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QUERYING THE MODERNIST CANON:
HISTORICAL CONSCIOUSNESS AND THE SEXUALITY OF
SUFFERING IN FAULKNER AND HART CRANE

In his retrospective essay, "Lyricism and Modernism: The Example of Hart Crane," Sherman Paul raises several questions that strike at the problems of Crane's canonizing.

To read the criticism of *The Bridge*—of Hart Crane—from our present vantage is . . . an astonishing experience. How could Allen Tate, Yvor Winters, and R.P. Blackmur . . . have been so unaware of the merits of the *poem* and the tough genius of its maker? How could critics so well versed in Eliot's work find it so difficult to make formal sense of *The Bridge*, and, being poets themselves, to enter the dimensions of the poem? They had the "time and familiarity" that, Crane told a reviewer of *The Bridge*, had helped him discover the unity of *The Waste Land* and would help others discover the unity of his "complicated" poem. But then, though Tate and Winters knew Crane's "too well-known biography," of more importance in understanding their response is the fact that criticism is always of its moment—that the criticism as much as the writing of *The Bridge* belongs to the history of modernism. (163-64)

The history of modernist criticism to which Paul refers includes the inexplicably troubled reception of Crane's major poem by the very critics who would have been expected to celebrate it. Though Paul does not discuss this group's judgment of other writers, these same figures—the enormously influential men who went on to become known as the New Critics—played a very different role in establishing the positive reputation of another "complicated" modernist. Following the active intervention of figures like Tate and other New Critics, including Cleanth Brooks and John Crowe Ransom, William Faulkner was to become recognized not only as a "tough genius" and a celebrated "poet" of his native region but the paradigmatic American writer of the modern period.

Paul goes on to suggest reasons for Tate's and Winters's rejection of Crane, some of which included the fact that, unlike Faulkner, Crane was not a Southerner and thus rooted to a "traditional" mode of life (167). There are other reasons, however, for these two writers' very different New Critical receptions. Though both produced complicated texts that addressed the mythical American past in their respective masterworks—*Absalom, Absalom!* and *The Bridge*—and in doing so revealed a "tough" genius, the nature of that complexity and toughness differed considerably. Central to understanding the different, even opposing critical responses to each writer's engagement with American

history is the way in which they both linked that engagement to a form of imaginative and textual suffering. As we will see, that suffering may in turn be said to relate to the two men's ways of expressing their very different, opposed sexualities. In their particular interest in accessing historical consciousness, Faulkner and Crane share the use of an oppositely valenced, sexualized suffering, a difference, that is, in an erotics of pain.

"History is what hurts," Fredric Jameson has written in a statement that, for Faulknerians, seems ready-made. Especially when the (historical) subject in question is Quentin Compson and his famous suffering in *Absalom, Absalom!*, Jameson's insight has proven useful for critics as different as Richard Godden in *Fictions of Labor: William Faulkner and the South's Long Revolution* (1), and Richard Gray in his biography, *The Life of William Faulkner* (204-05).¹ I agree that Jameson's assertion about historical pain is apt to a reading of *Absalom* and of Faulkner. But to claims such as Godden's and Gray's about history, which Jameson offers in a slightly different context in *The Political Unconscious*,² I would like to suggest a variation on this aspect of Faulknerian historicity. To do so, I propose contrasting such historical hurt in Faulkner with the patently erotic imagery of suffering that Crane uses in his own overture to American history—and to a history of miscegenation, racial oppression, and white guilt, no less. The role of the Native American for Crane is not identical to that of Southern blacks for Faulkner. Yet the precipitating narrative events of *Absalom, Absalom!* and *The Bridge* both pivot on an instance of white-ethnic sexual union, one that marks the unique legacy of an American history of conquest. Maquoqueeta's sacrificial burning in "The Dance" appears in the section of *The Bridge* that evokes not only John Smith's fabled marriage to Pocahontas, but the role played by white settlement in Native American genocide. Thomas Sutpen's early marriage to a West Indies plantation daughter who Sutpen believes passes on "Negro" blood to their son is the engine for his life's and the novel's Biblical tragedy.

The extended historical "moments" that Crane and Faulkner both seek to offer readers may then be defined by their affinities with pain. In the context of American history, that painfulness refers to the experience of historical subjects such as the American Indian as well as marginalized populations like Southern blacks and, as with a young Thomas Sutpen, rural poor whites. What

¹Godden cites Jameson in one of his book's epigraphs, suggesting the difficult and protracted class struggle in the South that Godden argues underpinned Faulkner's novels of the thirties and from which Quentin Compson suffers acutely. Gray offers Jameson's remark to refer to both the painful "openness" of history to debate in *Absalom* and, more generally, the personal difficulties Faulkner experienced during his writing of it (204-05).

²As Jameson puts it, "History is . . . not . . . a type of content, but rather the inexorable *form* of events; it is therefore a narrative category in the enlarged sense of some properly narrative political unconscious. . . . Conceived in this sense, History is what hurts, it is what refuses desire and sets inexorable limits to individual as well as collective praxis. . . . But this History can be apprehended only through its effects, and never directly as some reified force" (102). It is this aspect of historicity, what Jameson calls its "retextualization" in a manner that can be "apprehended only through its effects," that defines historical consciousness in Faulkner and, in similar ways but with very different critical responses, in Crane. In particular I see both writers producing textual effects that rather than reify history register its effects bodily. This painful historical content is mediated in either writer through the different expressions of a queer and a straight sexuality.

both Faulkner and Crane signal in key sections of their work is the way that historical awareness, on the part of either characters or readers, is activated by and necessitates a textual effect of suffering. It is the different valence of this suffering as experienced by readers—masochistic and identificatory, for Crane, sadistic and distanced, for Faulkner—that I suggest contributed to either writer's relation to the modernist canon. Faulkner's Southernness and supposed traditionalism were only part of his appeal to Tate and the Agrarians. Among other things, what appealed to the group that became the New Critics about Faulkner's modernism, and what prevented them from "entering the dimensions" of Crane's poetry, as Paul put it, was precisely this difference in either writer's sexuality. Faulkner's text, we will see, wields a force that follows from his heterosexuality and that evokes conventional (sexual) models of aggression. In his treatment of characters who are crucial for his reflections on Southern history such as Rosa Coldfield and Quentin Compson, but who for him also raised problems of sexuality, Faulkner inscribes effects that suggest a type of punishing as well as distance. Crane's text, conversely, bears the traces of a queer sexuality that evokes a shared suffering with his historical subject and an openness to what Kaja Silverman, in her theoretical work on masochism, calls a productive form of "deviant" masculinity, a socially destabilizing pleasure in pain. For the critics who helped establish the modernist canon and who laid such emphasis on a traditionally ordered, masculine culture and society, and for reasons that to Paul appeared puzzling but which I hope to make clear, Faulkner's version of historical pain proved far more appealing.

FAULKNER, CRANE, AND THE NEW CRITICAL CANON

I will return to an account of New Critical hegemony in the period when Crane's reputation might have been more solidly established, as well as relate Silverman's theory of male identity more directly to both Crane's and Faulkner's historical modernism. I might begin to elaborate this idea, though, by way of a singular example from Crane's life, a moment that offers a synecdoche for what would become his larger (mis)treatment by the New Critics and that has sexuality as at least part of its basis. Early in Crane's career, he experienced a disappointing rejection by Allen Tate, one that was to prove illustrative of his relationship with the critical establishment. This event occurred at a particularly vulnerable point in Crane and Tate's friendship, when Crane was in the process of developing his poetic voice and while Tate was turning toward his more forceful (and later, domineering) role as a critic. Langdon Hammer has suggested that there was a sexual element to Tate's rejection of Crane at this moment, one that he sees in relation to Crane's queerness and his companionable "overtures" to Tate. As an example, Hammer offers the occasion of Crane's asking Tate for a response to his early poem, "Recitative."³ As Hammer puts it

³The lines in which Hammer locates the poem's latent sexual meanings likely include the several references to a furtive union between two men ("twin shadowed halves" and "borne cleft to you . . . brother in the half" [25]) as well as the lament over the repressive "brain's disc" that "shivers against lust" (25). The poem's evocation of the future between its speaker and his partner provides both a tone of hope on which Hammer

about Crane's own understanding of the poem, "Crane saw in modernist texts a literature capable of including homosexual authors and homosexual meanings: the future imagined in 'Recitative' is 'white,' because its veiled sexual meanings, with the collaboration of readers like Tate, will be fully and freely shared" (xii). Unfortunately for Crane, Tate did not share this vision of a "white," future collaboration with either the sexual or poetic vision Crane proffered. Hammer describes the men's falling out over "Recitative" in the following way:

When Tate declined to take part in the future Crane envisioned, he withdrew as well from the sexual valences of his friend's appeal. In effect, Tate's unfolding resistance to Crane allied 'the right kind of modernism' with an embattled heterosexual masculinity. At the same time, Crane's isolation as the 'wrong' kind of modernist converged with his isolation as a homosexual man. (xii)

This statement encompasses an important component of my essay. Crane's queer isolation is one of the motive forces for my reading, and we will see how the notion of an embattled male heterosexuality has particular relevance to Faulkner. But Hammer's claim serves for only half of my argument. For his account of Crane's critical isolation, while it explicitly posits a role to Tate and implies one for other New Critics, does not treat this group's very different response to Faulkner. Faulkner, of course, experienced a nearly opposite relationship to the New Critics and to Tate than did Crane. He did not enjoy personal relationships with them when they uniformly decided to celebrate Faulkner's case, nor did he ever make any direct appeals to Tate and others to respond to his work (in the manner as had Crane). But in the late 1940s and until his reputation was established, the New Critics championed Faulkner's cause as the single most important writer of his generation. As with Crane, but to the opposite effect, Faulkner's erotic and painful treatment of history contributed to that critical development.

As Lawrence Schwartz has rather fully demonstrated, Faulkner's ascension owed itself in large part to his embrace in the forties, and after Malcom Cowley's *Portable Faulkner* (1946), not only by the United States State Department but by newly empowered figures from the Agrarians, Fugitives, and institutionally affiliated among the New Critics, such as Tate, Robert Penn Warren, and John Crowe Ransom.⁴ One episode from the narrative Schwartz offers of Faulkner's rise is perhaps most emblematic of the radical difference between his career and Crane's more difficult process of critical assimilation. In 1946 Ransom, convinced by Cowley's *Portable Faulkner* of not only

seizes and, not incidentally, the title for Crane's first collected volume: "Look steadily—how the wind feasts and spins / . . . Then watch / While darkness . . . falls away, / And gradually white buildings answer day" (25). The culmination of this optimism of course is the poem's assertion of sexual and artistic union and equality in its close. "In alternating hours have you not heard / All hours clapped dense into a single stride? / Forgive me for an echo of these things, / And let us walk through time with equal pride" (25).

⁴Schwartz describes the use of American culture—and he means "use" in its specifically political sense—by the federal government as a weapon during the Cold War. Like the work of other artists such as Jackson Pollack and Dizzie Gillespie, Faulkner's modernism was extolled in the 1950s by the State Department as an example of what a superior, "open" American political system could produce in the cultural sphere. He details the ways in which Faulkner's State Department tours were meant to bolster America's position geopolitically after 1950, appearances that were similar to those of musicians like Gillespie who also traveled abroad.

Faulkner's merit but his centrality to establishing a uniquely American (and purely "literary") figure who shared the New Critic's value system, persuaded Tate to edit a special issue of the *Kenyon Review* devoted to Faulkner. Although the special Faulkner issue never materialized, this was not due to any lack of commitment on the part of Tate and Ransom. They worked assiduously for several months, a period during which their regard of Faulkner and their commitment to him as *the* representative twentieth-century American writer only grew. Faulkner's Nobel Prize in 1950, then, only confirmed the attitudes that Tate, Cowley, Warren, and Ransom had held since the postwar reassessment of Faulkner, a collective valuation that was perhaps best summed up in an essay Warren wrote in 1946. As he put it, "The study of Faulkner is the most challenging single task in contemporary American literature for criticism to undertake" (Warren 124; qtd. in Schwartz 173).

The general shape of this story is already well known to most Faulknerians. My reasons for recalling it, however, help me describe the development of Faulkner's modernist career alongside that of Crane's. Allen Tate especially—though also Cleanth Brooks, as we will see—offers a way to relate Faulkner and Crane due not only to the simple fact of the different approach Tate took to the two men, one of whom (Faulkner) he barely knew and, by Schwartz's account, did not especially care for; the other of whom (Crane) he not only had as a close friend but with whom he shared a short-lived vocation as a poet. In other words, Tate is useful for a comparison of Crane and Faulkner for the role he might have played in the former writer's career but which for several reasons did not.

Tate and Crane's early friendship was not a clear occasion for the then-emerging critic to have folded Crane into his growing institutional embrace. Although Tate's ensconcing into a professorship at the University of Minnesota in 1951, like Ransom's at Kenyon College and Warren's at Yale (both in 1950), or his and others' editorships at journals such as the *Kenyon*, *Southern*, and *Sewanee Reviews* proved extremely important to Faulkner's burgeoning reputation, there is no reason that this propitiousness should necessarily have extended itself to a writer like Crane. Their regional differences, as well as Crane's direct treatment of urban modernity, might have had a good deal to do with Crane's omission from the canon that Tate and the other New Critics sought to produce.⁵ Yet the exigencies of a Midwestern poet writing about a decidedly modern scenario notwithstanding, a writer with a regional background like Crane's and a poem very much like *The Bridge* had, of course, dominated the critical discourse of modernism since the earliest efforts to define it.

⁵Paul refers to Tate's remarks about the need for American life and art to be "rooted in the soil" as a means of maintaining "the traditional organization of the consciousness" (Paul 167; Tate, "Hart Crane and the American Mind," 215). Revealing his bias against the metropolitan version of modernism Crane practiced, Tate viewed Crane's suicide rather pitilessly as evidence of the modern "break down" of consciousness (Paul 168; Tate, "Hart Crane and the American Mind" 213, 216). Demonstrating moreover his aristocratic elitism, as well as his view that the Americans who best exemplified his vision of a healthy spirituality and social reality were Southerners, Tate writes, "the only Americans who have ever been rooted in the American soil have lived on the European system, socially and spiritually" ("Hart Crane and the American Mind," 215-16).

I will return to the significant distinctions between Faulkner's and Crane's handling by the New Critics. Before doing so, however, I find it helpful to consider an account of the modernist canon that takes measure of its ideological elements as well as the unique historical circumstances of New Critical formalism. In a discussion of another key Faulkner critic, Cleanth Brooks, John Guillory offers terms that are strikingly apt for considering Faulkner and Crane. In his essay "The Ideology of Canon-Formation: T.S. Eliot and Cleanth Brooks," Guillory refers to moves both men made toward a canonizing of not only particular poems or literary texts, but also the institution of the university as a purveyor of a secular canon, one associated by Guillory and others with a newly empowered (because quasi-religious) cultural value. The "commitment to the preservation of value" that Guillory sees Brooks espouse in his reading of Donne's poem "The Canonization," for instance, shows Brooks to be shifting the power associated with a religious canon to a secular and cultural one (356). It is this move—which is symptomatic of all the New Critical positionings for power—that marked Brooks's and others' efforts to define what constituted a worthwhile American literature or modern canon.⁶ That they were able to perform these moves in the context of institutionalizing their positions within universities, but were also able to do so in the name of a "universal" or traditional conception of value is what marked their moves as ideological.⁷ Guillory helps illustrate the way that social and institutional history combined with conservative aesthetic judgments and politics to ensure a space for Faulkner that necessarily excluded a writer like Crane. The hegemonic quality of this move, Guillory points out, was obscured by Brooks's and the New Critics' success in presenting their views as teachers who extolled works of *intrinsic* literary value.⁸

This is not to say that the late forties assessment of Faulkner that Brooks, Tate, and Ransom pursued was not valuable for other reasons, nor that it was unimportant to later readings of Faulkner and, indeed, of American modernism. It is more simply my point that in their embrace of Faulkner as the most important American writer of their period, the New Critics sought to incorporate into American higher education the values that to them he represented.

⁶In comments that are apt for the New Critics, Guillory shows the extent to which Eliot's own interceding in critical discussion of modern poetry mobilized ideological terms that were intensely favorable to himself. He describes Eliot's subtly subversive claims about maintaining poetic orthodoxy to suggest how "the critique of ideology discloses the complicity of interest in nearly any discourse whatever; and if the process of canon-formation is not excluded from the system of ideological production, it should be possible to move beyond the massively resistant tautology of literary history: that works *ought* to be canonized because they *are good*" (338).

⁷The Foucaultian elements of Guillory's argument are evident in his assertion that the ideology of canon-formation has to do with the covert interestedness on the part of the critic, i.e., the extent to which a critic's particular interests are served—but not openly expressed—in his defense of certain writers.

⁸In describing the shift from Eliot's thinking about a religiously-inclined cultural orthodoxy about the canon to Brooks's attention to pedagogy, Guillory asserts that one of the political roles played by the canon is the investing of power in not only texts (or ideas about their value) but in teachers. "Eliot is not a teacher . . . but Brooks is in every way a theorist of pedagogy. The latent meaning of canon, as a rule of conduct, can be activated again; indeed, this is the meaning of the canon's dissemination" (351). The importance of this statement to my argument has to do with the historically unique role of the New Critics in institutions of higher learning. As the experience of not only Tate and Brooks, but Ransom as well demonstrates, it was the somewhat odd

Faulkner worked so well for the New Critics because his fiction lent itself to a particular kind of close reading and because he appeared to offer readers like Tate and Brooks a vision of traditional values. That those values were related to positions Eliot had espoused about poetic orthodoxy is entirely to the point. For the system of valuation that Eliot—and later, Brooks, Tate, and the New Critics—proposed would have no use at all for a writer like Crane.⁹

Like Faulkner's creation of a mythical Southern county in Mississippi, Crane may also be said to traffic in myth in his vision for America in *The Bridge*. Yet there are several reasons why his particular mythic approach did not suit New Critical sensibilities. In addition to the more obviously problematic suggestions of a homosexual valence to Crane's vision, particularly evident in "The Dance" and other lyrics that I discuss below, his more general ambition in *The Bridge* performs the opposite function of what critics like Brooks and Tate valued. Crane repeatedly claimed that his aim with *The Bridge* was a "synthesis" of America.¹⁰ As Guillory points out, it is the specific fact of *non*-synthesis or of exclusion that Brooks and, by implication, other New Critics sought to establish for the canon. This effect is especially clear where Guillory describes critical moves of Eliot's that Brooks emulates and that, he shows, are ultimately political and ideological. As he says of Eliot's re-ordered canon, one that valued Donne over Milton, "Its real status is precisely that of Donne's poetry, which circulated among a coterie of admirers, or a marginal elite" (343).¹¹ Faulkner was ideal for this similar type of canonical revising on the part of the New Critics. Taking up Faulkner's cause, the New Critics were able to celebrate a writer who, to that point at which they "discovered" him, had not yet *become* celebrated. Doing so allowed them to position themselves as a marginal elite,

historical circumstance of the institutionalizing of a certain *kind* of reading of literature in the academy—the formalism of the New Critics, as it combined with their ideological preferences—that contributed to their success in championing Faulkner.

⁹Orthodoxy is the key point around which many of Guillory's claims turn. As a way to (literally) map Guillory's conception of poetic value according to Brooks in *The Well-Wrought Urn*, an argument in which Guillory shows Brooks relying on a spatializing of the urn metaphor that has social as well as aesthetic overtones, I would turn to similar spatializing moves that Faulkner can be seen to make with his novels and Yoknapatawpha. Readers have long recognized how the painful realities of history and social life powerfully shape and enter Faulkner's mythical county. Yet what I suspect interested a critic like Brooks about Faulkner (as what interested him in Keats) was the way that Yoknapatawpha also followed a *separating*, in Brooks's view, of the space or "content" of traditional values and ways of life from those of the modern world. That separating made possible a realm in which Brooks's and the New Critics' idealized readers of modern American literature could perform their own idealized readings of it. For the ideal, and the notion of the sacred text or sacred content, is more easily maintained in a space that renounces the world, as Guillory explains in his exegesis of Brooks's approach to "The Canonization" and parts of *The Well-Wrought Urn* (356-59). Like Donne's lovers and Keats's urn, that is, Faulkner's mythical county can be seen to turn its back on a (secular, modernized) world that the New Critics abhorred. In appearing to do so to such readers, that separate space (lovers' hermitage, Yoknapatawpha, urn) also contains them in a realm beyond the contingencies of daily life.

¹⁰See Crane's several references to this idea for *The Bridge* throughout his correspondence during the long period of the poem's writing in *The Letters of Hart Crane*. Describing the project to Gorham Munson, Crane wrote, "Very roughly, it concerns a mystical synthesis of America" (124). Early in the poem's development Crane referred to working on "a synthesis of America and its spiritual identity now, called *The Bridge*" (127). Two years later, Crane maintained this vision of the poem in a letter to his patron, Otto Kahn: "*The Bridge* . . . aim[s] to enunciate a new cultural synthesis of our America" (223).

¹¹See Guillory's discussion of the necessity for Brooks (like Eliot) of occupying a position as a marginal cultural elite (343-46; 353-57).

a group of critics who recognized Faulkner's value better than did the rest of an American cultural life that the New Critics saw living in a "valueless" society and time. Embracing Faulkner marked his readers as possessing the values their culture was impugned to lack so sorely.

HISTORY, *THE BRIDGE*, AND MASOCHISM

Crane's notion of a synthesis of America aspires toward a grand vision of historical, ethnic, and geographical unity (or "bridging"). As we can see, this connectedness would not have served the New Critics' interest in seeking an exclusionary cultural position. Just as threatening to the New Critics, though, are signal passages from *The Bridge* and in his other poetry in which Crane describes efforts at connection that are far more intimate. Defined generally as erotic and physical, such unions in Crane are achieved most often through a sexualized and, as suggested by his speaker, pleasurable suffering. Early poems such as "Lachrymae Christi" exemplify this pattern with its image of "Thy face" that arises smiling "From charred and riven stakes" (20) or the "Thorns [that] freshen on the year's / First blood" (19) and "Spell out in palm and pain / Compulsion of the year" (20). Masochism and erotic wounding figure powerfully as a connecting agent in one of Crane's most frankly homoerotic lyrics, "Episode of Hands." There the image of a workman's hand in which a "gash was bleeding" that is being dressed by the factory owner's son (an unambiguous reference to Crane himself) includes "a shaft of sun / That . . . / Fell lightly, warmly, down into the . . . // . . . thick bed of the wound" (173), a figurative and literal moment of tenderness and penetration that leads in the poem's last line to "[t]he two men smil[ing] into each others' eyes" (173). As another example of Crane's ecstatic suffering we might consider the deliberately ambiguous opening stanza of "Recitative," in which the speaker uses an apostrophe to denote his Janus-faced reader's nearly intolerable "Reciting [of] pain or glee, how can you bear!" (25).¹²

These necessarily brief examples clearly suggest something of Crane's blending of pain and pleasure in his rendering of a homoerotic vision. Yet an account of male masochism on its own is not enough to convey how such suffering figures in Crane's effort to enter history. To describe that aspect of masochism in Crane's poetry we need to turn to his effort to join the lyric with epic in a manner that approximates narrative. That *The Bridge* uses as its epigraph a reference to the Book of Job, and thus arguably to the first male masochist in Western literature, may provide a clue for the workings of the larger poem's engagement with American history.¹³

Important to understanding the links between historical consciousness and suffering is Crane's move in the poem through an American space as well as past, one that prepares readers for his clearest evocation of masochism, "The Dance."

¹²It would of course be possible to trace Crane's investment in an account of male masochism, and I would not be the first critic to do so. Thomas Yingling has shown the way Crane's poetics are informed, even, in Yingling's phrase, "empowered" by images of erotic suffering. See particularly Yingling's readings of "The Dance" (23-27). Robert Martin similarly traces Crane's trope of erotic suffering (203-04, 214).

¹³"From going to and fro in the earth, and from walking up and down in it" (Crane 41).

In "The River," Crane introduces *The Bridge's* emphasis on the role of violence in traversing and remembering history, what "[t]ime's readings . . . construe" (58). "The River" also marks Crane's first effort, after his abrupt introduction of Columbus in "Ave Maria," to more deliberately and methodically carry the reader *through* history so as to arrive at a fuller apprehension of the strain, physical as well as psychic, that historical remembrance produces. As a consequence, "The River" is full of images that hint at the painfulness of an American history whose full effects readers will later encounter in "The Dance."

Most suggestive in "The River" is Crane's apparently willful effort to transcend both conventional literary representation and historiography in evoking the past. "The River" includes several instances of historical suffering that impress on readers a singularly painful event; it does so, moreover, in a manner that is seemingly illegible. Prior to referring to the historical ravages on the figurative "body" of the American continent (what Crane's speaker refers to as "always the iron dealt cleavage" [59]) and to the actual bodies of drowned African Americans (floating on the quintessential American river, the Mississippi [61]), but following the comparatively mild tone of the sequence's opening poems, Crane imagines Pocahontas as his lover for the first time: "And past the circuit of the lamp's thin flame / (O Nights that brought me to her body bare!) / Have dreamed beyond the print that bound her name" (59). In his disjointed poetic structure with *The Bridge* and in several of its individual lyrics, including "The River," Crane offers a vision of history "beyond . . . print," or at least beyond conventional representation. That he offers an encounter with a past marked by a violence beyond the dictates of logical prose narrative—historiographic or fictive—reveals Crane's effort to impose images forcefully enough that readers will not enjoy the comfort of an ordered rendering of events, but rather must encounter such moments from American history in their unmediated directness. For "The River" is punctuated by imagery of violence and punishment: "a road-gang" (58); "Scream[ing] redskin dynasties" (59); "floating niggers" (61).

Significant for my analysis are other formal elements of "The River" that reveal its centrality to Crane's conflating of historical consciousness and suffering. The linguistic violence of the epithet "nigger" sounds all the more harsh in the midst of what had been, to that point, *The Bridge's* delicate diction and tone, epitomized in "To Brooklyn Bridge" in the apostrophe "*And Thee, across the harbor, silver-paced*" (43), or in Columbus's quietly ruminative and Renaissance musings in "Ave Maria": "Be with me, Luis de San Angel, now—Witness before the tides can wrest away / The word I bring" (47). By the middle of "The River," Columbus's reflections and the speaker's earlier, seemingly innocent invitation to "go . . . west—young man" (57) are shattered by a very different word that Crane's poet-quester will now "bring": the singularly damning slur that American racial history emblazoned on the country's collective lexicon by way of its violent treatment of Africans themselves and, in the American South, of the standard locution of the term for slaves, "negro." Crane's sensitivities to lan-

guage appear here in the service of tracing the violences that attended American history and that he injects into “The River”’s disruptive breaks with both the sequence’s earlier treatment of history and with conventional writing.

The formal effect of registering the violence of history, and the necessity, to Crane, of embodying that violence in the texture of his poem makes itself felt in moments where Crane traces the movement of history forward as well as backward. His rendering of the progress of the River, for instance, a forward motion that he metonymizes with that of American material history, results in one of *The Bridge*’s more leaden lines. This seeming lapse in lyricism connotes something different, however, than simply what critics like Yvor Winters took to be Crane’s uneven poetic skill (Winters 28). In “The River”’s closing stanzas, and just before we move to Crane’s ultimate depiction of masochistic suffering in “The Dance,” we arrive at the putative end of the Mississippi, as of the poem:

. . . Ahead
 No embrace opens but the stinging sea;
 The River lifts itself from its long bed,

 Poised wholly on its dream, a mustard glow
 Tortured with history, its one will—flow! (61)

The muddy “mustard” color of progress here loses the golden or burnished glow that we traditionally are asked to associate with histories of conquest and progress.¹⁴ Rather, the “torture” that is history to Crane, like Stephen Dedalus’s nightmare from which he is trying to awake, shows a modernist sensibility that, like Joyce’s, manifests itself in formal dislocations. Here, the forward motion of the River, like that of history, is rendered in all its plodding, blunt movement through Crane’s heavy verse scheme and graceless rhyme. It is suggestive about Crane’s critical reception, and in a manner that helps explain my attention in that reception to masochism, that examples like the above quoted passage are cited by Crane’s detractors. Considered evidence of his poetic failure in *The Bridge*, moments like this appeared to readers such as Winters or Tate as an example of Crane’s unrefined sensibility, a “blemish” at the end of “The Dance” (Tate, “Hart Crane” 290) or a carryover from his debt to Whitman’s “loose” poetic structure (Winters 24) and an example of the “anti-intellectualist” quality of modern literature (Winters 30). In contrast to such critics, I would suggest this moment of “The River” as a case of Crane reworking literary tropes of progress or historical achievement. If such a reworking produces a poetic line that is less aurally pleasing, such displeasure (or lyric “pain”) may well owe itself to motives I trace more extensively below: the connections between Crane’s subject—historical consciousness—and his poem’s form.

¹⁴I refer here to historiography contemporaneous with Crane’s period of the 1910s and 20s, one that varies from recent approaches to history that more often question the terms of historical advancement. Patricia Nelson Limerick offers an example of a revisionist historiography of the same West and the frontier that Crane treats in *The Bridge*; see especially *The Legacy of Conquest*.

HISTORICAL TRAUMA AND THE (MALE) BODY

Before turning directly to Crane's supreme example of masochistic suffering in "The Dance," I would like to show more explicitly the deep structure of *The Bridge's* historical content. For the historicity of *The Bridge*, particularly in its masochistic dimension, owes itself to empirical facts of the period of the poem's writing as well as to Crane's mythic imagination. In his essay "'Our Native Clay': Racial and Sexual Identity and the Making of Americans in *The Bridge*," Jared Gardner points to the union accomplished with the male Indian brave in "The Dance" as Crane's response to both the prohibition on homosexual servicemen in World War I and the burgeoning nativism of the 1920s (35). The image Crane offers in the poem of a non-heterosexual, and thus "pure" genealogy from America's originary people followed the profound ideological confusion surrounding efforts to enlist Native American regiments during the War, undertook so as to send an "untainted," non-European ethnic "back" to Europe for the campaign (27-33). In so doing, nativists argued, America found and deployed a true native stock for a war in the Old Country. Gardner points to the speaker's "marriage" to Maquoqueeta in "The Dance" as a way to restore the queer male subject to a position of centrality in American history (as opposed to its margins, which was how then-Assistant Secretary of the Navy Franklin Roosevelt's purge of gay men in the military functioned) (32). In this way the poem accomplishes, Thomas Sutpen-like, a denial of the mixed race problems of an American miscegenist genealogy.¹⁵

In addition to its non-procreative aspect, the figured marriage in "The Dance" and its historical significance are occasioned by an ecstatic experience of suffering: the speaker and Maquoqueeta's shared immolation in the brave's sacrificial burning. The interest of this conflation in "The Dance" and in other sections of Crane's poem is its resemblance to a theory of history and male identity that emphasizes the role in both of masochism. In *Male Subjectivity at the Margins*, Kaja Silverman describes several elements of what she terms "deviant masculinities." In addition to tracing versions of consciousness that "assume forms which are profoundly antipathetic to the existing social formation" (2), she also "probe[s] the larger political implications of these 'deviant' masculinities, some of which do indeed say 'no' to power" (2). Silverman's rel-

¹⁵Crane's sexual union with Maquoqueeta, it should be pointed out, lacks Sutpen's strident racism. Gardner sees American writers after World War I like Crane (and William Carlos Williams and Waldo Frank) "attempting to define an American identity with the Indian as a central symbol. . . . [T]he cultural embrace of the Indian allows for the rejection of Old World genealogy in favor of a new kind of inheritance, an American self" (25). Gardner points out that the centrality of the Native American to this genealogy is necessarily symbolic (and in Crane's homoerotic vision, non-procreative) because of the simple historical fact that white America does not in fact have an Indian genealogical heritage (25). Gardner's terms are also suggestive for another way to connect Crane's poem to Faulkner's treatment of Sutpen. When *The Bridge* moves forward from "The Dance" to "Indiana," we find Crane examining one of the more common myths of American frontier history. Pointing to the pioneer woman's loss of her son to the lure of the gold rush, Gardner shows how the "[d]ispossessed, aimless" Indian woman encountered by the white mother is, like her, "a victim of the violence and greed that Crane portrays as intrinsic to the traditional reading of the [Western] myth" (42). Western myths of American history, then, are revealed in their violent and avaricious underpinnings by Crane in his long poem as similar aspects of the Old South myth are by Faulkner in *Absalom*.

evance to my argument is her effort to theorize a resistance to dominant structures of power that Crane's poem imagines. Crane's treatment of the Indian in "The Dance" involves his own self-conscious use of a deviant masculinity, one that deliberately undermines "the existing social formation" and thus mounts a stubborn resistance—a resounding "no"—to formations of power that are manifest in the social order and, significantly, in history.¹⁶

In the chapter "Historical Trauma and Male Subjectivity," Silverman describes male subjects who have been "wounded" by history. In addition specifically to trauma victims, she examines the way historical events such as war, dislocation, or social upheaval can induce suffering even in people and places where its effects are not immediately evident, such as those subjects who do not participate directly in war events. It is in these intersections of historical effect that Crane, his speaker, and his poem are situated. Silverman describes historical trauma as a phenomenon in which the male subject confronts a tear in the "dominant fiction" (53): the centrality of a conventional, heterosexual identity in a normative social order. The lack that Silverman contends male subjects encounter through historical trauma is perceived by them as an aftereffect of radically dislocating or physically injurious experiences like war. Following Freud's assessments of psychic and social "binding" of men in battle (56, 63), Silverman suggests that it is when they return home, with no need for these binding operations, that soldiers perceive the lack at the center of male heterosexual identity and its socially prescribed dominant position. "Sometimes the veteran . . . finds himself strangely superfluous to the society he ostensibly protected during the war; his functions have been assumed by other men, or—much more disturbingly—by women" (53). As Silverman also puts it, though, this recognition of vulnerability is not limited to an effect of war, nor to men who endure battle; historical trauma is produced by "any historical event . . . which brings a large group of male subjects into . . . an intimate relation with lack" (55).

Although the lack at the center of consciousness is not one that is peculiar to the male subject, Silverman focuses on it because of what she terms masculinity's "ideological alignment with mastery" (61). The lack or "void" Silverman mentions, in addition to recalling Lacanian conceptions of the de-centered subject, refers to her sense that Freud's death drive stands in opposition not to the subject's physical existence or well-being, but to internal, psychic dynamics performed by the ego. The death drive is Silverman's privileged category not only because it underpins her model of historical trauma—war trauma and neurosis—but because it, more than the external threat posed by experiences like battle, threatens to unbind or "reduce" (60) the male subject by an "indwelling" force (60) and because of its intense antagonism to the binding operations of the ego (57-61). As she puts it, "Masculinity is particularly

¹⁶And, we might add, in discourse about the canon. That is Guillory's point about efforts of critics such as Eliot and Brooks and that I've extended to figures like Tate as he regarded Crane. Such self-gratifying moves to consolidate power in the cultural sphere may then be seen to reflect the more overt political efforts to use a writer like Faulkner that, earlier, we have seen occurred in the 1950s.

vulnerable to the unbinding effects of the death drive. . . . The normative male ego is necessarily fortified against any knowledge of the void upon which it rests, and—as its insistence upon an unimpaired bodily ‘envelope’ would suggest—fiercely protective of its coherence” (61). Unlike the repressions of desire that result in the ego’s strengthening, “war neurosis [and trauma] . . . turns upon the dissolution of the ego or *moi*—upon the death of that through which the subject imputes identity to itself” (60-61). The historical trauma or lack to which the male subject is exposed in events like war is an encounter with the Freudian death drive, an impulse that “steps over the narrow boundary separating exemplary male subjectivity from masochism, or to state the case slightly differently, the masculine norm from its perversion” (102).¹⁷

The idea of the intense or “voluptuous” involvement in the destructive moment that Silverman describes (91), the “ecstasy” provided by an account of death or dissolution—all are apt descriptions of Crane’s poem of Maquokeeta and the dance. Particularly where Crane’s speaker finds the sacrificial burning of Maquokeeta the occasion for an unambiguously erotic identification, we see his effort in the poem to forge a connection to history by way of (shared) suffering and a resulting embrace of the self’s dissolution, an attack on the “unimpaired bodily envelope.” The seminal imagery of “Siphon[ing] the . . . heart’s hot root” or of tongues of flame that “busy the blue air” (63); the “long moan of a dance . . . in the sky” (63); finally the poem’s thinly veiled image of St. Sebastian (“I could not pick the arrows from my side” [64])—all of these moments connote both Crane’s effort at an ecstatic union with the Native American brave, as well as his clear embrace while doing so of pain. Crane’s poem’s “voluptuous ecstasy” may then be seen as one function of his treatment of history. Silverman’s theory of male subjectivity helps see the way that events of history can dislodge the grip of “normalizing” psychic processes—defensive mechanisms that are defined by their opposition to the same unbinding, destabilizing threat of the death drive that are manifest in “The Dance.”

Crane’s language of ecstatic suffering inscribes that threat, giving full and vivid expression to it from the inside of the poem. Stanza 14, which depicts the brave being engulfed by the fire’s flames, is shot through with images of the body; it also offers a blending of erotic and violent imagery that expresses the particular quality of the poem’s “ecstasy.”

And every tendon scurries toward the twangs
Of lightning deltaed down your saber hair.
Now snaps the flint in every tooth; red fangs
And splay tongues thinly busy the blue air... (63)

¹⁷Silverman further clarifies her discussion of the death drive in a manner that helps anticipate my reading of the very different exercise of violence in Crane and Faulkner, one that, we will see, reveals Faulkner’s strenuous efforts to exert a sense of self while confronting historical trauma. “The death drive can perhaps best be defined as the compulsion to repeat experiences of an overwhelming and incapacitating sort—experiences which render the subject hyperbolically passive. Mastery, on the other hand, results when those same experiences are *actively* repeated—when they are linguistically rather than affectively reprised” (58-59).

The flint that “snaps . . . in every tooth” brings the pain of the fire extremely close, inside a bodily orifice, as does the vivisection description “every tendon scurries toward the twangs.” Yet despite the pain this language connotes (or more properly, because of it), the passage also mixes the fire’s destructive power with a patently erotic image—its “splay tongues” that titillatingly “lick” or bite (with “red fangs”) Maquokeeta’s exposed body. And this sexual energy builds. As the sacrificial rite plays out before him, the speaker hears “black drums thrusting on,” then declares that “[he], too, was liege / To rainbows currying each pulsant bone” (64). “Thrusting” music accompanying “pulsant bone”—Crane’s language here nearly overwhelms the poem with its voluptuousness and sexual rhetoric. The climax of “The Dance,” erotically and narratively is stanza 18. It offers a point where the poem performs a *jouissance* of deathly and erotic conflating.

I heard the hush of lava wrestling your arms,
And stag teeth foam about the raven throat;
Flame cataracts of heaven in seething swarms
Fed down your anklets to the sunset’s moat. (64)

Rising “lava”; “foam”; “seething swarms”—this liquid imagery fairly drenches Crane’s Maquokeeta in what Crane himself referred to as his “ruinous lusts.”¹⁸ Viewed in the light of Silverman’s assessment of a stylistic or formal *excess* in representations of violence, Crane’s strategy in “The Dance” operates similarly to those moments that “voluptuously involve us in the destructive moment” (91). What Silverman’s account of textual violence allows is a way to read a historically animated gesture toward the death drive in Crane’s poem.¹⁹

My effort here is not to suggest that the death instinct as Crane expresses it in “The Dance” is linked to a typical account of male subjectivity in “perversion” (as Freud considered it) or to offer a straightforward equating of homosexual identity with masochism. Rather, what Silverman’s analysis of war trauma suggests is a way to see Crane’s own “voluptuous,” violent ecstasy as a function of his treatment of history. While it is true that Crane’s rendering of

¹⁸The context of Crane’s statement is apt. He made it in a letter in which he complained of the “sudden turns and antics” of those like Tate and Winters whom he ironically called his “friends” in their disapprobation of his work (and lifestyle). Referring to the more ingenious encounters he’d had cruising sailors on the docks of New York, Crane wrote “Let my lusts be my ruin, then, since all else is a fake and mockery” (*Letters*, 264).

¹⁹Silverman’s analysis of historical trauma addresses it largely through its representation. In particular, she grounds her analysis in discussions of several American movies made in the immediate aftermath of World War II, films that interest Silverman because of the ways they manifest the lingering, social effects of the war’s trauma. In pointing to examples these films offer of the dislodging of male subjectivity from its typical grounding in normative procedures and self-images, Silverman quotes Barbara Deming on the expression of death-instinctual drives in certain moments of cinematic “excess.” “The camera cannot take its full of that face, where teeth bite lips, eyes suddenly roll in a swoon . . . [It] voluptuously involves us in the destructive moment, moves in too close and dwells overlong, inviting us to suffer the ecstasy of dissolution, the thrill of giving it all up” (Deming 10; qtd. in Silverman 91). Silverman uses Deming’s account of film violence to illustrate her sense of the way historical trauma points up gaps in the fullness and self-sufficiency of the male subject, manifest in its fascination with the self’s annihilation.

this scene partakes of the same nostalgic, guilt-laden tropes of “celebrating” the Native American that have motivated white writers since Cooper, I am struck by the mutuality of suffering that Crane effects for both his presumably white speaker and his Native American subject. At the end of the poem, Crane makes his final effort to bond with Maquokeeta. “We danced, O Brave, we danced beyond their farms, / In cobalt desert closures made our vows . . .” (65). The space that Crane produces with the poem, that cobalt desert circle that encloses him and his historical subject in an imaginary shared realm, is tinged not only with the color blue but with traces of injury and pain. Being entered or ravaged this way, or allowing his speaker, through the imagery of the poem, to be violated, Crane accomplishes more than a romantic re-colonizing of an Other for the purposes of modernist aestheticizing or myth-production. Identifying here with the female subject (Pocahontas), but also displacing her—and by association, John Smith—as Maquokeeta’s sexual partner (Gardner 26), Crane shows the extent of his desire to supplant a white, male, heterosexual presence in American history with that of a marginalized subject. In so doing he productively conflates the positions of Native American, homosexual, and woman.²⁰

This section of *The Bridge* embodies aspects of Crane’s style that I have been at pains to suggest reveal a central aspect of his poetics as well as his historical imagination. Such moments in Crane’s writing, however, were met very differently by those critics who knew him and from whom we might have expected greater sympathy. Two brief examples may illustrate my larger argument about the reasons for Crane’s marginal status within modernism. Evoking the modernist, New Critical penchant for impersonality, Tate refers to the way such passages in Crane “are obscure” and to “[the poem’s] lapses into sentimentality” (“Hart Crane” 287). For Tate, “poetic sentimentality is emotion undisciplined by the structure of events or ideas of which it is ostensibly a part” (287). Winters went even further in condemning Crane for what he saw as his excessive emotionality. “The quality which we call restraint; and which is here lacking [in *The Bridge*] . . . is only to give order to his emotion. In Mr. Crane we see an attempt to emotionalize a theme to the point where both he and the reader forget to question its justification. It is, whatever fragmentary success may result from it, a form of hysteria” (29). Such “hysterical” writing in “The

²⁰The appeal of Native American culture and the figure of the Indian for Crane was their marginal position in history. This marginal status was one Crane felt in his sexual life and in his experience with his personal family and the “national” family of 1920s America (and which included Crane’s troubled friendships with his literary “family” or friends). Robert Martin refers to this aligning, suggesting that it allowed Crane an elaborate layering of identifications with a “virile” male subject (the Indian brave), a displaced woman (Pocahontas, as well as the burlesque figures of “Three Songs”), and himself as a homosexual (“displaced, unrecognized, alienated” [210]) from his family or a sense of national community (209-14). Doing so gives Crane an opportunity to both avoid an identification with an “effeminate” definition of gayness, which Martin claims Crane disparaged (211), and an equally uncomfortable identification with white heterosexual (and political) aggression. “As the original Americans driven out of their lands, the Native Indians can serve for Crane as an example of dispossession and alienation (their prayers are ‘forgotten’) and at the same time as a figure of a national and sexual unity not yet ‘broken.’ . . . Dancing with Maquokeeta reclaims history, seeking to undo the sundering of the national Oedipal drama, and creating a space for the love between men that *The Bridge* celebrates” (213-14).

Dance” is what I see connects it to a theoretical model like Silverman’s war trauma. And it is precisely what Silverman emphasizes as the capacity for war trauma to destructure, first, the male self, and then “events or ideas” that find their representation in historiography and their maintenance through normative male identity that Crane’s poem manifests. In this light we may see that beyond Crane’s lack of rootedness to the soil or his modernity, it was his poetry’s threat to the binding effects of masculinity, “tradition,” and conventional notions of history that Tate and other New Critics objected to so strongly. To admit of or, more importantly, experience firsthand the genuine historical pain *The Bridge* expresses proved for such critics far too discomfiting.

ABSALOM, ABSALOM!, HISTORY, AND SADISM

While it is perhaps clear how the incorporation of a sexualized suffering is central to Crane’s imagining of history, it may be less evident that Faulkner’s approach to *Absalom* makes similar use of a textual form of violence. A glance at Faulkner’s historical narrative, however, especially his manner of articulating it, can suggest both its own latent violence and the way such violence is erotic, if in a very different manner than is Crane’s. Faulkner’s imagery of violence appears as a coefficient of his effort to subject characters (and by extension, readers) to an increased awareness of historical “hurt.” Unlike Crane’s masochistic suffering, however, Faulkner’s textual effects are more aggressive and direct—sadistic as opposed to masochistic in their effects.²¹ In addition to the ideological aspects of Faulkner’s New Critical embrace described above, such “conventional” (heterosexual) violence, I’ll suggest, further aided Faulkner’s entry to the canon.

The opening sentence of *Absalom, Absalom!* prefigures much of what dominates the novel: a sustained act of violence and enclosing. Encrypted in Rosa Coldfield’s “dim hot airless room,” Quentin endures the afternoonlong experience of being subjected to Rosa’s implacable, forty-three-year-old sexual and psychological rage. As he sits in the hot dark, Quentin acts as a forced audience to Rosa’s telling for, we’re told, roughly five hours, enduring an oppressive heat, a lack of oxygen, Rosa’s incessant talking and, not unimportantly, the “lashes” of Faulkner’s writing. “[A]s the sun shone fuller and fuller” on the side of the house where Quentin sits with Rosa, commensurately becoming hotter and hotter, the atmosphere of the room is also “latticed with yellow slashes full of dust motes,” slashes that cut imagistically across Quentin’s face and body (5). As though to ensure that readers’ impression of the scene is one of violence or violation, the phrasing at the end of the sentence suggests not only death, but death—or corpses—dismembered. The “flecks of the dead old paint itself” may in fact be chips or flecks of paint—but the phrase may also imply that “flecks of the dead”

²¹Of course these two categories are more closely linked than such a comparison would suggest. Silverman refers to this fact when she discusses Freud’s conflating of the correlatives for sadism and masochism: mastery and the death drive. “Although mastery and the death drive could not be more antipathetic to each other, they nonetheless coexist in a strangely intimate manner. . . . Mastery, in other words, exists in a parasitic or anacletic relation to the death drive” (59). It is precisely this “intimacy” of mastery or sadism with masochism or the death drive that colors Faulkner’s treatment of his characters and, as we will see, that produces anxiety in him.

are what are being “blown inward from the scaling blinds as wind might have blown them” (5). As indeed they are, as it is the story of a dead Thomas Sutpen, his children, and would-be heirs that Rosa’s story, like the stifling wind, initiates at this point or “blows in” to the constrained atmosphere of the novel.

This violence pervades the novel’s opening. Miss Rosa, seated opposite Quentin, becomes transfigured through Faulkner’s language, her body dehumanized through the image of her “legs [that] hung straight and rigid as if she had iron shinbones and ankles” (5). (The very specificity of this imagery, in part, lends it its violent aspect.) Proceeding from Rosa’s extremities, Faulkner returns to Quentin and next atomizes, then shuts down his more delicate bodily functions—the sensorium, as “at last listening would renege and hearing-sense self-confound” (5). Like the overwrought manner of Rosa’s telling, Faulkner’s prose performs its own overwrought activity of assailing his main characters. Following Rosa’s haranguing, Sutpen “abrupt[s]” (6) into Quentin’s imagination, as “the long-dead object of her impotent yet indomitable frustration would appear, as though by outraged recapitulation evoked, quiet inattentive and harmless, out of the biding and dreamy and victorious dust” (5).

Faulkner’s phrasing here, particularly key moments such as “impotent yet indomitable frustration,” “outraged recapitulation evoked,” “harmless” (with its suggested opposite), or “biding . . . and victorious dust”—these locutions create an impression of violence, of anger suppressed as well as visited, and a forcible rendering of Rosa’s tale. As the opening continues, the violence and deathliness of Faulkner’s imagery increases, with a commensurate rise in tension and strain. “[Rosa’s] voice would not cease,” the narrator tells us; “it would just vanish” (5). Some of Faulkner’s most disturbing imagery enters into the silence that ensues.

There would be the dim coffin-smelling gloom sweet and oversweet with the twice-bloomed wistaria against the outer wall by the savage quiet September sun impacted distilled and hyperdistilled, into which came now and then the loud cloudy flutter of the sparrows like a flat limber stick whipped by an idle boy, and the rank smell of female old flesh long embattled in virginity while the wan haggard face watched him above the faint triangle of lace at wrists and throat from the too tall chair in which she resembled a crucified child. . . . (5-6)

In addition to “crucifying” Rosa, Faulkner fairly decapitates her as well, detaching her face from her neck by the “faint triangle of lace at wrists and throat” and isolating Rosa’s scrutinizing head and expression (5). Imaged thus as a dismembered, “crucified child,” Rosa fixes Quentin in her “haggard” gaze, a scene equally disquieting for readers as for him. The entire atmosphere of the scene and room is pervaded by the smell of death or coffins; moreover, the felt pressure of this space is heightened by the force of the “savage quiet September sun,” as Faulkner’s description of its compounded, gathered force (“impacted distilled and hyperdistilled”) makes clear. These pressures from the sun, which repeat those of the first sentence’s “yellow slashes,” animate this passage’s other central image. The sound of the sparrows, belied by the pleasing assonance

of their “loud cloudy flutter,” is connected metonymically to the image of the “limber stick whipped by an idle boy”—as is, in turn, the reference to the “rank smell of female old flesh.” What is suggested by Faulkner’s dizzying syntax is then another image of whipping or flaying: that of Rosa by the boy with the stick. As though to ensure a shrouding of Rosa in imagery of violence, Faulkner describes her “flesh embattled” against itself “in virginity.” As the voice then ceases, we find an image of trickling that sounds, due to the accumulated effects of the opening, like nothing less than bleeding: “and the voice not ceasing but vanishing into and then out of the long intervals like a stream, a trickle running from patch to patch of dried sand” (6).

The close of the paragraph moves towards what at this point may seem its inevitable conclusion: the emergence of Sutpen, the most supreme agent of violence in the novel, and to Faulkner’s unambiguous announcing of the violence of his story. Seeing Sutpen surrounded by his “wild blacks and the captive architect . . . in the long unamaze Quentin seemed to watch them overrun suddenly the hundred square miles of tranquil and astonished earth and drag houses and formal gardens violently out of the soundless Nothing” (6). The novel’s “soundless Nothing,” presented as the forced silence in Rosa’s parlor of her “vanishing” voice, as well as Jefferson’s earlier “tranquil and astonished earth” (6), is also Quentin’s own fascinated, awestricken imagination. Importantly as well, I suggest, it evokes the reader’s heretofore unassaulted mind.

All of this textual and corporal violence occurs, as noted, in the novel’s opening paragraphs. What does it signal about the narrative that follows? Significantly, what might it suggest about Faulkner’s interest in the novel with exposing its putative protagonist and, through him, the reader, to a heightened historical consciousness? Preparatory to hearing the Sutpen narrative, readers and Quentin are exposed to a sustained act of linguistic and imagistic violence. To be properly exposed to a (violent) story of the South, it appears, requires an initiating act of violence and, commensurately, a form of suffering. Historical consciousness as manifested in Quentin Compson and agitated in the reader depends, for Faulkner, on a process of excitation, an opening up to the past whose most pronounced effects are felt, as they are for writers like Crane, on the body. There is, however, an important difference between Quentin’s experience of this violence and the reader’s. Beyond the difference of position as reader and character is the difference in position as object or subject of pain. That is, Quentin and Rosa experience the pain of Faulkner’s writing as the object of its descriptive violences. Readers, from their detached positions, watch that pain inflicted.²²

Before taking up the spectacle of historical suffering in *Absalom* and its importance to his critical reception, I mean to address what may motivate Faulkner’s somewhat elaborate demonstration of violence in this novel. For beyond its opening, *Absalom* performs and describes several brutal acts of vio-

²²We might consider here the model for this kind of social positioning performed by novels that D.A. Miller describes in *The Novel and the Police*, the sense of security we derive upon watching violence performed on others. As Miller puts it, “It is not just that, strictly private subjects, we read about violated,

lence, particularly as they are associated with Quentin. The violent rending of the novel's close is well familiar, and it is not necessary to revisit the scene of Quentin lying in bed, "breathing hard" (307) and staring at the dark in his room as he tries to shake off the memory of his visit to Sutpen's Hundred. The psychological struggle Quentin undergoes here is obvious, a strain that becomes all the more acute on the novel's final page in his anguished response to Shreve's query "Why do you hate the South?" (311). Here I'd like to suggest a reading of this scene of suffering, of Quentin's veritable "splitting open" by Faulkner's narrative operations and its connections to the novel's similarly punishing opening.

The start of *Absalom, Absalom!* restores a character in Quentin who left the world and the narrative space of *The Sound and the Fury* with a decidedly limited knowledge. At the close of his section of the earlier novel, Quentin is on his way from his Harvard dorm room, preparing an act of suicide over his grief at his sister's, family's, and arguably the South's downfall. Returning to (narrative) life in 1936, at the start of *Absalom* Quentin is positioned by Faulkner so as to learn something more about the history of his family and his region. Albeit stubbornly, over the course of the novel and Rosa's narrating, Quentin will discover a great deal about a paradigmatic Southerner, the near-mythic former slaveholder and redoubtable Confederate colonel, Thomas Sutpen. Quentin's death by suicide at the end of *The Sound and the Fury*, as well as what appears as his resistance at the start of *Absalom* to hearing Sutpen's story told, points up a central fact about his disposition toward Southern history. Whether that past is manifested in his immediate family or in the lives of families like the Coldfields and the Sutpens that connect with his, Quentin prefers a striking and, in the case of the earlier novel, fatal quietude. Seeking an escape from what he terms the unacceptable reality of Caddy's "fall," Quentin refuses to question the reasons leading to his concern over her virginity and the ideal of feminine purity in the South.

The importance of the opening section of *Absalom* is its position, structurally and thematically, as a hinge in Faulkner's use of Quentin as a subject of Southern history. In the second half of the novel, when he and Shreve take up the act of narrating the Sutpen story, Quentin becomes far more active in his capacity to assess the South's history and its bearing on Sutpen's development. Revising versions of that story as told to him by his father and Rosa, Quentin looks more squarely at the difficulties of the South's past than he ever has before. Accompanying that confrontation, though, is a sustained pattern of violent imagery and detail that I suggest contributes to Faulkner's staging of an awakened consciousness.

Quentin's longest section of narrating inscribes the violence of the South's history more than that of any of Faulkner's other character-narrators. From the beginning of his narration of the novel, a long passage that dominates Chapter VII and that traces Sutpen's earliest roots in American history and identity, the

objectified subjects but that, in the very act of reading about them, we contribute largely to constituting them as such. We enjoy our privacy in the act of watching privacy being violated, in the act of watching that is already itself a violation of privacy. Our most intense identification with characters never blinds us to our ontological privilege over them: they will never be reading about us" (162).

distress that narrative encompasses is apparent. For example, in the section describing Sutpen's reaction, as a young boy, to being turned away at the plantation door, Quentin refers to Supten's realization that "*I not only wasn't doing any good to him by telling [the message he was sent to deliver] or any harm . . . by not telling it, there aint any good or harm either in the living world that I can do to him*" (196-97). This moment for Sutpen was, as Quentin puts it, "like an explosion—a bright glare that vanished and left nothing, no ashes nor refuse: just a limitless flat plain" (197). Significantly, the decimating "explosion" in Sutpen's mind and resulting leveling of consciousness is Quentin's metaphor. Narrating Sutpen's coming to awareness, Quentin relies on imagery that, like Faulkner's own in opening the novel, is notably shattering. The violence of the opening, directed largely at Quentin and Rosa, takes hold of Quentin's own narrative voice once Quentin takes over the act of narrating.

Quentin's imagery of violence here in describing Sutpen is significant, for it extends a pattern from his earlier narrating that reveals the imperative I am striving to describe: that of the body and of suffering in the achievement of historical consciousness. Sutpen's discovery of his "innocence," his lack of awareness of class difference and the hierarchy it imposed on Southern plantation life, may well constitute his "fall" into history. Prior to that awareness he had no conception of racial or class difference; he also, Faulkner makes clear, had no conception of the violence those differences prompt. Hearing the story as a young boy from his father about beating one of Pettibone's slaves, Sutpen naïvely asks his father why he and the other men "whupped" him, to which his father gives the equivocal answer, "Hell fire, that goddamn son of a bitch Pettibone's nigger" (191). In his next remark about this period of Sutpen's life, Quentin reveals the glaring lack of genuine understanding Sutpen's "innocence" produces: "[H]e must have meant the question the same way his father meant the answer: no actual nigger, living creature, living flesh to feel pain and writhe and cry out" (192). In his account of Supten's "innocence," Quentin is right. Without an awareness of social difference and of the violence of the economic, historical realities subtending his family's positions (like those of Pettibone's slaves, as well as Pettibone's coercively maintained power), there in effect for Sutpen was "no actual nigger," no "living flesh to feel pain and writhe." The discovery of innocence implies simultaneously Sutpen's loss of that innocence, a (startling, painfully) new awareness of the social reality he lives in. Through that loss of innocence and the recognition of class struggle, however, Sutpen is able to perceive real, fleshly pain—both others' as well as his own.

This is the recognition he gains in his Haitian sojourn. And it is this discovery of Sutpen's that, in narrating it, Quentin also accomplishes himself. Quentin's discovery of historical pain is belated, occurring fully, as we know, only in the novel's closing pages. Yet it is presaged by his account of Sutpen's "explosion" and his several encounters with injury and violence. Quentin's portion of the Sutpen story includes his trip to Haiti and his mystified account of suppressing a slave uprising, the turning point of which is Sutpen's ability to

“[bear] more than they [the Haitian slaves] believed any bones and flesh could or should (should, yes: that would be the terrible thing: to find flesh to stand more than flesh should be asked to stand)” (210). Enduring pain as he does, Sutpen becomes marked with physical and “historical” knowledge—that is, the knowledge of history and of racial and class conflict about which he had once been so radically innocent. Indeed, he shows Quentin’s grandfather the scars from the Haitian conflict—signs to Sutpen, as to Quentin, of his closeness to and experience of historical violence.²³ The narration of Sutpen’s Haitian experience includes the marring of other bodies besides Sutpen’s, such as those of the insurrecting blacks whom Sutpen successfully “subdued” (210) for their uprising. More graphically (more painfully) as well is the body Sutpen finds mutilated on the sugar plantation as a message from the Haitians in the days leading up to the rebellion. “[O]n the third day [he] found the . . . half breed, or what used to be the half breed, and . . . so began to comprehend that the situation might become serious” (209). Beyond these references to scars, torture, and mutilated corpses, Quentin’s narration includes the dramatic climax to Sutpen’s life and his relentless pursuit of an heir: his murder by Wash Jones, an event that includes the blows of Sutpen’s whip on Jones’s face as well as Jones hacking Sutpen down with a scythe. In the aftermath to Sutpen’s death, we find perhaps the most brutal scene in the novel—Jones’s murder of his granddaughter Milly and her daughter fathered by Sutpen. Approached by Major de Spain and several men from town, Jones uses “the butcher knife that he kept hidden and razor-sharp” (240) to commit the culminating act of violence in Quentin’s section, an act rendered uncomfortably vivid through Quentin’s reference to the sound of “the knife on both the neckbones” (241) and which ends, on the following page, with what amounts to Jones’s suicide.

As must by now be clear, this string of references suggests the violence that suffuses, even dominates Quentin’s principal section of narrating *Absalom*. My purpose in pointing them out is not simply to highlight the rather sensational aspect of this section of Faulkner’s novel. Rather, what I mean to indicate in Faulkner’s imagery and narrative mechanics is the *necessity* of pain to Quentin’s section. As a result of his act of narrating, Quentin will arrive at a fuller understanding of both the South’s history and of his own prejudices and conflicts arising from his Southern upbringing. Part of what occasions that understanding is the insistent violence that pervades his own section of “telling.” Shreve’s act of narrating, as well as Mr. Compson’s and Rosa’s, obviously includes crucial details and information. But none of their sections is as rife with violence as is Quentin’s. In this way the novel suggests that Quentin’s consciousness needs not only to be exposed to the violence of Sutpen’s and the South’s history. In order to allow that violence to affect consciousness or un-

²³Godden demonstrates the novel’s extensive if also anachronistic use of Haiti’s history and its meaning to America’s Southern planter class. He suggests that in its narrative and historical displacement of these events, as well as their suppression into the intricacies of Faulkner’s plot and style, *Absalom* reveals its most painful awareness and simultaneous denial of historical consciousness. It is in this respect that, for Godden, the Sutpen narrative reveals Jameson’s idea that “history is what hurts.” See *Fictions of Labor* 49 and chapter two, *passim*.

derstanding meaningfully, it has to be experienced as closely as it can—which for Quentin, a Southerner removed from the events of his region’s history, means being countenanced and internalized, “heard” as it had been for Quentin before he leaves Jefferson, but also externalized, spoken about, or narrated.

SEXUALITY AND READERLY DISTANCE

Earlier I indicated the important difference between Quentin’s experience of this violence and that of readers, one that is instructive for joining my reading of *Absalom* to questions about modernism, masochism, and the canon. In so doing, I also suggested the important differences between Faulkner’s and Crane’s incorporating of violence in their works. Crane’s queer identity marked his poetry at several points and in ways that we have seen contributed to his marginalizing by the New Critics. Despite the various rejections Crane experienced however, both personal and critical, Crane had sought throughout *The Bridge* to encourage a strong readerly identification with his speaker’s questing. Unlike the experience of reading Crane’s poem, reading Faulkner’s novel does not require a similar identification. Rather, *Absalom* encourages a striking readerly distance.

This difference goes to the heart of my reading. For the question of identification points up what I see as one of the key differences between Faulkner’s and Crane’s historical thought. There is little identification with the characters in Faulkner’s novel, masochistic or otherwise, of the sort we find between Crane’s speaker and Maquokeeta, and which must, structurally, extend to Crane’s readers. My reasons for suggesting this scenario are both generic and sexual. It may seem counterintuitive to say that a novelist, as opposed to a poet, discourages readerly identification. But Faulkner’s novelistic strategies regularly fashion a critical space between characters and readers, particularly as we view the process in which a character like Quentin arrives at a painful recognition of history. If my account of Crane’s poetic openness to readers differs from notions of the lyric as being the most private of literary forms, this is also because Crane so clearly invites readers to accompany him on his journey across America, both spatially and historically, and because of the erotic play on which the language of his poem depends. It is worth recalling in this context the opening of “The River”: “Stick your patent name on a signboard / brother—all over—going west—young man” (57), or the overtures to Columbus in “Ave Maria” and even more urgently to Whitman in “Cape Hatteras” (“My hand / in yours, / Walt Whitman— / so—” [84]). Identification and connection clearly inform Crane’s historical vision in *The Bridge*, and on several levels—that of readers with the poem’s questing seeker but, above all, that of the speaker with historical subjects like the Native American. That Crane effects that identification through a figurative marriage, and from the perspective of a desiring, homoerotic speaker, renders his version of historical suffering all the more powerful. And yet, to the more traditionally-minded and -gendered sensibilities of the New Critics that quality of historical awareness was all the more alien. Other readers of Crane recognize the com-

plicated ways his encounter with the American past demonstrates a willingness to experience the painful aspects of history and to compel a similar historical awareness on the part of his readers. My point, as I move toward my argument's close, is that this difference helps account for the very different receptions of such historically-minded modernists as Crane and Faulkner.

A final way to describe that difference of sexuality and identification is by way of the more veiled erotics of Faulkner's prose. For while the violent nature of *Absalom's* language or narrative may be clear enough, what is perhaps less so is the manner in which such violence is sexualized. One means to address that question is by way of its suggestions of the form of sexuality linked to violence and aggression: sadism. I raise the possibility of a sadistic sexuality to Faulkner's writing in this context not only because doing so offers the opposite category of what I describe as Crane's masochism. Rather, I do so because of the ways sadism allows us to recognize an aspect of Faulkner's sexuality that may also have interested Faulkner's critics.

In examining the sexuality of *Absalom's* treatment of characters like Quentin and Rosa Coldfield, we need to look away from the opening and Quentin's narration and at the language in Rosa's section itself. Faulkner approaches Rosa the way he does, I suggest, because of what she represents to Faulkner sexually. Not as a character who presents an erotic object of desire, but as a subject who speaks in ways that Faulkner himself "speaks" throughout much of this novel (as well as in others) and who, therefore, represents aspects of a sexualized self by which Faulkner was troubled. This quality is hinted at by Quentin in his reaction to the somewhat excessive quality of the Sutpen narration. "Yes, to too much, too long," he reflects upon hearing Shreve take up the story. "I didn't need to listen then but I had to hear it and now I am going to have to hear it all over again because he sounds just like Father" (174). In linking Shreve to his father, Quentin makes explicit an aspect of *Absalom's* prose style that is in fact marked throughout the novel and shared by all of its narrator-characters. Of significance is the way in which this style or, more properly put, stylization, is not only shared but heightened by the novel's sustained voice of narration in its center: Rosa Coldfield.

Critics have often described Rosa's voice as somehow stylistically "excessive." Arnold Weinstein called Rosa's section "the most turgid, yet rhapsodic prose Faulkner ever wrote" (140); Patrick O'Donnell refers to various accounts of Rosa's voice as "hysterical" or "neurotic" (32)²⁴. If Rosa's voice is notable for its denseness, shrillness, or rhapsody, it is nonetheless the case that it differs from that of the other characters only in degree, not in kind. Shreve may sound to Quentin like his father. He also, though, may well be said to sound like Rosa—as does Quentin himself, Mr. Compson, and even the novel's authorial narrator. Appearing late in the novel as it does, Quentin's remark about Shreve's voice becomes a kind of internal note, the voice of the novel itself confirming the shared quality of *Absalom* that is often remarked: the Faulknerian "mastervoice."

²⁴O'Donnell cites Kartiganer, who terms Rosa's voice "near-hysterical" (76) and Poirier, who describes Rosa's "neurotic richness" (14).

It may be admitted as well, however, that Rosa's voice, while indeed similar to those of the other narrators and like them in some measure, does possess extreme qualities. If the voice of *Absalom* is stylized or vivid, Rosa's voice is especially so. It is this quality to her voice that marks Rosa sexually.²⁵ It is also, then, this sexualized aspect of his writing, epitomized in Rosa but pervasive in *Absalom*, that Faulkner needs to be on guard against, to submit to a kind of interrogation that finds its figurative expression in a form of linguistic or textual sadism. This sadism appears in Faulkner's treatment of both Rosa and Quentin, and I along with other critics read it as a form of defensiveness on Faulkner's part.²⁶ With Rosa Faulkner may foreground a sexualized, extreme style. But he also fashions ways of distancing or subverting that voice, strategies that allow Faulkner and his critics a measure of comfort that Crane's writing denies.

The fulsome quality of Rosa's section, so close to Faulkner's elsewhere in the novel, offers a paradigmatic version of his own modernist style. But in her abjection, Rosa represents what Faulkner as a male artist cannot abide. As Patrick O'Donnell puts it, "In the representation of the body, and in the figurations of Rosa's 'speech,' Faulkner speaks to the foundations of identity and of his own art in that which is the object of bodily desire and which must be excluded—non-identity, the pre-linguistic, the body before language and the union of bodies—in order for art and identity to exist" (32). Rosa connotes a state of being that defines itself through a particularly evocative, "bodily" speech that Faulkner sees as feminine, but one by which he is discomfited. A perhaps different way to put this would be to say that Rosa represents a case of verbal ecstasy of the type that Faulkner rejects, but which Crane, in his imagining of the dance between his speaker and the Indian brave Maquokeeta, so willingly embraces.

It is for this reason that I suggest Faulkner exerts such a violent pressure on his characters and his writing, one that begins, as we have seen, with Rosa at the novel's opening. Representing as she does an example of a gendered voice, a verbal ecstasy or linguistic excess, Rosa confronts Faulkner with a subjectivity he could not fully accept as his own—despite the ways and the degrees to

²⁵I do not invoke sexuality to describe Rosa's language here in the derisive sense that other critics might have—and that certainly Tate and Winters did with Crane, seeing such stylization, like Crane's sexuality, as a pathology. For Tate and Winters *The Bridge* was marked by an effeminacy that is evident in the poem's style and that betrayed what they saw as Crane's personal as well as aesthetic failures. As Tate put it, "The 'causes' of homosexuality are no doubt as various as the causes of other neuroses. But the effect on the lives of its victims seems to be uniform . . . [Crane] had an abnormally acute response to the physical world, an exacerbation of the nerve-ends, along with an incapacity to live within the limitations of the human condition . . . Out of the desperate conditions of his life—which included almost unimaginable horrors of depravity and perversity of will—he produced . . . his poetry" ("Crane: The Poet as Hero," 296; 297; 298). In a far more laudatory manner, Feminist scholars have attributed similar quality of sensibility and of speech to Rosa. See for instance Minrose Gwin and her effort in *The Feminine and Faulkner* to describe Rosa's speaking as a version of Cixousian *écriture féminine*.

²⁶In his essay "Sub Rosa: Voice, Body, and History in *Absalom, Absalom!*" Patrick O'Donnell describes Rosa as an example of the Kristevan *abject*, a subject as well as a quality of speech that is especially disconcerting to the male writer. Referring to the failure of Sutpen's design due to its dependence on an "arbitrary system of differences" (31), a code of masculine prerogative that lodges its authority in oppositions between whiteness and blackness, masculinity and femininity, and so on, O'Donnell sees Rosa's abjection function as an affront to the "pure" identity Sutpen seeks (32-33). By extension, and in ways Faulkner himself might have recognized, Rosa's language functions as an affront to Faulkner and his writerly "design."

which she in fact suggests a uniquely Faulknerian style. Faulkner seems to have intuited what it was that Rosa represented to his project with *Absalom* and with his writing generally. Like Quentin, Rosa comes in for such highly charged treatment, one that I suggest has a sexualized quality of sadism, because she represents a threat to Faulkner that such violence can (seem to) neutralize.

Before returning to a consideration of this violence for Faulkner's critics, a final question remains about Faulkner's treatment of Quentin, his repeated exposing of him to the most violent events of the novel and whether such violence might also relate to sadism or sexuality. Of relevance to this question is the fact that, like Crane in "The Dance" section of *The Bridge*, Faulkner describes a homosexual "marriage" in *Absalom*. Quentin and Shreve's "marriage of speaking and hearing" (261) in chapter 8 is not figured through a shared ecstatic suffering. Rather, Faulkner's language in that section of the novel renders the boys' connecting as a triumph of imaginative, verbal narrative. Nevertheless, the roommates' sustained conversation in their common sitting-room at Harvard has distinct homoerotic overtones. Shreve is described as "naked to the waist," a fact that Quentin notes (180). Aware of Shreve physically, Quentin contributes his part of that narration and "marriage" in a way that seems fueled by a latent eroticism. Such erotic charge in the boys' talking is evident earlier in the chapter when Faulkner's narrator describes their talking: "There was something curious in the way they looked at one another . . . not at all as two young men might look at each other but almost as a youth and a very young girl might out of virginity itself . . ." (247). It is for this reason, this "curious" way of Quentin's looking, that Faulkner chooses to distance himself and his readers from him. Quentin narrates the violence of the Sutpen narrative and may thus be said to internalize it. Yet his incessant exposure to violence, as we have seen, also detaches us from him. Preventing readers from identifying with his experience due to the overwhelming violence that Quentin both witnesses and endures, Faulkner removes himself from a character whose sexuality troubled him.²⁷

More pointed and perhaps more obviously, Quentin demonstrates a personality and a mind-set that more than willingly accepts the masochistic allure of the death drive. It may not require pointing out that Quentin's neurosis and eventual suicide demonstrate precisely a "damaged" or deviant male psyche. Although not suffering from war trauma, Quentin nevertheless and throughout his section of *The Sound and the Fury* shows signs of psychic "unbinding," of a dissolution of ego that exposes a clear lack at the center of (Southern) white male identity. While clearly beyond the scope of this discussion, a similar observation could be made about the lack at the center of male identity that defines all of the Compson men in this novel, including Mr. Compson, but that is manifest most troublingly in Quentin's suicide or in Jason's need to

²⁷In a recent article, Norman W. Jones refers explicitly to this sexuality, describing the "orgasmic eroticism of Shreve's and Quentin's commingled storytelling" (343). Such eroticism for Jones is of a piece with the novel's larger treatment of homosexual desire, one that includes the possibility of interracial gay romance. Jones argues that "Faulkner's treatment of homoeroticism [in *Absalom*] shapes his approach to history" (341) in part through the evasions and lacunae that conflate historical knowledge and homoeroticism in the book.

domineer women like Caddy and Miss Quentin. In addition to the homoeroticism that informs Quentin's relationship with Shreve in *Absalom*, his markedly stricken psyche in both this novel and *The Sound and the Fury* reveals the very lack in male subjectivity Silverman describes. In his reactions to his family and the Sutpen narrative in these novels, Quentin may well be said to manifest the "woundings" of history that Silverman claims masochism reveals.

Authorial workings here become significant. Clearly, that is, Faulkner produces these effects in Quentin. If he evinces a masochistic dissolution or acceptance of the death drive, it is because Faulkner imagines him to do so. Yet this deceptively simple observation speaks to the larger point I seek to make about Faulkner's and Crane's writing and the critical responses to it. Quentin manifests qualities that Faulkner, as a Southern white male, recognized well. It is these same qualities, though (of masochism, deviance, or lack) that Faulkner, however vaguely, knew he also possessed and thus from which he needed to distance himself in his violent treatment of Quentin. By contrast, these are the very same qualities of his speaker in several poems, but especially in *The Bridge*, that Crane embraced so willingly and that function so productively in the poem.

Faulkner's (heterosexual) sadism, in turn, is at least part of what early critics of Faulkner picked up on in treating him as they did. Contrary to the "hysterical" strains of language in Crane and their homoerotic overlay, a quality that, as we have seen in "The Dance," both describes and invites an experience of male masochism, Faulknerian linguistic sadism allows a ready critical acceptance—because it also allows a ready readerly detachment. This effect is especially true for those critics who identified modernism as conventionally, even stereotypically "masculine," defined by restraint, irony, and an impersonal stance. Allen Tate, Malcom Cowley, Cleanth Brooks—whatever else we may say and even, at points, appreciate about their celebration of Faulkner, it must also be said that this particular group of critics was positioned (or positioned themselves) to accept uncritically and to a degree *misread* gestures in Faulkner that they themselves were making in their criticism. Chief among those readings was seeing Faulkner as nostalgically clinging to a vision of the Old South's values and cultural "purity," a purity that depended on subjecting the sexuality of characters like Rosa and Quentin to a form of violent scrutiny. For his part, and on the other hand, Crane offers moments of historical engagement that depend on a sexualized violence of a very different kind. Masochistic ecstasy of the type we find in *The Bridge* or elsewhere in Crane is indeed hard to countenance. (History is what hurts.) Sexuality expressed as a function of violence or sadism and as we find it in Faulkner has been, as his canonical history proves, far more palatable.

There is, finally, little way of proving the erotic valence of a violence found in Faulkner's linguistic strategies or representation of historical consciousness, nor perhaps what I describe as an oppositely valenced strategy in Crane. As I hope to have shown, one way of assessing that difference and its critical response is by way of the question of detachment toward such violence either writer allows. The possibility of such distancing is more pronounced in

Faulkner than in Crane, particularly if we consider the intense identification Crane's speaker experiences with his subject against the severities of Faulkner's prose and novelistic practices. In closing, I simply offer the question, then, whether gestures by New Critics like Tate and Winters of turning away from Crane and what they may have feared in him—versus their ready and highly influential acceptance of Faulkner—might suggest a similar turning away, and thus a similar fear, in us.

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