonymous with 'wild,' then 'Sutpen' is the silent unsleeping viciousness of the tamer's lash.*" (156) Demonstrating the importance of Sutpen's male line, in comparison to Bon, Clytie is an afterthought. A mixed-race daughter, continuing the tradition of plantation owner's second families (and the lack of choice for enslaved women), was not such an affront to the glory of Sutpen's design as Bon's racial mixing had been.[61] Clytie is representative of a liminal form of slavery. Julia Stern identifies that "she is daughter and chattel, a liminal figure, both Black and white, neither slave nor free. Race and gender make Clytie ineligible to take the baton of Sutpen's patriarchal whiteness." (146) Representative of the disparity of treatment between men and women, Bon is abandoned for of Sutpen's overarching design – yet Clytie is allowed to remain with her father, in a quasi-representation of filial loyalty.

Michel-Rolph Trouillot opines that the representation of slavery "is a ghost, both the past and a living presence; and the problem of historical representation is how to represent that

[61] According to Faulkner, when asked if Sutpen acknowledged Clytie as his daughter, the answer was "No. Well, that would not have mattered because Clytaemnestra was a female. The important thing to him was he should establish a line of dukes, you see. He was going to create a dukedom. He'd have to have a male descendant." (*University* 272)

ghost, something that is and yet is not." (146-47) Most pertinently, Bon's existence is "something that is and yet is not." Aspects of slavery are either elided in the text, such as the two nameless enslaved women who travel with Sutpen's caravan, or the brutality of slavery is overtly exposed by Faulkner, namely when Sutpen wrestles with his slaves, slick with sweat and blood in the firelight. In a reaction against the pivotal instance of being turned away from the plantation door, no longer "hitting a child's toy balloon with a face painted on it," "on certain occasions, perhaps at the end of the spectacle, as a grand finale or perhaps as a matter of sheer deadly forethought toward the retention of supremacy, domination, he would enter the ring with one of the negroes himself." (*AA!* 230, 29) By the end of the bloody spectacle, it is hard to decipher which figure is Sutpen, and which is his slave – both men are left "bloody to the waist," "bloody too, save that on the negro it merely looked like grease or sweat." (29) Blurring the boundary between Black and white, between master and slave, Faulkner focalises the narrative through Ellen, Sutpen's wife,

> Seeing not the two black beasts she had expected to see but instead a white one and a black one, both naked to the waist and gouging at one another's eyes as if they should not only have been the same color, but should have been covered with fur too. (29)

As witnessed through indications and fissures in Faulkner's text, Sutpen attempts to renege on his past marriage, and leaves Haiti for the new promise of Mississippi, marrying Ellen and becoming a plantation owner himself as a cover of respectability. Haiti, however, is the site for Sutpen's own rebellion, mirroring the country's history of successful slave revolt, and "soil manured with black blood." (251) Discussion of Haiti's status is necessary to address Faulkner's misuse of history and rebellion, in order to foreground Sutpen's mendacious flexibility, and converse rigidity in racial matters. The significance of Sutpen's own revelation of his history is one which situates Haiti as the location of 'the Other.'

Haiti is significant as a turbulent land feared by the American slaveholding plantocracy, with a reputation for racialised violence. Sutpen heroically quells a slave-uprising, according

to his own unverifiable version of events. Haiti becomes part of Sutpen's *mythos*: he single-handedly negates the insidious fear of Black rebellion in his own territory, the control of which can be transferred to Yoknapatawpha County and Sutpen's Hundred. Faulkner has chosen to erase history to foreground Sutpen's heroism, however, adding to his personal narrative but eliminating verisimilitude and creating myth. Raiford points out that "in this Haiti, although the events described take place in 1827, apparently there has been no revolution – no 1791 Santo Domingo rebellion." (111) Furthermore, "it is on this pre/non revolutionary Haitian stage, where white men still hold black men in bondage, that Sutpen performs supernatural acts of brawn and boldness." (111) Sutpen's wild tales of Haitian rebellion therefore come under critical suspicion, as "the reader is never in a position to verify this claim." (Jay Watson, *Modernity* 231) Feigning intimacy, Sutpen "unveils his story a year or so later, to a carefully chosen auditor, General Compson." (231) When viewed in this manner, even the key revelation of Sutpen's voice becomes suspect, and as much an event of narrative fabrication as Quentin and Shreve's storytelling.

Sutpen's design possesses "childlike heroic simplicity." (*AA!* 246) According to Sutpen's crafted legend, "when I realized that to accomplish my design I should need first of all and above all things money in considerable quantities and in the quite immediate future," then "I went to the West Indies." (243) By reverting to depicting Haiti as a slaveholding nation, Faulkner succeeds in amplifying the legend around young Sutpen. Haiti allowed Faulkner to create parallels with an almost-mythic quality, with the threat of Black resistance entering the narrative and allowing the space for the equally-threatening figure of Bon, emerging from the wreckage of Sutpen's failed first marriage, echoing the threat of Haiti as he moves closer to Mississippi by way of New Orleans. As Jay Watson comments,

> Out of this same Haiti will emerge a black subject to shadow and haunt Sutpen with a version of reality antithetical to the planter's and a struggle for recognition based on filiation rather than domination. Moreover, this figure will go all the way in his struggle, mounting a subversive incursion into Sutpen's design in pursuit of his own. (*Modernity* 234)

Herein, the respective legends of Bon and Sutpen are to combine after Bon's reappearance, but there may only be one victor for the Sutpen line. Bon is too much of a threat to Sutpen's design: he is a new Sutpen generation desperate for recognition, like his father before him, but who will be betrayed and rejected by virtue of his birth and his social position.

3.9 Charles Bon and Sutpen's Design

According to Faulkner, Sutpen "wanted to show that he could establish a dynasty too – he could make himself a king and raise a line of princes." (*University* 97-98) Intriguingly, Sutpen "wanted revenge, as he saw it," but also wished to expose social hierarchy, as he "wanted to establish the fact that man is immortal, that man, if he is man, cannot be inferior to another man through artificial standards or circumstances." (35) The young boy from the mountains, and the white saviour of Haiti's fictionalised slave-uprising, can now "make himself a king" in his extraordinary castle, and "raise a line of princes" to realise his design. (97-98) Revealed by ruptured narrative, Charles Bon is the original recipient of Sutpen's design, before being abandoned for his apparent mixed race, and his mother Eulalia's racial deception.

In 1890, the Mississippi Constitution enshrined in law that "the marriage of a white person with a negro or mulatto, or person who shall have one-eighth or more of negro blood, shall be unlawful and void." (Article 14, Sec. 263) [62] In Sutpen's view, Bon is the result of

[62] Though this date is later than the text's action, it represents overarching thought in Mississippi of the time.

> That initial mistake which he still insisted on, which he himself had not been able to find: 'I was faced with condoning a fact which had been foisted upon me without my knowledge during the process of building toward my design, which meant the absolute and irrevocable negation of the design.'
> (*AA!* 273)

Sutpen's design is predicated on racial and sexual purity: he has upheld his side of the design, "still a virgin" until his marriage, making his fortune, quelling the plantation rebellion and marrying the Haitian plantation owner's daughter after the siege had ended. (248) Eulalia, however, has betrayed the purity of the design, and caused the revelation of a "new fact" which "rendered it impossible that this woman and this child be incorporated into my design." (264) [63] Sutpen's *ethos* is clear: the landowner and his daughter "deliberately withheld from me the one fact which I have reason to know they were aware would have caused me to decline the entire matter." (264) Sutpen's motivations are clear, even as his son's racial purity is allegedly unclear; apparently Eulalia's mother "had been a Spaniard," a designation deliberately vague in racial delineation. (252) For Sutpen, however, even a question of racial impurity is enough to sever the family line, making his design "impossible."[64]

As Sutpen leaves his son behind in Haiti, Bon becomes reducible to the biology of his blood, an "irrevocable negation" of Sutpen's ideas of destiny, a destiny which "had fitted itself to him, to his innocence." (273, 246) Sutpen's heir is a liminal figure: originally accepted and then denied by virtue of his questioned bloodline, cast aside for a fresh start to Sutpen's design. The myth of racial inferiority enters the narrative as Bon is elided in the text – he is replaced by Henry, a new firstborn Sutpen son. A composition of many ideals, Sutpen's plans include an element of *male* racial purity, and Henry becomes heir apparent. Miscegenation, however, threatens the bedrock of Sutpen's second design, as Bon

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[63] This episode may be the first revelation in the layered text to denote that Sutpen had a child with his first wife.

[64] Similarly to the action of *Light in August*, a study of which occupies my fourth chapter, Faulkner's depictions of racial heritage are deliberately unclear.

machinates to meet and entice his half-brother into rebellion, trying to force their father to recognise him.

Like Sutpen becoming aware of racial difference, according to Faulkner, "Bon knew that he was a Negro, but until he found it was important to Sutpen, that wasn't important to him." (*University* 273) Bon is victim of Sutpen's design, as Faulkner elucidates:

> To have a Negro, half-Negro, for his son *would have wrecked the whole dream.* If he couldn't – if he had thought that that would ever be exposed that Bon was his son, he may have killed Bon himself. If it had ever come to that point, he would have destroyed Bon just as he would have destroyed any other individual who got in his way.
> (272; emphasis mine)

Within the construction of narrative, Bon becomes a mythologised emblem for Quentin, a point of fascination. Through the act of creation, aleatory Bon emerges from the past. Henry is the 'pure' white son who is allowed access to the design, but he will also fail as a Sutpen heir. Most crucially, Bon is denied a voice throughout, except in the narrative creations of Quentin and Shreve. Barbara Ladd identifies that Bon is "a retributive agent" and "a mystery whom we never see, who never speaks except through the mouths of those who tell his story, who has no identity independent of their projections." (535)

Bon is a victim of his birth and his circumstance. He is receptive of Henry and Judith's love, and becomes an emblematic figure for Rosa in his corporeal absence. Yet he is himself an empty vessel, and is murdered by his own brother for the sin of wanting recognition and justification. For Bon, it would have been sufficient to receive covert recognition from his father when visiting Sutpen's Hundred as Henry's university friend, yet he is destined to be denied. Bon would have been content with a scenario in which "*even though he say to me 'never look upon my face again; take my love and my acknowledgement in secret, and go' I will do that.*" (*AA!* 327) [65] In this determining act of mirrored rejection, passed from father to son in a

[65] In the layered structure of *Absalom!*, this scene is imagined by Quentin and Shreve, but taken to be Bon's motivations.

continuation of the legend, "Charles is rejected at his father's door, setting the mechanisms of his death into motion." (Caitlin Cawley 137)

Bon's journey from Haiti to the South is as secretive as his father's previous journey in the reverse. About twenty-eight years after his rejection, Bon arrives at the gates of Sutpen's Hundred, in a narrative echo of his later death in the same loaded location. As Sutpen realises the implications of his past, it is imagined that

> He stood there at his own door, just as he had imagined, planned, designed, and sure enough and after fifty years the forlorn nameless and homeless lost child came to knock at it and no monkey-dressed n— anywhere under the sun to come to the door and order the child away.
> (*AA!* 267)

Quentin's father surmises Sutpen's response to the appearance of his abandoned son, coming to ruin his design once more:

> He must have felt and heard the design – house, position, posterity and all – come down like it had been built out of smoke, making no sound, creating no rush of displaced air and not even leaving any debris.
> (267)

Sutpen had put his design into motion half a century earlier, yet might as well "never have existed at all by almost exactly fifty years." (272) Sutpen's design has been ruined by his highfalutin ideals of racial purity and concurrent inferiority: he has abandoned Eulalia, putting "his first wife aside like eleventh- and twelfth-century kings did," but had failed to deal with the consequences of doing so. (240) It is a deliberate choice by Faulkner that Sutpen does not see Bon's reappearance as his own fault – he has a pragmatic mindset, attributing it to a mistake, and the idea of Fate that has traced its path through the text. In Bon's reappearance, Sutpen is "not calling it retribution, no sins of the father come home to roost; not even calling it bad luck, but just a mistake." (240) Here, Faulkner's language echoes a previous line, in which Sutpen possesses "the unsleeping care which must have known that it could permit itself *but one mistake*." (53; emphasis mine) Bon has been the

"mistake" in a carefully-crafted design, and Sutpen will not waver in his course, or permit Bon to ruin his dream.

3.10 The Bon-Sutpen Line

Through Bon's friendship with Henry, we are privy to the events comprising the previous twenty-eight years before Bon appears at Sutpen's Hundred to 'destroy' his father's design. Tracing Charles Bon's familial line through narrative fabrication, he fathers a son named Charles Etienne St. Valery Bon with a quasi-wife in New Orleans. Charles Etienne in turn will renege against the expectations of lineage and behaviour, fathering his own son, Jim Bond, in an act of racial provocation.

Considering Bon's maternity, Faulkner addresses the verisimilitude of Quentin-Shreve's joint narration, in the setting of the action in the past "which Shreve had invented and which was probably true enough", and in the creation of Eulalia's image, "whom Shreve and Quentin had likewise invented and which was likewise probably true enough." (*AA!* 335) Eulalia is permitted a shadowy image in the text, like her son. Grandfather Compson is able to imagine her briefly, like his grandson: "the girl just emerging for a second of the telling, in a single word almost, so that Grandfather said it was like he had just seen her too for a second by the flask of one of the muskets." (249) Eulalia is created through differing strands of narrative, which allow her some narrative opacity, no matter that Sutpen's own narrative creation would rather relegate her to invisibility.[66]

Later, Henry visits New Orleans with Bon – his cultured university friend. Sheltered Henry is appalled by Bon's casual approach to racial boundaries and marriage. Close to Mississippi, yet protected by the state line with Louisiana, Bon has abrupted the Sutpen line into his own, and created his own *ethos* that disregards boundaries of race. Where Sutpen had been

[66] Eulalia does reappear in an imagined scene with the lawyer in New Orleans, see *AA!* 300.

ignorant or 'innocent,' Bon does not give weight to racial distinction, making his father's rejections more catastrophic. Bon also reintroduces the practice of miscegenation that had so disgusted his father; his wife is a courtesan of Black descent. Henry's image of this union is a shock "even to the unworldly Henry, let alone the more travelled father, the existence of the eighth part negro mistress and the sixteenth part negro son." (100) Bon's side of the family line is reduced to racist fractions of blood. Through Henry's focalisation, however, the designations of race for Bon's wife and Charles Etienne are incorrect – he is unaware yet of the role Bon's genetics would allegedly play in his son's racial purity, thinking Bon to be white.

Through layered narrative focalisation, Faulkner deliberately obfuscates ideas of heritage and lineage. Bon has reneged against the socially-accepted contracts of racial purity, as well as sexual propriety, and produced a manifestation of this rebellion in the birth of Charles Etienne. As Bon demonstrates in discussion with Henry, the rules of their shared Southern society do not condone his marriage or his child. In Henry's judgement, bearing in mind that Bon is also courting Judith, the existence of Bon's New Orleansian subversion is "drawing honour a little fine even for the shadowy paragons which are our ancestors born in the South and come to man- and womanhood about eighteen sixty or sixty one." (100)

Bon keeps his wife and son secreted in the echelons of New Orleans, echoing his father in Haiti. In context, a mixed-race *female* possessed an erotic thrill, yet a mixed-race *male* was doubly threatening to white supremacist ideologies, exacerbating threats both racial and sexual. Henry's staid refusal to recognise Bon's actions are a representation of the feigned ignorance of white society in the South: those families who turned a blind eye to their own indiscretions, yet housed mixed-race slave-daughters like Clytie, as they sought to impose societal limitations upon others. Henry's filial innocence will not yet consider the irony of his own father's part in rejecting miscegenation and his firstborn son.

In the next generation, however, the hidden branch of the Sutpen family tree is even further 'debased,' according to the rigidity of Southern racial rules: Charles Etienne entirely disregards the strictures of racial purity, and deliberately marries the darkest woman he can find, whether she comprehends her situation or not. Charles Etienne's wife is described in racially-loaded terms, making it clear that Bon's son's actions are another rejection of racial expectations: she is a mute "black gargoyle." (209) Charles Etienne's existence cannot be justified under the terms of the myth of racial inferiority – as demonstrated by Henry's struggles to reconcile the decisions of the secret brother whom he idolises. Merle Williams supposes that Charles Etienne "resorts to self-destructive aggression in his struggle to live out his mixed-race heritage, which renders him neither white nor black, neither master nor slave." (25) Charles Etienne marries "a coal black and ape-like woman" in retaliation to the white parts of his heritage. (*AA!* 205) Yet Charles Etienne has come of age non-cognisant of race: he has been raised in "a padded silken vacuum cell" in New Orleans, "where pigmentation had no more moral value than the silk walls and the scent and the rose-coloured candle shades." (199) The result of the reactionary union between Charles Etienne and his wife is Jim Bond, a "hulking slack-mouthed saddle-colored boy" who speaks only in cries, "who had inherited what he was from his mother and only what he could never have been from his father." (214, 215) Bond is a Faulknerian character existing only out of spite, and to demonstrate a message of implied racial toxicity and total impurity. The howl of Jim Bond is a cry of generational incomprehension. If "Absalom, Absalom!" is the cry of King David in II Samuel 18.33, then Jim Bond's wordless final howl is a nuanced form of Jesus's cry on the cross, crying "Eli Eli Lama Sabachthani?" or "my God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?" (Mark 15.34, echoing Ps. 22.1) The divisions between Sutpen and Jim Bond

are three generations, yet the great-grandfather would not recognise his offspring, and Bond is indicative of the age's fear of racial mixing.[67]

For Henry, potential incest with Bon's own sister Judith is acceptable; a concubine, 'octoroon', 'morganatic' wife are acceptable; an illegitimate son is acceptable; but the question of Bon's own race is unacceptable.[68] Doomed as the second-first son, Henry is a by-product of his time, in that his sheltered and racially-pure attitude renders him an emaciated, powerless shell at the novel's close. Unable to accept the truth of his half-brother, Henry "done shot that durn French feller. Kilt him dead as a beef." (*AA!* 133) As Bon-Shreve's narration imagines, "*it's the miscegenation, not the incest, which you cant bear.*" (356)

By initiating the Bon-Sutpen line, Bon is admirable in the reach of his legend, and its concomitant haunting of many characters throughout *Absalom!*. Judith and Henry love Bon as more than a brother, and Rosa loves his dead body – though she is unaware of his most important significance. Later, Bon fascinates Quentin and Shreve to the point where they are able to sublimate themselves to *become* him through linguistic creation, "Charles-Shreve and Quentin-Henry." (334) In turn, Rosa's linguistic creation of Bon amplifies his mythic qualities, elevating him despite his existence in the narrative's fissures and gaps.

3.11 "An Echo, But Not the Shot"

Despite his various forms of liminality, Bon is a romantic figure, particularly for Rosa.[69] Rosa's narrative is equally haunted by Sutpen and by Bon's missed promise. If Sutpen is the horror who stymied her life in 1866, Bon is the liminal figure who has never

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[67] Shreve joins in with this racial rigidity, conjecturing that "I think in time the Jim Bonds are going to conquer the western hemisphere." (*AA!* 378)

[68] These words are used throughout *Absalom!* to denote racial difference.

[69] Rosa is, however, withheld from the revelation that Bon is of mixed race. Rosa fears to "let flesh touch with flesh, and watch the fall of all the eggshell shibboleth of caste and color too." (*AA!* 139) Whilst this refers to Rosa's revulsion at Clytie's touch, it may also apply to the wider practice of miscegenation in Southern society.

quite existed, and affects her narrative with his own sequence of gaps and questions. When Henry shoots Bon, Rosa "*heard an echo, but not the shot*," creating potentiality in absence, and ensuring that Bon is aleatory in both life and death. (*AA!* 150)

Rosa is prone to creating her own versions of legend around male characters, specifically Sutpen and Bon: she has been developmentally-stymied by the onset of the Civil War in her own homeland, writing "schoolgirl poetry about the also-dead" in odes to Confederate soldiers, who "had seen all that living meant to her fall into ruins about the feet of a few figures with the shapes of men but with the names and statures of heroes." (65, 19) Rosa is a dual-figure: Melvin Backman observes that Rosa

> Is both the chaste Southern woman and warped old maid; the romantic defender of the South and paranoic hater of its supreme representative, Thomas Sutpen; vicarious bride in her dreams to Charles Bon and hater of the Negro.
> (604)

Bon's appeal for Rosa is as a hero and a concept, soon to be a weightless absence. Bon is

> The ordinary manifestation of the impenetrable and shadowy character. Yes, shadowy: a myth, a phantom: something which they engendered and created whole themselves; some effluvium of Sutpen blood and character as though as a man he did not exist at all.
> (*AA!* 104)

In the grandeur of Sutpen's design, Bon is a Faulknerian shadow like his father: present in his absence, doomed to repeat the Sutpen curse of rejection. Rosa's empty infatuation with Bon is only one facet of his elided identity, "a revenant living among the inferences of Rosa's narrative." (Godden 58) The figure of Charles Bon is entirely liminal in the text of *Absalom!*. Bon is present within the black and white lines of the page: a shadowed figure whose exaction of retribution shatters the Sutpen family to which he is denied entry. Bon's life is a revelation; both in the fact of his very existence as the first in the Sutpen line, and for the narrative unfurling of his life in New Orleans. Like his father's mythic origin, Bon "must

have appeared almost phoenix-like, fullsprung from no childhood, born of no woman and impervious to time and, vanished, leaving no bones nor dust anywhere." (*AA!* 74) [70]

Later, Henry will shoot Bon at the gates of Sutpen's Hundred. In Faulkner's multi-fabricated narrative of delayed decoding, we know that Bon has been killed, but not yet why. Bon has traced the footsteps of his father to a further point: he has been rejected from the plantation doorway, then has become engaged to the plantation owner's daughter. In Bon's case, these two experiences are telescoped into the house of his father.[71] The reader is made aware of the nebulous reasons for Henry's decision at a later point in the text, in keeping with Faulkner's construction of *Absalom!*'s plot as the original *mythos*. In an abruption of his own, Henry has taken definitive action, changing the course of the Sutpen family myth by fratricide. This seminal incident is, for Clifford Wulfman,

> The crux of the told layer, the climax of the "Greek tragedy" of the House of Sutpen, the inevitable outcome of Sutpen's rejection of Eulalia Bon, and the result of Southern culture's hysterical denial of its simultaneously split and yoked identity. (127)

As a relic of the Civil War, the South is both defeated and victorious, "simultaneously split and yoked" to the North by geography and political identity, but in control of the myth of the Lost Cause, as I have discussed. Now, Bon has become equally "split and yoked" to the fate of the 'House of Sutpen,' echoing great houses of classical mythology, yet Bon's Fate is tied to an ailing hero and a family of deceivers.

In an act of great significance to *Absalom!*'s *mythos*, Bon's body arrives at Sutpen's Hundred after his death, to be buried in the grounds of his father's successful design. Hidden from Rosa's eyes in a coffin, if Bon's empty body is indicative of his aleatory quality, then it finds its echoes in Judith and Ellen – Sutpen women who are maligned by virtue of their sex.

[70] Creating intertextual *mythos*, Faulkner's language echoes Shakespeare's *Macbeth*: Macduff and Bon are "none of woman born," "born of no woman" respectively. (4.1.91; 74)

[71] I am indebted to Jay Watson for this realisation: Bon's "response to the affront also resembles his father's: to become suitor to a planter's daughter." (*Modernity* 235)

Ellen is "at the absolute halcyon of her butterfly's summer," "Niobe without tears." (*AA!* 74, 13) [72] Judith is the empty "woman vessel" of transference, equating Henry and Bon's love within the confines of her safe, female space. (108) Bon's corporeality now mirrors Ellen's aleatory being: transitory, weightless, and therefore unreal. Bon has visited Sutpen's Hundred previously, to face his father and ostensibly woo Judith, yet it is this moment that ironically grounds him in the text, though he is no longer living. Despite her narrative authority, "Miss Rosa did not see any of them; she had never seen (and was never to see alive) Charles Bon at all." (74)

Bon is "a picture, an image." (74) Rosa – who has managed to deny her virgin chastity enough to transfer her love to her niece's fiancé – has effectively become infatuated. Through Rosa's narrative we hear of Bon's doubly-coded existence as body and ghost. Bon has emerged as an apparition within the overarching myth of Sutpen's history: an unwelcome revenant reminder of the past he tried to deny. Rosa's story-telling from the outset has hinted at "two half-ogre children, the three of them forming a shadowy background for the fourth one," ostensibly Ellen, following as "this was the mother," but also alluding to Bon. (13) [73] Now, after Henry has murdered him, Bon returns to the shadows as an occluded figure, destined to haunt the history of the Sutpen family once more. As Rosa narrates, "*I heard an echo, but not the shot.*" (150) Bon's life and death are encompassed within the time between the act and the reception of it, between reversed shot and correspondent echo, between action and consequence. In his narration, Quentin dreams that "the: *was-not: is: was.*" (324) *Absalom!* is recursive in its repetition and handling of the past: if *is* never *was*, then Bon is both *is* and *was* concurrently, suspended in "shadowy attenuation." (101)

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[72] Faulkner's early reference to mythic Niobe is telling, as she lost both her husband and children. See Ovid Bk. VI.
[73] Not to forget that Sutpen fathered Clytie, and later Milly Jones's baby.

Bon has spent most of his life in obscurity, returning into the Sutpen family dynasty too late. His legitimacy and existence are rejected, and he (like his father) survives the destructive bloodshed of the Civil War, before dying at his brother's hand before he can marry his sister. Rosa's fluctuating narration describes that, for Bon

> *One day he was not. Then he was. Then he was not. It was too short, too fast, too quick; six hours of a summer afternoon saw it all – a space too short to leave even the imprint of a body on a mattress, and blood can come from anywhere – if there was blood, since I never saw him…he was absent, and he was; he returned, and he was not; three women put something into the earth and covered it, and he had never been.*
> (152-53)

Bon has become "something," "it," an object, no longer a person in any capacity. In being Sutpen's forsaken first son, Bon's transference of affection to Henry – via Judith – is a continuation of covert affection, replacing the confirmation he craves from his father. Later, Quentin's own "encounter with Henry Sutpen is likewise an enactment, an allegory, of this transference narrative, this experience of the mutual interpenetration of past and present." (Wulfman 118) [74] For Bon, his is an impossible choice between Henry and Judith –

> Perhaps in his fatalism he loved Henry the better of the two, seeing perhaps in the sister merely the shadow, the woman vessel with which to consummate the love whose actual object was the youth.
> (*AA!* 108)

Judith becomes the empty vessel as a repository for desire, like Bon's weightless corpse later becomes for Rosa.

Ironically, Bon's death is a piece of history not destined to be recursively-repeated, in a work addressing the ways in which the past is recast into legend. Once Henry has murdered Bon and disappeared, and Bon's body has been lowered into the ground of the Sutpen family graveyard, Bon becomes effectively extinct. His presence may haunt the inhabitants of Sutpen's Hundred, but his existence is eventually negated. Along with Henry's

[74] Fleeing after murdering Bon, Henry emerges in the dark of Sutpen's Hundred before the house is set ablaze in December 1909.

disappearance and Sutpen's absence, Rosa, Judith, and Clytie live "*as if both they and we lived in that time which that shot, those running mad feet, had put a period to and then obliterated, as though that afternoon had never been.*" (158) Bon's grave becomes a

> *Mound vanishing slowly back into the earth, beneath which we had buried nothing. No, there had been no shot. That sound was merely the sharp and final clap-to of a door between us and all that was, all that might have been – a retroactive severance of the stream of the event: a forever crystallized instant in imponderable time.*
> (158)

Bon's death seems predestined – the text's title is taken from King David's cry for his dead son, and the structure is such that we are perhaps aware of Bon's death before we are aware of his life. For Burian, "traditionally, the criticism of tragedy has assumed that there is…something that can be called a 'true' tragic plot." (180) Mapping the idea of tragic recognition onto Henry's actions, in accordance with Burian's "'true' tragic plot," for Aristotle, "the most attractive things in tragedy, *peripeteiai* and recognition scenes, are part of the plot." (*1450a35-36*) [75] Accepting 'plot' as *mythos*, therefore, Bon is destined to be recognised by his brother and father, though denied by both in the final crucial moment.

Bon is desperate to be recognised by his father; an event that would make him retreat back into the past and leave the House of Sutpen in return. Bon expresses a childlike wish to "*see him, whom it seems I was bred up never to expect to see, whom I had even learned to live without,*" anticipating "that flash, that instant of indisputable recognition," because "*that's all I want. He need not even acknowledge me.*" (*AA!* 319) Diminishing anticipation, however, Bon "saw face-to-face with the man who might be his father, and nothing happened." (320) Later, Henry may acquiesce to Bon that "*you are my brother,*" yet Bon is the one to negate the recognition he has sought out: "*No I'm not. I'm the n— that's going to sleep with your sister. Unless you stop me, Henry.*" (357, 358) Bon's crude language equivocates race and

[75] *Peripeteia* (sing.) meaning "reversal of circumstances." (Merriam-Webster) For more on Aristotelian tragedy, see Lucente 4.

miscegenation in the empty vessel of Judith's body, and the possibility of procreation. Taken with the moment of meeting Sutpen above, these two moments of recognition essential to the traditional or expected *mythos* of *Absalom!* are deflated – the empty potential space of an echo, but not the shot.

3.12 Sutpen's Death and Faulkner's Chronology

Unlike Bon, Sutpen's death is dealt with by Faulkner in a more modernist style. Much like "*an echo, but not the shot*" that murdered Bon, Sutpen's end occurs off-page, conspicuous in its crafted absence. (*AA!* 150) In a metanarrative about the effects of narration, Faulkner's choice to situate Sutpen's cataclysmic death beyond the reader's eye is a rupture with the expectations of narrative tradition, yet the impact of his murder has reverberations stretching all the way into Quentin's present.

Sutpen's death is the next in a line of "encounters without witnesses, confrontations that can be inferred only by the trace of their explosive passage through time." (Wulfman 127) The reimagining of Sutpen's design, having to mutate after the Civil War and Henry's disappearance, is to have a child with Milly Jones, his manservant Wash's granddaughter. Sutpen "*was not for one moment concerned about his ability to start the third time,*" and his design envisages that he has "*but one more son, had at best one more son in his loins, as the old cannon might know when it has just one more shot in its corporeality.*" (*AA!* 278, 279) However, the son is a daughter: Wash Jones kills Sutpen for rejecting his great-grandchild, after murdering Milly post-birth.[76] Sutpen is slain ignominiously, for a situation which is entirely *infra dig*.[77]

Sutpen – the heroic Civil War Colonel, creator of Sutpen's Hundred out of desolate wasteland – has his death narrated by "*the old negress, the midwife,*" who has delivered his

[76] Accompanied by echoes of Aeschylus's Clytaemnestra murdering indomitable Agamemnon, Wash's rusty scythe is not necessarily the glorious apex of *Absalom!*'s *mythos.*
[77] Creating more narrative parallels in the text, Márta Asztalos notices that Wash Jones is "a drunkard – who closely resembles Sutpen's own father." (199) The generational ramifications of the Sutpen line cannot be escaped, if Sutpen is to die at the hands of a father-figure.

fifth child in the quasi-Biblical outdoor setting of Jones's fishing hut. (185) Only Quentin's Father sees Sutpen's death for an *apotheosis*, a raising to the gods. As Jason Compson III ponders, at the moment when Milly has given birth to a daughter instead of another doomed Sutpen son, and Sutpen's design comes crashing down once more,

> Father said that maybe he got his answer; that maybe there broke free and plain in midgallop against the yellow sky of dawn the fine proud image of the man on the fine proud image of the stallion…the apotheosis lonely, explicable, beyond all human fouling.
> (287)

Wash idolises "Kernel" Sutpen, seeing him as a man whose legend was "*bigger than all them Yankees that killed us and ourn*" (284, 287) Employing Jones, Sutpen has finally got his own equivalent of a "broadcloth monkey" manservant, though he is "malaria-ridden" and "what is it? the word? white what? – Yes, trash." (228, 87, 181)

Jones's liminality as a lower-class, "malaria-ridden" white man is lower than Sutpen's own social level. (87) Faulkner emphasises the mundane, everyday reliability and permanence of men like Jones, who

> Represented the man who survived the Civil War. The aristocrat in the columned house was ruined but Wash Jones survived it unchanged. He had been Wash Jones before 1861 and after 1865 he was still Wash Jones and Sutpen finally collided with him.
> (*University* 75)

Connotations of being poor 'white trash' follow the Sutpen family down from the mountains, to labour for the white man and be turned away at the door; these connotations also apply to Jones.[78] Seen via the narrative of Jason Compson II and Quentin, Wash is deliberately kept apart from the higher echelons of white status, even when Sutpen is equally as impoverished. Edward Clough argues that the act of demarcating Jones as "malaria-ridden" is so that "any risk of commonality or kinship with elite whites is

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[78] The term 'white trash' has been in use since 1821, to denote "poor white people of low social status, esp. when regarded as uneducated or uncultured." (Oxford English Dictionary)

physically displaced; any anxiety of class contamination is negated." (94) Jones is more the lowly manservant of many legends than a hero; he is not a special man, yet he is capable of murdering the indomitable Sutpen – a man who had also survived the Civil War, yet could not outrun his own actions. As a result of wanting one last shot of the procreative cannon, Sutpen is finally destroyed.

Sutpen's death is not visible to the reader, and occurs in silence: the midwife "*heard the whip too though not the scythe, no whistling air, no blow, nothing since always that which merely consummates punishment evokes a cry while that which evokes the last silence occurs in silence.*" (*AA!* 185) Sutpen's death in "silence" is at odds with the life of such a legendary figure, and Sutpen and Bon's deaths are predicated on incomplete binaries: "*an echo, but not the shot,*" "*the whip too though not the scythe.*" (150, 185)

After his death, Sutpen's secrets follow him to the grave. Viewing Sutpen's gravestone at the close of 1909, Quentin can only see

> *Thomas Sutpen, Colonel, 23rd Mississippi Infantry, C.S.A. Died August 12, 1869*: this last, the date, added later, crudely with a chisel, who even dead did not divulge where and when he had been born.
> (188)

It is here in which Faulkner's "Chronology" and "Genealogy" are useful extraneous elements, through which the reader may glean more information about Sutpen. Referencing Faulkner's paraphernalia included with the 1936 Random House publication, Jay Watson delineates these as paranarrative elements: in the sense that they are "elements that do not appear in the *narrative* discourse but still occupy *textual* space." ("Endpapers" 117) [79] Returning to Sutpen's life and death, the "Chronology" notes

> 1807 Thomas Sutpen born in West Virginia mountains. Poor whites of Scottish-English stock. Large family.
> (*AA!* 380)

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[79] Faulkner's hand-drawn map, a "Chronology", and a "Genealogy".

The "Genealogy" states the following:

> THOMAS SUTPEN.
> Born in West Virginia mountains, 1807. One of several children of poor whites, Scotch-English stock. Established plantation of Sutpen's Hundred in Yoknapatawpha County, Mississippi 1833. Married (1) Eulalia Bon, Haiti, 1827. (2) Ellen Coldfield, Jefferson, Mississippi, 1838. Major, later Colonel, –th Mississippi Infantry, C.S.A. Died, Sutpen's Hundred, 1869.
> (382)

The question of the text's endpapers is interesting: how much credence ought we give them, on the bearing of the narrative of *Absalom!* as a whole, in a narrative already partially-imagined by Quentin and Shreve? Extraneous elements offer grounding and verisimilitude for the text, yet are riddled with inconsistencies and discrepancies casting a conflicting pall on the use of them for trite reference purposes, as I have done above with Sutpen's birthdate and birthplace. The inclusion of this material in 1936 creates uncertainty, as the papers "occupy a weird but provocative limbo between the time of the main narrative (which does not extend beyond 1910) and the time of the book." (Jay Watson, "Endpapers" 119)

In a work that is itself an experimentation in testing the boundaries of relaying information and subverting creation of plot and *mythos*, the unreliability of the "Chronology" and "Genealogy" are perhaps no surprise.[80] These additions are a final dimension of the creation of Faulknerian myth, similar to Quentin's death noted before it has happened in *The Sound and the Fury*. Missing details are ostensibly filled in, but do not withstand further investigation: becoming, as Jay Watson surmises, "micronarratives that extend, however modestly, beyond birth and death to encompass other elements of personal history that edge genealogy toward skeletal biography, human annals toward human chronicles." ("Endpapers" 122) Furthermore, Jonathan Berliner argues that,

[80] Further revising the *mythos* surrounding *Absalom!*, Vintage International published *Absalom, Absalom!: The Corrected Text* in 1990 under guidance from Noel Polk. Much like the textual dichotomy between *Sartoris* and *Flags in the Dust* (though not as extensively different), this newer textual version continues discussion around Faulkner's intentions.

> Representing the past is a multimedia endeavor, whether we look to oral traditions buoyed by written *aide-mémoire* or forms like novels…but we are confronted with a choice as to whether we conflate fact and fiction. Faulkner demonstrates for us the role imagination can play in weaving stories about the past into the fabric of the present.
> (31)

Therefore, *Absalom!*'s endpapers and Sutpen's death endorse creation of recursive *mythos*: when one has understood the plot, the endpapers are a missing plot-piece disabusing any understanding once more, paradoxical and subversive in their veracity, making the choice between fiction and fact.

3.13 "A Barracks Filled with Stubborn, Back-Looking Ghosts"

Absalom, Absalom! is a work of shadowy figures, grandiose designs, and murderous miscegenation. The creation of *mythos* is woven around two figures joined by inescapable history: Sutpen and Quentin. Both men can be described as "a barracks filled with stubborn, back-looking ghosts"; the ghosts of Sutpen's design and the shame of being turned away at the mansion door, and Quentin's heritage into which he has been ineluctably born. (*AA!* 12)

Absalom!'s recursive structure works to endorse and work within the myth of the Lost Cause, amplifying it within a plot of inescapable inheritance. Echoing the tenets of the Lost Cause in her narrative to Quentin, Rosa's motive is to query "*at last why God let us lose the War*." (11) [81] Each of Faulkner's characters in *Absalom!* inherently endorse the overarching power and reach of the Lost Cause, and the framework of mythology in place to control public memory. In order for the *mythos* of *Absalom!* to succeed, Sutpen must pass the narrative to Quentin, though a reading is diminished by the knowledge that Quentin must commit suicide, as has already come to pass in *The Sound and the Fury.*

[81] Drew Gilpin Faust observes that "Confederate legislature pointedly selected 'Deo Vindicem' – 'Defended by God' – as the motto for their new country." (180)

Aristotle states that "unity of plot is not, as some think, achieved by writing about one man": Sutpen may be Faulkner's focus, but the *mythos* of *Absalom!* is enriched and subverted by Quentin, and also by Shreve. (*1451a15-16*) Furthermore, in Aristotelean tragedy, "one man's actions are numerous and do not make up any single action." (*1451a18-19*) The actions of Sutpen are reinforced by narrative creation and the townspeople's varied Chorus. Sutpen is amplified and given heroic magnitude, with a suitably-corresponding epic fall.

The myth of racial inferiority inherently informs Sutpen's actions, casting his first-born son away to adhere to his own design, which does not permit perceptions of racial 'impurity.' My argument will now continue to a discussion of Faulkner's use of the myth of racial inferiority in his short stories, as forms of control for those who are non-white.

CHAPTER THREE

FAULKNER AND THE MYTH OF RACIAL INFERIORITY

4.1 The Myth of Racial Inferiority

Belief in the myth of racial inferiority dominated William Faulkner's South, spanning a period that reached from before the outbreak of Civil War into the twentieth century. Under the terms of this mythification, non-white people were subjugated and 'Othered' through false narratives and the reality of violence. Racial 'Othering' supported white supremacy by creating a dominant mythology of non-white 'threat,' aided in part by the synchronous myth of the Lost Cause. By promoting this myth of inferiority, racist Southerners could police their fear of miscegenation, curtail voting rights, and patrol the limits of freedom through sanctioned violence.

Faulkner portrays the myth of racial inferiority through the lenses of history and literature, and I assess who would benefit most from upholding the myth as a form of control. Faulkner's use of myth depicts perceptions of racial inferiority within the boundaries of Yoknapatawpha County. I analyse a selection of Faulkner's short stories, which work together to provide a view of racial inferiority from the perspective of dominant white society. These works depict racialised violence as a consequence for not adhering to a non-white subservient position within the Southern racial hierarchy, placed within a timeline from slavery; to the immediate post-war period; to Faulkner's exceptionally-racialised modernity in the early-to-mid twentieth century.

My argument establishes mythification surrounding complementary ideas of racial *in*feriority and *super*iority, both predicated on race as a construct. I will then move into a discussion of Faulkner's "Red Leaves", "Mountain Victory", "Dry September", and "That

Evening Sun". These works depict a variety of racialised behaviour.[82] I focus the first part of my study on the Mississippi Delta's Indigenous population, and the interplay between Indigenous and Black characters when attempting to emulate white 'behaviour.'[83] "Red Leaves" shows the Chickasaw's adoption of slavery as a result of white influence. Progressing on the timeline to focus on the Civil War's aftermath, "Mountain Victory" shows racial tensions and ambiguity clouded by an enduring Union versus Confederate *animus.* When portraying twentieth-century racial attitudes, Faulkner's depictions of Black characters become most prevalent. "Dry September" explores a white woman's ambiguous accusation of rape by a Black man, and the consequences thereof. "That Evening Sun" examines white indifference to Black-on-Black violence, and the privileging of white ownership over Black bodies.

Each of these narrative elements promote the myth of racial inferiority, predicated upon questions of possession and dispossession of the South as a concept – offering promise for white Southerners only.

4.2 Race as a Construct

It is important to acknowledge the idea of race itself as a construct, though it has had very real connotations and consequences, particularly when violence is visited upon non-white bodies in racist climates such as the American South, with its long history of mob violence and lynching. Constructing rigid ideas of race, white society cast out those who were considered 'Other,' and promoted a more overt belief in white supremacy.

Speaking in 1916, Alain Locke opined that, despite some initial basis in anthropology, "the biological meaning of race has lapsed and the sociological meaning of race is growing in

[82] Though I focus primarily on interconnections between white, Black, and Indigenous peoples in Faulkner's Yoknapatawpha, I acknowledge that the presence of an Asian population in Faulkner's works has also been underdiscussed. For Mississippi specifically, see F.J. Davis114-16.
[83] Faulkner's translation of 'Yoknapatawpha' is "a Chickasaw Indian word meaning water runs slow through flat land." (*University* 74)

significance." (12) Further to Locke, in 1964 James Baldwin emphasised "color. White men have used this word, this concept, to justify unspeakable crimes, not only in the past but in the present." ("Guilt" 725) The insidious 'one-drop rule' of racial classification had endured until the mid-twentieth century, delineating that "a single drop of 'black blood' makes a person black." (F.J. Davis 6) Using the 'one-drop rule' could label people as non-white, subjugating them by doing so. The practice of 'Othering' was particularly prevalent in the years following the Civil War, when civic tensions were on the rise – contributing to the popularity of the Ku Klux Klan, and other forms of social and racial control. After Civil War defeat, white Southerners were looking for a demographic to blame for their loss, especially following abolition and the manumission of enslaved 'property.' Assessing the impact of Locke's early twentieth-century racial analysis, "ideas of race might be mythic constructions of reality, but they were rooted in a race *practice* of discriminatory treatment that had existed since ancient times." (Jeffrey Stewart xxvi)

The myth of racial inferiority does not solely encompass the Black-White binary, though Faulkner's fictions have indeed become known for displaying the racial hierarchy at work in Yoknapatawpha between white and Black populations. The presence of the non-white 'Other' in Faulkner's works, including Indigenous peoples, incites a discussion of the supposed inferiority of *any* race that was not traditionally 'white,' befitting the standards of purity that the tenets of Southern society necessitated. Elements like racial mixing, or 'miscegenation,' exacerbated perceived threat to the white population. Though baseless, racial difference was enforced by a series of rules and mythifications; these primarily did fall upon the Black population, after the Indigenous population had been forcibly removed.[84]

'Race' could therefore be outlined and enforced through the mechanisms of white supremacism, continuing through the practice of segregation and into the Civil Rights era.

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[84] See Hugh Brogan's discussion of Indigenous resettlement, 61-70.

The myth of race itself was created for control, "a biological fiction" which Faulkner identified, exposed, and endorsed. (Stewart xxxii)

4.3 "Go Slow Now"

Faulkner has drawn rightful criticism for his views on segregation. Records of Faulkner's works of non-fiction allow insight into the influences of the twentieth century on a middle-aged author from Mississippi, whose viewpoints were oftentimes in keeping with the environmental factors of his Southern identity, thereby perpetuating stereotypes of racial inferiority and subservience in his life and fiction. Yet, at the same time, Faulkner demonstrated remarkable foresight in the perceived public handling of the Black population in the South, and dismantles aspects of the myth of racial inferiority in the works I assess below.

When studying Faulkner's personal writings, an image of the author himself appears: Faulkner the man was not readily transparent, similar to his fiction. During the rising tensions in race and segregation in the South, Faulkner's opinions became infamous, as a white man clumsily interfering in racial issues. William Faulkner, the private citizen of Oxford, Mississippi does not appear to have held the exact same viewpoints as his authorial persona, underwriting "race as a unit of social thought" within his perspectives, as well as through narrative mythification. (Locke 85) It is important to mediate a study of Faulkner's differing views on race and society, and accept the varied multiplicities of Faulkner as a human being, and his viewpoint of the vestiges of segregated society. Faulkner's body of non-fiction works offers a viewpoint of the author as social commentator, particularly during the 1950s. As Mississippi had worked to oppress its Black population – the ratio of whom threatened to outnumber the white population – the end of slavery signalled the creation of new forms of oppression, as white people endeavoured to create new ways to limit the rights of Black people. The myth of racial inferiority was an accepted part of daily

life: 'Jim Crow' and segregation affected the lives of the non-white population, limning their existence as "a socially constructed category backed by law," whilst being an afterthought to white people unless the boundaries were transgressed. (Davis 30) The social hierarchy had swung back in favour of white supremacy, and 'justice' had been restored in the eyes of the white supremacists.

Faulkner's childhood and early adolescence in the dawn of the twentieth century coincided with the escalating rise of social tensions in the South. By Faulkner's death in 1962, however, he had witnessed the changes in society and history which had brought the increased actions of the Civil Rights Movement, and the needed amplification of non-white voices. The slow end to 'Jim Crow' laws had heralded the disintegration of segregation in the South; yet Faulkner took it upon himself to insert himself into the narrative of the Black population with a – perhaps misguided – sense of authority. In the midst of racial discussions, Faulkner would be called upon for his opinions, or would offer them unsolicited in the form of letters to newspapers in his surrounding Mississippi-Tennessee area.

Writing in 1957, Faulkner laments the prevalence of racial injustice continuing into the second half of the century, wherein the Black population were still subjugated nearly a century after the end of the Civil War and emancipation:

> As long as we continue to hold the Negro second class in citizenship – that is, subject to taxation and military service, yet denied the political right to vote for, and the economic and educational competence to be represented among those who tax and draft him – Congress will continue to be offered bills containing these same or similar dangers, which only an expert can recognize; until some day the expert won't be there in time, and one of them will pass.
> ("To the Editor" 229)

Herein, Faulkner addresses the issues of racist legislature and bias against the Black population; issues that were a legacy of Reconstruction and the continued fight for

equality.[85] Faulkner was, in some ways, a product of his time. His racial opinions could not fully outgrow the bias of his environment. Infamously, Faulkner was condemned for his views on ostensibly supporting segregation, opining that the Black man ought to bide his time, and not push for the premature end to segregation in the South. In his 1956 "Letter to a Northern Editor," Faulkner writes,

> So I would say to the NAACP and all the organizations who would compel immediate and unconditional integration: 'Go slow now. Stop now for a time, a moment. You have the power now; you can afford to withhold for a moment the use of it as a force.'
> (87)

This advice from a privileged white male was not well received by the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (Faulkner's "NAACP"), particularly after the long wait for equality and the slow end to 'Jim Crow' laws and segregation. Later in 1956, Faulkner clarified "by 'Go slow, pause for a moment', I meant, 'Be flexible.'" ("Leaders in the Negro Race" 108) Again, Faulkner is contrasted with the views presented within his fiction. It is important to note the fallacies of accepting Faulkner's fiction as a verbatim representation of his own thoughts and opinions. Faulkner was also a product of his environment, depicting some racial stereotypes and colloquial voices, and adhering to some of the racial biases of the time. For example, in discussions at the University of Virginia Faulkner proposes that "the will of man to prevail will *even* take the nether channel of the black man, black race, before it will relinquish, succumb, be defeated." (*University* 5; emphasis mine) The qualifier "even" betrays a thought that the will of man would be forced to take a lesser channel to survive, adhering to a mythology of racial inferiority in Faulkner's thought. Reductively, Faulkner notes that a Black author should "be freed of the curse of his color" and "forget that he's a Negro while he's writing." (53)

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[85] Racist legislatures are still in place across the U.S. today, including gerrymandered districts and voter suppression. As of mid-2024, see *Alexander v. South Carolina State Conference of the NAACP*.

Faulkner "lived and wrote within the very buckle on the great Southern lynching belt," as Neil McMillen and Noel Polk's metaphor illustrates. (7) The reality of the South's racist and violent practices led to the loss of many Black lives, and "represented a white, southern invention of new means to exercise racial power and oppression." (Blight "For Something" 1171) It is a sobering statistic that the state of Mississippi held the 'record' for the largest number of lynchings between the years 1882-1968.[86] McMillen and Polk record that

> Faulkner's assertions notwithstanding, lynching in his time was a problem peculiar to the Southern region, not to the American nation. Of approximately 4,700 total lynchings recorded for the years 1880 to 1930, nearly 4,000 of them occurred in the South. During the 1880s, 82 percent of all American lynchings occurred in the South; by the 1920s the figure had risen to 95 percent.
> (11)

The heritage of the Southern states, which Faulkner had been born into and worked within, was one of Confederate defeat and racial violence. It is no wonder, then, that white supremacy sought to dominate society as a solution, and forge the mythology of superior and inferior races. As I have previously discussed, the narrative of the Lost Cause was forged to protect white pride and ensure historical erasure, as controlled by those in charge of (white) power.

It was decided by social consensus that the Black population had to be brought back underneath the control of white power. That which was tacit became increasingly more overt, as the rise of the Klan, and of politicians like Strom Thurmond, former governor of South Carolina, allowed for a corresponding white subscription to the myth of racial inferiority, and the endorsement of white supremacy. Thurmond's *Southern Manifesto* was written in early 1956, to oppose racial integration. Thurmond's indignation underscores white supremacist infrastructures, declaring in March 1956 that "the white people of the South are the greatest minority in this nation. They deserve consideration and

[86] See "Lynching Information".

understanding instead of the persecution of twisted propaganda." ("Address by Senator Strom Thurmond") Clearly, political propaganda was concerned with some form of racial inferiority: the perceived threat to white supremacy.[87]

Speaking in 1957 and 1958, Faulkner expounded upon the idea of 'uplift suasion,' a concept Ibram Kendi describes as

> The idea that White people could be persuaded away from their racist ideas if they saw Black people improving their behavior, uplifting themselves from their low station in American society. The burden of race relations was placed squarely on the shoulders of Black Americans. Positive Black behavior, abolitionist strategists held, undermined racist ideas, and negative Black behavior confirmed them.
> ("Chapter 10: Uplift Suasion")

Faulkner points out that, if racial equality were to be achieved from his viewpoint of the 1950s, a Black man "won't want to mix with white folks any more than white folks want to mix with him, because I can't imagine any Negro after the – his experience with white folks wanting to be that close to them." (*University* 148) Additionally, "where the white man, because of his race and color, can practice morality and rectitude just on Sunday and let the rest of the week go hang, the Negro can never let up nor deviate." (211)

As these ideas all demonstrate, the freedman was still treated as a second-class citizen in the South in the twentieth century, delineated by social fault lines for the colour of his skin, with the onus on him to improve his station.

4.4 Racial Control in Mississippi

Faulkner's fiction addresses race in the South, responding to racial issues and exposing the social injustice of a hierarchy based on an undefinable construct. Faulkner's interlocking body of work demonstrates the Black-White binary that came to predominantly define race relations in Mississippi, constructed around policing racial

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[87] In order to prevent expansion of Black voting rights, Thurmond would later make "the longest filibuster ever conducted by a single senator in an unsuccessful attempt to derail the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1957." (Wall text for *Segregationists: True Stories*)

difference. In the state that Faulkner would later inherit, Mississippi became the first to actively suppress its Black population post-Civil War, enforcing new forms of racial control under the mythification of racial inferiority.

Black Southerners were now permitted access to the promise of the South for themselves. "The white South," as Gorra delineates, "had in its former slaves an ever-present reminder of defeat. It had someone to hate, and to fear." (*SW* 327) After the fall of the Confederacy in 1865, the fragile Southern ego had found solace in believing in the concurrent myths of the Lost Cause, and of racial inferiority. Entrenched within the myth of the Lost Cause is a culture of blame surrounding the non-white population. Racial control was based upon anger during the post-slavery, post-sharecropping period, and the end of enslavement and exploitation – along with the end of the plantocratic hierarchy in the agricultural, slave-owning South. In the years after Reconstruction, the South intensified its crusade to limit Black rights, and suppress the population through violence and coercion. New orders were put into place across Southern states: in the areas of legislation, economic coercion, the 'Black Codes' after Reconstruction, and 'Jim Crow' segregation as adherence to a form of neo-slavery. After the dawn of the new twentieth century, the South's racial bias and malevolence was deeply ingrained, offering little in the way of social progress.

Black people had been enslaved and treated like property in the South for centuries, after the first slave ship had landed on American shores in the 1600s.[88] Not content with merely owning other human beings for labour, white slaveowners acted to forge a climate of fear for their own actions. The rising success of cotton was concordant with a rise in the number of slaves required to work the land, and a white man's worth was measured by his money, his lands, his crops, and his slaves. When Lincoln announced the Emancipation Proclamation, brought into action on 1 January 1863, the longevity of the white Southern

[88] For a comprehensive overview of America's history of slavery, see Brogan 280-314.

plantocracy was effectively shattered. The end of the Civil War hammered the final nail in the coffin of the institution of slavery in its current form; a joyous occasion for the Black population, though conditions did not become tolerable overnight. The Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments to the Constitution granted freedoms in the form of citizenship and the right to vote, and control was enforced in the other direction as "Congress required former Confederate states to ratify the Fourteenth Amendment as a condition of regaining federal representation." ("Landmark Legislation")

During the era of Reconstruction, the South created the narrative of the myth of the Lost Cause, and believed in the ignominy of Northern oppression. The white South had been humiliated, barred from rejoining the Union until they could prove their moral worth, and had had their 'property' taken from them by the manumission of their slaves. As a final perceived injustice, in the years after the end of the war some Black people occupied positions of power and government which 'ought to' have been occupied by white people. It is no wonder, then, that with the end of Reconstruction and Northern governance in 1877, the South went back to its old ways. As Gorra observes, "the white South could abide those of indeterminate race only so long as its own position was guaranteed by the existence of slavery. Abolition paradoxically hardened the color line." (*SW* 251) Though the premise of the colour-line was labile, white supremacy thrived to police it. The non-white population were at the mercy of "the rival memories that resonated more deeply with the white majority in both North and South," doubly-victim of the myth of the Lost Cause and racial inferiority in the white, ex-Confederate South. (Blight "For Something" 1173)

Mississippi introduced 'The Mississippi Plan' as early as 1875, actioned in 1890 by forming the new state constitution, only seven years before Faulkner's birth. Woodward lists that

> The phase that began in 1877 was inaugurated by the withdrawal of federal troops from the South, the abandonment of the Negro as a ward of the nation, the giving up of the attempt to guarantee the freedman his civic and political equality, and the acquiescence of the rest of the country in the South's demand that the whole problem be left to the disposition of the dominant Southern white people.
> (*Strange Career* 6)

Depicted by Faulkner's discussions of voting rights and the violence which accompanied suggestions of Black equality, the consequences of the Black population being given the right to vote were more than white pride could bear. Colonel John Sartoris, the hero of the Civil War in the eyes of his son, acts to suppress and limit the Black vote in *The Unvanquished.* Calvin Burden and his son are shot in the street, and left to die as a result of their insubordination to the rules of propriety of white behaviour, and their unwanted Yankee ideologies. John Sartoris is imperfect: he may have been the subject of his son's veneration, but the racial bias of the South is deeply ingrained. Society will not change immediately and the humiliation of the defeat of the Civil War, the simultaneous fall of the Confederacy, and the struggles of Reconstruction will not disappear in the long memory of the South.

Mississippi's dominant achievements in racial control influenced the behaviour of the surrounding Southern states. In 1896 its neighbour Louisiana upheld segregation legislature for "equal but separate accommodations for the white, and colored, races," in the ruling of *Plessy v. Ferguson.* The myths of racial inferiority and the Lost Cause became of equal importance in the aftermath of the Civil War, informing each other in reciprocity. Emancipation created a vacuum for the insidious growth of white supremacy, disrupting the South's traditional institutions and idealised antebellum way of life.

4.5 Slavery in Faulkner's Works I: "Red Leaves"

The contaminative, claustrophobic atmosphere of Faulkner's Yoknapatawpha County allows for an examination of race, using the microcosm of the bounds of the county line. Jefferson is symbolic of small-town America: for most of Faulkner's characters, race is a clear delineation of class and status, a hierarchy set by the colour of skin or 'one drop' of blood. Faulkner's focus is on the endurance and aftermath of slavery, and the influx of freed Black people who were able to disrupt the *status quo* of Yoknapatawpha. The South's Indigenous population did not escape from the restrictive parameters of the myth of racial inferiority – Faulkner depicts a narrative path of inheritance of the land for the Choctaw and Chickasaw, and the conniving white people who will take it from them. "Red Leaves" (1930) presents perspectives on the actions and customs of white men, including their cross-racial legacy of slavery, and demonstrates how mythologies of inferiority are perpetuated.

Faulknerian fictionalisations like the ledger in "The Bear" depict the value apportioned to human life: "*Percavil Brownly 26yr*" was purchased "*3 Mar 1856*" and valued at "*$265. Dolars.*" ("The Bear" 201) These ledgers are a "chronicle which was a whole land in miniature, which multiplied and compounded was the entire South," and conceal freedom given "from a stranger in Washington." (224, 207) For white Southern men, the end of slavery had brought a corresponding end to their ultimate control. As Faulkner's pre-war setting of "Red Leaves" depicts, the system of slavery and Black subjugation had also been enforced by Indigenous people.

"Red Leaves" ("RL") demonstrates a more-overlooked depiction of racist behaviour: that of Indigenous against Black. Woven into the narrative is a depiction of the Chickasaw treatment of Black slaves, whom they keep despite apparent incompatibility with the Indigenous people's environment. The Chickasaw keep Black people enslaved, but complain about their laziness and inefficiency, despite the apparent need to emulate white people's

behaviour. Reflecting history, as Barbara Krauthamer has observed, "like their white southern counterparts, Indians bought, sold, owned, and exploited black people's labor and reproduction for economic and social gain." (2) Enforcing a racist hierarchy is not solely the white man's domain: the tribe demonstrate their dissatisfaction in the slaves they are forced to keep, in line with a wish to emulate the white man's custom: stating "we must do as the white men do." ("RL" 301)

"Red Leaves" follows two Chickasaw men hunting for their Chief's absconded Black manservant, who has refused to be buried with his recently-deceased master. Faulkner sees the title of this piece as "probably symbolism." (*University* 39) According to his authorial process,

> The red leaves refer to the Indian. It was the deciduation of Nature which no one could stop that had suffocated, smothered, destroyed the Negro. That the red leaves had nothing against him when they suffocated and they destroyed him. They had nothing against him, they probably liked him, but it was normal deciduation. (39)

The myth of racial inferiority is not necessarily reserved for white thought only, though white people were the most overt in their promulgation of the myth, as seen in the suffocation and destruction of the red leaves representing Indigenous enslavement practices. The history of Mississippi's Indigenous population is reflected in Faulkner's portrayal of the Chickasaw, whose ownership and prominence in the land is always in the background of the debate between the hegemony of white supremacy, and the rightful ownership of the land itself. The history of Faulkner's Yoknapatawpha is one of continued slights and disservices against the Indigenous population.[89] The exploitation of the tribespeople of Mississippi – and, by extension, Yoknapatawpha – pre-dates the suppression of slaves and Black people, with its own relevance to the overarching narrative of the myth of racial inferiority.

[89] The land cannot ostensibly be bought or sold, yet Thomas Sutpen will eventually gain his estate through nefarious means: he tricks the Chief into yielding, selling his land once more to the white man.

White invasion into lands and customs has created a shifting dynamic, in which the Chickasaw leader Chief Doom

> Began to acquire more slaves and to cultivate some of his land, as the white people did. But he never had enough for them to do. In utter idleness the majority of them led lives transplanted whole out of African jungles, save on occasions when, entertaining guests, Doom coursed them with dogs.
> ("RL" 300)

The system of slavery was not a viable or humane practice in the United States, and was also not limited to white supremacy, as exacerbated by the dichotomy between Indigenous and Black peoples that "Red Leaves" exposes. Faulkner further impounds support of racial inferiority by Doom's behaviour, inhumanely hunting people for entertainment. The myth of racial inferiority is perpetuated by the fictionalised Chickasaw, as they condemn the laziness of their enslaved people, and regret their presence as a burden. Underwriting mythification of racial inferiority, Indigenous behaviours "rested on ideas about the inferiority of blackness that came to be expressed as timeless and natural differences between Indians and black people." (Krauthamer 32) The tribe's slaves are seen as a nuisance, viewed by Faulkner's Chickasaw huntsmen as inferior to the hard-working tribe members. The enslaved are "nothing but a trouble and a care," demonstrating the incompatible perils of emulating slaveholding. ("RL" 304) Indeed, the lives of the Black slaves mean nothing, as Chief Doom's man-servant is expected to be buried alive with his former master, as well as the Chief's horse and dog. The manservant is a "Guinea man" captured "by a trader off Kamerun," now modern-day Cameroon, and is treated according to his Black status. (309) In this way, the value of the life of the manservant is equated with that of an animal, whilst also paradoxically being given the honour of being buried with the Chief.

In order to expand the tribe's commerce, their enslaved people were placed "in the cabins in pairs to mate; five years later Issetibbeha sold forty a head to a Memphis trader, and he took

the money and went abroad upon it." (302) Issetibbeha, the former Chief and descendant of Doom, is callously treating human life as an opportunity for self-generative profit. Observing the plight of the Indigenous population from the vantage point of the mid-twentieth century, Faulkner remarks that those left in Mississippi were

> Like animals in a zoo: they have no place in the culture, in the economy, unless they become white men, and they have in some cases mixed with white people and their own conditions have vanished, or they have mixed with Negroes and they have descended into the Negroes' condition of semi-peonage.
> (*University* 43)

Therefore, racial subordination can only be successful according to the terms of whiteness, in another apparent form of racial 'passing.'[90]

Linguistically, Faulkner's depiction of the tribe's speech in "Red Leaves" works to emphasise the racial inferiority myth. Elmo Howell notes that Faulkner's usage is

> Carefully oblique; what is said is not so important as what is not said. It is a narrative of ominous silences. In such expressions as "yao," "ole" and "aihee," and in the child-like, repetitive speech, Faulkner is trying to suggest the primitive nature of the Indians, sometimes comical, always deadly.
> (389)

Faulkner's representation of the Chickasaw and Choctaw tribal cultures is more of a stereotype, despite him being situated on the ancestral land of both tribes in the state of Mississippi.[91] Faulkner has used "oblique" language to promote a sense of primitivism, and endorses the myth of racial inferiority by doing so. In contrast, in Faulkner's later work "Lo!" the tribesmen complain about "having to talk white talk all the time" whilst in Washington, D.C., putting on a linguistic mask to comply with forms of white behaviour.

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[90] The other 'solution' was to seize land and remove the tribes from it. Following the Missouri Compromise, "within 20 years, the nation took 25 million acres of Native American territory and removed Choctaw, Chickasaw, Creek, Cherokee and Seminole from their lands." This movement "forced the migration of tens of thousands of Native Americans along with the African Americans they enslaved." (Wall text for *The Shifting Nation*)

[91] In the Chickasaw and Choctaw migration story, the formerly-homogenous tribe split according to the conflicting advice of the sacred pole. The people of the Choctaw believed that the pole had successfully guided them to their homeland, but the Chickasaw "continued eastward to a place near present-day Pontotoc and Tupelo, Mississippi." (Wall text for *Migration Story*)

(362) [92] As this disconnect demonstrates, white-coded behaviour has influenced the Chickasaw tribe.

4.6 White Influence in "Red Leaves"

In the pages of "Red Leaves", the interplay of Yoknapatawpha's non-white inhabitants is recognised. In doing as the white man does, the tribal model has been weakened by adopting a culture discordant with their own. This aspect of racial erosion is also seen in the appropriative character of Moketubbe. Moketubbe's role as the new Chief – after the suspicious death of Issetibbeha – coincides with a generative wish to copy the white man's culture. Donning the infamous pair of red shoes, Moketubbe is representative of a new facet of tribal culture: he will not relinquish his symbol of white influence, even as the tightness of the slippers threatens circulation. Moketubbe is malleable, becoming a puppet for the white man's dominance.

Within the sphere of the myth of racial inferiority, Faulkner's tribesmen become trite and stereotypical, tinged with the suggestion of authorial ridicule at their actions and superstitions, most apparent in the extended manhunt for the Chief's manservant. The two huntsmen, Three Basket and Louis Berry, disparagingly discourse upon the effect of white behaviour. Another hunter observes that "'this world is going to the dogs,' he said. 'It is being ruined by white men. We get along fine for years and years, before the white men foisted their Negroes upon us.'" ("RL" 305) Absurdly, Faulkner also shows Basket and Berry discussing the taste of human flesh:

> "I have tried this way. Man was not made to sweat."
> "That's so. See what it has done to their flesh."
> "Yes. Black. It has a bitter taste, too."
> "You have eaten of it?"
> "Once. I was young then, and more hardy in the appetite than now. Now it is different with me."
> "Yes. They are too valuable to eat now."

[92] "Lo!" is set later in Faulkner's Yoknapatawpha timeline than the action of "Red Leaves," fictionalised during Jackson's 1829 – 1837 presidency.

> "There is a bitter taste to the flesh which I do not like."
> "They are too valuable to eat, anyway, when the white men will give horses for them."
> (296) [93]

Once more equating Black bodies with animals, the tribe's "valuable" slaves can be exchanged for horses, and "they are like horses and dogs," a "herd of blacks" to care for. (296, 300-01) The Chickasaw give the slaves accommodation "like a pen for pigs," viewing them as a burden, "worse than the white people." (302, 296) These linguistic equations serve to underline the myth of racial inferiority: even similarly-subjugated peoples will mistreat others.

When asked if these tribes and their customs exist only in memory, Faulkner replied that

> There are a few, there's a reservation, a remnant of Choctaws. The others, the Indians in my part of Mississippi have vanished into the two races – either the white race or the Negro race. You see traces of the features in the Negroes and a few of the old names in among families, old white families.
> (*University* 9)

During the hunt for the manservant – which has later echoes in Sutpen's hunt for the French architect in *Absalom!* – Faulkner's narrative focus turns to presenting Black culture present in the work's dyad. The manservant greets one form of death at the jaws of the snake 'Grandfather,' but not his forthcoming live burial. By trusting the snake to kill him, Faulkner's servant is a representation of Faulkner's use of voodoo, and acts of mythification surrounding superstition. As seen in other works, such as "That Evening Sun", the presence of voodoo and superstition in Faulkner's works is a form of racial Othering seen as alien to white observers.[94] David Cox describes "Black superstition," "epitomized by 'voodoo.' An imaginary of significant power, 'voodoo' contained multitudes: atavism, sexual danger, unreason." (2) As recorded in histories of the Ku Klux Klan, white supremacists preyed on

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[93] Incredibly, Faulkner's belief about tribal cannibalism was that "who's to say whether at some time one of them might not have tried what it tasted like?" (*University* 9)

[94] The Compson children's perspective diminishes Nancy's superstition of finding "the sign" in her home – Jesus's presence is signalled malevolently by "a hog bone, with blood meat still on it." ("ES" 288)

the fear of Black superstition, and the mythologies at work amongst both the enslaved and Indigenous peoples.[95] Faulkner's depiction of the manservant embracing death from an animal may read as a mockery of superstition. However, Faulkner's reasoning is that the snake is "the old grandfather, the old fallen angel, the unregenerate immortal. The good and shining angel ain't very interesting." (*University* 2) "Red Leaves," depicts enslaved peoples' "fetish-shaped objects made of wood and rags and feathers," as well as their "ceremonies," "cryptic ornaments" and cryptic messages contained in "the drums." (296, 297, 310) For Berliner,

> The magical sense of writing Faulkner constructs throughout his works has an almost object correlative here, as the potent sticks and fetish objects communicate with spirits and gesture toward the man's impending death and burial to assist the chief in the hereafter.
> (69)

Later in Faulkner's works, *Requiem for a Nun* denotes encroaching white influence on the tribe's fading way of life: "the wild men, the wilderness's tameless evictant children looking only the more wild and homeless for the white man's denim and butternut and felt and straw which they wore." (20) Furthermore, "Ikkemotubbe's Chickasaws now wore Eastern factory-made jeans and shoes." (183) The myth of racial inferiority has become almost farcical, as the onset of progress has benefitted the white population, moving in one direction only.

In "Red Leaves," Faulkner explores boundaries of race within the Chickasaw community, and exposes the premise that the threat contained within "Red Leaves" is in mimicry of white behaviour, and allegiance to the created myth of racial inferiority. Lack of white racial presence creates stark contrast to the notable Black-white binary echoing throughout Faulkner's works, either latent or overt in his exposé of Southern racism. Whereas

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[95] Laura Martin Rose records that the Klan "made the negroes believe that they were the ghosts of their dead masters" to control their behaviour, as "the fantastic costumes were intended to work upon the superstitious fears of the negroes." (19, 43)

elsewhere in Faulkner, the white perspective is dominant and privileged, in "Red Leaves", the sole dynamic is between Indigenous and Black; though the presence of white power is referenced through conversation, not physicality. In this way, white dominance prevails in the background of the narrative – again, the implicit focus is upon "do[ing] as the white men do." ("RL" 301) Creating perpetuation of mythification within narrative, Faulkner primarily demonstrates the myth of racial inferiority at work in "Red Leaves" without much authorial mediation, observing the fictionalised Chickasaw through sustained use of racial stereotype, and alignment with absent whiteness.

4.7 Slavery in Faulkner's Works II

Faulkner's depiction of Yoknapatawpha's non-white inhabitants is often tinged by tacit social bias, as a result of his own privileged upbringing as a white male in the South. "Red Leaves" addresses the practice of slavery flippantly, demonstrating the Chickasaws' need to "do as the white men do" even to their detriment, not to mention the entirely-detrimental enslavement of others. ("RL" 301) Slavery in Faulkner's works assesses its impact through a mostly-white perspective of Black enslavement, and the various nuances of the 'happy slave' false narrative forged as part of the dual myths of the Lost Cause and racial inferiority.

It is readily apparent that the foundations of the Confederate States of America were based upon the myth of racial inferiority. Vice President of the Confederacy, Alexander Hamilton Stephens, gave a speech before the outbreak of war that succinctly summarised the nascent Confederacy's position. Speaking in Savannah, GA, on 21 March 1861, Stephens endorsed the myth of racial inferiority, as well as creating a rhetorical sense of the mythic past in allegiance to "ancient rights, franchises and liberties." His "Cornerstone Speech," with reference to President Lincoln and the Northern states, declares that

> The prevailing ideas entertained by him [Lincoln] and most of the leading statesmen at the time of the formation of the old constitution, were that the enslavement of the African was in violation of the laws of nature; that it was wrong in principle, socially, morally, and politically… *Those ideas, however, were fundamentally wrong. They rested upon the assumption of the equality of races. This was an error. It was a sandy foundation.*
> (emphasis mine)

Stephens does expose a counter-argument whilst refuting it: it *is* clear that slavery was "wrong in principle, socially, morally, and politically." Endorsing the might of the newly-formed Confederacy, Stephens believed that

> Our new government is founded upon exactly the opposite idea; its foundations are laid, its corner-stone rests, upon the great truth that *the negro is not equal to the white man; that slavery subordination to the superior race is his natural and normal condition.* This, our new government, is the first, in the history of the world, based upon this great physical, philosophical, and moral truth.
> (emphasis mine)

Stephens's speech in 1861 has not been given much critical attention, and his legacy has been mostly subsumed by more renowned names, such as Robert E. Lee and Jefferson Davis. On sculptor Gutzon Borglum's statue of Stephens, residing in the Capitol's National Statuary Hall, he is lauded as "Statesman – Author – Patriot" on its plinth – despite the fact that Stephen's speech inherently endorses the myth of racial inferiority to preserve slavery as a "natural and normal condition," recorded as chilling evidence of belief in subjugating human beings as property.

The practice of slavery was sometimes more normalised in the pre-war South, with Black and white families being intertwined by servitude throughout several generations.[96] Indeed, years after abolition, Faulkner recollects his own faithful "Mammy," Caroline Barr. In "Mississippi" there is the presence of "Caroline too, whom the middleaged had inherited too in his hierarchical turn." (39-40) The idea of human lives as a "hierarchical turn" of entitlement and inheritance prove that the South still had a need for development. The

[96] I refer again to Mississippi's statement of secession: "our position is thoroughly identified with the institution of slavery – the greatest material interest of the world." ("Declaration…Mississippi")

assumption of human lives as perceived property endured into the twentieth century: Faulkner has "inherited too" the body and fidelity of Caroline. Faulkner may have "inherited too" some aspects of the myth of racial inferiority. Caroline had lived with the Falkner family despite raising her own children, idolised by Faulkner for her steadfast loyalty.[97] According to a letter by Faulkner in February 1940, Caroline was "the old hundred-year-old matriarch who raised me." ("To Robert K. Haas" 117) *Go Down, Moses*'s dedication in 1942 was to Caroline, "who was born in slavery and who gave to my family a fidelity without stint or calculation in recompense." (5) Perhaps Faulkner perpetuated the myth of racial inferiority by insisting on preserving racial boundaries, and insisting upon Caroline's fealty to the white Falkner family over her own.

Tim Armstrong argues that,

> Given that we never see in Faulkner's work a fully developed representation of the subjectivity of a slave, what we are often dealing with are the apocryphal traces of slavery, its echoing places.
> (106)

In a Faulknerian extrapolation, we hear the echo of slavery, but not the shot, and mythification is perpetuated through paradoxically-absent enslaved bodies.

Throughout Faulkner's works, depictions of slavery are mediated through a gloss of jocund historical evasion, particularly in *The Unvanquished*, where the Sartoris household functions as an idealised, familial commune of white and Black alike. Colonel John Sartoris never punishes or exerts his will on his quasi-extended family, and there is not even a hint that he is the veiled father of Ringo.[98] In *The Unvanquished*, Faulkner is guilty of presenting a more idyllic version of the slave-culture of Mississippi. Regarding the social microcosm of the

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[97] With hindsight, biographical detail has emerged condemning Faulkner for his eulogy given for Caroline in 1940: see Judith Sensibar. Sensibar also outlines the Falkner brothers' heritage, including "both their grandfathers' interracial affairs." (181)

[98] Gorra writes on *Sartoris* that "the only reason for Simon's almost entirely nominal existence is to keep us from wondering about Ringo's parentage, to stop us from asking if he might be Bayard's brother." ("Loosh" 25)

Sartoris mansion, Gorra claims that "Faulkner depicts the plantation as though it were a well-run manor house, something almost English and with master and servants bound together by affection and loyalty." ("Loosh" 23-24) This particular depiction clearly echoes the 'happy slave' narrative of Southern myth-making. The logic of expected fidelity to a nation state which sought to deny human rights did not appear to occur to ex-Confederates. By using such narratives, the South looked to impose a retroactive vision of history. According to this mythification, the Old South was an idyllic, racially-sensitive wonderland, instead of a racist, violent, white-dominated culture of coercion and fear. Only a small segment of Southern society would have experienced the idyll of the South; those in the mansions built by enslaved workers, profiting from the system and so reluctant for abolition that they would go to war for it. Faulkner's fiction depicts the Sutpens and Sartorises who have benefitted from the South. Though there may be an argument made that Faulkner upholds this antebellum image of the South by electing to write about pre-War Mississippi, it is clear that Faulkner does *not* underwrite this mythology.[99] The history of the South is haunted by ghosts wearing "a gleam of crinoline, a laced wrist, perhaps even a Cavalier plume – who knows?," yet Faulkner does not adhere to the dedicated mythology manifesting a pre-secession arcadia, showing the realities of controlled racial differentiation. (***Requiem*** 181) Aspects of Faulkner's authorship may appear contradictory, however, as Howe corroborates, Faulkner's "truth is that he writes in opposition to his tradition as well as in acceptance," and "struggles with the Southern myth even as he acknowledges and celebrates it." (360)

In *The Unvanquished*, there are various instances of the realities of slavery, for both the enslaved, and the slaveholding classes. As the Sartoris family are subjected to the travails of

[99] The Falkner underwriting the myth of antebellum bliss is William Clark Falkner, successful author of *The White Rose of Memphis* (1881), and Faulkner's paternal "great-grandfather, a Confederate colonel and railroad builder," a blueprint for John Sartoris "assassinated by a former partner in 1889." (Meriwether, "William Faulkner" v)

a rapidly-changing landscape and situation, their slaves are their property and their quondam-allies. The juxtaposition of Philadelphy's faithful servitude with Loosh's betrayal of the family fortune is a stark reminder of the reality of the Sartoris family's dynamic. The question of emancipation makes its way into the narrative, as Philadelphy asks, "'you mean they're gwinter free us all?'" (*Unvanquished* 20) Loosh proudly replies, "'Gin'ral Sherman gonter sweep the earth and the race gonter all be free!'" (20) However, Louvinia is a voice of doubt: "'You black fool!' she said. 'Do you think there's enough Yankees in the whole world to whip the white folks?'" (20) The insertion of John Sartoris's white perspective also weaves through the narrative, counterposing Louvinia with her son Loosh: "Father said that Louvinia would have to watch him too, that even if he was her son, *she would have to be white a little while longer*." (18; emphasis mine) Faulkner's connotation here is that being 'white' is equated with being honourable, loyal, and betraying a son for the sake of a white family. In this way, the binary of white and non-white is reinforced by inferences of honour versus dishonour, loyalty versus betrayal.

In *The Unvanquished*, Ringo declares that "'I ain't a n— any more. I done been abolished.'" (137) It is important to consider those whom the Civil War and Reconstruction benefitted, and for whom it was a positive period. The South's Black population were freed from the yoke of white oppression and the evils of slavery, in theory through the Emancipation Proclamation, but in reality only at the end of the Civil War. This was not immediate, as the freedom that the Emancipation Proclamation had set into motion did not entirely guarantee any freedom from social restrictions. Michelle Alexander observes that the Emancipation Proclamation was ephemeral:

> Lincoln issued a declaration purporting to free slaves held in Southern Confederate states, but not a single black slave was actually free to walk away from a master in those states as a result. A civil war had to be won first, hundreds of thousands of lives lost, and then – only then – were slaves across the South set free.
> (20)

Though non-fatal violence had been sanctioned against Black people through slavery, unsubstantiated claims such as Black people feeling less pain, or being more sexually licentious, led to legal grey areas. Kidada Williams identifies that "the rape of enslaved girls and women was a common feature of slavery because U.S. laws failed to recognize rape as a crime against Black girls and women." (69) The myth of racial inferiority was upheld as a code of control, and belief in the moral rectitude of subjugating others. The relative freedom of Lincoln's decree was not an immediate solution to the issues and violence of slavery. The Emancipation Proclamation could only come into fruition by the end of the war, and Lincoln would live only six days after Lee's surrender before being assassinated on 15 April 1865. In terms of the endurance of Black subjugation, slavery may have ended, "the means and modes of Black subjection may have changed, but the fact and structure of that subjection remain." (Christina Sharpe 12)

The abolition of slavery affected the ingrained social structure of the South, disturbing its foundations with the blanket decree that

> All persons held as slaves within any State or designated part of a State, the people whereof shall then be in rebellion against the United States, shall be then, thenceforward, and forever free.
> ("Emancipation Proclamation")

In diametric opposition, Yacovone notes that "the ideology of white supremacy, not slavery, proved the more ubiquitous and more enduring institution." (5) No longer labouring under a set hierarchy, white Southerners had to adapt to the realities of their new social situation, and continue to enforce the mythification of racial inferiority. By the effects of abolition, the white male had become emasculated, and sought retribution for his lost slaves, viewing his former workers as a form of lost property and capital. The era of Reconstruction merely meant that white men would have to become more wily and covert in their punishment of the non-white 'Other,' mainly for the fact of their existence alone. Soon, the advent of the Klan and an increase in the practice of lynching would put an end to covert practices,

becoming far more overt. Violence was sanctioned by society, and was a way of keeping the population 'in check.' Occasioned by the end of slavery, the imbalance of power had swung to benefit the Black inhabitants of the South – although imperfectly, and minutely.

Faulkner's works explore one of the South's legacies: institutionalised, endemic racism against those who were non-white. The effects of freedom were widespread in promise, but stymied in actuality in the years after the Civil War. Grace Hale posits that

> Southern whites constructed their racial identities on two interlocking planes: within a regional dynamic of ex-Confederates versus ex-slaves and within a national dynamic of the South, understood as white, versus the nation.
> ("Introduction: *Producing the Ground of Difference*")

The South's resultant social dynamic was balanced on the precipice of race relations, and a reluctance to cede white supremacy. Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation was apparently "an act of malice towards the master rather than one of mercy to the slave." (Pollard *LC* 360) Belief in the myth of the Lost Cause incited racial hatred, and bolstered white Southern pride in their "ruthless persecution." (360) Narratives were created to stigmatise Black people, making them out to be violent rapists, and traitors to the Southern cause. In classrooms across the South, "young African Americans were also exposed to a Lost Cause narrative, which included assertions about the inferiority of their race." (K. Cox 161) Young William Faulkner inherited the biased narrative surrounding the Lost Cause and perceived inferiority: a white-led climate of fearmongering and racial subjugation was no longer operating under the mechanism of slavery, fostering contempt and distrust inherent in the enduring myth of racial inferiority. This myth had been bolstered by ideas that "scientific racism explained domination by one group over another as the natural order of things: Blacks were biologically destined to be slaves, and whites were destined to be their masters." (Dorothy Roberts 16) When taken in tandem with messages such as Stephens's "Cornerstone Speech" in 1861, the mythification of racial inferiority was relentless.

Post-abolition, Faulkner's poor, 'white trash' characters – such as Wash Jones and the ever-increasing Snopeses – found themselves unwillingly on the same social level as manumitted slaves and the Black population. White family bloodlines such as the Bundrens, the Compsons, and the young Sutpens had found themselves no longer part of a white hierarchy with Black people at the very bottom, but now on a par with those who a few years ago had been irrevocably *Untermensch.*[100] The racial divide of the Old South was replaced by a system no longer inherently privileging whiteness, creating a subduction in which, Albion Tourgée observed in 1888, "distance between its upper and lower strata cannot be maintained; indeed it is rapidly disappearing." (412)

The collapsing white Southern hierarchy, however, quickly found alternative ways to curtail the freedom of the Black populace. Sharing the same land, under the same auspices of freedom, did not immediately guarantee an equality of treatment. Instead, the myth of racial inferiority was perpetuated by white Southerners as a way to control and restrict their Black neighbours. Coercion took the form of lynching, public scapegoating, and erroneous legal practices.

4.8 "Mountain Victory"

"Mountain Victory" ("MV") represents a variety of tensions, including ideological, political, and racial. Published in 1932 – but depicting the immediate aftermath of the Civil War in 1865 – Faulkner eloquently examines the binary between a mountain family, who are some of Faulkner's 'poor white' characters, and the affrontery of the Confederate forces encroaching on their Union stronghold, though the war has ended at last. As "Mountain Victory" examines, there was substantial racial suspicion throughout the South, and by both former-Union and former-Confederate forces.

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[100] Although now known as a prevalent term in Nazi propaganda and ideology, "*Untermensch*" was first coined by Klan member Lothrop Stoddard, using "under man" in his 1922 monograph.

The Southern climate for belief in the myth of racial inferiority was clear, reciprocated by the action of "Mountain Victory" in the liminal state of the Union cabin in Tennessee, from which escape is ultimately impossible. The Civil War may be over, but the unnamed family are still suffering from its aftermath. Black and white tensions are immanent between the aligned forces of former Confederate Major Saucier Weddel and his newly-emancipated loyal manservant Jubal, versus the white inhabitants of the rural mountain cabin in eastern Tennessee, unfortunately placed on the homeward route Weddel and Jubal take from the arena of war in Virginia back to their estate in Mississippi.[101] In these sparse pages, Faulkner's tensions build from the outset. Though the war and the Confederacy have reached their end, tensions between Yankee and Rebel will not dissipate readily, intertwined with racial suspicion.

Weddel and Jubal appear at the mountain cabin to look for shelter, and are hosted by the unnamed Union family. Unwittingly, Weddel's presence reminds the son, Vatch, of the horrors of warfare, and also unknowingly seduces the daughter of the house. The myth of the Lost Cause encroaches upon the text, as the Confederate forces have been defeated – Weddel ponders, "it's nice to be whipped; quiet to be whipped. To be whipped and to lie under a broken roof, thinking of home." ("MV" 724) In contrast to Weddel's placidity, Vatch is traumatised by the Civil War, according to his brother Hule: "because he can still hear you uns yelling," choking his brother because he is "hearing you uns yelling still." (725)

The nomadic quest-narrative for Weddel and Jubal is to reach Mississippi, and Weddel's home of 'Contalmaison,' the promised land after four years of war. Weddel hopes that "after four years I have bought immunity from running," yet his fate is to die in the backwoods of Tennessee, partly to protect Jubal, as "he wants to go home too." (729) After four years of warfare, this simple wish is stymied by the mountain family, and their confusing crusade

[101] Faulkner's action takes place "in areas such as western North Carolina or eastern Tennessee, where civilian loyalties were divided and contested throughout the war." (Faust 200)

against Jubal's affront to them. Observed by the family, Weddel is accused of being a "nigra." (716) He is the son of a Choctaw Chief, and therefore another one of Faulkner's racially-liminal characters, the end of a narrative line Faulkner began in his short story "Lo!", with the protest of the Chickasaw or Choctaw tribe against white treatment of their people.[102] Weddel is the son of Francis Vidal, who clashes in "Lo!" with President Andrew Jackson as a trickster thorn in the President's side. Taking up the narrative thread from "Red Leaves", now the Indigenous tribes are even further enmeshed with the white man. Weddel recounts that

> In the old days The Man was the hereditary title of the head of our clan; but after we became Europeanised like the white people, we lost the title to the branch which refused to become polluted, though we kept the slaves and the land. The Man now lives in a house a little larger than the cabins of the Negroes – an upper servant. (718)

M.E. Bradford notes a disconnect, however, as "the world in which this young aristocrat operates contains no discrete Indian subcultures, no gathered red people for whom he could be 'the Man.'" (373) Faulkner's removal of the narrative to the mountains of Tennessee is representative of a type of barrenness, and a stark contrast to the enmeshed climate of Yoknapatawpha. Racial or tribal hierarchy has no bearing on the mountain family, who represent the overt, immediate threat of the hegemony of white supremacy. In "Mountain Victory", the Vidal-Weddel line will cease, at the hands of the mountain people. Weddel observes the irony of racial accusation from a Union household: "it's my face and not my uniform" which exacerbates tension, yet "you fought four years to free us, I understand." ("MV" 710) Weddel's liminality is in his "dark face, with dark eyes and black hair," wearing "that rebel cloak" of Confederate grey. (706, 704)

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[102] In "Mountain Victory", the tribespeople are definitively Choctaw. In "Lo!", a depiction of the same incident denotes the people as Chickasaw. Francis Weddel, father of Saucier, is alternately "chief to the Chickasaw Nation," or "a Choctaw chief named Francis Weddel." ("Lo!" 378; "MV" 717) Writing in 1945 to Cowley, Faulkner's "Indians were actually Chickasaws, or they may be so from now on. RED LEAVES actually were Chickasaws." ("To Malcolm Cowley," Aug. 1945, 197)

Weddel's Black companion Jubal is equally-responsible for the fearsome tension in the narrative, by becoming drunk, and seemingly holding ideas above his station. Through the focalisation of the wary white family, Jubal is demarcated as "the creature," and "a creature a little larger than a large monkey." (705) In turn, Jubal equally examines the meagre cabin in "a single glance," as "the Negro examined the woman standing barefoot in her faded calico garment, and took in the bleak and barren interior." (705) Establishing a sense of superiority, Jubal now attains "that swaggering arrogance which he had assumed as soon as he saw the woman's bare feet and the meagre, barren interior of the cabin." (707) For Jubal, the family are merely "dese hyer mountain trash," "hillbilly rednecks" who "aint never seed a bathtub." (710, 729, 712) As occurs elsewhere in Faulkner, Jubal speaks with the inflections of a linguistic 'Other.' In turn, his inflected demonym of "mountain trash" compounds the indignity of white mountain folk being placed at the same social level as Black people.[103] The myth of racial inferiority is assessed on a new level of Black versus lower socioeconomic white.

Jubal's pride is performative, with an air of "swaggering caricatured assurance," emphasising his idea of superiority when contrasted with the poverty of the cabin's inhabitants. (713) The aura of the cabin creates a timeless tone, as "the Negro talked on, his eyes closed, his voice interminable, boastful, his air lazily intolerant, as if he were still at home and there had been no war and no harsh rumours of freedom and of change." (715) When Jubal is surrounded by "deseyer ign'unt mountain trash," he is afforded a higher rung of the social ladder – at least, in *his* perception. (722) Later, however, his veil of confidence will fall. As the narrative ends, white dominance over Black is asserted, even in such a diminished state as "mountain trash" against Jubal's "creature." (705, 710)

[103] This event echoes my reference to the Sutpen family's social status. See 3.7.

The cabin in the mountains of Tennessee stands as a microcosm for the South's masculinised society, in which "the voices came now without heat or significance out of that dark and smouldering and violent and childlike vanity of men." (708) The use of "cabin" does not solely extend to Faulkner's Black characters.[104] The lexical complexities of Faulkner's usage further intensify the equation between Black people and poor white people, as both are situated underneath the higher echelons of white society. The "childlike vanity" of Southern men contributed to belief in the myth of racial inferiority, by employing tactics to protect their pride, to the deficit of the majority of the population – namely, those who were non-white and/or women. (708) In "Mountain Victory", the close-minded outlook of the cabin family extends to hatred of Weddel, perhaps as he is *above* them in station, in contrast to Jubal being perceived as below. The family are Union or Yankees, holding a latent threat, particularly as "de war done wid now." (712) The mountain family are aligned with the North and Union forces, and the geography of the Tennessee valley below emphasises the racial conflict: in its "vast *invisible darkness* the valley lay, the opposite cold and invisible range *black* on the *black* sky." (728; emphasis mine) "Invisible darkness" and blackness are an apparent latent threat, obscuring the opposite ridge and a chance of escape from this microcosm of heightened racial tension.

The spectre of the recently-ended Civil War hangs over the cabin, and Weddel elucidates the fate of warfare: "I'm just afraid. I think my luck has given out. I know that it has lasted too long; I am afraid that I shall find that I have forgotten to be afraid. So I cant risk it. I cant risk finding that I have lost touch with truth." (728) Bradford posits that "both the mixed-breed Mississippi aristocrat and the hill boy have a great deal in common. The war is over, the fighting done, yet the mutual antipathy is not abated, not likely to abate in the narrator's foreseeable future." (377) Though there are similarities between Vatch and

[104] Edward Chappell notes that Faulkner "ignored the complexities of African American housing in his fiction," by "relying almost exclusively on the term *cabin*." Therefore, "not all cabin residents were Black." (67)

Weddel, the latter's protection of Jubal will not be permitted to stand. For Weddel, Jubal's life is of too much importance to let him be killed by the mountain family; a viewpoint which leads to the deaths of both men. When Jubal has incapacitated himself on the cabin's moonshine, Weddel will not leave him at the mercy of the family, even as he is being told to leave for seducing the daughter he has not spoken to. Answering the father's "he is nothing but a nigra," Weddel declines: "not after four years," as "I've worried with him this far; I reckon I will get him on home." ("MV" 723)

For Jubal, the end of the War has given him his freedom – "he is only a Negro, member of an oppressed race burdened with freedom." (718) Similarly to Faulkner's other characters who refuse to act upon their newfound emancipation, however, Weddel explains that "he believes that *I* still belong to *him*; he will not believe that *I* have been freed. He wont let me tell him so. He does not need to bother about truth, you see." (718; emphasis mine) [105] Faulkner inverts the traditional expectations of slavery; Weddel belongs to Jubal, just as much as Jubal is Weddel's former slave. The affectations of "truth" have not reached the mountains of Tennessee, in which the war's echoes reverberate like the final shot that murders Weddel, Hule, and Jubal indiscriminately. The enclave of the mountains provides a final battle. When the end comes, Jubal is executed after his master and Hule: "crouching, the Negro's eyes rushed wild and steady and red, like those of a cornered animal." (735) [106]

Situated at the close of the Civil War, the events in "Mountain Victory" demonstrate that the myth of racial inferiority could take many forms. The myth of racial inferiority is intertwined with perceptions of race, Union-Confederate animosity, and Black-white socioeconomic tension.

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[105] As my argument has delineated, Faulkner's characters elsewhere are also liminal between slavery and freedom. Clytie's status is confused further by her paternity, and Ringo still has fealty to the Sartoris family.
[106] This episode again animalises the non-white 'Other.'

4.9 Sharecropping and Resentment

Black-white socioeconomic tension – as seen in "Mountain Victory" – was also created in the post-war practice of sharecropping in the South, in which land would be leased and worked on for a small payment, or a share of the crop. The era of Reconstruction in the South was hoped to be one of compromise: the system of sharecropping came into place after the fall of the intertwined systems of plantocracy and slavery, but quickly became predatory. White and Black workers forged a fragile symbiosis, though balanced on the rift of now being the same societal status. The myth of racial inferiority was reinforced after emancipation due to the added factor of competition for land and opportunities. While Black Southerners temporarily thrived as a result of their newfound freedom – long denied to them as human beings – white Southerners failed under the rising pressure of labouring for their own fortunes, in an agricultural economy ravaged by the recent warfare. Economic disparity encroached upon the previously-perfect lives of the white South; at least, as far as the mythification of the antebellum South had promoted.

Faulkner speculated in a 1956 interview that Black stigmatisation continued in the practices of the cotton industry:

> A planter who has a thousand acres wants to keep the Negro in a position of debt peonage and in order to do it *he is going to tell the poor class of white folks that the Negro is going to violate his daughter*. But all he wants at the back of it is a system of peonage to produce his cotton at the highest rate of profit.
> ("Talk with William Faulkner" 19-20; emphasis mine)

Faulkner demonstrates a clear knowledge of the enforced myth of racial inferiority, through fabricated threats of violence to reinforce white supremacism. Therefore, the myth of racial inferiority benefitted white people in a number of ways, even those of low socioeconomic status. The harrowing practice of slavery had turned to the similar system of sharecropping, benefitting the white man once again through "the highest rate of profit." Sharecropping

may have been potentially profitable for the worker, but new boundaries were put into place to prevent Black success.

Though being a sharecropper was more attractive and stable than being a wage laborer, the premise of each was still essentially a form of slavery, but now with some potential economic benefit to those working the land. The transition period of the South created the opportunity for a labour vacuum: many Black workers left the South, travelling North, East, or West into new lands of opportunity without such overt oppression. The state of agricultural harmony in the South, however, was not to last – if it had existed in the first place. In the Southern states, the onset of the myth of racial inferiority pitted white people against all others: primarily Black, Indigenous, and Asian. Furthermore, there was an additional white hierarchy in place – rich people were better than the poor 'white trash' manual labourers. *Absalom!*'s Wash Jones represents impoverished white Southerners who found themselves at the bottom of the social scale.

As a result, newly-found denigration created resentment, and supported belief in the myth of racial inferiority among the lower white classes. One might have expected the poor white and newly-freed Black population to form some sort of alliance against the economic oppression of the rich. Instead, the perceived myth of racial inferiority further widened the social chasm. As Faulkner demonstrates,

> That's what the white man in the South is afraid of: that the Negro, who has done so much with no chance, might do so much more with an equal one that he might take the white man's economy away from him, the Negro now the banker or the merchant or the planter and the white man the share-cropper or the tenant. ("On Fear" 96)

Additionally, according to Faulkner, "the agrarian culture was the only culture the white man went to much trouble to train the Negro in." (*University* 218) In the decline of the plantocracy, "the Negro becomes more and more of a problem, when that's completely gone

he'll be still more of a problem," as "the Negro had a definite place in that economy." (218) Therefore, enforcing the myth of racial inferiority had white economic benefit.

The golden period of the mythologised Old South had been replaced by economic hardship – an unprecedented fall from grace of a plantocracy predicated on slavery, personal wealth, and bounty from the land in the form of capital. Matthews summarises that enslaved people were

> Financialized as insurable lives whose loss turned their nonexistence into money; as sexually reproducible merchandise; as contracted wage earners; as speculative investments; and as collateral for mortgages, loans, or the purchase of other goods bought on credit, including more slaves.
> ("Slave Capitalism" 4)

Therefore, the abolition of slavery created a destruction of the South's economy, in which a person's life had been ascribed a monetary value, exchanged throughout slave markets in the South spanning from Charleston to New Orleans, and exploited for the perpetuation of white property.[107] Though white and Black farmers could work the land together, their close proximity led to resentment. The economic value of subordinating others was overt – now Black bodies were not owned and treated for their labour potential. As Mississippi's Black population began to thrive on their newfound freedom, white people acted to prevent their attempts at social equality, and reclaim their state-sanctioned hierarchy. Now in the post-Civil War age of sharecropping and commerce, there was a dangerous vacillation between Black freedom, and a body no longer owned by another, therefore protected by its economic value. A slave was seldom lynched, but a free Black body became fair game for the invention of rumour and racialised fearmongering. Considering the effect of failed secession, the South's economic and political infrastructures were realigned to promote a racist social agenda, consolidating power in the hands of the white population once more.

[107] The Old Slave Mart Museum in Charleston, SC, depicts South Carolina's reliance on slavery: "of the 15 people in the U.S. who owned more than 500 slaves, 8 were South Carolinians." This statistic is amplified: in the state, "3% white population owned 95% enslaved population." (Wall text)

For the all-white Southern Agrarians, writing contemporaneously with Faulkner, the future of the South was for white people only. Donaldson's assessment is that the Agrarians wanted to

> Maintain whiteness into sharp relief, in part by figuring regional agrarian tradition as white and male at every possible opportunity in essay after essay and in part by reducing African Americans to near-invisibility and near-silence.
> (xvi)

The structure of racism excluded those who were non-white: the Agrarians' essays accurately reflect the dominance of white men in the early twentieth century working to exclude the 'Other' and mythologise a South that had never existed.

For Agrarian Frank Owsley, the nature of the Old South was a halcyon era of white supremacy and connection "close to the soil," to be admired, and hopefully reimagined. (71) Citing agricultural versus industrial *animus*, Owsley made a defence of slavery his focus, as the practice

> Was part of the agrarian system, *but only one element and not an essential one.* To say that the irrepressible conflict was between slavery and freedom is either to fail to grasp the nature and magnitude of the conflict, or else to make use of deliberate deception by employing a shibboleth to win the uninformed and unthinking to the support of a sinister undertaking.
> (73; emphasis mine)

Defending slavery as a system "practically forced upon the country by England," Owsley also acutely establishes the dominant fear of the white South, as demonstrated throughout *I'll Take My Stand* – a fear of the ex-slave usurping white male positions of power and unmitigated dominance. (77) Harkening back to the Old South is indicative of a wish for the old values, and a return to white supremacy that saw its concomitant resurgence in the mid-1920s. Emancipation and manumission set the idealised precedent for a New South in which Black and white would live freely together, working the same land for the same pay. As Faulkner records, however, the Southern states colluded instead to limit the power of the Black population.

Faulkner demonstrates the discrepancy between the ephemeral ideology of people like Owsley's antebellum South, and its harsh realities. The land of the South had been a land of promise, defeat, and new hope, in which the Black population was paradoxically both an afterthought and entirely at the forefront of white consciousness. In "Mississippi" Faulkner observes that Black people

> Could worship the white man's God but not in the white man's church; pay taxes in the white man's courthouse but couldn't vote in it or for it; working by the white man's clock but having to take his pay by the white man's counting.
> (37)

The myth of racial inferiority enforced exclusion under "the white man's" control. The Agrarians' incendiary essays are conspicuous in their similar exclusion, promoting a vision of a New–Old South for all, yet deliberately excluding many of its inhabitants.

Emancipated freedom signified a new period for the Black Southern population, for whom Reconstruction was more an era of fragile promise: Goldfield records that "the surrender at Appomattox marked the time of liberation, not capitulation." (19) The pride of white Southerners had therefore been damaged twofold; by the loss of the Civil War, then by emancipation. For Owsley, the affront was clear: astoundingly, he claimed that his beloved South "was turned over to the three millions of former slaves, some of whom could still remember the taste of human flesh and the bulk of them hardly three generations removed from cannibalism." (62)

The myth of the Lost Cause helped to perpetuate the racist infrastructure of the Old South, carried into the New South by men such as Owsley, and by Agrarian Ransom's similarly-blinkered declaration – coming some seventy years after abolition – that "slavery was a feature monstrous enough in theory, but, more often than not, humane in practice; and it is impossible to believe that its abolition alone could have effected any great revolution in society." (14) This prevarication is inherently damaging, clearly demonstrating Ransom's

position of white male privilege. Agrarian Robert Penn Warren recognises the corresponding cultural shift when "the old Emancipation Proclamation was at last effective, and the negro became a free man in the country which long before he had decided was his home." (247) Warren is not free from criticism, however, as his vision of suitable freedom includes the idealisation of rural Black communities, containing little threat to an educated white middle-class who would deign to "let the Negro sit beneath his own vine and fig tree" because "in the past the Southern negro has always been a creature of the small town and farm. That is where he still chiefly belongs." (264)

The practice of sharecropping exposed a continuation of racial tensions in the South, creating *animus* between white and Black workers on the land. Tension was also exacerbated by fears of white 'passing,' in which Black people would enter into white society in order to access more economic and social opportunities.

4.10 Perceptions of Race and 'Passing'

In "Mountain Victory", Faulkner portrays the tensions and interplay between accepted forms of white superiority, and the hysteric 'perfidious' presence of those who were non-white. Saucier Weddel must be 'Othered' as a "nigra" for the lower-class white family to feel superior to the Confederate Major, accusing him of 'passing' when he is only passing *through* the Tennessee mountains. ("MV" 716) The threat of miscegenation to white bloodlines and implied purity became a societal fear for Faulkner's characters, as primarily dominated in discourse by *Absalom!*'s Charles Bon, and *Light in August*'s Joe Christmas. Dedicated chapters on these texts are placed in my study before and following this chapter on the myth of racial inferiority, as the repercussions of dominant mythifications of inferiority reverberate throughout Faulkner's works. Perceptions of race are carefully controlled, particularly in reciprocation of white privilege.

Quentin Compson observes in *The Sound and the Fury* (*S&F*) that racial consciousness permeates the South specifically: he "used to think that a Southerner had to be always conscious of n—s," but then "realised that a n— is not a person so much as a form of behavior; a sort of obverse reflection of the white people he lives among." (86) Quentin betrays a belief in the myth of racial inferiority, seeing the non-white 'Other' "not as a person," existing for his benefit only. If people were able to take on the apparently-superior "form of behavior" of white people, there is an underlying threat of 'passing.' The fear of 'passing' worked in both directions: there was a fear of undetected outsiders in white communities, and also the fear of being found out as being non-white, based on the Black-white binary of race as a construct and policeable actuality.

The fear of fraternising with a white-passing person is a narrative frequently occupying Faulkner's works, and those of other writers in the same period.[108] The myth of racial inferiority was twofold: a conditioned fear of those who were clearly non-white, and a more imperceptible, malignant fear of anyone who could be white 'passing' – those who may deceive the white population and 'pretend' to be white also. As Davis delineates, "'passing' is much more a social phenomenon than a biological one." (14) The language surrounding the myth of racial inferiority places a mendacious motive upon non-white characters, assuming a wish to deceive and infiltrate white society. The benefits of joining white society are not considered by those who are white, as their race provides a blinkered and intolerant attitude, upholding rigid segregation and perpetuating a climate of fear and suspicion. These factors contribute to the myth of racial inferiority, and Faulkner's deployment of the myth at play throughout his works in racially-liminal characters who expose race as a fallible construct.

[108] Contemporaneously to Faulkner's fictional output, one might refer to Nella Larsen's *Passing* (1929) for an idea of white-passing narratives foregrounding the simultaneous fear of being discovered.

In the postbellum South, attention was drawn inwards to the small spheres of communities no longer possessing the unifying focus of the Civil War and a common enemy. Faulkner's works represent the dangerous closeness of Southern society, as the social gaze turned its focus to overt exclusion of the 'Other.' After manumission, the Black population obviously did not disappear – in some counties in Mississippi, the number of Black inhabitants still outnumbers the white population, particularly around the sites of former-plantations on the rich plains of the Mississippi River. Mississippi's state capital Jackson has the highest population percentage of Black inhabitants of any large city in America.[109] This proximity, and the continuation of close-quarters as a legacy of a previous plantation economy, fed into the myth of racial inferiority. Instead of being owned and controlled as slaves, Black people were now apparently dangerous in their freedom. Subsequently, the solution was to spread a myth of violent, sex-obsessed Black male rapists, who would threaten the South's pure white women. Any violent behaviour from Black inhabitants would further endorse the myth, ensuring white control.

White men could step in to protect their *other* form of coercible property, gained this time by marriage, and ensuring reciprocal control of white women. Matthews explains that

> The fantasies that white women were helpless and black men predatory betrayed anxieties among certain classes of white males who, especially in the South, felt their economic potency slipping away with their slide into landless tenancy and debt, often in direct competition with successful free blacks, and their sexual command weakening in the face of women's greater control over their own lives. ("Cage" 120)

White supremacists promoted the need for control of Black men, alleging sexual threat to the purity of the South's white women. The masculinity of the white Southern male had been called into question, threatened after the defeat of the Civil War: by promoting racial imbalance, and returning to the days of a more formalised and segregated racial hierarchy,

[109] According to Casey Tolan, in February 2023, Jackson was "about 83% Black now – the highest percentage of any major city in the US."

the white man could regain his lost pride. Ironically, the contaminative fear of miscegenation was primarily the fault of white slave-ownership, as mixed-race children were brought into existence by the whims of the white slaveholder.

Southern white men had lost their control over both white women and Black people after the defeat of the Civil War. They would, therefore, soon turn to other forms of coercion to ensure their continued place in the social hierarchy.

4.11 Whiteness in Faulkner's Works

An aspect of Faulkner's fiction less-often explored is Faulkner's perception of *whiteness.* Integral to a study of Faulkner is a recognition of the overarching, white-dominated structure of the South; Faulkner was a white male, from a relatively privileged background, whose "own maternal and paternal ancestors included antebellum slaveholders." (Jay Watson, "Introduction," *Slavery* viii) Faulkner's works predominantly feature white characters, operating within the system of white privilege in a state that allowed them to do so. In turn, racial erasure is prevalent, including the fetishization of mixed-race characters. Faulkner's white characters are never questioned for their whiteness: they are allowed to control the town of Jefferson, and exert power over those who are non-white. In turn, issues of miscegenation and 'passing' enter into this social dynamic.

Faulkner's white characters must be held to account. Academic attention is usually placed elsewhere, in the questions of Faulkner's portraits of non-white people in the small-town South. Jay Watson argues, however, that

> A chorus of voices has countered that we ignore whiteness at our peril. They argue that the key to its dominance as identity and/or ideology lies precisely in its ability to go uncommented on, to pass beneath critical inspection as an unremarkable, neutral standard against which other identities can be measured and known. ("Introduction," *Whiteness* 7)

The perils of ignoring whiteness would allow for the continued rise of white supremacy: as occurred in the Klan's incipient rise. The racial delineations of whiteness ought to be held to account, no longer "an unremarkable, neutral standard" but another racial marker, as the white population in the South primarily judged and persecuted others for the colour of their skin or the invisibility of their blood. Race is a construct, not skin colour, or any other physical or non-physical factor. Racial epithets – including those which have been used historically as pejorative expressions of racism – are reducible to meaningless words, signifying nothing. Yet these terms hold great power: racial hatred finds its forms of expression in a number of terms Faulkner himself uses throughout his works, including the frequent vituperation of "n—."

Faulkner's portrayals of whiteness are as important as those of *non*-whiteness. As a contrasting tableau, the secret and sinister rise of the Snopeses spreading across Yoknapatawpha is permitted.[110] If the initial patriarch, Ab Snopes, had been Black, the rise of the Snopes domain would have faltered before it had begun. However, conniving behaviour, stealing, and trickery are all seemingly acceptable for white Yoknapatawphans. Interestingly, this 'white trash' insurrection has its origins in the locus of Frenchman's Bend – Jefferson is too genteel to facilitate such encroachment. There are no Black freedmen in Faulkner's Frenchman's Bend, to confuse the boundaries of Black and white through economic levelling. Ab Snopes and his family aided by their veneer of whiteness.[111]

Historically, there has been a disconnect between the social value of impoverished white people, and equally-degraded Black people. The myth of racial inferiority does not bother itself with a delineation for a lower white class – paradoxically, all white people are elevated by virtue of their skin colour, yet poor white people were on a level with Black freed-people.

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[110] The Snopeses appear primarily in their trilogy of *The Hamlet*, *The Town* and *The Mansion*, as well as "Barn Burning".
[111] Ab Snopes's lack of scruples causes Granny Millard's death in *The Unvanquished*.

Absalom!'s Thomas Sutpen is clear not to let "malaria-ridden" Wash Jones cross into his house, kept at the appropriate distance of the "scuppernong arbor," even though Sutpen himself had been deemed a form of 'white trash' before entering Jefferson. (*AA!* 87, 125) For Andrew Leiter, "poor whites' animosity toward slaves extends from their economic and social displacement in the slave economy, while the slaves in turn scorn the poverty of those displaced whites." (33) Post-slavery, faith in the myth of racial inferiority – in the form of social conditioning – created an opportunity for white people to exert disdain for their new economic equals, ensuring that supremacy was accessible for all who were white. The myth of racial inferiority united white people behind a Black or 'Othered' scapegoat. As *Absalom!*'s Wash Jones wonders, "maybe it would seem to him that this world where n—, that the Bible said had been created and cursed by God to be brute and vassal to all men of white skin, were better found and housed and even clothed than he and his granddaughter." (*AA!* 282) Like young Sutpen in the Tidewater Plantation doorway, Wash has discovered his place is lower than Black people's, and that there is a hierarchy of whiteness at work within the mythologies surrounding racial inferiority. The concept of inferiority can also affect permutations of whiteness; as long as the 'right' white men are at the top of the social hierarchy, all those below are subordinated.

The privileges of whiteness are such that, in one episode, Sutpen is indistinguishable from his slaves: "he and the twenty negroes worked together, plastered all over with mud against the mosquitoes," and Sutpen is "distinguishable one from another by his beard and eyes alone." (37) Connoting marriage with economic commerce, Sutpen "had now come to town to find a wife exactly *as* he would have gone to the Memphis market to buy livestock *or* slaves." (38; emphasis mine) Linguistically linking "livestock *or* slaves" demonstrates the relative value of both. Furthermore, Clytie Sutpen is the result of Sutpen's white male privilege over his enslaved women, in that "he brought the two women deliberately; he probably chose them with the same care and shrewdness with which he chose the other

livestock – the horses and mules and cattle – which he brought later on." (61) In addition, Charles Etienne's wife is "an authentic wife resembling something in a zoo." (209) Connotations with animals was a way in which the non-white 'Other' could be effectively dehumanised. Sutpen's enslaved workers are uncanny, limned as "his band of wild n—s like beasts half tamed to walk upright with men," when Sutpen's farming neighbours "allowed him to mix his wild stock with their tame." (8, 61) The white climate of the pre-Jefferson settlement in *Requiem for a Nun* depicts "rewards for escaped or stolen Negroes and *other* livestock," denigrating Black bodies in an echo of repeated "other livestock." (7; emphasis mine) Historically, slaves were held in as little regard as beasts of burden on the farms of the Southern states: *The Unvanquished*'s Granny Millard wants recompense for "the silver and the darkies and the mules," presumably in that order. (*Unvanquished* 77) The relative worth of slaves is again equated with animals to reinforce the myth of racial inferiority.

Faulkner appears to accurately reflect the interiority and motives of his Black characters, yet he is aware of the authorship of such characters coming from a position of whiteness:

> It is easy enough to say glibly, 'If I were a Negro, I would do this or that.' But a white man can only imagine himself for the moment a Negro; he cannot be that man of another race and griefs and problems.
> ("Leaders in the Negro Race" 110)

Inheritance of a culture bound by racial biases and a history of racialised violence informs Faulkner's viewpoint: he is aware of the limitations of his own voice, and the boundaries of imagination, yet his authorial mythmaking reflects the actual social attitudes of the white South. The rise of the Ku Klux Klan and the action of "Dry September" foreground the unquestioned privilege of whiteness within the enforced myth of racial inferiority.

4.12 The Inimical Rise of the Ku Klux Klan

The perpetuation of the myth of racial inferiority was aggressive in the fraught incubator of the South's social climes. The perceived slight upon the moral rectitude of the South – after the dubious morality of a war fought to preserve the institution of slavery – created a perfect climate for the rise of the Ku Klux Klan.

Initially formed in post-Civil War Tennessee, the Klan spread across the United States. The perception of white superiority – incorrect, yet potent in the South – created the perfect environment for the rise of the Klan's membership, and violent, coercive practices.[112] The first wave of the Klan was concordant with the atmosphere of the defeated South: it became an institution in the years after the Civil War. The Klan was not the only confederated form of justice in the South, as

> Beginning in 1865, white supremacists established paramilitary organizations throughout the South and later in the North. These groups included the White League, the Red Shirts, the Knights of the White Camelia, and, most infamously, the Ku Klux Klan.
> (Wall text for *Intimidating Freedmen*)

The Klan was the most well-known of these organisations. After declining in popularity, the Klan resurrected with a vengeance in 1915, in a cross-burning ceremony on top of Stone Mountain, Georgia's monolithic, unfinished monument to the Confederacy.[113] The reformed Klan adapted to a new social crusade, gaining widespread popularity in the 1920s.[114]

In the early years of the Klan, the secretive actions of its members were tied to the myth of the Lost Cause. As a form of domestic terrorism and coercion, the Klan attacked and murdered in the name of racial justice, supported by various prestigious social communities

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[112] See Woodward's *The Strange Career of Jim Crow* for further material on the Klan's rise.
[113] The original concept by sculptor Gutzon Borglum for the 'Confederate Memorial Carving' on Stone Mountain was to include a longer parade of Confederate Army soldiers across the surface of the site. Akin to the Confederate States of America, the idea did not come to total fruition. See Susan Neiman, p. 182.
[114] Though there was an obvious Southern leaning towards the Klan, the largest membership body was in Indiana: "all but two of the ninety-two counties had a chapter – the only state with such saturation." (Egan 12)

in the South, including the United Daughters of the Confederacy. Laura Martin Rose's 1914 monograph, *The Ku Klux Klan: or Invisible Empire* is a study of the inimical rise of the Klan, and a depiction of the biases in place within the South after the end of the War and the early twentieth century.[115] Rose lauds the Klan's actions, demonstrating the destructive societal work of the myth of racial inferiority. Her propaganda piece is dedicated to

> The Youth of the Southland, hoping that a perusal of its pages will inspire them with respect and admiration for the Confederate soldiers, who were the real Ku Klux, and whose deeds of courage and valor, have never been surpassed, and rarely equalled, in the annals of history.
> (11)

Echoing the public sentiment of the misguided end to slavery, Rose blames "four million slaves suddenly emancipated, with no realization whatever of the responsibilities that freedom brought." (14) The onus of Reconstruction efforts appeared to be the new yoke upon the Black population. Though writing nearly half a century after the end of the Civil War, Rose is representative of the powerful propaganda of the Lost Cause, lamenting that

> The South was soon under what is known as the Carpet-Bag Regime; men without principle were in power, and negroes, already demoralized by their freedom, were elevated to the highest positions.
> (16)

Rose demonstrates clear fear of non-white power, "elevated to the highest positions" above ex-Confederates. Rose could have been at home with the mob-mentality of white Jeffersonians, in that "the negro considered freedom synonymous with equality, and his greatest ambition was to marry a white wife." (17) [116] Finally for Rose, the inception of the Klan was a chance for "Confederate soldiers, as members of the Ku Klux Klan, and fully equal to any emergency" to act their part, and become heroes who "delivered the South from

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[115] Rose's grandfather was Thomas Martin, one of the original members of the Klan, who hosted early meetings in his family home in Pulaski, Tennessee. See Rose 11.

[116] This outrage can be applied to *Light in August*'s Joe Christmas and Joanna Burden, or Minnie Cooper's accusation of Will Mayes in "Dry September".

a bondage worse than death." (17) The death toll of the Civil War is the highest in American history to date, comprising two percent of the total population at the time, estimated to be 620,000 people.[117] The fate of Emancipation and Reconstruction were surely more benign in comparison, particularly when considering *white* deaths, not the Klan's regime of terror and lynching dominating the early history of the twentieth century. The branding of a slave-free South as "a bondage worse than death" demonstrates the absurdity of the stratagems used to promote the myth of the Lost Cause, yet is also a very real consideration of the time. (17)

The intertwining of the myths of racial inferiority and the Lost Cause are overt in Louisiana's 'Memorial Hall Museum.' An exhibition celebrates General Nathan Bedford Forrest in a feat of linguistic prevarication: "a self-made man" whose "fame as a leader of the cavalry had become almost legendary."[118] Echoing the mythic lore of the Lost Cause in Lee's speech on 9 April 1865, Forrest was apparently "finally overwhelmed by greatly superior forces at Selma, Alabama in April 1865." Forrest would then live out his days "again a planter." Unsurprisingly, the biased museum paraphernalia does not make a single mention of Forrest's other 'achievements'; he was the first Klan Grand Wizard in the 1860s, did not receive any military training before becoming a General, and responsible for the Fort Pillow massacre of Black Union soldiers in April 1864. Forrest is viewed entirely through a lens of apologist whiteness. Again echoing the tenets of the Lost Cause, another Memorial Hall exhibition states that "amongst officers and enlisted men, Union and Confederate, both marched off to war in 1861 with a single common desire – *the will to fight*." (Wall text for *The Will to Fight*; italics theirs) One might extend this further: "the will to fight to preserve the institution of slavery." The damaging language of the museum notes that these Confederate soldiers "went to war – seeking glory in defending their flag, their

[117] This figure is taken from wall text for the WWII Memorial, Washington, D.C.
[118] All quotations taken from wall text for *General Nathan Bedford Forrest.*

homes and their 'new nation.'" (Wall text for *Training*) Perhaps the lack of attention on enslaved bodies is more insidious than if it were to be overtly stated – these men were fighting for the overarching right to continue enslaving other human beings.

As an extension of displaced Confederate forces, the Ku Klux Klan would later fight to control the freedom of those who were non-white. Although Faulkner's depictions of the Klan are nebulous, the attitudes of his townspeople indicate a level of familiarity with actions and customs attributed to the Klan. Faulkner explicates his authorial stance on the Klan, which had spread across his home state:

> The spirit that moves a man to put on a sheet and burn sticks in your yard is pretty prevalent in Mississippi, but not all Mississippians wear the sheet and burn the sticks. That they scorn and hate and look with contempt on the people that do, but the same spirit, the same impulse is in them too, but they are going to use a different method.
> (*University* 94)

In Faulkner, "nightriders" make an appearance in *The Unvanquished*, "to keep the carpet baggers from organizing the Negroes," showing this "different method" of racial control. (*Unvanquished* 153; *University* 94) Timothy Egan notes cynically that "the rebranded Klan was an easy sell in the South, playing to Lost Cause sympathies of aging slaveholders who passed on their prejudices to their twentieth-century grandchildren." (46) The actions of various inhabitants of Jefferson demonstrate an unnamed affinity with the actions of white supremacists, though they may not don the Klan's white conical hats and robes directly. In the wider historical context, the Klan operated under the guise of social reform and justice: they were performing acts of social cleansing to control the Black population.[119] The Klan's violent, fearsome reputation worked to limit and control the behaviour of non-white inhabitants of the Southern states, who were violently oppressed under a campaign of fear and retribution by virtue of the colour of their skin. Much akin to the South's denial of the

[119] See Rose's *Invisible Empire* for a contemporaneous viewpoint of the Klan.

causes for secession and the Civil War, the Klan were lauded, and the moral implications of their actions were not considered by many white Southerners. Rose's *Invisible Empire* demonstrates that the Klan were accepted and supported by communities in the South, who believed that "no organization ever held loftier ideas or nobler purposes." (25)

Though there is a margin for considering coercion in Klan activities, particularly in small, insular towns in the U.S. like fictionalised Jefferson, one of the reasons for this support – particularly from Southern women – was due to their belief in the myth of racial inferiority. As I have delineated, Southern men perpetuated the myths of Black sexual deviancy; a predilection for rape; and the danger of the Black male to the chastity of the white Southern woman. Robert Samuels and Toluse Olorunnipa also corroborate that,

> During the period of slavery, the scientist Samuel Cartwright coined the phrase "drapetomania," a mental illness rooted in Black "rascality" that would prompt an enslaved African American to desire freedom, a disease that needed immediate treatment.
> (148-49)

Clearly, in this line of argument, the rigidity of slavery had been the last bastion to protect white women from these rapacious, manic urges. As a result, the Klan were not held to account, and were a formidable threat in the cause of white supremacy.

It is no surprise that white Southern males created their own ways of addressing and stymying the new-found power of the Black populace, in the invention and rampant success of the Klan. The valued traditions of the Old South – to which white Southerners wished to return – perpetuated a new racial hierarchy. By threatening the lives of Black Southerners, white men were able to regain their positions of power. McMillen and Polk corroborate that lynching "was always an effective instrument of white control, the instrument in reserve, a last white resort." (11) The key term here is "control": the threat of violence was a tool of oppression, coercing the South's Black population into compliance. Furthermore, the "last white resort" encroached insidiously into the foreground of society. Alabama's Tuskegee

University "houses the nation's most complete record of lynchings occurring in the U.S. during an 86-year period spanning 1882 to 1968." (C.W. Johnson) Tuskegee's records demonstrate that lynching gained a foothold in social practices. A total of 4743 lynchings have been documented in the "Lynching Information" data set, as recorded by Johnson. It is important to note that, of these numbers, 1297 lynchings were classified as "White," and a corresponding 3446 were classified as "Black." These numbers give a percentage of 27.35 percent White, and a corresponding 72.65 percent Black. Of these, 40.84 percent were due to "Homicides," and either "Rape" or "Attempted Rape" accounted for a combined total of 25.29 percent. ("Lynchings Stats") Faulkner's "Dry September" is a fictionalised, overt study of the threat of lynching, carried out in Jefferson after a white woman has accused a Black man of rape. Tuskegee denotes "Insult to White Person" as responsible for 85 deaths by lynching, 1.79 percent of the overall number, and representing the very real human cost.

4.13 "Dry September"

Faulkner's "Dry September" ("DS") is a portrayal of the racial issues plaguing Jefferson in the early twentieth century. First published in *These 13* (1931), the action contained within Faulkner's few pages exposes the prevalence of the myth of racial inferiority, as well as the perceived 'threat' towards white women in the South from allegedly-rapine Black men.[120] Fear of Black rule and interracial miscegenation were used as a form of control for the South's white women and the Black population – both groups whom white males in the South wished to bring under their control.[121] Faulkner depicts a chilling sense of racial violence and claustrophobia, which he would go on to develop after "Dry September" in *Light in August* the following year. As I have discussed, this envisioned threat was a form of control not limited to fiction. The mythologised threat of racial

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[120] It would be remiss not to draw parallels to the events of August 1955, and the lynching of Emmett Till in Mississippi. Faulkner has presciently predicted these events in "Dry September", depicting the effects of accusation against those who cannot have recourse.

[121] For more on miscegenation in American drama and fiction, see Diana Paulin.

inequality was endemic, contaminating the white mindset and inciting racialised violence, as Faulkner had witnessed in his beloved South. "Dry September" encompasses a number of themes: the threat of the white man's power against Black rights; the misguided chivalric protection of the South's white women; and the rise of white men enacting violence upon the Black population to prove their worth and racist beliefs.

Faulkner's action begins in "the bloody September twilight," as a rumour spreads like wildfire across Jefferson: "it had gone like a fire in dry grass – *the rumor, the story, whatever it was*." ("DS" 158; emphasis mine) The power of the townspeople to create myth and legend has transmuted into a "story, whatever it was": Miss Minnie Cooper has made an accusation of rape against a Black male, reinforcing white male allegations of Black male sexual violence. The action unfolds with a sense of half-truthful speculation and a lynching; accusation leading to a man's death. Faulkner presents the mediated voice of the barber Hawkshaw to alleviate the tension, yet the piece ends on an ambiguous note of white-on-Black violence, and the strain placed upon a community through their own actions of continuing to subordinate the 'Other' to their white will. "Dry September" is a mediation on responsibility and blame, witnessed within the righteousness of Hawkshaw; Minnie's aged virginity; and the racist violence of John McLendon and his mob. The impact of the short story lies in its uncertain ending, in which the reader's sympathy gives hope of sparing the framed man, yet the implications of the truth are hidden in plain sight. One would hope to see sense and sympathy for Jefferson's Black scapegoat, yet common sense and knowledge of historical context prevail. Therefore, prevarication is the key to this text.

The perceived 'threat' in "Dry September" is the threat of the false legend that the Black male was inclined to attack white women. In actuality, the threat is almost always of the *white* man. As belief in the myth of racial inferiority perpetuated, Black masculinity was a predominant threat to white supremacist society. Initially, Hawkshaw intervenes for Will

Mayes in Jefferson's barber shop: the absent Mayes is given the honour of being called "a good n—", and one who poses no threat to Miss Minnie Cooper's chastity and good name. (158) The ironically-rigid rules of racial inferiority – couched as they were within mythification – could be bent for certain people, perhaps as a perceived reward for loyalty. As Faulkner describes it, "I've noticed that the Southerner, he don't love the Negro in quantities, but he will defend some particular Negro." (*University* 220)

The barber's own racial identity is left vague – he is a "sand-colored man," a phrase Faulkner also uses elsewhere to denote uncertain racial lineage, such as in *Light in August.* ("DS" 158) The crux of the barber shop debate rests upon the ingrained social hierarchy that places a white woman's lie before a Black man's truth –Minnie is not entirely reliable. The myth of racial inferiority, including the dominant message of the Klan and other 'social justice' leagues, has created a society in which the word of Minnie Cooper is not questioned: as a barber shop participant validates, "won't you take a white woman's word before a n—'s?" (158) By attempting to protect the accused Black man from harm, the barber Hawkshaw draws suspicion upon himself, and is accused of being a "damn n—lover." (159) The uncertainty around Minnie's accusation does not stymie the men, who are bent on their plan for revenge. In their white male protective frenzy, they do not listen to the barber's reasoning that none of them gathered "knew exactly what had happened." (158) Even the barber's client, who is new to Jefferson and has no stake in the game, will not stand for this display of reason and benevolence, asking

> Do you claim that anything excuses a n— attacking a white woman? Do you mean to tell me you are a white man and you'll stand for it? You'd better go back North where you came from. The South don't want your kind here.
> (160)

In the client's questioning, the issues of race in Jefferson and the South are laid bare. The belligerent client is astounded that Hawkshaw is a true Southerner, in his reply, "North what?…I was born and raised in this town." (160) Implicit in the stranger's exhortation to

return to the North is a sense that such judicious behaviour will not be tolerated in the South, or by Southerners: aggression against the North is a remnant of the Civil War, even in the twentieth century. In this exchange, we witness the popularity of the myth of the Lost Cause, leading to the concurrent myth of racial inferiority. The juxtaposition of North-South meets White-Black, and a white man is expected to blindly support the assumed lynching of a Black male – Will Mayes.

Faulkner further heightens the claustrophobic barber shop tension with the appearance of McLendon, who restates the integral issue at hand, querying "are you going to sit there and let a black son rape a white woman on the streets of Jefferson?" (160) [122] Faulkner's inclusion of "on the streets of Jefferson" in this incendiary argument emphasises the reputation of the town itself, as an extension of Yoknapatawpha County, the state of Mississippi, and the South as a whole. What is done unto Minnie Cooper is done unto the whole of Jefferson, and the barber's reluctance to murder a potentially-innocent man after a white woman's dubious tale is taken as a slight upon the whole town itself. Echoing the narrative of small-town policies across the South, McLendon doesn't care for the veracity of Cooper's rumour, asking "happen? What the hell difference does it make? Are you going to let the black sons get away with it until one really does it?" (160) Reiterating the words of the stranger for shock value, "'you mean to tell me,' McLendon said, 'that you'd take a n—'s word before a white woman's? Why, you damn n—loving –.'" (161)

Furthermore, to doubt the word of Minnie Cooper is to doubt the entire narrative that white men created to subordinate and subdue white women and Black men: white chastity is threatened by Black masculinity, and therefore white men must control the Black population by force and coercion. As the men in the barber shop see it, Minnie Cooper's chastity is metonymic for all of Jefferson's women who are all threatened by Black rapist

[122] McLendon's commandeering status is supported, as "he had commanded the troops in France and had been decorated for valor." ("DS" 160) Now, he leads the lynch mob for Mayes.

tendencies: the unnamed client in the barber shop exclaims "I dont live here, but by God, if our mothers and wives and sisters –." (161)

Minnie is an alcoholic in her late thirties with waning appeal – the men of Jefferson "did not even follow her with their eyes any more." (164) Perhaps the insinuation is that the white men of Jefferson are eager to protect their white women as long as they are attractive. By accusing Will Mayes, Minnie has regained some interest in her fading femininity. Slyly, Faulkner does not explain whether Minnie has made false accusations or not; the inference is left to the reader. Minnie's veracity is called into question – it is alluded that "wasn't there something about a man on the kitchen roof, watching her undress, about a year ago?" (160) Furthermore, despite Prohibition, "usually by that hour there would be the scent of whisky on her breath." (163-64) At the end of the narrative, Minnie is witnessed laughing manically at the Jefferson picture-show, ostensibly overwhelmed by the return of public attention and notice.

The barber Hawkshaw is coerced into the mob mentality by the threatening forces of small-town politics, and an unforgiving lynch-mob. Having initially resisted, he joins the assembled mob in the symbolic twilight when "the day had died." (164) The crazed men state that his reappearance before they leave is a "damn good thing; by God, tomorrow when the town hears about how you talked tonight –." (164) The mob is indicative of belief in wilful racial inferiority, in a sly prevarication that the purpose of the hunt for Mayes is that "we're just going to talk to him a little, that's all." (165) When the mob of men reaches Mayes's location, the air seems unnatural and peculiar. There is a total silence, and "no sound of nightbird or insect." (166) The actions of the men are going against nature, and are influenced by the stifling pressure of the claustrophobic heat, surrounding the men and adding to their Bacchic insanity. Even Hawkshaw is inducted into the violence: Mayes strikes him in the mouth during his capture, and Hawkshaw retaliates, all the while knowing – or thinking – that the man is innocent. Subdued Mayes names some of the men

in turn, appealing to their humanity but causing anger at being recognised for their inhumanity instead – "he spoke a name or two," protesting "white folks, captains, I aint done nothing: I swear 'fore God." (166) Faulkner heightens the tale's horrific building tension, as the men take Mayes to "an abandoned brick kiln" which has vats so deep, they are "without bottom." (167) Unable to face the reality of forthcoming murder, Hawkshaw jumps from the car, and therefore flees from the responsibility of partaking in more mob violence. As he walks along the road, the barber sees McLendon's car return, with "four people in it," when it had once housed six. (168)

Faulkner then returns his narrative focus to Minnie Cooper, who has been surrounded by prying women wishing for her to eventually "tell us what happened. What he said and did; everything," though later they too wonder "do you suppose anything really happened?" (169, 170) Will Mayes's life has been traded for a temporary voyeuristic interest in Minnie, and her last gasp at gaining attention from men who are only interested in her presumed chastity, and the extrapolated protection of white honour. Indeed, as Crystal Feimster writes, "what honorable white man would not heed the call to protect white womanhood and what self-respecting white woman would not deem herself worthy of protection?" (51) Minnie is "feverish" with excitement, and men now "followed with their eyes the motion of her hips and legs when she passed," in a clear mirror of their previous indifference. The chivalric men have "suddenly ceased voices, *deferent, protective*." ("DS" 169; emphasis mine) The coded mythology of racial inferiority has been rigidly upheld.

Mayes is said to have euphemistically "went on a little trip," and the town's Black population have hidden from the main square out of fear or protest. (169) The narrative ends with McLendon violently striking his wife, though he has murdered Mayes to ostensibly protect the white female honour his wife represents. Unnatural silence recurs to mark the mob's unnatural act: "there was no movement, no sound, not even an insect." (171) The "dark world" beneath the "cold moon and the lidless stars" implies either a perpetual

night, after the murder of Mayes, or a cycle which will continue tomorrow; of the rising sun on another day of heat and pressure, the "aftermath of sixty-two rainless days," increasing the tensions of racial violence in Faulkner's South. (171, 158)

"Dry September" is a chilling examination of racial violence and rumour, which has its roots in the reality of the South. Accusations abounded, and white women's honour was gallantly, coercively, protected by men who would never consider to "take a n—'s word before a white woman's." (161) The strength of "Dry September" lies in deception. The murderous mob are ignoring the latent association that the protection of white women was a form of control to make up for an impotence of power. In turn, this power dynamic is forced onto Black bodies.

4.14 Segregation in Close Proximity

Mobs like in "Dry September", and the appeal of the Klan, could enforce their threat through segregation in close proximity. The glamour of great buildings such as the courthouse and Sutpen's Hundred in Jefferson are juxtaposed against the poverty of areas like 'Negro Hollow,' and the various small cabins of the lowly Black workers scattered throughout the county as afterthoughts to larger, grander, white properties. The institution of slavery had meant a close proximity of the population.

As Woodward notes, in the late nineteenth century "a frequent topic of comment by Northern visitors during the period was the intimacy of contact between the races in the South, an intimacy sometimes admitted to be distasteful to the visitor." (*Strange Career* 42) In this way, the paradoxical intimacy of slavery had to give way to a form of flexible segregation, "distasteful" yet necessary for a society basing itself on the economic benefits of racial mingling. According to Faulkner's analysis, the appeal of the Klan was to

> The poor unsuccessful white man. He has worked hard by his lights, and of course he has worked hard, he never gets very far ahead, he knows that he never will, he sees the Negro with the same sort of land he's got, with poorer tools and not as much credit as he's got, make a better job of it, to raise his family, and they seem to be happier than he does. And he doesn't like that. He's envious, he hates the Negro because the Negro is beating him at his own poor game, which is to make a living on forty acres of poor land. His only superiority over that Negro is not economic any longer. *It's because he's white and that Negro is not white and so he's going to do everything he can to keep that Negro black, because it makes him feel good.* That's the only thing, the only edge he has.
> (*University* 223; emphasis mine)

Therefore, the myth of racial inferiority is inherently enforced by the theory of behaviour Faulkner puts forth above. If the average or 'poor white' man no longer has anything left for economic superiority after the abolition of slavery – in more general terms affecting his sense of social esteem rather than as direct commerce – then he is on a parity with the Black worker who is allowed to prosper underneath the system of sharecropping. Formations such as the Klan allowed for people to be reminded of their racial difference at every turn, and for white men to regain a sense of power after the impotence of the Confederacy's defeat.

Faulkner's "That Evening Sun" demonstrates white indifference to Black trauma in Jason Compson and the Compson family's treatment of Nancy Mannigoe, perhaps simply "because he's white and that Negro is not white," or because of white privilege in the social hierarchy promoting indifference in its higher echelons. (223)

4.15 "That Evening Sun"

In "Dry September", Faulkner depicts the white man's dominance in protecting the chastity of a white woman: no matter Minnie Cooper's status, or the veracity of her claim, she is supported by the townspeople. In Faulkner's 1931 short story "That Evening Sun" ("ES"), however, the converse protection of a Black woman is of minor importance. Nancy Mannigoe – infamous elsewhere in Faulkner's work – is a vulnerable house-servant in this

1931 iteration of her character.[123] On one evening at the Compson Mile, Nancy is fearful of the actions of her vengeful husband Jesus. Faulkner depicts Black-on-Black violence, under the indifferent Compson eye of white privilege. The myth of racial inferiority is reinforced by perceptions of inequality and accusations of hysteria. Faulkner's gendered and racialised violence depicts that the myth of racial inferiority was enforced in one direction only.

The narrative is focalised through the naïve Compson children; Quentin, Jason, and Caddy. Their some-time servant Nancy is pregnant: the father is presumed to be a white Jeffersonian, as Nancy has turned to prostitution. The privileged status of the white man is represented by a Mr Stovall, who "was the cashier in the bank and a deacon in the Baptist church." ("ES" 273) With the underlying subtext implied – but not noticed by the innocent children – Nancy asks Stovall "when you going to pay me, white man? When you going to pay me, white man? It's been three times now since you paid me a cent." (273) In white-sanctioned retaliation, "Mr Stovall kicked her in the mouth with his heel" and Nancy is made toothless. (273) Nancy's Black body is allowed to be defiled by white men in Jefferson with no repercussions. Instead of being coddled and taken to the picture show like Minnie Cooper, Nancy is beaten and thrown into prison, attempts suicide, and is threatened by the spectre of her angered Black husband. Faulkner situates "That Evening Sun" fifteen years before the onset of progress in Jefferson – on the cusp of a new future. Underwriting the myth of racial inferiority, Nancy is typified as a drunk or a drug addict, and Jesus is a womaniser and a dangerous criminal.

[123] Nancy appears elsewhere, in *Requiem for a Nun. The Sound and the Fury* also contains an episode "when Nancy fell in the ditch and Roskus shot her and the buzzards came," but this is actually a horse with the same name, and Faulknerian obfuscation. (*S&F* 33)

4.16 Black Female Bodies

Overtly-depicting sexual transgression of the colour-line, Nancy is visibly pregnant, giving some truth to her accusation of Mr Stovall. Dehumanising Black bodies contributed inherently to the myth of racial inferiority, in a continuation of 'Othering.' The status of the Black female body depended on the myth of racial inferiority, and was not subjected to the same protection as her white counterpart.

Laurel Bollinger argues that "the silence about Nancy's fate thus becomes emblematic of societal exertions of white privilege, which refused to grant audience to black and female stories." (68) After Nancy's attempted suicide, the prison guard "said that it was cocaine and not whisky, because no n— would try to commit suicide unless he was full of cocaine, because a n— full of cocaine wasn't a n— any longer." ("ES" 273) Following this white-coded observation of Nancy's behaviour, "the jailer cut her down and revived her; then he beat her." (273) When Nancy's husband Jesus appears in the text he sneers at her pregnancy, impotently noting that

> I cant hang around a white man's kitchen…but a white man can hang around mine. White man can come in my house, but I cant stop him. When white man want to come in my house, I aint got no house.
> (274)

Racial difference is starkly noted: Nancy's fears are no more than meaningless hysteria to Jason Compson III when Nancy petitions his protection, as she fears retribution from Jesus lying in the ditch outside her cabin. The text is claustrophobic with fear and anticipation of violence. The Compson children – famed elsewhere in Faulkner's works, not least for their intelligence – become idiotic vessels for racialised misunderstanding, and the blinkered viewpoints of white privilege. When Nancy is attempting to evade Jesus and claim the Compsons' white protection, despite Jason III not accompanying them, Caddy fails to understand: "you're talking like there was five of us here," as if "father was here too." (283)

The Compsons do not understand Nancy's fears, or the murderous threat of Jesus's cuckoldry.

When Jesus "said it was a watermelon that Nancy had under her dress," Nancy goads that "it never come off your vine though." (283) Faulkner's original publication of this text did not include the 'vine' exchange; it was deleted as "I did remove the 'vine' business. I reckon that's what would outrage Boston." ("To H.L. Mencken" 49) Though the issue of illegitimate pregnancy may "outrage Boston," violence mediated against Black bodies was allowed to remain in the text undisturbed.

Jesus's character was originally named Jubah, and in an earlier version he discusses Nancy's pregnancy with Caddy:

> "Where did you get a watermelon in the winter?" Caddy said.
> "I didn't," Jubah said, "It wasn't me that gave it to her. But I can cut it down, same as if it was."
> (qtd. in Leo Manglaviti 652)

In the version of "That Evening Sun" in *Collected Stories*, Jesus and Caddy have an altered exchange:

> 'Off of what vine?' Caddy said.
> 'I can cut down the vine it did come off of,' Jesus said.
> ("ES" 274)

Nancy's desperation is clear and contaminative in the text: as a Black woman, she is afforded none of the protection or respect given by white men to white women. In the above exchange between Jubah-Jesus and Caddy, clearly Nancy will not be protected by Black men either. Jubah-Jesus has expressed the violent wish to "cut" Nancy down. Black female bodies are viewed as disposable, predominantly used for white male pleasure. In the antebellum period, Black enslaved bodies were abused – ironically ignoring the fear of miscegenation and pregnancy, though slavery was perpetuated by birthright. Occurring so

frequently in Faulkner, Davis notes that "miscegenation was taboo only for white women." (62) An episode in *Absalom!* reinforces my critique: slaveholders felt entitled to

> Girls with sweating bodies out of the fields themselves and the young man rides up and beckons the watching overseer and says Send me Juno or Missylena or Chlory and then rides on into the trees and dismounts and waits.
> (*AA!* 110)

Now in "That Evening Sun", Nancy's Black female body is a fecund vine to be "cut down."

<u>4.17 "It Ain't No Fault of Mine"</u>

Echoing white-enforced tenets of the myth of racial inferiority, Nancy bemoans "I ain't nothing but a n—…it ain't none of my fault." ("ES" 275) When Jesus's threat draws closer to the cabin where Nancy attempts to be protected by the Compson children without their father, Faulkner has Nancy repeat this demeaning viewpoint: "'I ain't nothing but a n—,' Nancy said. 'God knows, God knows.'" (279) At the close of the text, Nancy has given up hope, acquiescing to Jesus's threatened presence as "'I just done got tired,' she said. 'I just a n—. It ain't no fault of mine.'" (290)

Starkly juxtaposed against Nancy's fear, young Jason points out "'I'm not a n—.'" (290) In reply, Caddy argues "'you're worse,' Caddy said, 'you are a tattletale. If something was to jump out, you'd be scairder than a n—.'" (291) In comparative terms, then, a "tattletale" is worse than being a Black woman terrified by the threat of her murderous husband, from the viewpoint of the young, white Compson children. This reductive argument might be excused by childhood, yet for their father the solution for Nancy is simple: she would be fine "if you'd just let white men alone." (277) The solution is not for white men to let Black women alone, and the blame is placed entirely upon Nancy's Black body.

Furthermore, the myth of racial inferiority was not only perpetuated by white men, but also by white women. In "That Evening Sun", the children's mother Caroline Compson asks if "you'll leave me alone, to take Nancy home?...is her safety more precious to you than mine?"

(276) Faulkner skewers real threat versus perceived threat, and the vapidity of Caroline has informed her children's attitudes. Elsewhere in Faulkner's works, Jason Compson IV is a sneering adult, filled with contempt for anyone who is non-white. In "That Evening Sun", he is an inane five-year-old, asking Nancy "I ain't a n—…are you a n— Nancy?" Nancy replies "I hellborn, child…I won't be nothing soon. I going back where I came from." (280) When Caroline bans Nancy from the Compson bedrooms, "Jason cried. He cried until mother said he couldn't have any dessert for three days if he didn't stop." (281) Later, however, Jason becomes jaded and racist; a product of the societal angle of the myth of racial inferiority. In 1945, Faulkner wrote "Appendix: The Compsons", delineating family fortunes from 1699-1945, and contained within *The Portable Faulkner*. Jason IV's section follows him to the mid-1940s, when "he was emancipated now. He was free. 'In 1865,' he would say, 'Abe Lincoln freed the n–s from the Compsons. In 1933, Jason Compson freed the Compsons from the n–s.'" (718) In the South's legacy, Faulkner recognises "that Jason is the new South too." ("To Malcolm Cowley," Aug. 1945, 197) It is hard to imagine the disgusted Jason Compson of *The Sound and the Fury* and onward as protecting Nancy in any way, though he is still a naïve child.

As is prevalent in Faulkner's works, "That Evening Sun" ends with ambiguity. Nancy is caught between life and death, left to the threat of Jesus with none of the protection granted to other women by virtue of their white race. Faulkner addresses the myth of racial inferiority through Nancy's treatment, at the mercy of the hands and opinions of white men. The futile, pitiful life of a Black woman is of minor importance to the Compsons, who fail to understand her fear of retribution. The myth of racial inferiority has spread further into Black-Black dichotomies, indifferently observed by white privilege.

4.18 Conclusion

As this chapter on the myth of racial inferiority has demonstrated, the maelstrom of race and slavery was inherently bound to the Civil War and its aftermath, particularly pertinent in the antebellum laws of Mississippi, and the Southern states' non-white suppression. The myth of racial inferiority has been upheld and perpetuated by incorporation into public behaviour. Mississippi's status proudly promoted the myth of non-white inferiority through a history of indefatigable violence, including a spectrum ranging from indifference to lynching. The mythification of racial inferiority shows its many facets in "Red Leaves", "Mountain Victory", "Dry September" and "That Evening Sun".

Faulkner writes in "Mississippi" that the state's Indigenous peoples were "the obsolescent, dispossessed tomorrow by the already obsolete." (13) The myth of racial inferiority worked to keep the Indigenous population "dispossessed" and subjugated to white custom. "Red Leaves" demonstrates emulation of the white man, moving from the practice of slavery to more benign fealty and adoption of denim and footwear, as a way to "do as the white men do." ("RL" 301)

"Mountain Victory" assesses accusations of race and attitudes of superiority, subsumed in part to Union-versus-Confederate hostility. Racially-loaded allegations cannot be tolerated, particularly in the uncertain post-war climate and new order of emancipation, and the decreed end of conflict.

"Dry September" exposes the danger of accusation in a town prone to performatively-protecting white female chastity, counterposed against the indifference to Black trauma in "That Evening Sun". Will Mayes is one of many victims of white-loaded accusation, Nancy is indifferently left to face Jesus's threat, and Faulkner leaves his reader to make a judgement. The myth of racial inferiority is predicated on a concomitant belief in white superiority, privileging one at the expense of the other in order to maintain control.

As Faulkner examines throughout his fiction, the ideals of the Old South were an escape from the harsh realities of the onset of industrialisation, and the continued empowerment of formerly-marginalised groups, including women, Indigenous peoples, and Black Americans.

The South's social hierarchy had been set in stone until the Civil War, and dedication to the failed Confederacy endured in the white population's memory. When white Southerners were not falsely recalling the happiness of their slaves on plantations, they were inventing new restrictions for non-white people to preserve the balance of social power in their favour. The myth of racial inferiority was reinforced at all levels of society – from townspeople to politicians – ingrained within the *ethos* of the former Confederate states. As my next chapter discusses, *Light in August* acutely examines the mythology of race itself, and Faulkner's engagement with creation through provocation, racial passing, and policing ideas of race created through language and behaviour.

CHAPTER FOUR

LIGHT IN AUGUST AND THE MYTH OF RACE

5.1 The Myth of Race

My discussion of the myth of racial inferiority continues by addressing the myths of race in Faulkner's 1932 work *Light in August* (*LIA*), and the consequences of such beliefs in these limiting mythologies. *Light in August* is an examination of a white-dominated social construction of race, and the lengths to which sustained, blinkered belief in the myth of racial inferiority causes violence and civic unrest in Jefferson. The contaminant threat of miscegenation clouds Faulkner's depictions of race, racial 'passing,' and perceived threats to the equilibrium of white society. Concurrently, belief in the myth of racial inferiority supported the historical dominance of white supremacy. The threat of miscegenation disrupted the Black-White binary that had structured the antebellum South, and characters such as *Light in August*'s Joe Christmas are pressurised victims of the sustained racial thought oppressing non-white citizens throughout the South, as well as in Faulkner's setting of Yoknapatawpha.

In contrast to the majority of short stories discussed in my preceding chapter, *Light in August* is set in the twentieth century, and the threats Christmas faces stem directly from twentieth-century myths surrounding race itself. It is necessary to consider who creates race, and whom it benefits – a racial reckoning to ask *cui bono*? [124] In the postbellum South, belief in racial inferiority and boundary-lines of colour and race were far from 'myth.' Plantation owners were rendered obsolete by the time of *Light in August*'s 1932 setting. Instead, in the early decades of the twentieth century, the fight against racial inequality

[124] "Who benefits?"

took on a new appearance. The tone of 1930s America was one of inequality now through segregation and societal manipulation.

The mythification of race represents my argument of race as a construct socially-defined in order to stratify society. Yacovone supports that "there had never been any enduring definition of a race, even the white race. Criteria continually shifted, including and excluding nationalities depending on conditions." (6-7) [125] Race itself is a myth, though it is thoroughly policed. In terms of Faulkner's early-twentieth-century climate, *Light in August* represents a fictionalised reality of racial liminality. Perception of the colour-line worked in both directions, but moving from behaviours of Blackness to whiteness was viewed as more pernicious and insidious, "through the simple expedient of demonizing and reifying the range of color on a palette." (Morrison 7)

Light in August's action revolves around a dual plot – Lena Grove's search for the father of her unborn child, and the actions of Joe Christmas that culminate in his death. For the purposes of retaining the parameters of the myth of race itself, my research places Christmas in the foreground, acknowledging the importance of his violent actions as he explores his allegedly-mixed heritage – denying and foregrounding Black and white in interchangeable pathways. My following chapter will address Lena's role more directly within mythologies created around Southern womanhood and maternity. *Light in August* can be read in a variety of ways, including as a representation of religion, sexuality, or a *Bildungsroman.* I focus mainly on the myth of race and racial inferiority, as one of many social constructions informing Christmas's behaviour.

Faulkner's dual narrative strands vary in focus, as the events on the outskirts of Jefferson take place over a matter of days. Lena arrives in Jefferson as the plume of smoke billows from Joanna Burden's ruined mansion, and Joe Christmas is hunted down for Joanna's

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[125] One of these such criteria is the 'one-drop' rule, see 4.2.

murder. Lena finds Lucas Burch, gives birth to their child, and leaves town shortly afterwards with a new paramour, Byron Bunch. Narrative strands converge when Joe is mistaken for Lucas Burch, and ideas of race mingle with paternity and pregnancy. *Light in August* is a work of sustained questioning, standing in Faulkner's *oeuvre* as a precursor to *Absalom!*'s later ideas of racial uncertainty, and the consequences for limiting societal desire to label race as a certainty.[126]

5.2 Two 'Problems'

Light in August represents two apparent 'problems' surrounding race. These inherently affect Faulkner's environment and work. As I have argued, Faulkner occupied a liminality between the vanguard of the Old South, and a New South teetering on the precipice of racial reckoning. W.E.B. Du Bois and James Baldwin's works introduce two 'problems' of "the color-line," and "the Negro problem." Du Bois claims that "the problem of the Twentieth Century is the problem of the color-line." (3) For Baldwin, "the Negro problem" is both delineated and maintained by white behaviour, as "if Americans were not so terrified of their private selves, they would never have needed to invent and could never have become so dependent on what they still call 'the Negro problem.'" (*No Name* 54)

Light in August deftly examines race as a paradoxically-nebulous definite, defined by sustaining mythification in racial inferiority. "The problem of the color-line" permeates the work, as Joe Christmas slips between both sides of racial segregation. "The Negro problem" supports racial identification as a form of control and subjugation, to which Joe refuses to adhere. These two 'problems' of the colour-line and the behaviour of Black people, or the non-white 'Other,' are integral to this chapter's argument. The myth of race is well-

[126] In another echo of the *Absalom!* narrative, Faulkner originally wrote *Light in August* also under the title of *Dark House.* According to the original manuscript, Faulkner proposed 'Darck House' on 17 August 1931, before deleting it to replace with 'Light in August.'

established and controlled, though I support that race is a construct and not based in discernible fact.

5.3 "He Didn't Know What He Was, And So He Was Nothing": Joe Christmas As Faulkner's Tragic Figure

Faulkner's authorial creation of Joe Christmas is a narrative lesson in the dominant societal belief in the myth of racial inferiority. A racially-liminal child of supposed Mexican paternity in a white orphanage, adopted by a white family but repeatedly labelled as "n—," Christmas is exploited, outcast, and eventually murdered – a liminal figure in a society based around rigidity and stratification.

Joe is unsure of his racial heritage; a detail anticipating *Absalom!*'s forthcoming exposure of Charles Bon, as well as Bon's son Charles Etienne – although four years separates these works, echoes of Faulkner's thematic concerns are clear. Christmas is a tragic figure, driven to extremes by his racially-motivated confusion; he murders Joanna after a sexual relationship, when he feels constricted by ideas of race and 'belonging.' Christmas fits into the parameters of the myth of racial inferiority due to his sustained racial ambiguity, and the fact that he will never be able to discover the 'truth' of his own racial construction. Echoing Du Bois, Theresa Towner observes the irony of "Joe Christmas, who murders and is murdered because of the American color line, yet who never knows where he stands in relation to it." (21) As I have discussed, there is no 'truth' to race which can be solved, only degrees of relation and subjugation to constructed mythification.

The question of Joe's paternity (and therefore racial identity) is threaded throughout *Light in August*, as an exposure of racial prejudices and rigid notions of a permeable racial barrier. Baldwin questions the upholding of these barriers, in that

> One can measure very neatly the white American's distance from his conscience – from himself – by observing the distance between White America and Black America. One has only to ask oneself who established this distance, who is this distance designed to protect, and from what is this distance designed to offer protection?
> ("Guilt" 725)

When codifying mythification surrounding ideas of race, the one who benefits is nearly always white versus the non-white Other.

Constructs of race and racial 'passing' inform *Light in August*, as Faulkner delays and anticipates racial revelation. Faulkner also leaves the reader almost unsatisfied: Joe's racial profile is deliberately never revealed. The impact of Christmas's race is held within its total ambiguity: the suggestion of uncertainty permeates the text, causing a sense of unease, akin to that felt by the townspeople in Jefferson. Reading *Light in August* from a modern-day perspective must contextualise the fears of racial 'passing' and 'mixing' occupying a large part of public discourse throughout previous centuries. Belief in racial difference informed an equal belief in the myth of racial inferiority, particularly emphasised by a dominant white populace as a way to enforce restrictions on the non-white population.

In April 1957, Faulkner explained his assessment of Joe Christmas. Joe is a tragic figure, due in part by the anguish of his racial uncertainty:

> I think that was his tragedy – he didn't know what he was, and so he was nothing. He deliberately evicted himself from the human race because he didn't know which he was. That was his tragedy, that to me was the tragic, central idea of the story – that he didn't know what he was, and there was no way possible in life for him to find out. Which to me is the most tragic condition a man could find himself in – not to know what he is and to know that he will never know.
> (*University* 72)

Joe wishes to live outside of the constrictions of the human race, though he will never be permitted to do so. He will eventually hide in Black cabins, and the wilderness of the woods. When he returns to humanity, however, he is killed for his transgressions – not necessarily for murdering Joanna Burden, but for 'passing' as white. As Faulkner delineates, Joe's

tragedy stems inherently from the tensions of his racial uncertainty. Joe's crisis is "not to know what he is and to know that he will never know," and the narrative withholds a judgement. (72)

Faulkner's use of language in *Light in August* is deliberately vague. Joe is a "sand-colored man" with "parchmentcoloured" skin. (*LIA* 88) Indeed, he is often confused for his counterpart, Joe Brown, alias for Lucas Burch. However, as Aliyyah Abdur-Rahman delineates: "race is not, nor has it ever been, completely corporeal." (139) Nonetheless, for the white inhabitants of Jefferson in the 1930s, racial mixing is insidious and needs to be punished.[127] Although perhaps Faulkner's lines of segregation are permeable, particularly for Joe, the delineated mindsets of citizens were fixed within the binary of white and Black.[128] Joe's behaviour is violent and dangerous: "he carried with him his own inescapable warning, like a flower its scent or a rattlesnake its rattle." (*LIA* 23) Hiding from scrutiny, Joe works in a liminal role "behind the veil, the screen, of his negro's job at the mill," and lives "in a tumble down negro cabin on Miss Burden's place." (25) He is aided by Reverend Gail Hightower, a man with his own past to reckon with, and Byron Bunch, a fellow mill-worker – though these men do not help him when he has murdered Joanna.

Joe's actions are frenetic and racially-motivated – he wishes to strike out against white questioning about his race. Crucially, Joe can pass for white, yet this act leaves him questioning his Black identity, if he were to possess one. Caught between two groups, Joe often wishes to join neither. The action of lashing out against societal categorisation of race is not new: Joe taunts Black and white societies to react to him through increasingly-outlandish behaviour, particularly in the North when the setting briefly changes to display Northern attitudes towards race. Perhaps Joe is used to the rigid racial non-acceptance of

[127] For example, in a Faulknerian call-back to the events of *Sartoris*, Joanna Burden's father and brother are murdered by John Sartoris for supporting Black voting rights, and left in the street as a demonstration of ingrained racist inflexibility. The Burdens are Yankees interpolated into Yoknapatawpha.
[128] There is also an argument for Christmas being of Mexican descent, see Worley and Birkhofer.

the South, and only feels at ease when he is playing the part of the angry Black man, lashing out at the white world like so many of Faulkner's characters are wont to do. Joe also taunts Jefferson by coupling with Joanna, transgressing the town's inflexible racial boundaries and codes by doing so. Joe's sexual relationship with Joanna is transgressive, yet it cannot be sustained. Joanna is responsible for acts of transgression herself, reneging against the Calvinist predestination that caused her father and brother to be killed in Jefferson, along with their insistence on supporting the Black vote and voting rights. Joanna degrades Joe, forcing him to play a part of a Black, racialised stereotype.

An overarching belief in the myth of racial inferiority therefore creates tension in the text. Threats of violence and retribution spiral into Joe's murder. Although not as overt as the lynching of Will Mayes in "Dry September", Joanna and Joe's deaths are grotesque. Joe is sacrificed with a beatific smile and a castration: he is a murderer, but it holds some weight that his victim is a white woman, belonging in a white man's town. He is a liminal figure, not quite Black and not quite white, reneging against the fixed racial categorisation that Jefferson's inhabitants require. Joe's tragedy is held within the suspension of his race: "he didn't know what he was, and so he was nothing." (*University* 72)

5.4 Creating Race through Provocation I

The idea of creating race through provocation threads throughout *Light in August*. Joe begins testing the limits of race and sexuality, using forms of provocation to generate responses primarily ending in violence. Baldwin argues that the old orders cannot redeem themselves because "they have always existed in relation to a force which they have had to subdue." (*No Name* 46) Joe is calling upon this force to subdue the anger within himself. If he cannot define his own race through "white thinking," perhaps he can provoke others to 'choose' his race for him. (*LIA* 166)

Jefferson provides a microcosm of racist, white, Southern society. George Lipsitz posits that "race is produced by space, that it takes places for racism to take place." (*Racism* 5) Metatextually, Faulkner's original manuscript contained more-overt descriptions of Christmas's racial markers, before being revised to create ambiguity.[129] As M. Sullivan discusses, the fact of these revisions "reveals the extent to which 'racial' identities are ideological and psychological constructions rather than biological facts." (499) Ensconced within the narrow-minded, overtly racist environs of the small-town South, however, the cycle of racial delineation begins at the very moment of Joe's birth. It is pertinent to note that his grandfather, Eupheus 'Doc' Hines, places him in a *white* orphanage in Memphis. Hines gleefully reveals, however, that whilst at the orphanage, Joe is repeatedly called a "n—! N—! in the innocent mouths of little children": more of an insult between children than a covert exposure of racial 'truth,' or the sign from God Hines has taken it to be. (*LIA* 284) Even children are engaged in supporting the myth of racial inferiority, affecting Joe's racial definition from early childhood and forcing his legacy of retaliation by their provocation. Kwangsoon Kim observes that

> Even though he suspects Joe's father to be black, Hines surprisingly relents, re-categorizing Christmas as white by sending him to the white orphanage and thereby giving him a chance to be a legitimate member of white society.
> (194)

Discussing Joe's parentage, Byron Bunch supposes that Hines "knew somehow that the fellow had n— blood. Maybe the circus folks told him. I dont know. He aint never said how he found out, like that never made any difference." (*LIA* 277) The myth of racial inferiority may privilege a Mexican non-white Other over "n— blood," but Hines murders his daughter's lover anyway, executing him and leaving "the man there in the road." (277, 279) When the circus owner appears to corroborate the story, "how the man really was a part

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[129] See Regina K. Fadiman, *Faulkner's* Light in August: *A Description and Interpretation of the Revisions* (1975).

n— instead of Mexican…like the devil had told Eupheus he was a n—," hearsay is again used to create racial definition. (280)

Next, Joe's racial barriers are extended into adulthood, including sexual transgressions with Bobbie Allen the waitress and prostitute; a series of nameless women; and Joanna. Faulkner explains that, for Joe, "the people who destroyed him made rationalizations about what he was. They decided what he was. But Christmas himself didn't know and he evicted himself from mankind." (*University* 72) Joe has a mindset of himself against others; his enemies are conglomerates of either Black or white bodies. He does not consider nuance in others, and pits himself against them to enforce provocation or violence. Discussing this phenomenon, Sullivan posits that "Joe's *I* fades, eclipsed by 'n—,' the Other signifier whose mark is black and ineradicable and lethal." (514)

Creating race through provocation is a unique take on racial difference. Joe forces others to make the choice for him, as the Faulknerian representation of a wider whole in which the reader is similarly kept unaware of Joe's race. Belief in aspects of race, such as the fabricated 'one-drop rule,' created race for others in a less extreme – but still dehumanising – way than Joe's forceful insistence on being labelled as white or Black. Davis elucidates that "centuries of miscegenation had produced large numbers of mixed persons who appeared white and who could pass when they wanted to." (55-56) One must consider the racial landscape of America, and the contrast between white and Black that has been discussed eloquently by both Baldwin and Toni Morrison. For Baldwin, there is a suspicion that "white people carry in them a carefully muffled fear that black people long to do to others what has been done to them." ("Guilt" 724) Mapping this reasoning onto Joe can explain his violent death – there is a contaminative fear that those who have been so oppressed will retaliate. Morrison points out the need for a foil to "literary whiteness" by way of a corresponding "literary blackness." (xii) This argument is not to define Joe's race, however, or to ignore the idea of race altogether: Morrison also meditates on an American audience's "fact that the habit of

ignoring race is understood to be a graceful, even generous, liberal gesture. To notice is to recognize an already discredited difference." (9-10) Thereby, Joe exists in a liminal space of definitions. Joe continues to use provocation to gain a sense of identity.

By potentially possessing some element of ephemeral Blackness, however, Joe is one of those who possess, in Sharpe's viewpoint, "already weaponized Black bodies (the weapon is blackness)." (16) If 'Blackness' can be a weapon, then Joe is turning it back upon his white audience and wider society. These critical opinions represent an ongoing conversation concerning race and racial difference, with foils of whiteness adding to wider societal labelling.

5.5 "Damned If I Haven't Wasted a Lot of Time": Joe's Element of 'Choice'

For most of his life, Joe feels constricted. He lashes out against any expectations which will classify him – imposing boundaries on his restlessness, and providing barriers to rail against. Joe is also capable of switching between the codes and societies of white and Black people – an act he is privileged to do. In the racial climate of the 1930s, fear of the 'one-drop rule' of racial categorisation – and the concomitant imagined threat of miscegenation and racial trespassing – travelled both ways across Du Bois's 'color-line.' "Black blood" may be insidiously introduced into the white bloodline, through the threat of 'passing'; a theme which runs throughout Faulkner's works. (*LIA* 333)

Joe indicates an element of racial 'passing' in his behaviour. Ostensibly slipping between Black and white, Joe is at ease in neither world. Mark Jerng posits that racial passing

> Assumes that race is a stable referent to which the individual can relate and that the individual is an already integrated entity. It assumes and reproduces both race *and* the individual as static givens.
> (70)

Therefore, when Joe cannot be categorised as racially-determinate, he reneges against stable referents, present in society for order and control.

I have previously emphasised the peril of ignoring conceptions of whiteness in discussions of race.[130] Lipsitz argues that, "as the unmarked category against which difference is constructed, whiteness never has to speak its name, never has to acknowledge its role as an organizing principle in social and cultural relations." (*Possessive* 2) When Joe is treated as white, he is thrown into a twisted version of reciprocal white morality. The benefits of being 'white', however, do permit Joe to pass undetected within Jefferson. When Joanna questions Joe's heritage, he replies that he knows nothing about his parents, "except that one of them was part n—." (*LIA* 188) Once Joanna asks him how he knows, Joe answers "at once humourless and sardonic: 'If I'm not, damned if I haven't wasted a lot of time.'" (188) This line proves to be the most seminal in *Light in August*; Joe is entirely unsure of his parentage, as is Faulkner's reader. Yet Joe is too far into a life of provocation and racial privilege, in the sense that he has privileged its importance over all else. Joe's fear is exposed in Joanna's proposal to become a Black lawyer, and therefore "tell n—s that I am a n— too?" (205) This proposal is a catalyst, and the use of "too" is the breaking point for Joe's anger. Joe becomes a volatile embodiment of threat: entirely representative of the threat of miscegenation, and the threat to white male dominance which this act would represent, as well as to white women after murdering Joanna.

Joe's provocation is borne from a sense of injustice, and a tendency towards violence as a form of recognition. When he is forced into a racial category, however, his reaction is one of performative provocation. Joe's anger is directed at the rigid basis of society forcing his hand, making him 'choose' between Black and white. Ironically, the real limits of this boundary are not discrete, and are more of a grey area. As I have argued, Faulkner does not offer an answer to Joe's 'real' racial identity: it is arguably not of importance. Joe's behaviour is informed and constructed by the town around him, and their belief in the myth of racial

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[130] See 4.11.

inferiority. When Joe 'becomes' Black, he becomes a threat to white women, and disrupts the town's considerations of his character. It is a signifier of a form of racial privilege that Joe is able to code-switch in this way – for the most part, he is able to ignore social barriers, and traverse the terrain between Black and white, as well as North and South. In terms of the myth of race itself, corroborated by Krister Friday, "by keeping Joe's racial precursors indeterminate and by charting the effects of this indeterminacy across corporeal and cultural presents, Faulkner changes the valence of race." (43) The "valence of race" has become belief in a mythology designed to benefit in one direction only.

Are we, as readers, supposed to make a decision or a judgement about Joe's race? I believe that if we do, we would sure waste "a lot of time." (*LIA* 188) Instead, we are left to read Faulkner's deliberate, mediated ambiguity. Joe is a fluid character – therefore he fits into the parameters of the myth of racial inferiority, but also does *not* conform to societal mores. We are not meant to make a judgement, or else Faulkner would have made one for us within his lines. Clues to Joe's parentage are impossible to rely on: they are based in hearsay and accusation, predominantly formed through Hines's unreliable ramblings. This lack of judgement or ambivalence about Joe's race, however, has been informed by a modern-day viewpoint: for the citizens of Jefferson, Joe Christmas *needs* a race, and needs to fit into expectations of Blackness or whiteness. If he is neither or both, he is insidious and disruptive; a threat. Christmas refuses to 'act' either white or Black – in accordance with the town's narrow viewpoint of racialised expected behaviours – and angers them with his subversion. It is imperative that he be categorised and treated according to the racial imbalances constituting the rigid social and racial hierarchy of the South. In this way, the myth of race permeates the action of *Light in August*: Joe's actions are inherently informed by the colour-line and the indeterminacy of his existence.

Joe acts in a vacuum, set apart from society as a loner-type figure who acts out of self-preservation and concern. He has "deliberately evicted himself from the human race because he didn't know which he was," yet the human race will not allow Joe to be evicted without categorisation. (*University* 72) He cannot remain untouched by society as an external force, however, as it proceeds with exerting its will onto him, eventually eradicating him for his racial uncertainty and non-conformity. Christmas wishes to remove himself from the society of man, but crucially the same society that condemns him will not permit him to leave without a price: "he knew that he would never know what he was, and his only salvation in order to live with himself was to repudiate mankind, to live outside of the human race. And he tried to do that but nobody would let him, the human race itself wouldn't let him." (118)

Joe's own viewpoints on race and racial inferiority are as biased and racist as the society surrounding him. On the surface, Joe does not care for Black people – he uses them as a means to an end, trying to infiltrate amongst their patterns and households, yet never fully committing to living as a Black man himself. In some instances, he thinks of Black people as animalised and inferior, particularly when he has travelled North to Chicago and cannot feel at rest within the apparent smell of sleeping bodies. Joe is frequently disgusted by the appearance and behaviour of Black people. In this way, Christmas is acting out at a part of his own potential biology. Joe is also exhibiting racial biases, conforming to the overarching behaviour of the white society in which he lives and operates. White men are the arbiters of race, and are the most vocal about imposing boundaries and posturing their own policing of the racial boundaries.[131] The myth of race endorses segregation, both ideological and physical. In reality, the mythification surrounding the colour line was more permeable than it may have been perceived or upheld to be.

[131] As discussed, this may likely be a response to the failings of the Confederacy, and a rigid binary of white and non-white relations.

If Joe does not care to be a white man, he must also recognise the privileges of being able to choose. Joe depicts some sense of choice in his actions, ruminating on "all the thirty years that I have lived to make me what I chose to be." (*LIA* 196) Race may be a constructed mythification of perceived value, yet lines of colour were usually inscribed by appearance as a factor. In *Light in August*, Black people think Joe is white, and white people also believe Joe is white; he infiltrates a Black church and the congregation flee, as he is apparently a white man trespassing in their Black space. The churchgoers are fearful, as "then they saw that the man was white," and "they saw that his face was not black." (239) Joe is defined through opposition: he is "not black." In this way, Joe cannot be white and cannot be Black – his violence and anger stem from either being one or the other, or being neither. When Joe wishes for something from a community, he is able to 'enter' into that race, such as when he ravages a Black cabin for food, and wonders that the inhabitants "were afraid. Of their brother afraid." (248) He will claim kinship when it benefits him, slipping between margins.

In the 1930s South, Joe has been forced to make a choice about his race, despite frequent attempts to provoke others. Faulkner's characters may be fictional, but the issues represented within *Light in August* are indicative of the racial violence and deadly consequences of reinforcing the colour line in postbellum, post-Reconstruction society.

5.6 Creating Race through Provocation II

Creating race through provocation, Joe sometimes acts performatively: he delights in telling Bobbie the waitress that he is Black, and tells other women of his race with a grandiose sense of revelation. Joe does this to provoke, after having sex with these women, and expects rejection. However, he is disappointed when Bobbie is initially accepting of his apparent mixed-race. Later, once Bobbie has shown anger at Joe, he is freed to take this incident as a catalyst for fifteen years of wandering, vacillating between the poles of North and South.

Joe lives on the border between Black and white, as well as the implied border between Yankee and Dixie: Faulkner describes his flight as a street that "ran into Oklahoma and Missouri and as far south as Mexico and then back north to Chicago and Detroit and then back south again and at last to Mississippi." (*LIA* 165) Joe feels a sense of moral decrepitude at the prostitutes who will not reject him for his "black blood," and react with indifference. (333) Even in provocation, Joe runs from female sexuality. Having refused to rape a young Black girl when he was fourteen, Joe discovers the comparative delights of wooing Bobbie, only for his fidelity to be turned back upon him by the harsh realities of love, and Bobbie's moonlight job as a prostitute pimped out by Max and Mame.[132]

Finding his racial uncertainty turned back upon himself, Joe becomes the subject of wider gossip. Bobbie curses Joe when he has tried to run away with her, and potentially murdered McEachern, calling him a Black man in anger and echoing how the dietician had reacted during his childhood: "bastard! Son of a bitch! Getting me into a jam, that always treated you like you were a white man. A white man!" (160) Bobbie's repetition amplifies her point, that Joe is *not* a white man, and ought to be treated differently. Then Bobbie reveals Joe's 'secret' to her audience, as "he told me himself he was a n—! The son of a bitch! Me taking for nothing a n— son of a bitch that would get me in a jam with clodhopper police." (161) This incident becomes a point at which Joe's burgeoning sexuality is conflated with his race. Joe may be a son of a bitch, but he may also be a son of the non-white Other.

Next, Joe is beaten by Bobbie's pimps or protectors, in the aftermath of her harsh exposure. Joe had returned to Bobbie's house to marry her and escape the town, but instead he is beaten for his suspected racial duplicity. The two men discuss his racial passing while beating him:

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[132] Joe's refusal to rape the girl is not through a sense of chivalry, but racially-charged revulsion ending in violence: he kicks, hits, and abuses her, indicative of the violent outbursts that come to characterise his adult life. See *LIA* 115.

> *Is he really a n—? He dont look like one*
> *That's what he told Bobbie one night. But I guess she still dont know about what he is than he does. These country bastards are liable to be anything*
> *We'll find out. We'll see if his blood is black.*
> (161)

Joe is dangerous in his liminality, "liable to be anything" and exposing fear of the foreign because "he dont look" as whiteness expects. Interestingly, if "these country bastards are liable to be anything," then Joe has secondary liminality in being more foreign to Jefferson. He may be from out of town, a "country bastard," "more than just a foreigner," introducing his rural Otherness into Jefferson. (161, 144) This adds another facet to ideas of foreignness, not related necessarily to race, yet still in ideas of Otherness versus belonging.

As for the violent connotations of "we'll see if his blood is black," a preoccupation with blood – and particularly the concept of Black blood – is a sign of fetishisation. Morrison indicates the impossibility of categorising purity through blood as

> A pervasive fetish: black blood, white blood, the purity of blood; the purity of white female sexuality, the pollution of African blood and sex. Fetishization is a strategy often used to assert the categorical absolutism of civilization and savagery.
> (68)

By creating race through provocation, counterposing Morrison's "civilization and savagery," Joe's beating by the two men is supposed to reveal the 'truth', yet it raises more questions than it answers.

Reacting to Bobbie's rejection, and the cruel realities of race and love, Joe travels across a number of states, looking for opportunities to commit violence against womankind. Indeed, he echoes his maternal grandfather Hines's crazed denouncement of "God's abomination of womanflesh." (*LIA* 277) Joe experiences moral disgust at being both Black and white – during his time in the moral wilderness, he tests the limits of female entanglements by 'switching' himself between Black and white depending on whether or not he had the money to pay:

> Beneath the dark and equivocal and symbolical archways of midnight he bedded with the women and paid them when he had the money, and when he did not have it he bedded anyway and then told them he was a negro. For a while it worked; that was while he was still in the south. It was quite simple, quite easy.
> (165)

Again, Joe has created race through provocation, as well as a pecuniary motivation. Joe is unprepared, however, for any female response that does not fit into his own ironically-expected parameters. It is this scenario of acceptance which makes Joe violent and sick:

> Because one night it did not work. He rose from the bed and told the woman he was a negro. "You are?" she said. "I thought maybe you were another wop or something." She looked at him, without particular interest; then she evidently saw something in his face: she said, "What about it? You look all right. You ought to seen the shine I turned out just before your turn came."…It took two policemen to subdue him. At first they thought that the woman was dead.
> (165-66)

Once more, Joe may also fit into connotations of foreignness rather than racial difference. To be confronted with the idea of being "another wop or something" provokes Joe to violence, beating the woman to the point of near-death. Joe may wish to be white or Black, but he seemingly cannot tolerate the alternative of being indeterminate.

Joe's is a façade of indifference: he feigns indifference at his racial ambiguity, yet anticipates and provokes responses from others – particularly the women he sleeps with. Much like *Absalom!*'s Charles Etienne inviting the violence of white men, Joe courts punishment and incites sexual and racial transgressions. Both men are victims of – and perpetuate – mythologies of race due to personal uncertainty. Joe deliberately angers white men to gain some form of recognition and attention, leading to his eventual, crazed relationship with Joanna. Heidi Kim argues that "inhabitants of Jefferson classify Christmas as a foreigner but somehow suppress the possibility of his non-whiteness; in their outrage at finding out that he is not white, they insist that he must be its absolute opposite, a 'n–.'" (208) Therefore, Joe is created by provocation and language, and his behaviour is contradictory. As H. Kim observes, there are

> Other valences of race relations outside of appearance and blood: foreignness, language, citizenship, and socioeconomic status. The anxiety betrayed by literary depictions of indeterminate skin color across multiple races leads us to consider all these valences, rather than simply the sexual dimensions that have been emphasized in the politics of interracial crossing.
> (202)

Joe *may* be the result "interracial crossing" himself, yet he is also crossing boundaries by seducing women indiscriminately – they are chosen for provocation. Joe conflates sex with race, tricking his way across his nomadic pathway until he is confronted with the reality of race holding a value of near-meaninglessness, dismissed as "what about it?" (*LIA* 166) Following this dismissal, Joe

> Was sick after that. He did not know until then that there were white women who would take a man with black skin. He stayed sick for two years. Sometimes he would remember how he had once tricked or teased white men into calling him a negro in order to fight them, to beat them or be beaten; *now he fought the negro who called him white.*
> (166; emphasis mine)

In this two-year period, Joe has entirely inverted his perception of his own race. Although Faulkner abstains from exhorting his audience to pass judgement, Joe has – in this time – clearly decided to live amongst Black people as a Black man:

> He was in the North now, in Chicago and then Detroit. He lived with negroes, shunning white people. He ate with them, slept with them, belligerent, unpredictable, uncommunicative. He now lived as man and wife with a woman who resembled an ebony carving.
> (166) [133]

During his flight, Joe tries to breathe in the smells and aura of Black people when he is among them, as if these imperceptible elements are capable of giving him an answer to his own conceptions of race. In this act, Joe tries to somehow negate the influence of his white blood:

[133] Joe's quasi-wife has similarities to Charles Etienne's wife in *Absalom!*.

> At night he would lie in bed beside her, sleepless, beginning to breathe deep and hard. He would do it deliberately, feeling, even watching, his *white* chest, arch deeper and deeper within his ribcage, trying to breathe into himself the *dark* odour, the *dark* and inscrutable thinking and being of negroes, with each suspiration trying to expel from himself the *white* blood and the *white* thinking and being. And all the while his nostrils at the odour he was trying to make his own would *whiten* and tauten, his whole being writhe and strain with physical outrage and spiritual denial.
> (166; emphasis mine)

Contraposing perceptions of whiteness against darkness, Faulkner clearly presents the struggle of Joe's "white chest", "white blood" and "white thinking" as he attempts to somehow deny one race over the other – an exercise in futility.[134] Torturing himself with "outrage and spiritual denial," Joe is attempting to write himself out of existence, "trying to expel from himself" that which might make him white.

Joe's Black companions are a nebulous group of indeterminate bodies, creating a focus on the bodily that is extended through repeated imagery of "white blood," and "the dark odour" surrounding Joe within its invisibility. (166) The myth of race itself is predicated on that which cannot be seen, akin to "the dark odour, the dark and inscrutable thinking and being of negroes," that pervades Joe's senses, permeating his body and mind. In his adolescence, Joe linguistically elides the Black female body as "womanshenegro," fearful of its power in discrete elements. (115) Later, when Joanna's house is a burning spectacle, Faulkner reinforces the invisibility of the area's Black inhabitants:

> This was a region of negro cabins and gutted and outworn fields out of which a corporal's guard of detectives could not have combed ten people, man, woman or child, yet which now within thirty minutes produced, *as though out of thin air*, parties and groups ranging from single individuals to entire families.
> (212; emphasis mine)

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[134] Curiously, Joe seems to believe in the veracity of blood: "just when do men that have different blood in them stop hating one another?" (*LIA* 184) In this context, however, Joe is discussing Joanna's father's and brother's murders at the hands of Colonel Sartoris, and the "different bloods" appear to be in correlation with Northerners and Southerners.

Edouard Glissant argues that "Faulkner's Blacks are conventional silhouettes, as though invisible as long as they remain a group." (65) Joe uses these bodies as a way to disappear himself – he is eliding himself, if others cannot create for him.

Once Joe has murdered Joanna, he is eminently caught between his Black and white 'bloods': when he is running from his consequences, "he watched his body *grow white* out of the darkness like a kodak print emerging from the liquid." (*LIA* 79; emphasis mine) Lit by the beam of headlights, external forces cause Joe to "grow white", after he has taken solace in the black darkness of the night. Joe can be Black and/or white in private, but the external input of the townspeople will always force him into a choice, as he tries to force them as well. Joe's response is vituperative: he has been standing naked in the undergrowth, and calls out to the passing car, "'white bastards!' he shouted. 'That's not the first of your bitches that ever saw…'" (79) Joe's initial response is also coded by race and anger, with a sexual overtone of his relationships with white bodies. In these ways, Joe's creation of race through provocation endures until his death.

5.7 Joe Brown/Lucas Burch

The mythification of race is seen in Joe's liminality between proposed races, and also between identities. Joe resists fitting into the parameters of white society, a pattern of behaviour which will eventually act to his detriment. Jefferson becomes suspicious and paranoid, particularly when Joe is frequently mistaken for his counterpart, Joe Brown. Joe Brown – or Lucas Burch – is another subversive character; he also does not fit into the rigid parameters of race, and is a double for Christmas.[135] The two men become virtually interchangeable, to the point where Lena Grove becomes confused as to which man fathered her child. Christmas and Brown are conflated by Faulkner, living in the same house and sharing linguistic similarities to the point of their first names. Joe is denied an identity: he

[135] For clarity in this section of my argument, I refer to the character as Joe Brown.

reflects *Joe* Brown and *Jo*anna. Upon Christmas's first introduction, the reader is perhaps misled into thinking he is Lucas Burch in disguise – the two men appear in Jefferson out of no past, and work at the town mill. Lena's perspective has occupied the work until this point of introduction, and Christmas's name is wryly questioned when noting this point of difference: "'I never heard of nobody a-tall named it,'" says a mill-worker. (*LIA* 23)

Introducing the idea of an alias creates a moment of confusion before the 'real' Lucas Burch-Joe Brown appears at the mill six months later. In Lena's search, Brown is also conflated with Byron Bunch. The accumulation of names hides a multiplicity of realities. In the same way that Christmas's race does not 'matter', the two men are treated with increasingly fluid similarities – until Brown is accused of murdering Joanna, and calls Christmas a "n—" to deflect attention away from his own suspicious behaviour. (71) Echoing the children's taunting in the orphanage, Brown has linguistically-delineated Christmas as Black, though he has been enmeshed in a white setting.

Once doubt is introduced, Christmas is immediately non-white. Other racial distinctions do not matter: Joe Brown exposes doubt that Christmas is entirely white. Wholly for his own gain, for the thousand-dollar reward, Brown introduces the fatal inclination that Christmas is non-white. Brown claims "go on. Accuse me. Accuse the white man that's trying to help you with what he knows. Accuse the white man and let the n— go free. Accuse the white and let the n— run." (71) In another instance of muddied comparison, Brown claims the townspeople have been calling Christmas "a foreigner for three years, when soon as I watched him for three days I knew he wasn't no more a foreigner than I am." (72) By collating himself with Christmas, Brown has reinforced their similarities. When the paternity of Lena's baby is called into confused question, though we know it is Brown, it is telling that the baby itself has a "terracotta face," in another instance of racial indeterminacy through linguistic demarcation of the non-white 'Other.' (302)

Therefore Joe's racial passing is a source of fear and subversive miscegenation in the entirely-unforgiving racial climate of the 1930s South. After Brown's doubt is introduced, Faulkner's reactive use of language delineates Christmas in various ways, insinuating that he is a foreigner, rather than a Black man. Christmas is variously addressed as a foreigner, a wop, and Hyram (a Jewish name, adding in connotations of anti-Semitism). When fighting Brown, Christmas is a "durn yellow-bellied wop," showing a trend towards people linguistically-Othering him, and demeaning him whilst being violent. (203)

Cunningly (yet clumsily), Brown shifts blame and racial deception away from himself, and onto Christmas. The question of Brown's race is often overlooked, in favour of attempting to unpick the 'truth' of Christmas's race. Is Brown's behaviour a way in which to avoid blame, by frenetically shifting the focus to Christmas and seeing which accusations stick? Or is Brown's behaviour indicative of another exposé of racial passing; with Brown's race also balancing precariously underneath the suspicions of the townsfolk? Brown is another outcast in Jefferson, living on the outskirts with Christmas; an act which occasions homosexual undertones, as well as racial queries. When Lena comes upon Byron Bunch in the mill, she observes that Brown is "dark complected," adding to his racial uncertainty. (36)

Brown, however, lashes out at the accusation of Joanna's death, and seals Christmas's death by his frantic accusation that "he's got n— blood in him. I knowed it when I first saw him. But you folks, you smart sheriffs and such. One time he even admitted it, told me he was part n—. Maybe he was drunk when he done it: I dont know." (72) [136] Rebecca Nisetich observes that "Brown stabilizes his own racial identity by destabilizing Christmas's," in that "Brown's accusation enables him to reify his white racial identity by defining himself in opposition to his partner." (50) Brown's definition through opposition causes Joe to appear even more anchored within the myth of racial inferiority. He is entirely 'Other,' and Brown's

[136] Although Christmas can never fully know the 'truth' of his race, he tends to claim a part of his identity while he is drunk.

survival depends on the town's quick acceptance of Christmas as a Black man. "Defining himself in opposition" is indicative of a larger whole, in which the myth of race itself is predicated on the outcast of the Other: either you are within the circle, or without.

5.8 Coming Into Being

Joe becomes enveloped within different conceptions of race: he occupies the boundary between Black and white, and finds himself entrenched in the mindset of either world. It is when he is held in a liminal attenuation of purpose, however, before murdering Joanna, that Joe "found himself." (*LIA* 84)

Joe had been a phantom in the white streets, but comes into being trapped in the Blackness of Freedman Town, "surrounded by the summer smell and the summer voices of invisible negroes. They seemed to enclose him like bodiless voices murmuring, talking, laughing, in a language not his." (84) Akin to the image of the circle, which I go on to discuss, Joe is trapped within the suffocation of Black bodies, permeating the air along with his psyche. Ideas of racial passing are couched within the "invisible" Black voices, seemingly-insidious in their lack of visibility – and the connotation that they could 'pass' amongst the townspeople. Joe does not claim the language of those in Freedman Town, which adds an element of Othering coming from Joe himself – they communicate in a way which is "not his." (84) Instead, he runs furiously back into the security of the white town, and "the air now was the cold hard air of white people," more sterile but enticing than Freedman Town. (84) Joe feels a reactionary sense of peace at his geographical superiority: "he became cool. The negro smell, the negro voices, were behind and below him now." (84) Placing mediated distance between himself and Freedman Town, Joe balefully views it as "the other street, the one which had almost betrayed him." (85) Tellingly, it is this street in which Joe had "almost" belonged, and in which he "found himself" in a metaphysical sense. (84)

Joe's life has been a series of decisions between Black and white, both consciously and subconsciously. In addition to his own self-reckoning, the rest of Jefferson's townspeople have also forced Joe into making a decision about his race, to come into being. That which is Other cannot be tolerated, as the mob-mentality demonstrates. Owen Robinson posits that "in this environment, to be a black person is not to be a person at all but a code, a manifestation of an anonymous but ever-threatening mass." (122) Joe's threat lies in his anonymous, disguised skin: he is unable to be classified according to Black or white restrictions, in a society governed by the laws of race as an overt manifestation of outward appearance. The mythification surrounding race demonstrates adherence to societal rules that had been ostensibly overturned during the post-Civil War period, yet merely took on a new guise under 'Jim Crow' laws and new ways in which to segregate races, and the 'norm' versus the Other.

Joe Christmas, then, is allowed to have a foot in both worlds of race, until white society forces him to choose one or the other – however, if Joe is delineated as 'white,' it holds a mirror up to white behaviour in turn. Jefferson is threatened by Joe as he does not fully conform into their ideological box of either white or Black. There are obviously no discrete boundaries between races, and the idea of race itself is a form of control, rather than the result of any concrete reasoning. Faulkner may allude to the colour of Joe's skin, but his race is invisibly unfathomable. The mythologies surrounding race work to limit Joe, and the townspeople subscribe to the theory of racial inferiority through their words and actions. Joe's enemies are not the only arbiters of race throughout *Light in August*: as Marta Puxan-Oliva argues,

> It is not only the town that provides an external perspective of Christmas: Byron Bunch, Joe Brown, Hightower, and Gavin Stevens, although watched themselves, create a portrait of Christmas that is voiced individually but feels integrated. (57-58)

Therefore Joe is a creation of external perspectives, as well as created from a sense of his own interiority.

Doc Hines's crazed ramblings also expose a form of the truth about Joe. Hines is a fanatic believer in the myth of racial inferiority, even before Faulkner's narrative chicanery exposes his identity as the orphanage's ex-janitor, and Joe's grandfather. Hines's mad tirades are dismissed as the insane ramblings of "an old man and harmless," as he and his wife are "'crazy on the subject of negroes. Maybe they are Yankees.'" (*LIA* 253) During a racist, misogynistic tirade, Hines describes an interaction between Joe and a Black worker at the orphanage:

> He said, "How come you are a n—?" and the n— said, "Who told you I am a n—, you little white trash bastard?" and he says, "I ain't a n—," and the n— says "You are worse than that. You dont know what you are. And more than that, you wont never know. You'll live and you'll die and you wont never know."
> (284-85)

In this interaction during his childhood, Joe has already been made aware of the differences between races, and has been told that he is in a worse predicament than being a "n—", as he will "never know" the 'truth' of his race.[137] Joe is in an in-between state, conscious of somehow belonging to both worlds. Repeatedly, he is called a "n—" to reinforce the mythologies of race and limit him. Jerng's research posits that "Christmas is not so much a character as he is the product of collective fantasy." (81) This theory is a key connection to my discussion on fantasies of race, and race as a construct. Christmas is fetishised and fantasised by the community, a "collective fantasy" of subversive racial passing, who can be delineated as someone who "wont never know" the truth of his heritage and identity, except for that which is imagined and forced upon him by others. (*LIA* 285)

[137] The orphanage worker clearly echoes Faulkner's University of Virginia interviews in 1957-58 here, in that Joe will "never know" his race.

Once Joe's identity is revealed by Joe Brown, the townspeople jump on the racial bandwagon. Voices all claim to have had prescient knowledge of Christmas's racial identity all along. A proprietor of a shabby corner-store tells Hightower that

> "I said all the time that he wasn't right. Wasn't a white man. That there was something funny about him. But you can't tell folks nothing until –. "
> (228)

The fact that most Jeffersonians were unaware of Christmas's existence, unless they were paying him for his bootlegged whisky, pales in comparison to the need for salacious gossip. Joe is not "right," and must be punished for his liminality.

5.9 Joanna Burden: The Different Myth of Racial Inferiority

Joe's actions with Joanna Burden are salacious gossip for those in Jefferson. He had been carrying on a relationship with her in the shadows of her dark house, an act both sexually-transgressive and increasingly dangerous. They fight when Joanna encourages Joe to fully accept his Black identity, and Joanna is killed. Beyond his control now, Joe's identity comes into being through the focalisation of the townspeople.

If Joe is defined as Black, it is speculated by the townspeople that he raped and murdered Joanna once her body has been discovered; her throat cut and her house burning behind her.[138] Faulkner describes an array of people interested in the sordid details of Joanna's death:

> Among them the casual Yankees and the poor whites and even the southerners who had lived for a while in the north, who believed aloud that it was *an anonymous negro crime committed not by a negro but by Negro* and who knew, believed, and hoped that she had been ravished too: at least once before her throat was cut and at least once afterward.
> (*LIA* 212; emphasis mine)

[138] In the end Joe is the one to kill Joanna, but their relationship has become mutually destructive – Joanna eventually threatens Joe with an ancient pistol that fails to fire.

Clearly, this is a fictional echo of the accusations surrounding the myth of racial inferiority, which I have discussed in my preceding chapter. Ideas of Black-on-white rape added to titillating rumour around Jefferson with unfounded accusation, yet also more perniciously allowed for the control of all bodies, and justified racial violence and lynching. Joanna's murder is delineated as "an anonymous negro crime committed not by a negro but by Negro," creating a monolithic mass of racial difference. Joanna's death acts as a social occasion for Yoknapatawpha's different social strata – she is discussed and disseminated as much as when she was alive, now with the ostensibly-titillating detail of her head being almost removed, and a query of rape after her death. In death, Joanna is protected as a white woman, even though she had been ostracised from the town whilst alive by virtue of her family's provocation and her own sexual transgression. As I have argued, the myth of racial inferiority exhibits the typical belief in the purity of white women, as a latent reaction to the myth of the Lost Cause and white male impotence predicating the need to 'protect' women from the threat of Black virility and miscegenation. The townspeople express a covert wish that Joanna had been raped by Joe's Black virility, "at least once before" her murder and "at least once afterwards." (212)

After the discovery of Joanna's body, and the subsequent outraged delineation of Joe as Black, there is uproar as "the townsfolk react by forcing Christmas into the most obvious and pervasive racialized identity construct: the black man as heterosexual rapist and murderer." (Nisetich 52) Here, the townspeople have made a decision about Joe's race, and the ways in which he fits into their expected narrative of Black violence. If Joe were to be Black, he is a sexually-crazed murderer. If he were to be white, he is one of their own – this cannot be permitted. Joe's racial liminality works in the townspeople's favour, to avoid holding a mirror up to their own (white) capacity for equal violence. The solution is to lynch Joe, fitting him neatly into the parameters of consequences for Black violence, or existence. After Joe's capture, when the Mottstown sheriff "and the Jefferson sheriff both promised

that the n— would get a quick and fair trial," "somebody in the crowd says, 'Fair, hell. Did he give that white woman a fair trial?'" (*LIA* 263) Joanna is reducible to "that white woman," with Joe contraposed as her sensational Black lover, rapist, murderer.

Joanna is portrayed as a warped figure of femininity – depicted as a depraved nymphomaniac, a Yankee who deserves Joe's callous treatment of her, yet her death is reconfigured as a horrific murder against a white member of Jefferson. The town's white men finally come out to avenge her death, including Percy Grimm, who will later catch and lynch Joe. In life, Joanna had been treated as another outcast, complementing Joe's exclusion, and becoming equally as ostracised due to her racial sympathies in a staunchly-Southern town. The Burden family carry the stained legacy of Yankee external influence, and are shunned for doing so. In the event of Joanna's death, however, it becomes clear that the men of Jefferson possess the overwhelming need to defend white female chastity, as a result of their own perceived impotence within the boundaries of a newly-defined postbellum society. Joanna is shunned for thinking Black people "are the same as white folks. That's why folks don't never go out there. Except one." (38)

Joe's relationship with Joanna is eminently progressive and transgressive. Over the course of some years, Faulkner depicts scenes charged with racial tension and transgression. Indeed, Faulkner also injects a tone of sexual fluidity between Joe and Joanna, which ultimately cannot be permitted, and Joanna experiences a phantom pregnancy.[139] Joanna's personal beliefs are not so firmly entrenched in the myth of racial inferiority *per se*, yet she is also guilty of fetishisation. The sexual relationship between Joe and Joanna is paradoxical, as well as potentially Black and white. Joe is the oxymoronic "lover of her spinster's bed", and "even after a year it was as though he entered by stealth to despoil her virginity anew."

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[139] Faulkner introduces Lena as a pregnant Madonna-figure, contrasting with the tension of Joe and Joanna – the threats of miscegenation and pregnancy are contrasted subtly when these two women are compared. See Irene Visser.

(171, 172) Joanna is another representation of duality: she fluctuates between man-like and spinster, wanting to be a devout Christian mother yet portrayed as a nymphomaniac. Faulkner depicts a sense of gendered transgression, in that

> There was no feminine vacillation, no coyness of obvious desire and intention to succumb at last. It was as if he struggled physically with another man for an object of no actual value to either, and for which they struggled on principle alone. (173)

Joe wonders that "'it was like I was the woman and she was the man. But that was not right, either. Because she had resisted to the very last. But it was not woman resistance." (173) For all of their sexual proclivities, Joanna treats Joe as another house-servant on her property, providing dishes which are "*set out for the n—. For the n—.*" (175) Again, Joe correlates sex with race, as Joanna becomes the last in the long list of woman who have wronged him: "no white woman ever did that. Only a n— woman ever gave me the air, turned me out." (174) It is Joanna who introduces a racial angle into her relationship with Joe: she cries "Negro! Negro! Negro!," forcing him into a fetishised role for her own gratification. (192) Though Joe may confess that he could be partially-Black to the women he sleeps with, it is still on his own terms, and he does not appreciate being reified. This behaviour from Joanna is not the true catalyst for her murder, however, as she introduces religion in her attempts to pray over Joe, and "make of him something between a hermit and a missionary to negroes." (200) As a refrain of justification after the murder, Joe repeats variations of "she ought not to started praying over me." (82) White religion intermingles with the creation of racial demarcation – Du Bois's "color-line" becomes more indelible in Joe's mind, as he is forced to consider crossing into "a n– college" and becoming "a n– lawyer." (3; *LIA* 204)

Faulkner emphasises Joanna's lack of integration. As a quasi-Yankee, Joanna is denied the town's care or protection during her life, despite the fact that she had been born in Jefferson. Joanna is betrayed by a refusal to assimilate – she had been born "in the house yonder and had lived there ever since," but her accent is Northern, and in her voice "New England

talked as plainly as it did in the speech of her kin who had never left New Hampshire." (177) Furthermore, Joanna is of Calvinist stock, and her ancestor had loudly declaimed upon "cursing slavery and slaveholders." (179) This attitude does not appear to stem from a sense of morality, but an overbearing Christian outlook proposed by Calvin Burden Senior:

> Damn, lowbuilt black folks: low built because of the weight of the wrath of God, black because of the sin of human bondage staining their blood and flesh…but we done freed them now, both black and white alike. They'll bleach out now. In a hundred years there will be white folks again. Then maybe we'll let them come back into America.
> (183)

In the Burden family lineage, Calvin suspects that his son has married a Black woman. Despite the fact that she "was Spanish and not Rebel", Calvin's attitude towards this intermixture is pragmatic, unlike Hines's overt reaction to his daughter's 'sin' – Calvin compliments Calvin Jr.'s "man's build", despite his "black dam and his black look." (183) Although superficially not entwined with the myth of racial inferiority – and possessing a viewpoint entirely at odds with their fellows in the South – the Burdens become intimately linked with the postbellum landscape, by virtue of originating from New Hampshire, in the North. As Joanna explains,

> They hated us here. We were Yankees. Foreigners. Worse than foreigners: enemies. Carpetbaggers. And it – the War – still too close for even the ones that got whipped to be very sensible. Stirring up the negroes to murder and rape, they called it. Threatening white supremacy. So I suppose that Colonel Sartoris was a town hero because he killed with two shots from the same pistol an old onearmed man and a boy who had never even cast his first vote. Maybe they were right. I don't know.
> (184) [140]

Indeed, the Burden family's ideas of predestination are so strong that Joanna's Grandfather Calvin interrupts her parents' wedding ceremony to deliver a speech, in which

[140] In this exposition, we also hear the other side of the Sartoris legend Bayard tells in *Sartoris.*

> He got off on Lincoln and slavery and dared any man there to deny that Lincoln and the negro and Moses and the children of Israel were the same, and the Red Sea was just the blood that had to be spilled in order that the black race might cross into the Promised Land.
> (186)

Herein, ideas of slavery and equality are expressed, unwelcomed in the South.

As the last-surviving Burden, Joanna feels the abject responsibility of white responsibility as "the curse of the black race is God's curse. But the curse of the white race is the black man who will be forever God's chosen own because He once cursed Him." (187) In 1952, Faulkner wrote that the use of "Him" was a misprint for "Ham." ("To Henry F. Pommer" 374) This argument also echoes the delineation of Black-skinned people in the Bible as cursed, "the sons of Ham" condemned via Ham's son Canaan, for Ham seeing his father Noah's shame. (Gen. 10.6, 9.21-25) In *Absalom!* Faulkner makes explicit mention of this racial theory: "that burlesque uniform and regalia of the tragic burlesque of the sons of Ham." (196) [141] In this way, Joanna both does and does not believe in the myth of racial inferiority. She has inherited a tradition of Calvinist belief, in that all of the Black race is cursed by predestination, and therefore potentially inferior within the ideological parameters of the myth of racial inferiority. Instead of condemning Black people, however, the Burdens accept a responsibility for this curse. Therefore, Joanna does not act in the same racist manner as a large majority of those in the South; yet she does believe that there is a difference between the races casting "a shadow in which I lived, we lived, all white people, all other people." (*LIA* 187)

No matter her beliefs, Joanna would never have been fully accepted into Jefferson: when Faulkner describes the backstory of recurring character Gavin Stevens, he also notes the importance of lineage in connection to the Burdens: Stevens's family "was old in Jefferson;

[141] Stephens's "Cornerstone Speech" echoes these delineations, claiming that the Black man "by nature, or by the curse against Canaan, is fitted for that condition which he occupies in our system."

his ancestors owned slaves there and his grandfather knew (and also hated, and publicly congratulated Colonel Sartoris when they died) Miss Burden's grandfather and brother." (329) Joanna's family are too close to being 'carpetbaggers' and political opponents, shaking the foundations of slaveholding and being murdered for their actions. However, these ideas of political segregation are subsumed when Joanna is murdered. The townspeople are quick to forget that "while they were younger, children (some of their fathers had done it too) they had called after her on the street, "'N— lover! N— lover!'" (215) Sullivan argues that "the racist fantasy of black sex crimes creates cohesion in the white community and even allows the 'n—lover' Joanna Burden to be posthumously recuperated by the town." (505) It would appear that the North-South divide is more liminal than the strict segregation between white and non-white.

Contrasting with Jefferson's acceptance of Joanna after her death, Bobbie is not equally as protected by the townspeople. Mattias Smångs's research into violent forms of racial 'justice' notes that "poor white women failing to meet prescribed behavioral norms by, for example, engaging in prostitution or consensual interracial sexual relations, were especially seen as less deserving of support and protection." (72) Both Bobbie and Joanna's relationships with Joe are consensual, yet Joanna's privileged position as the white, middle-class daughter of a preacher affords her some respect and indignation after her murder. Bobbie, on the other hand, is "less deserving," only physically protected by her pimps.

Therefore, Joanna is indicative of a different myth of racial inferiority – she takes the 'Black curse' upon herself, but Joe refuses to adhere to the curse too. Posthumously-protected by the town, Joanna may transgress the perceived colour-line, but she must also suffer the consequences of doing so.

5.10 Joe Trapped Within the Circle

Joe feels trapped by Joanna's fetishisation and expectation. However, I argue that he is primarily trapped within the constrictive circle of the myth of racial inferiority itself. In another insight into interiority, Joe has felt the cage of life around himself: "his own flesh as well as all space was still a cage." (*LIA* 118) Joe can run to the progressive cities of the North, like Chicago or Detroit, yet he cannot escape the reactive pull of the South. Whilst in Yoknapatawpha, he can oscillate between the Black and white ends of town, but he cannot outrun his actions.[142]

After the seminal racialised altercation with Bobbie and her protectors, Joe

> Entered the street which was to run for fifteen years. The whiskey died away in time and was renewed and died again, but the street ran on. From that night the thousand streets ran as one street, with imperceptible corners and changes of scene.
> (164-65)

Joe carries an awareness of the extent of his life, and the fragility of it: later he is thirty-three, on the run for murder, and experiences the feeling of

> Entering it again, the street which ran for thirty years. It had been a paved street, where going should be fast. It had made a circle and he is still inside of it. Though during the last seven days he has had no paved street, yet he has travelled further than in all the thirty years before. And yet he is still inside the circle. 'And yet I have been further in these seven days than in all the thirty years.' he thinks. 'But I have never got outside that circle. I have never broken out of the ring of what I have already done and cannot ever undo.'
> (252) [143]

Joe's restlessness is depicted in the idea that "he was ready to travel one mile or a thousand, wherever the streets of the imperceptible corners should choose to run again." (174) Straining at the edges of expectations upon him, Joe is also trapped by Joanna, and the note she leaves in his cabin, by which "he should have seen that he was bound just as tightly by

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[142] Faulkner contrasts Joe against Lena's travels; Lena is free to cross state lines, perhaps a benefit of her implicit 'purity.'

[143] Joe's understanding has overtones of Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, in "what's done cannot be undone" versus Joe's "what I have already done and cannot ever undo." (*Macbeth* 5.1.71; *LIA* 252)

that small square of still undivulging paper as though it were a lock and chain." (201) Being chased after Joanna's murder, Joe envisions the following scene:

> It seemed to him that he could see himself being hunted by white men at last into the black abyss which had been waiting, trying, for thirty years to drown him and into which now and at last he had actually entered, bearing now upon his ankles the definite and ineradicable gauge of its upward moving.
> (245)

Despite the pull of the "black abyss," Joe also feels "the neutral greyness" of the dawn, which may be transposed into a reading of Black and white; a combination of which would produce grey. (245) Again, Joe walks in "the dewgrey of dawn," the liminal time between night and day, and the liminal colour between the feigned absolutes of Black or white. (249)

Joe stands outside of Time, as well as race – he is forever in the circle, and cannot rest. He becomes obsessive about finding out the day of the week, after he has been excommunicated from Time. By the end, Joe is tired of running, and tired of the expectations of either race: he wishes to give up, and is "ready to say Here I am *Yes I would say Here I am I am tired I am tired of running of having to carry my life like it was a basket of eggs.*" (250) Again, Joe feels the pull of the black abyss which will drown him, and "that mark on his ankles the gauge definite and ineradicable of the black tide creeping up his legs, moving from his feet upward as death moves." (252) External forces exert their pressure on Joe, and his death is alluded to by the insidious creep of the "black tide."

For Joe, breaking out of the circle will always be impossible. The myth of race has limited him: he is trapped within the circle of his own actions, and the limitations imposed by others.

5.11 Joe's Death and the Racial Order

Joe's death is indicative of the generalised anger against miscegenation, racial 'passing', and the expected behaviours of Black people as a lower denomination of society, when viewed entirely through the generated lens of the myth of racial inferiority.

Anger is directed towards Joe once the townspeople have heard of his actions, after he has emerged from his enclosed week in the wilderness and re-entered *white* society – perhaps he would have been permitted to enter Black society, kept invisible, at a remove. A mob-mentality belief in the myth of racial inferiority creates consternation in Yoknapatawpha, as Joe is not behaving as a Black man 'ought' to behave, particularly as rumours spread across Jefferson's idle streets. Joe has been caught, but hasn't had the decency to subscribe to white people's expected behaviours. He is not contrite, and has had the audacity to 'pass' as a fellow white man under their noses. Of course, the townspeople may have discovered this 'fact' sooner, if the town had paid attention to Joe, rather than ignore his removed existence as a lowly bootlegger mill-worker and/or a quasi-foreigner, until it had a bearing on their lives after he murdered a white woman and indirectly caused the destruction of her property.[144]

Joe's death is foreshadowed at the burning house, as the firemen "began to canvass about for someone to crucify." (*LIA* 213) In the aftermath of Joanna's murder and the fire, the townspeople discuss racially-inflected gossip:

> "She might have had n—s living in the house with her, from what I have heard. What I am surprised at is that it was this long before one of them done for her." "Get me a n—," the sheriff said. The deputy and two or three others got him a n—. (215)

[144] It is revealed that Joe Brown had set the mansion ablaze in a misguided attempt to hide Joanna's body from being discovered.

In this scenario, the actual identity of the Black bystander does not matter – he is "a n—" who can be "got," and is therefore under suspicion due to hearsay. Again, Black individuality is subsumed by the myth of racial inferiority – the sheriff immediately assumes that a Black man is to blame for murder, in the same way that the action of "Dry September" immediately accuses Will Mayes without proof. The anonymous man from the crowd is whipped until he reveals the cabin's inhabitants are "two white men," though one of the sheriff's acolytes had known this already. (216) Therefore, the unforgivable act of murder is compounded further when Joe is discovered passing in a white area, in an affront to the expectations and parameters of the myth of racial inferiority.

Bloodhounds are brought in from the neighbouring town to catch Joe's scent, though it is hard to find, and the townspeople are convinced by the myth of racial inferiority "to think the durn fool never had no better sense…show he is a n—, even if nothing else." (229) Whilst evading capture, Joe decides manically that "he knew that the undergrowth was full of negroes: he could feel the eyes." (241) Joe is also perpetuating the myth of racial inferiority, showing the animalisation of an undergrowth filled with wild, invisible creatures. He laces up "his black shoes, the black shoes smelling of negro," in another obsession with imperceptible olfactory reside, the same idea of scent the bloodhounds chase across Yoknapatawpha. (245) Joe is caught in Mottstown, however, "in broad daylight, on a Saturday with the town full of folks." (259) Adding insult to injury, "he went into a white barbershop like a white man, and because he looked like a white man they never suspected him." (259) Continuing on from his need for recognition through provocation, Joe walks the streets "like he owned the town" until he is recognised. (259) Tellingly, "he never acted like either a n— or a white man. That was it. That was what made the folks so mad." (259-60) As Sullivan observes, "in Faulkner's Yoknapatawpha narratives, all definitions are relative to the term 'n—.'" (503) The degrading use of this word throughout the text is a cipher for race relations and delineation. The crowd in Mottstown crow over "Christmas! That white

n— that did that killing up at Jefferson last week!" (*LIA* 255) The common voice of the *polis* has the irony of limning Joe as a paradoxical "white n—," as if his actual racial make-up does not matter to them after his capture. Now the townsfolk are creating his racial identity for him collectively, and Faulkner describes the town's gossip as a personified "talk" that

> Went here and there about the town, dying and borning again like a wind or a fire…then the talk flared again, momentarily revived, to wives and families about supper tables in electrically lighted rooms and in remote hill cabins with kerosene lamps.
> (259)

Rumour spreads about the town, reaching from high society to low in its dissemination, echoing the oral storytelling of legend through salacious regeneration. Each retelling of Joe's actions and capture create more ideas and delineations of his racial identity, as the townspeople discuss that

> "He dont look any more like a n— than I do. But it must have been the n— blood in him. It looked like he had set out to get himself caught like a man might set to get married. He had got clean away for a whole week."
> (259)

Once more, race and sexuality are combined, between Joe's capture and a man's intent to be married.

Joe's actions are inexcusable even after the murder. By acting sanguine, he angers the townspeople even more, to the point where "it was like he never even knew he was a murderer, let alone a n— too." (260) The town conflates the despicable act of murder with race, in that Joe is equally as damnable for his race, as well as his actions. Puxan-Oliva notes that there is a "crucial role played by the town's rumor and external focalization in the shaping of the storytelling." (70) When a man named Halliday, recognising Joe, "had already hit the n— a couple of times in the face, and the n— acting like a n— for the first time and taking it, not saying anything: just bleeding sullen and quiet," the gossiping

townspeople are satisfied because Joe acts according to their expectations. (*LIA* 260) Now, Joe has become tangible in apparent Blackness.

Drawing parallels to Joe, Lucas Beauchamp's insubordination offends Jeffersonian society in Faulkner's *Intruder in the Dust.* Lucas has a dual heritage from both the white man and the Black, yet he does not acquiesce to the nature of either, and refuses to subordinate himself to the whims of the town: he is thrown in a prison cell for a crime he did not commit, as a result of the town's racial bias and need for a Black scapegoat figure. The town, like with Joe, want to subordinate Lucas to "*be a n— first. He's got to admit he's a n—. Then maybe we will accept him as he seems to intend to be accepted.*" (*Intruder in the Dust* 18) At the end of this later work, Lucas is freed.[145] For Christmas, however, his fate is to be murdered and castrated by the archetypal white supremacist, Percy Grimm. For the gentility of Jefferson, both Christmas and Beauchamp must be brought into submission.

At the close of Christmas's life he turns to the dynamics between Black and white. Instead of being an apparent mixture of both, he feels sharply white and Black in succession. Escaping from outside Jefferson's courthouse, Joe partakes in one of Faulkner's chase-scenes, which invariably include a Black person being hunted by white people.[146] Christmas is contorted between the different 'bloods' within himself, and as he runs throughout Jefferson his actions are imagined by Gavin Stevens. Stevens pictures the previous generations creating Joe in the present moment, and a history of

> All those successions of thirty years before that which had put that stain either on his white blood or his black blood whichever you will, and which killed him. (*LIA* 333)

As Stevens imagines,

[145] Unlike Joe, Lucas did not commit the murder of which he was accused.
[146] For examples of Faulkner's human hunting scenes, see *Go Down Moses* and the hunt for Tomey's Turl; "Red Leaves" and the hunt for Chief Doom's manservant (though the hunters are Chickasaw); and "Dry September" and the mob's hunt for Will Mayes.

> His blood would not be quiet, let him save it. It would not be either one or the other and let his body save itself. Because the *black blood* drove him first to the negro cabin. And then the *white blood* drove him out of there, as it was the *black blood* which snatched up the pistol and the *white blood* which would not let him fire it. And it was the *white blood* which sent him to the minister.
> (333; emphasis mine)

After this conjecture, Stevens posits, "then I believe that the white blood deserted him for the moment. Just a second, a flicker, allowing the black to rise in its final moment." (333) Returning to the imagery of blood,

> It was the black blood which swept him by his own desire beyond the aid of any man, swept him up into that ecstasy out of a black jungle where life has already ceased before the heart stops and death is desire and fulfillment. And then the black blood failed him again, as it must have in crises all his life.
> (333)

Joe has "defied the black blood for the last time, as he had been defying it for thirty years." (334) Though this scenario of Joe's interiority is a fabrication by Stevens, it can be taken as a form of narrative fact. As Faulkner has explicated, Stevens's meditation on Joe's conflicted bloods is "an assumption, a rationalization which Stevens made." (*University* 72) Again, Joe has been created entirely through the perspectives of others.[147] Stevens privileges the nobility of Christmas's alleged "white blood" over his Black, as evidenced by the attribution of violence to the latter – the noble white blood "would not let him fire" the pistol when he is cornered by Grimm in Hightower's house, whereas the black blood exists in a "black jungle," drawing connotations of animal behaviour by alluding to such a setting and perceived savagery. (*LIA* 333)

Joe's grandmother, Mrs Hines, tries to intervene with Joe's death.[148] Stevens supposes that "I believe that all she wanted was that he die 'decent', as she put it. Decently hung by a Force, a principle; not burned or hacked or dragged dead by a Thing." (330) Joe *is* executed

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[147] As in *Absalom!*, Faulkner attributes importance to the act of storytelling and narrative creation through the ideas of his characters. Faulkner has another character creating race through narration, like Quentin and Shreve.
[148] 'Mrs Hines' is not granted a first name in the narrative.

by “a Thing”: adherence to the myths of race and racial inferiority, leading to his lynching. In stark contrast, Doc Hines is found in the street “preaching lynching, telling the people how he had grandfathered the devil’s spawn and had kept it in trust for this day.” (332) Unfortunately for Joe and Mrs Hines, however, he is found by Percy Grimm. Grimm is a new form of white masculinity – he has rejected the overtures of the Klan to form a new viewpoint of racially-charged protection.[149] Grimm is a proponent of a newer form of belief in the myth of racial inferiority and white supremacy, possessing

> Sublime and implicit faith in physical courage and blind obedience, and a belief that the white race is superior to any and all other races, and that the American is superior to all other white races and that the American uniform is superior to all men.
> (335)

Much like the action of “Dry September”, the outrage of Jefferson’s male contingent is violently performative. Joanna Burden and Minnie Cooper are not members of the town: they are ignored until their protection becomes of interest, and white men can seize the opportunity to protect their ‘virtue.’ Joanna has been provided for by Black people – “coloured folks around here looks after her.” (167) She has been cast aside by white people, until her death provides an opportunity for racist performance and another excuse to murder a Black person. As Abdur-Rahman argues,

> Lynching functions in the absence of slavery’s racial organization and operational logic to fix racial categories in the postemancipation period and to annihilate the threat that African American male enfranchisement posed to the desired (racist) social order.
> (148)

Joe’s death is caused by belief in the myth of racial inferiority, and a power vacuum left by the end of slavery as a hierarchy for white male dominance in the South. Grimm organises a

[149] By creating Grimm, Faulkner had become prescient, presenting a form of fanaticism later aligned with Nazi Germany. Faulkner notes that “I wrote that book in 1932 before I’d ever heard of Hitler’s Storm Troopers, what he was was a Nazi Storm Trooper.” (*University* 41) It is impossible to fully compare Grimm in 1932 to events in global history which had not come to pass, yet he is a proto-Storm Trooper whose fanaticism causes him to murder Christmas.

lynch mob under the performative guise of the American Legion, and "a fair platoon" of men who will exact their form of justice. (*LIA* 336) Grimm's open white supremacy is admired in Jefferson:

> The town had suddenly accepted Grimm with respect and perhaps a little awe and a deal of actual faith and confidence, as though somehow his vision and patriotism and pride in the town, the occasion, had been quicker and truer than theirs. (339)

Grimm is an extreme example of the male need to demonstrate dominance and feigned protection. Grimm's role as a bloodthirsty, militant organiser is similar to the overt actions of the Ku Klux Klan, distilled into one man. For Grimm, however his role is borne of a misguided patriotism; a young man who has been born too late for the action of World War I, and is only good for a performative protection of Jefferson's white women.[150] This attitude is clear after Grimm has hunted Christmas to Hightower's house, "emptied the automatic's magazine" into him, and proceeded to castrate him. (345) Similarly to Joanna's retribution after death, "later someone covered all five shots with a folded handkerchief." (345)

Grimm is frenzied, telling Joe during his castration that "now you'll let white women alone, even in hell." (345) This is an act so violent that one of his cronies "began to vomit." (345) After publication, Faulkner wrote glibly that Grimm "was the Fascist galahad who saved the white race by murdering Christmas." ("To Malcolm Cowley," Sept. 1945, 202) Grimm's reasoning may seem weak and pathetic, as he crows over Joe's body as it erupts in an effusion of "pent black blood." (*LIA* 345) However, the practice of castration before lynching has a long history in the South. Smångs delineates that,

> Framed as a defense of the virtue and purity of white womanhood from black defilement and pollution, the castration of an African American man and the display of his emasculated body signaled to white lynch mobs and audiences their communal racial superiority and triumph over what they perceived as an inferior and menacing

[150] Grimm "was too young to have been in the European War, though it was not until 1921 or '22 that he realized he would never forgive his parents for that fact." (*LIA* 334)

racial group.
(57)

By removing Joe's physical embodiment of sexuality, Grimm has neutralised his threat – though by doing so, he has released the "pent black blood" of Joe's racialised body instead. (*LIA* 345) Joe reaches a form of secular apotheosis, as the blood "seemed to rush out of his pale body like the rush of sparks from a rising rocket; upon that black blast the man seemed to rise soaring into their memories forever and ever." (345)

Joe's death becomes so renowned that he is heard of three weeks after the fact, across the state line in Tennessee. The furniture dealer in the final chapter knows Jefferson, casually, as "where they lynched that n—." (369) Joe is linguistically defined as a "n—" in death, by strangers who can only understand another rote lynching, and another day in Faulkner's Deep South.

5.12 Conclusion

The 'myth' of race is dealt with in *Light in August* by a series of liminal moments. Joe Christmas is within the circle and without, Black and white whilst being neither or both. Faulkner's use of myth becomes a study in reading between the lines, but to search for an answer to Joe's race is to collude with the townspeople in Jefferson to limit him, to fit him to our own purposes.

I have claimed that the 'myth of race' is a construct perpetuated by white Southerners, in order to enforce white supremacy. I contend that *Light in August* is Faulkner's most overtly-racialised work. The contaminative threat of miscegenation clouds Faulkner's examinations of race, racial passing, and the perceived threat to white society leading to a rise in the myth of racial inferiority, and the historical dominance of white supremacy.

Faulkner's sustained depiction of suspected miscegenation and thwarted racial classification in Jefferson has reinforced my argument through depictions of belief in the myth of racial

inferiority, and classifications of race endorsed to limit Joe specifically. He is murdered by Percy Grimm, yet the townspeople will only gossip and retroactively label him as Black. The myth of racial inferiority is constructed and maintained for the benefit of the white townspeople, representative of a wider social hierarchy benefitting from upholding the myth of race. Christmas is Faulkner's tragic figure, the man who "didn't know what he was, and so he was nothing." (*University* 72)

My next chapter will discuss the expected role of women in Faulkner's South, in which women like Lena Grove are contrasted against Joanna Burden: each has her share of trial, yet Lena is allowed to prosper where Joanna is condemned. Elsewhere in Faulkner's works, women are also expected to adhere to expected behaviours, working in union with the myth of the Lost Cause, and using tenets of the myth of racial inferiority as a form of control.

CHAPTER FIVE

FAULKNER AND THE MYTHS OF SOUTHERN WOMANHOOD

6.1 "Then the War Came and Made the Ladies Into Ghosts"

Faulkner's representations of female experience moves on a trajectory between the female body and ideas of the bodily; sexual freedom; pregnancy; abortion; or motherhood. Despite female agency, women were repeatedly stymied by male control and the climate of the South, trapped within constructed mythologies enforcing their compliance through linguistic or physical ideologies operating to ensure male control. This controlled claustrophobia is a direct result of the legacies inherited by the South, and the destructive myth of the Lost Cause continuing to work upon Southern behaviour.

Faulkner's subject is "one of the three oldest ideas than man can write about, which is love, sex." (*University* 131) Though his subject of interchangeable "love" or "sex" may be one of the oldest, modern society found new ways to impose control and glorified ideals onto women. Women are expected to adhere to antebellum values of propriety and chastity, but the advent of the new twentieth century and the destruction of World War I allowed them some new opportunities.

This chapter will focus on the contrast between Faulkner's 'Southern' and 'modern' women, focusing primarily on female characters in *Absalom, Absalom!*, *As I Lay Dying*, *Light in August*, *Soldiers' Pay*, *The Sound and the Fury*, and *The Wild Palms*. Using 'Southern' as a collective word for unreconstructed, antebellum women, these works function in Faulkner's timeline to address the manifestation of the Lost Cause myth seen through women who conform, and those who are controlled. Furthermore, womanhood was often correlated or intertwined with motherhood as an expectation forced upon them by both male control and ingrained

societal expectation. Faulkner's works address the expectations and propriety of women as mothers, forced upon them at times, no matter how unsuited they are for motherhood itself. *Absalom!*'s Jason Compson III most accurately identifies the effect on women of the Civil War and the Lost Cause enduring into the twentieth century, observing that "years ago we in the South made our women into ladies. Then the War came and made the ladies into ghosts. So what else can we do, being gentlemen, but listen to them being ghosts?" (12) In assessing the rise of the New South against the Old South, I examine the various forms of womanhood endorsed or regulated by remnants of the myth of the Lost Cause, analysing where women are able to resist its legacy. This regime change is assessed by O'Brien, in that "the ancien régime's religion, manners, racism, historicist sentiment, and ideas of sexuality, as they stood at midcentury, were handed over to the New South, not unscathed but substantially intact." (6) [151] My first chapter assessed the protected, "intact" role of women in public remembrance, as organisations like the United Daughters of the Confederacy (UDC) upheld Lost Cause mythology.[152] This chapter focuses more on the burgeoning promise of the twentieth century, and the women who resist, returning to Jason Compson III, being "made" into living ghosts. Women had become victims of mythification and loaded veneration, forced upon them by the heritage of the previous generation. However, they may resist the controlling myths of Southern womanhood temporarily.

6.2 Faulkner's Southern Women

Faulkner's Confederate-aligned Southern women are literary echoes of "women, the ladies, the unsurrendered, the irreconcilable," whom the author remembers from his childhood. (*Requiem* 202) These women are "maiden spinster aunts which had never surrendered," seemingly notable for their "maiden" chastity that upheld antebellum values in their bodies as well as their indomitable behaviour, and refusal to become ex-

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[151] One may also consider the implications of "intact" womanhood within this quasi-regime change.
[152] See 2.3.

Confederates in their post-war worldview. (*University* 249) The myth of the Lost Cause controlled these women, even as they supported the myth in turn, amplifying its legacy.

For Faulkner, the portrayal of Southern women allowed for a study in female mythification, reflecting intimate ties to the myths of chivalry and legend. In his use of myth, Faulkner looks back to eras in which men were knights, ladies were damsels in distress, and sexual purity was upheld. These time periods were as long ago as the twelfth century, and as recent as within Faulkner's past century. Faulkner's interpretations of myth can be seen in frequent reference to classical myth, Biblical influence, and medieval legends and quest narratives – all appearing in Faulkner's titles or textual allusions. The quest narrative is a clear influence in both *Light in August* and *As I Lay Dying*.[153] Addie Bundren's coffin is a physical representation of decay, as she and her family make their way through Yoknapatawpha to her desired final resting place. Lena Grove's ill-advised journey across the South culminates in her fleeting stop in Jefferson to find Lucas Burch and give birth, before the cyclical passage of her journey into Tennessee.

With the benefit of hindsight, Faulkner was also operating within a period of legend, in the creation of myths surrounding his writing. In Faulkner's works one can view Quentin Compson as a repressed repository of such archaic chivalric values, in the overarching narrative of a South looking back to the 'better' days of pure white magnolias, and 'pure' women.[154] In the post-war South, as Ransom delineates, "persecution intensified her tradition, and made the South more solid and more Southern in the year 1875, or thereabouts, than ever before." (17) Therefore, expectations of Southern womanhood led on from the Civil War, informing mythification and behavioural patterns throughout the

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[153] The influences of Greek myth upon Faulkner are also clear in *As I Lay Dying*'s title. According to André Bleikasten, "Faulkner borrowed it from Book XI, the 'Book of the Dead,' of the *Odyssey*," therefore "intertextuality is already at work, weaving its threads with those of myth and epic." (163)

[154] The state of Mississippi itself is also complicit in the antebellum imagery of magnolias, present on the state flag in a number of periods, most recently since January 2021. The state flag's canton from 1894 had depicted the most-common 'Confederate' flag, the Battle Flag of Northern Virginia.

South. Control of women also allowed for a reciprocal belief in the myth of racial inferiority, as discussed in my previous two chapters. One reasoning for female control was to ostensibly avoid the 'threat' of non-white sexuality.[155]

The 'Old South' occupies the imagination as a sense of place and space that harkens back to a supposedly preferable era, in which women were desirable Southern belles, and men were their dashing and protective heroes. Women were left to protect their property, "supporting households and families and managing slaves" during the war. (Drew Gilpin Faust 6) For every enterprising Granny Millard in *The Unvanquished*, there is a correspondingly useless Ellen Sutpen in *Absalom!*. Faulkner's women embody various myths coded by the expectations of history which work upon them. Daniel Singal denotes this as the 'Cavalier' period of the South, taking ideas of behaviour from the Victorian era: the Cavalier appealed to Southerners with "his larger-than-life scale and his aura of romance" as a remnant from the pre-war, pre-century South. (11) However, the Cavalier stood as "more a mythical than a real social entity, " and the fact that this South did not exist is merely an afterthought. (Davenport 9)

Belief in the mythic power of the Lost Cause meant that women were used as tools for propaganda, particularly in a post-war climate of the Reconstruction South that stymied the voices of defeated Confederate men. The UDC played upon familial roles and fidelities, although their projected "image of the southern lady was more a product of fable than fact." (Catherine Clinton xiv) Furthermore, "the Queens of the Golden Mask" were a lesser-known Ku Klux Klan counterpart for female participation, creating a feminised "place for them in the Invisible Empire." (Egan 61) Oppression and repression worked together to ensure the perpetuation of white male supremacy in the Southern states, both passively and

[155] Providing contemporaneous views on 'threatening' non-white male virility, Northerner Robert Shufeldt observed in 1915 that "young blacks are distinctly lewd and sensuous in their inclinations, and at an early stage develop a desire to possess white women, traits which they, in reality, never outgrow, and which are a constant menace to the gentler sex of our people everywhere." (131)

actively. In a simplification, if white women were protected, white men could eradicate the threat of Black empowerment, and counteract the indignities of Northern-imposed Reconstruction and Civil War defeat. The myth of the Lost Cause gave rise to the manipulative protection of upper-class white female chastity. As Karen Cox posits,

> Tradition was important to the Lost Cause because it not only defined the role women were to play; it defined the role of men as well. Within the Confederate tradition, both women and men accepted a particular set of traits as typical of southern womanhood and southern manhood.
> (44)

Similarly to the myth of the Lost Cause, then, with its reliance on ghosts and heritage, the controlling myths of Southern womanhood created expectations based on the behaviour of 'gentlemen,' and the reciprocal perceived value of Southern 'ladies.'

For white women, the myth of the Lost Cause also enforced their own entrapment within ideas of mythology and conduct that were predicated upon white men as saviours. Deliberately leaving women without a sense of agency, the majority of Southern women were not permitted to operate under their own authority. Ownership was integral to male control. Clinton supposes that "one of the important goals, therefore, of the countless constraints to which women were subjected was to render them, in effect, desexualized." (110) Sexual attraction was only permitted for white men. During Reconstruction and reunion, Silber notes, "Northerners also expressed concern over an apparent loss of sexual mores, noting a tendency toward a more open and public display of sexuality, especially among the less well-to-do." (9) Class and sexuality combined to reinforce overarching control, as "the Civil War had wreaked havoc on the stability and rigidity of the Victorian code of gender." (Silber 28) Perhaps the loss of enslaving rights caused a corresponding sense of ownership and control of women's bodies, though this coercion had existed before the Civil War as well, particularly for enslaved women.

Faulkner's women are not all passive recipients of the containing, limiting myth of Southern womanhood: they resist it, transgress it, confront it, and are troubled by it. However, Southern women like Rosa Coldfield are constructed "more of maiden hope and virgin expectation," contrasted against the punished sexuality of Faulkner's modern women. (*AA!* 190) Faulkner's innocent women are taken advantage of: Dewey Dell Bundren in *As I Lay Dying* pines for her lover Lafe who has made her pregnant, and *Absalom, Absalom!*'s narrative section told by Thomas Sutpen describes his sister as "the unmarried sister who pretty soon, so he told Grandfather, and still without any wedding had another baby." (227) Lena Grove of *Light in August* approaches her pregnancy with steadfast humour – her open window gives access to a lover, and she thinks that perhaps if she had shut it, she would not be pregnant. Rural women are less bounded by the expectations of Southern womanhood, not in the same way as women from 'good' families; those like Rosa, or Caroline Compson. Social pressures of womanhood added nuance, in addition to racial parameters structuring society. In contrast to the last bastions of Southern womanhood, K. Cox observes that

> By the time this younger generation of women reached adulthood, the Old South had been idealized through the narrative of the Lost Cause. So too had the women of the Old South, who were portrayed as models of femininity to be both celebrated and emulated. *For this generation, myth had replaced reality.*
> (38; emphasis mine)

The progress of the modern age is measured against Faulkner's Southern women who have upheld the Old South myth.

Sartoris depicts strongholds of Southern womanhood in Virginia 'Jenny' Du Pre and Aunt Sally Wyatt – women who refuse to acknowledge the onset of progress. Aunt Sally "lived much in the past, shutting her mind with a bland finality to anything which had occurred since 1901," whereas Miss Jenny entered the Sartoris orbit "two years a wife and seven years a widow at thirty." (*Sartoris* 149, 25) The Civil War created an entire generation of lost women, also evidenced by Rosa Coldfield. As *Absalom!* opens, Rosa is a relic of a former

time – much like the South itself. Quentin Compson's narration notes an aversion to "the smell of female flesh long embattled in virginity." (*AA!* 8) [156] Rosa may be the ultimate Southern woman: she is committed to the South and the ideological cause of the Confederacy, resplendent in the security of her unwed chastity to both the Confederate nation and personal sexual freedom. When Sutpen dares to cast aspersions on her honour, she remains incredibly outraged – even forty years after the fact. Though Rosa would not have been the first woman Sutpen dishonoured, she becomes the most vehement against his actions.

It must be acknowledged that only the 'right' type of Southern woman was venerated: sexually 'pure' and white. Interlinked with the myth of racial inferiority is a concomitant privilege of white female propriety. Sutpen's grand 'design' has been destroyed by the mythic 'drop' of blood that had irrevocably sullied his first wife. The role of women becomes another taboo binary between Black and white – Sutpen's daughter Clytie and Bon's wife in New Orleans are juxtaposed against Rosa's impenetrable chastity, contrasted yet again with the lower status of Milly Jones. It perhaps goes without saying that treatment of Black and white women is clearly different. Interestingly, however, Sutpen's individual treatment of women remains largely the same: a Haitian land-owner's daughter; a Black slave woman; Ellen Coldfield Sutpen; and Milly Jones are all mothers to his children. Rosa's sexual appeal is also under consideration, as long as the child is a son: Sutpen suggests that they may "breed together for test and sample and if it was a boy they would marry." (177) Tellingly, this affront is on a white woman's body, and therefore egregious. For the *Black* bodies in the text, a white male's wishes could not be met with such disdain. Sutpen's acknowledgement of his heirs may differ, but he is democratic in his treatment of the women who bear these children. After emancipation, the threat of the Klan and night-riders still enforced Black

[156] Quentin, however, is not the best judge of female character, obsessed as he is by his sister Caddy's virginity.

propriety. Roberts argues that "white men also exploited Black women sexually as a means of subjugating the entire Black community," and the "Klan's terror included the rape of Black women." (39, 38-39) Herein, Faulkner demonstrates the expectations of the time. A Black woman's body belongs to her owner, and a white woman's body is her own – as long as she conforms to the wishes of white men.

There are those Faulknerian characters who continue to desperately cling to the glory days of the Old South, and a time in which women were assigned to a certain role, giving them a clear definition of their roles and status. The rest of Jefferson has entered the new century, but Rosa is an old woman caged in the confines of other people's outmoded beliefs. It is no surprise, then, that Rosa believes in the myth of the Lost Cause, and glorifies Confederate soldiers as an abstract poetic ideal, "accumulating her first folio in which the lost cause's unregenerate vanquished were name by name embalmed." (*Corrected Text* 6) Rosa is one of "more than half-million white women who belonged to the slaveholding families of the Confederacy" for whom "this crisis of identity was particularly acute." (Faust 6) [157] Furthermore, Tara McPherson delineates that "stereotypical images of southernness such as the lady or the belle function as asymptotes…cultural limit figures that detail the contours of our cultural and regional ideals of femininity." (5) Therefore, Faulkner's weak brides and romantic women are indicative of certain Southern expectations of subjugated womanhood, and are yoked to previous ideals. For example, Ellen Sutpen is Faulkner's sole plantation mistress: an entirely ineffective, ephemeral woman with no sense of responsibility or hardiness. Ellen dies, and Judith, Rosa, and Clytie become the *de facto* heads of Sutpen's Hundred, enabled by Sutpen's wartime absence. Faulkner's Southern women are permitted to flourish under the circumstances of war.

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[157] See Buck's discussion of Confederate women's "triple agony," 38-43. (39)

It is important to consider the effects of these controlling myths upon Faulkner's *modern* women, who have the virtue of coming of age in a new America and a new South. However, the strictures of older society will not allow them to flourish. It is clear that each of Faulkner's modern women must suffer a consequence for their freedom. My argument makes clear the consequences of this freedom, spanning from submitting to male control to death.

6.3 Drusilla Hawk: "Bride-Widow of a Lost Cause"

Expectations upon female behaviour were accelerated by the death-toll of the Civil War, as was the nexus of grief and marriage. *The Unvanquished*'s Drusilla Hawk is a connection point between Faulkner's modern women, and those who are consigned to the past.

As Drusilla dryly points out, she is released from the bonds of constrictive matrimony by the death of her fiancé Gavin Breckbridge in battle at Shiloh. Linguistically-echoing Shakespeare's Lady Macbeth crying to "unsex me here," Drusilla has "deliberately tried to unsex herself" according to her affronted mother, "refusing to feel any natural grief at the death in battle not only of her affianced husband but of her own father" too. (*Macbeth* 1.5.48; *Unvanquished* 131) Drusilla is held in Faulknerian 'attenuation,' the grieving, proleptic widow-to-be, as "when Gavin Breckbridge was killed at Shiloh before he and Drusilla had time to marry, there had been reserved for Drusilla *the highest destiny of a Southern woman – to be the bride-widow of a lost cause.*" (132; emphasis mine) According to Bayard Sartoris's Aunt Louisa, Drusilla is "outraging all principles of purity and womanhood that our husbands had died for," therefore enforcing the controlling myths of Southern womanhood. (134)

Faulkner and his various narrators are fascinated by the mysticism of women, attributing feminine mysteries to ordinary motivations. For Bayard, Drusilla is the ultimate symbol of

unknowable femininity, a "Greek amphora priestess" lingering in his psyche like a spring of verbena on a pillow. (151) Bayard attributes some romantic aspirations to Drusilla's embittered acceptance of the war, and of her marriage to his father John.[158] The world of the Civil War becomes a gynarchy, in which Bayard and Ringo are the premature recipients of "a world of burned towns and houses and ruined plantations and fields inhabited only by women." (130) The men who exist in the Civil War's world are boys, aspiring to be men but left behind in the action. Women are given a social status above these boys. When the diminished number of defeated men returned, however, it was to a new world of emasculation. The reiteration of male power had to be emphasised through reciprocal female negation.

Drusilla is on the crux of a new order, rejecting the mould to be "bride-widow of a lost cause." (132) However, Drusilla undermines ideas of modernity by unsexing herself as a form of masculinity, then conforming to marriage. Bayard "thought how the War had tried to stamp all the women of her generation and class in the South into a type and how it had failed," though Drusilla is too early to inherit the twentieth-century 'new order' like Faulkner's modern women are able to do. (157)

6.4 Faulkner's Modern Women

In the twentieth century, Faulkner's modern women demonstrate that the dominant myth of Southern womanhood can be written against. Through language, Faulkner addresses issues of sexual repression, sexual freedom, pregnancy, and abortion. He presents examples of revolutionary women whose actions and attitudes are before their time, and also depicts outdated bastions of antebellum propriety, who are unable to adequately function in the post-war society or turn of the new century in which they find themselves. There are two facets of the female character in Faulkner's depictions: sexuality and/or

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[158] Bayard's own mother and sisters are elided, not even recognised in their absence.

maternity. Women are sexually-desirous objects, who may also perform the functions of motherhood.

For Faulkner, most of the female ties to motherhood are in the gestational act of pregnancy itself. We rarely see women as mothers, as often as we witness them procuring abortions or giving birth. Children themselves are more of an afterthought: Faulkner's women are not necessarily maternal. *As I Lay Dying's* Addie Bundren is potentially the exception to this rule of lack of maternal feeling, yet her voice must speak from beyond death. Instead, Matthews observes that "the modern young woman as sexual renegade preoccupies Faulkner's imagination." (*Faulkner* 37) In this new age of modernity, women are able to rebel to an extent. The proscribed roles for women may be avoided, and some may become a freer "sexual renegade" as a result, but crucially this freedom is only authorised in the short term. Most overtly, *Absalom!*'s Henry Sutpen believes "his simple and erstwhile untroubled code in which females were *ladies* or *whores* or *slaves*." (*AA!* 114; emphasis mine) This tripartite designation is coded for Faulkner's modern women, outlining the structure men prescribe for them. Faulkner's *men*, however, do not often live up to the expectations women have for them either: for example, the ineffectuality of *Sartoris*'s Horace Benbow and Young Bayard; Lafe's absence in *As I Lay Dying*; and the neurotic chivalry of Quentin Compson.

Faulkner's Lena Grove, Dewey Dell Bundren, Joanna Burden, Caddy Compson, and Charlotte Rittenmeyer flourish in their perceived immorality, "exploring what it means not just to be a woman, but to be a modern sexual subject." (Kristin Fujie, "Modern Sexuality" 117) Each are "modern sexual subjects" particularly when moving within – and reneging against – the constrictions of expected purity in the early twentieth century. Modernity plays its part in Yoknapatawpha too, encouraging the comparative licentiousness of Faulkner's modern white women. In turn, the threat of extramarital sexual relations result

in pregnancy: an outward symbol of a life of 'immorality.' Faulkner's depictions of abortion are a heavy contrast to sexual freedom.

Against the background of the Civil War; Reconstruction; the promising beginning of the twentieth century; the outbreak of World War I; the Prohibition era; and the intrusion of World War II, Faulkner's women are presented with myriad reasons to rebel. The particular crisis of transition during World War I affects ideas and expectations of womanhood: women are now more free, yet this freedom comes at a high price. In *A Fable* (1950), Faulkner ponders a correlation between warfare and expectations of womanhood:

> The maiming and the dying too of husbands and fathers and sweethearts and sons, as though bereavement by war were a simple occupational hazard of marriage and parenthood and childbearing and love.
> (136)

The hinge for new sexual behaviour is the outbreak of war, accompanied by female opportunity. According to Young Bayard Sartoris, "everybody ought to get married once, like everybody ought to go to one war," though for his future wife Narcissa "there would be peace for her only in a world where there were no men at all." (*Sartoris* 76, 201)

Elsewhere, Faulkner's women represent a culture of forced protection from racial anxieties, and a desirability which fades as soon as the maid in question is married. Eula Snopes's appeal fades in *The Town* before her suicide, and the coquettish allure of *Sanctuary*'s Temple Drake is transmuted into the horrifying, aged desperation of Minnie Cooper in "Dry September", or Emily Grierson's grotesque mystique in "A Rose for Emily". In Temple's strange plight in *Sanctuary* (1931), the underlying, unsympathetic anguish of Popeye's impotence allows some element of Temple's sexual purity to endure. She is a damsel in distress, locked in a Memphian bordello, but no chivalrous men bother to save her.

Faulkner's modern women are beset by issues of the modern age. The formidable, mythological monolith of Southern womanhood is ameliorated by the lure of cities like New

York and Chicago; fast marriages and adultery; the freedom of sexual abandon and the grounding reality of pregnancy and loss.

6.5 Abortion

Pregnancy is a preoccupation throughout the works I have chosen to discuss. The expectations of Southern womanhood include procreation under the 'right' circumstances. Sexual impropriety was reserved for men only; for a woman to behave inappropriately was unacceptable. Therefore, the reciprocal question of access to abortion also enters Faulkner's works.

For every placid pregnant Lena Grove, there is a fearful Dewey Dell Bundren. For every worldly-wise, coddled Caddy Compson, there is a desperate Charlotte Rittenmeyer. The Dewey Dells and Charlotte Rittenmeyers of Faulkner's works must pay for their iniquity, trying and failing to procure viable abortions. The advent of modernity brought more issues to the fore, as when "the twentieth century began, and women also declared their rights to sexual freedom, the attacks on reproductive autonomy escalated." (Becca Andrews 21) The significant act of abortion is seen in *The Wild Palms* (*WP*), published in 1939. Faulkner nears the taboo of secretive abortion in the story of lovers Harry Wilbourne and Charlotte Rittenmeyer: considering the sexual development of Faulkner's time, abortion becomes a topic talked about in its absence. The early decades of the 1900s eventually gave way to the freedom of the latter half of the century, yet Faulkner would not be alive to witness it. *The Wild Palms* is a more modern novel, in which Faulkner depicts his current zeitgeist of sexual freedom and an irreverent attitude towards the bonds of marriage and 'propriety.' Harry and Charlotte's sophisticated *élan* occasions the need for an abortion, during their passionate love affair. The abortion is procured 'off stage,' conducted by Harry, a former medical student. We are privy only to its exceptionally-horrifying result: Charlotte haemorrhages and dies. Although *The Wild Palms* superficially may be read as a caution

against abortion, Faulkner is unfailingly sympathetic. On the contrary, men are made to bear the brunt of the consequences – though this may be because Charlotte has died, and therefore cannot be punished any further. Harry is imprisoned; though Charlotte's husband gives him a cyanide pill, Harry grinds it into dust. To remember Charlotte as more than "*half of memory,*" Harry announces that "*between grief and nothing I will take grief.*" (*WP* 273) In the act of abortion, the consequences of sexual freedom are clear. Charlotte has left her husband and children for a new life of illegitimacy and the promise of sexual abandon, yet she must pay the ultimate price for her escape. Charlotte's pregnancy does not end with the miracle of new life, but her own death.

Pregnancy is a reciprocal part of the veneration of womanhood in the South, both in Faulkner's works, and in historical precedent. Pregnancy throughout Faulkner's works is dealt with in a number of ways: Lena Grove's serene, Madonna-like fecundity; Dewey Dell Bundren's infantile understanding of her changing body; Rosa Coldfield's shock at Sutpen's disgraceful proposal; and Joanna Burden's horrifyingly empty womb. The culmination of delicate, chaste maidenhood is transmuted into the expected duties of a wife – which each of these women reject – in a society placing utmost importance on a typical structure of male domination.

6.6 *As I Lay Dying*

As I Lay Dying (*AILD*) is one of Faulkner's most unflinching, experimental works. The narrative assesses female experience through language and veneration of Addie Bundren's dying body, readily apparent in mythification through beatification of her female body and its significance within the Bundren family *mythos.* Surrounded by brothers, Dewey Dell becomes the only Bundren woman, viewed in her turn by men. The controlling myths of Southern womanhood are placed upon expectations of these two Bundren women. The

work abounds with pregnancy and motherhood, yet we are not afforded much insight into female interiority, as this is a work constructed by the gaze of others.

In *As I Lay Dying*, female bodies are reified and mythicised through male lenses: Addie and Dewey Dell are observed by their male family members. Addie is a mother and a wife, Dewey Dell is a sister, and they are wholly defined in these relational roles. As Matthews observes, *As I Lay Dying* is "a study in belatedness, the majority of its characters dead or mad or doomed without knowing it yet." (*Faulkner* 144) Here, the action and boundaries working against women are not linked to the Civil War's legacy, or the results of freedom post-World War I. Instead, it is a rural force marshalling Addie and Dewey Dell. Faulkner's opinion was that this work most represented "my imaginary county," and therefore the forces at work within it. ("To Harold Raymond" 359) Both Bundren women are "doomed without knowing it yet," by virtue of their gender and the expected social code of rural Mississippi. (Matthews, *Faulkner* 144) Faulkner's works depict the honour and shame culture of a patriarchally-designed society, in which characters such as Dewey Dell rebel. Dewey Dell's trials are rife within *As I Lay Dying*: she must procure an abortifacient, and is then presumably raped by the dispensing pharmacist. Dewey Dell's chief issue is her innocence around the acts of sex and pregnancy. Here, Faulkner examines the fate of 'disloyal' women: Dewey Dell's mother Addie was also pregnant with an illegitimate child, as the result of an extramarital affair. We are afforded a sparse glimpse into Addie's pre-death mindset, as she considers the moral implications of her son Jewel Bundren's existence. As a wife in the patriarchal culture of the rural South, Addie must fit into a set of expectations. Dewey Dell is equally aware of her predicament, but cannot utilise the means necessary to end her pregnancy.

From Darl Bundren's disassociated opening chapter, in which his older brother Cash builds the coffin and "Addie Bundren could not want a better box to lie in," we are removed from

the immediacy of direct observation. (*AILD* 8) "Addie Bundren" is not yet revealed to be Darl's mother, and Darl speaks with the blunt defamiliarization of grief. "Addie Bundren" is the signifier for a female body, which will "lie in" the coffin her son is building. Cora Tull's voice and chapter are next to view Addie's dying body, no more than a quiet figure wherein "the only way you can tell she is breathing is by the sound of the mattress shucks." (11) Another of Faulkner's desirable women, Eula Snopes, appears in Cora's section. She is wishful that Darl will view her, but he passes by the feminine-centred room without comment: "he does not look in as he passes the door." (11) Eula wishes to be viewed, she "touches her beads lightly, and then her hair," but the male gaze is altered and stymied by Cora observing Eula, not Darl: "she finds me watching her, her eyes go blank." (11)

It is Addie's wish to be buried in Jefferson, though the Bundrens live outside of the town. The narrative follows the family as they attempt to honour Addie's final wish, with her decaying body in a wagon exposing their ineptitude. Addie's coffin and final journey are attended to in a vigil, with the Bundrens ironically ignoring Addie's decomposition. The significance of Addie's decaying corpse is one of revolted disgust, as her body becomes an object – dissimilar to the objectification of a desirable young woman, as she had once been. Instead, she becomes a cumbersome, stinking piece of flesh. Jeanne Ewert speculates that "Faulkner accords Addie, both in her careful designation of her time of death, quality of coffin, and place of burial, even in the plaintive note of the title taken from the wronged Agamemnon, the prerogatives of noble birth." (228) Noble or not, Faulkner juxtaposes the beauty of the Yoknapatawphan landscape against the immediacy of Addie's corpse, and again with the vile avarice of her husband Anse Bundren against recollections of Addie's own beauty and compassion for her family.

Addie's dying body and the coffin become one in "that goddamn box" of Jewel Bundren's narration. (*AILD* 15) Addie observes Cash making the coffin in a sort of maternal veneration, "where she can see him saying See. See what a good one I am making for you."

(15) Addie and the coffin are equally depersonalised, as the "box" euphemistically describes the overt near-death of the coffin – further emphasised by the stark coffin outline later in the text during one of Tull's sections, disrupting the page to show its bleak lines. (70) [159] Jewel longs for a pastoral vision when "it would just be me and her on a high hill." (15) For a body that is observed and shared between the Bundren family, Addie is "ever a private woman." (17) Upholding values of heritage, Addie has "that family burying-ground in Jefferson and them of her blood waiting for her there." (18) The reader is not yet allowed access to Addie's interiority, but Cora's voice demarcates Addie as

> A lonely woman, lonely with her pride, trying to make folks believe different, hiding the fact that they just suffered her, because she was not cold in the coffin before they were carting her forty miles away to bury her.
> (21)

Cora, external to the insular Bundren family, can say "coffin," but still reifies Addie's dead body as an object to be carted. Although surrounded by her family, according to Cora, Addie was "dying alone, hiding her pride and her broken heart." (22) In a series of observations, Cora admires Darl viewing Addie's dying body:

> He come to the door and stood there, looking at his dying mother. He just looked at her, and I felt the bounteous love of the Lord again and His mercy…he just stood and looked at his dying mother, his heart too full for words.
> (22-23)

Addie is connoted with Christianity through Cora's exaggerated piety. Cora is an outsider who can view the dynamics of the Bundren family, though she is also the origin of views such as "the reason the Lord had to create women is because man don't know his own good when he sees it." (58)

Anse Bundren seems too weak to function without a female presence: Cora's daughter Kate wryly observes that, once his wife dies, "he'll get another one before cotton-picking." (29) At

[159] See Appendix B for the coffin's outline in Faulkner's text.

the novel's close, we know this to be true. Anse sees Addie's worth in her motherhood, as "couldn't no woman strove harder than Addie to make them right, man and boy: I'll say that for her." (33) Doctor Peabody sees Addie through the lens of her role as Anse's wife: "she has been dead these ten days. I suppose it's having been a part of Anse for so long that she cannot even make that change, if change it be." (37) Again, we are not yet privy to Addie's voice. Under Peabody's gaze, Addie's body is "no more than a bundle of rotten sticks." (37) Changing metaphor for simile, the effect of receiving Addie's own gaze is "like the stream from a hose touches you," and "her eyes look like lamps blaring up just before the oil is gone." (37, 38) Peabody is discomforted by Addie's gaze being turned back on himself, observing the observation.

Next is Darl, disassociating himself from the corpse, "the handful of rotten bones that Addie Bundren left." (41) Again, Addie is conflated with the coffin's progress, coming into being through the movement of Cash's saw: "at each stroke her face seems to wake a little into an expression of listening and of waiting." (42) Faced with Dewey Dell's keening female grief, Anse's sterile response is to tell her to "git up, now, and put supper on." (43) Vardaman Bundren's childlike innocence – though sometimes mediated by a more mature and knowing narrative voice – cannot understand where his mother has gone. The youngest Bundren, Vardaman cannot reconcile the idea of his mother's body with her past presence:

> It was not her. I was there, looking. I saw. I thought it was her, but it was not. It was not my mother. She went away when the other one laid down in her bed and drew the quilt up. She went away.
> (54)

Vardaman's simple constructions emphasise the act of observation of female bodies, and his innocence and lack of understanding create sympathy. Vardaman confuses his mother's body with the fish he had caught and killed, as "it was not her because it was laying right yonder in the dirt." (55) He cannot stand to see Addie's body nailed into the coffin, solving

the problem later by drilling holes into it – but her corpse is defiled in the process as "two of them had bored on into her face." (60)

Addie's body lies for three days, waiting for the return of Jewel and Darl. She must then suffer the ignominy of an 'immodest' movement of the coffin as it is placed upon the team of horses: "as though within it her pole-thin body clings furiously, even though dead, to a sort of modesty." (77) Aligning with imposed ideas of chastity, the female body must be modest, even in death. When Addie is laid to rest, she wears her wedding dress. The elevated *pathos* of such an outfit – representative of her role as a wife – is tempered by the almost-comical veil fashioned "out of a mosquito bar so the auger holes in her face wouldn't show." (70)

Then the coffin and the body become one. Samson, a new outsider, observes that "they had *something* in the wagon." (86; emphasis mine) Addie's existence is contained within "that goddamn box" itself. (15) Similarly to Cora, Samson is able to understand Addie's body as an object, not the remnants of a mother and wife: "a woman that's been dead in a box four days, the best way to respect her is to get her into the ground as quick as you can." (89) Conversely, Darl is able to ignore the coffin's protection, and plainly sees his mother when the coffin gets stuck in the flooded ford. The result of this oversight is grotesque: "Cash turns back into the wagon. He lays his hands flat on Addie, rocking her a little…together we shove Addie forward, wedging her between the tools and the wagon-bed." (115-16) Darl's narration does not mention the coffin; it is as if their mother is still alive and humanised, not yet gone. The effect of Darl's overlooking is horrific, constructing Addie as a stripped-bare object wedged into the wagon. Later, the coffin and Addie are depersonalised, and "in the wagon bed *it* lies profoundly." (125; emphasis mine)

6.7 Addie Bundren

Finally, in the fortieth chapter of *As I Lay Dying*, we hear Addie's voice, and are given her first-person perspective. Far from the serene mother-figure presented to us throughout the preceding narrative, Addie has viewpoints on motherhood and expectations which come as a surprise.

As with most of Faulkner's women, Addie is expected to find her purpose in motherhood, which will alleviate her monotonous life of expectation and rote behaviour. As a school teacher, Addie does not necessarily like children – she is glad to have time to "hate them," and looks forward to pupils misbehaving so she can whip them. (*AILD* 134) Addie shows a language of agency in her decision to pursue her husband, looking to alter her life "and so I took Anse." (134) In Faulkner's justification, Addie has the following motivation:

> She had probably married Anse because of pressure from her people, but she probably saw through him that he was no good. She was ambitious probably and she married him against her inclination and she saw nothing ahead of her but a dull and dreary life as a slave without – just a slave, no pay, no compensation – then suddenly she found that there was something in motherhood that didn't, maybe didn't compensate for it but alleviated it.
> (*University* 114-15)

Chafing against the bounds of her life, Addie notices the "wild geese going north and their honking coming faint and high and wild out of the wild darkness," seemingly identifying with their freedom to be "wild." (*AILD 35*) Addie understands the expectations of motherhood, but that does not mean she will adhere to its set parameters – she knows that "words are no good; that words don't ever fit even what they are trying to say at." (136) Therefore, Addie also chafes against the inadequacies of language, and conflates language with motherhood because "motherhood was invented by someone who had to have a word for it because the ones that had the children didn't care whether there was a word for it or not." (136) Addie's life is defined by longing, for the wild geese and the clinical idea of Love,

a word wholly inadequate and detached for her: "I knew that word was like the others: just a shape to fill a lack; that when the right time came, you wouldn't need a word for that." (136)

Faulkner's text uses a gap in its typography to represent this "shape to fill a lack," in which Addie remembers

> I would think: The shape of my body where I used to be a virgin is in the shape of a   and I couldn't think *Anse*, couldn't remember *Anse*. It was not that I could think of myself as no longer unvirgin, because I was three now.
> (137)

Addie's oxymoronic "no longer unvirgin" demonstrates the inadequacy of language to explain virginity, and the state of losing virginity and becoming a mother. If women are trapped between the states of being virgins and being mothers, Addie is attempting to articulate a form of resistance. The empty "shape of a   " within the text is a signifier of absence, the notation of emptiness. By noticing the absence, attention is drawn to it. Therefore, the time before virginity may also be a time before language itself.

Darl also understands his relationship to his mother as part of the past, as she is no longer existent. When Vardaman asks who Darl's mother is, Darl responds that he does not have one, "because if I had one, it is *was*. And if it is was, it can't be is. Can it?" (79) Through language, like Addie becoming a mother, Darl is no longer a son.

Visualising language, Addie lies awake picturing Anse's name until it becomes an object itself –

> I would think about his name until after a while I could see the word as a shape, a vessel, and I would watch him liquify and flow into it like cold molasses flowing out of the darkness into the vessel, until the jar stood full and motionless: a significant shape profoundly without life like an empty door frame.
> (137)

Addie sees Anse as purely representative.[160] After producing Cash and Darl, Addie is secretive, picturing the wild figure "coming swift and secret to me in the woods dressed like sin" who fathers Jewel. (139) Yet Addie's children are intimately produced of *her* body alone, a singularity wherein "my children were of me alone, of the wild blood boiling along the earth, of me and all that lived; of none and of all." (139) Addie's life of crescendoing frenzy is quelled by Jewel's birth, as "the wild blood boiled away and the sound of it ceased." (139)

Addie sees her children as mathematical equations to negate her own sin, and the presence of Jewel's nameless father: "I gave Anse Dewey Dell to negative Jewel. Then I gave him Vardaman to replace the child I had robbed him of. And now he has three children that are his and not mine. And then I could get ready to die." (140) These nebulous "three children" are Anse's only, yet also produced from Addie's boiling "wild blood." (140, 139) [161] Addie is wild and free in her sin, not repenting for her actions because she has found peace and silence at last by having Jewel, and then theoretically wiping her slate clean through Dewey Dell and Vardaman.

After Addie's sole passage of narration, she is no longer pursued by men: her decaying body is now chased by ten buzzards, "circling and circling" around her coffin and landing on it as the Bundrens progress onwards to Jefferson. (148) By the time the quasi-cortège has made its way to Mottson, Addie and her coffin are defined by the external perspective of the townspeople as "it" and "this thing." (161, 162) Darl now refers to the coffin with his mother inside it as "her": "we put her under the apple tree…now and then she talks in little trickling bursts of secret and murmurous bubble." (168) Vardaman also hears Addie's body talking, "only I can't tell what she is saying." (170) Cash understands the metonymy of the coffin and

[160] In a reversal of genders, Anse is reminiscent of Judith Sutpen reified as a vessel for Henry and Bon's mutual desire. See 3.11.
[161] The question of which three Bundren children these are has occasioned frequent scholarship, see Charles Chappell. I extrapolate that they are Darl, Dewey Dell and Vardaman.

the body, but “when Jewel worked so to get her outen the river, he was going against God in a way.” (185)

Addie’s lone chapter in the text’s series of narrators gives her a sign of interiority, and a sense of understanding in the role of women. Addie is a lack in the narrative, identified through her role as a mother and an object in a coffin. In her stead, she has left her daughter Dewey Dell motherless at a crucial point.

6.8 Dewey Dell Bundren

The voice presented in Dewey Dell’s first narrated chapter is a change in tone, and a linguistic shift emphasising her youth and simplicity. Her sexual bargain with Lafe is predatory, and her lack of parental care is readily apparent: her father is pathetic, and her mother is dying.

Dewey Dell and Lafe work picking down a row of cotton, making a bargain that they will have sex when her cotton sack is full. “The woods getting closer and closer and the secret shade” represent where she will seemingly have sex, and Dewey Dell demonstrates a lack of agency because “I said will I or won’t I when the sack was half-full because I said if the sack is full when we get to the woods it won’t be me.” (*AILD* 24) Although Dewey Dell is using the first-person, her lack of awareness is clear when Lafe begins to fill her sack: “I said ‘What are you doing?’ and he said ‘I am picking into your sack.’ And so it was full when we came to the end of the row and I could not help it.” (24) Faulkner does not provide an authorial opinion on Dewey Dell in her first chapter, but presents her with sympathy and a sense of *pathos*. Actions are done *to* her, and, as we later discover, they have consequences on her female body: she is pregnant, “and so it was because I could not help it.” (24)

Darl also plays into the idea of Dewey Dell’s unawareness – not her ignorance, as Faulkner is kind in his sympathies towards Dewey Dell’s predicament. Darl knows that Dewey Dell is pregnant, and projects the idea that “you cannot believe it is true because you cannot

believe that Dewey Dell, Dewey Dell Bundren, could have such bad luck: is that it?" (34) Dewey Dell cannot find her voice to ask Doctor Peabody for help, and there is no more mention of Lafe's presence, so it is Darl who imagines the following tortured exchange:

> S*he is looking at him, saying You could do so much for me if you just would. If you just knew. I am I and you are you and I know it and you don't know it and you could do so much for me if you just would and if you would then I could tell you and then nobody would have to know except you and me and Darl.*
> (43)

Darl can effectively imagine Dewey Dell's lack of a voice, but perhaps this is because of his own psychological difference. Like Quentin Compson, Darl is ponderous and can understand the inner workings of sisters; the stylistic choice of italicisation conjoins the two young men who must suffer for their difference: Quentin in suicide, and Darl in a Jackson mental institution for setting fire to Gillespie's barn.[162] Darl is the only narrator who can successfully understand Dewey Dell. He knows her encounter with Lafe, he knows the truth of her pregnancy, and he can see the shape of her body where the others are blind to it: "Dewey Dell's wet dress shapes for the eyes of three blind men those mammalian ludicrosities which are the horizons and the valleys of the earth." (130) Here, Dewey Dell is conflated with the natural world, and her body will reveal its secrets to those who can see.

Dewey Dell articulates her own thoughts in an identical way to Darl's imaginings, thinking that "he could do so much for me if he just would. He could do everything for me." (49) Dewey Dell is the subject of male actions, and male consequences. Peabody can "do" actions to her, which we may infer to be providing an abortion. Dewey Dell also attributes her pregnancy to a sort of loneliness, similar to her mother:

> It's because I am alone. If I could just feel it, it would be different, because I would not be alone. But if I were not alone, everybody would know it. And he could do so much for me, and then I would not be alone. Then I could be all right alone.
> (49)

[162] There are similarities to Benjy Compson too, but Darl is far more articulate, therefore his main comparator is Quentin.

Dewey Dell is surrounded by her silence, furthering her isolation. She is also aware of her body coming undone, or "unalone": "I feel my body, my bones and flesh beginning to part and open upon the alone, and the process of coming unalone is terrible. Lafe, Lafe. 'Lafe' Lafe. Lafe." (51-52) Drawing parallels to her mother, Dewey Dell too repeats her lover's name like a chant.

Elsewhere, Moseley the pharmacist observes Dewey Dell in Mottson. Barefoot Dewey Dell presents a forlorn, sympathetic figure, as her inability to communicate traps her within her pregnancy. Having been taken advantage of by Lafe's 'cotton' in her sack, now in Mottson Dewey Dell cannot successfully speak. The pharmacist asks if she wants medicine, suspecting her to be using "female dope," but he also sees "her eyes: kind of dumb and hopeful and sullenly willing to be disappointed all at the same time." (158) Dewey Dell does indeed want medicine, an abortifacient, but will not successfully articulate her need. Matthews admires Dewey Dell's resolve, as "her determination outlines a course of action for women unwilling to reproduce their subordination without at least protest." (*Faulkner* 151) Determined as she is, Dewey Dell is still taken advantage of, and still pregnant.

In a macabre – yet comedic – exchange, Moseley asks

> 'Where's your ma? I said. 'Haven't you got one?'
> 'She's out yonder in the wagon,' she said.
> (*AILD* 159)

The pharmacist is another man, like Peabody, able to help Dewey Dell "if he just would." (49) Moseley, however, will not provide any abortifacients: "tell your pa, if you have one, and let him make somebody buy you a wedding licence." (159) Anse's helpfulness for Dewey Dell is as equally as negligible as the pharmacist's, and her mother may be "out yonder," but we know that her situation cannot be resolved by Addie's dead body in the wagon outside. (159) Dewey Dell clings on to the hope that "Lafe said I could get it at the drugstore. He

said to tell you me and him wouldn't never tell nobody you sold it to us." (160) Like *Light in August*'s Lena Grove's dalliance with Lucas Burch, Dewey Dell has been led astray by a man who might be "half-way to Texas by now." (160)

Another pharmacy, in Jefferson this time, and MacGowan is the one to prey on Dewey Dell's innocence. Jody and MacGowan spy on Dewey Dell "through the crack," and Jody indicates that "'she looks like a pretty hot mama, for a country girl.'" (192) Damned with this faint praise, MacGowan stalks Dewey Dell in the pharmacy parlour. MacGowan does understand Dewey Dell's predicament of "female troubles," and her communicative silence, as "them country people. Half the time they don't know what they want, and the balance of the time they can't tell it to you." (193) Rudely mocking Dewey Dell as a country girl, MacGowan "never saw no ring. But like as not, they ain't heard yet out there that they use rings." (194)

Now it is MacGowan's turn for linguistic games – giving Dewey Dell ineffective medicine from "a bottle that looked all right," we witness the following exchange:

> 'Hit smells like turpentine,' she says.
> 'Sure,' I says. 'That's the beginning of the treatment. You come back at ten o'clock tonight and *I'll give you the rest of it* and perform the operation.'
> 'Operation?' she says.
> 'It won't hurt you. You've had the same operation before. Ever hear about hair of the dog?'
> She looks at me. 'Will it work?' she says.
> 'Sure it'll work. *If you come back and get it*.'
> So she drunk whatever it was without batting an eye.
> (197; emphasis mine)

We can infer MacGowan's sexually-suggestive "operation" as something to be given and received, exploiting Dewey Dell's innocence. Faulkner presents Dewey Dell with sympathy and *pathos*, within the impending narrative claustrophobia of MacGowan's predatory pursuit. That night, MacGowan "went back and put some talcum powder into six capsules,"

trapping Dewey Dell in her innocence with another placebo, then leading her down into the cellar to rape her. (197) Again, we witness a chilling lack of communication:

> 'Are you sure it'll work? she says.
> 'Sure,' I says. 'When you take the rest of the treatment.'
> 'Where do I take it?' she says.
> 'Down in the cellar,' I says.
> (198)

Dewey Dell is trapped within linguistics, as much as she has been trapped by Lafe and her own body. Dewey Dell's only protection is the presence of Vardaman outside the drugstore in the twilight, equally as non-understanding. Both siblings have childlike innocence, but Dewey Dell's is to be manipulated once more. Faulkner's sympathy towards Dewey Dell is clear, as at least she is fatalistically aware of MacGowan's deception. However, it is too late; "'it ain't going to work,' she says. 'That son of a bitch.'" (200)

Dewey Dell is a young woman destined to operate within a man's world. She is at the mercy of adult issues that she has been forced to understand, particularly after the death of her mother. Now it is Anse's turn to exploit his daughter, taking the ten dollars that Lafe had given her to procure an abortion, and using it to acquire his new wife and teeth. The two events are linked within the narrative, incongruously appearing at the same time, yoked together through purchase. The idea of 'Mrs Bundren' is further complicated by questions of role and identity. Women's value is seen in commodification: as soon as Addie has died, Anse knows that "'God's will be done,' he says, 'Now I can get them teeth.'" (44) Later, these teeth are finally obtained upon Anse's new marriage and Dewey Dell's failed attempts for an abortion, along with a "graphophone" from his new wife, and shovels with which to bury her predecessor Addie – cast aside in the promise of "them teeth." (206, 44) Addie is buried without much ceremony, and Cash sparsely narrates that "we got *it* filled and covered." (188; emphasis mine) "It" is the grave for the Bundren matriarch, soon to be replaced.

Strangely, Cash's narration only presciently refers to her as "Mrs Bundren," of "Mrs Bundren's house" even before the marriage has taken place. (186)

According to Joshua Kavaloski,

> The Mrs. Bundren at Anse's side is neither here nor elsewhere differentiated from Addie, so that the two figures merge into one. This identity crisis affects the structure of the whole novel. By terminating with essentially the same character that commenced it, the narrative effaces the distinction between beginning and ending. (181)

Recursively turning upon another marriage and another exploited woman, then, the final line is Anse's: "'Meet Mrs Bundren,' he says." (*AILD* 208)

6.9 Women in *Light in August*

Similarly to *As I Lay Dying*, *Light in August* is a work filled with the echo of pregnancies, yet they are all unfailingly inadequate.[163] Lena, Milly Hines, and Joanna Burden are all seen in phases of pregnancy, though only Lena's is treated positively. Milly dies in childbirth, and Joanna's pregnancy is a phantom product of provocative sexual transgression.

Faulkner acutely addresses the lot of women in rural Alabama, at the outset of *Light in August.* Orphaned, Lena Grove must live with her brother and his wife, who is fulfilling the expected aim of womanhood:

> For almost half of every year the sister-in-law was either lying in or recovering. During this time Lena did all the housework and took care of the other children. Later she told herself, 'I reckon that's why I got one so quick myself.' (*LIA* 2)

Faulkner's authorial benevolence for Lena is readily apparent, as her pregnancy is more of a wry anecdote: "she had lived there eight years before she opened the window for the first

[163] Obsession with pregnancy spreads into discourse surrounding the text itself, with 'Light in August' denoted by some critics as alluding to a calving period in the summer farming season. Faulkner insists, however, that this parallel to pregnancy and gestation is unintentional; he was inspired by the appearance of light in August. See *University* 199.

time. She had not opened it a dozen times hardly before she discovered that she should not have opened it at all. She said to herself, 'That's just my luck.'" (3)

Lena's pregnancy is approached with humour and a sense of slapstick comedy – so is the cotton-picking sack episode which results in Dewey Dell losing her virginity. Yet Dewey Dell's infant-like understanding of the Jefferson pharmacist is claustrophobic, tense, and sober. In contrast, Lena's flight through the open window for the last time is treated as entirely funny: "it was a little difficult, this time. 'If it had been this hard to do before, I reckon I would not be doing it now,' she thought." (3) According to Faulkner, Lena came into existence "out of my admiration for women, for the courage and endurance of women." (*University* 74) As Armstid remarks in the opening scenes, however, "it wasn't any woman that got her into what she don't even call trouble." (*LIA* 9) Lena has been duped, like a number of Faulkner's women: Lucas Burch's worth to Lena is as "*a man she ain't going to ever see again and that she has already seen one time too many as it is*." (17)

Out of the women in *Light in August*, at least Lena is afforded a degree of autonomy: Gail Hightower's wife is not given a name, and she is only defined by her role as the minister's wife. Even after her suicide in Memphis, her name at the hotel is an alias, and "the police found her rightful name where she had written it herself on a piece of paper and then torn it up and thrown it into the waste basket." (48) The salacious newspaper articles call her "the wife of the Reverend Gail Hightower, of Jefferson, Mississippi." (48) Hightower's wife resists expectations of gender – she will not sit contritely in church, and is placed in a sanitorium for her behaviour. Elsewhere, Bobbie Allen is demeaned by Joe Christmas after his initiation into the world of transactional relationships – he had been a shy lover, but became loud and brash, as "he spoke of the waitress to the others, even in her presence, in his loud, drunken, despairing young voice, calling her his whore." (147) Joe's adoptive father delineates Bobbie as a "Jezebel" and a "harlot." (150) These episodes acutely depict the

expectations upon women for sexual purity. In terms of white male protection, Glenda Gilmore asserts that, though

> The bargain theoretically extended chivalry and protection to all white women; in effect it paid working-class white women…a whiteness bonus through which they purchased the assumption of lily-white innocence formerly reserved for upper-class white women.
> (125)

Some women are permitted to benefit from this "whiteness bonus," despite the counterpart of control.[164]

The women in Faulkner's works are often more informed and worldly than their male counterparts, despite their ambitious schemes. Lena is the one to release Burch from his responsibilities of fatherhood, as he makes his escape. Burch is easily replaced by Byron, and Lena's quest narrative resumes unhindered. Lena is also permitted to reveal her pregnant body, and to revel in the unusual sight of her prominent, symbolic fertility. Men's eyes ignore her pregnant state: Byron Bunch stupidly claims that he did not truly realise that she was not a virgin until her child is actually born. Lena's virginity is held in suspension, and Byron is able to imagine Lena in a virginal state, untouched by men because she has not been touched by himself: "*it was like it was not until Mrs Hines called me and I heard her and saw her face and knew that Byron Bunch was nothing in this world to her right now then, that I found out she is not a virgin.*" (*LIA* 297-98) The ambiguity of the closing chapter of *Light in August* either denotes Byron's spurned advances, or it points towards a future with a secure sense of legitimacy. Lena is treated kindly by those in Jefferson, indicative of her beatific allure and unshakeable rustic placidity. Only Hightower can tell Byron that

> If you must marry, there are single women, girls, virgins. It's not fair that you should sacrifice yourself to a woman who has chosen once and now wishes to renege that choice. It's not right. It's not just. God didn't intend it so when He made marriage. Made it? Women made marriage.
> (234)

[164] As discussed previously, Joanna is only afforded the townspeople's protection after her death.

Though occupied by the impropriety of Lena having a child out of wedlock, Hightower is the only character who does not coddle Lena. Like Addie Bundren, Hightower's wife sees marriage as a way to "escape from her present life" of propriety, but Hightower sees marriage as "a dead state carried over into and existing still among the living like two shadows chained together with the shadow of a chain." (356) Expectations of marriage are sometimes not mutually beneficial.

Faulkner's women are the objects of desire, held high on their pedestal of untouchable lust. For women to be appropriately controlled, they must be subjugated and told it is for their own protection. In the antebellum gendered climate, as Clinton writes, "women bore total sexual accountability; white men enjoyed total sexual control." (204) Furthermore, in Southern women's Northern counterparts, Silber identifies that

> Some northern white women also feared the loosening bonds of sexual behavior, especially as it seemed to demean the status of refined white womanhood. They suspected that women no longer occupied the same distinctive and sanctified space that they once did.
> (155)

Tellingly, women can only occupy "distinctive and sanctified space[s]" when they are apportioned them, and when they submit to male control. When women act out against their boundaries, however, they often die: Joanna Burden and Charlotte Rittenmeyer are two pertinent examples. For Joanna, sexual release is "as if she believed that it would be the last night on earth by damning herself forever to the hell of her forefathers, by living not alone in sin but in filth." (*LIA* 190) Joanna is condemned as being "in the wild throes of nymphomania" for her wanton sexuality, clouded as it is by racial overtones. (191) When Joanna desires a child, it is revealed that Joe "betrayed her with other women, women bought for a price." (194) Though Joanna might experience a phantom pregnancy, Joe tells her that "there is not anything the matter with you except being old. You just got old and it

happened to you and *now you are not any good anymore*," assigning value to her womb by doing so in a binary of "good" and its counterpart, bad. (205; emphasis mine) Crazed Doc Hines sees his daughter Milly tainted by "the womansign of God's abomination already on her," when she runs away with the man from the circus. (277) Hines "would take the pistol again and say he would find a doctor or kill one" to procure an abortion, "trying to find a doctor who would do it." (280) This depiction of abortion is entirely coloured by racial intolerance, and Milly is left to die for her transgression: Hines declares to "'let the devil gather his own crop: he was the one that laid it by.'" (281)

In an apostrophe by Hightower after Lena's baby is born in Joanna's cabin, he ponders Joanna's status as a "poor, barren woman. To have not lived only a week longer, until luck returned to this place. Until luck and life returned to these barren and ruined acres." (302) Repetition of "barren" connotes Lena's fertility with the "barren acres" of Joanna's womb. In contrast, showing Faulkner's authorial benevolence towards Lena, her own pregnancy is seen as wholly vital and life-giving. Lena and her baby are permitted to pass out of the narrative on their way to Tennessee, having apparently fulfilled expectations of womanhood. However, Faulkner's other women do not escape as easily.

6.10 Caddy Compson

The Sound and the Fury's Caddy Compson is the perpetual child with "muddy drawers" of Faulkner's obsessive imagination. (*University* 1) She is the formidable, stubborn Compson destined to bring shame upon the family by acting improperly with men, and having to cover her illegitimate pregnancy with a hasty marriage and a sense of lost 'value'. In the next generation, Caddy's wild and wilful daughter mirrors the behaviour of her mother whilst bearing the name of her dead uncle Quentin.

Caddy and Quentin are most often seen through the damning male lenses of the Compson brothers. We are unfailingly aware that Caddy is denied a voice within the text – she

seemingly appears only to aggravate her brothers, including the memories of her presence affecting Benjy Compson. For Faulkner, the authorial decision to deny Caddy a voice was because "Caddy was still to me too beautiful and too moving to reduce her to telling what was going on, that it would be more passionate to see her through somebody else's eyes," equating her narratorial worth with her beauty and relying on the "more passionate" biased narration of her brothers instead. (1) In her brother Quentin's narration, "*women only use other people's codes of honor*," yet I argue that women are entirely used *by* these codes. (*S&F* 175) Quentin will duel Gerald Bland for the oblique matter of his sister's honour, but Jason will not protect the female Quentin from making the same mistakes as her mother. The burlesque lure of the circus takes Quentin, adding insult to Jason's injury at the ignominious nature of her betrayal, and echoing the circus-man who fathers *Light in August*'s Joe Christmas: it appears that Faulkner's women are drawn to making the same mistakes.

Equating sexual freedom with sexual worth, Gerald Bland queries "how tough women have it, without anything else they can do except lie on their backs," in the modernity of a new South where women might be afforded some autonomy. (167) Even Caddy's own brother Jason sees all women as "once a bitch always a bitch," and her daughter as a "dam little slut." (180, 185) Jason's behaviour towards women is a modern take on the protection of Southern women, similar to McLendon's discussed violence in "Dry September". Jason claims that "I never promise a woman anything nor let her know what I'm going to give her. That's the only way to manage them. Always keep them guessing. If you cant think of any other way to surprise them, give them a bust in the jaw," a far cry from the child of "That Evening Sun" who was scared of the dark. (193) Perhaps, if Faulkner is to represent modern women, he must also represent modern men too – men like Jason who do not care for codes of chivalry or propriety, as long as they get their share. In contrast, Quentin's narrative of mania notes that "no compson has ever disappointed a lady," adhering more to chivalric

codes of conduct, but perpetuating the issue of controlling women by raising them to mythologised standards of veneration. (178)

Caddy is contrasted to the propriety (and feminine weakness) of her own mother, Caroline. A relic of the Old South, Caroline laments the fate of her family – she cannot cope with the pressures of the modern world, retreating to her bed at the first signs of 'improper' behaviour. Pathetically, Caroline claims that "'I am not one of those women who can stand things.'" (8) She may "'wish for Jason and the children's sakes I was stronger,'" but this is an empty claim. (8) Caroline declaims that "I was taught that there is no halfway ground that a woman is either a lady or not," trapping Caddy within her own expectations of motherhood and fidelity. (103) When Caddy is caught with a young man, her mother "went around the house in a black dress and a veil," whilst "crying and saying her little daughter was dead." (230) Southern women like Caroline are able to declare, "'thank God I dont know about such wickedness. I dont even want to know about it. I'm not like most people,'" as they are protected by the manufactured safety of the myth of Southern womanhood. (259)

When Caddy is pregnant, unlike the burgeoning symbol of *Light in August*'s Lena, it is concealed by her fast marriage, and a covering of her shame equal to the covering of her pregnant body in the text. Caddy is aware that "I've got to marry somebody," conforming to societal expectations. (113) We do not witness Caddy's power of maternity: she is hidden in the text once more, with Quentin's name another signal of elision through nominal ambiguity. According to Deborah Clarke, "Faulkner has robbed the mother not just of her voice but her maternity. Because the brothers control the terms of the narrative, Caddy exists as sister rather than mother." (32) Caddy is remembered in her sororal role, but is denied motherhood through the connotations of sin and illegitimacy that bring shame upon the Compson name. Compson servants Roskus and Dilsey see the damage in "'raising a child not to know its own mammy's name,'" and Caddy's identity is successfully eroded. (*S&F* 31) Benjy too "could not remember his sister but only the loss of her." ("Appendix"

718) Jason tells banished Caddy, by their father's grave, "we dont even know your name. You'd be better off if you were down there with him and Quentin." (*S&F* 203) Caddy wants her daughter returned to her care, offering Jason a thousand dollars, but Jason says, "I know how you'll get it…you'll get it the same way you got her," blaming her for sexual promiscuity. (209) Hypocritically, Jason can be entangled with a lover, Lorraine, in Memphis, but would "like to see the good, church-going woman that's half as square as Lorraine, whore or no whore." (246)

Previously, Benjy's confused narrative catches Caddy with a man when "it was two now, and then one on the swing," policing her sexuality through non-verbal cries. (47) Later, Quentin is caught on the same swing with her suitor, the circus-man with the red tie. Jason sneers that "I says you know just as well as I do what's she's going to grow up into," as "you cant do anything with a woman like that, if she's got it in her." (216, 232) Chasing Quentin through Yoknapatawpha, Jason misogynistically expects that, when he finds their car, "I knew they wouldn't be far from it, just under the closest bush." (240) Jason's anger at the robbery is compounded by being "outwitted by a woman, a girl," and "worst of all, by a bitch of a girl." (307) Female behaviour in *The Sound and the Fury* is heavily-policed by Compson men.

6.11 Virginity as a Mythologised Entity

Virginity is a mythologised entity regulated by men to ensure female control, and demonstrates a clear connection between codes of mythification and an incorporation of sexuality within its remit. Most affected by Caddy's freedom, Quentin claims incest with his sister, and is revulsed at the moment of discovering her lost virginity.

In *Absalom, Absalom!* Quentin ponders that

> Perhaps this is the pure and perfect incest: the brother realizing that the sister's virginity must be destroyed in order to have existed at all, taking that virginity is the person of the brother-in-law, the man whom he would be if he could become,

> metamorphose into, the lover, the husband; by whom he would be despoiled, choose for the despoiler, if he could become, metamorphose, into the sister, the mistress, the bride.
> (96)

According to "Appendix: The Compsons," Quentin, third of his name,

> Loved not his sister's body but some concept of Compson honor precariously and (he knew well) only temporarily supported by the minute fragile membrane of her maidenhead.
> (709-10)

This concept of virginity is itself mythicised, a "minute fragile membrane" predicated on the after-effect of a lack. As Jason Compson III explains, the parameters of southern womanhood placed weight on a nebulous entity that does not exist: "women are never virgins. Purity is a negative state and therefore contrary to nature." (*S&F* 116) When Quentin retorts, "that's just words," his father replies, "so is virginity." (116) Caddy's section of the "Appendix" elucidates her viewpoint of virginity, "the virginity of which she was custodian and *on which she placed no value whatever*: the frail physical stricture which to her was no more than a hangnail would have been." (710-11; emphasis mine) Women are trapped, linguistically, within expectations of womanhood – Jason III's viewpoint is against the grain, pointing out that "it was men invented virginity not women." (*S&F* 78)

Questioning his sister's apparent betrayal, Quentin asks, "*have there been very many Caddy*," to which she can only reply, "*I dont know too many*." (115) The myth of racial inferiority also enters the narrative: Quentin questions why his sister must "*do like n— women do in the pasture the ditches the dark woods*." (92) In contrast, on an excursion to the countryside, Quentin encounters Miss Holmes and Miss Daingerfield who "looked at me again with that delicate and curious horror, their veils turned back upon their little white noses," representing the expected propriety of Southern womanhood, their "little white noses" contraposed against Caddy's "dark woods." (145, 92) In contrast, to Shreve chivalric Quentin is reminiscent of the heroic "young Lochinvar" of Scott's epic "Marmion", a "half-

baked Galahad of a brother" according to Herbert Head, a "champion of dames" for Spoade. (93, 110, 167) [165] "Inextricably tangled in the coils of a romance mythos that [Quentin] can neither repudiate nor ignore," protecting Caddy is the new equivalent of protecting women in the South, except Quentin is ineffectual – he is not the hero, but a "half-baked" version, "young Lochinvar rode out of the west a little too soon," who loses Caddy to the unknowable "dark woods" of female sexuality. (Murphet 122; *S&F* 110, 93, 92)

Faulkner describes Caddy as "the beautiful one, she was my heart's darling," again placing value entirely on her beauty and appearance. (*University* 6) Caddy is also entirely reified as property by Jason IV, as Minrose Gwin examines:

> Caddy herself is a commodity in Jason's economy, albeit one without much value. What he remembers, though, and what he cannot forgive her for spending is her past value as a virgin, that which was negotiated to Herbert Head but was found worthless.
> (57)

Caddy's commodification is a negotiation for her virginity. She becomes a representative repository for male desire and commercial product, with Head offering Jason a job after their marriage. The manifest behaviour of coercive control is included in expectations of Caddy's actions. When language breaks down towards the close of Quentin's section, he can only label Caddy "whore whore." (*S&F* 159)

Caddy *is* permitted a small degree autonomy over her actions and desire. When Quentin questions "*did you love them Caddy did you love them,*" she answers, "*When they touched me I died.*" (149) This reads as a culmination of pleasure, rather than an admission of shame. Discussing her forthcoming marriage to Head, Caddy reveals, "yes I hate him I would die for him Ive already died for him I die for him over and over again everytime." (151) Caddy must suffer for her desire, however, like the majority of Faulkner's modern women.

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[165] See "Marmion" Canto V, XII, 313.

Faulkner's "Appendix" finds Caddy in 1945 in the fast car and clutches "of a German staffgeneral" – at which her callous brother Jason just "began to laugh." (713) Therefore, Caddy was forever "doomed and knew it; accepted the doom without either seeking or fleeing it," and is always at the mercy of Southern womanhood's most dangerous counterpart: Southern manhood. (720)

6.12 *The Wild Palms*

Faulkner's modern women are controlled by various mythologies, expected behaviours, and the consequences for chasing freedom. *The Wild Palms* draws parallels with representations of romantic and chivalric love, and the ideals that Harry and Charlotte uphold to test their relationship, even as this acts to their own destruction. When Charlotte gets pregnant, and dies after Harry's botched abortion, she becomes another of Faulkner's women who may resist the expectations of her sex but are not permitted to be entirely free.

In 1925, Faulkner declared an ode to "women, with their hungry snatching little souls!" ("Verse" 115) Charlotte's desire most acutely reflects this image of Faulknerian womanhood; a catalyst that rejects her marriage to Francis 'Rat' Rittenmeyer and expected duty to their children, leaving them for Harry, and a fruitless narrative traversing the United States. Harry and Charlotte chafe against the bonds of respectability, and the jobs they are forced into for money and food versus their romantic, poetic idealism. The ideals of a wandering, nomadic lifestyle – seeming fuelled by the power of love – drive the couple into the devastatingly-savage climate of Utah. In the cold mountains, their love begins to wither. The setting of *The Wild Palms* is integral to its convention-breaking action, and its gendered rejection of societal values, as one of few works set outside of Yoknapatawpha, and

therefore disregarding the concomitant pull of the Southern past specifically.[166] Cleanth Brooks delineates that, in non-Yoknapatawphan works which

> Involve characters who either have broken away from the values of that culture or else have never belonged to it…the loss of community has all sorts of disturbing consequences. Among them is the disturbance of the sexual code and the concept of love.
> (266)

Therefore, narrative settings of the Mississippi coast; New Orleans; Chicago; Lake Michigan; and the Utah mine all provide opportunities for Charlotte to reject the conventions of the male-dominated *status quo*, and completely give herself over to the exalted ideal of love.

Charlotte is one of Faulkner's venerated women – an incarnation of femininity. She has "the secret irreparable seeping of blood" inside her, which may signify pregnancy or menstruation. (*WP* 5) The couple's arrival on the coast causes outrage – the indignant estate agent discloses that

> I dont think they are married. Oh, he says they are and I dont think he is lying about her and maybe he aint even lying about himself. The trouble is, they aint married to each other, she aint married to him. Because I can smell a husband.
> (5)

The unnamed Doctor, approached by the couple for shelter, is anguished about supporting illegitimacy or infidelity: he insists upon odd party numbers in his property unless the couple are married. Although Harry and Charlotte may subscribe to the codeless ideal of love, those around them still insist on propriety and the expected social code. Even in the distance of Utah, Billie Buckner advises Charlotte to "make" Harry marry her, because "it's better that way." (150)

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[166] Non-Yoknapatawphan works include *A Fable*, *Mosquitoes*, *Pylon*, *Soldiers' Pay*, and various wider settings of Faulkner's short stories.

The Wild Palms "explores the expansive powers of female desire," yet there is always a price for women to pay in return. (Gwin 127) Harry and Charlotte's depicted ideal of love becomes sullied. No matter how idealistic and blinkered they may be, the physical product of their transcendent love – their unborn child – will end them both. Faulkner does not restrain his account of Charlotte's fatal abortion: she is putrefying from the inside, rotting and decaying through smell creating an inimical, horrifying threat. Faulkner's description leans towards the grotesque, in a stark contrast to the idealistic language of Harry and Charlotte's pure love. The clinical sexuality of the Doctor's marriage contrasts with Harry and Charlotte's fiery passion – the Doctor and his wife "went to New Orleans and spent two days in a hotel room, though they never had a honeymoon. And though they had slept in the same bed for twenty-three years now they still had no children." (*WP* 4) If there are expectations upon women to have children, particularly within the controlling myths of Southern womanhood, then there is a subversive element to the Doctor's sterility, and "the stale bed of his childless wife." (11)

Harry is also a sexless character. He cannot resist Charlotte's brittle allure, or her tragic quality, apparently

> Which he knew (he was learning fast) was not peculiar to her but was an attribute of all women at this instant in their lives, which would invest them with a dignity, almost a modesty, to be carried over and clothe even the last prone and slightly comic attitude of ultimate surrender.
> (40)

Charlotte has high ideals: she is not an opportunistic cheat, but wishes for their union to be "not back alleys. I've always said that no matter what happened to me, whatever I did, anything anything but not back alleys." (40) Charlotte aspires to a purity of love that cannot be sullied by hotel room trysts, and is fully committed to the ideals of romance she has "read in books" but "never had actually believed: that love and suffering are the same thing and

that the value of love is the sum of what you have to pay for it and any time you get it cheap you have cheated yourself." (41)

Charlotte is passed from Rat to Harry, an action "almost identical with the conventional mumbo-jumbo of father and bride at a wedding in church." (46) Charlotte and Harry wish to rail against the various paradigms of "conventional mumbo-jumbo" governing their separate lives. Charlotte ceases to be a wife and a mother; likewise, Harry ceases to be a medical intern and becomes an ideological, shiftless drifter. It is Harry's monologue that suspects women want to "*take the illicit love and make it respectable*," though *he* is more concerned with respectability than Charlotte. (70) Harry and Rat are sublimated to female desire: the two men are "aligned, embattled and doomed and lost, before the entire female principle." (49) In this thoroughly-modern world of the New*er* South in 1937, Charlotte is allowed agency for her own desire, despite its unrealistic aspects. Charlotte wishes for life to be

> All honeymoon, always. Forever and ever, until one of us dies. It cant be anything else. Either heaven, or hell: no comfortable safe peaceful purgatory between for you and me to wait in until good behavior or forbearance or shame or repentance overtakes us.
> (71)

Charlotte's marital ties have to be cut in the train's drawing room as they speed across Lake Pontchartrain, out of New Orleans and up to Chicago – she and Harry consummate their desire before reaching any destination. Concerned with their outward-facing respectability, Harry fears "they must have disseminated an aura of unsanctity and disaster like a smell." (51) Later, he muses upon "the ability of women to adapt the illicit, even the criminal, to a bourgeois standard of respectability." (89)

Charlotte must be committed to an idea of love, as "if it was just a successful husband and food and a bed I wanted, why the hell do you think I am here instead of back there where I had them?" (99) The trials of employment and Chicago take their toll, and the couple's love become sterile: Harry laments that "we were too busy; we had to rent and support a room

for two robots to live in." (109) Romantic love has become automatized, particularly in the industrial North compared to the vibrant promise of New Orleans. Charlotte is an aleatory artist, creating a depiction of something she whimsically names 'the Bad Smell': it can be "the tiny figure of the old man, the Bad Smell," or it can be found in the death of love. (89) In Charlotte's containing ideal of love,

> They say love dies between two people. That's wrong. It doesn't die. It just leaves you, goes away, if you are not good enough, worthy enough. It doesn't die; you're the one that dies. It's like the ocean: if you're no good, if you begin to make a bad smell in it, it just spews you up somewhere to die.
> (71)

Charlotte correlates love with worthiness, trapping herself as "no good" in her own high expectations. (71) She is perhaps able to control the influence of "the Bad Smell" by containing it in art, romanticising it as "a little ancient shapeless man with a foolish disorganised face, the face of a harmless imbecile clown." (89, 81) The Bad Smell appears as a sort of Everyman figure, a mythic "lares and penates" mirroring Roman belief in household protection, but it is telling that he is male. (89) The face may appear "foolish," "harmless," but can be extrapolated to demonstrate the control of men on female bodies and relationships. Harry and Charlotte cannot outlast the Bad Smell of guilt and ceaseless idealism after their affair.

In a narrative thread running throughout Faulkner's works, and as I have discussed above, Harry meditates on "the instant of virginity" as a mythicised concept, "that condition, fact, that does not actually exist except during the instant you know you are losing it." (116) A virgin until he met Charlotte, "*keeping my virginity until it damn near spoiled on me*," Harry is also poetic in his rejection of non-ideal love because "it was the mausoleum of love, it was the stinking catafalque of the dead corpse" of expectation. (175, 118) Aware of the couple's predicament, caged as they are in social expectation, "they will have to find something else to force us to conform to the pattern of human life which has now evolved to do without

love – to conform, or die." (118) The unpaid miners on their next stop in Utah may "live pretty happy a long time on illusion," but Harry and Charlotte can also deny their love and bask in its "illusion" until it has consequences. (166)

In Utah, Billie stands as a cautionary tale for Harry and Charlotte; she is "jammed" with an unwanted pregnancy, and hopes for an abortion. (151) [167] Faulkner's use of "jammed" perhaps connotes a piece of machinery or automation which is malfunctioning; in this case, the womb. About the pregnancy, Charlotte presciently states, "suppose it was us. I know you will have to throw away something. But we have thrown away a lot, threw it away for love and we're not sorry." (163)

Acquiescing to Billie, Harry performs an abortion. Hidden from view, we only witness the aftermath three days later. Harry confidently states that the procedure is "nothing. Simple enough. A touch with the blade to let the air in," and if women die it is because "the operator was no good. Maybe one in ten thousand." (161) The novel's recursive structure has already revealed at its opening that Charlotte is sickened with some bodily ailment, which we are now able to infer is the result of this "simple enough" procedure. Billie abortion is "*O K*," however, giving false hope and confidence to Charlotte and Harry's similar situation. (172) The odds of repeated success outweigh the acknowledgement of "one in ten thousand" unlucky women. (161)

Linguistically, Harry's fears of pregnancy echo both Temple Drake and Quentin Compson, in a panicked "*something is about to happen to me. Wait. Wait.*" (172) [168] Unbelievably, Charlotte has believed in the power of love to resist pregnancy, as "when people loved, hard, really loved each other, the seed got burned up in the love, the passion. Maybe I believed

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[167] Demonstrating some adherence to codes of social privilege, Charlotte remarks that Billie's masculine name is "'a perfect whore's name, isn't it?'" (150) One may consider Faulkner's other masculine-named character, *Light in August*'s Bobbie Allen, who is both waitress and prostitute.

[168] Temple exclaims a similar cry at male threat in *Sanctuary*, "something is happening to me!" (82) Harry's "*wait. Wait*" also echoes *Absalom!*'s Shreve's interjections, e.g. 176.

it…or maybe I just hoped. Anyway it's done." (172) Charlotte's pregnancy is stark in the Utah mine's barren sterility. Harry's response is anguished, "cried aloud into the immaculate desolation, with harsh and terrible sardonicism, 'I will set up as a professional abortionist.'" (175) Harry is able to procure some abortifacient pills from a drugstore clerk with relative ease – successful in comparison to Dewey Dell's total lack of support or comprehension from Lafe or herself. Charlotte takes all "five objects which might have been coffee beans," but they do not work, and their time of reckoning draws closer. (180)

Even though Charlotte has grown hard and harsh, she still has faith in love: "it isn't love that dies, it's the man and the woman, something in the man and the woman that dies, doesn't deserve the chance anymore to love." (184) Charlotte is echoing the idea of controlling female sexuality; she no longer "deserve[s] the chance anymore" as a punishing price for her freedom. Once Harry has performed the abortion, Charlotte "*kept on losing blood and it got to be pretty bad. Then all of a sudden two days ago the blood stopped and so there is something wrong, which might be something badder still.*" (188) Even with the anticipation of her death, Charlotte still cares for Harry, who must "get to hell out fast" when the consequences will catch them both. (191) The Doctor recognises the "bright wild passion" of love radiating from Harry and Charlotte, yet "which had somehow passed him up." (234) Harry attributes his failure to the fact that "*I loved her,*" damning the abortion because he was affected by ideals of love and feeling. (250) Love has created the pregnancy too, yet Charlotte is the one who dies.

The romantic ideal of love has turned into grief, and desire has destroyed all of its participants. Harry and Charlotte paradoxically reject social ideals, whilst also sublimating themselves to an ideal of love that is their undoing. The controlling myths of Southern womanhood have entered the twentieth century, fully transmuted from an echo of the Lost

Cause into a sustained depiction of social values imposed on women by men, even if they are naïve and idealistic, mediated through mutual desire.

6.13 *Soldiers' Pay*

A "youngly glamorous" work written during Faulkner's six-month stay in New Orleans, *Soldiers' Pay* (*SP*) acutely addresses the new, modern landscape of the early 1900s. ("To Horace Liveright" 40) Faulkner addresses a new mythification of the Southern woman: one who may try to rebel, but is still under the influence of propriety, and tempering masculinity. Faulkner uses Margaret Powers and Cecily Saunders to display his ideas of freedom and agency. Representing conflicting ideas of womanhood and propriety, Margaret and Cecily alter the myths of Southern womanhood that endured to enter the twentieth century. Here, Faulkner's women are entirely modern in their thinking, as a result of World War I and its impact on the *status quo*. Not yet known for his sprawling Yoknapatawpha County, Faulkner still represents his South by situating the main action in Georgia; another state rich in Civil War history, and correlating Southern expectations upon women that are broken by taboo desire.

The novel opens in the North, as a train steams through the Northeast Corridor. Equating women with machines and industrial progress, Joe Gilligan cries to the conductor that the soldiers' train in upstate New York "couldn't be no safer with us if it was your own daughter." (*SP* 10) Soon, the action will turn to Georgia, as scarred and wounded Lieutenant Donald Mahon is returned to his people, and his old life. Whilst Gilligan and Julian Lowe are tending to Mahon on the train, widowed Mrs Margaret Powers enters Faulkner's scene. Gilligan and Lowe uselessly assess her:

> She seemed…she was young; she probably liked dancing, yet at the same time she seemed not young – as if she knew everything. (She is married, and about twenty-five, thought Gilligan.) (She is about nineteen, and she is not in love, Lowe decided.) (28)

Gilligan is more astute than Lowe, who moons after Margaret as a knowing and romantic avatar of womanhood.[169] Similarly to *The Unvanquished*'s Drusilla, Margaret Powers has lost her lover in the war. Unlike Drusilla, however, times have changed enough to allow the women in *Soldiers' Pay* to choose their own sexual path. Drusilla's passion is bridled by her marriage to John Sartoris, yet by the turn of the century, modernity has impacted the South. Later, Margaret is permitted to leave after being widowed again.

Margaret is referred to throughout the text mainly as 'Mrs Powers'; an ironically-distanced nominal relic of her marriage. Margaret reflects the fate of many young women during wartime, even in the new promise of the twentieth century. Her husband Richard 'Dick' Powers has been killed in France after a short, passionate "three days together." (30) Again echoing Drusilla, Margaret is detached from her husband's fate – she had disconnected herself from their desperate hysteria only to be told that Dick had been killed. Margaret

> Thought of her husband youngly dead in France in a recurrence of fretful exasperation with having been tricked by a wanton Fate: a joke amusing to no one. Just when she had calmly decided that they had taken advantage of a universal hysteria for the purpose of getting of each other a brief ecstasy, just when she had decided calmly that they were better quit of each other with nothing to mar the memory of their three days together and had written him so, wishing him luck, she must be notified casually and impersonally that he had been killed in action. So casually, so impersonally; as if Richard Powers, with whom she had spent three days, were one man, and Richard Powers commanding a platoon in the – Division were another.
> (30-31)

A motif of division runs through Faulkner's text, perhaps indicating a separation between war and peacetime, either pre- or post-war. In this early work, Faulkner pierces the futility of wartime passion: Margaret knows that Dick "had not even got her letter! This in some way seemed the infidelity: having him die still believing in her, bored though they both probably were." (31) Margaret does not necessarily mourn the loss of her husband *per se*, but

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[169] Lowe's letters intersperse the text, showing a thread of romantic infatuation turning to carelessness. Eventually, Margaret's letter to Lowe at the novel's close is returned to sender. See James Watson, 34-39.

the fact of her youth, as "she being young must again know all the terror of parting, and that passionate desire to cling to something concrete in a dark world, in spite of war departments." (31) Widowed in her early twenties, Mrs Powers is now only twenty-four, and Faulkner disables any romanticisation of warfare.

Mahon is engaged to a sweetheart back in Georgia. According to Gilligan, "folks got 'em engaged when they was young before he went off to war. And do you know what she's going to do when she sees his face?" (34) Gilligan is always presciently aware of the situation around him: he has accurately predicted that Margaret is married before seeing her wedding band, and surmises that "you ain't got any husband." (35) He also knows parenthetically early on, with regard to Mahon, "(she is in love with him)." (36) Gilligan has read the last letter from Mahon's fiancée Cecily Saunders, providing a grounding sense of reality identifying "all the old bunk about knights of the air and the romance of battle, that even the fat crying ones outgrow soon as the excitement is over and uniforms and being wounded ain't only not stylish no more, but it is troublesome." (34)

In 'Charlestown,' GA, Cecily appears in the manse to see Mahon's rector father 'Uncle Joe.' Bright and flighty, Cecily is eyed with interest by a lecherous visitor, Januarius Jones, before we are made aware that she is Mahon's inconstant sweetheart. Mahon is believed to have died in the war, allowing Cecily to indulge and tease Jones before the news arrives of Mahon's return from the dead. Margaret and Joe have accompanied Mahon to Georgia, whilst erstwhile Lowe returns to San Francisco. Pitting women against each other, Faulkner demonstrates "that subtle effluvia of antagonism found inevitably in a room where two young 'pretty' women are." (67) Margaret's innocent, mature care is contrasted with Cecily's vacuous need for attention, particularly male. Cecily twitters to 'Uncle Joe', as "the audience watched this, Mrs Powers with speculative detached interest." (68) Perhaps more jaded, Margaret observes that Cecily is a girl "believing that she is in love with the boy, or his illusion – pretending she is, anyway." (69) Despite Mahon's disfigurement, Margaret

castigates herself, and supposes that "it's quite romantic, being reft of your love and then having him returned unexpectedly to your arms. And an aviator, too." (69)

Returning soldiers possess some attractive cachet, as *Sartoris* will later demonstrate in Bayard Sartoris's tortured appeal. Sandra Gilbert argues, however, that

> The gloomily bruised modernist anti-heroes churned out by the war suffer specifically from sexual wounds, as if, having traveled literally or figuratively through No Man's Land, all have become not just No Men, nobodies, but not men, unmen.
> (423)

Mapping this onto a duality between the Civil War and World War I, men are once again impotent war heroes, "unmen." Returning with wounds and impending blindness, a body as injured as his mind, Mahon is now unattractive to petulant Cecily.[170]

In *Soldiers' Pay*, Faulkner addresses three periods of female experience: before the outbreak of World War I, the war years, and the post-war social landscape. Denis de Rougemont identifies that, "inasmuch as our notion of love enfolds our notion of woman, it is linked with a theory of the *faithfulness of suffering* which encourages or obscurely justifies in the recesses of the Western mind a liking for war." (243) Women's fortunes and opportunities fluctuated to accommodate a male absence, but the return to the old order was not necessarily welcomed. De Rougemont's "faithfulness of suffering" is another expectation upon women: in a moment of free indirect discourse, Cecily accommodates herself to being "engaged again," before she had seen Mahon. (*SP* 70) She speculates, "how would I like to have a husband and a wife, too, I wonder? Or two husbands? I wonder if I want one even, want to get married at all…I guess it's worth trying, once." (70)

In Mahon's absence, Cecily has become involved with George Farr, an equally-inane man of "startled vacuity," who has a face "like a handsome moon, empty as a promise." (114, 71)

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[170] Tellingly, as Faulkner later reveals, Mahon *had* been an alluring figure, particularly when seducing Emmy.

Despite Cecily's vapidity, Faulkner introduces a sense of sorrow for her. She is "beginning to feel miserable and lost," resigned to marry Mahon imminently as "he'll probably want to be married tomorrow, and I'll have to do it." (71, 72) Stricken by the sight of Mahon's injury, however, Cecily faints in an angelic display of ineptitude: "the light passing through her fine hair gave her a halo and lent her frail dress a fainting nimbus about her crumpling body like a stricken poplar." (78) Fujie observes that "this feminine failure to confront the reality of the war and its corporeal damage finds its most dramatic expression" in Cecily's swoon. ("Rotten" 37) Throughout the text, Cecily's pathetic frailty is emphasised against Margaret's electric dynamism. Margaret is able to confront Mahon's injury immediately in the train carriage, only sympathising with a face "young, yet old as the world, beneath the dreadful scar," "his poor terrible face." (*SP* 25, 27) Mahon's injury is of exceptional *pathos*, yet Cecily cannot see anything beyond her own self-absorption, and her hysterical insincerity causes her to approach a figure she thinks is Mahon, her arm across her eyes to conceal his scar, crying "Donald, Donald! I will try to get used to it, I will try! Oh, Donald, Donald! Your poor face! But I will, I will." (113) When the concealed figure turns out to be Jones, Cecily is able to see Mahon "without a qualm, scar and all," but is quietly angered by him: "you have caused me to look foolish, she told him with a whispered smooth fury, sweetly kissing his mouth." (114)

Possessing a two-dimensional character, Cecily's external appearance is as shallow and simple as her perceived love for Mahon – "her affection for him is quite pretty." (140) Contrasting with Cecily's dramatics, Margaret is entirely calm and controlled. As Gilligan sees it, "what man is for her? he wondered, knowing that after all no man was for her, knowing that she would go through with all physical intimacies, that she would undress to a lover (?) with this same impersonal efficiency." (125)

Embarrassed by Mahon in Margaret's watchful presence, Cecily swears off men, but cannot rescind the taboo attention of George, and ponders her "body beneath the covers,

wondering how it would feel to have a baby, hating that inevitable time when she'd have to have one." (118) In the expectations of womanhood, Cecily will "have to" also marry eventually. Cecily's jejunity is enabled by her parents, Minnie and Robert Saunders, displays of archetypal Southern society. Robert mixes a julep on the porch with a spring of mint from his hat as Minnie debates that "an engagement in wartime and an engagement in peacetime are two different things." (82) Dramatically, Cecily cannot stand the sight of Mahon. In her own self-interest: "if I have to see him again I'll – I'll die. I can't bear it, I can't bear it." (80)

6.14 "Men Are the Ones Who Worry About Our Good Names"

Margaret has more worldly wisdom than changeable Cecily. When Gilligan jokes about ruining her "good name," she replies, "my good name is your trouble, not mine," wryly aware that "men are the ones who worry about our good names, because they gave them to us. But we have other things to bother about, ourselves. What you mean by a good name is like a dress that's too flimsy to wear comfortably." (*SP* 87) The expectations upon women have been broken by newfound post-war freedom. An Alabamian, Margaret had managed to escape to worldly New York City, and can accurately press against the "flimsy" dress equivalent of male expectation.

In Georgia, echoing the South's popular motif of the magnolia blossom, Gilligan notes that the ubiquitous white blooms in Charlestown are "not good for anything if you pick 'em. Touch it, and it turns brown on you. Fades." (87) Faulkner reinforces natural imagery to support Cecily's inconstancy: she is a flower of the Georgia South, but her infidelity to Mahon means that "he's already got one that's turning brown on him." (88)

In contrast to both Margaret's durable cynicism and Cecily's flightiness, the manse housekeeper Emmy is hopelessly infatuated with Mahon. Emmy is a "dishonoured virgin," an apparent paradox wherein she vows that "I won't never marry nobody…I think I'll just

die." (58, 100) Eyeing Margaret with suspicion until learning of her widowhood, Emmy thinks "(my Donald was killed, too.)" (102) Emmy is acutely aware of the schism between pre- and post-war Mahon, as she has "liked him better than anybody." (104) One night in the moonlit woods, Emmy and Mahon had made love: "it was like everything was dead except us." (105) Like Dewey Dell, Emmy is denied the propriety of a relationship, and is bedded outside like an animal. Though Faulkner describes the scene with some tenderness, Emmy is abandoned twice over – Mahon remains engaged to Cecily, and then goes off to war. Later, Emmy is still romantically-inclined, with no reaction to Mahon's scar except to remember "that head above her, against the sky, on a night long, long ago." (137) Demonstrating the presumed binary between motherhood and womanhood, Emmy feeds blind Mahon his meals, as she "enjoyed mothering him, now that she could never have him again for a lover." (224) When confronted with the idea of marrying Mahon, however, Emmy's pride cries "me? Me marry him? Me take another's leavings? (Donald, Donald.) And her leavings, at that, her that's run after every boy in town, dressed up in her silk clothes?" (227)

Elsewhere in the narrative, Cecily meets George under the cloak of darkness, and he takes her virginity in an echo of Mahon and Emmy. Taking assertive control for once, Cecily has determined that she must ruin herself, because then she cannot marry Mahon. Afterwards, George remembers how Cecily "had run into the dark house in her nightgown, weeping." (122) Once Cecily has completed the task to fully sever herself from Mahon's engagement, she considers that "now I'm not a good woman any more. Oh, well, it had to be sometime, I guess…" (126) George is able to see another side to Cecily, as her surprising coarseness offends him – equating sex with marriage, after George remarks that "now, we'll have to get married," Cecily's replies, "you've got it backward. Now we don't have to get married." (178)

If marriage is the expectation for women, particularly given the additional parameters of the traditional South, then Margaret had fulfilled it. She ruminates on her short marriage as Gilligan questions her:

> "Margaret," said Gilligan at last, "were you in love with your husband?"
> …
> "I don't know, Joe, I don't think I was. You see, I lived in a small town and I had got kind of sick lazing around home all morning and dressing up just to walk downtown in the afternoon and spending the evenings messing around with men."
> (134)

After moving to New York City and meeting Dick, Margaret understands the lure of wartime romance:

> You remember how it was then – everybody excited and hysterical, like a big circus…you know how it was: all soldiers talking of dying gloriously in battle without really believing it or knowing very much about it, and how women kind of got the same idea, like the flu – that what you did today would not matter tomorrow, that there really wasn't a tomorrow at all.
> (135)

In sharp contrast to the staid Civil War South – dictated by stern matrimonial matchmakers like *Sartoris*'s Miss Jenny – women in twentieth-century New York are used to soldiers' marriage proposals: "you see, we all got so many proposals that we hardly listened to them." (135) Gilbert identifies that "the war functioned in so many different ways to liberate women – offering a revolution in economic expectations, a release of passionate energies, a (re)union of previously fragmented sisters, and a (re)vision of social and aesthetic dreams." (447) Women like Margaret can finally enjoy their liberation, enjoying the transient attention of men doomed to carry on to the battlefields, in the conceit that "there really wasn't a tomorrow at all." (*SP* 135)

Margaret reminisces that "sometimes at night I'd wake up, wanting Dick, but after a time he got to be a shadowy sort of person, like George Washington. And at last I didn't even miss him any more." (135) In a narrative flashback to the French front-line, we learn that Officer Powers was shot at point-blank range by one of his own men, his "face in red and bitter

relief" creating narrative tension between Margaret's carelessness, and the horrific actuality of the act making her a widow. (153)

Recalling the time she and Dick had spent together, Margaret recognises their forced idealism in youth:

> How young, how terribly young; tomorrow must never come. Kiss me, kiss me through my hair…don't leave me, don't leave me! No, no! we don't love eachother! we don't! we don't! Hold me close, close: my body's intimacy is broken, unseeing: thank god my body cannot see.
> (151)

Earlier, Dick and Margaret have tried "to eradicate tomorrows from the world" in their hotel room – yet tomorrow must come, and Margaret has been left alone. (31) Dick has gone to Europe, and Margaret reminisces on "the rotten trick you played on me." (31) Margaret's "broken" sexual experience reveals "the dark secret," Fujie posits, "that the new sexual freedom exposes women to disillusionment and horror." (*SP* 151; "Rotten" 43) With the hindsight of accumulated tomorrows, Margaret can tell that she did not love Dick, but she *had* enjoyed the wartime fluidity of rules and societal judgement.

Now, however, times have changed again, and Cecily's flirtatious behaviour is frowned upon. Cecily may reap the rewards of the post-war climate, but she cannot escape her expected duty to marry. Margaret, in contrast, can enjoy some aspects of freedom – her protective widowhood sanctions freer behaviour. One of Charlestown's – and Faulkner's – indomitable older women, Mrs Burney, remembers her own son Dewey, dead in France. Referring to Cecily, she crows, "the way that girl goes on with men! she thought exultantly. Dewey may be dead, but thank god he ain't engaged to her." (*SP* 152) A relic of older thinking and the honour of warfare, Mrs Burney contemplates of a soldier in the town that

"it ain't his fault if he wasn't brave enough to get killed, like Dewey was." (152) [171] Pryingly, Mrs Burney asks Margaret,

> 'You never lost no one you loved in the war, did you?'
> 'No,' Mrs Powers answered, gently.
> (214)

Margaret may not have loved Dick, but she had desired him in the frenzy of wartime satisfaction, and remembers his "body breaking into mine like a burglar, my body flowing away, washing away all trace of yours." (153) Theirs is a short engagement and a short marriage, in contrast to the tortured, protracted dilemma of Cecily and Mahon.

Januarius Jones's vulgar eyes assess Cecily, noting her function to be "not for maternity, not even for love: a thing for the eye and the mind. Epicene, he thought, feeling her slim bones, the bitter nervousness latent in her flesh." (186) "Epicene" is a word Faulkner later reserves for *Absalom*'s Ellen Sutpen – another fluttering, weightless woman.[172] Like a cheapened mythic Pygmalion, Jones's rapacious infatuation is "building himself a papiermâché Virgin." (187) [173] Jones asks Cecily, "do you think all a man wants of you is your body?" – having encountered George in the dark night and his attentions afterward, perhaps Cecily would be inclined to say yes. (188) Spurned, Jones tell her to "have all the Georges and Donalds you want. Take them all for lovers if you like. I don't want your body." (189) Concerning herself between three lovers, Cecily goes to Mahon: "oh, your poor, poor face, your blind, scarred face! But I will marry you. They said I wouldn't, that I mustn't, but yes, yes, Donald my dear love!" (203) Though there are only a few years between them, Margaret observes that Cecily is "just young and more or less of a fool about men." (208) Later, Cecily's inner monologue merges the two men: "yes, yes, Donald. I will. I will! I will get used to your poor face, Donald! George, my dear love, take me away, George!" (217) Seeing herself as spoilt

[171] Michael Zeitlin posits that Dewey was the soldier who shot Dick Powers point-blank, see 133.
[172] In *Absalom!*, Ellen is "the esoteric, the almost baroque, the almost epicene objet d'art." (101)
[173] See Ovid Bk. X.

now, Cecily's choice is to flee Charlestown, telling Mahon's father, "I am *not a good woman any more*, dear Uncle Joe. Forgive me, forgive me." (229; emphasis mine)

Conforming to convention, and Southern systemic misogyny, Cecily becomes Mrs George Farr, "properly married by a priest in Atlanta the next day (but then I always told you about that girl)," focalised via an unknown narrator. (233) Margaret wryly questions Cecily's motivations after Mahon's death, because "think how much fun she could have got out of being so romantically widowed, and so young. I'll bet she's cursing her luck this minute." (253) However, Cecily's eyes are already haunted by an initiation into marriage a few short days after the wedding, as the newlyweds form a scene on the railway station platform: "It was Mr and Mrs George Farr: they saw Cecily's stricken face as she melted graceful and fragile and weeping into her father's arms. And here was Mr George Farr morose and thunderous behind her. Ignored." (255-56)

After Cecily's evasion of Mahon, Margaret firmly states that "I'm going to marry him myself. I intended to all the time. Didn't you suspect?" (230) Mrs Powers seamlessly becomes "the new Mrs Mahon," "putting an end to that equivocal situation." (231, 234) Mahon's mother is absent from the narrative, therefore Margaret is able to become Mahon's mother-figure as well as his wife before he dies. The weight of Margaret's decision is such that she is divided again: "married, and she had never felt so alone." (231) 'Mrs Powers-Mahon' can also freely reject Gilligan's advances, as "I'm too young to bury three husbands." (255) We may observe, however, that Margaret's hurt accompanies her freedom: "don't you see, I have been married twice already, with damn little luck either time, and I just haven't the courage to risk it again." (255) Faulkner's twentieth century post-war women are indeed more free, but there are downsides to their freedoms.

Where "Faulkner's fiction teems with wandering women," Judith Sensibar admires Margaret's freedom: "in the final frame of her, she's on a train again, this time heading West

– willfully [*sic*] homeless, without destination, still fiercely desirous, still unattached." (139) Margaret may be a thoroughly-modern woman – she will drink, smoke, marry and be widowed twice over – yet Faulkner still treats her with sympathy, akin to his later idea of *Light in August*'s Lena Grove's unshakeable serenity. Events may happen *to* these women, but they are, in a way, untouchable. Margaret disappears into the railroad network, ready to begin again – she is one of select few Faulknerian women permitted to live, to love, to progress into the promise of wider America:

> No more into the United States, but into the *rest* of the United States, because the long pull was over now; only the ageing unvanquished women were unreconciled, irreconcilable, reversed and irrevocably reverted against the whole moving unanimity of panorama.
> (*Requiem* 201)

It is no accident that Margaret cannot fit into the staid propriety of the South versus "the *rest* of the United States," contraposed against Cecily's return to Charlestown on the same train Margaret leaves on. "Ageing unvanquished women" are the ones persisting with the controlling myths of outmoded Southern womanhood, but Margaret may escape intact.

6.15 "Sex and Death"

In his portrayal of women, Faulkner yokes together "sex and death: the front door and the back door of the world. How indissolubly are they associated in us!" (*SP* 246) By detailing the controlling myths of Southern womanhood, my argument has demonstrated how Faulkner's modern women are limited by the oppression of the South, victims of inheritance who are not permitted to flourish. When considering the impact of these myths, it is also pertinent to consider the ways in which these women might attempt to renege against the power of the Lost Cause.

Faulkner has demonstrated that his narrative reach can stretch beyond Yoknapatawpha and Mississippi into Alabama, Georgia and Louisiana, yet constrictions upon women also reach throughout the South. Some interbellum women are able to survive: *The Unvanquished*'s

horse-wrangling Granny Millard and Drusilla Hawk, or *Sartoris*'s Miss Jenny. Faulkner admires these women, and their efficacy as "only the undefeated, undefeatable women, vulnerable only to death, resisted, endured, irreconcilable." (*Requiem* 196)

In the watershed of the early twentieth century, modern characters do have their initial fun, benefitting from some comparatively-lax restrictions on womanhood. However, there is sadness behind Margaret's hard, glittering sexuality. Charlotte's association between "sex and death" is more literal, dying after her botched abortion. The same is true for Joanna, too sexually-aware and self-assured to be permitted to live in contrast to Lena. Dewey Dell must surrender her body whilst trying to end her pregnancy, and Addie is forced beyond language to describe the effects of motherhood. Cecily thinks to ruin herself in the night to escape from her duty to Mahon, echoing Caddy's marriage of necessity, yet it is an imperfect solution that must still end in marriage to *someone* in order to satisfy social codes.

Starkly, Faulkner's *Requiem for a Nun* lays out the path of progress open to most Southern women: "bridehood, motherhood, grandmotherhood, then widowhood and at last the grave – the long peaceful connubial progress toward matriarchy." (217) As I have analysed, women who do not conform to the myths of controlling Southern womanhood must pay its ultimate price.

CONCLUSION

"A NEW CENTURY AND A NEW WAY OF THINKING"

7.1 William Faulkner's Use of Myth

My argument has assessed five specific areas of William Faulkner's use of myth. These key areas interlock to demonstrate where Faulkner upholds mythologies surrounding the South, whilst he concurrently dismantles some apocrypha, and adds his own legends to Southern *mythoi*.

The myth of the Lost Cause; the *mythos* of *Absalom, Absalom!*; the myth of racial inferiority; *Light in August* and the myth of race; and the controlling myths of Southern womanhood all coalesce within the paradoxical boundaries of the undefinable South. Each of my identified mythologies work in turn to reinforce the South's overall legacy, and Faulkner's authorial support of the South's abiding belief in its myths.

Faulkner's use of myth is labile: although there are elements of Faulkner's narratives that push against the Southern *status quo*, an inheritance of dominant mythology cannot be fully elided. Therefore, Faulkner's use of myth is informed by the history he has inherited, whilst his work in turn generates more mythologies for the South.

As my research has demonstrated, the enduring myth of the Lost Cause strengthened the myth of racial inferiority as a form of behavioural regulation, and also permitted the controlling myths of Southern womanhood to persist into the new twentieth century. Faulkner writes in *Requiem for a Nun* that the turn of the century in Jefferson brought about "not only a new century and a new way of thinking, but of acting and behaving too." (202) Assessing Faulkner's use of myth from a vantage point of the twenty-first century now, it is clear that the onset of the new twentieth century still carried some vestiges of the myth of

the Lost Cause in the South. The spectre of the Confederate forces, an era of Reconstruction, and a push-back against Northern 'oppression' collectively caused a strengthening of Southern identity. "A new way of thinking" still adhered to the tenets of propriety for women, and racial oppression for those who were non-white.

Faulkner observes that we are at risk of "forgetting that victory or defeat are bought at the same exorbitant price of change and alteration." (206-07) My research has discussed that the century's "new way of thinking, but of acting and behaving too" could only apply to a select few – the consequences for any behaviour fell onto women and those punished by the myth of racial inferiority. (202) The promise of "change and alteration" were bought at the "same exorbitant price" of abortion or unwanted pregnancies, racial violence, and an inimical history of lynching indubitably corrupting the legacy of the South. (207)

Drawing a narrative line through the South, with a particular concentration upon Mississippi, my focus on Faulkner has also stretched from the shores of Lake Michigan, to the staid outskirts of Atlanta, to the heady sybaritic draw of New Orleans. The legacy of the South is created by Faulkner, in turn, using his main framework of Yoknapatawpha County to expose wider impressions of the South. The lure of the South is too strong to escape, as it concurrently grapples with its own history.[174]

7.2 The Yoknapatawpha Dream

The South does not necessarily *want* to forget about its past. Faulkner acknowledges "the phantoms, the fading wraiths of that old time which had been exhausted, used up, to be no more and never return." (187) The heritage of the past is recursive, myth created out of the land itself, commemorated by monuments and legends passed down to each generation.

[174] For more on the South's history, see Neiman's comparison of Southern memory versus specifically-German forms of remembrance.

I have framed my work around *Absalom, Absalom!*'s exhortation from Shreve to "*tell about the South. What's it like there? What do they do there. Why do they live there. Why do they live at all.*" (174) The imperative to "*tell about the South*" has no easy answer. Faulkner places emphasis upon a concept of "the Yoknapatawpha dream," as a part of the wider whole of the ephemeral American Dream. (*Requiem* 219) I have chosen to focus on how Faulkner's use of myth has echoed throughout his works, from women to warfare, Reconstruction to race. When constructing mythologies, I also identify a similar aleatory strand of narrative process: Faulkner's dreams for Yoknapatawpha and America.

The writer's endurance within history is not a guarantee. Faulkner's purpose, according to correspondence documented by Cowley, "is to put everything into one sentence – not only the present but the whole past on which it depends and which keeps over taking the present, second by second." ("Undying Past" 663) Faulkner's use of myth has become a layering of the past into the present, overtaken "second by second" by the formation of newer histories. The sum of the South is countable in its history – not consigned into the past, "only not gone or vanished either, so long as there should be defeated or the descendants of defeated to tell it or listen to the telling." (*Unvanquished* 70) Each of Faulkner's texts intimately coalesces around the South. Faulkner has become a Southern lodestone for various creations of self-serving myths, focused most within the boundaries of the myth of the Lost Cause. As I claim, the Lost Cause is the proponent of a motion of heritage affecting the South: it has affected education, history, narratives, social behaviour, and incited racial violence. Accordance with belief in the Lost Cause's mythology has created new forms of control, as well as paving the way for white supremacism, and subordination or subjugation in its wake.

7.3 Faulkner's Predictions for the South

Faulkner presaged his legacy in 1953, imagining a time when an author "himself partakes of the immortality" through his work. ("Foreword" 182) Faulkner remarks that

> Someday he will be no more, which will not matter then, because isolated and itself invulnerable to the cold print remains that which is capable of engendering still the old deathless excitement in hearts and glands whose owners and custodians are generations from even the air he breathed and anguished in: *if it was capable once, he knows that it will be capable and potent still long after there remains of him only a dead and fading name.*
> (182; emphasis mine)

Echoing Faulkner's search for "some Homer of the cotton fields," his authorial prowess in mythmaking for the South lives on in his legacy of "a dead and fading name" as metonymy for reflected past Souths, embodying – perhaps reluctantly – the "capable and potent" bardic figure representing people and place, and myths living within public memory. (*Sartoris* 226; "Foreword" 182)

Faulkner was also discerning about the future of the South, believing pessimistically in 1933 that

> The South (I speak in the sense of the indigenous dream of any given collection of men having something in common, be it only geography and climate, which shape their economic and spiritual aspirations into cities, into a pattern of houses of behavior) is old since dead.
> ("Introduction…1933" 290-91)

The antebellum South is indeed "old since dead," if the cause of the Confederate States of America is taken to have ended in 1865. Yet the South itself is mutable and ever-adapting. Though I have identified a series of mythologies which belie stubbornness to change and a fixation on a mythologised history that damages Southerners, the South itself – as indefinable as it is – arguably remains an "indigenous dream." This "dream" echoes Faulkner's 'American Dream' sentiment I have also used to frame to my argument.

Faulkner claims, as I have referenced, that the promise of America is

> The dream, the hope, the condition which our forefathers did not bequeath to us, their heirs and assigns, but rather bequeathed us, their successors, to the dream and the hope. We were not even given the chance then to accept or decline the dream, for the reason that the dream already owned and possessed us at birth. *It was not our heritage because we were its.*
> ("Privacy" 63; emphasis mine)

Determined to proclaim the end of *a* South, but perhaps not *the* South, Faulkner has also argued the perception that "the South, as Chicago is the Middlewest and New York the East, is dead, killed by the Civil War. There is a thing known whimsically as the New South to be sure, but it is not the south." ("Introduction…1933" 291)

After Faulkner's death in July 1962, the South has continued to demonstrate mutable qualities, with adherence to racist infrastructures and political discord. The idealised promise of the New South has been reiterated many times, such as in Roosevelt's 'New Deal' occupying discourse in the 1930s; the white-leaning politics of Nixon in the 1960s; or Reagan's inflammatory Southern appeal in the 1980s. Faulkner had looked towards the future, recognising the enduring power of Southern mythification appealing to public memory as a whimsical New South, renewing iterations of the myth of the Lost Cause. I have considered the price of freedom for Faulkner's characters, whether it be inheriting a doomed cause, or a series of social codes that dictate their lives. Various mythologies function in tandem for limitation. Women have their freedom taken from them in order to buckle under male-sanctioned forms of propriety, whereas non-white characters always pay a price – either for 'passing' between both black and white races, false accusation, prejudiced perceptions of inferiority, or mimicking the practices of white people to their own detriment.

7.4 "There'll Be A 2057"

We can only imagine how Faulkner would have reacted to the racial reckonings of the remaining twentieth century, moving into the present. Faulkner himself mused at the

University of Virginia in 1957 that his works were meant to resonate with the common audience in an unimaginable future of 2057. Faulkner's ideas of the future provide a key to reading his works, with his following interpretation of Time's inexorable rampage towards the future. Faulkner begins by stating that "a man's future is inherent in that man," with temporal progression inherent "in the sense that life, A.D. 1957, is not the end of life, that there'll be a 2057." (*University* 139) Furthermore,

> If we just had a machine that could project ahead and could capture that, that machine could isolate and freeze a picture, an image, of what man will be doing in 2057, just as the machine might capture and fix the light rays showing what he was doing in B.C. 28. That is, that's the mystical belief that there is no such thing as *was.* That time *is*, and if there's no such thing as *was*, then there is no such thing as *will be.* That time is not a fixed condition, time is in a way the sum of the combined intelligences of all men who breathe at that moment.
> (139)

Therefore, I ask, where do we go from here, when we are now closer to the man from 2057 than Faulkner's imagination speaking in 1957? Faulkner is famed for his aphorism that "the past is never dead. It's not even past." (*Requiem* 81) In terms of the sprawling "Yoknapatawpha Dream," *Requiem for a Nun* fills in the history of Jefferson and Yoknapatawpha from its humble beginnings as a trading post, with stories "washed thinly over with a faint quiet cast of apocrypha." (219, 209) These tales have created mythologies which in turn contribute to the whole of Faulkner's *oeuvre.* Therefore, I will now address my identified overarching mythologies, plotting their trajectory and development after Faulkner's own timeline ends in 1962.

7.5 The Myth of the Lost Cause

The myth of the Lost Cause can no longer be relegated to attics and trunk chests in Southern mansions, as they are depicted in *The Unvanquished*, *Absalom, Absalom!*, and Faulkner's histories of a dead time revisited. My argument has demonstrated that the myth of the Lost Cause lives on, informing each other area of created mythology.

Faulkner's Mississippi has endured as the epicentre for events which are not to be lauded. The myth of the Lost Cause is readily apparent in the fact that the Confederacy did not fade into obscurity, as might be expected from a short-lasting opposition force. Instead, forms of the 'Confederate Flag' or 'Battle Flag' are perpetuated across the United States, from Washington, D.C. down to the Mississippi Sound. *Requiem for a Nun* had already anticipated the selling of Confederate paraphernalia in 1953, "on the occasions when young men from Brooklyn, exchange students at Mississippi or Arkansas or Texas Universities, vended tiny Confederate battle flags among the thronged Saturday afternoon ramps of football stadia." (207) Confederate symbolism was a point of pride for Memorial Associations, but has now become a social flash-point for *contra* opinion. The so-called 'Confederate Flag' is now flown as a symbol of freedom from oppression, but is actually one of many variations, the 'Battle Flag of the Army of Northern Virginia,' and was never flown as the unified symbol of a fading ideal.[175]

Faulkner admits that he "used the Civil War to – for my own ends," simultaneously endorsing the mythification of the Lost Cause whilst writing against it. (*University* 73) The power of Lost Cause mythification has spread into revisionist history and politics. The U.S. Capitol, enduring centre of American democracy even when splintered by the Confederacy, has been the site of purely-American rage and furore. Though we are to take lessons from history, future historians will surely also be taking lessons from the age we are in now. If the United States are desperate for an originary mythology, then the continued celebration of defeat is a curious remnant of history. Now from the perspective of the twenty-first century, political events align with creating new mythologies of truth and fact versus public perception, and willingness to believe in fabrication: a renewed Lost Cause.

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[175] The 'Confederate' flag is often flown in coalition with the Gadsden Flag of 1775 declaring "DONT TREAD ON ME," a design originating in South Carolina – later the first state to secede, and showing Faulknerian disregard for apostrophes.

As my argument has demonstrated, the mythology of the Lost Cause has spread throughout Faulkner's works, and the perceptions of behaviour that echo throughout his novels, short stories, and non-fiction writings I have discussed. This mythology had endured through stubborn public adherence to the mythology that elevated Southerners' fathers and grandfathers from Confederate soldiers into heroes, in the same company as the well-known names of Robert E. Lee, Thomas 'Stonewall' Jackson, and J.E.B. Stuart. The myth of the Lost Cause has endured as a coping mechanism, a tool of public remembrance, and a way to assuage public guilt and anger at the outbreak of the 'War Between the States,' a misnomer underplaying the death of a combined total of over 620,000 lives.

I have claimed that the Lost Cause led to a rise in equally-damaging mythifications, which have persisted into the present through another century of perceived inferiority and the need for control. In Faulkner's use of myth, the Lost Cause informs the majority of his works – by creating the *mythos* of *Absalom, Absalom!* and the narratives of *The Unvanquished* and *Sartoris*, expanded by later publication of *Flags in the Dust.*

7.6 The Myth of Racial Inferiority

My research has assessed how the myth of racial inferiority spread throughout the South in the decades following the Civil War. Faulkner's use of myth in his works depicts that the equivocal myth of white supremacy and correlating inferiority persevered throughout the Reconstruction period onwards, well into the twentieth century and the oppression of 'Jim Crow' laws, segregation, and racial integration. Faulkner's short stories and *Light in August* demonstrate the climate of racial violence in the South, as well as ideas of 'race' as a quantifiable element.

Faulkner's heritage of Mississippi was weighted by the volatility of the state itself. There have been innumerable reports of racial violence, particularly given the South's legacy of lynching and harassment. Post-war Mississippi was not contrite, and was instead the first to

introduce limitations such as the 'Black Codes' which would become 'Jim Crow' laws. Mississippi also refused to ratify the Thirteenth Amendment to the Constitution – which abolished slavery – until 2013, 148 years after it was officially ratified by a three-quarter majority, and the last state to do so.

Faulkner's Mississippi would have looked similar to the state of today, with a degree of Black settlement along the "alluvial swamps" and plains of the Mississippi Delta. ("Mississippi" 11) The rich Delta farmland meant a higher concentration of plantations and enforced labour, which has endured in clear racial fault-lines along the Delta itself. According to Andrews, "Mississippi operates in extreme conditions, but make no mistake: that situation is the result of decades of gerrymandering and disempowerment of nonwhite people who call it home. It is the Blackest state in the union." (106) According to the latest census from July 2022, sixty years after Faulkner's death, the racial demographic of Mississippi was estimated as 58.8% "white alone," and 37.8% "Black or African American alone." (*Mississippi*) Now Mississippi has a reputation for being an undereducated, underfunded state, onto which racism casts a long shadow. Legacies such as the 'Freedom Summer' murders of James Chaney, Andrew Goodman, and Michael Schwerner in June 1964, or the sight of murdered teenager Emmett Till in his open casket in 1955, draw attention to a past that Mississippi has repeatedly tried to cover up. [176] [177] The Mississippi Civil Rights Museum in Jackson, MS, recovers this history in the state – one of many civil rights museums working to rectify and educate visitors, but cannot educate those who won't acknowledge their history.

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[176] In 1980, only a few short years after the nearby discovery of the bodies of Chaney, Goodman and Schwerner, Mississippi's Neshoba County Fair provided the stage for Reagan to declare "I believe in states' rights," which will always be a loaded, incendiary term. ("Reagan's …Fair Speech.")

[177] On 25 July 2023, President Joe Biden signed a proclamation establishing a National Monument for Emmett Till and his mother, Mamie Till-Mobley, on what ought to have been Till's 82nd birthday. There are two memorial markers planned in Mississippi, and one in Chicago, IL.

By the time of his death in July 1962, Faulkner had witnessed seminal change in the atmosphere of his home state. As the twentieth century continued, the schism between races widened. James Meredith's hard-fought integration into the University of Mississippi had been realised in October 1962, only a few short months after Faulkner's death. Similarly, Clemson University, SC, had admitted Harvey B. Gantt in January 1963, pushing the motto of "integration with dignity."[178] This trite motto did not accurately reflect the process, but was more peaceful in comparison to the University of Mississippi's need to protect Meredith with "127 deputy marshals" to subdue violent protestors. ("The U.S. Marshals")

In terms of the myth of racial inferiority, there is data to suggest that lynchings across the United States were more rare than previously thought. Though the data, analysed by Stephen Dubner and Steven Levitt, is based on the number of lynchings recorded by Tuskegee University, "relative to the size of the black population, lynchings were exceedingly rare," and thought to be "hardly the everyday occurrence that they are often considered in the public recollection." (54) It is necessary to consider the reality of the myth of racial inferiority, not solely fictionalised characters. The history of Mississippi and the wider South is one of state-sanctioned murder and vigilante justice, undertaken in the name of organisations such as the Ku Klux Klan. Tuskegee's data set comes to an end point in 1968. However, a *Washington Post* headline declared in 2021 that "lynchings in Mississippi never stopped." DeNeen Brown records that "since 2000, there have been at least eight suspected lynchings of Black men and teenagers in Mississippi." Data gaps do not signify a cease in the number of lynchings.

The myth of racial inferiority is inherently dominant in the infrastructure of the fractured United States. The contiguous states, the Lower-48, are split again into North and South, 'red' and 'blue,' east and west, where there once was a divide between slave-holding and free

[178] For more on Clemson University's integration see George McMillan.

with the Missouri Compromise of 1820, and the states seceding from the Union.[179] More than 150 years after the end of the Civil War, polarised, fractured America whole-heartedly perpetuates the myth of racial inferiority. It does so in police brutality; altered education echoing the efforts of Ladies' Memorial Associations; and deliberately-mendacious political rhetoric. Therefore, the created myth of racial inferiority worked in tandem with the idea of white supremacy – both ideas were forms of control reliant on myth. Faulkner demonstrates a clear influence from history in his fiction, outlining the myth of racial inferiority and perceptions of 'race' itself.

7.7 The Controlling Myths of Southern Womanhood

The controlling myths of Southern womanhood have had a long afterlife, despite new waves of modernity and opportunities for women, particularly post-war. The need to control women persists, by holding them to mythicised standards of behaviour: the Old South echoes into the New, reinforcing social control by white patriarchal principles. In terms of pregnancy and access to abortion in particular, Faulkner's works and my argument have shown that the alternatives to abortion are harrowing and dangerous. However, women's rights in the United States are going backwards, becoming a taboo subject once more.

Female bodily autonomy is now a fabrication made in the imagination. Faulkner's modern women may have been city-wise and experienced in some works – such as Charlotte Rittenmeyer and Margaret Powers – yet there is an enduring sense of rural fragility and rusticity for undereducated, innocent women like Lena Grove and Dewey Dell Bundren. Joanna Burden can combine these two modes. Overall, the myths of Southern womanhood are as controlling as ever, working to limit female bodies. Far from a myth or fictionalisation, in the state of Mississippi in 2023 abortions were permitted in the case of

[179] Though the 1820 Missouri Compromise was repealed by the Kansas-Nebraska Act of 1854.

rape, but not incest – a more flexible policy than its neighbours. Cox Richardson's *au courant* commentary in June 2023 recorded that, after the Supreme Court decision to overrule *Roe versus Wade* giving access to abortion services across the States,

> Fourteen Republican-dominated states promptly banned abortion. Alabama, Arkansas, Kentucky, Louisiana, Missouri, Oklahoma, South Dakota, Tennessee, and Texas banned abortion with no exceptions for rape or incest; Mississippi banned it with an exception for rape but not incest.
> ("June 24, 2023")

The landscape of women's rights is ever-changing. The controlling myths of Southern womanhood are being strictly enforced, now bordering on criminal prosecution.

Throughout the South, Faulkner has depicted a sense of innocence that cannot end happily. Unfortunately, the period between the decision of *Roe versus Wade* to allow access to abortion in 1973 came to a contentious end in 2022 – not even lasting half a century. The fault here is not with women like in Faulkner's fiction, who might hold love on a pedestal and in a simple binary of expected return. Instead, they are betrayed by men. These men are controlling women by getting them pregnant: filling their cotton sacks in Mississippi, enticing them through an open window in Alabama, sublimating themselves to the ideal desire of love in Louisiana (in *As I Lay Dying*, *Light in August* and *The Wild Palms* respectively). Faulkner's women may have to fight to end their pregnancies, against rapist pharmacists (*As I Lay Dying*) and botched procedures ending their own lives in the process (*The Wild Palms*), but these fictional incidents take place at the beginning of the twentieth-century, not the twenty-first.

7.8 "A New Century and a New Way of Thinking"

Studying Faulkner in the twenty-first century provokes "a new way of thinking" about the author himself: a Nobel Prize winner who primarily wrote about Mississippi, but who also experimented as poet, playwright, and postmaster. (*Requiem* 202) Faulkner was a master of modernism without much in the way of formal training – by his own admission –

desperate to see action in the 'Great War.' Returning to Oxford, Mississippi with a new surname and an affected limp, Faulkner was one of the foremost storytellers about his own life, let alone creating an interconnected literary universe within the microcosmic focus of Yoknapatawpha. A man who created his own mythology in order to "*tell about the South. What's it like there? What do they do there. Why do they live there. Why do they live at all,*" Faulkner has felt the unconscionable pull of the American Dream and the heritage of the South in all of its formats, undeniably because "it was not our heritage because we were its." (*AA!* 174; "Privacy" 63)

The weight of history is such that we are "hypnotized beneath the vast weight of man's incredible and enduring *Was*." (*Requiem* 180) In the heritage of the past we may espy "a gleam of crinoline, a laced wrist, perhaps even a Cavalier plume – who knows?" (181) However, Faulkner also emphasises the relentlessness of progress, even whilst keeping one authorial eye on the Civil War:

> Because that old war was dead; the sons of those tottering old men in grey had already died in blue coats in Cuba, the macabre mementoes and testimonials and shrines of the new war already usurping the earth before the blasts of blank shotgun shells and the weightless collapsing of bunting had unveiled the final ones to the old. (202)

Before the end of the nineteenth century, focus had shifted to a re-United States, united during the Spanish-American War of 1898 and Faulkner's "blue coats in Cuba" emphasising yet another paradoxically 'new' war, in a nation grown accustomed to warfare, where "the varied threads of reconciliation had woven their garment of reunion," and the old Confederate grey had been transmuted back into (re)Union blue. (Buck 306)

Faulkner himself has created a dual myth of the South, in depicting how the South has created and upheld myths. Faulkner is now part of Southern mythology, whose works stand as "epilogue and epitaph" to a history of the United States, with a specific focus on the ideological parameters of the South. (201) Writing to Cowley in 1949, Faulkner states that

"it is my ambition to be, as a private individual, abolished and voided from history, leaving it markless, no refuse save the printed books." ("To Malcolm Cowley," Feb. 1949, 285) My argument has demonstrated that Faulkner was inherently connected to his works, forming a dichotomy in which the forging of myth and legend could only have been created by a man who loved the South, "loving all of it even while he had to hate some of it because he knows now that you dont love because: you love despite; not for the virtues, but despite the faults." ("Mississippi" 42-43)

My analysis of Faulkner's use of myth has situated Faulkner within literary, historical, and sociological discussions. Conducting this research extrapolates how Faulkner synthesises fiction and non-fiction, history and imagination, to form a new version of the South working within and reneging against mythologies. My analysis asserts that repeated issues surrounding race, the aftermath of the Confederacy, and the topic of freedoms reflect ever-growing civil unrest and racialised tensions, perhaps because Faulkner recognised that "*nothing ever happens once and is finished.*" (*AA!* 261) Observing the United States of America has emphasised a new form of disunion. Where Faulkner's myths may once have appeared to end along with his writing career, his works continue to grow in relevance. Across the South, monuments to dead ideals have fallen, but women are accused of 'criminal conspiracy' when attempting to access abortion services, and "democracies die more often through the ballot box than at gunpoint." (Cox Richardson, *Democracy* xi) [180]

My research determines that overcorrection and mythologisation of history are entirely embedded within the creation of myth itself, and inherited Lost Cause ideology. These tensions have created further iterations of the political and social climates Faulkner's works reflect, ensuring enduring relevance to discussions of women's rights, race, and the ideological parameters of the South.

[180] Alabama's Attorney General claimed "criminal conspiracy" for abortion access in mid-2023, see Andy Rose.

Faulkner searched for "some Homer of the cotton fields" to appropriately tell the saga of the South. (*Sartoris* 226) Clearly, Faulkner's use of myth has earned him this title: odes to Mississippi and the South weave through Yoknapatawpha County. Taking inspiration from classical mythologies, as well as more recent and damaging iterations of mythification, Faulkner's use of myth is as relevant today as his first novel's publication in 1926.

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APPENDIX A

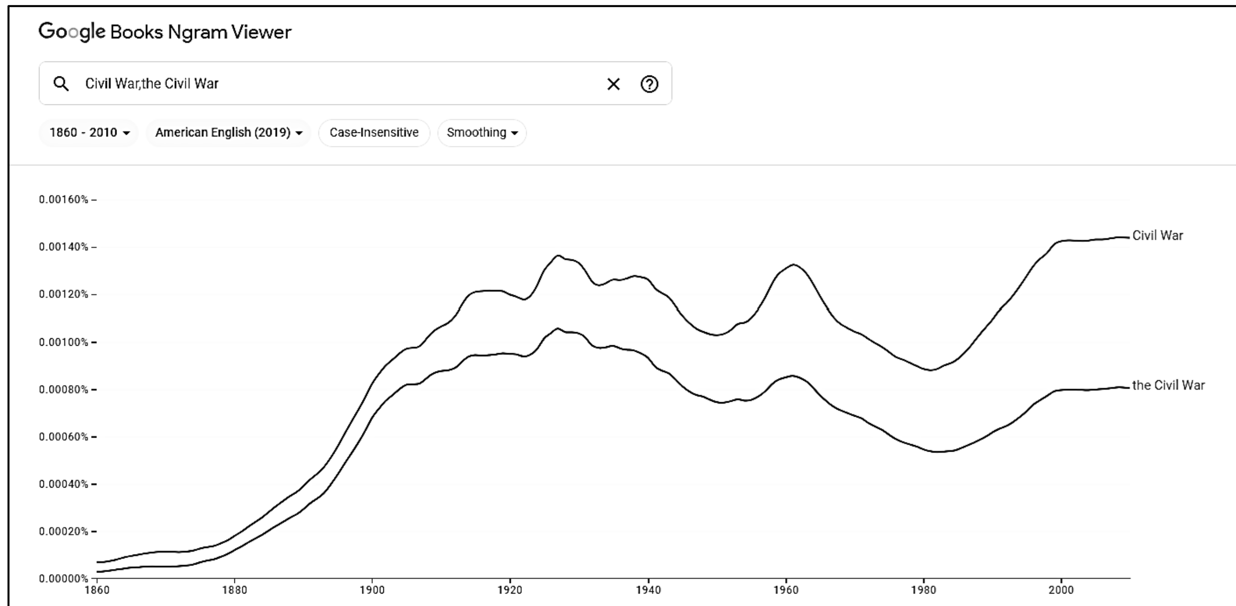

Fig. 1: Google Books Ngram Viewer results for 'Civil War' and 'the Civil War,' limited to the period of 1860 - 2010. This image has been altered to black and white.

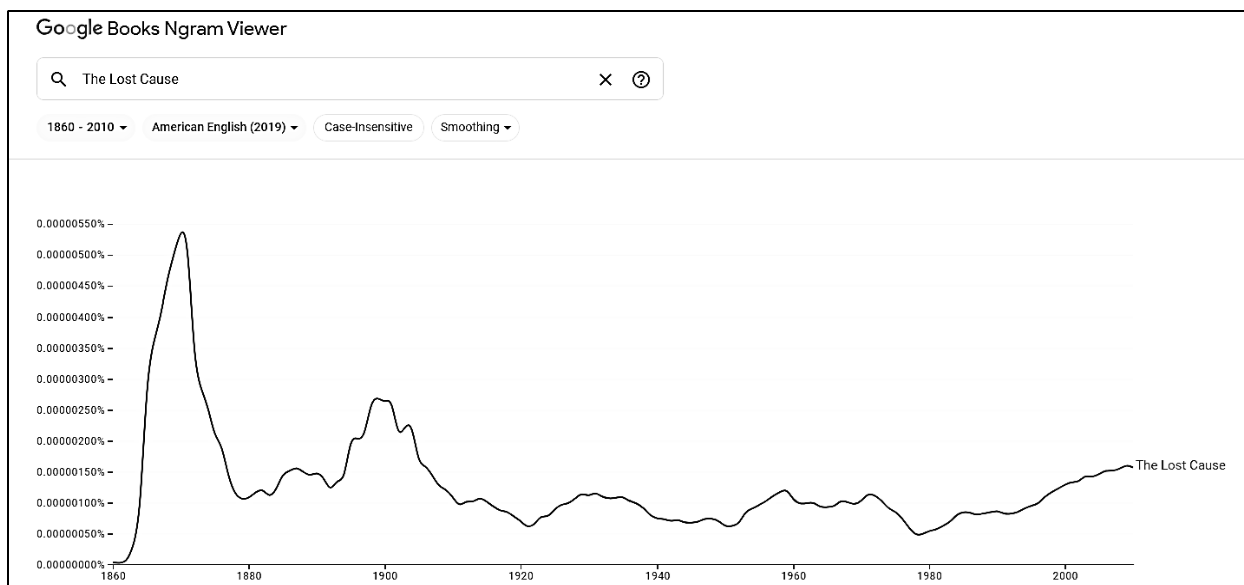

Fig. 2: Google Books Ngram Viewer results for 'the Lost Cause,' limited to the period of 1860 - 2010. This image has been altered to black and white.

APPENDIX B

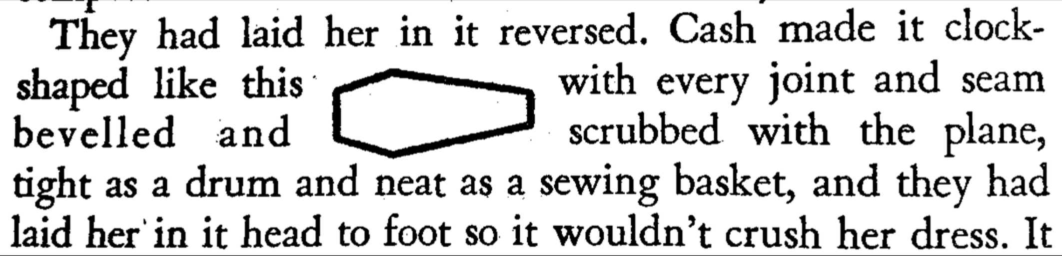
They had laid her in it reversed. Cash made it clock-shaped like this with every joint and seam bevelled and scrubbed with the plane, tight as a drum and neat as a sewing basket, and they had laid her in it head to foot so it wouldn't crush her dress. It

Fig. 1: *As I Lay Dying*, Penguin Books, 1976, p. 70. This image has been altered to black and white.