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GAY FAULKNER: UNCOVERING A HOMOSEXUAL PRESENCE IN
YOKNAPATAWPHA AND BEYOND

A dissertation presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy in the Department of English
The University of Mississippi

by

PHILLIP ANDREW GORDON

June 2013

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation is a biographical study of William Faulkner (1897-1962) as his life coincided with a particular moment in LGBT history when the words *homosexual* and *queer* were undergoing profound changes and when our contemporary understanding of gay identity was becoming a widespread and recognizable epistemology. The connections forged in this study--based on archival research from Joseph Blotner's extensive biographical notes--reveal a version of Faulkner distinctly not anxious about homosexuality and, in fact, often quite comfortable with gay men and living in gay environments (New Orleans, New York). From these connections, I reassess Faulkner's pre-marriage writings (1918-1929) for their prolific reference to homosexual themes. I culminate these early years with a new reading of Darl Bundren from *As I Lay Dying* (1930)--the first novel Faulkner completed after his marriage--for the way Darl's community constructs him as queer and the way he defines his own gay identity as a "wounded" soldier who was exposed to homosexuality during his time at the war in France. Then I turn towards the changes Faulkner's perspective underwent after his marriage, in the 1930s, as he wrote his major novels. Finally, I turn towards the final years of his career and assess Faulkner's depiction of V. K. Ratliff in the latter novels as a Cold War homosexual of the Snopes trilogy, whose presence throughout Faulkner's career crystalizes in the closing scenes in *The Mansion* (1959) as the final verdict on the great saga of Yoknapatawpha County. This study is a developmental narrative of Faulkner's queer identity throughout his life and of his mastery of gay representation through its many emanations in the first half of the twentieth century.

DEDICATION

For Mom, Dad, and Steve
and
for Meghan, Marty, and Jim

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

No scholar is an island. This dissertation would not have been possible without the generous financial, archival, academic, and moral support of more people than I could ever list here. The majority of this dissertation was written under the generous support of the Francis Bell McCool Dissertation Fellowship for Faulkner Studies, sponsored by Campbell and Leighton McCool, in honor of Campbell's mother. Other generous funding came from a research grant sponsored by the Graduate Student Council at the University of Mississippi and a semester long fellowship sponsored by the Graduate School at the University of Mississippi.

The research in this study comes primarily from four archives. Thanks to the Howard Gottlieb Archival Research Center at Boston University. Also, thanks to the Harry Ransom Center at the University of Texas-Austin, and particularly to Jennifer Shapland, a public service intern who happened to be assigned to my initial inquiry and went out of her way to help me track down and obtain materials for this project. Thanks as well to Jennifer Ford and her wonderful staff in Special Collections at the University of Mississippi for their help with documents relating to Hubert Creekmore. It is a blessing to have such excellent resources so close to home and have such an excellent team to care for them. Thanks, thanks, and thanks again to Drs. Bob Hamblin, Chris Reiger, and Lisa Speer at Southeast Missouri State University for their patience and hospitality in the Center for Faulkner Studies and their Special Collections. The backbone of this study is the material contained in the Brodsky/Faulkner Collection housed

at the library in Cape Girardeau. I cannot thank them enough for being such generous custodians. Special thanks to Lisa Speer, who always had her door open when, after hours of staring at old letters, I just needed to talk with a receptive audience about all the cool stuff I was finding.

Numerous mentors have guided me not only *through* the dissertation but *to* it in the first place as well. As a hapless undergraduate who transferred to the University of Tennessee at Martin, I stumbled into an English department that would forever change my life. Thanks to the late Dr. Carl Buchanan, whose small but poetic advice on a cold February evening would eventually turn into the central metaphor of the first two chapters of this study. To Dr. Lynn Alexander, with whom I travelled to Oxford for a marathon reading of *Absalom, Absalom!* and decided that Oxford was where I needed to be. To Dr. Daniel Pigg, whose short essay on Wilfred Owen's "Disabled" gave me the first significant inroad to making this argument at all. To Dr. Jeff Miller, for whom I first read *Absalom* and *As I Lay Dying* and in whose class I first pondered what "gay Faulkner" might mean. And to Dr. Neil Graves, an Ole Miss alum and UTM professor, who has been my friend and confidant for seven years now, and whose haunting and beautiful water color of Rowan Oak will one day grace the cover of this book.

Thanks to Dr. Benjamin F. Fisher, ostensibly a formidable Edgar Allen Poe scholar, but whose encouragement and--on a more practical level--extensive revisions and copy-editing made what were some ugly scratches on a few pieces of paper into the legible document below. And thanks, finally, to the friends who have put up with me and inspired me while I have wept over spilled milk and leapt for joy over my greatest accomplishments. To Mel, Chris, Kelli, Sara,

Amy, Ann Marie, and Hillary. See below for evidence of what your friendship helped me see through to its conclusion. What follows would not be there without you.

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INTRODUCTION

The study that follows seeks to understand the life and work of William Faulkner in relation to the gay history that ran adjacent to that life and with which Faulkner often engaged in the various performances so vital to his sense of identity. William Faulkner lived from 1897 to 1962, a time of tremendous change in the cultural recognition of homosexuality and in the ways in which gay men performed their identities against the backdrop of that cultural recognition. By the time of Faulkner's adolescence and coming-of-age, a generation after gay Mississippians such as Stark Young and William Alexander Percy, homosexuality as a particular identity category had entered the mainstream consciousness of Western Europe and the United States, the stage on which Faulkner's canonical status is measured and the cultural milieu in which he grew up. By the time of Faulkner's death, a distinct genre of gay literature had developed primarily as a niche market but was well on its way to a general readership thanks to works from the 1940s and 1950s by well-known authors such as Gore Vidal and Truman Capote, among many others. Considered by many to be a great American author so highly esteemed for what Toni Morrison has called his "gaze," or "his refusal-to-look-away approach" (297), and for his critical explications of history, Faulkner was aware of this tradition, knew gay people, participated in settings distinctly recognizable as gay, and wrote homosexuality into his fiction from his earliest attempts at poetry to the final novels of his prolific career. I argue that from this participation Faulkner forged for himself what I am calling an "apocryphal" gay identity. While we so far do

not have information to confirm or deny whether Faulkner engaged in physical sexual acts with other men, the identity he forged for himself--evidence of which has long existed in the biographical record--suggests that he did, in fact, understand what it meant to “be gay.” In his specific cultural moment and geographic location, this understanding greatly influenced his work.

To articulate this aspect of Faulkner’s life and work, this study will primarily fuse two fields of scholarly inquiry: Faulkner Studies and Queer Theory. While technically, this study seeks to *intervene* into both fields, especially in regards to Faulkner Studies, a better model for the goal of this study might be to say that it seeks to *participate* in a long conversation. Primarily, this study functions as a new addition to the biographical record of Faulkner’s life but also as a turn in the current canon within Faulkner Studies of essays concerning Faulkner and queer sexuality. Simultaneously, this study will focus on homosexuality, not general queer sexualities, as its central concern in relation to Faulkner life. As a mode of Queer Theory, studies that seek to articulate specific homosexual interpretations are often overlooked or dismissed from current “objective” post-structuralist models of queer sexualities. Queer Theory is not, in itself, the culprit in this oversight; rather, implementations of Queer Theory that deny the obvious political realities of sexual identity are to blame for the lack of coherent studies of gay sexuality, particularly in a twentieth-century context that Queer Theory does, in fact, warrant. Also, the fusing of Queer Theory with Performance Theory, or the philosophical inquiry into performative identities, greatly helps to elucidate the gay energies relevant to Faulkner’s life. The “apocryphal” gay identity this study claims for Faulkner is meant to signify a version of performative identity as it manifested, consciously and subconsciously, in Faulkner’s life and work.

This study seeks to participate in the subset of Faulkner Studies devoted to biographical criticism. Therefore, while I hope that the range and interest of this study can appeal to a novice, this study does not and cannot supplant the extensive biographical work that has already been done on Faulkner. This study should most properly be read in addition to, not in place of, the major biographical works. As such, the goal of this study is in keeping with the tradition of Faulkner biography, a field wherein the most significant studies have sought to expand the current record without the goal of supplanting older work as “outdated.”

Biographical studies of Faulkner have their origin during Faulkner’s own lifetime. Arguably, the first extensive biographical work done on Faulkner were the introductory sections in Malcolm Cowley’s *The Portable Faulkner*. Cowley’s difficulty while composing these sections illustrates the problem that all subsequent biographers have faced. Cowley interviewed Faulkner as his primary source of information. Faulkner either flatly lied about many details from his life or at least greatly exaggerated them. Reports and rumors about Faulkner’s exploits-- often started by Faulkner--rarely record the actual details of his life. Rather, Faulkner had a habit of embellishing stories and essentially improvising fictitious detail from the most basic of actual biographical premises. A perfect example of this fast-and-loose storytelling is his lying about his service in World War I. As is well-established in Faulkner biographies, Faulkner never fought in World War I. He did, however, serve as a very low-ranking cadet in a flight training program for the British Royal Flying Corp in Canada. From that basic kernel of truth, he fabricated a series of stories about his exploits as a flying ace over the trenches in France. Cowley ran headlong into these stories and had a difficult time discerning truth from fiction. What he eventually composed is not “untrue,” but his biographical work would certainly remain largely incomplete until after Faulkner’s death. Other scholars sought biographical information from secondary sources. The

first significant compilation of these sources was published in 1965 as *William Faulkner of Oxford* by James W. Webb and A. Wigfall Green. This compilation includes numerous short recollections of Faulkner by other Oxonians who grew up with him or knew him in his hometown. Though neither Cowley's nor Webb and Green's studies were "original," as both grew out of gathering disparate pieces of already recorded information and compiling them in single volumes, these two studies served as platforms for the subsequent development of biographical studies of Faulkner. On the one hand, scholars followed Cowley to produce increasingly detailed academic studies of Faulkner's life. On the other hand, friends and acquaintances, including Cowley, began producing increasingly long and revealing memoirs about Faulkner that have greatly expanded our views of his life (and though memoirists can certainly be unreliable, in comparison to Faulkner's first-person stories, the memoirists are downright scientific).

Memoirs related to Faulkner include those by his brothers Murry (Jack) and John (Johncy). Neither Estelle nor Faulkner's daughter Jill ever published a memoir, though both were interviewed many times and provided much biographical detail and insight into Faulkner's life. Estelle's son by her previous marriage, Malcolm Franklin, wrote a memoir of his childhood in Faulkner's home. Just before her death in 2011, Dean Faulkner Wells, Faulkner's niece, wrote her memoir of the man she considered a surrogate father after her own father, Faulkner's youngest brother, died before her birth. For the purposes of this study, the most significant memoirs are not by family members. Malcolm Cowley's memoir *The Faulkner-Cowley File* proves a better biographical record than *The Portable Faulkner* because Cowley was honest in it about the elisions he felt compelled to make in his earlier scholarly work. William Spratling, Faulkner's gay roommate from New Orleans, left a memorable but often misleading account of

his friendship with Faulkner. He was also interviewed extensively by Blotner at the same time as he was writing that memoir. As I discuss in Chapter Three, Blotner's interview notes from Spratling are also incomplete. Spratling proves to be an enigmatic figure whose biographical significance requires careful consideration. The most significant memoir to this study, however, is Ben Wasson's *Count No 'Count: Flashbacks to Faulkner*. I include many details from it in this study, as did Blotner in his revised one volume biography. Read as an account of the open secret of Wasson's homosexuality, this memoir reveals significant data concerning Faulkner's erotic investment in his gay male friends.

As for critical biographical studies, their history includes a single turning point that established the tradition of "adding to" the biographical record, not supplanting it. In the final years of his life, Faulkner met a young professor at the University of Virginia, Joseph Blotner. Blotner and Faulkner became good friends, and Faulkner eventually came to see Blotner as something like a son. Faulkner and his wife Estelle trusted Blotner immensely. After Faulkner's untimely death in 1962, Blotner asked to write Faulkner's biography. Estelle acquiesced to his request in a hand-written note that Blotner could show to any interested party as proof that he was Faulkner's official biographer. Blotner then began collecting data, and one of the great literary biographies ever written was born. Blotner collected information through interviews and a massive letter-writing campaign. He compiled thousands of pages of documentation, and in 1974 he published a two-volume biography of nearly two thousand pages. This massive biography is such an extraordinary and detailed chronological account of Faulkner's life that any reader of it would be forgiven for assuming that it could not possibly have omitted any information, though obviously it is not flawlessly complete. No biography is a perfect account, though Blotner's is fairly close. The problems with Blotner's biography, though, were quickly

revealed. First, after he published it, he immediately began to receive letters from interested parties who claimed that some of his facts were misrepresented. Second, the sheer size of the biography proved too cumbersome for the average reader, and while the volume sold very well, it was not read as a popular biography but more as an encyclopedic guidebook. Third, as a chronological encyclopedia of Faulkner's life, it lacked the interpretative focus and the narrative structure of most literary biographies (though Blotner included interpretation and narrative, his original biography is bogged down with chronologically arranged data).

Blotner would almost immediately set about to rectify the problems of the two-volume edition. His chief concern was factual accuracy. Two particular aspects of Faulkner's life proved difficult to decipher in his original research: Faulkner's profound alcoholism and his affairs with Meta Carpenter and Joan Williams. The Faulkner family tried to keep information about Faulkner's drinking hidden from Blotner. Carpenter and Williams proved unwilling to discuss their intimate lives for the record. After Blotner published his biography, he began to receive tips concerning Faulkner's alcoholism. Furthermore, Estelle's death in 1972 made it easier for Blotner to speak more openly about the information he did have but chose to suppress. Also, after Estelle's death, Carpenter published a memoir of her affair with Faulkner. In general, the passage of time loosened tongues, and Blotner began to revise his massive biography to include new relevant details to the stories he had so meticulously compiled. He also siphoned off what proved to be extraneous detail of interest to critics but doggedly laborious to slog through for the average reader. Finally, he added a modicum of interpretative criticism to suggest how certain events in Faulkner's life might have influenced certain works. In 1984, Blotner published a much-shortened one-volume revision of his biography, though that shortened revision also contained greater analysis of many significant details and new information about the key events

in Faulkner's life even as Blotner deleted minor details that he felt were less germane to the grand biographical narrative.

Taken together, Blotner's two biographies present what almost appears to be a full accounting of the details of Faulkner's life. They are not, however, complete. There is also a third version of Blotner's biographical data: his notes, which are currently housed in the Kent Library at Southeast Missouri State University as the Blotner Papers. Though difficult to imagine because of the size of the two published volumes, these notes contain information that Blotner never published--or published in greatly edited form--in either biography. I have used the Blotner Papers extensively for this study. From a scholarly perspective, Blotner should be considered as having compiled three separate biographies: his unedited notes, his encyclopedic two-volume biography, and his shorter narrative one-volume revision. I use all three to craft this study. They are three distinct sources, and as I show in the chapters that follow, they present evidence of Faulkner's sexuality in profoundly different ways.

Perhaps the only peer to Blotner's work is Frederick Karl's *William Faulkner: American Writer*. Karl's thousand-page study aspires to the scope of Blotner's work and even adds detail to the biographical record, primarily in its lengthy opening chapter that details the life of Faulkner's forebears, especially his great-grandfather. Karl's work also differs from Blotner's in that Karl forms the narrative of his biography around a psycho-analytic framework. His biographical details are firmly secured to Faulkner's aesthetics, whereas Blotner steers clear, for the most part, from assuming authorial intent so extensively. Several biographers have attempted to retell Faulkner's biography as a traditional chronological narrative. Two of the most significant members of this field include Jay Parini's *One Matchless Time* and Stephen B. Oates' *William Faulkner: The Man and the Artist*. Neither study adds new data to Faulkner's biography, though

of all of Faulkner's biographers, Parini is the most inclusive of possibilities of Faulkner's sexual otherness and even possible latent homosexuality. Oates presents Faulkner's life in a fast-paced narrative that reads as if it is a novel, though his data accurately accords with Blotner's. Other literary biographers have preferred a more distinctly textual approach, and while they include biographical data, they primarily structure their studies as chronological literary studies of the novels. Chief among these include Judith Wittenberg's *William Faulkner: The Transfiguration of Biography*, which argues that Faulkner transcribed his psychic life into his fiction and develops themes as they relate to the major events of his life. In *William Faulkner: His Life and Work*, David Minter prefers a less psycho-analytical approach than Wittenberg but basically follows a similar pattern of relating themes from the fiction to major events in Faulkner's life rather than simply recording the works as dates on a timeline in a larger events-based focused study such as Blotner's.

Blotner's extensive biographical work has proven such a landmark that few scholars have truly intervened into its content. Rather, subsequent biographers have primarily used it as a basic foundation for more exclusively focused studies. The most significant among these is Joel Williamson's *William Faulkner and Southern History*. As I have done, Williamson relied on the Blotner Papers more than either published biography. His biography of Faulkner reconsiders several pieces of data differently from Blotner's considerations, but Williamson's chief contribution is his extensive research about Faulkner's extended family. Williamson adds to Blotner's record an painstakingly detailed account of Faulkner's paternal and maternal ancestry to craft an understanding of the degree to which racial elements in Faulkner's fiction stem from his family history. Williamson's model of looking at one area of Blotner's study and then expanding on it greatly influences the design of this study. Subsequently, Williamson has been

followed in his endeavor by Judith Sensibar and James G. Watson. Watson has focused extensively on Faulkner's performance as a World War I soldier and has studied how that specific performance influenced his fiction. Watson makes no pretense of claiming that his study offers an all-encompassing understanding of Faulkner's fiction. His study seeks only to follow a single biographical theme through Faulkner's fiction, in this case Faulkner's performative repertoire as opposed to Williamson's interest in the history of race. Sensibar has made two significant additions to Faulkner Studies in this same vein. First, in *The Origins of Faulkner's Art*, she compiles a detailed view of Faulkner's early poetry and the debt that poetry owed to Faulkner's erotic life and readings of poems by French Symbolists and Decadent Victorians. Second, in her more recent *Faulkner and Love*, she compiles extensive biographies of Caroline Barr, Maud Butler Faulkner, and Estelle in order to place key details of Faulkner's fiction onto a broader biographical framework than simply as exclusive events in Faulkner's life. Her sense that the cross-sections of the lives of these women with Faulkner's life produced many aspects of his aesthetic vision greatly influences my own sense that, additionally, Faulkner's interactions with gay men such as Ben Wasson in this same formative period produced their own aesthetic influences as well.

In short, then, this study reviews the entirety of the current biographical record of Faulkner's life. It does so, however, in order to focus on specific events relevant to the theme of Faulkner and homosexuality. Faulkner's life is replete with relevant data for this theme, only that data is currently spread out in multiple sources. In Blotner's work, it appears in different forms in different places. In his published biographies, though, it is primarily a victim of the chronological structure of narrative. That these elements emerged at different moments at disparate times in Faulkner's life precluded Blotner's consideration of them as forming one

particular narrative in the many narratives that made for the fullness of Faulkner's character. I highlight these relevant details and extract them from their discreet placement in a larger overview of Faulkner's life. I then trace them as a recurring feature of a narrative within that life that, though constantly revising itself, nonetheless emerges as a singular, unified motif. To this narrative, I add new detail gathered through related biographical inquiries, much as Williamson and Sensibar highlight certain features of Faulkner's biography and add supplemental research to them. I cannot stress strongly enough, however, that the life of Faulkner that emerges in this study is not the only life of Faulkner. Rather, gay Faulkner is one narrative strand of the many roles and identities that Faulkner assumed throughout his life. I construct a full biography of that gay life, but this biography does not preclude other narratives of the other roles he also performed nor should it overshadow the significance of other biographical influences in the fiction he produced.

I am making a more traditional *intervention* into studies of Faulkner and homosexuality. Oddly, in the preface to her 2009 study *Faulkner and Love*, Sensibar claims that there is already a "growing literature on Faulkner and gender, Faulkner and race, lesbian Faulkner, gay Faulkner," but she does not believe that there has been enough critical attention paid to "Faulkner's perception of the relation of creativity to sexuality" (xiv). She further claims that "no one has yet attempted to relate fiction to fact" (xiv). On the matter of Faulkner and general sexuality, I would accept an argument that few critics have done a satisfactory job of relating fiction to fact--Wittenberg and Karl extensively debate this connection but their views of sexuality do seem outmoded in our contemporary literary-theoretical climate. I am less inclined to accept that much work has been done on "lesbian Faulkner" and "gay Faulkner." That work has been done does not mean that much work has been done. In fact, for both topics, the

scholarly literature is decidedly atrophied in relation to the vast critical market of Faulkner Studies. Unfortunately, this study focuses on gay male performance and sexual identity and not on lesbianism. Though I will attend briefly to lesbian representation in Faulkner's early poems and in *Mosquitoes*, I do so in order to highlight the difference in Faulkner's handling of gay male versus lesbian themes. The unique histories and gender matrices that inform a sense of gay male versus lesbian identity necessitate that both receive fair and unambiguous inquiry. My immediate concerns are with gay male identity, but my concerns do not preclude the important work that remains to be done on lesbian representation in Faulkner. In fact, I look forward one day to reading *Lesbian Faulkner*, whether such a study seeks to damn or to praise Faulkner's depictions. Those depictions are beyond the scope of this study, however, which seeks to explore Faulkner's relationship to gay men, gay communities, and conceptions of gay identity in the first half of the twentieth century.

As for gay Faulkner, the current scholarly canon is decidedly small. Two of the annual editions of the *Faulkner and Yoknapatawpha Conference* have been devoted to *Faulkner and Gender* and *Faulkner's Sexualities*. Both contain gay-specific studies, though neither are exclusively devoted to this theme. Though Faulkner scholars have long devoted modest discussion to gay themes in Faulkner's fiction, the first essay-length study of homosexuality in Faulkner was only published in 1983. One of the two most significant extended conversations about homosexuality was inaugurated in 1988 when Hal Blythe first suggested that Homer Barron in "A Rose for Emily" might be gay, though the subsequent conversation has been entirely devoted to refuting Blythe's postulation rather than advancing his interpretation. The 1983 essay by Don Merrick Liles inaugurated the other extended conversation, this one in regard to *Absalom, Absalom!*. While that conversation has proven to be a complex and challenging

series of thoughtful interventions, it has ventured from a gay-themed inquiry to a more broadly Queer Theory-oriented approach that largely avoids explicitly labeling any scene or character as *homosexual*. As I discuss throughout this study, other scholars have argued for homosexual characters in novels as diverse as *Sanctuary*, *The Hamlet*, and *Go Down, Moses*, though these essays all rely on difficult and at times even graphically homophobic models of sexual identity that, generally speaking, sound similar in tone to the way early Faulkner scholars, predominantly white men, discussed matters of gender or race. This study attends to these essays in the appropriate chapters that follow. While none of these essays should be categorically discarded, this study marks a new turn in Faulkner Studies and a new view of gay Faulkner molded from a fusion of biographical criticism and a distinctly gay-focused Queer Theory. As such, this study is an intervention into this particular branch of Faulkner Studies. Even at the conclusion of this study, however, one will not be able to claim that gay Faulkner has been completely done. Quite the contrary, it is just beginning.

The other significant focus of this study is its insistence that *gay* Faulkner is the appropriate perspective, not *queer* Faulkner, or at least not queer Faulkner in the sense that his sexuality was so contingent and plural as to be nebulous. My goal in this study is to articulate Faulkner's life in relation to a specific gay identity with a vital and rich history that spans the twentieth century and preceded Faulkner's birth in the nineteenth. While certainly my perspective is rooted in Queer Theory, it might more appropriately be considered Gay Theory, or part of a re-tooled Queer Theory with a LGBT focus rather than a general sexualities focus. To explain this perspective, I need to detail a fine point in three major works of Queer Theory that is often forgotten. Two of these three works, Eve Sedgwick's *Between Men* and *Epistemology of the Closet*, appear throughout this study as guiding theoretical texts. The third, Foucault's

History of Sexuality, Volume 1, appears less explicitly, but the detail so intrinsic to this study is a principle he most famously described.

Between Men is often--and erroneously--applied not only to Faulkner but to many literary works from the twentieth century. Sedgwick's model of male same-sex "homosocial" bonds is often applied to representations of male same-sex relationships in a twentieth century context--especially in regard to historical novels written in the twentieth century but set in the nineteenth. This application is misguided. While certainly some form of "homosocial" bonds between men that articulate themselves through a sexual exchange of a woman do circulate in twentieth century fiction, Sedgwick herself explicitly denied that her model of these relationships has applicability. In the Coda of *Between Men*, she clearly states that "[b]y the first decade of the present century [the twentieth], the gaping and unbridgeable homophobic rift in the male homosocial spectrum already looked like a permanent feature of the geography" (201). Though she does not fully explore the implications of the "rift" she identifies in the four different perspectives of Walt Whitman that she cites in the Coda, she is clear that any work written in, say, the 1850s, "would have to be written very differently indeed by 1910" (201). The reason for this rift is because a new view of homosexuality was emerging that would fundamentally change the discursive patterns of the conversation. Indeed, the appropriate twentieth century version of Sedgwick's model from *Between Men* is Luce Irigaray's reiteration of it in *This Sex Which Is Not One*, where Irigaray identifies the desires latent in the triangulation of the sexual economy (two men competing for one woman) as hom(m)osexual. Irigaray's wordplay is meant to signify that in a twentieth century matrix, the "homosocial" desires of the nineteenth century have transformed discursively into "homosexual" forms ("man" sexual would be a rough translation of Irigaray's neologism, though her French pun is also intended as a homophone for

“homosexual”).

In this regard, Irigary is articulating in a twentieth century context the precise intent of Sedgwick’s self-rebuttal. Sedgwick would state her position on this rift much more clearly in *Epistemology of the Closet*, where she explains, “*Epistemology of the Closet*, which depends analytically on the conclusions reached in *Between Men*, takes up the story at exactly that point” where *Between Men* left off. She continues,

That is to say [. . .] the book’s focus is on sexuality rather than (sometimes, even, as opposed to) gender. *Between Men* focused on the oppressive effects on women and men of a cultural system in which male-male desire became widely intelligible primarily by being routed through triangular relations involving women. The inflictions of this system, far from disappearing since the turn of the century, have only become adapted and subtilized. But certainly the pressing immediate fusion of feminist with gay male preoccupations and interrogations that *Between Men* sought to perform has seemed less available, analytically, for a twentieth-century culture in which at least some versions of same-sex desire unmediated through heterosexual performance have become widely articulated. (15).

The version of unmediated same-sex desire to which Sedgwick refers is male homosexuality, but she also implicates the implicit connection of homosexuality to homophobia. What was in the nineteenth century a homosocial bond navigated through the appropriate articulation of gender roles became by the twentieth century a sexual bond wherein the men acted upon homosexual desires for each other or acted out homophobic responses to the latent homosexuality of their relationships. The reason for this rift, which Sedgwick places between 1850 and 1910, is because

in between those dates, the word *homosexual* came into existence and, basically, changed everything.

Michel Foucault most famously described the advent of “the homosexual.” The premise of Foucault’s theory in *The History of Sexuality* is that, prior to the advent of psychology in the latter half of the nineteenth century, sexuality was an action that one performed. In the twentieth century, it became an all-encompassing identity that defined one’s life. The reason for this shift was that a rising institution, determined to categorize individuals and their relation to society, began a process of medicalizing perceived sexual perversions into discreet pathologies. According to Foucault, the prime example of this process were men who previously might have engaged in sexual acts with men but who were not homosexuals. As he famously declared of this shift, “The nineteenth century homosexual became a personage, a past, a case history, and a childhood, in addition to being a type of life, a life form, and a morphology, with an indiscreet anatomy and possibly a mysterious physiology” (43). The desire *to know* about men who acted on their desires for other men led the developing science of psychology to create a new epistemology for its categorization. Foucault specifically dates this shift to 1870 and then summarized his hypothesis:

Homosexuality appeared as one of the forms of sexuality when it was transposed from the practice of sodomy onto a kind of interior androgyny, a hermaphroditism of the soul. The sodomite had been a temporary aberration; the homosexual was now a species. (43)

Foucault’s implicitly utopian goals in making this statement were to imply that the political realities facing so-called *homosexuals* in the 1970s, when he composed his theory, were a product of a self-perpetuating taxonomy that labelled difference and thus caused it. Foucault

clearly implied throughout his work that if individuals would get beyond discursive categories, the oppressive regimes of the modern world would cease to exercise so much power over individual's lives.

Foucault's vision is certainly compelling, if ultimately unrealistic. Yes, the word *homosexual* was effectively "invented" in 1870 by psychologists who were trying to classify a group of people into a discernible form. Logically, this "invention" implies that prior to 1870, *homosexuality* did not exist, a premise which logically leads to the conclusion that it does not exist now except in the minds of those who use this term as an identifying category. Certainly, the word was conceived by doctors as a way to diagnose perversion/inversion/unnaturalness. Throughout history, even to our contemporary debate about ex-gay therapy, the medical establishment has used the word to imply a disorder and to impart externally to someone a classification that impinges upon his right of free expression and self-definition. The corollary, however, is that after 1870, men were not simply defined as homosexuals but defined themselves as homosexuals and created their own sense of what the identity entails. The interpellation of identity is not a one-way process. Even when men--such as Faulkner--were labeled "queer" by other people, the capacity these men had to talk back to such a label and define their own "queerness" proves a much more powerful rebuttal of the oppressive regimes that originally advanced this taxonomy than to disregard the political realities of life for gay-identified people and claim that we simply do not really exist. Even though we did not originally choose this word, it is unlikely that we will now simply snap our fingers and make it go away. In reality, the more this term has been applied to us, the more *we* have emerged as a coherent community and forged relationships and ways of life. The word does not only oppress. It also creates.

The central problem with Foucault's theory is that it is, itself, discourse. His original

intentions of revealing the artifice of discursive sexual identities has long since been subsumed by a misapplication of a supposedly objective version of Queer Theory that sees Foucault as truth rather than as discourse. Foucault originally intended to identify the patterns of discourse that created sexuality, specifically homosexuality, in late nineteenth and early twentieth century psychological theories. Unfortunately, we have long since passed the time when Foucault's diagnosis of the problems of discourse has been subsumed as part of the discourse itself. The ubiquity of reference to *The History of Sexuality* and particularly to his premise that "the homosexual was now a species" so saturates Queer Theory as to have ceased serving as a thoughtful proposition and instead has become a standard assumption with no new insight to help explain how sexuality functions in our ever-changing lives. Just as Freud, Havelock Ellis, and other psychologists of their period once served to advance a standard institutionalized paradigm for homosexuality, Foucault's theories have become our own institutionalized paradigm for the *truth* about homosexual identity. Foucault is our new epistemology, and if we do not concur with his assessment of the nature of homosexuality, then we must obviously be wrong.

There is a loud and forceful branch of Queer Theory currently devoted to the rejection of homosexuality as a viable or appropriate term to understand sexual identity. Though this branch may think that it is free from the fetters of discourse and is making a positive apolitical statement, it is actually only denying a voice to homosexuals. Notably, no Queer Theorist under the auspices of any liberal vision has managed to make homosexuality go away in place of a newer, better world. In fact, Foucault's premise--that homosexuality is a recent invention, which makes it a problematic concept for its clear artificiality--has found its most powerful articulation as a subset of a highly political conservatism. His premise, in fact, sounds disturbingly similar to recent comments by Justice Samuel Alito during the Supreme Court's hearing of two same-sex

marriage cases in the Spring of 2013. Alito dismissed the significance of gay marriage because, as he declared, it is “newer than the internet, newer than cell phones.” His reasoning implies that, by default of its newness, gay marriage may not actually exist. In the long term, we might all realize that it is just a fad with a short shelf-life and has no long term potential to shape the realities of our social lives. For Justice Alito, gay marriage is an invention that just appeared. For Foucault, homosexuality itself is as well.

Queer Theorists who adopt Foucauldian philosophy too eagerly sound similar refrains. In Faulkner Studies in particular, two relatively recent events stand out--one very public, one very personal. At the 2007 *Faulkner and Yoknapatawpha Conference*, Catherine Kodat’s public delivery of the paper she would eventually publish in the conference proceedings included a decidedly more forceful repudiation of gay identity than her published paper would contain. While making a list of the two most important works to the history of Queer Theory, she affirmed Judith Butler’s *Gender Trouble*, but she paused to explain that Sedgwick’s *Tendencies*, not *Epistemology of the Closet*, was not only more important to Queer Theory but also *better* for Queer Theory because *Epistemology* was “too political” in its considerations of homosexual identity. Her assumption was that homosexuality was too politically charged an identity category and therefore not useful to Queer Theory. Thus *Epistemology* is not as important one might think, and those who think that it is important must be too political in their critical perspectives. Such a political agenda obscures the rarified consideration of the truth of sexuality that less political and apolitical theory advances. Later that day, at a barbeque on the grounds of Rowan Oak, Kodat sat beside me and proceeded to talk at length about her husband and three kids. I found myself silently wondering if heterosexuality is as politically charged a category as homosexuality apparently is. After all, was she not coming out to me in her own highly political

way? Did it occur to her that her marriage and kids were simply an invented reality and that, shared DNA aside, she and they were merely re-instituting a decidedly recent phenomenon known as the “family”? After I politely declined to finish my meal at her table, I began to see more clearly her error. The same cultural matrix that requires that gay people come out produces the insidious repudiation of gay identity as somehow too political. Gay people do not declare their sexuality in a vacuum in which they have no sexuality prior to coming out. Rather, as Adrienne Rich would express it, they have a compulsory heterosexuality. Heterosexuality is the default state. If a person does not declare his/her sexuality, then he/she is assumed to be heterosexual. The blindness exhibited by heterosexuals in regard to the power of their position is somewhat akin to the blindness of white people to the ease with which they can walk down any street in America and not be stopped by police. Admittedly, a gay person can probably walk into a room and act straight, but that gay person is probably significantly more aware that he/she is acting than people who take their performative realities for granted. Only someone who has never had to come out as gay could so blithely declare that gay identity is too political.

The other event pertains directly to this study. I originally wrote Chapter Ten of this study as a separate essay and sent it to *GLQ*, the preeminent Queer Theory journal. The version I sent was considerably more sophomoric than its current form and could not pass muster at any number of journals for its basic structural flaws. My rejection included a thoughtful list of comments about many of the problems in the essay that have greatly helped me to clarify my position. Those comments, however, were not the primary reason given for my rejection. The first sentence of the rejection letter very clearly stated that my work was outdated and advised that I rethink my approach to sexuality studies. *GLQ* no longer published essays devoted to proving that a historical figure was gay, or so I was informed. Despite the fact that the central

argument of the essay was that V. K. Ratliff, a character in a novel, can be read as gay and he is not a *historical* figure, what truly stunned me was the timing of the rejection email.. The editor who emailed me worked at a university in California. The day before that editor sent the email, the state legislature in California passed a law--the first of its kind in the nation--requiring that LGBT history be taught in public high schools. A central instruction of this law was that when a historical figure was introduced in a class, his or her sexual identity must be included in the discussion. For example, that the astronaut Sally Ride lived almost half of her life with her same-sex partner cannot be omitted from discussion about her scientific accomplishments (especially since we are all too happy to discuss the many wives of Henry VIII). I have often wondered if that email had been composed weeks previously and simply held and randomly transmitted on that awkward date or if the editor woke up that morning and composed that email. Either way, the event marked a major moment for me as it was the first time I could feel confident--and not arrogantly so--that my perspective on gay identity may not actually be as outdated as many Queer Theorist would consider it to be.

When Queer Theory is used to minimize or even blatantly dismiss the reality of homosexual lives, it becomes complicit in a long history of oppression--much older than the word *homosexual*--motivated by whatever version of *homophobia* was current at any given historical moment. In this regard, Queer Theory articulates a diachronic perspective of denial and otherness that can only be measured in its inverse relationship to the demands such a Queer Theory has that sexuality be discussed with utter synchronic specificity. Not all Queer Theory is so misguided. Indeed, in the introduction to the tenth anniversary edition of *Gender Trouble*, in response to its popularization and what she believed were misrepresentations of its intent, Judith Butler explained that she did not formulate her theories in the abstract but in direct response to

the realities of the lives that she witnessed in drag bars and while sitting among large crowds of gay men on Rehoboth Beach. This study has similar origins. In it, I attend to the reality of gay life. Moreover, while I actually am highly skeptical of the theory that “homosexuality appeared” at a certain historical moment, at the very least the combined recognition by Foucault and Sedgwick that something changed in the latter nineteenth century, near or about 1870 in particular, fully justifies *gay* inquiry in regard to William Faulkner. Even from the perspective that homosexuality is a nineteenth century invention, one must concede that Faulkner was born well after homosexuality was invented, so reading his life and works for their relevance to gay identity is entirely justified. That radical shift before Faulkner’s birth established the paradigms for gay identity *as we know it*, to borrow a phrase from Sedgwick’s fifth axiom in her devastatingly political study *Epistemology of the Closet*.

My LGBT-focused Queer Theory is political, as all Queer Theory is. As such, the most significant influence on the overall approach I take in the study that follows is outmoded by many standards. I follow the patterns of gay reading explained by Jacob Stockinger in his 1973 proposal “Toward a Gay Criticism.” In this study, I attempt to implement his guiding principles in my approach to Faulkner’s life and his texts. For Stockinger, those principles include:

- 1.) Gay criticism should be a homosexual appreciation of literature as well as an appreciation of homosexual literature.
- 2.) Gay criticism should be a “committed” criticism encompassing all aspects of the context as well as text.
- 3.) Gay criticism should be eclectic criticism.
- 4.) Gay criticism should distinguish between homosexuality as a sexual phenomenon and homosexualities as literary phenomenon. (306-07)

His fifth point is that “gay criticism should criticize classic literature more than contemporary literature” (308). Unfortunately, forty years after his essay, this final point proves to be Stockinger’s biggest critical oversight. Too often critics find ways to discuss any sexuality but homosexuality in regard to contemporary authors, including Faulkner. Stockinger’s central principle, however, demonstrates why a writer such as Faulkner benefits from committed gay inquiry: “Perhaps *all* literary artists and works of art require an exposure to gay criticism and, until they have been exposed to such criticism, our understanding of them and of the creative process behind them is inaccurate and incomplete” (305). As I demonstrate in this study, this assertion holds exceptionally true for the life and works of William Faulkner.

Stockinger’s concerns with creative process brings me to my final commentary in this introduction. I define Faulkner’s homosexuality as “apocryphal” throughout this study. I also refer to his creative process as “apocryphization.” There are three main reasons why I have chosen these terms. First, while I refer to performative identities, the framework of performativity does not fully account for the complexity of Faulkner’s self-presentation. Certainly, Faulkner “performed” gay identity at times in his life. He had numerous models for this identity around him throughout his life, and though sometimes he rejected certain performances of homosexuality, he also sometimes clearly embraced them. The catch is that, generally speaking, to adopt and reiterate a performed identity is largely a subconscious process. Though *Gender Trouble* is her masterpiece on this topic, Butler succinctly epitomizes her premise for performance theory in the short essay “Imitation and Gender Insubordination.” In that essay, she refers to the challenges of being asked to speak at Yale as a lesbian. She queries if she is not, prior to her presentation, already a lesbian, and if she is, then why would she need to act any differently at Yale as a lesbian than she would in her normal life. She ponders the

significance of the different performative contexts of her private versus her public life in order to deconstruct the idea that *any* performance is natural. All performances are contingent upon context and all are artificial. Nonetheless, as she demonstrates with her description of Aretha Franklin singing “You Make Me Feel Like a Natural Woman,” the performances *feel* natural to the person who performs them. Faulkner seems to have *felt* natural and comfortable in multiple gay contexts, so to say that he *performed* gay identity in those contexts is the appropriate terminology.

The problem with the discourse of performativity in regard to Faulkner presents itself alongside the second reason I have chosen “apocryphal.” As a writer, Faulkner was far from a social realist. Rather, he recorded real impressions from his surroundings and fictionalized them as hyperbolic types and outlines of real events and people. This heightened reality enabled his articulation of his profound vision by allowing for verisimilitude without direct correlation. Faulkner, however, did not describe this process as “turning the real into the fictional.” Rather, he famously described this process as “sublimating the actual into apocryphal” (*Lion* 255). He “apocryphized” the actual life around him, but he did so consciously. He knew that he was borrowing from actual events and people and manipulating their realities into his fictional cosmos. I prefer not to consider his creative output as his literary “performance” since he is not performing himself. He is crafting narrative perspectives and creating multiple voices, but these perspectives and voices are not the same as his performed identity. They are apocryphal voices that he approximates from his actual experiences.

The problem is that he did not simply apocryphize voices and persona in his fiction. Throughout his life Faulkner did not simply perform identity as a semi-subconscious selfhood. Sometimes he fictionalized his personal history through out-and-out lies. Especially in the first

half of his life, Faulkner pretended he was a wounded World War I flying ace. He also pretended that he was a bohemian poet. He was playing parts for both of these, quite consciously, but he performed these highly stylized roles in order to apocryphize his own biography. He wanted to stand out as different, or other, for his surroundings, especially in his hometown of Oxford, Mississippi. When Faulkner told stories about being shot down in France in the war, he knew he was lying, but he was creating an apocryphal self with these stories that fed directly into his creative output. He played a soldier and then processed his play into fiction. Similarly, he played a homosexual and then processed that play into his fiction as well. He apocryphized both identities in the actual world in order to understand them in his apocryphal creation. This degree of conscious role playing feels different from the performative identities that Butler describes. Faulkner did not, though, simply perform these identities out of the ether *ex nihilo*. Rather, he successfully fooled even his closest friends with his apocryphal performances because he was surrounded in his life by actual people who *did* perform these identities as felt, natural performances. Faulkner apocryphally emulated the actual performative identities he witnessed. Key among the identities that he witnessed performed around him throughout his life was gay identity manifested in some of his most intimate friendships. Like a mirror, Faulkner reflected back to his gay male friends strikingly cogent reproductions of their performances. Those reflections were not “fictional” any more than a reflection in a mirror is fictional. They were illusory--and they certainly prove to be quite elusive--but they were versions of actual identities that were no less *real* than the identity they mirrored. Faulkner may even have felt like they were real at times, though this study does not venture any opinions about whether or not Faulkner ever consummated a gay relationship. He may have, or he may not have, but he would not have to have sex with another man to understand gay identity. The beauty of performance theory is that

it undermines the idea that there is an essential self below the surface. Rather, it celebrates the conundrum that illusions, while never objective reality, come greatly to shape reality and even *feel* like reality. In this way, the illusion becomes the reality. For Faulkner, this apocryphal reality of performing gay identity greatly shaped his life and creative process.

Finally, I use the term apocryphal for decidedly prosaic reasons. I base the premise of this study entirely on evidence that currently exists in the biographical record of Faulkner's life. There are no proverbial smoking guns nor some piece of groundbreaking research that no one has uncovered before. Rather, my assertion that Faulkner led an apocryphal gay life comes from the already catalogued archive. The evidence I present, however, has largely stayed in the archive and has never seen the light of day in published form. I did not find a buried lockbox in the backyard at Rowan Oak with secret pictures of Faulkner and Ben Wasson in compromising sexual poses. Nor have I interviewed a ghost from Faulkner's time who reported that he had sex with Faulkner. In this study, I consider data that Blotner long since collected. I trace information through several biographical sources. I pull that data out and find the narrative buried in it. Unfortunately, a lot of data that I use is in Blotner's notes, but it never made it to publication in either biography. With one exception, it never appears in subsequent studies by other biographers either. I would not say that a group of Faulkner scholars met in council and determined what data would belong in the record and what data they would store in their secret byzantine dungeons alongside lost scrolls from Alexandria or proof that blood descendants of Jesus went on to populate Medieval France. Such a narrative would impart far too much conscious effort to suppress what in reality probably has just not been deemed important until now. The official Faulkner does come to us as something of a Jesus figure, though. The great American author has his gospels written by his apostles. We might almost forget that there are

other gospels, they just have not been sanctioned with the significance of published form. If Blotner's published biographies are the Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John of Faulkner Studies, however, then this study is the Gospel of Philip, of Andrew, or of Bartholomew. Blotner is the official version; this study is Faulkner apocrypha. I will allow the truth of this material to speak for itself.

In the study that follows, I overlay Faulkner's life onto the gay history that occurred alongside it. To make the connections between the two visible, I rely on a gay-focused version of Queer Theory that is heavily influenced by Jacob Stockinger and by archival research. What follows is a gay biography of Faulkner from his birth until his death with consideration of his creative output throughout his life. It is an apocryphal biography, but it is time that it saw the light of day.

CHAPTER 1: "QUAIR" FAULKNER

William Faulkner never quite fit in. Despite the odds stacked in his favor as the oldest son of an established white family in a small Southern town in the first half of the twentieth century, he never could inhabit the single, easy role of insider, or "one of us," in the town that would so entirely define him. The dynamic of feeling different, of feeling like an outsider and defining himself as one in opposition to the mantle of expectation readily available for him to don, most particularly defines the life--especially the young life--of this great, established, canonical icon of American literature. This dynamic has multiple facets; among these facets is one that results from the coincidence of time and place. William Faulkner, American writer, came of age and entered the maturity of his artistic vision over a sixty year span of history during which difference, or *queerness*, was taking on a new meaning, and a subculture was forming into which he would find himself immersed, though few scholars have siphoned off the details of his life in such a way as to reveal that beneath the mask of his multiple performances of identity, at the heart of Faulkner's sense of self, is a narrative of gay American history. From the earliest stages of his life and in his earliest efforts at self-definition, the shadow of this history cast itself onto his self-performance and greatly influenced the direction of his life and the creative impulses that generated his early prose and poetry. What is so remarkable is the degree to which Faulkner did not fear this shadow. He embraced it.

This study is devoted to understanding what it means that Faulkner fashioned for himself

a gay identity, among the many other performances in which he often engaged. He knew about homosexuality, he knew homosexuals, and he could perform homosexuality in ways far more complex and personal than as homophobic reactions and displays of psychosexual angst. In his life, he crafted what I am calling an apocryphal gay identity, or an apocryphal homosexuality. In this study, I will explore the multiple manifestations and meanings of this identity in his life and in his writing. Understanding the ways in which he apocryphized gay identity--in his own performances of difference and in the fiction and poetry he produced from his observations and experiences--sheds profound light on the William Faulkner we know and, as is the case with all apocrypha, the William Faulkner we do not.

William Faulkner was the firstborn son of a union between two families whose histories course like blood across even contemporary maps of north Mississippi, quite literally in the case of Falkner, Mississippi, a town north of Ripley named after Faulkner's grandfather, the "Old Colonel" William Clark Falkner, whose railroad passed through the town on its route between Middleton, Tennessee, and Pontotoc. That same Old Colonel still stands as the most prominent marble citizen of a stiller town, the cemetery in Ripley, where he gazes over his nearby railroad to the west, country just purchased from the Chickasaw Indians when he came to Mississippi as a young man in the 1840s. The Falkners cannot quite be called the most prominent settlers in the area, certainly not equal to the Jones-Thompson family and its large holdings on the Tallahatchie River in Lafayette County before the war, or the Longstreet-Lamar family, which saw local and national political prominence both before and after the war. Rather, the Falkners rose to prominence only *after* the war, benefitting precisely from being not large landowners with the majority of their capital invested in slaves but instead businessmen and lawyers, the prototypes of industrious and opportunistic individualists who would ride the waves of the postwar Southern

economy to establish themselves as the ersatz inheritors of the planters the ravages of war and emancipation had usurped.¹ These Falkners would stretch across the landscape of north Mississippi along the rail lines to Oxford and New Albany, where though they could never be considered equal to the great robber-barons of the greater late-nineteenth century American landscape, they would carve form themselves at least local prominence and relative wealth in their little notch of native soil. Despite the declining post-war Southern economy, William Faulkner grew up in Oxford down the street from “The Big Place,” owned by his grandfather J. W. T. Falkner, the Young Colonel. If he never met the Old Colonel, he still likely knew that the Old Colonel’s house had been on “Quality Ridge” in Ripley before the Old Colonel was gunned down in the streets of that town by his former business partner.²

More significant to the young William Faulkner’s sense of place and identity may well be the maternal line he inherited, an equally industrious family but with less romantic appeal than the legendary Old Colonel of Faulkner’s paternal line. Joel Williamson relates the story of Maud Butler Falkner’s father absconding with the yearly tax revenues of Oxford in the late 1880s; Dean Faulkner Wells has recently confirmed that he also took with him his octoroon mistress and likely settled with her for a time somewhere in Arkansas. On the one hand, as Williamson argues, though it may never have been openly spoken of at the dinner table, young William surely knew this story and likely felt a keen stigma from it.³ On the other hand, the name Charles Butler--shared by Faulkner’s maternal grandfather *and* great-grandfather--would not necessarily have brought shame in Oxford. The great-grandfather, Charles Butler, is memorialized in contemporary Oxford on a historical marker in front of the First Baptist Church on Van Buren Avenue, leading downhill from the Square towards the old Depot.⁴ This Charles and his wife Berlina, along with Lelia Swift, Maud’s mother, are all buried in a family plot in St. Peter’s

Cemetery in Oxford right in the shadow the central grove of cedar trees surrounding the graves of the Jones-Thompson family, who gave the land for the cemetery to the town but provided the highest and metaphorically the most important ground in it for their posterity. The prominence of other “old” Oxford families can largely be measured by their proximity to those cedars, including the Butlers, Kings, Shegogs, and Isoms.

This same older Charles Butler is directly responsible for the actual geography of the Oxford in which his great-grandson would grow up. Charles Butler, Sr., surveyed the land that is now Oxford and laid out the grid pattern that marks the streets of the original town. The younger Charles Butler was responsible for the construction and upkeep of the sidewalks and street-lamps of the town, for which he was collecting the tax dollars with which he absconded.⁵ In a completely non-metaphorical sense, when young Billy walked around Oxford, he followed in the paths of his forefathers, his world their world, his life and its patterns preset by theirs. In a metaphorical sense, he could understand the duality of that path and the different ways his forefathers negotiated it: the Charles Butler of civic virtue, the Charles Butler who ran away.

Young William Faulkner never quite assimilated into the Victorian regularity of his hometown. Writing from New Orleans in 1925, he would claim that his youthful interest in poetry sprang from the double compulsions “firstly, for the purpose of furthering various philanderings in which I was engaged, secondly, to complete a youthful gesture I was then making, of being ‘different’ in a small town” (*ESPL* 237). That Faulkner was “different” seems a true enough statement, but his claim that he intentionally affected this difference is more specious. Accounts of Faulkner in his teens collected by biographers confirm that, to some degree, Faulkner performed this difference, primarily, sartorially. Frederick Karl explains that Faulkner’s initial interest in books probably led him to his affinity for Estelle Oldham, but Karl

continues, “what must be stated and even stressed was another side of Billy, not in sexual tastes, but in the desire to pass himself off as a dandy, or certainly someone different” (70), which he pursued through “a feeling for clothes and flamboyance [as of] someone who seeks roles, even at nine and ten; who, somehow, transcends his time and place and relocates himself with Charles Baudelaire, Oscar Wilde, and others like them who acted out” (71). Given the rigidly defined world he inherited, Faulkner would likely have put on these differences precisely for the reasons Karl suggests, to get out of (to transcend) his time and place for one not so stultifying.

But not all the roles he would play were necessarily self-created, and one of the ubiquitous biographical anecdotes from Faulkner’s youth implies something far less intentionally affected. Joseph Blotner relates this revealing anecdote as follows:

[William] and his brother [Murray] shared a taste for comic novels, just as his mother liked the serious novelists he did and Estelle enjoyed some of the same poetry that moved him. But it would be two years before a new friendship [with Phil Stone] would provide a mind as keen as his own to supply the excitement of a sympathetic response to new literary experience. And before that would happen [. . .] his alienation would prompt some students at the Oxford High School to tease him and call him “quair.” (39)

Williamson relates the same story, pausing to clarify that the colloquial spelling of the word Blotner supplies “means ‘queer’” (169), in case readers tone deaf to the peculiar timbre of that word find themselves unable to decipher it. *Queer* is a strange but powerful word, one which may sound very different to individual listeners, and one whose history was undergoing much change in the period of Faulkner’s adolescence. But then, what might the word *queer*, or more properly “quair,” have meant to William Faulkner?

Jay Parini expands a bit on what he thinks the word “quair” might have meant when applied to Faulkner; “According to Blotner, it was about this time that his fellow students referred to him as ‘quair,’ *in part because of his dandyish dress and in part because he shunned the company of athletes and those students who led more active social lives*” (30, italics mine). The italicized portion of Parini’s assertion is his interpretation of why Faulkner might have been called queer, not Blotner’s. Parini owes his interpretation largely to Frederick Karl, who does not relate the story about Faulkner being called “quair,” but does repeatedly ponder the significance of what he calls Faulkner’s “feminized life” (86). Karl uses “feminine” in regards to Faulkner’s early life to describe his artistic pursuits--drawing, writing--in a town with clear demarcations between appropriate activities for young boys and young girls. (Here one might imagine Faulkner’s own perspicacious understanding of those same sexualized divisions as represented in his later fiction. After all, Emily Grierson briefly trains young girls to paint china dishes but no young boys are ever sent to her house). Indeed, Karl, in his psychoanalytically informed biography, often suggests that Faulkner’s love of horses and keenness on male activities such as hunting and on spending time in all-male spaces such as the hunting camp stem directly from his need to compensate for his other, more “feminine” pursuits, or at least feminine in the eyes of the community in which he needed to define himself.

That what made Faulkner “quair” might be associated with his gender or sexuality is no minor point for a young man growing up in the 1910s. As Marilee Lindemann points out in her biography of another famous queer writer, Willa Cather, of whom Faulkner was a younger contemporary, the cultural “moment--from the 1890s to the 1920s,” when Cather and Faulkner both experienced their “sexual and literary coming[s]-of-age” was “a period when ‘queer’ became a way of marking the differences between still emerging categories of ‘homosexuality’

and ‘heterosexuality,’ and the word acquired a sexual connotation it had lacked in nearly four hundred years of usage” (2). Teenage boys calling teenage Faulkner “quair” is not the same as their calling him *homosexual*, equivalent to our contemporary term *gay*. At that precise cultural moment when Faulkner was called “quair,” the word would have been in too much a state of connotative flux to pinpoint precisely what it would have meant, though it seems unlikely it would have registered the same note as the more contemporary slight “that’s so gay” does among teenagers now. But somewhere on the periphery of its connotations, the word *queer* had already begun to acquire its homosexual associations; that we feel it strike a chord in our contemporary acoustics is not an altogether unjustified feeling.⁶

Parini is the only one of Faulkner’s major biographers willing to posit that “[i]t is not outlandish to suppose that Faulkner himself had homosexual feelings at this time” (31). He explains as his basis for this supposition that homoerotic interests are not uncommon in adolescent boys, and though Faulkner by the latter half of the 1910s was no longer an adolescent, his particular consciousness, noted for its profound depth, could easily have stored away those nascent feelings and been able to access them for certain roles he would play in his later life. There is something out-moded in the notion that all boys have childish homoerotic feelings but, naturally of course, grow out of them, for we now generally acknowledge that homosexuality is not a misguided stage of childhood development whereas a model of childish homosexual impulses that disappear with maturity sounds more akin to Freud or other late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century psychological theorists or their intellectual descendants in the 1940s and 1950s, including Alfred Kinsey. In the early 1970s, the psychiatric community began a long and still evolving process of revising this basic maturation pattern to a more realistic understanding of sexual identity. But Parini is onto something here when he ponders what it means that

Faulkner's early experiences of "difference" are sexually tinged and that he does not discard those experiences in his later life. He seems, in fact, to nurture them, primarily in response to an event that would crystalize his developing sense of place and expectations: the marriage of Estelle Oldham, the girl who was supposed to be his promised bride.

Two Roads Diverged

The square regularity of the streets of Oxford bears metaphorical connection to the Victorian order pervasive in the South in which Faulkner grew up. Joel Williamson asserts that "[i]n regard to gender roles" this order "was exceedingly clear" for young Faulkner as for all his peers "born into a Southern world that had a vision of itself as an organic society with a place for everyone and everyone, hopefully, in his or her place" (365).⁷ Faulkner's dandy dress and interests in arts put him at odds with this vision and resulted in his being labeled "quair" as a teenager; though as Williamson's use of the word "hopefully" implies, this vision that Southern society had of itself was a vision--a normative vision--which not everyone managed to attain. Still, that Faulkner was a "quair" youth does not mean his attainment of a Southern/Victorian ideal was hopeless. Youth, in this vision, could serve as protection against the full force of the word "queer," ameliorating it into a colloquial form with, surely, its own peculiar sting but also its own exceptions. So long as the young Faulkner would someday put away his childish things and mature to manhood, as Parini suggests might have been the case, his "quair-ness" could be written off as the idylls of youth which would allow its presence in the community to remain unthreatening.

To put a metaphorical spin on it, we might say that Faulkner was given to cutting across

yards and through alleyways, tracing crooked pathways off the grid of the streets his great-grandfather surveyed, but the streets remained intact, and the owner of a violated garden or jumped fence could take consolation in knowing that one day the young man would understand the value of the plan the community had laid for itself; one day the young man would learn to stay on the sidewalk and walk along the preordained streets. Joel Williamson succinctly describes the plan Faulkner's life was *meant* to take (*meant* in the sense that convention, not necessarily any personal desire, dictated it) as following a preset trajectory of "progression of love, marriage, and sex; family, clan, and community" (365). Of these steps, marriage is the most crucial because, if not the initial step, it is the most legally, morally, and communally binding. As for the initial step, love, Faulkner was safe being "quair" as a teenager because he had Estelle Oldham, the girl from down the street, whom he wanted to marry, safeguarding his place in the social milieu of Oxford regardless of his being a little different from everyone else.

Williamson narrates the prescribed premarital progression in the Southern/Victorian community as follows:

In the Victorian mind, God had so arranged the world that there was one certain woman ideally created for every man and one man for every woman. When they found one another they would recognize their destiny instantly and intuitively. There would be a sequence--rituals of recognition, love, courtship, engagement, and marriage. Before marriage the woman would be a virgin. After marriage would come sex and then children. (365)

The extent to which this progression describes any actual courtship is suspect, but it is not meant to describe the real. It describes an ideal, which, when imposed upon members of a community as what they are *supposed* to obtain, becomes the normative goal of those members, in this case

the outline of heteronormativity. Following this path--or at least appearing to follow it--makes one belong to the community and makes one incapable of ever truly being "queer." What might actually happen in the privacy of the heteronormative bedroom or, more broadly, within the confines of those discreetly squared-off lots filling the gaps between the surveyed streets may be very queer indeed, but it does not register as such so long as the porch is swept, *per se*, or Sunday service attended, the right political affiliations maintained, or the servants paid in a timely manner.

Though Estelle's picture appeared in the *Ole Miss*, the student annual for the University of Mississippi, as a sponsor for Cornell Franklin as early as 1913, Faulkner still pursued her as if they were fated to be together and had long understood their mutual destiny (Blotner 41). According to an often-cited story, a seven-year-old Estelle once declared of a boy, who happened to be William Faulkner, riding by her house on a pony that "I'm going to marry him when I grow up" (17). Biographers starting with Blotner use this anecdote to demonstrate how fated both Estelle and Faulkner felt their marriage was, even as that sense of fate weathered the eleven years between Estelle's marriage to Franklin and her and Faulkner's eventual union in 1929. Williamson, though, ventures that "[l]ater evidence suggests that Estelle might have said the same about several boys" (Williamson 149). Judith Sensibar, in the detailed biography of Estelle from her study *Faulkner and Love*, gives by far the most nuanced account of Faulkner and Estelle's courtship. Among her more noteworthy additions to our understanding of what she terms this "iconic love-at-first-sight account" and a "fateful viewing" (289) is that she is able to point to a competing narrative also told by Estelle of when she "first" fell in love with William Faulkner. In particular, Sensibar explains another account Estelle gave in which she claimed she fell in love with Faulkner when she was sixteen, an age which coincides with her leaving for

boarding school in Virginia.⁸

These narratives of fated love told by Estelle (notably, after Faulkner's death) coincide nicely, if somewhat inconsistently, with the image of the idealized love they were supposed to have for each other in the sexual economy of their hometown. It is unlikely the course of their love--or any love, for that matter--ran as smoothly as Estelle's hindsight remembered it. What Faulkner and Estelle understood as "love" for each other must be viewed in its proper context; that context is one of revision, as if the eleven year lapse in Faulkner's love for Estelle were essentially a waiting period without any challenge to the ultimate narrative of their clearly defined, heterosexual life. Faulkner's "quair" pursuits could be excusable so long as his ultimate desire resided in the right object of sexual attraction. A perfect example of the cover Estelle offered Faulkner were the dances they often attended together when they were teenagers first entering that sexual economy, the dances being the rehearsals for proper gender relations and the discipline of courtship, though in the case of Estelle and Faulkner, apparently, sometime after the "recognition" phase of their storied romance. Though Estelle danced with many boys and young William either refused to dance at all or danced very poorly when he did feel compelled to try, Estelle nonetheless made time to "sit and talk with him. They had an 'understanding,' she later said" (Williamson 174). This minimal degree of attention seems to have allowed for tremendous maneuvering on Faulkner's part, and that any biographer cites it at all implies a general acknowledgement that Faulkner's fundamental desires were heterosexual, even if he was not a very good dancer. Of course, we can just as easily read these interactions as a mark of friendship as we can assume they say anything at all about the feelings of two young love-birds with a sense that one day they would marry and all would be right with the world. After all, if other teenage boys at these dances simply took the time to talk with Faulkner on the sidelines of the dance

floor, few scholars would read so heavily into *their* intentions as to assume it must mean they were secret lovers with an “understanding” of their own. The interactions between Faulkner and Estelle seem perfectly plausible in a narrative of their devotion to each other that searches for patterns in the glance of hindsight, and may well have served in the moment to pass Faulkner off as excusably “quair.” They do not, though, offer any conclusive proof of the full range of Faulkner’s nascent selfhood nor do they preclude further development of his “quair-ness” into something less excusable in his community.

Nonetheless, in the sexual order of Oxford, Faulkner could pursue Estelle through the rose-tinted glasses of a courtier, and her later accounts of these years mostly verify our assumptions that they long felt connected to each other, despite her decision to marry Franklin when pressed to do so by her parents. Before that other marriage and the damage it did to Faulkner’s prescribed path in life, whatever less-than-linear “quair” pursuits he might entertain would be rounded off so long as he arrived at that appropriate marriage with the perception of the appropriate courtship intact. Estelle’s accounts serve the purpose of excusing all the misdirections along the way, and can easily be construed to assume Faulkner, as far back as the 1910s, was a heterosexual, even if he was a bit different at times, since clearly, later in his life, he married a woman and had a child (and have affairs with Meta Carpenter, Joan Williams, and Else Jonsson). With Estelle, Faulkner could only be “quair,” never “queer.” Perhaps he still can only be “quair” to this day in the eyes of most scholars and biographers because of the well-crafted narrative of his fated heterosexual life. The community could (and still can) overlook his youthful difference thanks to Estelle’s presence, even if that presence was in reality far more tacit and complex than most biographical accounts assume.

Into this picture of his youth, two influences hover that would later have profound effects

on Faulkner's life. First, he befriended Phil Stone. Scholars often question whether or not Stone was a closeted homosexual, questions I do not find intriguing both for lack of evidence and because trying to find evidence that Stone was gay can easily overshadow inquiries into the numerous other openly gay men with whom Faulkner found friendship, mentorship, and even, perhaps, intimacy. What Stone did irrefutably provide Faulkner was reading material not found in the local library. Stone plied Faulkner with the latest poetry in the most avant-garde literary magazines. Stone provided Faulkner with the great French symbolists and imagists. His reading list for Faulkner included Mallarme and Pound, among many others, and it is likely that Faulkner's exposure to Eliot and Aiken originated with Stone.⁹ Also, though Stone may not have introduced Faulkner to Swinburne, they shared an affinity for his poetry. These authors would detail queer sexual practices in their works, especially Mallarme, Swinburne, and Aiken. Those queer practices would include various non-normative sexual desires, among them lesbianism and male homosexuality. The young Faulkner would read these works and later experiment with their themes in his early poetry after Estelle's marriage.

The other influence of this period would be a less thematic one: the flesh and blood example of the gay writer Stark Young, another son of Oxford who preceded Faulkner by not quite a generation.¹⁰ Faulkner met Young through Phil Stone sometime in 1914 when Young returned to Oxford for a visit. Though Young was from Oxford and his family still lived there, he did not live there. In 1914, Young was teaching in Texas, though he would soon move on to Amherst College and, by 1921, would be living in New York in Greenwich Village. According to Parini, Young "was as openly homosexual as one could be in those days," and his "urbane manner [. . .] attracted Faulkner, who found the bluff, swaggering models for male behavior on display around him rather stifling" (31). I would pause here to consider the double-sidedness of

Faulkner's feeling of being different during this period in relation to Young's "difference."

Faulkner affected his own difference--or made his own "youthful gesture" towards it--and his appreciation for Young surely stemmed from a shared sense of difference in their small town for reasons of literary interests and less-provincial world views. On the other hand, Faulkner was called "quair" and here was a man who was openly "queer." Thus, their affinity for each other, while no evidence suggests it was physical, cannot be reduced to a purely intellectual appreciation (in fact, Young's taste for the poetry of Gabriel D'Annunzio did not accord with Faulkner's poetic taste at all).¹¹ Parini describes the appeal Young held for Faulkner as being of a nature that "Young, like [Phil] Stone, represented an alternative way of being in the world that included literate conversation and a love of books" (31). Of course, what rises to the surface of expressions such as "alternative way of being" is not just the interest in art and literature that made one "quair" but the additional implications of homosexuality attendant to that interest in the gendered world in which these men grew up. Young's presence highlights the fine line at this moment in American cultural history between being queer and being *queer*, or between being just "different" and being homosexual. Faulkner's friendship with him and sense of mutual difference straddles that line.

To understand Young's homosexual identity, we can turn to his contemporary from Greenville, Mississippi, William Alexander Percy. Percy was born in 1885, Young in 1881.¹² The short generation gap between these two men and Faulkner's generation was one of quick change and lasting implications. In his biography of William Alexander Percy, Benjamin E. Wise explores the complex and changing codes of gay identification of the latter nineteenth century, with obvious direct relation to the northern and western edges of Mississippi that Faulkner and Young also inhabited. Wise actually traces a long history of same-sex intimacy in Greenville,

beginning not with William Alexander but with his uncle, William Armstrong Percy, yet another short generation further back in the chronology of emerging gay identity when the practice of living and self-identification met the psychological theorizing of the Foucauldian “species” of the late-Victorian mind. Faced with the various tragedies of his generation of the Percy family, “William Armstrong took comfort in a romantic friendship with a neighbor, Henry Waring Ball,” Wise writes (25). Though William Armstrong did not keep a diary of this friendship, Ball did; in that same diary, he charts a string of such friendships: “Will Percy was my first love, my original Damon and Pythias. There has been a long line of them since--Will Percy, Will Mays, Sam Bull, Will Van Dresser, Tony Russell, and now Eugene” (qtd. in Wise 25). Wise is quick to clarify that the numerous relationships Ball recounts occurred from the 1870s to the 1890s, at a time when “homosexuality was not yet conceived as an identity, an either/or sexual preference, [and] men were free to share romantic love without the stigma of *being* homosexual” (25). Therefore, the expression “romantic friendship” became a way to express numerous relationships that hovered in the gray areas of non-definition, some physically sexual, others not, all possibly homosexual, but only possibly and so safely assumed to be something else possibly, too. William Alexander Percy would not have such freedom. By the time of his young adulthood in the first decade of the twentieth century, terms such as “effeminate” and “sissy” had become less ambiguous as markers of difference, and the cover of societal ignorance no longer protected young men from accusations, even if the term “homosexual” was not the preferred way to identify “the love that dare not speak its name” (Wise 7). Wise is emphatic to assert throughout his biography that Percy negotiated his identity against a paradigm we can now identify as “gay”; Wise, in fact, argues that Percy’s negotiations, and those of others from his generation, are the source for our contemporary understanding of this identity in the latter half of the

twentieth century and now into the early years of the twenty-first. He means to assert that men like Percy (and Young), men of the generation prior to Faulkner's, are the originators of the performance of gay identity with which subsequent generations would contend and that they would emulate.

The two William Percys, Armstrong and Alexander, are not merely convenient examples of a moment in gay history somewhat tangential to Faulkner's life. Ben Wasson, a friend of Faulkner's born in Greenville in 1900 and himself gay, knew William Alexander Percy and even introduced Faulkner to him. Faulkner read Percy's poetry and reviewed it in the University of Mississippi campus newspaper, *The Mississippian*. Faulkner would not meet Percy (or read his poetry) until long after establishing a relationship with Stark Young, but the themes of Percy's work and the pattern of Percy's life mirror Young's. Young was also a pioneer negotiating his sexual identity in a time when what we now clearly recognize as homosexual was a far less well-formed system of signs or as coherent a performance. Young, along with Percy, would be the type of influence to *set* the paradigm; Faulkner observed that paradigm as if it were an established mode of being, a category of person--homosexual--with a history and a sense of community antecedent to Faulkner's life and therefore seemingly part of an indefinitely old pattern that had always existed, even if that community and members of it would also seem to be always elsewhere, as a kind of oppositional identity in relation to the expectations of small-town Southern life. Unlike Percy, who travelled often to Europe but also, according to Wise, felt a strong connection to his home in Greenville, Young left Oxford rarely to return after he graduated from the University of Mississippi. When Young was home, though, he would spend time with Stone and Faulkner. Young's influence on the young man sixteen years his junior would prove significant.

When Faulkner met Young, he was crafting his own sense of difference through literature and clothing. For Young, his actual homosexuality exacerbated his difference from the realm of accusation to that of practice. That Young embraced his homosexuality put him at considerable odds with the life patterns Oxonians envisioned themselves pursuing. Karl explains of Young, “As a homosexual in a small town, he was obviously under restraints” (80). What those restraints might have been, Karl, in his impressive understatement, does not detail; but if we envision, say, the out gay lifestyle described by George Chauncey in *Gay New York* and consider that Young eventually moved there, we can begin to see an outline for visible gay life in the early twentieth century, at least in certain social spaces. As Chauncey explores, such social conventions as gay bathhouse culture, cruising, and a range of vocabulary for the varieties of homosexually-inclined men that circulated in the Village (wolves, trade, etc.) created a communal atmosphere for men to act out their desires there, with at times crackdowns by the authorities but nonetheless with a general sense of freedom that openly soliciting sex from a stranger would not result in immediate imprisonment. Faulkner, who spent many of his visits to New York throughout his life in Greenwich Village, would eventually write in 1957 that the Village is “a place with a few unimportant boundaries but no limitations where people of any age go to seek dreams” (*T* 652). He would amend this description in 1959 to “[a] place without *physical* boundaries,” as if suggesting that the freedom found there was not merely emotional or psychological but “physical” as well (*M* 814, italics mine). In the smoldering aftermath of Estelle’s marriage, Faulkner would make his first trip to Greenwich Village to room briefly with Stark Young. The boundless sexual freedoms there stand in marked contrast to the stifling fixity of sexual mores in Faulkner’s Oxford.

Still, prior to that marriage, Faulkner had a chance of falling into the inertia of the set

patterns of an expected life. Young, on the other hand, would not find his place on the square streets of his hometown. Rather, he would move beyond those streets, into a road something like the one that leads Joe Christmas onward for fifteen years in *Light in August*, not in that Young led a life similar to the poverty and violence of Christmas' but rather in that he lived a life beyond the Victorian heteronormativity of his hometown and, by extension, opposed to it. I would underestimate the remarkable diversity of Southern gay life to assert that for "queer" Southerners, they have two options: stop being queer (physically and psychologically) in order to stay in the South or leave the South in order to be queer. But, *in extremis* and under the right set of circumstances, these two paths may present themselves as the only available options. Stark Young seems to have felt enough of a sense of difference for his homosexuality to want a different space to pursue his life. Faulkner, at least until 1918, did not seem to feel so moved.¹³

As just the local "quair," such extremities seem a stretch for Faulkner as he ended his teen years and moved into his early twenties. He had Estelle, or could at least believe he had her. He had a friend in Phil Stone, plying him with reading material. He had met, so far mostly in passing, a young man who would come to exert tremendous influence on him, Ben Wasson, but his influence would mainly come to bear after Estelle's marriage. Nothing in this earlier moment of Faulkner's life lends itself to an extreme worldview beyond the typical youthful ennui of small-town life, Southern or otherwise. But it is also important to note that, with the right catalyst, the course maintained by tacit inertia can easily be swayed. In his teens, Faulkner had before him two paths: the path of the queer, represented by Young and his decision to live beyond the confines of Oxford, or the path of expectation and marriage within those confines, as represented by the supposedly fated sense of commitment to Estelle. It seems clear that Faulkner wanted to choose the latter and marry Estelle, but when she asked him to elope with her, he

refused because he would not marry her without first asking the permission of her father.

Philip Weinstein, in his recent biography *Becoming Faulkner*, marks this refusal as a--if not *the*--seminal experience in Faulkner's young life. Working in Honolulu, Cornell Franklin found himself employed and established and ready for a wife. He wrote to his mother in December 1917 that he wanted to marry Estelle when he returned to Mississippi the following April. His parents and her parents agreed that this was a good match. Thus, Estelle found herself engaged to Franklin, a circumstance that left her, according to Weinstein, "both unsurprised and dumbfounded," but also "[d]esperate" (67). Weinstein continues,

[S]he turned to Faulkner for a way out, but he felt as hemmed in as she did. It had taken him, also, a lifetime of becoming who he was to find himself in this trap. The trap of who he was: a brooding poet yet to publish poems, a young man without a high school diploma, a frustrated cashier in his grandfather's bank, someone easily identifiable as one of the town's aimless and heavy-drinking youths; in short, a bad bet. He had no prospects, no counter-argument to propose. What he wanted most was getting ready to happen--not despite who they were but because of who they were. She could not bear it. "I supposed I *am* engaged to Cornell now," she told him, "but I'm ready to elope with you." "No," he answered, "we'll have to get your father's consent." (67)

Here was the moment when Faulkner could have married Estelle and did not. Other biographers focus more intently on the day of Estelle's actual marriage to Cornell Franklin, 18 April 1918, as the climax of this rupture in Faulkner's prescribed trajectory through the expectations of his community. By 18 April, Faulkner was already in New Haven with Phil Stone, trying to avoid, it seems, facing the reality of losing his ideal of Estelle as his destined wife. This avoidance

included watching men return to the campus from service in the War.

Of course, while various biographers focus on various moments, they also unanimously concede that the several months surrounding this wedding are, generally, the critical junction in Faulkner's life. I appreciate Weinstein's pausing to consider Faulkner's rejection of the offer of elopement because it draws into relief that Faulkner did not just want to marry Estelle; he wanted to marry her in a certain way that followed a preset series of rituals. When the moment to marry her presented itself, he held to those rituals at the expense of his would-be bride. She married another man. Faulkner was left as just the town "quair." So he left town, as seemingly the best and only path left available to him.

Estelle's marriage to Cornell Franklin ruptures the progression of Faulkner's life. He was a dandy and an artist, he wrote poems and drew pictures. His classmates called him "quair." But that didn't matter because he had Estelle to pursue, a proper path awaiting him. And then that was gone. So his other option was also something of a given: he would follow the example set by Stark Young, the other queer, and step out onto the open road. It was a road that would last eleven years.

CHAPTER 2: QUEER FAULKNER

In the Spring of 1918, Faulkner left Oxford for New Haven, Connecticut, where he shared a room with Phil Stone, who was completing a degree at Yale. While there, he hatched a plan with Stone to join the British Royal Flying Corps and eventually moved to Canada to begin flight training. The war ended before he completed this training, and in December 1918 Faulkner returned to Oxford; but notably this Oxford did not have Estelle. From 1918-1929, Faulkner would leave and return to Oxford in a series of attempts to find a place for himself beyond his hometown. At the same time, he often found himself in his hometown, as a student at the University of Mississippi, originally, then as something of the town bum for which he earned his famous nickname “Count No ‘Count.” The basic arc of his life for these eleven years is outlined in numerous biographical studies: Oxford, New York, Oxford, New Orleans, Europe, New Orleans, Oxford. Estelle also made regular trips home to Oxford in a trajectory that mapped the deteriorating path of her marriage. Faulkner would often be in Oxford for Estelle’s visits, but Judith Sensibar cautions that, at least for the first five to six years of that marriage, Faulkner would not necessarily have had his eye on his own eventual courtship of her (he actually courted Helen Baird in New Orleans in the mid-1920s).¹

When Faulkner got off the train from Canada in 1918, he returned a changed man in that he had begun to fashion for himself a series of new identities. As James G. Watson details, Faulkner played the part of the wounded soldier, despite having neither fought in the actual war

nor been injured in it or even in his training. This performance, though important in his life, was not his only guise. Judith Sensibar details another mask he often wore, that of the poseur, or the Pierrot figure of the impostor, a literary trope with which he was fascinated. A more prosaic way of expressing this identity, following Williamson, would be that Faulkner took on the pose of a would-be Bohemian after his return from the war.² He wore old, ragged clothes and affected a detached attitude; he wrote adaptations of the imagist and symbolist poets he so deeply admired; and he experimented with pen-and-ink drawings clearly inspired by Audrey Beardsley. To an extent, he modeled his notion of the Bohemian on decadent and other fin de siècle artists such as Oscar Wilde, whose “art for art’s sake” commitment to aesthetic pleasure greatly influenced Faulkner as he made his first forays into being an “artist,” the bridging identity that links these others manifestations of Faulkner’s developing sense of self.

These performances Faulkner crafted for himself all deserve the critical attention that has been paid to them. In particular, his performance of the wounded soldier, and the way that performance would work its way into his fiction, bears great relevance to this study and its search for gay themes in Faulkner’s work. I will return to it in Chapter 4, but to understand its deeper implications, we first need to consider another performance that so far has not received the critical attention it deserves but is also at the heart of this nexus of identities Faulkner appropriated in the wake of World War I. Taken as a whole, Faulkner’s various performances speak to the degree to which he wanted to set himself apart from his hometown; he wanted to be different. One way he did this was through a performance of an emerging “queer” identity that extends from his earlier “quair” designation: beginning in 1918, Faulkner began to pose as a homosexual.

Faulkner was, apparently, keenly aware of the cultural value of the various roles he

played and how, at this moment in history, the signs of these other performances also bled into a “queer” identity that was coming into focus as a discernible “gay” identity. We know that Faulkner embraced this identity because of the multiple times he placed himself directly into the milieu of gay subcultures and surrounded himself with gay men. We also know that he embraced this identity because of the way he treated it in his writing. When Faulkner returned to Oxford in 1918, he returned not as the youth with a degree of freedom allowed him until he embraced expectations. He returned as the queer man who had failed to follow the natural progression of life via the Victorian pathways recognizable to his hometown. His reaction to his new role in town was to enroll in the university, write queer poems and stories, and befriend--in fact court--a young man he met before the war, Ben Wasson.

Ben Wasson, who would prove to be one of Faulkner’s few lifelong friend, was a homosexual, though he was not the only homosexual on the campus at Ole Miss in the late 1910s. He was simply the one Faulkner chose to court. We could almost intuit that in a social space such as a university that attracted young men and women from all over the state and the South, we would find a greater diversity of people in the student population than the local town population (though at Ole Miss, that population would not include any racial diversity until 1962); that greater diversity would seem, we might hope, to allow that homosexuality surfaced on the campus. Unfortunately, intuition fails in this matter, thanks largely to the degree to which homosexuality, though possibly, as Eve Sedgwick terms it, an “open secret,” was still more secret than open, and what was generally known on campus then has disappears over the lapse of time as memory consolidates into the erasures of hindsight. Thankfully, proof for such an intuition comes from a series of letters Joseph Blotner received from an Ole Miss alum named Paul Rogers, a contemporary of Faulkner’s and Wasson’s from their undergraduate days, and

through the revisionist atmosphere on campus he tried to, but could not quite succeed in, creating. As Blotner was composing his revisions for his one-volume edition of the biography in early 1980, he exchanged letters with Rogers, who insisted that, despite the evidence of Faulkner's publishing lesbian-themed homoerotic poems in *The Mississippian* in 1919, homosexuality was neither known nor discussed on campus. He also insists repeatedly in his letters that Wasson was not gay, though Rogers also claims he never knew Wasson intimately. What Rogers claims no one knew actually sketches in outline what was, in fact, well known on the Ole Miss campus at the time.

At numerous points in his letters, Rogers' denials function as a kind of backhanded admission, as if his rhetorical gestures are escaping his control to occlude the actual state of affairs in his version of early 1920s undergraduate life. Rogers constructs an imagined campus innocence when he ruminates nostalgically,

The University of Mississippi is the one place where I have lived as an adult that homosexuality was a theme of no interests to the students. In fact, I never heard that word during the four years I was there. There was another, but so seldom heard that it is fair to say that the matter was almost never discussed. I wish it were that way now.³

"It" is not that way now; and we might question to what extent it was "that way" then.

Elsewhere, Rogers goes so far as to provide, "In 1925, I was a graduate at Cornell University. This was the time, and almost the very year, in which homosexuality burst, so to speak, upon the country and became a subject of open interest and conversation."⁴ His sense of the timing is considerably off, historically speaking, but his geography is equally a convenient revision of actual gay historical presence. The proximity of Cornell to the cityscape of New York would

make it, mythically at least, more susceptible to the gay influences found therein. Meanwhile, Mississippi could never harbor native homosexuality, or so the myth goes, at least not until it has had the insidious opportunity to spread itself slowly southward. This myth of isolation, best epitomized in John Howard's study *Men Like That*, traces gay history as a history of urban spaces, originally New York, San Francisco, and Los Angeles, but over time extended to the hinterlands of Memphis, New Orleans, Atlanta, and even Birmingham. Howard even implicates gay historians as complicit in this historical pattern that gay life means urban life: as he says, "Where many are gathered, there is the historian" (12). He means to imply that where homosexuals live in less robust and discernibly coherent communities historians often disregard that they even exist. This pattern leads, however, to a perpetuation of a variety of myths of rural gay life, including themes of isolation, suicide, and self-loathing, as if the lack of a gay community in small towns, particularly in Mississippi, the focal site of Howard's study, self-eradicates any gay presence that might rear its head therein. Howard works to debunk this myth throughout his study; Paul Rogers' letters perfectly fit the model of this myth and the cracks implicit in it that Howard deconstructs.

In his letters, Rogers claims that the word "homosexual" had no currency, supplying instead the expression more common on campus:

But one thing is certain, the subject of homosexuality was not [a]t that time of much concern, as it is now and has been for the last fifty years. In fact, at the university there was only one word for it (indicated by the two letters C & S), and the male student's pundonor, or point of honor, was phrased as follows, "If one ever approaches you, sock him."⁵

If homosexuality was not of much concern, then why were all the boys on campus trading a

phrase to remind each other to defend their honor with their fists if they were ever confronted with it? Despite his attempts to other homosexuals into a different species from the rest of the undergrads with the derisive “If *one* ever approaches you,” clearly the students had to know *a priori* to “one approaching you” that “one *might* approach you,” and “you” better know what “one” is before “one” does. Also, to call gay men “Cock Suckers” (the letters C & S) instead of “homosexuals” hardly makes them disappear. But then, even Rogers cannot fully reconcile the myth to the reality. While wishing it “were that way now,” he admits that “the matter was *almost* never discussed” back then before, as he also claims, it exploded onto the national consciousness in 1925 while he was a student at Cornell. Almost never discussed is quite different than saying never discussed; furthermore, things exist in the world that are never discussed, which does not mean they do not exist. Finally, as I will discuss in more detail in Chapter 6, the word *queer* had actually acquired its homosexual connotations as early as 1915, so fully that the *Oxford English Dictionary* credits the earlier date as when those connotations had so saturated uses of the word as to be worth recording as part of the definition of *queer*.

To Blotner’s credit, he does not buy into Rogers’ revisionist nostalgia. He gently pushes back in his response by addressing Wasson’s homosexuality more explicitly than he ever allowed himself to address it in published form in either of his two biographies:

A propos of “Sapphics” and homosexuality being a theme of no interest to the students at Ole Miss, do you think they were naive about it, or would the conventional gentlemanly code have precluded such attention to it? A couple of recent books have tried to assess WF’s sexuality, along predictable and, I think, somewhat unlikely lines. I do remember, though a Charlottesville doctor, a member of the Farmington Hunt, asked me about it obliquely, because of his own

orientation, I think. I don't know if you knew Ben Wasson. It has been suggested to me that Ben was homosexual. Do you recall how he was regarded on the campus. One man said as a boy he was beautiful, angelic, taken up by older students and perhaps spoiled by them.⁶

Rogers responded again to deny more emphatically that Wasson was a homosexual, while continuing to deny that he knew Wasson very well except by reputation for his striking features. Conversely, Rogers' response to Blotner's query about homosexuality produced one of the most striking statements of the letter exchange: that Faulkner, not Wasson, was the one most "sophisticated" in regards to gay life: "I would suspect now that WF [William Faulkner] himself was more sophisticated about homosexuality than any student at Ole Miss, if only because of his numerous trips to Memphis and his acquaintance with the Victorians."⁷ With this statement, Rogers effectively places homosexuality in close proximity to Ole Miss--in this case in nearby Memphis, Tennessee--but only by way of reiterating the basic premise of the myth of homosexuality: that it is urban (Memphis) in relation to the rural (Oxford) space of the Ole Miss campus. Rogers, however, firmly places Faulkner into this myth; Faulkner did, in fact, travel to Memphis often in the early 1920s with Phil Stone. The "Victorians" in Rogers' letter probably refer to Swinburne and other poets whom Faulkner imitated in his early published poems in the campus newspaper (more on these in Chapter 3). Rogers is giving away clues to the open secret of William Faulkner's campus reputation, but despite his denying Wasson's role in constructing that reputation, Wasson's own memoir serves as the best source for why other students thought Faulkner was more "sophisticated" about matters of homosexuality than most fellow students would/should be.

As Blotner and Rogers exchanged these letters in 1980, Wasson was composing his

memoir, which he would finish as a rough and unedited draft just before his death on 10 May 1982. One particular story from that memoir, an expansion on an earlier story of Wasson's first meeting with Faulkner, speaks to the level of sophistication these two men shared in regards to homosexuality. But Wasson could be as coy as Paul Rogers in how he presents the open secret of his homosexuality. He, too, preferred to adhere to his own "gentlemanly code," which participates in a long history of such coded language in memoirs, letters, and other documents that recount gay life. Despite revisionist histories and cultural predilections for silence, the love that dares not speak its name has long found a way to express itself.⁸

Faulkner actually met Ben Wasson before the war, though only briefly. Nonetheless, this first meeting set the stage for the friendship that followed. Wasson describes this first meeting in two places: first in an essay he wrote for the *Delta Democrat-Times* in Greenville, Mississippi, on 15 July 1962, in the days following Faulkner's death, and later, right before his own death, in his memoir *Count No 'Count: Flashbacks to Faulkner*, published posthumously in 1983. As with Estelle's accounts of her first seeing Faulkner and falling instantly in love, Wasson's accounts have the advantage of hindsight to fortify them in a larger narrative of his and Faulkner's relationship. Wasson, though, would admit that his memories were flawed and beg of his readers that they read them as impressions, not as fact. There is something to Wasson's apologia that goes beyond a faulty memory.

In his first account of their meeting, Wasson explains that he was sixteen, had just arrived on campus, and was walking with "a newly made friend" whom he identifies as a senior but never explicitly names. Robert Farley, a fellow student, would tell Blotner in an interview that the young neophyte Ben Wasson "looked seraphic like a seraphim when he first came to Old Miss. He was a sweet kid and was taken up by upper classmen. He was as pretty as he could

be.”⁹ On the one hand, in all his recorded memories of his first few weeks at Ole Miss, Wasson fails to account for what made him so popular with the older boys on campus. On the other hand, Wasson does explain that his friend “gave me a special sense of sophistication.” The senior and Wasson encounter Faulkner, and the senior and Faulkner began to talk about clothes and moved into a discussion of poetry. Wasson recalls Faulkner’s “neatly trimmed mustache which struck me as quite worldly and daring.” Wasson admits to being mesmerized by the conversation, which enhanced his already romantic feeling for the early Autumn atmosphere of the campus, when “the world then seemed mostly green. Everything was so alive, so vital, and now I had met a fellow-man who was green with fresh thoughts, full of a love for creative things.” But in his mesmerized state, Wasson realizes he has not yet actually spoken to Faulkner; he has only watched him talking to his senior friend. So, naturally, Wasson speaks up and “told him in over-flourishing politeness that I was glad to meet him,” to which Faulkner “turned to me and his eyes held amusement.” At this point Wasson records one of Faulkner’s more famous one-liners: “‘Ah,’ he said, ‘we seem to have a young Sir Galahad on a rocking horse come to our college campus.’” Wasson concludes the story by reporting that a few days later Faulkner “in kindly fashion, looked me up: me, a lowly freshman.” Their friendship had begun.¹⁰

On the surface, this version and the later version of the same meeting in Wasson’s memoir appear virtually the same, but Wasson’s later version shifts the timing of the meeting to create an even more sophisticated account of the subtle interactions he means to implicate. A perplexing subtext permeates the early version. Wasson is mesmerized and spends moments just watching Faulkner, taking in his clothes, his appearance, and his voice. When he finally does speak, Faulkner is amused, as if Wasson’s attentions had not gone unnoticed. The story could have ended there; Faulkner could have been amused by Wasson’s obvious crush but moved on,

uninterested in having a love-struck freshman tag along after him around campus. In this light, we can read “Sir Galahad on a rocking horse” as possibly a slight on Wasson, whose angelic charms stood out at this moment as a bit naive and childish. The image of a handsome, courtly knight riding a rocking horse--a child’s toy--offers a rather humorous take-down of Wasson’s youth. Still, Faulkner looked up Wasson a few days later, so clearly the comment was not intended to dismiss Wasson and might very well have been a way to compliment him.

Innocent though this meeting seems, it teems with subtle markers that Wasson will later embellish with more detail and which point to a code of gay encounter on the Ole Miss campus in the years after World War I (and notably, Faulkner never “sock[ed] him,” as Rogers explained to Blotner was how boys at Ole Miss were expected to act around a “cocksucker” like Wasson). The new details that Wasson includes in his memoir retelling of this first encounter change the tone in important ways. Wasson dates his first meeting with William Faulkner to the Fall of 1916, his first semester at Ole Miss. Wasson, a freshman, had made friends with some upperclassmen, “one among them, to [his] great pride, a senior,” when “Bill Falkner” strolled along (Wasson 24). Faulkner was wearing clothes Wasson later learned were meant to look “regimental,” though Wasson found them “quite British” (25), descriptions that align Faulkner’s self-presentation before the war with his faux-soldier act from after it, which I will explore in Chapter 4. And Faulkner was already known as “Count No ‘Count” on campus and around town, which aligns this slight on his personality given him by Ole Miss students among whom Faulkner circulated after World War I with Faulkner’s “quair” self-presentation from before Estelle’s marriage, a self-presentation he would modify after the war but not relinquish (25). The senior student in whom Wasson took such pride introduced Wasson to “the Count” and quickly rejoined, “You two fellows should get along fine,” before adding after a pause, “You both like to

read poetry and highbrow books. Don't you?" (25).

The subtext of this exchange merits attention. Ben Wasson was a homosexual. He was also, in 1916, a sixteen-year-old freshman finding himself surrounded by older boys who included him in their group. One can easily interpret the "pride" he takes in his senior friend as a coded reference to a crush, though the gentle but razor-sharp teasing that followed when Faulkner arrived on the scene leaves a reader with no real sense of the extent of the relationship, whether it was acknowledged but unreciprocated or was reciprocated to some degree, perhaps along the lines of what Howard delineates as "men like that" (Wasson, the homosexual) and "men who like that" (the senior, who may have had a sexual interest in the boyish and attractive Wasson but did not identify as gay). The clues in the story do suggest that the senior at least tacitly acknowledged Wasson's attentions, as it is the senior who cuts so deftly into Wasson's pride with the assertion, "You two fellows should get along fine." The implication here is that Wasson and Faulkner are both "men like that." That Faulkner may not have actually been a "man like that" would in no way prevent the senior from making that accusation, given Faulkner's reputation as the town "quair." Of course Wasson and Faulkner will get along, the senior implies; they both like poetry and books, those less-than-manly pursuits that marked Faulkner as "quair" in Oxford in the first place and now take on a different and more pointed significance in relation to Wasson and the other boys in the group. Thus, the senior is quick to throw a punch towards Wasson, a recognition of what he is, in that final question: "Don't you?" To paraphrase the senior, he is stating that Wasson and Faulkner will like each other. Why will they like each other? Well, the books and poetry, right? Only by adding that final question, the senior turns the previous assertion on its head. Maybe it is not the books and poetry at all. The final question implies that maybe it is something else.

Although Wasson's account is a memoir, reading this exchange as a highly coded, perhaps even purposely manipulated, conversation on his part is justified by its "Preface." Furthermore, the publication history of the memoir serves to bolster the impressionistic, as opposed to factual, nature of Wasson's account. In regards to that publication history, Wasson drafted the manuscript of the memoir before his death, but he died before its editing was complete. Final revisions fell to the staff at the University Press of Mississippi, which published the memoir, and primarily to then editor-in-chief Seetha Srinivasan, Martha Lacy Hall, a freelance copy editor, and marketing manager Hunter McKelva Cole, all of whom worked to clean up the manuscript to meet the approval of Wasson's surviving sister, Mary Wilkinson. While preparing his one volume edition of the Faulkner biography, Blotner wrote to Cole to ask to see the manuscript (a quick glance at the notes from that biography demonstrates that he not only saw it but also used it extensively in his revisions). In his response, Cole provided a photocopy of the manuscript in its current form at the time along with a note to explain its unfinished state and how the editors had cleaned it up. He explains that the UPM team worked from "a photocopy of a very poorly typed version in cursive script" complete with handwritten marginal revisions from Wasson and additional editing by an unnamed third party. Cole would note to Blotner that, even after Mary Wilkinson approved the manuscript, problems remained, but he also explains:

In its present state, although it has many stylistic flaws, it retains both Wasson's rhetorical mannerisms and the accounts as he presented them. He made few attempts to pinpoint dates. The preface was created from extracts taken from rambling explanatory passages at the beginning and ending of various accounts.¹¹

Stylistic flaws and inexact dating aside, the memoir "retains [. . .] the accounts as he [Wasson]

presented them.” Indeed, the dates do not matter; rather the accounts Wasson wished to present and the way he presented them without fleshing out selected details prove to be the central issue of the book.

The “Preface” constructed by the editors highlights a single rejoinder. In it, Wasson stresses that “the reader will understand that I make no pretense at recalling Faulkner’s words exactly as he spoke them, but I do say that our conversations--and those we had with others--are substantially factual and are faithfully reported” (x). Indeed, this conversation with the senior Wasson takes such pride in knowing may best be read for its “substance” rather than its “fact.” After all, Wasson explains that he hopes his memoir will “creat[e] a truthful portrait of William Faulkner in the days I knew him” (x). Wasson’s genius is his misdirections and coded language; and in his memoir he relates again and again, from their 1916 meeting until their last encounter in the late 1950s, stories relevant to an understanding of Faulkner’s life meant to register as true regardless of their “factual” accuracy. I would contend that he is trying to say-without-saying that he and Faulkner shared an acknowledgement of and mutual participation in Wasson’s gay life, only Wasson (to win his sister’s approval and with revisions from an unknown third hand) does not “come out” in explicit terms in the book. That is not the “truth” he means to tell, for the memoir is not about Wasson, but about Faulkner. He does not, and probably cannot, come out for Faulkner; but he can direct us to stories that reveal part of Faulkner’s character that does demonstrate that, among his many personae, he also played the part of a homosexual courtier with Wasson; this is all the truth Wasson needs for us to know. In short, Wasson is trying to tell us something without violating a code of silent acknowledgement. It is important that we listen carefully to the version of these events he wants to relate and acknowledge the open secret at their core.¹²

The cracks in his presentation show. Indeed, Wasson seems to want to let us know that Faulkner was, proverbially, in on the sly coding of his rhetoric in that first meeting. If there were subtexts abounding between Wasson, the lone freshman, and the group of older upperclassmen surrounding him, we can imagine that Faulkner, already acquainted with Stark Young and so not a completely sheltered novice entering a larger world, could have easily inferred those subtexts himself. But just to be sure we understand Faulkner's sophisticated understanding of the situation, Wasson separates Faulkner's compliment from the moment of their original meeting in his memoir, making it not a spur of the moment offhand comment but a calculated phrase passed through a messenger and meant to take the measure of this angelic young man. In the 1983 version, Wasson explains:

A few days later, my *special senior friend* stopped me on campus as I was hurrying to class.

"Saw the Count [Faulkner] in town yesterday. You know what he said about you? Man alive!"

"What?"

"Said you looked like a young Galahad who's just gotten off a rocking horse. I told you he's nuts." (26, italics mine)

Wasson never explains why the senior friend from the previous anecdote has become, over the course of "a few days," a "special senior friend." That the cutting recognition of a few days prior has become "special" is highly suggestive, but Wasson, magnificently opaque, leaves the word to hang in the sentence, alliterative but undefined. He does, though, admit that "I took [Faulkner's] remark as a compliment" (26). Indeed, how could he not have: a carved, boyish face on the body of the (sexually) purest knight of Camelot. The "rocking horse" becomes a positive reference to

his youthful beauty, not a slight on his immaturity.

Given Wasson has already established his literary pretensions--he reads poetry and highbrow books just like Faulkner, right?--we can read this literary reference in its most purely literary way as a high court romance with shades of Arthurian chivalry. According to Wasson, Faulkner has described him as an idealized beauty, all the more so for his sexual purity. Wasson stages this meeting and Faulkner's compliment in terms of high romance; it is a courtship. In fact, it even occurs over time, not in any immediate passing moment, and requires a messenger to exchange a message between the two "lovers" separated by time and distance. Whether or not these were the actual words exchanged between these men is suspect, but what we are left with as the *truth* of the story is that Wasson and Faulkner, from their earliest meeting, deeply understood each other. They can communicate on this high literary (and courtly) level, but the "special senior" can only exclaim, "I told you he's nuts."

The dichotomy Wasson sets up with this transference of timing is marvelous. The messenger is the very same "special senior friend" from a few days prior, but whatever the extent of the relationship between that "special friend" and Wasson, the senior does not understand the higher sophistication of Faulkner's remark. He thinks it is just "nuts." Thus, Wasson establishes that what follows with Faulkner is a relationship that is more meaningful because it is a relationship of the minds of these two men, not merely a product of the glands. Wasson figures the senior as something of a clod. He lacks the sophistication and charm, or what might best be described as the courtliness, of Faulkner. In an effort to prove his own sophistication, Wasson is using his memoir to return to Faulkner the compliment paid to him all those years before. If Wasson is Galahad, then Faulkner is himself a "Count" of some account; Wasson memoir serves, many years later, to account for his courtly friend and the special relationship they formed.

Unlike the senior, Faulkner plays the part of the errant knight out to defend the honor (the sexual purity) of a maiden, though in this case the “maiden” is a young male with an angelic face, not a (female) virgin guarded by variously colored knights as is often the case in Malory’s famous version of the old round table stories or the poetics of the Victorian Tennyson in his verse retelling.¹³ Therefore, Faulkner is a better partner and more deserving of Wasson’s “pride” and love than that senior, and will, in fact, win Wasson’s devotion. As a courtship, Faulkner’s initial salvo into Wasson’s heart worked. After the war, they would share a level of intimacy that even their classmates would call “queer.”

The brief meeting and exchange of compliments before the war blossom into a full-fledged courtship when Faulkner returns from Canada and re-encounters Wasson at Ole Miss in the Fall of 1919, which is also when Faulkner became a member of the Sigma Alpha Epsilon fraternity and began to spend intimate time with Wasson both on campus and off in the private setting of the Stone family home. I would offer this courtship as the primary example of Faulkner’s actively and intentionally acting out a homosexual identity. Unlike the “quair” dandyism of his youth and his wounded soldier and Bohemian personae, this apocryphal performance is not merely a suggestively or latently, or even metaphorically, homosexual identity. With Wasson Faulkner plays at an actual homosexual relationship with a homosexual in a model courtship. Nor was this courtship a minor incident but a long, drawn-out affair of true minds (and maybe even true hearts); and let us not unto the marriage of true minds admit impediments. The sophistication of both of these men allowed them to meet each other on a higher level than as merely co-literary companions. After recounting his first meeting with Faulkner, Wasson details with sophisticated suggestion to rival any coded narrative of gay love the intimate bonds of his and Faulkner’s mutual affections.

Wasson epitomizes his courtship with Faulkner through two examples from after Faulkner's return from the war. The first begins privately but culminates in a public display on campus as they began to be reacquainted through their fraternity. Wasson confesses to loving the ritual practices of the fraternity, "especially that of initiation," which he considered "to be almost holy" (31-32). The bonds Faulkner forged in his fraternity would have long and, at the time, certainly unforeseen effects in his later life, effects I will return to in Chapter 9 of this study. In the immediate moment, however, Faulkner's primary bond in the fraternity was with Wasson. Wasson had been initiated in SAE at Sewanee, where he transferred after his freshman year at Ole Miss; he returned to Ole Miss in 1919 for a law degree. Faulkner's own initiation in the Fall of 1919 at Ole Miss left him less impressed. After his initiation ceremony "at the country home of Jim Stone," he asked Wasson to walk home with him some three miles to his parents' house on campus. Wasson narrates:

It was a dark night, and the way led through a thick wood of leafless trees. Bill was completely familiar with the terrain. I was filled with awe, imbued by the performance and words of the ritual, the ceremony having left an almost hypnotic effect on me. I said to Bill what a splendid choice the goddess Minerva had been for our patron.

"Don't you think the ritual's beautiful?" I said.

"All that mythological hash?"

"You're joking." I scarcely believed him.

"Can't you tell when Roman gods enter or Greek gods crash the scene?"

It's almost uncanny how those exact words remain in my memory when much more important things have long since faded.

“I miss flying,” he said, cutting off further discussion of the ritual. (32)

If these are the “exact words” Faulkner spoke, there is much to them. In this scenario, Wasson plays the initiate, Faulkner the guide, even as Wasson describes attending Faulkner’s initiation into the fraternity of which Wasson has been a member for two years. Wasson allows himself to be led, playing his part in this performance. Faulkner scoffs at the other performance at the fraternity initiation, but perfectly fulfills his role in the woods. He is sure-footed and never loses his way. He pretends he is a pilot who misses flying; he plays the part of the war hero for the eyes of his captive audience of one. These “exact words” place Faulkner in the role of teacher to Wasson’s wide-eyed innocence, a relationship bolstered also by the narrative when Wasson explains that Faulkner “was completely familiar with the terrain” of his hometown, whereas Wasson is not. They “continued [their] stroll to the campus through the dark woods, with [Faulkner] leading the way” (32), but their relationship changes after this first intimate time together. Each has played his part in the relationship accordingly, and the relationship, accordingly, begins to grow.

“In a day or so,” Wasson continues, Faulkner “came to my room and held up a slim book, then handed it to me. The author was Conrad Aiken. Titled *Turns and Movies*, the book recounted in an unconventional manner moments in the lives of some people in the worlds of music and the stage” (32). This book proves an apropos selection given Wasson and Faulkner’s later collaborations in the campus theater troupe they founded together, The Marionettes. They are men interested in the world of music and the stage. But to read the book, Faulkner leads Wasson out of his room and to “a place near one of the ubiquitous Confederate monuments” on campus where they “sat there together in the grass, and he read the book aloud to me as students passed to and fro, glancing questioningly at us” (32-33). A conversation ensues between them

over the merits of Aiken's poetry with Faulkner as his proponent, Wasson as his detractor in favor of Keats and Shakespeare. Their talk is very high-minded and literary, or so it would seem on its surface.

As is often the case with Wasson, he has implied more in his description of this day of reading than might immediately meet the eye. Those passing students "glanc[e] questioningly" at Wasson and Faulkner reading to each other on the grass from a book of poems. Perhaps those students passed at just the right moment to hear Faulkner read aloud from "The Apollo Trio" about a group of traveling actors described as "damned degenerates" who have "women's hips, With penciled eyes, and lean vermilioned lips" and who "eat up cocaine" and "[simper] sweetly in falsetto tones" (lines 4-6, 13, 20). Perhaps they recognized Aiken's allusions in the poem to drag culture and effeminate homosexuality. Or perhaps, just in passing, they overheard Faulkner reading from "Gabriel de Ford," a poem about a ventriloquist, "a grotesque manikin" with "fixed and smiling lips" (lines 5, 7), a poseur in mid-performance and a fitting description of Faulkner himself whose reputation as Count No 'Count preceded him on campus and raised its own set of questions about this strange local and his strange ways. These students may even have slowed enough in passing to hear Faulkner finish the poem:

And since he always sings and never talks,
And flits by nervously, swinging his cane,
Rumors are thick about him through the circuit.
Some say he hates the women, and loves men:
That once, out West, he tried to kiss a man,
Was badly hurt, then almost killed himself.
Others maintain a woman jilted him. (lines 14-20)

As a matter of pure passing detail, after the war, Faulkner often walked around with a cane for an injury he claimed he got in the trenches, though the other details of the poem likely caught the attention of passing students just as much as the mention of the cane would. It should come as no surprise that the other students would “glance questioningly” at these two young men reading Aiken’s poems to each other.¹⁴

The other example appertains to what can best be described as a series of private dates between the two men, sequestered dates away from the public eye of campus. “There were nights,” Wasson recounts, “when [Faulkner] would invite me to go to the family home of Phil Stone, where Bill was apparently welcome at all times,” even when the Stones were not home, as is the case with this particular story in Wasson’s memoir (33-34). Faulkner led Wasson into the family library where “he watched me read the book titles, and waved a hand to a brown leather chair where I sat down.” Then he offered Wasson “the treat [he’d] been promising,” a private concert of several Red Seal records the Stones owned, including one Faulkner claimed as “maybe [his] favorite--Beethoven’s Fifth,” which Wasson had never heard (34). Wasson and Faulkner, intimate together alone on an evening in the Stone family library, “were caught up in the spell and surge of the great musical composition” and listened in complete silence to the recording a second time through (35). Wasson recalls that they “had several such music sessions when the Stone family was away” (35), though he pauses to address this relationship in terms other than as a simple mentorship:

I doubt he felt he was acting the role of mentor; it was more a sharing. There wasn’t anyone else, other than Phil Stone, who cared deeply for things like literature that were thought on the campus to be quite far afield, outre, and, probably, effeminate. He had found in me a young malleable person who liked the

things he liked. He wasn't, and never became, a gregarious man. But maybe by being with me and talking with me, there wasn't so much loneliness for him. (36)

We could pause and consider what Wasson means by "sharing" and tease out the possible euphemism of the "several such music sessions" he and Faulkner enjoyed together at the Stone house while the Stones were away. After all, this space has loaded implications. Wasson lived on campus with a roommate; Faulkner lived in his parents' home. But in the privacy of the Stone house, they could create an intimate setting for a type of exchange that co-educational institutions strive to prevent occurring on campus grounds among members of the opposite sex and must turn a blind eye to in all-male dormitories. In this case, lacking a shared room on campus, they retreat to an off campus site, specifically, according to Wasson, to assuage Faulkner's "loneliness."

Whatever might have happened at the end of these nights together, to label these interactions *homosexual* is a fair assessment of them. In general, it is reductive to assume that this relationship--or any relationship--can only be homosexual if it progresses to the stage of physical sexual intercourse. Homosexuality is not a purely mechanical function, and throughout the twentieth century, and especially as men took on performed identities for homosexuality in the early twentieth century, the sense of *being* homosexual has long superseded simply *doing* "homosex" for men who apply the term to themselves a marker of identity, as Wasson did, though he avoided such explicit words in his memoir.¹⁵ As this relationship between Wasson and Faulkner highlights, the performance of these elaborate courtship rituals between these two men would give Faulkner ample experience of a homosexual perspective as a mode of being and living in the world, not simply as a act of two bodies touching with no context or larger implications for the lives of the men who claim those bodies as their own. With or without sexual

intercourse (Wasson is not one to kiss and tell), Faulkner produces fictions the profound truths of which are not hindered by the minutiae of his experience but by his understanding of the all-encompassing whole of how one defines his/her life. In this private setting, Faulkner could learn much about what it means to be gay, to define oneself as gay, and to perform that definition of self as a means of interacting with the world.

Indeed, in the case of this apocryphal homosexual relationship with Wasson, there is as much to be said about the public perception of this relationship as about Faulkner's private performances of it. As Wasson points out, the interest he and Faulkner had in literature and the arts was perceived by many as "far afield, outre, and, probably, effeminate." To be blunt, there is nothing "probably" about it. These public and private performances did not go unnoticed on campus nor did their implications remain unremarked. As Louis Cochran, a friend of Faulkner's from this period and a fellow student at Ole Miss, noted of Faulkner in an interview with Joseph Blotner: many on the Ole Miss campus "thought him queer" (qtd. in Blotner 80). Blotner does not inflect the word here to signal some type of local or colloquial usage like "quair." The word is pure and pointed: queer. The people calling Faulkner this word are not just the locals of Oxford anymore with their peculiar "quair," but the students at the university, twenty-somethings from around the South, New Orleans to Memphis, and in some cases veterans of a foreign war. This crowd is a more cosmopolitan and educated group, more familiar with broader national slang terms and their uses. Such a distinction matters because the word itself in the early 1920s is far less nebulous than just a few years previously; *queer* is coming into its own and taking on a specific denotative meaning in government documents and elsewhere to refer specifically to homosexuals. By 1920, *queer* meant *gay*. The students on campus are calling Faulkner a homosexual.

Faulkner only spent a little more than a year enrolled at Ole Miss. He withdrew from the university in the fall of 1920, but after his withdrawal, he stayed in Oxford doing little except adding to the impression that he really was just a count of no account, though he would continue to publish poems, stories, and even reviews in the campus newspaper. Among those reviews was one of William Alexander Percy's volume of poetry *In April Once*. Percy would read the review and would not appreciate it. When Wasson introduced Faulkner to Percy in Greenville in 1921, the meeting did not go well (Blotner records that Faulkner was also thoroughly drunk when he met Percy, which did not help mitigate any cool reception between the two). Seeing his friend wasting away in Oxford, Stark Young inserted himself into Faulkner's life in the fall of 1921. Faulkner accepted his help.

The Oxford Eagle social column ran an announcement in September 1921 to say that, after studying a year in Italy, Stark Young would be returning to Oxford briefly on his way to his teaching post at Amherst College, though Young was effectively in the process of resigning that post to move full-time to New York to work as a drama critic.¹⁶ The *Eagle* also reported on 8 September that Dr. A. A. Young, Stark's father, had fallen off a ladder at his home and was hurt. In his notes, Blotner connects the two items of information: "So he [A. A. Young] was home at this time; so Stark could come to visit him & find WF [William Faulkner] 'discontented.'"¹⁷ Emily Whitehurst Stone, Phil Stone's wife, would also remember that Stark Young "rent[ed] a room over the Square to write, over New's Drug Store [. . .]. One hot summer day there, PS [Phil Stone] and WF were laughing at D'Annunzio, when SY [Stark Young] said, '#But you know he still has quite a following.' WF and PS laughed and SY was furious."¹⁸ The version of this account that makes its way into Blotner's one-volume biography--Blotner merely says that Faulkner and Young did not agree on the merits of D'Annunzio's poetry--omits the jovial

intimacy of Emily Stone's telling. Seven years after being introduced to Young, Faulkner clearly maintained a good relationship with him and enjoyed his visits home to Oxford.

Blotner was not unaware of the bonds among Young, Stone, and Faulkner. Emily Stone also mentioned in her interview critiques of Young's writing by the citizens of Oxford, including by his own father, "who talked about his writing" and "would only wonder how he could remember all that."¹⁹ In an undated note to himself, Blotner added:

WF once remarked to me (perhaps to FLG [Frederick L. Gwynn]) wryly, that Mr. Stark Young once told him that people in his home town (Oxford?) wondered how he could remember so much (his Dr. father too?) as appeared in his stories. WF sardonic about the fact that they couldn't understand imagination or writing fiction so true it would be what people would do, perhaps people the writer never knew of. (This last unspoken by WF, but part of what he meant I'm sure).²⁰

Blotner is conceding in this note that Faulkner's ability to turn "the actual into apocryphal" might have had a source more directly in Young's tutelage than is often credited, though Blotner's note also implies that Faulkner felt that all writing--Young's, Balzac's, Dostoyevsky's, et. al.--comes from precisely this process of apocryphization. Still, Young's proximity to Faulkner would have made Faulkner, perhaps, more attuned to the criticisms that the local population laid against Stark Young. After all, in regard to *The Hamlet* in 1939, Faulkner would claim that he faced almost the same criticism from his fellow Oxonians. In a letter to Malcolm Cowley, 16 August 1945, Faulkner would claim that his character V. K. Ratliff/Suratt left many in Oxford wondering, "How in the hell did he remember all that, and when did that happen anyway?" (*SLWF* 197).

In other notes compiled with various interviews and newspaper articles related to Young,

Blotner would continue pondering Young's influence on Faulkner. Blotner summarizes an announcement from the Oxford *Eagle*, 6 March 1924, about Young's two new books, *Three Fountains* and *Italian Sketches*. The same announcement also says that Young would be "staging" the play *Welded* by Eugene O'Neill. Appended to this summary, Blotner comments,

He [Young] must have been an example for F [Faulkner] long before Sherwood Anderson. F may very well have been thinking of Y [Young] in those reviews he did for the MISS [*The Mississippian*], reviewing those plays, O'N's [O'Neill's] among them, thinking maybe of making a career for himself as a reviewer at the same time that he was writing his plays.²¹

Later in his career, in the 1950s after Faulkner's Nobel Prize, numerous writers and literary figures would remember connections to him that are, at best, suspect; even many Oxonians would suddenly recall having been his biggest fans all along. Young, on the other hand, was accused of *not* caring for Faulkner in those earlier, formative years. To this charge, he would respond in the *Eagle* in 1950 that he had long been a friend of Faulkner's and long had faith in Faulkner's brilliance.²² Young, it appears, was not merely a *ex post facto* hanger-on.

In 1921, when he returned home to Oxford, Young would accordingly make an offer to Faulkner that would have tremendous ramifications for his developing career. Worried that Faulkner was "bruised and wasted" in his provincial hometown, Young "suggested that he come to New York and sleep on my sofa till Miss Prall, a friend of mine, could find him a place there and he could find a room" (qtd. in Blotner 102).²³ Elizabeth Prall managed a bookstore in New York where Young was able to find a job for Faulkner. This same Elizabeth Prall later married Sherwood Anderson and moved to New Orleans, where she would be instrumental in Faulkner's migration to the Vieux Carre in the mid-1920s. In 1921 Faulkner did not realize the lasting effect

this advantageous trip would have on him; rather, he wanted out of Oxford. He accepted Young's offer and travelled north, though he actually spent the majority of October in New Haven with friends he had met while living there with Stone in 1918. Faulkner would not return to New York until November to rendezvous with Young.

Blotner coyly says of Young that he was a "rare bird in the eyes of the average Oxford resident" and a "true exotic" (102). Frederick Karl offers a more explicit rendering of the tension to which Blotner obliquely refers: "Given his sexual preferences, Oxford was clearly not the territory for [Young]. He needed large cities and travel abroad, where he could blend into the landscape and escape unnoticed" (174). In essence, Karl is setting up the same mythic geography Howard attempts to deconstruct in *Men Like That*. In this mythos, the rare bird Young does not belong in Oxford; he does find a good place for himself in New York, specifically in Greenwich Village. *If* Oxford is a rural space completely non-conducive to gay life (and that is a big *if*), Greenwich Village certainly is not.²⁴ Young would be the first of two known homosexual roommates of Faulkner's in the 1920s, Young in Greenwich Village, William Spratling in the French Quarter in New Orleans. Both locations have a long history of being associated not only with artistic communities, but also of functioning as gay enclaves in the larger American landscape. Greenwich Village functions as a kind of white elephant in discussing Young and Faulkner; it delineates against an otherwise homogenous background a distinctive shape, a feature of the landscape that, to say the least, stands out. Greenwich Village, even in 1920, had already established its place as a gay haven. If Young was gay in Greenwich Village where he could live his life more openly than he felt he could in Oxford, then Faulkner's moving in with him in the Village would have put him into gay living quarters with an openly gay man; perhaps even Young's sense of that Faulkner needed a change of place was predicated off his sense that

Faulkner, like Young himself, would thrive in the less (sexually) repressive atmosphere of gay Greenwich Village.

Jay Parini has been willing to suggest that Young's "interest" in Faulkner "was, also, perhaps, a sign of sexual attraction: he relished the company of younger males, especially those with an artistic bent, like Faulkner, who either had no explicit knowledge of Young's sexual inclinations or didn't much care" (58). Since Faulkner knew Young was a homosexual, it follows that he "didn't much care." In regards to Faulkner's life in New Orleans in later years, Parini is willing to concede that "[o]ne sees that Faulkner was clearly at ease with homosexual men" (76) and that "I suspect the he identified with homosexuals as outsiders and considered himself--as an artist--an outsider as well" (77). There is no good reason why we cannot apply these statements retroactively to Stark Young and Faulkner's brief time in 1921 in Greenwich Village and even earlier, to Faulkner's friendship with Young from their first meeting in the mid-1910s.

Faulkner's stay with Young proved minimal, lasting only a few days. According to the postmarks on his letters home, he went to New Haven, writing his mother from there on 6 October 1921. Evidence in the letter suggests he had stopped in New York first, as he explains, "Mr. Stark hasn't come yet, so I left an address at his office in New York so he can tell me when to come down to get work" (*Thinking* 144). The letters from New Haven continue through 1 November 1921. After a nine-day hiatus, Faulkner's next letter home, dated 10 November, is postmarked from New York. In the interim, he has come to New York, moved in briefly with Young, and met Elizabeth Prall. "Mr. Stark," Faulkner writes, "lives in Greenwich Village, a lovely basement room where you can be lulled to sleep by the passing of the subway trains. I stayed with him last night and spent today looking for a room of my own" (156). Faulkner stayed with Young for only a night or two, though his letter very clearly explains that Young's

apartment consisted of a single basement room. His letter otherwise describes the crowds of New York and briefly details the eccentricities of style for its denizens, notably all in the Village. “Miss Prall” wears “[h]orned rimmed glasses, bobbed hair, and smocks,” which elicit from Faulkner the exclamation: “Styles are queer” (157). He also notes that the first important poet he meets, Edwin Arlington Robinson, is “a real man,” which is to say he is “not a Greenwich villager” (157). At some point in Faulkner’s journey through Greenwich Village, William Alexander Percy came by to visit him, apparently all in good faith as a friend from down South, any transgressions for Faulkner’s drunkenness in Greenville or his review of Percy’s poems forgiven (Blotner 108). Apparently, Young was not the only gay Mississippian who acted differently in New York than he did at home.

That Faulkner arrived in New York on Young’s invitation only to stay a night with him and want to find his own place certainly seems odd, at least on the surface. In a later interview now collected in *Lion in the Garden*, Faulkner would claim of his stay with Young that, “He had just one bedroom so I slept on an antique Italian sofa in his front room. It was too short. I didn’t learn until three years later that Young lived in mortal terror that I would push the arm off the antique sofa while I slept” (14). Young would recall the situation differently. Along with saying he had only a one room apartment, which Faulkner’s 1921 letter verifies, he also noted that the sofa was just “a homely denim sofa, bought at a sale” and quite different from what Faulkner claimed was “an antique I so preciously feared would be ruined by the wild young genius!” (qtd. in Blotner 104). Faulkner’s embellishment of this brief stay strikes an odd note for the degree to which it participates in a coded homophobia almost to the point that it sounds like an inside joke. First, Faulkner seems reluctant to admit that he shared *one* room with a man, a known gay man no less, in Greenwich Village. He places himself in a front room, not in the bedroom, even

though the apartment, by both Young's account and the admission of Faulkner's earlier letter, allowed for no such spatial differentiations. Second, despite making sure that no one thought he slept in the same room with Young, much less on the same bed (or sofa), Faulkner alludes to his sleeping habits enough to suggest that he is a rambunctious sleeper given to breaking the bed in his nightly tumbling. Though the sofa is "too short," Faulkner himself was a very short man and often felt self-conscious about his height. Finally, in much the same way that "sleeping with" someone is a euphemism for sex, Faulkner's fear of breaking the sofa in his sleep comes across as a humorous euphemism in its own right for other nocturnal activities, and at the least suggests that, if he was actually sleeping, he was tossing and turning the whole night through. One can only speculate why.

I am reading so much into Faulkner's anecdote not because I believe that he is trying to cover up the truth but committing numerous Freudian slips that reveal something about his "real" sexuality but because the evidence clearly suggests that he is telling a fiction about his stay with Young that deserves to be read for its deliberate ironies and subtle implications. In this case, in an interview from 1931, ten years after his night with Young, he is creating an apocryphal homophobia and playing his part splendidly, though in actuality he is simply admitting that he understands what connotations might arise from his admission that he slept, even for just one night, in the same room as gay Stark Young in gay Greenwich Village. Though one need always be careful reading Faulkner's letters from the late 1910s and early 1920s too literally, as these are the letters that Faulkner used to craft his apocryphal wounded soldier identity, the letters do offer some understanding of Faulkner's real motives for moving out from Young's apartment so quickly. In his second letter home from New York, postmarked 12 November, he begins right away by assuring his mother, "I am settled at last" (*Thinking* 158), in an apartment near Central

Park. While he doesn't like it, since it is "about ten miles from Mr. Stark" (159), he allows that "[i]t will do until I find a place I like better" (158). "I want," he makes clear, "a place down toward Greenwich village where Mr. Stark lives, but rents are cheaper in this part of town" (158). Faulkner did eventually move to the Village, finding an apartment at "35 Vandam Street" (161).

There is ample circumstantial evidence in these anecdotes to claim that Faulkner was comfortable around, knew about, and lived with and among homosexuals, even preferring to live in their neighborhood rather than elsewhere in the city where rents are cheaper. In particular, he seems devoted to "Mr. Stark." Greenwich Village, of course, has long had a reputation as an artistic enclave as well as a reputation as a gay neighborhood, a reputation George Chauncey dates to the 1910s and 1920s when the enclave in the Village "constituted the first visible middle-class gay subculture in the city [. . .] even though its middle-class and bohemian members are better remembered" (10). Blotner himself says of the Village, as coyly as ever, that it was a place "to try free expression and perhaps free love, but also to try to paint, sculpt, compose, and write" (105). Gary Richards offers as well that Faulkner's next habitue, "the bohemian Vieux Carre of the 1920s was one of the few urban areas of the United States outside Harlem and Greenwich Village with a significantly open homosexual population" (22). Though no evidence survives that Faulkner ever "slummed it" in Harlem to take in a drag show in the early 1920s, he would hardly need so overt a homosexual escapade to experience the gay life of the city and of one of the preeminent and most open gay subcultures in the country (and he would "slum it" in Harlem in 1932 with Ben Wasson to visit a drag bar with Carl Van Vechten and his boyfriend).

The existing record of this digression from a life firmly planted in Oxford points to

Faulkner's desire to find a space for himself in the world beyond the Victorian, and implicitly heterosexual, confines of his hometown. He did not want to live *with* Young; instead, he wanted to live *like* Young, unfettered by tradition, expectation, and convention, the free life of an artist in a brave new world. But these desires implicate a homosexual life. There is no reason to believe that Faulkner was unaware of those implications. Although he was invited by Young to New York, the invitation of a place to stay only lasted until Faulkner could find a place of his own. He did so quickly, having some money from home to live off of and having landed a job with Elizabeth Prall as soon as he arrived. Faulkner attempts this trip to New York to forge his own life, not merely to flop on a friend's couch like a bum. He does not seem interested in courting Young the way he courted Wasson nor sharing an intimate emotional relationship with him. His excursion is entirely professional; as Young has moved beyond the confines of Oxford, so will his friend, William Faulkner. That the path he will follow was forged by a homosexual whose trailblazing is related to his sexual identity is mostly a coincidental result of time and place (at that time and in that Oxford, gay life appeared unbearable, so Young sought a new life elsewhere). That time and place are Faulkner's as well as Young's. He follows a path that parallels Young's. There is no reason to believe that he was blind to those parallels; in fact, his 1931 recounting of the trip, in which he plays with the implications of his one-night stand, suggests he knew perfectly well the multiple levels of meaning in his following and staying with Young in Young's attempt to escape the confines of home. Though other options did exist, Faulkner saw a choice between two options: the (heteronormative) life of Oxford or this (queer) life of Young's. He chose Young's path, and with it he inherited its accoutrements. Rather than shun them, he embraced them and let them become part of his sense of self and, later, a part of his fiction.

Unfortunately, this sojourn only lasted until Christmas 1921. Worried about Faulkner, Phil Stone, with the help of Estelle's father, Lem Oldham, secured Faulkner his infamous job as university postmaster in Oxford. After a brief stay in New York, Faulkner agreed to come home to accept the job, making this foray to the Village something of a failure. He would stay in Oxford until 1924, where he would continue his friendship with Ben Wasson. Though Wasson graduated with his law degree in 1921 and moved home to Greenville, he often returned to Oxford, and one of his visits, which coincided with one of Estelle's visits, offers further insight into the way Wasson and Faulkner interacted with each other in the elaborate performance of their courtship and lifelong relationship.

In December 1924, Faulkner was preparing a permanent move to New Orleans; he had made numerous trips to the city from 1921 to 1924 with Phil Stone and the Clarksdale gangster Reno DeVaux, but in late 1924 he went to New Orleans to meet Elizabeth Prall, now Elizabeth Anderson, Sherwood Anderson's new wife. The trip convinced Faulkner to move to New Orleans, which he would do in early 1925, but first, he found himself in Oxford with Wasson and Estelle. While in Oxford, Wasson stopped by the Oldhams' home for a party. Faulkner chose not to attend in order to continue working on a poem. After the crowd left, Estelle invited Wasson to stay and showed him into the music room, where she played the piano for him, in a setting that closely approximates the "musical sessions" Wasson and Faulkner shared at the Stone's home while they listened to Red Seal records there. "She finished the piece," Wasson explains in his memoir, "then rose from the piano stool, put her arms around my shoulders, and we spontaneously kissed" (81). Notably, the subject (Estelle) of the sentence performs the verbs "finished," "rose," and "put." Wasson changes the subject to "we" for the verb "kissed," putting himself into the situation as an acting agent, not merely the recipient of an unwelcome advance.

The kissing lasted until Cho-Cho (Estelle's daughter Victoria) interrupted. Wasson makes a quick exit, and after stumbling around town for a while, confused, made his way to Faulkner to confess. "Bud," Wasson recalls Faulkner saying, "Eve wasn't the only woman who handed out an apple, just the first one" (81). Faulkner gave Wasson the poem he had just finished and never mentioned the incident again, though Wasson would believe a similar incident in *Flags in the Dust* between Belle Mitchell and Horace Benbow was based on Wasson's transgression.²⁵

That Wasson grants himself agency in this kiss seems odd, though it does help to mitigate the erroneous assumption that Estelle is a wanton provocateur. Had Wasson depicted Estelle as throwing herself on him despite his resistance, she would come across as a hussy acting out uncontrollable sexual impulses when, ultimately, Wasson means to suggest a far more nuanced and intentional interaction was taking place. That Wasson must confess immediately to Faulkner seems odder. Estelle was still married to Cornell Franklin, and Wasson claims in his memoir that he did not at the time know that Estelle and Faulkner had feelings for each other prior to that marriage or possibly over the course of its duration. That Faulkner forgives Wasson so easily is odder still. Did he not still secretly love her or have any plans to marry her someday himself? By 1924 Faulkner had likely surmised that Estelle's relationship with Cornell was in extreme turmoil; Sensibar points out that Estelle's many trips home to Oxford would have made most observers aware that something was amiss. Yet Faulkner still left for New Orleans, despite her presence and any slight suggestion she might become available. Not until 1927, when he returned from living in New Orleans, does he seem to begin moving in the direction of courting her and to begin solidifying a life for himself in Oxford. To an extent, his forgiveness of Wasson follows from his assumption that, despite her troubled marriage, Estelle was still not his to feel slighted by. We might also wonder at the degree to which Faulkner did not see Wasson,

declaring himself culpable or not, as a threat.

It is tempting to try to read Estelle's motives in this incident. She knew that Wasson and Faulkner were very good friends, but later, in Hollywood when Faulkner tried to pass off Meta Carpenter as Wasson's girlfriend rather than his own, Estelle would see right through it. Estelle likely knew that Wasson was a homosexual from his reputation on campus and in Oxford. From the time she sponsored Franklin in the yearbook she participated in the social scene of university life where, we can easily assume, she would have learned the basic social categories of campus life, including the markers for and rumors about male homosexuality. Did she kiss him despite his homosexuality? Did she kiss him knowing he would tell Faulkner? So as to make Faulkner jealous? Or did she kiss him because, by kissing him, she was kissing the one who replaced her as the object of his affections? Was kissing Wasson a much deeper act, a confused moment when Faulkner's two "lovers" come together, only awkwardly since the two lovers are themselves bound to gender codes and protocol? Arguably, in this incident we see Estelle bonding with Wasson, her would-be lover's would-be lover, only that bonding occurs as misplaced kiss since Estelle and Wasson, a woman and a man, do not know how else to articulate this bond, of which Wasson claims he is ignorant and, as a homosexual, would not seem likely to pursue in the first place. If we could unsex all three of these lovers, we would see triangles of exchange and interaction not too dissimilar from those Eve Sedgwick explores in nineteenth-century literature in her book on "homosocial bonding," *Between Men*. But these bonds are not between *men* and mitigated by the ameliorating presence of a woman. Wasson and Estelle, a man and a woman, are negotiating their shared love for another man. Wasson and Faulkner seem to have little trouble expressing their devotion to each other, whereas with Sedgwick's paradigm, such blatant homosexuality must be mitigated by the presence of the woman. In this case, though, the

homosexuality is not the problem, but the heterosexual desires of this triangle are certainly having a difficult time articulating themselves.

All these questions about what, precisely, motivated Estelle at this moment must reside in the realm of speculation because they seek to understand motivations that are fundamentally unarticulated. This incident is told to us by Wasson; no record survives in which Estelle confirmed or denied this incident or commented on her motivations, though Wasson remained her friend throughout her life as much as he remained Faulkner's. Wasson's motives do deserve our consideration. In Wasson's memoir, the incident culminates in his confession. He worries about *his* relationship with Faulkner, and Faulkner, ever the courtier, forgives Wasson's transgressions. Indeed, in Wasson's story, it is Wasson, not Estelle, whose virtue in the eyes of his lover is imperiled. The two figures in direct contact are two men. Estelle is the lover whose desires are vague and peripheral. She courts Faulkner through Wasson; Faulkner does not court Wasson through her. Wasson may kiss her, but he also does not court Faulkner through her; he goes directly to Faulkner to confess. An incident similar to this will show up in Faulkner's fiction, though not in *Flags in the Dust*, but in "Divorce in Naples," when George forgives Carl for his brief tryst with a woman. In the story and in this real event, the wronged lover forgives his beloved. Wasson remains steadfast. Galahad's purity, though tempted, remains true.

If he failed to escape Oxford in 1921, Faulkner was considerably more successful in attempts to escape in 1924 and through 1927. In New Orleans, Faulkner would begin writing prose and eventually compose his first two novels. He would fail to court Helen Baird, though he certainly made every effort to succeed. And he would share a room with another openly gay man, the architect and artist William Spratling. He would travel to Europe. He would visit Oscar Wilde's tomb. Spratling would have an homosexual affair in a jail in Europe, for which Faulkner

would forgive him as he had forgiven Wasson. They would return to New Orleans and continue living with each other in one of America's other historically known gay spaces: the Vieux Carre.

As recently as 2012 in his study *Dixie Bohemia*, John Shelton Reed has attempted to outline the sexual otherness and bohemian liberation of the French Quarter in the 1920s. He quite naturally places Faulkner and Spratling in the center of his "circle," largely because their co-authored book *Sherwood Anderson and Other Famous Creoles* offers the most extensive listing and first-hand published accounting of the people so instrumental in creating the sexual and artistic freedom there. When, however, Reed wanted to flesh out the sketches in that book and understand the extent of sexual liberation--and particularly the homosexual presence--in the Vieux Carre, he turned to the Blotner Papers, Joseph Blotner's extensive interview notes that he collected for his biography, because those notes, if not the biographies produced from them, teem with rich, gossipy details of the sexual habits and sexual openness of the people with whom Faulkner surrounded himself, particularly gay men such as Lyle Saxon, William Odiorne, and the unconquerable William Spratling. Prior to Reed's study, Gary Richards laid out the most detailed biographical groundwork necessary to understand the gay influence Faulkner's time in the French Quarter had on his early prose. While in the next chapters I plan to extend Richards' premise to Faulkner's larger oeuvre rather than just to his prose creations from while he lived in New Orleans, there is little to add to Richards' biographical material. Nor was Richards the first to note that many of Faulkner's friendships in the quarter were with gay men.²⁶ Scholars such as Joel Williamson, Minrose Gwin, and James Polchin openly discuss the homosexuality of these men Faulkner met in the French Quarter and the possible influences their homosexuality had on Faulkner's fiction. If there is one place in Faulkner's biography where scholars have laid out the extent of gay influences on Faulkner, that place is New Orleans.

Richards, in the most detailed and fully articulated study of the lot, redirects the traditional pattern of the conversation about Faulkner's time in New Orleans, arguing not that Faulkner lived in New Orleans and happened, while there, to meet a few openly gay men but that New Orleans was itself a center of gay life into which Faulkner immersed himself and that these men are the characters most prominent in the life he led in that immersion. Of Faulkner's life in New Orleans and the fiction he produced from it, Richards writes that, despite Faulkner's attempts to minimize the influence these gay artistic models had on him, "he repeatedly betrays his admiration of these figures and implicates himself in multiple strategies that reinforce links between artistic production and male same-sex desire" (21). What Richards ultimately means to posit is that Faulkner, whose artistic pursuits were in his life been labeled effeminate, "quair," and queer, found in the French Quarter a community of "queer" (homosexual) artists who not only showed him that such associations of art and sexuality have merit, but that those associations are nothing to be afraid of. In fact, looking at the entirety of Faulkner's life up to his arrival in New Orleans, I would slightly alter Richards' framework: Faulkner did not discover this association between art and homosexuality in New Orleans. He was well aware of it before he arrived in New Orleans, and his arrival there may actually have been predicated on just this very association.

The stories of Faulkner and William Spratling's exploits in New Orleans, and later in Europe, have already been well-documented in Faulkner biographies, though they deserve revisiting, for if ever Faulkner openly embraced a gay life, he embraced it with William Spratling. Drinking overpriced Pernod and bathtub gin they made in their shared apartment, Spratling and Faulkner passed the time by shooting from their window with a BB gun at passersby and awarding points based on the exoticism of their targets: a "butcher boy" was worth

fewer points than if one of them “pink[ed] a Negro nun” which “rated ten points (for rarity value)” (Spratling 28). In his memoir, Spratling also recounts a joke he and Faulkner pulled on Robert Anderson, Sherwood’s son, who stopped by too often and wore out his welcome at Spratling and Faulkner’s apartment: “The kid was so difficult to get rid of that finally, one day, we grabbed him, took his pants off, painted his peter green and pushed him out on the street, locking the door” (28). According to Richards, both Blotner and Parini give misleading accounts of this incident when they reduce it to childish game-playing. Robert Anderson, Richards points out, was nearly twenty when the two Williams did this to him, “suggesting that adult sexual currents rather than those of ostensibly desexualized childhood impacted this scenario” (Richards 24). Also, in one of the sketches Faulkner wrote for the *Times-Picayune* while he was living in New Orleans, “Out of Nazareth,” the narrator, David, a stand-in for Faulkner, recounts joining a character named Spratling in Jackson Square for some cruising. Spratling scores a young vagrant who loves Housman’s collection *A Shropshire Lad*. In this cruising scene in New Orleans, referring to *A Shropshire Lad* is no random allusion. Faulkner means to use the volume as a signifier of the gay theme of the story, which is everywhere inferred but carefully never explicitly stated. With the volume, he is tipping his hand, in case his readers miss that the story is about two men cruising a park for young “lads.”

Faulkner’s original purpose for being in New Orleans, other than to meet Anderson, was ostensibly so he could sail to Europe. Instead, he spent the first half of 1925 writing *Mayday*, later titled *Soldiers’ Pay*, when he was not out cruising with Spratling or writing his sketches for the *Times-Picayune*--including “Out of Nazareth”--or, in his spare time, writing a letter about marriage and the difficulty two people of opposite sexes have in relating to each other to the editor of a New Orleans paper. Spratling would claim his influence on this period of Faulkner’s

creative life, specifically in regards to the novel Faulkner wrote in their shared apartment. He explains that *Soldiers' Pay* is “a novel in which I am ‘reflected’ as one of his characters,” though he never specifies which character he means and the term “reflected” leaves open to interpretation the degree to which his influence permeates Faulkner’s novel and his other literary output at the time (Spratling 31).

A more direct example of Spratling’s influence, though, may be a less famous but supremely revealing essay Faulkner wrote for a local newspaper. On 4 April 1925 in the *Item-Tribune*, the “poet, philosopher, and student of life William Faulkner” responded to an editorial column in which the writer had queried: “What is the matter with marriage?”²⁷ The editorialist, Barbara Brooks, was paying ten dollars for the best response of no more than 250 words. Faulkner, whose picture was published with his response, offers that marriage is not the problem; the people who enter it are. He admonishes those who become consumed by “[t]he first frenzy of passion, of intimacy,” which he claims “is never love.” He worries that “man invariably gains unhappiness when he goes into a thing for the sole purpose of getting something. To take what he has at hand and to create from it his heart’s desire is the thing.” Significantly, Faulkner’s response to the question does not fault the institution of marriage; it faults the people, the man and the woman, who enter it. To the extent to which Faulkner’s response measures the depths of his own heart, he is implicating himself for his refusal to marry Estelle as much as he is admonishing Estelle for marrying Franklin instead, both past moments an older Faulkner is perhaps reconsidering and categorizing as the product of the “frenzy” of youth. After all, he was the one who had marriage to hand with Estelle in 1918 and refused on a technicality that later he may have easily come to regret as a spur of the moment impulse that costs him his promised bride. He wanted to marry Estelle; on a fundamental level, he is an advocate for the institution of

marriage. He obstructed the marriage by not understanding what Estelle needed from him--an alternative to her parents' choice of a husband whom she did not love.

Despite the failings of marriage, Faulkner maintains that the union of two people is not the problem. He even specifies: "Two men or two women--forming a partnership, always remember that the other has weaknesses, and by taking into account the fallibility of mankind, they gain success and kindness." Though Faulkner does not call it a marriage--indeed, the same-sex marriage debate belongs to our time, not his--what he means by a "partnership" more accurately describes the "marriage" to which he believes heterosexual partners should aspire. He advocates for love, "a fuel which feeds its never-dying fire," rather than for passion, "a fire which burns itself out." The conceit of his response to the marriage question is that same-sex partnerships maintain a higher degree of purity than the base passions of heterosexual affairs. Same-sex partners understand each other. He takes this conceit so far as to make it the model on which all successful (heterosexual) "marriages" should be built, not on the institutions of an expectation but on the partnership of like minds. That Faulkner would turn his attention to the question of marriage at this juncture in his writing, and argue for same-sex partnerships as a model of happy married life, is no minor sidetrack. The influences that shaped his opinion in this editorial are fundamental to all of the creative output in these critical years of his intellectual development, especially in both of the novels he wrote in New Orleans.

Faulkner would eventually make his trip to Europe. He and Spratling travelled to Europe together, but only after Faulkner had submitted his manuscript of *Soldiers' Pay* to Boni and Liveright, which accepted it for publication. The two Williams arrived in Genoa on Sunday 2 August 1925 and immediately got themselves into trouble. Sometime after midnight, Spratling, admitting he "had reached that stage where everything seemed irresistibly amusing," approached

a woman and a man he describes as “her ‘business manager’” and proceeded to toss coins on the floor while dancing on a table (Spratling 32). In his drunken state, he had convinced himself that he had found a pimp and prostitute and was delighted that they both “scrambl[ed] after the coins” (32). The fun lasted until he was arrested for stomping on the coins, and therefore defacing the image of the king on them. He spent a night in jail. In his memoir, Spratling describes very little about his prison experience except to say that he spoke to other prisoners, including “a young kid” and an “Italian hero who had escaped the French Foreign Legion in Africa” (32). Spratling does report that, in the morning when Faulkner came to retrieve him, Faulkner was “distant and gloomy” and seemed mad at Spratling. When Spratling pressed him about “seem[ing] a little sore,” Faulkner rebutted that “why shouldn’t he be sore, having missed such an experience himself” (33).

Blotner remains faithful to Spratling’s account when he recounts it in his biography in its proper chronological place.²⁸ Blotner then includes that Faulkner shared this incident with Ben Wasson in a letter in which “he made himself the protagonist” (Blotner 156). Whether or not Blotner ever saw this letter is unclear. Wasson reported in his interview with Blotner that Faulkner had written him “from Europe saying he had been jailed in Italy obviously and characteristically he had appropriated Bill Spratl[ing]’s story.” In those interview notes, immediately following this sentence, Blotner added, “Ben says Bill Sprat[ling] introduced the Riviera [Riviera] to America whatever that means,” but for reasons also unclear, Blotner crossed this sentence out.²⁹ Such simple facts belie an important detail in the story, which appears in the revised edition of Blotner’s biography but nowhere in the first, nor in either of Spratling’s published accounts nor in either the hand-written nor the later typed versions of Blotner’s interview with Spratling in January 1965, though Blotner would cite that interview as the source

for a profound piece of information about Spratling and about Faulkner's appropriation of his night in jail.

According to Blotner, Spratling admitted that “[t]here in the dark cell, another prisoner had begged for his sexual favors, and Spratling had brusquely granted them” (Blotner 176). When Blotner added this detail to the 1984 revised biography, he quite pointedly does *not* include it in its proper chronological place with his recounting of the Genoa material in Chapter 18. Rather, he adds it later, far removed from the identity switch Faulkner made in his letter to Wasson, in Chapter 20 with a general overview of some of Faulkner's fictional output from his European trip. Joel Williamson follows Blotner's lead (and his notes and his sources) to verify that Faulkner did relate the incident to Wasson and did change the incident to say “that it was he [not Spratling] who got into difficulty and was thrown in jail” (202). But Williamson places the incident from the jail immediately in context with Faulkner's appropriation of the story; he explains, “Apparently, Spratling told Faulkner that while he was in jail, he participated in a homosexual act,” though he also offers that “[p]resumably, however, Bill did not tell Ben about a sexual encounter” in his letter, only that he, not Spratling, had spent a night in jail (202). Williamson refuses any interpretation of this strange identity switch beyond the adverbs “Apparently” and “Presumably,” both of which he adds because he is following Blotner's published records but cannot confirm those records in the archived interview notes. Surely, Blotner would not have included this information had Spratling not told it to him, but he clearly chose not to write it down in his notes; though perhaps something of this story explains Wasson's reference to the “Riviera” that prompted Blotner to write “whatever that means.”

That Faulkner took a story about a sexual encounter from his gay friend in Europe and told it to his gay friend in America creates a chain of gay erotics between these men and

implicates Faulkner's own sense of the continuity of his relationships with these two gay men. Unfortunately, the written record of what Spratling actually said to Faulkner and then what Faulkner related to Wasson is lost--close inspection of the archived interview notes demonstrates that Blotner's additional 1984 detail is predicated at best on unverifiable hearsay.³⁰ It is tempting to read Wasson's ambiguous statement about Spratling bringing the Riviera to America as a coded reference to his knowledge of Spratling's gay exploits in Europe and his return to America afterward, but certainly the dearth of any clear detail in the interview statement makes such a reading impossible to support. That Williamson "presumes" Faulkner did not relate the *whole* story to Wasson in that missing letter makes him a vote against such a reading of Blotner's crossed-out sentence from his interview notes. The entire incident and its suggestive implications in this study seem so nearly to be the smoking gun that does not smoke. Nonetheless, Williamson does draw attention to the curiosity of the incident and Faulkner's interest in and appropriation of it. Given these details, and assuming that Blotner was not simply making them up, the fun Faulkner regrets missing was Spratling's homosexual encounter in a foreign jail.

After arriving in Europe, Spratling and Faulkner separated to make their own tours, but met in Switzerland after only a few days and traveled together onward to Paris, arriving on 13 August 1925. Faulkner began working on material that would become his heavily psychoanalytical though never completed novel *Elmer*, which Blotner would later publish after Faulkner's death in its most nearly-completed form "A Portrait of Elmer."³¹ Faulkner would tour the Luxembourg Gardens, source of inspiration for the final scene in *Sanctuary*, and tour some World War I battlefields, gaining copious firsthand information to include in his World War I stories set in Europe. Much of Faulkner's European sojourn informs his early fiction, especially the Genoa jail incident, which greatly influences "Divorce in Naples," as Faulkner takes the

Wasson/Estelle incident from the previous year and transfers it to Naples, a substitute for Genoa. He takes the two primary characters, two male lovers whose bond is threatened by a third party, and substitutes Spratling's night of adventure for Wasson's transgression with Estelle. The protagonists of the story, George and Carl, substitute for Faulkner and Spratling, but Carl and George are crewmen on board the ship, whereas Faulkner and Spratling were passengers. The final substitution in the story proves most intriguing: the woman in the story with whom George cheats on Carl for the man in the jail with Spratling.

The sexual encounter occurs offscreen, Carl returning to a table in a bistro to find his lover George has disappeared with one of the women with whom they were having drinks. The narrator describes these women as "of that abject glittering kind that seamen know or that know seamen" (877). The pun in this description, in the first sentence no less, establishes the double-talk of the entire story. Thus, when another crewman, Monckton, admonishes Carl for bring his "wife to a place like this" when Carl brings George to the bistro in the first place, we are justified to read the marital terminology as evidence of George and Carl's homosexual "marriage" (or "partnership" to use Faulkner's expression from his *Item-Tribune* essay). George is gone for days. When he does return, Carl is gloomy in his own right and keeps his distance from George until they can make up.

The girl is Faulkner's substitute for Spratling's time in jail and his sexual encounter with a male. Faulkner makes that homosexual encounter into a heterosexual encounter at a house or hotel to which Carl has no access. The jail/house/hotel is a space beyond his purview; outside of their shared space, his lover is cheating on him. What specifically occurs out of Carl/Faulkner's sight or with whom it occurs matters very little, as there is little to limit the imagination of a jilted and jealous lover of any orientation when he or she feels cast off and wronged. Even

though he may have wished himself the protagonist in Spratling's original escapade, Faulkner easily created a story from his disengaged and "jilted" role in whatever happened in Genoa from his perspective, not Spratling's. Indeed, Faulkner played a central part in the affair; his role was as the jilted lover of a homosexual relationship. Such a series of intricate and provocative substitutions speak to Faulkner's ability to take the actual details of his experiences and make them the apocryphal material of his stories.

If Spratling and Faulkner are George and Carl, the primary (sexual) relationship is between them and does not involve the unnamed third party, whether it be a male prisoner or a woman of the town. As with Wasson's confession to Faulkner about Estelle, wherein the two main characters were Wasson and Faulkner, not Faulkner and Estelle, we see the focus of the story coming back to Faulkner, his gay male friend, and *their* relationship. And we see Faulkner performing his role in that relationship as he should, as the typecast jilted lover, who happens to be gay. Any anxieties the protagonist experiences pertain to his sense of betrayal by his lover, not to his sexual orientation as somehow wrong or loathsome. Nor is the protagonist looking for a third party to help mediate his sub rosa homosexual desires. The homosexuality is explicit. The third party does not help but hinders the otherwise good relations between the two (gay) men.

In addition to this incident in Genoa with Spratling, the European trip is marked by other equally homosexual performances and experiences. On 16 August, Faulkner writes home to his mother that he has gone sailing down the Seine, "past Auteuil and Meudon, to Suresnes" (*SLWF* 11), saw the Arc de Triomphe, and "walked down the Champs-Elysees to the Place de Concorde" (12). He also took in the Bastille and made his way to Pere Lachaise Cemetery where he "went particularly to see Oscar Wilde's tomb" (12). James Polchin remarks that "[t]he fact Faulkner respected Wilde and his work underscores the young writer's interest in a certain sexual

decadence” (149), and continues that “[f]or Faulkner, Wilde’s life and work probably provided a means of creative social criticism. Wilde’s plight as the persecuted homosexual and outcast of Victorian England may have served as a model of the effects of repressive social morals” (150). Wilde’s influence on Faulkner probably mostly accords with Polchin’s assertion.³² Faulkner saw himself as different, found an interest in literary modes of the late-nineteenth century in which Wilde participated and which he greatly influenced, and probably appreciated Wilde’s willingness to explore sexualities outside of the accepted norm, an appreciation that does much to explain Faulkner’s regard for another poet who challenged Victorian mores, Algernon Charles Swinburne. But Faulkner did not visit Swinburne’s grave, or for that matter any other graves while in Europe, or at least none he wrote about in his letters home.

Faulkner does not explain his sentiments concerning Wilde’s grave beyond noting that he “went particularly” to see it, a pilgrimage Wilde’s fans still make today to kiss his tombstone; Faulkner never confessed to having kissed the tombstone, but he did likely read the inscription on the tomb from Wilde’s *The Ballad of Reading Gaol*:

And alien tears will fill for him

Pity’s long-broken urn,

For his mourners will be outcast men,

And outcasts always mourn. (qtd. in Ellman 589)

Certainly, Wilde’s outsider status appealed to Faulkner, and these lines register the power of his exiled life and the struggles he endured for his iconoclasm. Faulkner wanted to craft for himself a degree of difference in his own hometown; in Europe we find Faulkner on his most successful endeavor to kick the dust of that town off his feet and escape to a life less rigid in its expectations. Faulkner led a queer life. Wilde did, too, but Wilde’s queer life was not only a

performance of mannerisms that bothered the gender categories of his society. Wilde had sex with men and was tried for it as a crime. The most famous of those men, Lord Alfred Douglas, did little to hide the evidence of his affair with Wilde, a sexual affair, and Faulkner would have been as aware as anyone of his generation of the sensational trial that accompanied Wilde's downfall and imprisonment and, of course, his writing of the poem Faulkner read on his tombstone.

Whether or not Faulkner would have known that the prime piece of evidence used against Wilde was a letter he had written to Douglas that Douglas allowed, through carelessness, to fall in the hands of blackmailers is less certain. In that letter, Wilde refers to Douglas by the pet-name Hyacinthus. Back in New York, Boni and Liveright were reading a manuscript of Faulkner's first novel, wherein a hyacinth becomes a critical symbol in understanding what has happened to Donald Mahon, a symbol I will return to in Chapter 5. For now, it suffices to say that Faulkner knew what made Wilde an outcast: his homosexuality. Faulkner fashioned his own identity of difference and "went particularly" to visit Wilde's tomb. Faulkner must have been aware of the implications of his own performance at this moment. We see in this story, especially in context with Spratling's exploits in Genoa, a view of William Faulkner very intentionally and precisely posing as a gay man and even writing home to his mother about it.

In the same letter in which he mentions visiting Wilde's tomb, Faulkner also mentions "hav[ing] met one or two people--a photographer and a real painter" (*SLWF* 12). The photographer was William "Cicero" Odiorne, a man Joel Williamson describes as "a highly talented photographer and mysterious person from New Orleans" but who was also "homosexual, and, sadly, limped because he had a club foot" (205). The friendship Faulkner and Odiorne would begin in Paris would continue in 1926 in New Orleans when Faulkner returned

there. Spratling and Faulkner would even include a sketch of Odiorne in their book *Sherwood Anderson and Other Famous Creoles*. Odiorne's pictures of a bohemian Faulkner strolling the streets of Paris have become iconic images of the author. Odiorne clearly made an impression on Faulkner beyond just being good with a camera. "Odiorne and Bill [Faulkner] were very good friends," writes Williamson, "Bill allowed Odiorne to read some of his current work, always a sign of respect and affection on his part" (215). This friendship remains relatively unexplored by Faulkner biographers, but its extent does seem mitigated because though Faulkner continued his friendship with Odiorne in New Orleans, he still preferred rooming with Spratling after their trip to Europe together ended in December 1925. Faulkner would spend Christmas in Oxford, and then return to New Orleans for much of 1926 and reside there primarily until 1927 with Spratling as his roommate for the entirety of his tenure.

When Faulkner returned to New Orleans, he immersed himself into the gay subculture there, an immersion that would not go unnoticed by the local inhabitants, worldly-wise denizens of a gay landscape with no denial or double-talk about the men who inhabited their world. In notes for his biography concerning Faulkner in New Orleans, Blotner records several decidedly gossipy interviews with former residents who knew Faulkner and Spratling in the mid-1920s. One interview with Harold Levy finds Levy digressing about Odiorne. Levy explains, "Odiorne limped because of a club foot--a homosexual too. Odiorne had a coldwater walkup in spite of this."³³ While surely Levy means that Odiorne had a "coldwater walkup" despite his club foot, the syntax of Blotner's notes leaves some interpretive room about the proper antecedent for "in spite of *this*." There is a certain humor in imagining Odiorne had a "coldwater walkup" in spite of his homosexuality.

In his own interview, Spratling told stories about numerous artists, sculptors, and writers

from New Orleans, often offering brief accounts of them, such as for Sam Gilmore, who “had come to NO in 1921. He wrote exquisite poetry, was a homosexual.”³⁴ In reference to himself, however, Spratling was evasive, if playfully so. Spratling began his interview by teasing Blotner:

WF [William Faulkner] didn't seem highly sexed. He was certainly not homosexual, but he seemed interested in what was going on inside here. (the head.) Mrs. Levy [Harold Levy's wife] said Oliver LaFarge defended WS [William Spratling] against charges of homosexuality by saying, Anyone who sleeps with as many women as he does! Who keeps a douche bag in his bathroom. Jas. K. Feibleman said he thought WF started out being interested in women but eventually the bottle took over.³⁵

Spratling's bravado comes through in this account; he later even claims Faulkner stole Helen Baird from him, as he was “interested” in her first. Blotner relates in his biography that “Spratling good-naturedly said that he had been interested in [Baird] first and Faulkner had taken her away from him. Spratling was probably exaggerating both his own interest in Helen Baird and Faulkner's appeal to her” (142). Coy Blotner is showing his own abilities at understatement here. The homosexual Spratling did not steal Helen Baird from Faulkner. The real story seems to be that, to the extent to which Faulkner paid unreciprocated homage to her in poetry, Baird stole Faulkner from Spratling. While in none of his written or typed notes does Blotner ever directly refer to Spratling's homosexuality, the clue that Spratling told Blotner about his sexual encounter in a Genoa jail suggests that he and Blotner did, in fact, openly discuss homosexuality during Spratling's interview beyond just this story about Oliver LaFarge defending Spratling because of his douche bag. This story is simply the one that survives in the archive.

Reading Spratling's account of his *own* charge of homosexuality--or, more properly, his

second-hand account that someone else told him that another person had defended his reputation when yet another person had called him a homosexual--is, to say the least, loaded. Why would anyone accuse Spratling of such a thing? Especially if he were courting women, such as Helen Baird? Why is it important to establish that Faulkner was not highly sexed? The accusation that Spratling is a homosexual is mitigated by the hyperbolic response that he sleeps with a lot of women and has a douche bag in his bathroom. Fortunately, the man with whom he shares that bathroom and with whom he shares his apartment is *not* "sexed" lest we might wonder if that douche bag is for all of Spratling's female company or for other purposes. Objectively speaking, a douche bag can be used to rinse any body cavity; for sexually active gay men, douching and other cleaning methods are standard hygienic practices often performed both before and after sex. The douche bag, a red herring in Spratling's interview, was just as likely used for homosexual purposes as it could have been for feminine ones. If Spratling or his roommate *were* highly sexed--which, thankfully, Spratling claims was not the case at least for the roommate--we might have to consider that the douche bag actually belonged to Faulkner or Spratling and probably got a lot of use.

If Spratling was accused of being a homosexual, the accusation was very likely much broader than that: i.e., that he and Faulkner were lovers. That they lived together makes this a likely assumption for their circle of friends to deduce; and if there really was a douche bag hanging in Spratling's bathroom, its presence implies at the very least that he was engaged in an active sex life of which Faulkner, his roommate and fellow bathroom user, would have been very aware. The other option would be that the the two roommates carried on an active sexual relationship together for which they needed a douche bag as one of a standard accoutrement of male same-sex practices. Since we know Spratling was gay and since we have no records or

accounts of Faulkner's own engagement in a sexually promiscuous parade of women during this period, these two deductions are the most reasonable we can make: the douche bag was Spratling's for all his lovers, of whom his roommate Faulkner was aware; or it was Faulkner and Spratling's because they were lovers. The douche bag serves as the perfect metaphor for Faulkner and Spratling's relationship and the open living situation they shared in their halcyon New Orleans days. It both does and does not seem to mean anything, which is why it is so marvelous.

Even without this metaphor, other scholars have already considered the homosexual implications of Faulkner and Spratling's relationship, at least as far as assuming that other members of the New Orleans community prodded the two men about being lovers. Despite not citing Spratling's interview, Gary Richards deduces this general assumption about Faulkner and Spratling's relationship purely from the circumstantial evidence of their cohabitation and close friendship. Of course they would be seen as lovers. Of course Faulkner would be aware of that perception among their friends. Richards ponders if perhaps this perception would have led Faulkner to some anxiety, and it might have, but it did not cause Faulkner enough anxiety to make him move out of Spratling's home. In fact, the circumstantial evidence from the entirety of this period of Faulkner's life seems very clearly to imply that the homosexual implications of his relationships caused him no anxiety at all.

The evidence suggests that Faulkner and Spratling shared more than just a mutual living space. They performed together a model of gay identity that struck their own friends as gay, though the hyperbole of LaFarge's defense of Spratling also suggests that no one was taking these accusations too seriously. Faulkner could safely perform a gay identity in the Vieux Carre with Spratling; if that identity included sex with Spratling as a lover, so be it, though gay identity

exceeds the actions of the bedroom. From the coming-of-age of men like Percy and Young, both a generation older than Faulkner, gay identity had left the isolated confines of a single action men might perform but otherwise not associate with any sense of self. It had become a mode of being, an identity, that encompassed many facets (sometimes all facets) of a person's life. Taken as a whole, much of Faulkner's life from 1918-1928 is readily identifiable as homosexual. Evidence of the degree to which Faulkner engaged in this performance and was consciously aware of its implications can be seen in the fiction and poetry he produced during these years.

In the next chapters, I will detail that work and the gay presence in it, for the fiction of this period, prior to 1930, offers by far the vast preponderance of gay representations in Faulkner's creative output. Though homoerotic and queer undertones can be found in almost all of Faulkner's texts, the prose he begins to generate in New Orleans and Europe, including his first two completed novels and the abandoned novel *Elmer*, along with stories generated in response to his European trip, such as "Divorce in Naples," and the World War I fiction he produces in the 1920s up to and including *As I Lay Dying*, and even his early commercially successful Yoknapatawpha story "A Rose for Emily," abound with homosexual representations that rival the canons of out gay authors producing explicitly gay works of their own. Before New Orleans, in the brief fiction he wrote and certainly in the poetry that most centrally occupied his attention, gay themes abound. Coupled with his New Orleans material, these chart a narrative of Faulkner's appropriation of his apocryphal gay identity and detail its multiple stages of expression and experience as he converts his (actual) performance of it to his (apocryphal) creative treatment of it. He lived in New Orleans, at least primarily, until 1927 but even after he returned to Oxford, a move that very nearly coincides with Estelle's return there and her filing for divorce, he continued to explore homosexuality as a theme. But once he was back in Oxford,

his handling of the theme and his performance of his apocryphal homosexual identity began to change. His return home in 1927 also coincides with a new turn in his fiction, the creation of his apocryphal county Yocona (the original name of Yoknapatawpha) and his beginning to populate that county with the characters and experiences of his actual life made apocryphal. At the end of his eleven-year road, he found marriage and its expectations and embraced them. Before that marriage, his fiction and poetry would teem with the inspiration of the eleven years of that apocryphal gay life.

CHAPTER 3: GAY FAULKNER

As much as any of his other apocryphal identities, Faulkner's immersion into gay culture and his crafting of a gay identity greatly influenced his writing during the years 1918-1929 and into the first year of his marriage to Estelle and the first stories and novel he wrote after his marriage. On one hand, Faulkner converts his experiences with gay men and in gay settings into surprisingly sympathetic and complex depictions of gay characters with gay sensibilities. On the other hand, the influences of queer themes in his poetic models also led him to explore lesbian themes in his own early poetry, themes he would revisit in his second novel *Mosquitoes* alongside a provocative representation of a gay male relationship. He did not treat lesbian themes and gay male themes equally, though the influence of William Alexander Percy's "Sappho in Levkas" seems to have given him at least a modest capacity to show a degree of sympathy for all same-sex desires, not just male-centered ones.

First Fiction: "Moonlight"

Faulkner vaguely identified "Moonlight" as "about the first short story I ever wrote" (Meriwether 87). Blotner provides that the earliest version of the story is probably from "around 1919 or 1920 or 1921," though it was not until much later, in 1928, that Faulkner submitted it to a magazine, in substantially revised form, only to have it rejected (*US* 706).¹ The story was never

published in Faulkner's life, only afterwards by Blotner in *Uncollected Stories*. The story that eventually reached print focuses on an unnamed protagonist preparing a rendezvous with his girl, Susan. The previous evening, Susan's uncle, also identified as her "guardian" by the protagonist and Susan as a means of dismissing the familial element of his paternal protection, comes upon Susan and the protagonist in a swing in her yard, right as her curfew comes due. By sheer size and authority, the uncle runs off the protagonist, leaving him feeling emasculated. In response, Susan sends him a note asking to meet again, when "I will be yours tonight even if tomorrow not goodbye but farewell forever" (US 497). Skeet, the protagonist's friend, is employed to arrange a new rendezvous so as to fool the uncle that the protagonist is not making an inglorious return.

The protagonist assumes Susan means that she wants to have sex with him. He is sixteen, as is Skeet, but Skeet has already been initiated into the mysteries of sex. He and "most of the others would go down into Nigger Hollow at night sometimes and they would try to make him [the protagonist] come, but he never had. He didn't know why; he just hadn't" (498). Though he thinks to himself, "*Maybe I ought to practice up on niggers first*" (498), and worries, "*It's like I'm going to miss out now*" (496), he also confesses, "*That's all I want, he thought. I just want to seduce her. I would even marry her afterwards, even if I ain't a marrying kind of man*" (500). In these semi-stream-of-consciousness asides, the protagonist conflates sex and seduction, the former the physical act, the latter the courtship that proves so problematic for him. The former seems not to trouble him, but without the latter, the former will not take place. Notably, he seems to believe that Skeet's trips to "Nigger Hollow" involve seduction, rather than assertions of white male authority. Skeet's sexual initiation is antithetical to the one the protagonist seeks, but the protagonist misses this distinction. He wants to seduce somebody, the sex being a consequence of that seduction but not necessarily the end he most desires. Skeet's end is physical sexual

gratification *sans* seduction. The protagonist's inability to differentiate between the two explains his inability to articulate why he has not gone with Skeet and "the others" on their excursions. The other unarticulated element of his desire is *whom* he wants to seduce. He repeats that he wants to seduce "somebody." He never specifies who that somebody is, nor even that person's sex. He also "ain't a marrying kind of man." Faulkner will use this same phrase to describe the eternally certified bachelor, Homer Barron.

The protagonist offers Skeet some of his father's whiskey in exchange for Skeet's help. Skeet agrees, but when he and the protagonist meet to carry out their plan of sneaking Susan out to meet the protagonist, Skeet immediately demands his whiskey first, even "grasp[ing] at the bottle inside [the protagonist's] shirt" for it (500). When Skeet does finally bring Susan to the protagonist, she wants to go to the movies, which is where she has told her aunt she is going. She probably did not say she was going to the movies with anyone, but that is all she has in mind. The protagonist proceeds to fondle her, though "his hands felt queer and clumsy as they touched her" (501). He offers her whiskey, which she rejects as she "curiously" asks him, "What's the matter with you tonight?" (501). They manage a kiss, "the cool uncomfortable unlustful kissing of adolescence" (501). He then proceeds to take her to his aunt and uncle's house. They are out of town, but he has convinced himself that their bed is preferable not merely for its availability but because it is "*where laying has done already took place, maybe just two nights ago, before they left*" (499). When Susan realizes his intention, she cries out and begs him to stop. He immediately complies, feeling stupid and "like wood," and can only say to himself, "*I wouldn't have hurt her. All I wanted was just to seduce somebody*" (503).

Although the protagonist of the story has not successfully acculturated to the communal practices of sexuality as his peers have, the story does not seem too particularly promising for a

gay reading even until these final moments when the seduction fails. At that point, Faulkner tellingly adds another paragraph that, as will the final paragraph and revelation of “A Rose for Emily,” calls for a complete revision of the signs the story hinted from its first words. After the protagonist apologizes to Susan for scaring her, the story concludes, “He held her. He felt nothing at all now, no despair, no regret, not even surprise. He was thinking of himself and Skeet, lying on a hill somewhere under the moon with the bottle between them, not even talking” (503). The protagonist feels no passion for seducing a woman; he only wants to seduce somebody. In the wake of his failure, his thoughts turn to an easier, pastoral romance that requires no fretful seductions. His thoughts turn to Skeet. Skeet, of course, participates in sexual acts with a girl/woman, or so it seems right to assume that he does. The sex of whomever he is seeking in “Nigger Hollow” is never given, but that “others” go with him makes it unlikely that they are all gay and all seeking male companionship. The focal point of the narration, though third person, is limited to the unnamed protagonist, so whatever is happening in “Nigger Hollow,” the narration only provides readers with the perspective of the protagonist. That the narration never identifies what is happening there not only suggests that the protagonist does not know but also and equally that he prefers not to find out. The narration leaves us with his pastoral ideal of an intimate space to share with Skeet: all we know and all we need to know. The bottle *between* them may seem as if it is a barrier, but Skeet has already felt inside the protagonist’s shirt for that very bottle, reaching his hands to touch the protagonist and crossing any barriers the bottle might seem to impose.

The easy reading of this story focuses on the failed “seduction” in the context of Faulkner’s failure to win Estelle’s hand in marriage. Early versions of the story lend credence to this impression, but Faulkner’s revisions imply that such a directly autobiographical reading was

not his intention. Writing about early draft versions of the story in which the protagonist, named George in that draft, rejects his female lover without turning his thoughts to a male companion, Frederick Karl claims that the ending, through a similar twist in the final paragraph, allows the protagonist to turn the tables on his rejection. The “twist of the story,” Karl claims, “is of interest; for it places control in the hands of the young man, not the girl, and he finally rejects her” (178). Karl continues to conjecture that “[i]f Faulkner did indeed write this in the Fall of 1921, when he was just past twenty-four, the story memorializes a young man building his defenses against rejection” in the wake of Estelle’s recent return to Oxford and subsequent removal to the Far East with her husband (178-79).² On a biographical level, it seems likely that Faulkner wrote some of his own emotions concerning Estelle into the story, but Estelle is not all of the story. Estelle was absent for much of those crucial years of 1919-1921 when the story was first written. In the face of her loss, Faulkner centered his attention on Ben Wasson in the courtship he enacted with him by reading him poetry on campus, escorting him through the dark woods, and spending evenings alone with him in the front parlor of the Stone’s house, when the Stones were out of town. That house represents a preferable, private place where maybe laying has also occurred just a night or two prior to Faulkner and Wasson’s visits.

The evolution of this story from its first version in 1919-1921 to its final form in 1928 demonstrates an author reworking and playing with his material in a cogent, perhaps even intentional, fashion, not as a deeply subconscious upwelling of secret anxieties. As Blotner reports in his original two volume biography, the original story focused on two friends, Robert Binford and George, carousing at a drugstore and cruising the passing women. “They are superficially hard and cynical,” Blotner describes, and “[i]n the dark shade of the courthouse trees they drink corn whiskey and smoke cigarettes” (2 *Vol.* 322). When George meets his girl

Cecily and attempts to get her into an empty house, she resists him, just as Susan will resist the unnamed protagonist in the later version of the story. In the earlier version, though, Cecily eventually relents, at which point “George changes his mind” about having sex with her (322). The two walk together back downtown, their tryst unconsummated.

Karl reads this earlier version of the story, which certainly lends itself much more to Karl’s reading wherein George, the stand-in for Faulkner, takes charge and controls the outcome of the seduction in order to seize the powers of rejection from the woman who rejected Faulkner in his actual life. As Faulkner revised the story, the woman (Cecily/Susan) regains that power. At the end of the original story, Cecily and George return downtown. When Susan rejects the protagonist of the later story, that protagonist imagines fleeing to the countryside with Skeet. As Robert Binford becomes Skeet over the course of the revision process, he takes on elements of both Ben Wasson and Phil Stone. Skeet’s sexual initiation mirrors the one Stone “confessed to his wife” about his own adolescent experimentation, according to Susan Snell (37), though the girl in Stone’s confession lived “up the railroad tracks” and was named, improbably, Dewey Dell. Her race is not specified. Faulkner’s friendship with Stone, however, does not accord with the youthful homoeroticism of the pastoral romance that the protagonist imagines with Skeet at the end of the final version of the story. That homoeroticism rests, most likely, in an apocryphization of Faulkner’s courtship of Wasson. Skeet is a translation of elements of both Stone and Wasson, part the friend, part the object of sexual interest so naturally a part of the protagonist’s world that he need not be seduced with all the difficulty attendant upon seducing a member of the opposite sex in the elaborate rituals of proper heterosexuality.

We see elements here of what Faulkner will later claim in his editorial to the *Item-Tribune*, that when two men form a partnership, “they gain success and happiness,” whereas a

man and a woman are always at odds. Perhaps Faulkner's successful courtship of Wasson laid the groundwork for the editorial Faulkner wrote while living with Spratling many years later. Faulkner's general impression of male-male courtships in the 1920s would account nicely for the revisions of "Moonlight" from its early draft version in 1919-21 to its final version in 1928. Over the course of his revisions, Faulkner made multiple substitutions, involving Estelle and Wasson, in order to turn his actual experience into an apocryphal narrative. In the final version of the story, Faulkner assimilates basic biographical details from his life and overlays them onto a fairly basic plot involving readily identifiable literary types: wooing suitor finds his attentions unrequited by a dismissive woman so he turns to a friend for consolation. Susan/Estelle functions similarly to the bodiless female voice from T. S. Eliot's "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock," explaining to her would-be lover, "That is not what I meant at all." Skeet/Wasson becomes the surrogate for the unrequited love for that woman. Having a surrogate for his unrequited affections better serves to alleviate the sting of rejection than for the protagonist/Faulkner to pretend the power to reject Susan/Estelle had been his all along. The (male) surrogate allows the protagonist to imagine seducing somebody successfully, regardless of his earlier rejection, much as Faulkner successfully courted Wasson in place of Estelle in the early 1920s, in and around the time the story was originally written. But Faulkner's process of creating his fiction is not always so directly a matter of scratching out one person's real name and substituting a pseudonym. Faulkner's making the actual into the apocryphal involves a more complex process of assimilation, not just substitution, to refigure a given scenario into something vaguely recognizable as autobiographical but still fundamentally its own, unique telling of events.

Poetic Complications

While writing and revising this first prose story, Faulkner's main interest was poetry. In that poetry we see the problem Faulkner encountered when translating his idealized same-sex partnership into a lesbian context. Three of Faulkner's earliest writings contain variations of lesbian themes: "L'Apres Midi d'un Faune," his very first publication; "Sapphics," an early poem he published in *The Mississippian* while a student at Ole Miss; and an imitation of Sappho, "o atthis," that he wrote in 1919-20 but would not publish until many years later in *A Green Bough* (1933). The first two he apparently wrote as individual poems but later included them, along with "o atthis," in his unpublished sequence *The Lilacs*, which he gave to Phil Stone in January 1920 as a handmade volume.³ None of these three poems is a fully original creation. "L'Apres Midi" is an imitation of the symbolist poem by Stephane Mallarme, which was also translated by Sergei Diaghilev's Ballets Russes--and specifically by Diaghilev's male lover Vaslav Nijinsky--into a famous ballet in Paris in 1912. Reworking Mallarme's poem was very popular among avant garde artists of the modernist movement. "Sapphics" is an imitation of Swinburne's much longer poem from his collection *Poems and Ballads* (1866). "o atthis" is most apparently an imitation of translations of the ancient Greek poetess, the so-called tenth muse, Sappho, though Judith Sensibar suggests it has a more direct antecedent in a poem of the same title by Ezra Pound published in September 1916 (*Origins* 69). As an imitation of Sappho in the wake of late nineteenth century Victorian poetry, it is not unique regardless of its pedigree; but it is worth contextualizing its content, if not its form, not with its Victorian ilk but with its Mississippi cousin, William Alexander Percy's "Sappho in Levkas," published in a volume of the same name in 1915.

Though seemingly the apprentice works of a developing poet, these poems are not purely

imitative. For both “L’Apres Midi” and “Sapphics,” Faulkner greatly reduced the scope of his antecedents, and in his distillation of the earlier, longer poems, crafted content decidedly different from Mallarme’s and Swinburne’s and decidedly his own. Faulkner’s distillation specifically revises the representations his antecedents make of lesbianism and its relationship to art. In Mallarme’s original, his faun is led into the woods by a nymph and comes upon two nymphs sleeping together. The faun is a projection, or an “illusion” as Sensibar calls it in *The Origins of Faulkner’s Art*, but the erotic voyeurism of the faun’s vision inspires the creation of the poem as the faun “realizes that illusions are powerful agents capable of generating real and deeply felt emotions. Such emotions, if listened to objectively and carefully perceived, may be used, in Mallarme’s faun’s case, to make music and poetry” (71). Swinburne employs a similar frame. The speaker of his poem “Sapphics” dreams he is following Aphrodite across the seas to Lesbos. Aphrodite feels a compulsion to journey to Lesbos on “reluctant / feet” (lines 12-13), but once there, she comes upon Sappho, “Ah the tenth [muse], the Lesbian!” (line 30), singing her songs in praise of her love for women. Aphrodite wants to reject this vision and weep, but she keeps turning towards it in order to see “the Lesbians kissing across their smitten / Lutes with lips more sweet than the sound of lutestrings, / Mouth to mouth and hand upon hand, her chosen, / Fairer than all men” (lines 49-52). Despite her distaste for what she sees, Aphrodite witnesses it and is inspired by it. The speaker adopts the image of Sappho for the creation of his own poem. In these poems lesbian sexuality is productive; it produces, as if in a kind of procreative erotic fire, the poetic voice of both speakers and is fundamental to the creation of art. It is tempting to believe that Faulkner might appropriate imagery from both poems and revise it in accordance with the idea that (female) same-sex relationships extend beyond prurient sexual expression to deeper kinship and understanding. He does not so revise it.

Faulkner appropriates both poems, but his versions of both change the procreative, generative element of lesbian sexuality from the originals. Led into the woods by a nymph, Faulkner's faun giddily "follow[s] through the singing trees / Her streaming clouded hair and face / And lascivious dreaming knees" (*Early Prose* 39). The faun is fascinated by the beauty of this one nymph and becomes increasingly enraptured by it. In this regard, Faulkner's faun is not different from Mallarme's, but before Faulkner's faun can come upon the two sleeping nymphs, "some great deep bell stroke" wakes his speaker from his vision (*Early Prose* 40). Faulkner removes the lesbian scene from his version of the poem. Sensibar argues that, whereas Mallarme's "faun experiences an erotic sensation that arises from fantasizing about the nymphs" sleeping together, "Faulkner, unable still to be a disinterested observer of his own emotions, excludes this daring suggestion from his poem" (*Origins* 71). Sensibar rightly points out what Faulkner omits from his version of the poem. She also points out that he keeps the chase scene, but she does not dwell on the implications of the chase, only on the implications of the omission.

The main interest of Faulkner's speaker is in chasing the illusion of the nymph's erotic calling. He wants to be titillated by the singular nymph leading him through the forest. He does not want to witness a lesbian encounter between two nymphs; one nymph is enough for him. Before he stumbles too far into his vision, he wakes up, but the nymph's eroticism still inspires him. The fantasy is still erotic, if not homoerotic and fixated on a lesbian scene. In terms of lesbian representation, Faulkner's use of it in this poem is his omission of it. He read Mallarme's original, complete with its lesbian representation. He chose not to include that lesbian representation; the source of his poem is good old-fashioned heteroeroticism. In his poem, the lesbian scene we do not witness is subordinated for the ideal nymph we do see and that inspires the creation of the poem. The chase becomes the central inspiration; the lesbian encounter

becomes excess waste, unnecessary to the creation of art. The poet discards it. The speaker does not need to acknowledge that women can be lovers. His inspiration rests entirely in his one muse; his poetic vision rests entirely between her “lascivious knees.” Faulkner is turning away from any interests in lesbian same-sex desire; he focuses instead on a heterosexual fantasy.

In his imitation of Swinburne’s “Sapphics,” Faulkner allows the scene of lesbian sexual encounter, but he changes Aphrodite’s perspective. Sensibar points out the concise but deeply telling change of perspective: in Swinburne’s poem, Aphrodite “Saw the Lesbians kissing” (line 49); in Faulkner’s version, “She sees *not* the Lesbians kissing” (*Early Prose* 51; *Origins* 81, italics added).⁴ Faulkner cuts tremendously from Swinburne’s poem, removing the name Sappho altogether and reducing Swinburne’s twenty stanza poem to his own six stanza version. He adds the word *not* twice in his poem, so that whereas Swinburne records what Aphrodite witnesses, Faulkner records what she shuns. Faulkner concludes his poem with a stanza of unremitting despair:

Before her go cryings and and lamentations
Of barren women, a thunder of wings,
While ghosts of outcast Lethean women, lamenting,
Stiffen the twilight. (*Early Prose* 52)

Sensibar explains that the “Lethean women,” another of Faulkner’s additions not in Swinburne’s original, are meant to suggest that this scene of lesbian sexuality is best forgotten, not remembered at the end of the vision as the source for the production of art. In Faulkner’s version of the poem, lesbianism is the source of “cryings and lamentations.” The women who practice it are “barren.”

Here, though, as in “L’Apres Midi,” what we do *not* see becomes central to the meaning

of the poem. Though Aphrodite turns away from the scene of kissing lesbians, the speaker of the poem does not. He goes right on recording it, implying that he is watching it and taking note of it, even if Aphrodite does not. Unlike his version of “L’Apres Midi,” in “Sapphics” Faulkner does not flinch from openly displaying the lesbian scene. What the speaker sees but declares that Aphrodite turns away from becomes a record of omission that reminds us what has been omitted. Conversely, in all of his fiction, Faulkner never once shows two men kissing; even George and Carl in “Divorce in Naples” only manage a dance or two while the narrator of that story observes them. Though we know they are lovers, we are never privy to a sex scene. In “Sapphics,” the lesbian scene we are meant to forget is the focal point of the poem, laid bare and out in the open for the reader as exactly the thing we are not supposed to see. This playful element of the poem, to say by *not* saying and to show by *not* showing, allows the reader to participate in the speaker’s illicit voyeurism. Though an audience may be troubled by the sound of loud weeping over the barrenness of lesbianism, we are still allowed the fantasy of watching two women make out. The speaker enjoys this scene, even if Aphrodite is troubled by it. He records it in a poem.

Certainly, Faulkner had a different understanding of lesbianism than he had of male homosexuality, and Sensibar correctly points out that Faulkner was troubled by lesbianism despite his early interest in depicting it. Oddly, in *Faulkner and Love*, she returns to these two poems and the collection *The Lilacs*, a gift of which Faulkner made to Phil Stone. Sensibar posits that Faulkner must have given Stone these poems as a way of acting out, psychically, his own anxieties over his increasingly close relationship with Stone, a man. Sensibar goes as far as claiming that “Stone was the first of a long series of very bright men, many of them either bisexual or homosexual, who served, as Stone self-mockingly put it, as Faulkner’s ‘wet nurse’” (242). Though she can provide no evidence to verify that Stone was either bisexual or

homosexual, Sensibar asserts this implicit connection between Stone's sexuality and Faulkner's supposed response to it not as evidence that Faulkner was troubled by lesbianism but as evidence that he was troubled by all homosexual and homoerotic desire, including that between men. As she states,

In both of these poems, written before self-censorship resulting from the Wilde trials, Mallarme and Swinburne are celebrating the myriad forms of sexuality--homosexual acts and fantasies in particular--from which they, as mature poets, derive imaginative inspiration. In contrast, Faulkner appears threatened by the underlying emotional currents in these poems. (312)

Sensibar is conflating too many sexualities here, and then using that conflation as the basis to argue that Faulkner's reaction to homosexuality must be fundamentally anxious, despite their being ample evidence to the contrary in his writings and in the biographical record.⁵ First, regardless of Stone's sexuality, Faulkner never demonstrated any sense that he was "threatened by the underlying emotional currents" between himself and Wasson, himself and Young, or, later, himself and Spratling. Second, lesbianism and male homosexuality are two different sexual identities and should be considered in a more discreet context than as simply "myriad forms of sexuality" with no distinction for larger codes of gender and uses of sexual representation in literature.

In Faulkner's two poems, as in the originals on which he modeled them, lesbianism is presented as a variety of heterosexual male fantasy, not as a means of voicing closeted male homosexual desires. Mallarme and Swinburne wrote about sexual acts between women as part of a tradition of heterosexual Sapphic-themed poetry from the Victorian period and late-nineteenth century. Their titillation at seeing women together is mildly pornographic but still heterosexual.

Though he changes the lens of each sex scene, Faulkner is also thoroughly invested in the voyeuristic fantasy of these poems, with limited interest in the lesbianism at their core. A man viewing women for the sake of erotic pleasure does not at all imply that same man would receive erotic pleasure from viewing other men. Faulkner is not threatened by his own interest in viewing, or *not* viewing, lesbian sex; so long as he receives the sexual gratification he associates with female sexuality, lesbianism is acceptable. Faulkner's understanding of lesbianism does not bear on his perception of male homosexuality except to the extent that his chosen models demonstrate his awareness of sexualities beyond purely heterosexual ones, for men as well as for women. In fact, he seems very aware of the difference between the appropriation of Sapphic themes for voyeuristic heterosexual fantasy as opposed to for coded homosexual representations.

In his adaptation of Sappho, "o atthis," Faulkner offers a more nuanced understanding of lesbian sexuality with considerably more empathy than his other two lesbian themed poems. As an imitation of Sappho's scattered verses, Faulkner's version is purposely slim on detail and imagery and reads as if it is itself a fragment of a longer poem. But Faulkner's poem contains the seed of a full idea and, much as with Pound's "In a Station of the Metro," captures a still image of a singular instant that is complete in itself despite its minimalist design. Atthis is the famed subject of much of Sappho's poetry, the woman on whom Sappho showers her desires, though Atthis had a male lover and abandoned Sappho, who shortly killed herself in despair, according to tradition. Basically, Atthis is to Sappho as Laura is to Petrarch, Beatrice to Dante. Sappho, as poet, creates a female speaker in her poems who is recording her erotic attachments to another woman; therefore, her poems record same-sex desire and have long belonged to the canon of gay and lesbian literature. Faulkner's imitation of this Sappho serves a purpose beyond mere apprenticeship. He is appropriating Sappho's illicit same-sex desire and making it his own

heteroerotic love poem to an idealized female. In so doing, he demonstrates the power of same-sex desire to convey universal emotion. As they (lesbians) love, so he loves. In this regard, “o atthis” differs from “L’Apres Midi” and “Sapphics,” which remain heterosexual fantasies with no regard for the subjectivity of those engaged in same-sex love.

When Faulkner, a male poet, appropriates the voice of Sappho to praise Atthis, he infuses that voice with heterosexual desire that, if coded, is heterosexual nonetheless, and only minimally coded. As Swinburne and Mallarme can record their voyeuristic encounter with lesbian erotics and still stay safely in the realm of heterosexual fantasy, Faulkner’s inhabiting the voice of Sappho also safely remains in the same realm. One could argue that his interest in imitating this style is to find a way in his poetry to cry out for Estelle. He wrote the poem before January 1920, at a time near to one of her visits to Oxford after her marriage.⁶ Faulkner makes himself Sappho cleaving his/her chest over the loss of Estelle/Atthis to another man (Cornell Franklin), though as with all of his apocryphal creations, this poem is an imitative experiment in style about Estelle’s loss, not necessarily a measure of Faulkner’s actual emotional depths as much as a measure of his acute perception about how to make real events into aesthetic creations. “o atthis” is not a very lesbian poem at all in that the male author can easily be seen as simply appropriating a female voice to lament his female lover, but the subversive same-sex desires at the heart of the poem do not transform easily into voyeuristic fantasy. We are not watching lesbians kiss; we are hearing a person grieve, who happens to be a lesbian. The reason for this remaining element of same-sex subjectivity may result from to the influence of William Alexander Percy.

In November of 1920, Faulkner published in *The Mississippian* a review of William Alexander Percy’s volume *In April Once*. Comparing Percy to Swinburne and noting that Percy

“obscures the whole mental horizon” (*Early Prose* 73), he dwells on the pagan and Latin influences in Percy’s poems in order to claim that Percy “suffered the misfortune of having been born out of his time” (71). Overall, the review attempts to make room for Percy’s antiquated poetic forms; saying that Percy is a poet out of his time is not intended as an insult. Nonetheless, when Ben Wasson introduced Faulkner to Percy in Greenville, the review had stung Percy enough to mitigate any jovial meeting between the two, though in New York in 1921 Percy befriended Faulkner as if untroubled by the review after all. Also, Percy’s *In April Once* is not his only work that seems out of its time. The title poem of Percy’s first collection, “Sappho in Levkas” also harkens back to the Victorians in its extreme coding of same-sex desire. As Faulkner read Percy’s second volume, we may assume that he was familiar with the first, and possibly familiar with the criticisms directed toward it.

Benjamin Wise discusses the critical reaction to Percy’s earlier volume, citing specifically the response of Harriet Monroe published in the Memphis *Commercial Appeal*, whose review of *Sappho in Levkas* hit the same notes as Faulkner’s later review of *In April Once*.⁷ Monroe argued that the book “represented certain tendencies which the modern poet should avoid with every fibre of his being and every effort of his art” (qtd. in Wise 136). What Monroe missed, according to Wise, is that Percy is not writing in the modernist tradition but a classical one in line with coded homosexual works by the likes of “Walter Pater, John Addington Symonds, and Charles Kains-Jackson, among others,” and that Percy was “trying to portray homosexual relationships not as sodomy but as love” (137). To accomplish this end, in “Sappho in Levkas” Percy wrote from the point of view of Sappho crying out to her spiritual father Zeus. Percy’s poem is not a fragment; it is hundreds of lines long. As Sappho, the speaker laments not the loss of Atthis or an idealized female, but rather confesses her attraction to and affair with the

young shepherd boy Phaon. The eroticism in the poem remains homoerotic; Percy may write as a woman, but he is a man, and the speaker uses *her* gender to praise the beauty of a man *she* wants but cannot have. As will his female counterpart Atthis, Phaon abandons Sappho, leaving her to the despair that becomes the impetus of her lament. The loss of love in this poem, as in Faulkner's imitation, is the source of poetic inspiration, not the erotic titillation of viewing two nymphs in loving embrace or two lesbians kissing.

Faulkner's far gentler critique of Percy's later volume of poetry suggests that he understood the deeper meaning in Percy's poetry better than other contemporary reviewers. Faulkner's review of *In April Once*, in which Faulkner focused on the classical instead of the modernist nature of Percy's poems, was quite possibly his way of responding in code to Percy's coded poetry. He recognizes Percy's "tendencies," and if they are not "modernist," then Faulkner is still willing to grant that they belong to a tradition worthy of respect, even if they were formally outmoded. Possibly, too, Faulkner was aware of the deeper codes of a poem such as "o atthis," his own imitation of Sappho, though his poem is a far more formally modernist adaptation than Percy's. In content, however, both Faulkner and Percy display similar techniques. Percy, a gay man, parrots Sappho, a lesbian, in order to praise the beauty of a Phaon, a shepherd boy, and also in order to lament Phaon's loss and the transgression against her own same-sex desires that he caused her (a coded way for Percy to confess his own transgression against heterosexual expectations). To ferret out the intricate layers of same-sex desire in the poem requires a highly astute understanding of the way the poem is structured. In his imitation of Sappho, Faulkner parrots the lesbian to lament the loss of Atthis, a woman. Faulkner is still partaking of a heterosexual tradition of appropriating lesbian themes for heteroerotic ends, but the poem is far more tame than his previous two lesbian-themed poems in that it at least tacitly

acknowledges the universal applicability of Sapphic love. Percy's gay-male-themed Sapphic poem offered a model to Faulkner of how to move beyond the purely voyeuristic appropriation of lesbian themes.

Faulkner, however, would not write only lesbian-themed poetry. In his one other major publication of his pre-novel writing, he published a provocative poem in New Orleans in 1922 that calls heavily on his experiences with Wasson. In June 1922, *The Double Dealer*, a magazine out of New Orleans that also published Hemingway and other major voices of American Modernism, published "Portrait," by William Faulkner. The poem consists of six quatrains, each with an individual ABCB rhyme scheme. The action in the poem revolves around a speaker who refers to himself as "I" and a partner whom the speaker refers to as "you." The two are returning from a night out together, "tonight's movie" (*Early Prose* 99). The speaker sounds like a gentler, less mortified Prufrock than Eliot's original as he directs: "Let us walk here, softly checked with shadow, / And talk of careful trivialities" (99). The setting recalls the one described by Wasson in his memoir after Faulkner's initiation into SAE at the Stone house. Faulkner guided Wasson back through the dark woods, Wasson trailing in Faulkner's wake and brimming with awe at the rites of initiation. Faulkner is not the speaker, necessarily, nor is he transcribing exactly the events of that walk through the woods, but the imagery of the poem, the situation it describes, and the relationship between the "you" and the "I" seem greatly influenced by this or a very similar event.

Much in the poem suggests parallels to Wasson's later account, both in the minute detail Faulkner uses and in the way in which Faulkner presents the relationship between the speaker and his companion. The speaker recalls, "The darkness scurries, / And we hear again a music both have heard / Singing blood to blood between your palms" (99). Perhaps the music is

Beethoven, whom Faulkner shared with Wasson on their “several such music sessions when the Stone family was away” (35). Also, the intimacy of the poem brims with delicate but heavily erotic connotation:

Come, lift your eyes, your tiny scrap of mouth

So lightly mobile on your dim white face;

Aloofly talk of life, profound in youth

And simple also. (*Early Prose* 99)

The “tiny scrap of mouth” and “dim white face” suggest images of feminine beauty, but though the speaking subject of the poem might feminize the object of his gaze, that does not mean this is a “Portrait” of a lady. The feminine features might be female, but they also recall descriptions of Wasson, famed for his angelic features and youthful beauty. That the speaker wants this object of his attention to talk of life “aloofly” in a way “profound in youth and simple also” will later be echoed in the speaker’s partially admonishing, “You are so young” (99), which recalls the rocking horse on which Faulkner once placed Wasson, his Sir Galahad. The sting of the admonition is minimal; the tone of the poem suggests a nurturing, paternal quality in the speaker. He is enamored with the youth of this person walking with him. Emphasizing the youth and femininity of the “you” in the poem are ways the speaker establishes the hierarchy of their relationship. He is older and wiser, the youth younger and more impressionable. He leads, the youth follows. He literally looks down on the youth, who has to “lift your eyes” to the speaker. The tiny, feminine mouth serves both as synecdoche for all of the youth’s tiny, feminine features and as contrast to the unstated manliness of the speaker, whose mouth is not so tiny, nor the rest of him. Faulkner was never a tall nor imposing man in real life, but he relies on the dichotomy of small/large, feminine/masculine to establish, structurally, the nature of the relationship between

the two bodies in the poem.

The tone is similar to the one Wasson attempts to impart to Faulkner in his memoir as Faulkner gently admonishes him after the SAE initiation for being “filled with awe, imbued by the performance of words and rituals, the ceremony having left an almost hypnotic effect on me” (Wasson 32). That memoir would not be published for nearly sixty years after “Portrait” first appeared, but the similar treatment of this shared memory bridges those years, suggesting that the evening had a similar impact on Faulkner. Wasson seems to think that Faulkner was fairly dismissive of the initiation, but “Portrait” suggests that Faulkner recalled the details of that night both intricately and evocatively, not dismissively nor judgmentally. In the poem, Faulkner allows his speaker to dwell on the naivete of his protege:

And frankly you believe

This world, this darkened street, this shadowed wall

Are dim with beauty you passionately know

Cannot fade nor cool nor die at all. (99)

The speaker also ends the poem by calling on the youth to “Profoundly speak of life, of simple truths, / The while your voice is clear with frank surprise” (100). The speaker is implying in this imperative that his own voice has lost the sense of wonder he sees in his young protege; but as that wonder inspires the speaker, even if sorrowfully, it serves as the impetus for the creation of the poem. The speaker envies this youth and is moved by his faith in beauty.

“Portrait” originally belonged to the unpublished collection *Vision in Spring*, which in her edition of the collection, Sensibar dates to 1921 as a gift Faulkner gave Estelle while she was in Oxford before Cornell Franklin came to retrieve her. Sensibar also considers the volume a sequence, much as the unpublished volume *The Lilacs* (1920) and the later published volume

The Marble Faun. In light of the entire sequence, the object of the speaker's attention in "Portrait" would seem to be female. Though the poem does not contain a single gendered pronoun, the other poems in the volume have a clear sense of sexed characters: the male Pierrot, the female Columbine. At times throughout the sequence, the speaker addresses "you," speaks as both "I" and "we," and refers to "he," or Pierrot. While there is much ambiguity that derives from this constantly changing perspective--even Sensibar claims, "*Vision in Spring* is difficult to read" (*Vision* xix)--the essential interaction described seems to be between a male figure and a female figure.

Taken out of the context of its larger sequence, a context in which it was not originally published, the feminized "you" does not retain a definite sense of being "female" and could easily be the object of a different kind of erotic attraction. The poem offers little evidence to suggest that the feminine youth is, in fact, female. The only phrasing from "Portrait" that describes the physical body of the object of the speaker's attention beyond its face and mouth is from the fourth stanza:

Young and white and strange
You walk beside me down this shadowed street,
Against my hand your small breast softly lies,
And your laughter breaks the rhythm of our feet. (*Early Prose* 99; *Vision* 34,
italics added)*

How, precisely, the speaker can both walk *beside* the "you" of the poem and also have "your small breast" lying "[a]gainst my hand" makes for a strange contortion. Perhaps the speaker's arm is draped over the shoulder of this other person, and so the hand is resting in the vicinity of the breast? This is an awkward image in an awkward line, but clearly the "breast" is singular.

Even the verb “lies” verifies the singularity of “breast,” as it is the breast that is grammatically doing the lying “against my hand.” The first and third line of all the stanzas are unrhymed; the line could just as easily have been “Against my hand your small breasts softly lie.” But “breast” is singular, not the plural “breasts” used to name part of a female body Faulkner will later call “mammalian ludicrosities,” also plural, in one of his more famous novels (*AILD* 164). The poetic “breast” of the poem is not a sexual innuendo; it refers to the chamber wherein resides life, wherein resides the heart, a universal organ. Otherwise, in the text of this one poem, no other evidence sexes the object of the portrait except imagination and inference.

“Portrait” was published individually in New Orleans and marks Faulkner’s entrance into New Orleans as a poet long before his actual arrival there to tutor under Sherwood Anderson. By reading the poem out-of-sequence, the sexuality of the poem reveals itself as far less heterosexual than the longer sequence would seem to suggest it is. Armed with Wasson’s memoir account of those years, we can easily see the details of Faulkner’s poem as a reworking of his experiences with Wasson, which would imply that the intimacy of the poem, if not the sequence to which it belongs, is homosexual, possibly intentionally so. Without conflating too many varieties of sexuality here, if we were to follow Sensibar’s lead in her assertion that Faulkner’s gift of *The Lilacs* to Stone was an enactment of homoerotic anxieties (though it was not), then we could assume conversely that Faulkner’s gift to Estelle of *Vision in Spring* with its poem inspired by his courtship of Wasson links the two courtships. This assumption would imply that Faulkner courted Wasson, a man, as a means of practicing his later courtship of Estelle; such an assumption does not leave much room for homophobic anxieties on Faulkner’s part. This moment could also serve as a measure of Faulkner’s own profound negative capability: he could use one poem to court two different lovers of two different sexes with no

thought of the contradictions implicit in such a double-minded purpose. Such a negative capability would not necessarily imply that Faulkner is bisexual. Rather, he could be homosexual and not homosexual at the same time. To impart to Faulkner this degree of negative capability would imply that his sexual identity was permeable, contextual, and contingent, a move commiserate with much of the current modus operandi of sexuality studies. But to impart this capability to him also implies that he understood what being a homosexual entailed and that he understood homosexuality *as* an identity, not simply as an action. Indeed, at no point in the poem do the two bodies in it have sex.

The lone publication of “Portrait” in 1922 simply highlights its homosexual elements by clearing away the surrounding ambiguities of the longer sequence. Placed in a chronology building to the publication of his sketches in the *Times-Picayune*, which have numerous gay (male) themes, the homosexuality of this first New Orleans piece accords with Faulkner’s general development as a writer in the early 1920s. Nor does the poem, as a purveyor of gay male themes, wince or flinch in its depiction of intimacy, nor make its depictions voyeuristic.

More Short Fiction

By 1924, two years after “Portrait” appeared in print and at least three years after it was originally written, when Faulkner moved to New Orleans with a copy of his recently published *The Marble Faun* in hand, Wasson’s central place in Faulkner’s apocryphal gay imagination was waning, and naturally so. “Portrait” was likely written before Faulkner’s sojourn to New York in late 1921, though published in New Orleans afterwards. In New Orleans Faulkner would find a different experience of homosexuality than what he knew in Oxford. With Wasson in Oxford,

there is a certain insularity to Faulkner's gay depictions as the private walk on a dark lane with his one companion or the romantic escapism of a failed courtier dreaming of an isolated space on a hillside with his one true love. New York, and definitely New Orleans, would introduce Faulkner to a much larger gay world wherein such isolation would not have been the readily available and recognizable place for the lone queer.⁹ In these communities, homosexuals abounded *as* communities. The influence of these communities on Faulkner's writing was the new narrative perspective he developed in order to record those communities as an observer and a commentator on the way in which homosexuals integrate into and interact in their social settings.¹⁰ The central narrator or character in his New Orleans writings, however, still participates in the homosexual interactions being recorded. In "Out of Nazareth" the narrator is out cruising with a character named Spratling and only desists from courting the young vagrant they both approach because "Spratling saw him first," so he had dibs we might say (*New Orleans Sketches* 47). Narratively, such a deferral allows the narrator to back out of the direct courtship and record the gay life around him, whereas the unnamed protagonist in "Moonlight" and the speaker in "Portrait" do not have a perspective that allows them to see beyond their immediate moment or outside of themselves. Beyond the intimacy of their encounters, their experiences are isolated from their larger world; their desires are insular, their place marginal, their state alone. In New Orleans gay men are everywhere. Faulkner would gleefully record the gay life he witnessed all around him.

The three stories that best epitomize Faulkner's recording of the gay life of New Orleans are "Jealousy," "Out of Nazareth," and "Don Giovanni." Gary Richards offers the most thorough overview of these stories and the gay themes they present, though his treatment of these themes, for all its promise, falls into the same pattern as Sensibar's assumptions about the supposed

homoerotics between Faulkner and Stone: Richards assumes that anxiety must rule the day in Faulkner's treatment of homosexuality. His overview also includes works that are not simply homosexually themed, but rather works that show "disturbing pictures of heterosexuality" (31) or in some way demonstrate what Richards identifies as Faulkner's anxiety over the intimate homosexual relationships in which he was engaged. Richards' treatment of the influence of male homosexuality in Faulkner's early prose includes details from "Damon and Pythias Unlimited," the unpublished short sketch "Peter," "Episode," and slightly later writings such as "Mistral" and "Snow," written after Faulkner and Spratling's trip to Europe. I beg to differ with including these stories in the record of Faulkner's gay-themed New Orleans writing because of two important sources absent from Richards essay (and, for that matter, from Sensibar's work, from all the essays published in *Faulkner's Sexualities*, and from the critical work of Noel Polk in his essays on homosexuality in *The Hamlet* and *Go Down, Moses*).¹¹

First, Richards uses published biographies, not the archived notes on which those biographies are based. The image of New Orleans and the gay space there is anything but tight-lipped in Blotner's archived notes--a fact demonstrated by John Shelton Reed's preference for those notes to construct the "bohemian" atmosphere of New Orleans in the 1920s. Unfortunately, when Blotner chose to exclude those details from his published biographical record, he inadvertently set in motion an erroneous (because incomplete) understanding of Faulkner and sexuality. As recent studies such as Richards' attempt to reconstruct an understanding of Faulkner's life in relation to homosexuality but without access to the full record of Faulkner's gay life, the distortions of that life that those studies produce move towards increasing grotesquery, to borrow the meaning of the term from Sherwood Anderson, an apropos borrowing in reference to Faulkner's time in New Orleans. The grotesquery that has developed is that the

one truth of Faulkner's sexual life was his anxiety about it. Using Anderson's terminology from the opening section of *Winesburg, Ohio*, we might say that this "truth," formed of a great many vague thoughts, loses what inherent *beauty* it might have had as it becomes the sole item of discussion--perhaps better stated as it loses whatever potential it might have had to shed new light on the work and the man--and instead it becomes a *falsehood*--or a misinterpretation that perpetuates and distorts itself through repetition. Thus what was a conclusion deduced from the consideration of certain evidence--which, as it turns out, was not all the evidence, only certain selective evidence--becomes an *a priori* assumption directing all subsequent discussion that looks basically something like this: sex freaked Faulkner out and particularly anything even remotely queer, much less gay, surely caused him endless anxiety that boiled over in his writings. That Faulkner might have immersed himself as an observer and fellow traveler in a sexual subculture, as many of Blotner's interviews suggest, is a premise lost in the fold. The anxiety model flourishes unmitigated by the biographical evidence of Faulkner's comfort among gay men.¹² Certainly, Faulkner may have had his anxious moments, but those moments are only part--and I would argue a small part--of the larger narrative of his (apocryphal) gay life.

Second, regardless of access to Blotner's papers (wherein a copy of Faulkner's *Item-Tribune* essay sits), all Faulkner scholars now have access to Faulkner's thoughts on "What's the Matter with Marriage." James Meriwether included the essay in his 2004 re-edition of *Essays, Speeches, and Public Letters*.¹³ Any consideration of Faulkner's New Orleans writing that wishes to make any general conclusions about that writing must consider *all* of the writing produced during that period to which a scholar has reasonable access. Faulkner's thoughts on marriage and the basis of a successful relationship suggests far less anxiety about same-sex relationships than Richards allows. As a measure of his response to his surroundings when he wrote the piece,

Faulkner's advocacy for same-sex relationships in "What's the Matter with Marriage" does much to assuage the notion that he felt anxiety over his gay life in New Orleans. He makes that gay life in New Orleans the model for successful relationships.

Richards considers excellently the broad scope of Faulkner's writings from those critical years in New Orleans, from his *Sketches* to his later short stories and the novel *Mosquitoes*, but his archive is incomplete. I do not make this critique to fault only Richards; rather, I single out his work for being as close to an accurate portrayal of Faulkner's gay life in New Orleans and its influence on his writing as a scholar has managed to present, only even he falls into a limiting pattern when he attempts to articulate that influence. Anxiety wins the day. New Orleans, however, is the one gay space currently carved out for Faulkner in considerations of his work. Richards, regardless of the faults in his essay, carved out that space, but the interviews with Faulkner's New Orleans friends and that little essay on marriage from a New Orleans paper help us greatly to understand the ways in which Faulkner played with gay representation in this period of his writing. Here was a world in which he was far from the "queerest" man in the room and where he could play and perform among the community, rather than retreat to the margins for the stifling fixity of convention lest someone single him out as "queer."

"Jealousy" demonstrates the tensions between the a view of Faulkner's sexual anxieties and the greater--and apocryphal--influence of his life in gay New Orleans. In the story, a restaurant owner, Antonio, tries to convince himself that a young waiter is flirting with his wife. The root cause of his tension, however, is that the waiter's friendliness with his wife, if it is *not* flirting, must be a kind of effeminate gay chumminess and is, therefore, threatening to Antonio's manhood much more deeply than if the waiter were merely trying to cuckold him. In a fit of rage, he threatens to kill his wife, only to have her dismiss him as "insane" and recall him to his

duties as host while patrons arrive for dinner. Antonio then approaches the waiter with the same accusation, that the waiter is having an affair with his wife. Richards narrates the exchange that follows:

If anything, the waiter seems stereotypically gay. Consistently flashing his “white satirical smile,” he flatly denies the husband’s accusations with bitchily overprecise diction-- “You are already mad. Had you not been I should have killed you ere this. Listen, tub of entrails, there is nothing between us; for her sake whom you persecute, I swear it. I have said no word to her that you have not seen, nor she to me. If she be attracted to someone, it is not I”--and the confrontation culminates when he prissily slaps the husband. (Richards 29, interior quotations *New Orleans* 34, 37-38)

Richards also notes other details about the waiter, who is described in the story as “a tall Roman god in a soiled apron,” marked by his “supple grace” (*New Orleans* 34, 36). Richards proceeds to read the story as an indictment of “unenviable heterosexuality” (Richards 30) in which Faulkner uses the “courteous and efficient” (*New Orleans* 36) waiter as a juxtaposition to the clod-like owner who sells his restaurant to the waiter rather than continue to expose his wife to whatever it is that seems to be bothering him.

Interestingly, Richards does not include in his discussion the waiter’s response to Antonio that if Antonio wants to kill him, he would have to do it “from behind” (*New Orleans* 38). John Duvall appropriates similar imagery from Faulkner’s World War I stories to discuss “male homosexual panic” over the prospect of anal penetration and emasculation. If we apply that reading here, that doing it “from behind” is a kind of Freudian slip on the part of the waiter in reference to anal sex, the tensions between the waiter and Antonio amplify to something more

than what Richards deems “simply the husband’s projections” of his homophobia onto the waiter. Thus, when Antonio attempts to shoot the waiter in the back of the head at the end of the story only to have the gun explode, Richards merely notes the “self-inflicted suffering and punishment when the antique pistol bursts in the husband’s hand” (Richards 29). He does not add that the waiter “crashed forward into a glass table, then to the floor” (*New Orleans* 40). Standing at point-blank range, the waiter is at the very least seriously injured, possibly killed by the “husband’s projections.” This story represents no mere “irony [. . .] in the scenario of triangulated desire that evinces a pronounced homoerotic connection between the two men” (Richards 29). The metaphorical injury to Antonio’s heterosexual masculinity may be unfortunate, but Richards completely ignores that the “stereotypically gay” waiter is seriously injured, too. The story is not about the woes of heterosexual angst. The story documents a hate-crime.

The two opposing forces in tension in Richards’ reading are “stereotypically gay” and “unenviable heterosexuality.” That the unenviable heterosexual severely wounds if not kills the stereotypical homosexual does not find a place in the essay; rather, the “near-constant anxiety about heterosexuality” Richards finds in the *New Orleans Sketches* comes to elide considerations of the homosexual representation in the story (Richards 29). The waiter does appear to be crafted in order to pique the reader to believe he might be gay, perhaps stereotypically so. His actions may well be “bitchy” and “prissy,” and his entrance into the story as a “tall Roman god” offers a quick, superficial way to suggest that he attracts the eye. Antonio notices him and “knotted his hand into a fist upon the desk and he stared at his whitening knuckles as at something new and strange” (*New Orleans* 35). Clearly, what he sees troubles him, but Antonio’s feeling hyperbolic anxiety does not mean that Faulkner felt the same degree of anxiety, too.

The real tension in the early scenes of the story is between seeing and reacting: the appearance of someone who looks gay and the reaction of someone troubled by his own perception that someone else is a homosexual. Given that reaction, what consequences might result? We might imagine Faulkner sitting in his own Vieux Carre cafe, observing the patrons and the waiters in that gay space and imagining the confrontation he describes between a waiter and an owner, arguing bitchily and prissily with each other, in public no less. Faulkner's genius is in taking us from that superficial moment and into the personal lives of these two men all the way to the violence at the end of story. The story offers no real clues as to the nature of the relationship between these two men beyond being a rancorous business partnership infused by jealousies that at times almost surface but ultimately remain elusive and unclear. Out of that ambiguity, Faulkner apocryphizes a scenario that is not a spilling over of his own heterosexual anxieties, but is an indictment of heterosexual anxiety that is taken to the grotesque extreme of becoming irrational. Antonio is mad; Faulkner uses him to demonstrate how dangerous such madness and panic can be. Indeed, even if the waiter is "stereotypically gay," Antonio is no more justified in trying to kill him than if the waiter were gay but less flamboyantly so. Faulkner is not the homophobe in the story. In his observations about the dangers of over-reacting to a person who might be perceived as gay, this story is an indictment of homophobia.

Seemingly the diametrical opposite of "Jealousy" is the sketch "Out of Nazareth." The setting is Jackson Square. An unnamed narrator is wandering the streets with his friend Spratling. They are talking about art and the use of light in paintings, but this conversation is a cover; the two men are cruising the park together, a gay practice as common then as now.¹⁴ After the exposition, the action in the story actually begins with an abnegation of jealousy. Upon seeing a young man in front of St. Andrew's Cathedral, Spratling exclaims, "'My God,' he said, clutching

me, ‘look at that face’” (*New Orleans* 47). Since “Spratling saw him first,” the narrator allows him to do the courting, which in turn allows the narrator to record the courtship, but not before the narrator dwells upon the nature of this particular beauty:

And one could imagine young David looking like that. One could imagine Jonathan getting that look from David, and, serving the highest function of which sorry man is capable, being the two of them beautiful in similar peace and simplicity--beautiful as gods, as no woman can ever be. And to think of speaking to him, of entering that dream, was like a desecration. (47)

The “desecration” of “entering that dream” is probably less noble than it sounds (a prurient mind might read such language as a poetic way of referring to penetrative anal sex). Thankfully, this “desecration” is also “beautiful as gods” and beautiful in a way “no woman can ever be.” More a painter than a man of words, Spratling says hello. Spratling and the narrator take the young man to eat, where they learn that he is effectively a hobo traveling cross-country from migrant work camp to work camp, but that he also writes.¹⁵

The innocence of the exchange seems, as the narrator suggests, almost a desecration to read for its deep and loud homosexual undertones, as if to do so would break the delicacy of a love that dares not speak its name. Rather than directly admit his feelings, the young man hands over his copy of A. E. Housman’s *Shropshire Lad* and explains that he “like[s] it because the man that wrote it felt that way, and didn’t care who knew” (49). Neither Spratling nor the narrator bothers to ask “what way” Housman felt. The crux of the story is that one either knows or does not know. Spratling and the narrator know. We, as readers, are invited to test our own wits in the story; just as the young man will not state aloud what they all three know, the narrator refuses to name what he, too, does not care if his reader knows. I will return to the homosexual

associations of Housman's volume in Chapter 4 in reference to Faulkner's use of it to signify homosexual desires in *Soldiers' Pay*. For now, the "secret" of the reference is that careful readers would recognize Housman's interests in "lads" in the volume as an elaborate coding of his homosexual desires. Paul Fussell claims of the volume that few readers were unaware of what was effectively Housman's open secret: the suffering lads were his way of depicting his (at the time) illicit homosexual desires in a form that allowed him to praise their beauty and valor.

The young man wants to pay for his meal, but Spratling will not allow it. As an alternative method of payment, he suggests that the young man come to his apartment the next day so Spratling can use him as a model for a painting. If Spratling wants to sketch the young man for a painting, then the narrator writes his "sketch," so he gets his own kind of gratification from the exchange. The multiple types of sketching occurring in this exchange allow for the word *sketch* to expand to the realm of euphemism. To "sketch" the young man means alternatively to draw him, to write about him, and to make sexual advances towards him, at least to the degree that both forms of artistic sketching involve paying tribute to his beauty. Spratling absolutely insists that the young man "call on *us* tomorrow" (49, italics added), implying that he and the narrator will be present for what ensues at the euphemistic "sketching." The invitation to an intimate, private "sketching" suggests that Spratling intends for the young lad to pay for his meal with sex.

Instead, the young man hands over a story he has written as payment, before "confid[ing] to Spratling and me, blushing, that he is seventeen" (53). The narrator, accordingly, reprints that story in the frame of his larger sketch. Gary Richards rightly calls the story written by the young man a "powerful Whitmanic narrative" (35). The short piece seems actually to be a prose revision of "Pioneers! O Pioneers!," with the longer frame narrative serving as a kind of

explanation of its powerful homoeroticism. The full sketch “Out of Nazareth” almost seems like an extended trope of stanza eighteen of Whitman’s poem:

I too with my soul and body,
We, a curious trio, picking, wandering on our way,
Through these shores amid the shadows, with the apparitions pressing,
Pioneers! O Pioneers! (lines 69-72)

The narrator, acting as his own kind of sexual pioneer, channels to great effect both Whitman and Housman in this sketch set on the “shores” (or banks) of the Mississippi River. Jackson Square specifically, but by extension the Vieux Carre of which it is the heart, serves as a space to act out the powerful homoeroticism of Whitman’s poetry in the specific homosexual context of the gay life of New Orleans. One cannot help but note two key features of the sketch: the narrator is implicating the degree to which he participated in, not just observed, that life, and he puts that life out in the open, in the public Jackson Square in the middle of the afternoon, as if for the world to see. As for Whitman’s “amid the shadows,” the only shadow casts in the story is the narrator’s refusal to state clearly that which can be reasonably inferred. To think! Faulkner-- or at least his narrator--might have felt this way and does not care who knows! Next to “Divorce in Naples,” the sketch “Out of Nazareth” is Faulkner’s most overtly gay text. For all of its suggestive silence, it is arguably the most celebratory.

Both “Jealousy” and “Out of Nazareth” were published in *The Times-Picayune* in 1925, on 1 March and 12 April, respectively, dates congruent with Faulkner’s publication of his editorial on marriage in the *Item-Tribune* on 4 April. The third gay narrative from Faulkner’s pre-European New Orleans period was never published in his lifetime, at least not in its original short form. Joseph Blotner dates “Don Giovanni” to “the first half of 1925” and notes that its

original typescript includes under Faulkner's name the address "624 Orleans Alley/ New Orleans," the address he shared with Spratling beginning in March of 1925, where he also wrote *Soldiers' Pay* (US 705). "Don Giovanni" resembles a more *mature* version of "Moonlight" in that the plight of the protagonist, Herbie, mirrors that of the unnamed protagonist from the earlier story. Herbie, however, is a thirty-two year-old widower with thinning hair who married early in life with hardly any courtship, only to have his wife become an invalid and die. Herbie's age makes him exactly twice as old as the protagonist from "Moonlight." Now, much older, Herbie wants to court a woman. Skeet becomes Morrison, a more worldly-wise and patient friend whom Herbie consults on his tactics for wooing a woman. Morrison lives upstairs from an unnamed writer who represents a new element in the story. Blotner suggests that the basic premise of the relationship among Herbie, Morrison, and the unnamed writer is modeled upon that of Faulkner, William Spratling, and Sherwood Anderson.

This story epitomizes Faulkner's move from the insular gay themes of his earliest writing to the communal gay themes of his New Orleans material. Herbie spends the first half of the story explaining his plans to court his date not to his date but to Morrison. The story implies that such lengthy discussions between Morrison and Herbie are common. The first implication that something in this talking about love is amiss comes from the unnamed writer. When Herbie first tries to find Morrison to go over his game plan for his date, Morrison is asleep. Herbie yells up to him from the street only to have the unnamed writer complain about the noise and ask Herbie if "you think this is a bathroom?" (US 481). The writer does not know what Herbie wants to talk about, but his equating Herbie's actions to something one does in a bathroom strikes an odd note. In an effort to get rid of Herbie, the writer wakes Morrison, essentially allowing whatever is going on between Herbie and Morrison to happen so long as it does not interfere with his work.

What ensues is a conversation about the planned courtship longer than the courtship itself. Morrison approves the plan, though with a slightly ironic tone as he seems to understand how hopeless Herbie's plan is. Part of the conversation turns to the weight of Herbie's "artillery" and its lack of recent use (483-84). Still, rather than dash Herbie's hopes, Morrison encourages him. The communal aspect of these three men helping each other overshadows the homoerotic subtext in Herbie and Morrison's conversation. The conversation does not stand out as odd in this context, even if it should belong in a bathroom.

Such is not the case *after* the date, when Herbie seeks out Morrison again. Herbie's courtship fails. He finds out that his planned conversation, calculated to elicit very precise responses from his date, does not elicit the responses he expects; courting a woman proves to be far more difficult than he imagined. We do not witness any of the date first-hand. Rather, "[p]erhaps three hours later," Herbie returns to call again on Morrison. The writer intercedes. Herbie finds himself talking at length about the date to the writer, explaining how his date deserted him for a younger, rougher man. The writer would find the story humorous if he did not find it so pathetic. He expresses his stupefied rage by exclaiming aloud, "'God, regard your masterpiece! Balzac, despair! [. . .] Get to hell out of here,' he roared, 'you have made me sick!'" (487). He suggests that Herbie "go to a brothel, if you want a girl" (487). Herbie, though, does not seem actually to want a girl. He really seems to want to seduce somebody, nothing more. Unable to rouse Morrison and thrown out by the writer, he wanders the streets and considers a new plan: he will talk rough and be rough! This, he is sure, is the secret. Needing to tell Morrison, he calls him and, rather than let Morrison get in a word even in greeting, as soon as Herbie hears the phone pick up, he dives into his new plan: "I will be cruel, hard, and brutal, if necessary, until she begs for my love. What do you think of that?" (488). Here, as he did in

“Moonlight,” Faulkner turns the story on its head in a single line. Rather than Morrison’s being on the other end, Herbie finds that he was talking to the operator, a woman, who responds in kind: “You tell ‘em, big boy; treat ‘em rough” (488).

If in “Moonlight” the pastoral romance imagined by the narrator seems melancholy and wishful, in “Don Giovanni” Faulkner elevates a sense of homosexual longing to the level of farce. In “Moonlight,” there is no one to identify that what the protagonist is feeling when he longs to be with Skeet on a hillside is a homosexual desire. In “Don Giovanni,” the female operator’s response immediately brings to the fore the intense eroticism that has colored Herbie and Morrison’s interactions all along. Herbie courts Morrison. Though the writer might see it at first, so long as it does not interfere with his work, he does not care. When Herbie forlornly explains his failures to the writer, then the writer dismisses Herbie and even claims that Herbie makes him sick. Undeterred, Herbie continues to seek out Morrison, whom he clearly feels is his one companion in the world, from whom he seeks understanding, solace, advice, and company. When Herbie finally does muster the courage to speak openly about what he wants, his pure impatient rush to talk to Morrison mucks up the whole affair. Indeed, Morrison should have been on the other end of the line; Herbie wants to say these things to Morrison in the first place. Faulkner does not, however, lament the farce of the pseudo-homosocial conventions keeping Herbie and Morrison from speaking openly to each other (they do enact their courtship through a woman, if only by telephone and accidentally). He makes the farce humorous; no harm comes to anyone. The writer keeps writing, the operator hangs up to take another call. Herbie is embarrassed. Morrison is still out there waiting to listen patiently to his woman troubles, to hear Herbie “treat ‘em [them? him?] rough,” and to enact varieties of courtship rituals with him until Herbie finally gets that courtship right.

Mosquitoes, Both Ways

Though Faulkner never published “Don Giovanni” as a short sketch, he used it as the framework on which to build his second novel, *Mosquitoes*, about the inanity, artistic pretensions, and sexual ambiguities of New Orleans bohemian life. Faulkner transforms Herbie into Ernest Talliaferro, Morrison to Dawson Fairchild, a writer, and the unnamed writer into Gordon, a sculptor. Herbie’s date, identified in “Don Giovanni” as Miss Steinbauer, becomes Jenny in the novel (*US 705*). These changes and the expanded length gave Faulkner a canvas on which to paint much more broadly and intricately developed characters. While the majority of commentary about homosexual themes in the novel appertains to its lesbian content, there is also ample material in the novel appertaining to themes of male homosexuality, most notably in the character of Dawson Fairchild. In fact, one may reasonably suggest of these themes that the novel itself is a longer version of “Don Giovanni,” in which Faulkner changed the names of the principal characters and to which he added roughly three hundred pages of banal artistic banter that takes place over four days on a boat. Faulkner also adds some clarity to the original scene in “Don Giovanni.” Expecting to hear from Talliaferro/Herbie after his failed courtship of Jenny, Fairchild/Morrison laments, “I wish Talliaferro could find him a woman. I’m tired of being seduced,” and so explicitly names the type of relationship he and Talliaferro have (*Mosquitoes 313*). Though the novel leaves much ambiguity in Talliaferro’s character, his double-courtship, first with the older rich widow Mrs. Maurier and then with Jenny, makes him seem ultimately heterosexual, but he maintains at least a latent desire to prefer the company of men. On the other hand, Fairchild does not need Talliaferro to seduce him. Faulkner’s other central addition to the

novel is a new male character as part of this community of men. Julius Wiseman, Fairchild's friend, who is often identified as "the Semitic man," joins the cast as Fairchild's constant companion.

Minrose Gwin explores gay male themes in the novel, but her emphasis rests squarely on Talliaferro in her essay "Does Ernest Like Gordon? Faulkner's *Mosquitoes* and the Bite of 'Gender Trouble'." The question of her title is apt; she finds evidence of Talliaferro's interest in Gordon in the first scene of the novel, perhaps an outgrowth in the added material of residual gay themes from "Don Giovanni." Ernest spends time "watching [Gordon's] hard body in the stained trousers and undershirt, watching the curling vigor of his hair" (*Mosquitoes* 10). At the end of the novel, Talliaferro calls Fairchild in a repeat of the ending scene from "Don Giovanni." Gwin could not, however, rephrase her question "Does Gordon Like Ernest?" Gordon is described in the novel as the "queer shabby Mr. Gordon," so he clearly elicits a strange response from people, but he proves to be the most hyper-masculine figure and only successful courtier of women on the boat. As her title explains, Gwin chooses to read these incidences as evidence of "gender trouble," using Judith Butler's concept from her book of the same name, rather than as evidence of explicit male homosexuality.

In the revision of "Don Giovanni" into *Mosquitoes*, Faulkner's most consistently gay male character is not Talliaferro, but Dawson Fairchild, with a little help from his friend/lover Julius Wiseman. Unfortunately, the impression that Sherwood Anderson served as the model for Fairchild seems to have precluded such a discussion of Fairchild's homosexuality. Blotner suggests that Morrison in "Don Giovanni" is based on Sherwood Anderson, a connection he carries to its logical conclusion in relation to *Mosquitoes* to claim that Morrison becomes Dawson Fairchild. This flow chart roots Fairchild in Anderson as well.¹⁶ Frederick Karl supports

Blotner's opinion on this matter and claims in his introduction to the most recent edition of the novel that "Dawson Fairchild stands in, in many ways, for Sherwood Anderson" (1). This genealogy seems, tacitly, logical if we assume that any single character in one of Faulkner's novels functions in a 1:1 correlation with a real-life person, but Faulkner transferred actual characteristics into his apocryphal creations more complexly than so simple a correlative genealogy. The problem is that if Fairchild is Anderson and Anderson was a heterosexual, then considering Fairchild to be a homosexual would seem to be rather *illogical* as having no biographical basis. If *Mosquitoes* evolved out of Faulkner's life in New Orleans, then the family tree of each character implicitly limits interpretations of those characters beyond the confines of reasonable poetic license. Indeed, could a homosexual suddenly appear in the branches of any family tree with no predecessor or genetic reason, as simply a completely original mutation?¹⁷

If, however, we consider that Spratling may also inform Fairchild, then we might be able to see the degree to which we can read Fairchild for his heavily suggestive homosexuality. Morrison in "Don Giovanni" is *not* a writer. The writer in the original story has no name. He is too busy to put up with Herbie's games of courtship. Herbie and Morrison, meanwhile, forge ahead with their courtship and leave the stodgy old writer to grumble in despair and disgust at what that writer perceives as mans' degradation. As in "Out of Nazareth," we see Herbie and Morrison effectively "cruise" together, though not in the specific context of two men on the prowl for a sexual partner in Jackson Square but as two men trading ideas about how to secure a partner, ostensibly a woman of course. Blotner also suggests that the unnamed writer becomes Gordon (*US 705*). Gordon, the sculptor, seems a likely kin to Spratling, a visual artist and architect as opposed to a writer; but in this genealogy, the unnamed writer that links the actual Spratling and the apocryphal Gordon certainly makes for an unclear evolution. In *Mosquitoes* the

unnamed writer actually appears in the “Epilogue” in sections five and ten as a character in addition to Gordon. If there is any genetic kinship between Gordon in *Mosquitoes* and the unnamed writer in “Don Giovanni,” that kinship results from Faulkner splitting the original character to create two new characters, not merely renaming one character as someone else. Into one of those new characters, Faulkner infused elements of William Spratling. Similarly, Fairchild is not one-hundred percent Sherwood Anderson. In his revisions, Faulkner included a great deal of Spratling in Fairchild as well. Blotner and Karl are not wrong to explicate genealogies between real-life figures in Faulkner’s life and his fictional creations, and certainly Anderson informs Morrison and Fairchild. Their genealogies, however, only tell part of the whole that Faulkner so deftly apocryphized for his fictional creations. If Spratling was right, that he is reflected in a character in *Soldiers’ Pay*, then he is very likely reflected in characters in *Mosquitoes* as well. Much of Fairchild may have roots in him, and much of Fairchild seems to owe a debt to his homosexuality.

Evidence abounds in the novel *Mosquitoes* to suggest that Fairchild is a homosexual. Early in the novel, when Talliaferro asks Fairchild to keep him company and give him advice, Fairchild responds that “Julius and I are spending the evening together,” implying to Talliaferro that he would be the third-wheel (44).¹⁸ Later, Julius and Fairchild run into Gordon by a row of warehouses near the dock and discuss the impending boat party. Speaking of the value of having friends with boats and cars, Fairchild explains, “If you can neither ride nor drive the beast yourself, it’s a good idea to keep it in a pasture nearby” (50), but his “beast” is no longer purely boats and cars but becomes a metaphor, ostensibly, for having a woman available “to ride” as needed. Gordon does not respond, but Julius does, calling out Fairchild for his faux-heterosexual reference: “But you’ve got your simile backwards [. . .] You were speaking from the point of

view of the rider” (50). Julius’ zinger is meant to remind Fairchild that men can be kept and ridden just as cars and women can (in contemporary gay parlance, Julius is distinguishing between a “top” and a “bottom” and implying that Fairchild is the latter). If Julius is Fairchild’s lover, then this line is the wink-and-nod acknowledgement between them. They trade increasingly metaphoric barbs in front of Gordon before moving on without him. Fairchild and Julius proceed to wander the banks of the Mississippi River and watch “[t]wo ferry boats [which] passed and repassed like a pair of golden swans in a barren cycle of courtship” (53). These boats (punningly designated as “ferries”) mirror Fairchild and Julius, though if their “cycle of courtship” is “barren,” they still stand together on the banks, “remove their hats,” and watch peacefully and without speaking the coming and going of the boats in their courtship, a ritual with significance to them, “barren” or not. This mutual watching is one of the only unspoken moments in a novel dedicated to conversation and serves as a metaphor that need not be articulated: the love that dares not speak its name.

Life on the *Nausikaa* provides further evidence for Fairchild’s homosexuality. Fairchild leads the men below deck at every opportunity to partake of the bootleg whiskey he has smuggled on board in his luggage. These retreats ruin the plans of Mrs. Maurier for dancing and cards since her goal is to balance the number of men and women as part of her sense of social order. Playing and dancing with uneven numbers unnerves her. By default, then, Fairchild represents the loss of the heterosexual balance (men to women) that Mrs. Maurier’s efforts represent, though we should expect nothing less of him since “Fairchild was not that sort: social obligations rested too lightly upon him” (103). When Fairchild does come above deck and enters into the sexual banter, he does so only to poke fun at heterosexual practices. Of sex between a man and woman--after marriage of course--he sneers, “If the husbands ever saw the comic aspect

of it . . . But they never do [. . .] There'd sure be a decline in population if a man were twins and had to stand around and watch himself make love" (185). While this bit of wisdom implicates the ungainliness of the male as well as the female body, the "husbands" are, notably, the ones who would find it "comic." The twin husband would not necessarily find his twin the ungainly partner but rather the way that his twin, coupled with a woman, looks simply foolish. The first twin, while in mid-coitus, has the distinct advantage of being distracted by what he is doing to realize objectively how comical the contortions of heterosexuality are. Were the one twin to look at the other, he might forego the comic ugliness of "woman" all together for the narcissistic enticement afforded by the appearance of his twin and the promise of his symmetry as opposed to the comic coupling of different parts.¹⁹

Returning to this theme, Fairchild calls himself "a purely lay brother to the human race" (241), implying that his only interest in heterosexuality is for its reproductive necessity, a kind of labor for the layman to perform for utility, not for enjoyment. He then goes so far as to claim of women, "After all they are merely articulated genital organs with a kind of aptitude for spending whatever money you have" (241). Fairchild prefers the company of men and dismisses the sexual appeal of women as anything more than breeders. At his side, ever-present, is his friend and fellow dismissive misogynist Julius. In fact, when Mrs. Maurier has enough of Fairchild and boots him off the boat in Mandeville, he still wakes up, hungover, beside Julius and "tried to rouse the Semitic man, but the other just cursed him from his slumber and rolled over to face the wall" (302). Fairchild has gotten out of his bed to wander the room before attempting to wake Julius. The novel leaves unclear whether the bed in which Julius sleeps is the same bed Fairchild has just exited. At the end of the novel, when Talliaferro calls Fairchild to repeat the dirty-talk scene from "Don Giovanni," Fairchild is not merely out; he is out with Julius.

Certainly, Fairchild and Julius partake of their share of what readers might find to be unnecessary misogyny. One could not fault Richards were he to apply to Fairchild and Julius his characterization of the gay waiter from "Jealousy"; they are a pair of "bitchy queens." There is, however, a fullness to their characters that saves them from the depths of a flat onerousness. They stay above the fray of the sexual politics onboard the *Nausikaa*, and much of their misogyny surfaces only when they are confronted with the banal sexual economics of their fellow passengers, who are not themselves particularly praiseworthy specimens of humanity, regardless of Fairchild's commentary. On land in the "Prologue" and "Epilogue," Fairchild and Julius wander through the disconnected lives of the other characters as a form of social glue, generous in their friendships and untroubled by the perils of the New Orleans social/sexual scene. They suggests much about Faulkner's experiences in gay New Orleans, as their unencumbered lives prove by far the most enviable of all the characters and those characters' various attempts at their largely unsuccessful heterosexual courtships.

On the other hand, the misogyny that permeates Fairchild and Julius' relationship exceeds into Faulkner's depictions of lesbianism in the novel. His handling of lesbian sexuality-- alongside his sympathetic portrayal of gay men, no less--regresses unfortunately to his early voyeuristic poetry in which he denies lesbian desire the marriage of true minds he allows for his gay male characters. In *Mosquitoes*, Faulkner returns to Swinburne's "Sapphics," only now the two "lesbians" kissing from that earlier poem become Pat Robyn and Jenny Steinbauer. Aphrodite becomes Eva Wiseman, Julius' sister, only in this case she is not appalled by but pruriently participating in the heterosexual voyeurism of the supposedly homoerotic scene. That scene proves to be bonafide Faulkner apocrypha in that it was cut from the final version of the novel for reasons not altogether clear, though metaphorically the excision of the scene bears

striking parallels to Faulkner's earlier handling of lesbian material in both "Sapphics" and "L'Apres Midi," where we see by not seeing. Minrose Gwin provides the excised scene, which occurs on the second day of the voyage, at the end of the "eleven o'clock section" (*Mosquitoes* 156) and briefly explicates it in relation to its surrounding context. Eva Wiseman has put Mrs. Maurier to bed and stumbles upon Pat and Jenny kissing in their bunk. The two have been alone together since the beginning of the "ten o'clock" section, undressing in front of each other and talking about their virginity for nearly fifteen pages of verbal foreplay.

Material in the "ten o'clock" section remained in the final published version of the novel. "Jenny had the cabin to herself" (*Mosquitoes* 136) when Pat arrived. Jenny is undressing; Pat comments, "You've got a funny figure" (139), as Jenny combs her hair with the only luggage she brought--the comb. "Her hair," the narrator tells us, "lent to Jenny's divine body a halo like an angel's" (139). Pat is surprised that Jenny makes no effort to re-dress and asks aloud, "Don't you wear any nightclothes?" (140), though Jenny reminds Pat that she had promised to lend her some of her own, which Pat never supplies. As Pat lays down to sleep, "Jenny's angelic nakedness went beyond her vision and suddenly she stared at nothing with a vague orifice vaguely in the center of it, and beyond the orifice a pale moonfilled sky" (140). If we imagine that Faulkner is given to puns, then "nothing with a vague orifice vaguely in the center of it" is an indirect way of saying that Pat is staring at Jenny's naked vagina in the pale moonlight from the open port window. They discuss Pat's brother Josh, change positions in their shared bed several times, make mention of a "black man" from Mandeville named Faulkner (145), and eventually light on their mutual virginity as the scene ends and returns the reader to the upper deck and Mr. Talliaferro and Mrs. Wiseman.

With this provocative foreplay as the set-up, sometime after eleven o'clock Eva Wiseman

puts Mrs. Maurier to bed and comes to Jenny and Pat's cabin. The excised passage describes "the two young women, Jenny and Pat, in their shared bunk, and commences to describe explicitly and in highly erotic language their sexual contact" (Gwin 134). That passage, reprinted nearly in full in Gwin's essay, includes descriptions of Pat "stroking [Jenny's body] lightly" and Jenny "sigh[ing]" and "ma[king] a soft wet sound with her mouth" (qtd. in Gwin 134). Finally, they kiss. Gwin stops quoting the scene and proceeds to summarize what happens next:

At this point Pat jerks away and accuses the working-class Jenny of kissing in a common way. Pat says that she will teach her how to kiss properly. As she proceeds with this undertaking, Eva Wiseman opens their door and watches them "with dark intent speculation." And here the scene, which has been framed by the lesbian presence of Eva Wiseman, ends. (135, internal quotation from *Mosquitoes* typescript)

Though she is Julius' sister, Eva Wiseman never merits the odd title "the Semitic [wo]man." Rather, the narrative and the other characters refers to her most commonly as simply Mrs. Wiseman, a honorific usually reserved for married women or, more likely in her case, for older women in a group who are not generally part of the sexual economy and are off the market. Eva Wiseman is the proverbial "old maid" of the boat party, the female equivalent of a man who "ain't the marrying kind." Jenny and Pat are the objects of male sexual desire in a reiteration of the heterosexual fantasy from "Sapphics." Gwin explicitly calls Eva Wiseman a lesbian, though the novel never makes so explicit a point of naming her particular sexual identity.

In the excised scene, however, the old maid Mrs. Wiseman is depicted as more than just an unfortunate woman who could never find a husband. She is, in fact, the old, prurient lesbian, similar to Swinburne's Aphrodite only in what she sees, lesbians kissing, not in her reaction to it.

Mrs. Wiseman is quite pleased with what she discovers. Later, “Jenny found Mrs. Wiseman in their room, changing her dress” (*Mosquitoes* 178). This encounter opens a very short scene from the “eleven o’clock” morning sequence from the Day Three chapter, so, temporally, roughly twelve hours after Eva Wiseman watched Jenny and Pat kissing. While briefly talking about Mr. Talliaferro, “Mrs. Wiseman paused and watched Jenny curiously” (178). In a much shorter rehearsal of the foreplay from the night before,

Jenny looked at her reflected face, timelessly and completely entertained. Mrs. Wiseman gazed at Jenny’s fine minted hair, at her sleazy dress revealing the divine inevitability of her soft body.

“Come here, Jenny,” she said. (178).

The scene ends, fraught with implications that what follows is another kissing lesson. There is, however, no excised material from this encounter. Whereas Faulkner had his young lesbians flirt and then kiss, and then later removed the description of the actual kissing, when the older, predatory lesbian Eva Wiseman beckons Jenny, there is no scene to excise. Faulkner never intended to show his audience this kissing. This scene lacks the two nubile young bodies that make Pat and Jenny’s foreplay so titillating. Also, none of this viewing inspires the production of art. With the exception of Gordon, all the other artists and characters in the novel only talk about art but never actually produce it. In this regard, their erotic output is onanistic and “barren.”

Pinning down precisely why the lesbian kissing scene between Pat and Jenny was cut from the final version of the novel proves difficult. Gwin explains that, among the existing letters between Faulkner and his publisher, the crucial one in which the publisher explains the excision has not yet been found by archivists, which would make it even more bonafide as apocrypha. Ben Wasson would explain to Blotner that “[t]he book was badly cut or rather was cut badly by

the publisher. The business about the lesbian attraction between Jennie and the other woman shocked the publisher.”²⁰ (BW to JB 28 March 1965). Wasson’s comments establish both that the excised scene was “lesbian” and that Faulkner was not the culprit in its removal. His publishers were. Using the existing letters in the larger archive, Gwin offers a reasonable deduction for the removal of the material: “that to be published in the mass market, [Faulkner learned that] he would need, at least in part, to muffle and veil explicit same-sex eroticism” in his fiction (122), though his publishers, not the mass market, seem ultimately the source of the cutting. Gwin cites as corroborating evidence for this claim the trial for obscenity of Radclyffe Hall for her lesbian themed novel *The Well of Loneliness*, which occurred in November of 1928, roughly a year after *Mosquitoes* was published, to suggest that publishers in general were nervous about material that might put embroil them in costly legal proceedings..

At the risk of being too elliptical, Gwin’s deduction is both true and not true. Certainly, publishers deleted gay and lesbian themed material from texts prior to publication precisely to avoid costly court battles and lawsuits for obscenity. That Boni and Liveright, Faulkner’s publishers, preemptively excised material that would, in fact, later so trouble the publication of Hall’s novel suggests that the late 1920s saw a general crackdown on certain sexual material. Homosexually themed material did not, however, *always* lead to such drastic editorial decisions nor costly court battles. Mann’s *Death in Venice* and Proust’s *Cities of the Plains* were not banned outright for their depictions of male same-sex desire, nor would later fiction from the early 1930s with overt gay (male) themes find itself in legal limbo. Conversely, Faulkner had previously written and published lesbian themed poems, “L’Apres Midi” and “Sapphics,” though both in a much more limited “market” on the campus at Ole Miss. In 1933, he would publish “o atthis” as part of a volume for national release. Furthermore, just prior to his working on

Mosquitoes in the wake of his European trip, he had written “Equinox,” later to be published as “Divorce in Naples,” which sympathetically portrays a gay-male relationship. Gay male themes also abound in *Mosquitoes* itself, even in the edited version. To claim that Faulkner felt the need “to muffle and veil explicit same-sex eroticism” seems only to hold in regard to lesbian, not gay male, eroticism, and only in 1927. Also, *The Well of Loneliness* is more famous for the way in which Hall appropriates psychoanalytical models of lesbianism to paint a sympathetic portrait of her lesbian characters and to give Stephen Gordon a degree of subjectivity those very models were meant to preclude. Hall’s novel famously lacks a sex scene. Faulkner’s lesbian material in *Mosquitoes* is voyeuristic heterosexual fantasy. Faulkner’s and Hall’s depictions of lesbianism are not equal nor are the reactions to them (excision prior to publication versus an obscenity trial afterwards). Still, *Mosquitoes* and “Divorce in Naples” stand out in Faulkner’s *oeuvre* for their open sexuality. His later fiction is far more coded. As an item of Faulkner apocrypha, it would be worth a lot to find the letter Boni and Liveright wrote to him to explain their decision to cut the kissing scene between Pat and Jenny. As the record currently stands, the reason for these excisions proves elusive. Gwin, however, may be right to offer these excisions as Faulkner’s first experience with having explicit homosexual material edited from his work. The experience may well account for his decision to move away from such explicit themes in his work; by the mid-1930s, the homosexuality he includes is significantly more coded and latent than in his works from the 1920s.

Return to Short Fiction

Between “Don Giovanni” and *Mosquitoes* Faulkner wrote his most overtly gay story,

“Divorce in Naples,” originally titled “Equinox.” He would not publish the story for several years, but Blotner dates its original composition to just after Faulkner’s return from Europe.²¹ I have already explored this story in the previous chapter where I argued that two incidents in Faulkner’s life provide actual sources for the apocryphal details of the story: Ben Wasson’s apologizing for kissing Estelle and William Spratling’s jailhouse adventures upon his and Faulkner’s arrival in Genoa. There is hardly a need to argue for the subtextual homosexual themes of “Divorce in Naples”; it is a gay narrative. I would, though, like to challenge Blotner’s brief but significant overview of the story from the revised biography.

When Blotner succinctly summarizes “Divorce in Naples,” he includes in that summary not only key details but also his impression of the eventual outcome of George and Carl’s relationship beyond the ending of the story. That impression only follows from the details of the story if Blotner is making an *a priori* assumption about the supposedly natural progression of sexual development, which subordinates homosexual desire as a youthful dalliance for the full maturity of proper heterosexuality. Unlike Richards and Sensibar, Blotner is not explicitly falling into a pattern of “anxiety” about homosexuality in Faulkner’s fiction, but he nonetheless does offer a reading of the story that limits its homosexual implications. Blotner summarizes the story as follows:

The story deals with two crew members on a thirty-four-day ocean crossing. George is a large dark Greek, whose beloved Carl--a small blond eighteen-year-old Philadelphian of Scandinavian descent--betrays him with a female prostitute. *Their reconciliation is shadowed, however, by an indication of future heterosexual betrayals by Carl.* (175, italics added)

The first two sentences of Blotner’s reading relate accurately the events of the story. George and

Carl reconcile, as the third sentence says. There is, however, no reason to read “Divorce in Naples” as a story of “developmental” homosexuality on its way to the rightful fulfillment of sexual maturation as a heterosexual. There is, quite frankly, no “shadow” of “future heterosexual betrayals” haunting the conclusion of the story. There is an indication that Carl is still growing, actually physically growing, thus he wants George to buy him “a suit of these pink silk teddybears that ladies use. A little bigger than I’d wear, see?” (893). Blotner reads this passage as evidence that Carl intends to cheat on George again as soon as they make landfall in some other port-of-call--Carl wants the pink teddy for his possible future female sexual partners to wear, who will be bigger than him because of his lithe, small frame (in contemporary slang, Carl is a “twink”).

The end of the story, however, is far too ambivalent for such a definite reading. The problem with Blotner’s reading is one of perspective about the basic sexual development of homosexual/heterosexual identity. If, as Jay Parini claims, that “[i]t is not outlandish to suppose that Faulkner himself had homosexual feelings” during his youth (31), then Blotner’s reading of “Divorce in Naples” may explain the ending of the story. Parini assumes that Faulkner grew out of those “feelings”: “Certainly, by the time he reached adulthood, his homoerotic feelings were safely repressed” (31). Blotner is, apparently, applying the same basic premise to the fictional Carl. Carl will also “safely repress” his “homosexual/homoerotic feelings.” Unfortunately, George--the Greek, of course--is beyond saving, but Carl will mature and abandon his childish affair. Following the same line of reasoning, Faulkner would eventually “grow out” of his homosexuality and marry Estelle, though he also maintained close friendships with openly gay men who never put away their childish feelings for proper (hetero)sexual relationships. I would argue that Faulkner was skeptical of such a narrative of proper development. “Divorce in

Naples” does not have to offer heterosexual futurity to have a well-articulated, meaningful conclusion.

The story centers upon a young and sexually inexperienced Carl taken in by the older and more sexually experienced George. They are lovers; the first person narrator of the story makes this clear when he relates that the other members of the crew call Carl George’s “wife” and then throughout his narration of the key events of the story, including their reconciliation and dancing together on ship. The narrator, however, is just an observer, limited to what he sees and hears; while he may provide details about George and Carl’s affair and does serve to verify they are lovers, he is not privy to the most intimate exchanges of their sexual lives. He can only record their dancing, their fighting, and their eventual reconciliation after Carl’s Neapolitan tryst. In Naples, Carl does disappear with a young woman, likely a prostitute, a woman who “know[s] seaman” (877). George is despondent, even after Carl returns to the ship. For days after leaving Naples, the two avoid each other. Finally, the narrator observes Carl performing a kind of purification ritual:

He undressed swiftly, ripping his clothes off, ripping off a button that struck the bulkhead with a faint click. Naked, in the wan light, he looked smaller and frailer than ever as he dug a towel from his bunk where George had tumbled his things, flinging the other garments aside with a kind of dreadful haste. Then he went out, his bare feet whispering in the passage.

I could hear the shower beyond the bulkhead running for a long time; it would be cold now, too. But it ran for a long time, then it ceased and I closed my eyes again until he had entered. Then I watched him lift from the floor the undergarment which he had removed and thrust it through a porthole quickly,

with something of the air of a recovered drunkard putting out of sight an empty bottle. (888)

After this ritual, Carl speaks to and reconciles with George. Since he did just throw away the unclean undergarments of his sexual tryst with a woman, he quite naturally needs new undergarments. As a sign that he is more committed now to George and, from experience, more certain of his homosexual preferences, he wants a pink teddy. He wants his lover to buy it for him. He wants one that will last as he grows up and stays with George. He asks his lover to buy him a pink teddy just a little bigger than he is so that he can grow into it.

On close inspection, I hope that my reading of the story appears eerily parallel to Blotner's. I intend my reading to challenge his, but not necessarily supplant it. A reading that contends that Carl means to turn heterosexual and betray George again is based on the same two premises as my reading, only the former is inverted. First, to believe that Carl means to move towards heterosexuality is to assume that his homosexual affair with George is a product of his immature sexual curiosity, a childish experiment that, on becoming a man, he puts away. Such a reading would be based on a simple, and possibly subconscious, reiteration of a basic model of psycho-sexual development. If, however, sexuality is something that develops, then the opposite development must also hold true. Carl is experiencing stages of his sexual development. He has a tryst with George. As a childish experiment, he tries sex with a woman. Realizing a heterosexual life is not what he wants, he returns to his rightful sexuality, more mature for his experience and more ready for the committed love a mature relationship requires. The older and more experienced of the two, George understands and accepts his lover's transgression. Yes, the story charts a psycho-sexual development, but there is no reason to privilege heterosexuality as the natural outcome of such a development.

Second, as I've previously explained, the basic sexual economy is not a Sedgwickian homosocial economy where two men "have sex" with each other by triangulating their desires through the ameliorating presence of a woman. Wasson and Faulkner are not deferring their true feelings through Estelle when Faulkner forgives Wasson for kissing her; nor is Faulkner necessarily angry at Spratling because he, Faulkner, did not have sex with the third party to his and Spratling's relationship. Spratling knows that he is gay; so does Wasson; Faulkner knows that Spratling and Wasson are gay. The relationships they form need not be triangulated through someone else. They exist in the open "between men" but distinctly in twentieth century, not nineteenth century, patterns, which even Sedgwick concedes are different from their predecessors and must be understood in new and contextually relevant ways. As Faulkner apocryphizes this actual experiences, what comes to the fore of his narrative is the love between two gay men, not the anxiety between two straight men who are worried about being gay.

Yet for all of Faulkner's acceptance of and even celebration of gay male bonds--and his thoroughly pre-Sedgwickian understanding of the "epistemology" of twentieth century homosexuality--anxieties do enter his fiction. The jovial community of "Don Giovanni" becomes the ambiguous ending of "Divorce in Naples" and then the misogynist banter of *Mosquitoes*. The open space of New Orleans becomes the utopia of the ship on which Carl and George work, an idyllic space roving an empty, formless, and unconfined ocean. In both of these works, ports are dangerous because they represent a re-entry into the confines of society. The ship from "Divorce in Naples" becomes the *Nausikaa*, a space with an upper and a lower deck, also roving open waters, but mostly stuck near shore for the greatest part of the novel, which begins and ends on land. The next, and final, story pertinent to the development of gay themes in Faulkner early writings confines the homosexual within the prison and tomb of heterosexual expectations. After

Mosquitoes, Faulkner literally and figuratively returned home: to Oxford and to Yocona/Yoknapatawpha County, to Estelle and to marriage. There he wrote one of his most famous stories, “A Rose for Emily,” about a man who rejects marriage because of his ambiguous--though possibly gay--sexual identity only to die and rot for thirty years in the bridal chamber of his “wife.”

Faulkner wrote “A Rose for Emily” after he married Estelle. He published it very quickly for a minimal but welcome financial gain alongside his deliberate “tour de force,” the novel *As I Lay Dying*.²² Along with the later “Barn Burning,” “A Rose for Emily” has become his most widely-read work, often taught at the high school level where even high school students recognize the details that suggest Homer Barron is no ordinary suitor for Miss Emily’s hand.²³ The narrator, something of the town scribe who speaks from a timeless omniscience and employs the royal “we,” offers tantalizing clues about Homer’s sexuality. “Little boys would follow him in groups to hear him cuss the niggers,” the narrator tells us; one always knows where Homer is by the laughter of boys and men around him (CS 124). For such a minor detail, this characteristic about Homer is precisely what later confuses the town when they realize that Miss Emily intends to marry him. Homer’s male orientation serves as one of two pieces of evidence to explain the reaction the narrator reports:

When she had first begun to be seen with Homer Barron, we had said, “She will marry him.” Then we said, “She will persuade him yet,” because Homer himself had remarked--he liked men and it was known that he drank with the younger men in the Elk’s club--that he was not a marrying man. (126).

Homer’s remark is “that he was not a marrying man,” a statement almost verbatim lifted from the protagonist in “Moonlight” when he explains “*I ain’t a marrying kind of man*” (US 500).²⁴

The town understands the implications of this statement based on their observations that “it was known that he drank with the younger men in the Elk’s club” and “[l]ittle boys would follow him in groups.” From these details they deduce that “he liked men.” This deduction does not actually mean that Homer “likes men” in a homosexual sense; rather, it means that the town thinks that he does. The opinion of the townspeople shifts over the course of the story with their consideration of these details. Originally, they assume Homer and Emily will marry, but they also quickly concede that, actually, “she will [have to] persuade him yet.” On close inspection, the townspeople deduce that Homer is *queer*, to sum him up in a word not used to describe him but that is nonetheless apropos.

Homer’s sexuality has consternated Faulkner scholars at least since Hal Blythe, in 1988, identified him as a homosexual, claiming that “Faulkner has painted a picture of a modern pederast that helps the audience penetrate the chivalric illusion and see that Miss Emily’s beau is gay” (49). Scholars should be wary of this claim, not because Blythe argues that Homer is gay but because Blythe considers homosexuality a form of “modern pederasty.” Blythe quotes from the story about the little boys following Homer, but he omits the full sentence that they followed him “to hear him cuss the niggers.” Faulkner does not intend Homer to represent some antiquated chivalric tradition; Homer, the Yankee carpetbagger, represents the complicity of all Americans, North and South, in the racial superiority that produced Jim Crow laws and brought about that era that Joel Williamson describes in his monumental study as “The Crucible of Race.” This period, the turn of the nineteenth into the twentieth century, coincides with the action of the story; Faulkner documents the racial politics of that period magnificently.

Also, Faulkner actually wrote the story in the late 1920s/early 1930s. In addition to the label “modern pederasts,” Blythe’s argument that Homer is gay relies, quite literally, on classical

notions of “pederasty,” not even on Sedgwick’s homosocial paradigm from *Between Men*, which later scholars use to discuss Homer’s sexuality but which is also an erroneous text to use to explicate the story. *Between Men* charts homosocial bonding in English literature from the Renaissance to the (American antebellum) 1850s. “A Rose for Emily” is set entirely in the postbellum period. The Grierson house was built “in the heavily lightsome style of the seventies” (CS 119), being the 1870s, after the word homosexual was first coined by German psychologists and became a “species,” according to Michel Foucault (*History* 43). Homer is only in Jefferson because, during the post-war period, numerous Northern investors and workers, such as Homer, “invaded” the South. Also, the story was written much later, well into the twentieth century by a twentieth-century author. Sedgwick herself, in *Epistemology of the Closet*, disavows her paradigms from *Between Men* as a valid methodology for understanding twentieth-century homosexuality:

But certainly the pressingly immediate fusion of feminist and gay male preoccupations and interrogations that *Between Men* sought to perform has seemed less available, analytically, for a twentieth-century culture in which at least some versions of same-sex desire unmediated through heterosexual performance have become widely articulated. (15)

Yes, they have. Faulkner--with Wasson in Oxford, Young in New York, and Spratling in New Orleans and Europe--witnessed, participated in, and, in his fiction, articulated them.

The consternation on the part of scholars--some have even gone so far as to claim that gay readings of Homer are “errors of interpretation” and “misreadings” because they are dangerous for young high school minds (Fick 99)--deserves such close scrutiny in relation to “A Rose for Emily” because Homer is one of a small number of Faulknerian characters whom

scholars have attempted to discuss as gay.²⁵ His case represents the pitfalls of all gay Faulknerian readings. On the one hand, the argument for his homosexuality is marred by the anachronistic application of paradigms that fail to account for the realities of gay life *in the present as well as in the past*; indeed, for all the praise heaped on Faulkner as a chronicler of Southern *history*, his works are actually far more significant for their insights into his contemporary scene rather than for recording antebellum plantation life or giving an accurate depiction of the realities of Reconstruction and/or Reconciliation. The legends, myths, and accounts of nineteenth century life he collected certainly animate his writings, but when Toni Morrison praised Faulkner's "gaze" and "his refusal-to-look-away approach" (297) she meant to acknowledge his keen eye for the world he lived in, not for a world he never saw.²⁶ On the other hand, the backlash against gay readings such as Blythe's is conservative to the point of being reactionary and, under the auspices of protecting the fragile and marginal space of non-normative identities, denies a voice to one of the very identities it supposedly seeks to protect. The middle ground is more productive: not whether Homer is or is not gay, but rather *how* his sexuality is represented and *what* that representation might mean in relation to the story.

The central issue relevant to gay themes in "A Rose for Emily" is not what Homer does but how the town reacts to him, including how Emily acts towards him and what she does to him in order to keep him in her life. We know that Faulkner knew gay men in many different environments with varying degrees of freedom and confinement placed on them by their immediate surroundings. Notably, Homer is not in New Orleans; he is in Jefferson. Faulkner's apocryphal courtship of Wasson speaks more to Homer's plight in the story than Faulkner's experience of the gay life of New Orleans. Whatever happens between Homer and Emily happens in private; the town can only speculate about their relationship. If Homer is gay, that too

does not “happen” out in the open. The narrator may describe his drinking with young men and his boisterous male companionship in town, but the narrator very specifically does not directly state what these details mean except to say, open-endedly, that Homer “liked men.” James Wallace notes quite pointedly that “[t]o believe that the narrator here reveals something true about Homer is to become exactly like the narrator and his society of gossipy, nosy neighbors” (106). Wallace believes that the crux of the story is the propensity of the town to gossip and that Faulkner uses his narrator to draw readers, unaware, into the cycle of that gossip in his apocryphal small town (107).

Wallace discusses the role of the narrator and he wants very much to confine his study to the text of the story itself; in this context, his claim proves immensely valid. I am interested, however, in applying external material to Faulkner’s writing, particularly biographical material relevant to the gay relationships he had in his life. Even with my shift in emphasis, I still find Wallace’s claim fundamentally valid. In many ways, Homer’s plight reflects Faulkner’s own situation as he wrote the story and his experiences growing up as the town “quair,” a term applied to him by his fellow townspeople in much the way the Jeffersonian populace determines that Homer is different and “likes men,” too. Faulkner understood the value of gay representation and could use it to great effect in his stories, as he does here (and as he did in the short sketch “Jealousy”), to indict homophobia and to critique the stifling expectations of a heterosexual social order. The town is complicit in what happens to Homer; his imprisonment is a natural product of the expectations of the town that can only see him as one way (straight and married) or another (gay and disappeared). In this regard, Homer approximates the same vulgar dichotomy represented by Stark Young, a man who seems to have had tremendous influence on the young William Faulkner. Young would not marry a woman, so he fled to Greenwich Village

to make a life for himself. Faulkner could not marry Estelle, at least not when he first wanted to, so he followed Young to a different life. But Faulkner came back to marry. He reappeared in Oxford after his travels to New York, New Orleans, and Europe. Though the dichotomy of presence/absence for straight/gay life certainly is crude in that it does no justice to the complexity of identities and living situations in the actual Oxford of Faulkner's pre-marriage life, it nonetheless seems to be a powerful divide undergirding Faulkner's sexual identity and perspective on the world. This dichotomy structures nearly all of his gay-themed fiction; as I will detail in Chapter 6, the novel written alongside "A Rose for Emily" explores the same dichotomy only with the end of removal rather than marriage. Neither ending offers an affirmation of the expectations of a small Southern town. Both were written at the mid-point of the author's life. "A Rose for Emily" eerily predicts the length of Faulkner's actual marriage, as well. The thirty years of Homer's captivity approximates quite accurately the thirty-three years between Faulkner's marriage and his death.

Ultimately, in "A Rose for Emily" we are left with an image of sheer horror--not in favor of homosexuality but certainly against the confinements of a heterosexual marriage. We must remember that at a point in Faulkner's life he faced two reductive but no less palpably "real" options: he could either marry Estelle and gracefully slide into the life of Oxford or he could reject that life for the "queer" life he first witnessed in the person of Stark Young. Evidence suggests that he wanted the former, preferring marriage to Estelle with her parent's permission to eloping with her. When that plan did not work, the quair/queer young man ran off to fight a war, failed, came home, courted a gay man in the confines of his hometown, learned much but decided he needed a bigger world, moved to gay Greenwich Village, failed, came home, worked at a miserable job in the university post office for three years, failed, moved to gay New Orleans,

toured Europe with a gay man, moved back to gay New Orleans to live with that gay man, and became the novelist who would go on to win the Nobel Prize. Then he came home to marry Estelle. He did not fail in New Orleans, or so it seems. He did fail to woo Helen Baird while he was there. He did fail to publish his third novel, *Flags in the Dust*, at least without serious revisions, but that novel itself reveals his interest in returning home and his having a seemingly endless supply of stories to tell about it. He finally married Estelle, correcting an earlier failure. At home he would spend the next twelve years producing a series of novels and stories that would change the world.

But all was not well. That strange and ill-defined man, Homer Barron, comes to town. He can play a part in town that makes men laugh; he can drink with the boys. The town thinks he is a bit odd, certainly “not the marrying kind.” Ultimately, that Homer Barron disappears. Only later does the town realize what happened to him. He got *married*, in a decidedly metaphoric sense. Emily’s powers of persuasion involved rat poison; she killed *that* Homer Barron who wanted the freedom to drink with the men at the Elk’s Club and tell jokes to the boys. She confined him to her bedroom, away from the temptations of that former life and its implication of homosexual desires. She made Homer a heterosexual. Over the course of thirty years, Homer decayed beyond recognition, the “still unravished bride[groom] of quietness” forever sequestered to the bridal chamber, but certainly no longer fair even if he is eternally chaste.²⁷ “A Rose for Emily” apocryphizes something deep in Faulkner’s life, a purging of a self that can no longer walk freely through the backlots and alleyways but must conform to the rigid expectations of the streets, indeed the bedroom. Homer Barron is in town to oversee the building of sidewalks after all, those strictures that guide where the townspeople should walk, the rigid pathways to guide them where they should be going.²⁸

With “A Rose for Emily,” Faulkner’s apocryphal gay life abroad is coming to an end. The new life he embraces in marriage produces a new set of challenges for how to articulate gay identity at home. Yet, for all his interests in depicting homosexuality and the sympathy and complexity with which he particularly presented gay male identity, this narrative of his apocryphal gay life is only half complete. Simultaneously, Faulkner also performed another identity, the apocryphal soldier returning from World War I. His out-and-out lies about his war experience have long fascinated scholars, and certainly Faulkner’s World War I themes permeate much of his fiction. Especially in his handling of those themes from 1918 until the publication of *As I Lay Dying* in 1930, his performance of war and his performance of homosexuality bled into each other, for reasons largely beyond his control. Rather than cordon off the two, he began to assimilate them in his representation of a “queer” wounded soldier returning home to an untenable peace. He would find literary precedent for this assimilation, and he would also find the wounded soldier motif a much more productive means of bringing homosexuality into a small town context with its rigid heterosexual expectations, though it would take Faulkner the entire eleven years of his apocryphal gay life to find the best means to articulate the conflict at the heart of these apocryphal identities.

CHAPTER 4: CADET FAULKNER

Faulkner's wartime experiences long baffled scholars, especially his early biographers.¹ The first major collision between his self-created myth and the reality of his experiences happened in the mid-1940s. In 1944 Malcolm Cowley wrote to Faulkner for permission (and information) for a study of his works, out of which would eventually grow *The Portable Faulkner*, the volume perhaps most significant in establishing the critical place of Faulkner with which we are now so familiar.² Faulkner, whose literary reputation remained high even while his popular readership dwindled from its already anemic numbers, could not have helped being delighted by Cowley's attention. The mid-1940s found Faulkner in his first serious dry spell as a writer. The 1942 publication of *Go Down, Moses* marked the end of that "matchless time" in which he produced what John Pilkington has called "The Heart of Yoknapatawpha." After 1942, Faulkner found himself somewhat spent creatively, producing only the occasional, and often forgettable, short story in response to the New Deal or World War II and making his first tentative scratches at a new World War I novel that would take him over ten years to complete and that would be vastly different from his previous World War I novels about soldiers returning home to rural, Southern spaces.³ Enter Malcolm Cowley, courting the old writer for a biographical essay and envisioning a collection of Faulkner's work that would expose the scope and history of his great apocryphal creation.

All seemed well and good in the collaborative process between the two men, or so one

would be led to believe by the letters Cowley eventually collected in *The Faulkner-Cowley File: Letters and Memories 1944-1962*. All seemed well, that is, until Cowley pushed Faulkner for more information about his service in World War I. In a letter, 8 December 1945, Faulkner willingly outlined his life for Cowley, including reference to his supposed service in World War I, but with a notable rejoinder that the dearth of details about his time in the service was not unintentional:

I graduated from grammar school, went two years to highschool, but only during fall to play on the football team, my parents finally caught on, worked about a year as a book-keeper in grandfather's bank, went to RAF, returned home, attended 1 year at University of Mississippi by special dispensation for returned troops, studying European languages, still didn't like school and quit that. Rest of education undirected reading.

The above I still hope can remain private between you and me, the facts are in order and sequence for you to use, to clarify the whos who piece. The following is for your ear too. What I have written is of course in the public domain and the public is welcome; what I ate and did and when and where, is my own business. (67)

Cowley did not take the hint. Being an eager suitor in pursuit of Faulkner's legend--aware as he was of reports that Faulkner had a metal plate in his head from a war wound and had once crashed a plane into a barn--Cowley mistook Faulkner's coyness as humility rather than cover. When he subsequently sent Faulkner a draft of the essay that included how Faulkner had "been trained as a flyer in Canada, had served at the front in the Royal Air Force, and, after his plane was damaged in combat, had crashed it behind the British lines," Faulkner's response was more

direct (72). He excised the war material in his revision of Cowley's original paragraph and asked that Cowley make "no mention of war experience at all" in his biographical piece (74). When Cowley continued to include the information--after all, Faulkner provided no reason for his redactions--Faulkner became increasingly belligerent in his coyness. He admonished Cowley that "[i]f you mention military experience at all (which is not necessary, as I could have invented a few failed RAF airmen as easily as I did Confeds) say 'belonged to RAF in 1918' (77).⁴ Cowley still failed to take the hint and sent the war material to the typesetter. At this point, Faulkner boiled over: "You're going to bugger up a fine dignified distinguished book with that war business" (82). He wanted the description of his service removed from print. He offered to pay for the resetting himself.⁵

Finally, Cowley "saw the light" (83), and from the perspective of 1966 when he compiled his memoir, he could finally ask himself, "Why didn't he say flatly that he hadn't served in France during the war?" (75). Indeed, even when Cowley agreed to cut the material about the crashed plane, Faulkner responded at length to explain that perhaps he crashed the plane through pilot error or that, whatever really caused the crash, he did not deserve credit when so many other brave pilots had never gotten any. That there was never any crash, that there was, in fact, no service in France or in the war beyond at best a few meager flight hours at a training facility in Canada, Faulkner failed to admit to Cowley. The truth will out, however, and after Faulkner's death Cowley outed it. He seemed bemused, if somewhat chagrined, at his ignorance during the letter exchange from the mid-1940s. After all, he assumed that the stories he had heard about Faulkner were true; he thought that he knew and understood the man; and he thus pursued his misconceptions to the breaking point.

Faulkner was a man of many guises, and he held to few stories throughout his life more

steadfastly than he did to his persona of being a wounded World War I veteran. He often repeated the story when it suited him, such as when he was courting Meta Carpenter. He sometimes displayed his very own RFC uniform, such as when his daughter Jill was born and “he expressed his pride” by wearing it while visiting her in the hospital (Williamson 240). These instances of using his apocryphal invention of his war experiences were ways to further decidedly heterosexual ends. Such was not the case before Faulkner married Estelle. When Faulkner returned from Canada in December 1918, he fashioned for himself an apocryphal sense of difference in his small town, based on performances of himself as a bohemian poet, a gay man, and, most famously, a wounded veteran of the first World War. He had begun fashioning these identities even before he left, the residue of his youthful gestures becoming the conscious efforts of a man forging his own way through the backlots and alleyways of Victorian convention. While his false claims at having been a soldier who was wounded in aerial combat in France have occupied much of the biographical interests in Faulkner’s life and his creative output in his early years as a writer, there is more to this soldierly persona than has heretofore been explicated.

Faulkner’s soldier persona was not mutually exclusive of his apocryphal gay identity, largely owing to the same cultural context in which a “quair” boy would become a “gay” man in the first quarter of the 20th-century. As Marilee Lindemann explains of Willa Cather, Cather (and Faulkner as well) came of age during a crucial juncture in the history of *queerness* as the concept assumed connotations that we today recognize as “homosexuality.” Cather and Faulkner also devoted significant effort to producing narratives of queer soldiers that bear striking similarities to each other, as Merrill Maguire-Skaggs has established; Maguire-Skaggs even goes so far as to suggest that Faulkner borrowed extensively from Cather’s queerly inflected martial

novel, *One of Ours*. Whether or not it was originally Faulkner's goal to muddle the two personae--the soldier and the homosexual--when he first returned to Oxford remains unclear, but by the time he wrote *Soldiers' Pay*, he seems to have been aware of the links between the two. By the time he married Estelle and wrote *As I Lay Dying*, he would directly confront the duality of these modes of difference in one character, Darl Bundren, and removed him from his postage stamp of native soil because he is "queer."

The true history of Faulkner's wartime experience is short and relatively uneventful. He enlisted in Canada in June 1918. On 11 November, armistice was declared, ending World War I. On 5 December, William Faulkner's corps of flight cadets in Toronto was demobilized. By mid-December, Faulkner was at home in Oxford. He spent 179 days in the RFC, all of them in Canada, at best only a few brief hours of them even in a plane, much less flying one, and possibly no flight hours at all. Blotner graciously offers that Faulkner did gain something important from this experience: "The product of his 179 days--part of the triad he would cite so often: imagination, observation, and experience--would last him a lifetime" (67). What Faulkner did not gain were his wings, a head wound, a leg wound, or even the uniform he wore when he got off the train in Oxford in December 1918, posing as a war hero. By the time Faulkner descended from that train, however, he had effectively fully elaborated this fictional persona as a wounded veteran (he affected a limp when he first arrived, but it is unclear at what point in the following months he began adding that he also had a metal plate in his head).

The triumph of Faulkner's apocryphal persona did not begin on that December day. Rather, it began even before he left Oxford for New Haven, before Estelle's wedding, when he began telling stories about his failure to enlist in the American armed services as a pilot for being too short, though no evidence supports that he ever tried to enlist at all (Blotner 60). At this

point, he was still William Falkner. He might even have still envisioned some life with Estelle. He would actually enlist after her marriage, in Toronto. To do so, he would pose as a British national from Finchley, England (on his mother's side), affecting an English accent from his heavy Mississippi drawl. He would also lie about his age, making himself eight months younger than he really was. His most significant affectation, though, was that he "misspelled" his name with a "u," becoming for the first time William Faulkner in his attempt to remake himself as something other than *that* boy from *that* town. These elaborations would take time to perfect, time his brother Murry (also called "Jack") actually spent in the trenches in France, serving in the United States Marine Corps. Faulkner's lack of time in the trenches himself, however, in no way prevented his self-presentation as a soldier with an exciting and noble martial history.

The main prop of Faulkner's apocryphal persona when he returned to Oxford was his uniform. During his flight training, Faulkner was just a cadet and wore a poorly-cut cadet's uniform, which was nothing as grand as the officer's uniform he would wear on his return to Oxford. James G. Watson has explored the evolution from Faulkner's actual wartime sartorial condition to the fictionalized pomp of his return. In *William Faulkner: Self-Presentation and Performance*, Watson analyzes the early images of Faulkner in his actual cadet uniform, an "ill-fitting costume" which Faulkner wore with no "sense of ironic self-presentation" and "no gesture of selfhood" (18). Faulkner would call this his "rookie" uniform and complain about it--and draw pictures of it--in letters home to his mother in July 1918 (24). Upon demobilization, Faulkner had the right to wear this uniform when he returned home; but, Watson explains, by August Faulkner

assured Murry [his father] and Maud he would have a real officer's uniform in eight weeks-- 'my sure enough uniform,' he called it--and concluded the letter

with still another drawing of himself to counteract the Cadet image, this one in the classic uniform of a flying officer in garrison cap, belted tunic, breeches, putties and stick. (24)

Faulkner would not achieve a higher rank or its attendant uniform in eight weeks. Roughly twelve weeks later the war would end; sixteen weeks later would find him home, where he would “present himself to his family [. . .] wearing the uniform he had drawn in his August letter” (Watson 27). Despite his never having attained the uniform or a commission, Faulkner accomplished his apocryphal transformation from cadet to officer for two reasons. First, he used the money paid to him by the RFC for his honorable discharge to buy an officer’s uniform (Blotner 66). Second, he had already established for his audience (his parents first, the city of Oxford by extension) that he would have earned that uniform in the time that elapsed between his drawing of it in August and his re-appearance at home in December.

Though Faulkner could not have foreseen the armistice that would prevent his actual commissioning, he laid the groundwork for his apocryphal officer’s status months in advance of any fruition of his goals of returning to Oxford as a wounded war hero. He clearly had some grand mission in mind as a way of removing himself from obdurate sameness at home to become someone different, perhaps even praiseworthy. Key to this deception would be that he did not enlist anywhere near Mississippi nor even in the American armed services. He created a foreign identity to bring back to Oxford, a sign of difference to declare that, as Joel Williamson explains, “[h]e had not been simply another American ‘doughboy’ in a rough cut, ready-to-wear, ill-fitting uniform,” but that he had been “truly cosmopolitan in his military career, transcending provincial Mississippi, the South, and even America” because he served for the British RFC (185). Of course, the chances of actually dying in war would have lent to this effort at deception the

grandeur of myth. Since he never died (or even fought), he simply found himself at home playing a role that his hometown would find quite queer indeed.

In her study of Willa Cather, Marilee Lindemann notes not only the changing connotations of the word *queer* to mean “homosexual” during the 1910s and 1920s, but she also explores the degree to which the term came to signify dissonance with American national identity as a new sense of “American” emerged during this period to replace more regionalist identities and foci in American literature, thought, politics, and public life. Lindemann explicates multiple uses of *queer* in Cather’s fiction to show that, sometimes at least, “queer” was a marker for foreign-ness, often applied to characters who retain the marks of their foreign origins (Scandinavian, German, Czech) and have not yet assimilated themselves into their contemporary American scene. At the same time, for Cather *queer* also meant “homosexual,” and she even employed *queer* at times self-referentially in letters when she clearly meant to refer to her lesbianism.⁶ Lindemann’s study seeks to synthesize the connotative dissonance of the terms *queer* and *American* at a time when both terms were “sites of contestation, up for grabs in the game of the nation’s emergence as a modern industrial, imperial, and cultural power in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries” (4). The “cultural power” Lindemann refers to is a sense of likeness--in appearance, tastes, origin, etc.--as the fundamental tenet of American-ness. Lindemann then proceeds to argue that Cather’s work, “queer[s] ‘America’ by examining the axes of difference--psychosexual, racial/ethnic, economic, and literary--that made the nation [at this moment] a space of vast energy and profound instability” (4). Her argument foregrounds the fascinating way in which a localized identity--citizenship, or a sense of self bound to a place for the likeness one has to other natives of the place--created an understanding of “normal” or “American” against which one could be measured as queer.⁷

If we apply this understanding of *queer* to Faulkner when he returned from “the war” (or at least returned from Canada) in December 1918, in full on British officer drag no less, then we can begin to understand the deeper significance of this self-performing apocryphal identity and its relation to a larger narrative of Faulkner’s life. The “quair” Faulkner is becoming more “queer,” in terms very much sartorial again, though this time with a vague sense of foreign-ness, that he has been somewhere outside the confines of his hometown, touched new and queer things, and has now returned, affected by (though in reality only affecting) a queer identity. Understanding Faulkner’s deep roots in Oxford (Mississippi, not England) allows one to grasp the utter irony of this queer performance; after all, no amount of sartorial display could ever shake the thoroughly ensconced like-you-ness that marks the reality of Faulkner’s place in his hometown and home region. He is seeking marks of difference, though, to set himself apart. Apparently, he felt he was apart from, not a part of, that town, though in this case, as with his dandy dress while a teenager and his interest in literature and art, this particular marker of difference (foreign/queer soldier) contains strong connotations of a homosexual identity that in the 1920s would infuse the fictions produced from this apocryphal pose. As youthful gestures at being different in a small town, Faulkner discovered that all markers of difference carry many of the same basic connotations.

Clothes alone do not a costume make, however, and there was more to Faulkner’s self-presentation as a wounded World War I veteran that implicates it in sexual--and eventually homosexual--difference. While William Faulkner was writing letters home to his mother about his flight training, his brother Jack saw action from September to just shy of the November armistice in 1918, was gassed in the midst of ferocious fighting, and suffered from shrapnel in his right knee and in his skull from a German shell. From early November to mid-December,

after Faulkner returned home, the family had no word from Jack and assumed he was dead. These dates matter. When William Faulkner got off that train in December 1918, he faked a limp. Sometime later, he also lied and claimed that he had a metal plate in his head from an old war wound. The latter lie may have come directly from his brother's actual stories, but clearly the former lie, the limp, was his own creation, for at the time of William's return, he would not yet have heard from his brother nor known about his brother's wounds. Both of William Faulkner's apocryphal wounds become central to the wounded veterans he creates, though the limp is the most telling and the origin of the connotations for the "head wounds" that his later fictional soldiers suffer.

World War I fiction abounds with veterans returning home effectively sterilized by the war. Rather than narrativize the war in stories of triumphant warriors returning home, secure in their masculinity and guaranteed (sexual) futurity for their victorious homelands, the highest brows of Modernism figure the returning soldiers as so many hollow Prufrocks scouring for moral sustenance in a dry and barren world waiting for the unfulfilled promise of rain. Sometimes authors expressed the sexual metaphor in emphatic ways, such as Jake Barnes in Ernest Hemingway's *The Sun Also Rises*, whose only war wound is his impotence though he is otherwise healthy. Others crafted veterans whose wounds were more encompassing, though fundamentally still sexual, such as Clifford Chatterley in D. H. Lawrence's *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, who has been paralyzed from the waist down, is in a wheelchair, is accordingly impotent, and therefore cannot gratify his wife sexually.⁸ Others forego explicit sexual injury for the completely metaphorical wound, for example in Ford Madox Ford's prescient novel *The Good Soldier*, where the wounds are purely psychological, or in Part II of Eliot's *The Waste Land*, where even fertile (hetero)sexuality loses its potency because of an abortion. We can easily

connect Faulkner's World War I narratives to these narratives and draw comparisons between the (sexual) wounds suffered by Faulkner's veterans. More significant, though, is the degree to which Faulkner's apocryphal wounded veteran persona was already participating in these narratives when he exited the train in the immediate aftermath of the war.

Faulkner's war "wound" is his loss of the path to proper heterosexuality when he turned down Estelle's offer to elope. He manifests this wound by faking a limp caused by a leg wound. A leg wound as a metaphor for sexual frustration or impotence has a long literary history from classical and Renaissance literature that World War I fiction simply adapts in male figures such as Jake Barnes and Clifford Chatterley, whose injuries "below the belt" merely reiterate the tradition of leg-wound-as-sexual-wound that has its roots in figures such as Shakespeare's Adonis or Homer's Odysseus.⁹ Perhaps Faulkner's use of a passage from the epic journey of Odysseus to title his novel about the Bundren's journey to find Anse a new wife is purely coincidental, perhaps not. A limp is a fairly easy injury to fake, and while most of Faulkner's wounded veterans would suffer from less physical wounds, with the notable exception of Elmer Hodge, the metaphoric leg/sexual wound is nonetheless the root for the mental/sexual traumas Faulkner will transform and explore in characters such as Bayard Sartoris, Donald Mahon, and Darl Bundren. Faulkner takes an old trope and expands it in the new context of World War I, largely by observing another type of wound common to veterans of World War I: a head wound, or what he calls "shell shock" in a letter he wrote home to his mother shortly before his enlistment in 1918 (*Thinking* 48).

The synthesis of a leg to a head wound as a metaphor for sexual damage caused by the war likely has its basis in biographical details. Faulkner began his lie about the metal plate in his head much later than his return to Oxford in December 1918, very probably in direct response to

Jack's actual war wounds, which far exceeded the apocryphal limp Faulkner affected in his first performances of his soldier identity before Jack returned home. This particular type of injury bears a metaphoric significance much more contemporary to World War I, as the reality of returning soldiers with horrific injuries met the cultural imagination of the country to which they returned, and which Faulkner observed in New Haven in the person of a wounded veteran named Captain Bland, whom Faulkner identifies as suffering from "shell shock" though he bears no visible external wounds. The idea of a metal plate in one's head mixed with the psychological trauma of shell shock meld in Faulkner's imagination as a singular consequence of war: the all-purpose head wound. He eventually links the idea of a head wound to a leg wound and its sexual significance to create a metaphor for psychosexual damage caused by going off to war. In the image of the head wound, Faulkner could move beyond simple metaphors for sexual impotence and into more complex metaphors for war wounds as a measure of psychological damage. By synthesizing the idea of the sexual wound (the leg wound) and the mental wound (the head wound), Faulkner's war characters become tinged with psycho-sexual damage and, returned to their native soil, they cannot find peace in hometowns that expect them to marry and settle down after the trauma of their wartime experiences.

This synthesis of physical wounds into deeply psychological sexual traumas took time for Faulkner to perfect, but his efforts represent one of the most profound insights of his particular literary genius. Through repeated experimentation with variations on a standard narrative of the wounded returning soldier, Faulkner would eventually create Darl Bundren, whose wound, what makes people call him, and only him in the entire novel, "queer," is not a limp nor even ostensibly physical nor purely the result of shell shock. Rather, he suffers a psychological sexual wound when the path of his life takes a turn beyond the boundaries of his experience and

expectation, shows him a queer, foreign world, and then pulls him back into a local orbit that can only understand his new sense of self as “queer,” or insane. He is purged from the novel that Faulkner wrote in the months immediately following his marriage and alongside his depiction of Homer Barron trapped in Emily Grierson’s grotesque bridal chamber. In the novel, in the story, and in Faulkner’s personal life, the journey--the Bundren’s funeral procession, Homer’s carpetbagging, and Faulkner’s travels--ends with marriage. Each journey also concludes with the repudiation of the queer, either through removing him to an asylum, killing him in the marriage bed, or suppressing him for a life with a wife, her two children, and the responsibilities of making a home.¹⁰ Not only would Faulkner raise Estelle’s children, but he also had two of his own with Estelle (one, Alabama, would die hours after her birth, the other, Jill, survived). His actual story would resolve itself with a proper heterosexual union. His fictional creations would not find any such life when they returned from their wars. As Faulkner never actually fought in the war, his marriage does not actually resolve any narrative of the returning soldier and only resolves his apocryphal self-creation. His fictional soldiers, however, inherited the full weight of their literary precedents and never could find the guarantees of sexual futurity the victories of battle should have promised them.

Faulkner began the process of experimenting with images of sexually damaged soldiers in his early poetry, but not until his first novel in 1925 while he was immersed in the gay subculture of New Orleans did he turn his full attention to those images and attempt to narrativize them. Though he was creating his apocryphal soldier identity even before the war ended, in New Orleans, affecting his limp and claiming that he had a metal plate in his head, Faulkner sat down to create a narrative--to make the actual into the apocryphal--out of his performances. From 1918 to 1925, Faulkner’s performance of his wounded veteran identity was

mostly a matter of his repeating it until it was accepted as true, whereas with his apocryphal gay identity, he courted and lived with gay men and even made efforts to submerge himself into gay communities. We can see how he blended his various apocryphal identities by considering four projects he had open on his desk at roughly the same time, early 1925. In the same brief period, he wrote his gay-themed sketch “Out of Nazareth,” his essay on what is the matter with marriage for the *Item-Tribune*, his first novel *Soldiers’ Pay*, and an essay entitled “Literature and War.” From this final item we get a sense of the literary influences on which Faulkner drew to craft his World War I fiction. In that essay he does not include Cather’s *One of Ours* though he seems likely to have read it very closely. Other well-known influences on Faulkner’s work, namely A. E. Housman, appear in *Soldiers’ Pay* and “Out of Nazareth.” Not surprisingly, then, at this moment in Faulkner’s life, as he begins his experiments in World War I narratives, his chief influences from World War I literature are largely gay influences as well.

A starting point for understanding how these various aspects of Faulkner’s life merge is in Faulkner’s repeated use of A. E. Housman’s heavily homoerotic ode to young soldier boys, *A Shropshire Lad*, a volume Faulkner scholars have long identified as one of his favorites and heavily influential on his early writing. The youth of “Out of Nazareth” carried with him a copy of *A Shropshire Lad*. Early in *Soldiers’ Pay*, just before he discovers that his son Donald is still alive, the rector pulls a tin box out of his desk in which he keeps a few of his son’s treasured belongings. Its “sorry contents” include: “a woman’s chemise, a cheap paper-covered ‘Shropshire Lad,’ a mummied hyacinth bulb. The rector picked up the bulb and it crumbled to dust in his hand” (64). We will later realize that the woman’s chemise probably belonged to Emmy, with whom Donald had a brief but seemingly passionate affair before the war. In this tin box, though, the woman’s chemise seems strikingly out of place. What would young Donald be

doing with a woman's chemise? Given the other contents of the box, the chemise implies that Donald had a secret sexual life, though not a heterosexual one.

The copy of Housman would overtly seem to signify war and death, but also exudes a deeply homosexual significance that was not lost on contemporary readers before and after the war. Housman's volume predates the war by nearly twenty years, and Faulkner may well have read it before the war, but Paul Fussell establishes that the volume, though popular before World War I, came to have renewed significance and a large readership directly in response to the war. He also argues persuasively that the volume was a central influence on much of the later poetry written by actual veterans of the war. Fussell describes the increased popularity of *A Shropshire Lad* in the marketplace of World War I literature, however, as a means to sanction latently what was prior to the war unmentionable overtly but very much at the heart of Housman's martial iconography and at the heart of much war poetry inspired by it:

But it might seem that the "increase in interest" [in Housman's volume] was less in poetry than in the theme of beautiful suffering lads, for which the war sanctioned an expression more overt than ever before. Homoeroticism was now, as it were, licensed. *A Shropshire Lad*, Brian Reade observes, "is like a beautiful ruin built over an invisible framework, and Housman obscured the framework so well that until recently not many readers of the poems seemed to guess that it was *l'amour de l'impossible* which haunted many of them. . . ." Whether or not readers were really that naive--I think they were not--it is remarkable the way *A Shropshire Lad* [. . .] anticipates, and in my view even helps determine, the imaginative means by which the war was conceived. (282)

The volume shared by the youth in "Out of Nazareth" and Donald Mahon in *Soldiers' Pay* links

them to this “invisible framework” of “*l’amour de l’impossible*.” Fundamentally, Fussell is describing what Sedgwick later terms the “open secret” of twentieth-century male homosexuality. Donald’s and the youth’s preferences for Housman is meant to signify their homosexuality without uttering the love that dares not speak its name. That within five months of writing the sketch and the novel Faulkner would visit the grave of the most (in)famous victim of an older Victorian order that would, through incarceration, work to keep that name unspoken and impossible speaks to the degree to which the theme of unarticulated homosexual desire is on Faulkner’s mind in 1925. Of course, in “Out of Nazareth,” Faulkner makes a game out of not saying what is clearly being shown. He understands both the “secret” and how “open” it was for readers. Faulkner uses that open secret to signify the homosexuality in the story and in the novel as well.

Faulkner turns the youth being procured by Spratling in “Out of Nazareth” into the young, pre-war Donald Mahon, pulling his beloved book out of his pocket and declaring his awe that someone could feel like *that* and not mind who knows about it. If we still doubt, however, the full implications of the contents of the tin box, and the degree to which *l’amour de l’impossible* and the “open secret” of homosexuality influenced Faulkner’s depiction of Donald, the flower the rector pulls out--and crushes--screams their implications in powerful metaphor. The hyacinth has long held an important place in gay literary representation. Hyacinthus, for whom the flower is named, was a male beloved by Apollo and, of course, killed in the prime beauty of his youth. From this story the flower became the representation of the desire between two male lovers, eventually becoming the nickname Oscar Wilde gave to his beloved Alfred Douglas in a series of letters that Douglas carelessly misplaced and that subsequently fell into the hands of blackmailers and finally to the solicitor charged with trying Wilde for his sexual

conduct. Those letters were eventually used in Wilde's trial as the cornerstone of the evidence to prove that his relationship with his Hyacinth was (homo)sexual.¹¹

In early April as he began the novel, Faulkner also wrote his editorial to the *Item-Tribune* in answer to the query "What Is the Matter with Marriage?" The argument that two men or two women have a better chance at happiness than heterosexual couples appears twice in *Soldiers' Pay*. First, when Cecily realizes that Donald is still alive, she begins to fantasize that Margaret Powers has been his lover. She then ponders, "How would I like to have a husband and a wife, too, I wonder?" (80), meaning a three-way marriage with one husband and two wives. Would the wives share the husband? Would the husband share his wives? Who would have sexual access to whom? Cecily continues, "Or two husbands?" (80). Would they sleep with each other and with her? Cecily fancies that she should get married at least once because, "I guess it's worth trying" (80), but she seems uninterested in a simple heterosexual marriage where she and one man are stuck unhappily with each other. A multiple marriage would provide more options and more mutual understanding according to the logic of Faulkner's editorial response, of which Cecily becomes a spokesperson.

Emmy has a similar moment, though hers is more clearly an indictment of heterosexual relationships despite the number of partners. As she recalls her childhood, she recalls her father, an alcoholic house painter, marrying "an angular shrew who, serving as an instrument of retribution, beat him soundly with stove wood in her lighter moments" (116). Of this unhappy marriage, Emmy's father advises his daughter: "Don't never marry a woman, Emmy. [. . .] If I had it to do all over again, I'd take a man every time" (116). Though on the surface this declaration appears to be folksy humor, the idea of her father "tak[ing] a man every time" to guarantee his happiness rings more emphatically when read beside Faulkner's assertion that

“[t]wo men or two women--forming a partnership, always remember that the other has weaknesses, and by taking into account the fallibility of mankind, they gain much success and happiness” (*ESPL* 337). The problem, of course, is that Emmy “takes a man,” in this case Donald. Her father is so mad that he disowns her, leading her to take refuge at the rectory until Donald returns from the war. Perhaps the father realizes the inverse of his own statement. He might need a man to guarantee his happiness. Emmy would logically need a woman. The opposite sex partner is the problem, not *all* women. His declaration misleads Emmy; she should “take a [woman] every time” or else she will suffer. Notably, when Donald returns, his injuries prevent him from recognizing Emmy or even acknowledging her existence. They do not understand each other any longer. War made him blind to her, but she should have known that their affair would only lead to heartache, as heterosexual love always does when it is a frenzied fire of passion. Same-sex couples fare better in this Faulknerian universe.

Reading from Faulkner’s canon preceding his time in New Orleans also provides a fascinating source for Emmy’s character. If Donald is outed by the contents of his tin box, he is saved by Emmy’s being the likely owner of the woman’s chemise. She was his last (known) sexual partner before leaving for the war. In her description of her night with Donald, Emmy draws on the imagery Faulkner also used in his short story “Moonlight” where the male narrator dreams of being alone on a hillside with Skeet as the ultimate source of joy. Faulkner revised that story through the 1920s with its final vision of Skeet and the narrator on a hillside together not completed until 1928. This evolution of the story generally allows for its revisions both to influence and be influenced by material in *Soldiers’ Pay*. Emmy expands the details from that story, describing how Donald came to her one night and whisked her away to a pond for some skinny-dipping, after which she lies down in the cool, damp grass, where she can “see him

running along the top of the hill, all shiny in the moonlight, then he ran back down the hill toward the creek” and toward her (123). He returns to her and they make love.

The male author Faulkner describes the scene of Emmy’s giving herself to Donald from *her* point of view. As a writer, he lets himself imagine “[w]hen he looks at you--you feel like a bird, kind of; like you was going swooping right away from the ground or something. But there was something different there, too. I could hear him panting from running, and I could feel something inside me panting, too” (123). This scene depicts Donald seducing Emmy but has links to the revision of the desired but never experienced seduction between Skeet and the protagonist of that earlier story. Faulkner expands the scene from the point of view of the seduced, not the seducer. In “Moonlight,” seduced and seducer are men. In *Soldiers’ Pay*, they are a woman and a man, but a man is writing the woman’s part about what it must feel like to be seduced by a man and subsequently to have sex with him. One may reasonably suggest that Faulkner did not need to rely on his creative powers to imagine what Emmy might have felt at that moment. What she felt and what the protagonist of “Moonlight” imagines with Skeet seem to be revisions of the same basic scenario, only with differently gendered characters interacting in each final version.

Beyond his own immersion into gay culture and his references to gay themes in his own writings that re-appear in *Soldiers’ Pay*, other evidence demonstrates that by 1925 Faulkner had read much World War I literature and borrowed its “queer” themes to produce his own narratives. Merrill Maguire-Skaggs argues persuasively for the relationship between *Soldiers’ Pay* and Willa Cather’s *One of Ours* in her essay “Cather’s War and Faulkner’s Peace.” She asserts that “Faulkner’s novel begins where Cather’s leaves off--with soldiers returning from the war” (42). The influence did not produce a one-to-one correlation between the main characters of

both novels, but the elements Faulkner borrowed for his novel are central to his apocryphal identities as a soldier and a homosexual. Maguire-Skaggs accounts for the difference in branches of service between the protagonists (Claude Wheeler is in the American infantry, Donald Mahon in the Royal Flying Corps) by siphoning that difference through Victor Morse, the American flying ace whom Claude first encounters on the *Anchises* on his crossing to Europe. Claude and his fellow bunkmates “were astonished to see that [Morse] wore the uniform of the Royal Flying Corps and carried a cane” (Cather 224), and are surprised to learn that he is actually from the unglamorous town of Crystal Lake, Iowa, and is, therefore, not a dapper British airman after all. Morse goes on to die in glorious air-borne combat, which Claude only hears about second-hand but never actually witnesses. Maguire-Skaggs not only compares Morse with Donald (and with Bayard Sartoris from *Flags in the Dust*) but also notes that this description of him “matches the Bill Faulkner who wrote home about learning Morse code during aeronautical training” (47). Morse stands out because of his foreign affectations and his cane; Faulkner had attempted to emulate both in December 1918 when he returned from his un-fought war. Like the real Faulkner, Claude was fascinated by men like Morse; but neither Morse nor Claude would ever return home.

Ultimately, Maguire-Skaggs argues that Cather’s Claude becomes Faulkner’s Donald, only the “clod” becomes more sophisticated, as if Claude progressed from the infantry to being an RFC pilot, then lived and came home. The connection between the two characters is that one is an account of the type of man who leaves for war, the other an account of the type of man who returns. If, however, Faulkner’s Donald Mahon represents the continuation of the narrative of Cather’s Claude Wheeler, or if, as Skaggs explains, “[e]ach writer seems to talk *at* the other directly” in their World War I fictions, then the debt Faulkner owes Cather should carry with it

the imprint of Cather's interests beyond basic descriptions of soldiery and the ironies of war (46, italics added). In quite literally the first sentence of description of the world Claude encounters once he leaves home for the service, Cather details that Claude's new company now consists of "[a] long train of crowded cars, the passengers all of the same sex, almost the same age" (Cather 217). These "soldier boys" (218) fascinate Claude, and he spends time throughout his journey and wartime experiences describing in great detail the minutia of their faces and body types. Once in Europe, Claude encounters the deranged "star patient here, a psychopathic case" (272). The psychopath has forgotten himself, not unlike Donald Mahon in Faulkner's novel, but "[t]he queer thing is, it's his recollection of women that is most affected," from his memories of his mother to his betrothed. Donald's mother never appears *Soldiers' Pay*; instead, Donald forgets his betrothed, Cecily, and his other lover, Emmy, the two women in his life.

Other latently homosexual material abounds in Cather's novel. The psychopath escaped once and was taken in by a French family whose son died in the war. Claude, accordingly, meets David Gerhardt, who leads Claude to the Jouberts, an elderly French couple who have lost both of their sons and so take in Claude and David as replacements. Claude quickly becomes infatuated with the urbane, sophisticated David and hopes to impress him. These two take their extended leave together, returning to the Joubert's home. This idyllic break from combat fulfills Claude's otherwise inarticulate homosexual desires just before he and David return to the front to die. Claude comes to articulate this shared leave as "the period of happy 'youth' [. . .]. He was having his youth in France" (331). Of David, he determines that, in his past, "he was always looking for some one whom he could admire without reservations [. . .]. Now he believed that even then he must have had some faint image of a man like Gerhardt in his mind" (332). At the end of the novel, Claude makes a bargain with God that if David can live, he will accept that he

must die, but in the star-crossed irony of lovers in mortal danger, David dies, too.

No good homosexual awakening can go unpunished. Both men die in glorious battle. Claude, who could never quite fit in back home in Nebraska, is transformed in the minds of his mother and the family retainer, Mahailey, into the son well lost but always transcendently near, perhaps even “directly overhead, not so very far above the kitchen stove” as the novel ends with perfect poetic irony (371). Marilee Lindemann notes of this bitter ending: “The women’s devotion to Claude’s memory and to one another and their ability to endure disappointment stand as an implied critique of a masculinity that seems to require the violence of war to realize itself” (72). She continues:

In *One of Ours* war makes the queer a hero and gives him a space for love, allowing him to reconstitute a family, enter history, state his faith in his “wonderful men” (Cather 385), and die for a glorious cause, but all of this exaltation is predicated on the twin violences of war and misogyny, implying that men who love men do so because they feed on death and the hatred of women.

(74)

I do not entirely concur with Lindemann’s assertions of Claude’s “misogyny,” though his relationship with his wife Enid--and her depiction in the novel--certainly give Lindemann grounds for her inclusion of misogyny in her discussion. The absolute contempt with which the narrator of *Soldiers’ Pay* depicts Cecily Saunders makes the misogyny in *One of Ours* tame by comparison. I do agree, though, with the heart of her critique of Claude’s heroism, a critique to which Faulkner seems to have been exceptionally attuned.

For Lindemann, Cather’s novel critiques masculinity by depicting a man who loves other men, a seemingly effeminate trait in its American context, but who proves his manhood by dying

violently in a war. Claude's acceptance into society is based entirely on his proving that he is "man enough" for it, which requires his death since he is also "queer." That death is necessary--in a foreign war and far from home--because otherwise Claude's queerness, his homosexuality, threatens the fabric of a society that would extol his masculinity. He can be as non-heterosexual as he would like to be, so long as he is far from home, never comes back, and dies gloriously enough to overshadow the tainted reality of his life that leads to that death. If such a queer figure dares to live, the delicate balance of the home-front cannot find a place for those unfortunate enough to return as survivors; the hero who returns is simply queer. Indeed, Donald Mahon was reported, quite thankfully, dead before he shows up, somewhat alive, on his father's doorstep. While he thinks that Donald is dead, the rector can go through the tin box of loaded signifiers of Donald's homosexuality without noticing their significance--he can even crush Donald's hyacinth bulb. He can narrate a life for his son that is unencumbered by the weighty connotations of the signs before him. Any sign that does not fit that narrative dissolves away into oblivion. Donald can be the man his father wants to remember him as. Unfortunately, at just the moment when the rector begins the process of editing his keepsakes of his son's life, that son reappears, alive but severely wounded by the war.

As Maguire-Skaggs establishes, Faulkner's novel is the second half of Cather's original in which Faulkner envisions Claude Wheeler returning home alive. Claude dies at the end of Cather's novel, and Cather offers as the final scene the transfiguration of Claude in the eyes of Mahailey and his mother into an ever-present memory always just above the stove or thereabouts. Claude becomes Donald in Faulkner's novel. Accordingly, Faulkner begins his novel with the "deceased" Donald coming back to life. The narrative flows forward from that moment until Donald does finally die, though throughout the novel, numerous characters

concede that Donald is not really alive. The war killed Donald. The man who returns is just a shell to see to its grave. The Donald from before the war has died, metaphorically. The Donald who returns does not fit the narrative his father and the rest of the townspeople want to tell themselves. If Claude's war experience allows him to articulate his homosexuality, his death allows society to repudiate his homosexuality and to accept him into the fold. If he does not die, however, that homosexuality becomes articulated but not repudiated. Thus Donald Mahon might properly be read as the flesh and blood embodiment of that homosexuality, washing up on the proverbial shore back home. We should not be surprised that the goal of the various characters in the novel is to get Donald married so as to close any fissures in their narrative of his life that his reappearance opens.

Though certainly heavily influential, *A Shropshire Lad* and *One of Ours* do not wholly account for the all of the gay themes in Faulkner's World War I fiction. As Faulkner wrote his novel, his sketches, and his essay on marriage, he also wrote a short but revealing essay on "Literature and War." Paul Fussell devotes an entire chapter to "homoeroticism" in literary depictions of the war.¹² In his essay, Faulkner cites two of four authors whom Fussell singles out for their homoerotic writings. First, Faulkner cites Siegfried Sasson, who mentored Wilfred Owen and who wrote in his war memoirs about his close relationship with a man named Dick. Fussell identifies two "Dicks" in homoerotic war writing--the name of the idol of both Sassoon and Robert Graves; Faulkner names Margaret Powers' dead husband "Dick" in *Soldiers' Pay*. Second, Faulkner cites Rubert Brooke, whose handsome "special beauty" became iconic during the war and filled "needs" on the home-front that "were as deeply homoerotic as they were patriotic" (Fussell 276). Fussell extends his study to include "The British Homoerotic Tradition" and its influence on World War I writers, primarily through the equal parts homoerotic and

martial imagery of Housman's volume *A Shropshire Lad*. Faulkner does not single out Housman in his essay, but he singled out Housman in his other writings from 1925. He also previously listed *A Shropshire Lad* in his essay from 1924, "Verse, Old and Nascent: A Pilgrimage," wherein he had explained his predilection for "complet[ing] a youthful gesture I was then making of being 'different' in a small town" (*ESPL* 237). In "Literature and War," he does not rename Housman but focuses instead on men who wrote directly in response to World War I, as opposed to men whose pre-World War I writings would find greater relevance because of the war.

Faulkner begins his essay by claiming that reading Sassoon's poems puts him back, imaginatively, in the trenches. He never experienced the trenches, but he certainly imagined much from Sassoon's poems. If Faulkner could garner so much from his readings of Cather and Housman, especially mining them for their homoerotic and homosexual material, what he might actually have been able to see in Sassoon was more than just bombs, gas, barbed wire, and mini-guns. Also, as he named neither Housman nor Cather in his essay, we know he read more than just the four authors he listed in it. Indeed, the poet Faulkner did not name--Wilfred Owen--likely served as the key influence for his wounded soldiers. Owen was a homosexual poet whose senseless death in senseless battle so domesticated him for an English-speaking readership as to make his poems some of the most powerful and well-known responses to the war.

As Faulkner did in his poem "Lilacs" and in *Soldiers' Pay*, in "Disabled," written in 1917, Owen envisions the life of the returning veteran who did not die in battle and thus cannot bear the so-called glory expressed in the old saying *Dulce et decorum est pro patria mori*, an expression Owen will ironize in another of his famous poems. This veteran lives and now "[sits] in wheeled chair, waiting for dark, / And shiver[s] in his ghastly suit of gray, / Legless, sewn

short at elbow” (lines 1-3). His physical disabilities remove him from the sounds of children playing in the park and the twilight attention of “girls [who] glanced lovelier as the air grew dim” (line 9). His once beautiful face, sought by artists, has grown “old” and pale since he “lost his colour very far from here” in the “shell-holes” of the battlefield (lines 16, 17, 18). Such was his zeal for war that he enlisted early, even lying about his age, so he could hear the “drums and cheers” of the crowds as his train rolled away after he was called up to fight (line 36). He returned to fewer and more subdued crowds, and “[o]nly a solemn man who brought him fruits / *Thanked him*” for his service and sacrifice (lines 38-39, italics in original). He will spend the rest of his life in institutions and as an object of pity to those who did not go to war and so did not return so wounded. The closing lines of the poem sound the refrain, “Why don’t they come / And put him to bed? Why don’t they come?” (lines 46-47). Even the speaker in the poem prefers that this invalid be removed from sight.

In addition to the physical wounds, his countrymen and women base their reactions to him on a deeper revulsion. As the speaker explains, “All of them touch him like some queer disease” (line 13). That word *queer* carries much weight in the poem and suggests that this soldier’s “disability” refers to something far less outward than his missing arms and legs. Daniel Pigg challenges readers to consider the cultural context of the word *queer* at this historical moment to understand the poem, though his essay from 1997 makes use of an older version of the *Oxford English Dictionary*, which first cites *queer* as “homosexual” in 1922. A more recent edition of the *OED* establishes the currency of this particular usage as early as 1915. Pigg first argues that the soldier’s disability is not simply a product of the war but of “oppression in society that has brought a soldier to this state.” Thus as the soldier imagines the hands of girls that will no longer touch him, Pigg continues that “[f]or the poet, the notion of queerness is connected not

just with the loss of potential heterosexual contact but also with the great notion of the ‘lie’ [line 29] that has created him in this particular image.” That lie is the same lie that Cather explores: dying in war makes one great and brave, but going to war also exposes one to queerness, which makes that dying necessary. In this sense, war makes a soldier queer; or, as Pigg explains it, “War creates the queer and the strange.” Given the newly emerging use of *queer* concurrent to the war and the ways in which it shaped the world and artistic responses to it, I would assert that the war made the soldier *gay*.

I do not mean to suggest that exposure to war spreads homosexuality as if homosexuality *is* a disease, though that suggestion certainly seems to be at the heart of the homophobia so rampant in a society afraid of these men who return home alive. In fact, Faulkner’s experience of the Spanish Flu, a major world crisis contemporary to the war, would lend to him a sense that the effects of war and communicable diseases bear metaphoric connections. Cather also hints at a similar linkage: onboard the *Anchises*, Claude becomes a nurse during a devastating outbreak of the flu, which becomes his first exposure to the horrors of mass casualties and the irony of death taking those who seem least likely to die. In relation to homosexuality, if Claude Wheeler’s narrative is any guide, the war opens a pathway by which men who feel as if they are outcasts can find a means to enter society. While going to war to find the label *hero* and receive the plaudits of the nation, these men also find that their otherwise suppressed or dormant homosexual desires that they could not express at home they can express abroad. These men are not diseased, nor do they catch homosexuality. Rather, they realize that societal conventions and expectations are relatively spatial and relevant only to a small space. Once they leave that space, they find that being gay is neither all that horrible nor all that rare. This gay literary narrative will be repeated in landmarks of gay fiction throughout the twentieth century from *Beebo Brinker* to

Tales of the City: small town boy/girl goes to big city; isolated homosexual finds community.¹³

This powerful literary narrative is one Faulkner would have found particularly appealing in 1925 as he moved away from the provincialism and confinement of Oxford to the freedoms of the Vieux Carre. Conversely, he might have found this spatial and mobile narrative particularly confining when he thought about returning home. For what happens to the man who finds expression for his desires in a foreign war, but who has to return home afterwards, never again to feel the hands of the girls back home on him or be the recipient of heterosexual attention because his “wounds” prevent him from joining those practices anymore? When he returns home, the people who never left in the first place can only treat him as if he has some queer disease. No one wants to catch what he brings back to the isolated hometown that would prefer to mourn him dead than face the reality of his life in the trenches and among all those other young men.

Faulkner saw both sides of this narrative, the freedom of leaving and the confinement and convalescence of return. When he did finally return home in 1927, he revised and re-envisioned this narrative and eventually repudiated its queer elements in the first novel of his domestic life, *As I Lay Dying*, which is, alas, really just a novel about a wounded soldier returning home from war. He wrote it after he had rehearsed many varieties of this narrative of the returning soldier through the latter 1920s.

CHAPTER 5: QUEER SOLDIERS

On Sunday, 7 April 1918, before he had hatched his plan with Phil Stone to join the RAF but also in what would prove to be the final months of the war he planned so fastidiously to join, Faulkner wrote home to his mother from New Haven that he had met a “celebrity,” Nicholas Llewellyn, a soldier most recently from the front near Rheims but bearing a wound from the first battle of Ypres (*Thinking* 48). That Faulkner calls Llewellyn a celebrity speaks to the awe he felt in regard to those famous fighters of a war that he romanticized from the safe distance of the Yale campus. This romanticization is strikingly incongruent with the perception of the war held by actual veterans at that late stage in its history. Paul Fussell traces elements of the irony so prolific in the poetry and memoirs written by actual veterans to as early in the war as the costly stalemate at first Ypres in November 1914, but Fussell also establishes that the tone of World War I literature emanates from seeds planted long before the war, in poetry by Thomas Hardy and A. E. Housman. In April 1918, Faulkner, a fan of both Hardy and Housman, had not yet attained the modern perspective about the war Fussell finds in the British writings of his study. Rather, Faulkner’s starry-eyed excitement about meeting Llewellyn reeks of the youthful detachment of one not involved in the war in any real way, a detachment verified by Faulkner’s efforts to enlist and fly planes in the war in order to be like his other idols mentioned in his letters home: Major Raoul Lufberry, Victor Chapman, William Thaw, and Bert Hall (*Thinking* 56-57). Naturally, Faulkner insists in his letters that all of these men died, though as James G.

Watson points out, Faulkner's romanticizing of their deaths failed mention that two actually survived the war (58, n2). We might consider these forgotten survivors as the first casualties of Faulkner's apocrypha and his oversight concerning their actual fates his first World War I fiction.

These details in Faulkner's letters home from New Haven speak volumes about his impressions of "war" and its glories. Cowley suffered much onerous correction and Blotner spent years digging in army records to unearth the truth about Faulkner's wartime experience, or lack thereof. These letters, in hindsight, do more than enough to implicate how very far away from the actual war Faulkner's experience was. His letters home from New Haven, then eventually from Toronto where he was in the early stages of basic training at flight school when the war ended, do belong in a canon of his World War I writings, though, and not entirely for the clear fictions they contain. Indeed, if Faulkner did not experience the war, he did experience the other catastrophic event concurrent with it, the Great Influenza.¹ His letters home from Toronto all came through quarantine. The base was shut down. The backdrop was the Spanish flu, a part of the narrative of World War I that Willa Cather also included in *One of Ours*.² Nor was Faulkner's experience of this part of the war purely an abstraction through the veil of quarantine. On 21 October 1918, he began a letter home with the seemingly innocuous, though somewhat perturbed, "The quarantine has not lifted yet, though one can parade for a pass to see a dying relative or some such thing," but then turned to a much more personal loss, "That was rather bad about Vic. It's queer how the people one thinks would live for ever are the first to go" (*Thinking* 117). "Vic" was Victoria Oldham, Estelle's sister, who died of the Spanish flu. Her unexpected death is what he finds so queer. Faulkner's accounting of this death--his peculiar use of the word *queer*--in effect compliments Fussell's understanding of the irony the war instilled into the larger

literary consciousness of those who lived through it. War (and the flu) strike down those least likely to be its victims. So it goes.

There is a singular unifying motif in Faulkner's quarantine, Victoria's death, and the fictional experience of Claude Wheeler, hero in *One of Ours*, with the Great Influenza. A small town boy from Mississippi, Faulkner finds himself among a larger group of men from all parts. Victoria and her husband were living in Georgia at an army training camp--another instance of a local from a small town migrating to a new environment to be around men of all types. Claude Wheeler experiences the Influenza on board a ship crossing the Atlantic to fight in the war. A man from a small, isolated Nebraska community, Claude confronts the disease when he, too, is moved into contact with a larger group of men from all over the United States. From the point-of-view of epidemiology, few situations could be more conducive to the spread of a viral contagion than that caused by the war, wherein millions of men and women from small, isolated communities came into contact with large, mobile populations. As the name *Spanish Flu* implies, moreover, the movements of men back and forth between Europe and America--largely for the cause of fighting the war--provided the perfect path for the dissemination of the virus into American populations at a far more accelerated rate than would have been likely during peacetime.³ The flu and the war were both foreign, yet both reached back across the Atlantic to touch the lives of those at home.

The spread of this queer disease would prove to be a major part of Faulkner's wartime experience. The larger thematic influence of the Spanish Flu is a subcutaneous aspect of Faulkner's World War I writings, though one that will inform his ideas of what happens to a small-town man when he leaves his local sphere for the European theater and then returns. In short, that man will have been exposed to conditions which he will bring home with him, and

which have the potential to be quite dangerous in a small, local population unfamiliar with his new condition. Nor would Faulkner limit the potential for “infection” only to the flu. Years later, after he published *As I Lay Dying*, in May 1931, Faulkner wrote a brief review for *The New Republic* of Erich Maria Remarque’s novel *The Road Back*, an apt title for the thematic discussion of how Faulkner would depict the war in the 1920s and up until the publication of *As I Lay Dying* in 1930. In that review, Faulkner would state almost explicitly the types of war “contagion” his fiction describes. Speaking of the hope that the book will find a popular readership, Faulkner explains, “And if the United States had not got back its troops 50-percent intact, save for the casual cases of syphilis and high metropolitan life, [the novel] would not be bought (which I hope and trust that it will be) and read.”⁴ In 1931 Faulkner could clearly conceive of the war and the “50-percent intact” returning soldiers as having been exposed to diseases, namely syphilis in this case instead of just the flu, the former a sexually transmitted disease as opposed to the airborne influenza. What could he mean, however, by “cases of [. . .] high metropolitan life”? What contagion does this condition imply? What would a case of high metropolitan life look like?

The review piece from 1931 and the letter home about Victoria’s death form bookends around Faulkner’s treatment of war as a type of exposure and returning soldiers as contagious carriers of a peculiar/queer disease, like Wilfred Owen’s disabled veteran. In between the two, Faulkner will experiment with varieties of narrative predicated on this idea of contagion and the returning soldier, only the contagion his soldiers harbor will always have an element of psychosexual “disease” in need of treatment by a “doctor” in *Soldiers’ Pay*, by a matchmaking aunt in *Flags in the Dust*, by an asylum in *As I Lay Dying*, and by a wife--or at least the suggestion of a wife--in all three. The other telling detail from Faulkner’s in-the-moment

experience is from the letter from New Haven, 7 April 1918, in which he glamorized Nicholas Llewellyn, though this detail, like the full implications of war and contagion, would take time to saturate Faulkner's vision and infiltrate his apocryphal creations. After fixing on Llewellyn for a paragraph, Faulkner adds the following observation, almost as an afterthought: "There are two other English officers here, Captains Massie and Bland. Bland is suffering from shell shock" (48). Though one might be tempted to believe that witnessing shell shock would give Faulkner pause in his pursuit of glorious battle-fame, it does not (nor, for that matter, does the body count he recites for Maud in his letter about Lufberry and all the other dead pilots he can name). At this moment Faulkner may well have been of two minds like two blackbirds in one tree: on one level he sees Bland and records his existence, on another level he fails to recognize what he sees. Putting this double-vision in a Faulknerian context almost seems too easy because, of course, "Memory believes before knowing remembers" (*LIA* 119), or so Faulkner tells us in the first novel he wrote after completing *As I Lay Dying*, and after realizing in one character the full apocryphal potential for the bare edges of the war he recorded in these early letters.

The "queer" element of World War I literature does not inform Faulkner's first foray into his war-themed fiction. In 1919, he published a short story in *The Mississippian* entitled "Landing in Luck." The hero of the story, Cadet Thompson, is an American attempting to fly with the RFC. Though he is a slow learner and rather clumsy in the air, he has as much pluck as he has luck. After clipping the landing gear off of his plane at take-off in his first solo flight, he manages to land successfully, which is to say that he survives even if the airplane does not. Despite the circumstances that do not portend his future success in flying, his landing earns him respect and a place at the table with the more accomplished British pilots. The story is fanciful and heavily influenced by Faulkner's hero-worship of men like Llewellyn. Much of Faulkner's

supposedly “first-hand” experiences that he would relate about his “actual” adventures in the war (the metal plate in his head, his stories about crashing behind enemy lines) reek of such romanticized images of war. His fiction, on the other hand, rarely returns to such fancy.

Written in 1920 but not published until 1933 in *The Green Bough*, the poem “Lilacs” signals the beginnings of a consciousness of the effects of war. The unnamed subject of the poem is a wounded pilot who has returned home to die. He had been “Raiding over Mannheim” when “Out of the bullet-tortured air: / A great black bowl of fireflies” swarmed up to engulf him (*MF/GB* 9-10). Wounded beyond repair, the pilot now finds himself in the midst of a garden party while around him women “[drink] tea / Beneath the lilacs on a summer afternoon” (7). The pilot is an object of pity. The only attention he gets from the women is to overhear them talking with other men at the party about him. The pilot overhears one of these men whose “voice has dropped and the wind is mouthing his words / While the lilacs nod their heads on slender stalks, / Agreeing while he talks, / Caring not if he is heard or is not heard” by the pilot who languishes in the mute silence of his Prufrockian internal monologue (10). The pilot’s closing thoughts record his response to this overheard pity: “I hear their voices as from a great distance--Not dead / He’s not dead, poor chap; he didn’t die--” (11). The pilot is conscious of what is happening around him, but he cannot affect it. His life is internal, theirs external; he is the center of attention, but he is not a participant in the action of the poem. “Lilacs” bears a striking resemblance to Owen’s “Disabled,” only at the end we hear Faulkner’s pilot reciting to himself the pity of the other partygoers rather than hear the speaker in the poem voice the pity by wishing someone would take the ruined invalid with his queer disease out of sight.

The “moral” the poem conveys is that it would have been better for the pilot, the “poor chap,” to have died in Europe in the war and thus to have spared himself the benign pity he

experiences when he returns home figuratively dead. He certainly is no longer part of the co-ed socializing at the party, and one can reasonably conclude that “he will never feel again how slim / Girl’s waists are, or how warm their subtle hands” (Owen 67).⁵ The crowd looks at him, if they do not touch him, like some queer disease. Overall, the poem seems to propose that death would have been preferable to pity, or that between death and pity one should choose death. Indeed, the glories of battle are meaningless if they do not also kill the pilot or soldier. The poem stops just short of critiquing the irony of glorious death in battle and instead fixates on the pilot’s failure to die. The poem, then, continues to carry forward Faulkner’s own sense of the romance of the fallen hero, whose failure makes him as much of a slow-learner and just as clumsy as Cadet Thompson in “Landing and Luck” (a more skilled pilot would have died). By bringing the pilot home, however, to encounter the pity of “the women” instead of the tacit respect of his fellow pilots, Faulkner opens a door through which to direct his later World War I fiction to much greater and more mature ends.

Post-1920 and “Lilacs,” Faulkner continued to perform his World War I wounded soldier persona to his friends and in various social situations, but his writing moved into the imitative poetry explored in the previous chapters. That writing was heavily gay-themed, but was not war-themed. Faulkner also courted Ben Wasson, moved briefly to New York with Stark Young, and eventually moved to New Orleans and the gay scene of the Vieux Carre. In 1925, settled in New Orleans and still dutifully performing his outward role of having a limp and a metal plate in his head from war wounds, he began his first novel, which he referred to as his “mistress.”⁶ He also wrote occasional pieces for the *Times-Picayune*, such as “Out of Nazareth,” and submitted the occasional essay to the *Item-Tribune*. He moved in with William Spratling. He was also reading the work of Siegfried Sasson and Rupert Brooke. When he returned to World War I fiction in

1925, his output underwent a decided change from the the hero-worship of men like Llewellyn to an awareness of that other figure from his encounter in New Haven so many years ago, the shell-shocked Bland.

In *Soldiers' Pay* Faulkner returns to his wounded pilot from "Lilacs," and, introducing him into the novel, he also echoes the sentiment from that poem and its romanticized image of war. Cadet Julian Lowe and Joe Gilligan are trading wit and whiskey on a train meant to take them home from the war after they have been decommissioned. On the way, they encounter Donald Mahon, a name Faulkner intended as a double pun on "man" in order to universalize Mahon's condition and, conversely, to rob him of identity as just another "man," or body, sacrificed to the gods of war. Perhaps unintentionally, though, Mahon's name also implies a gendered distinction that reminds us that, when we look upon "Mahon," we are beholding a "man." Cadet Lowe beholds him thus:

He saw a belt and wings, he rose and met a young face with a dreadful scar across his brow. My God he thought, turning sick. [. . .] Cadet Lowe pressed the bell, regarding with a rebirth of the old feud between American enlisted men and officers of all nations the man's insignia and wings and brass, not even wondering what a British officer in his condition could be doing traveling in America. Had I been old enough or lucky enough, this might have been me, he thought jealously.

(21)

Mahon's scar, his officer status, and his perceived foreignness repulse and attract Lowe, whose eyes regard not only Mahon's "young face" now scarred but also take in his whole body, conveniently dressed in officer regalia. Mahon is actually from "Gawgia," as the black porter tells Lowe and Gilligan, but Gilligan insists, "Christ, I thought he was a foreigner" (21). Then, as

Lowe's fascination increases and he begins questioning Mahon, Gilligan rejoins, "Don't you see he don't remember himself? Do you reckon you would, with that scar?" (25). He later declares, with significant ambiguity, "My God, it makes you sick at the stomach, don't it?" (25). The "it" has no clear antecedent and in context could refer to "the dreadful scar" itself or to Mahon's "face, young, yet old as the world, beneath [it]" (25); or *it* could refer more generally to the collision of the scar and Mahon's youth as what disorients and sickens these two men staring at him. Whatever *it* is, however, it makes Gilligan *sick* at the stomach when he sees it. This generic expression of revulsion carries much significance in relation to Donald's injuries, or his queer disease.

If Gilligan gets sick, Julian Lowe almost seems to be aroused by Mahon's presence and perceived glories. Lowe provides too much excessive hero-worship in this scene in his "jealousy" of Mahon's scar. He represents an apocryphal version of the younger William Faulkner in New Haven, idolizing dead pilots and wounded soldiers without fully realizing the horrors of war that his novel in 1925 much more deftly handles than his early story and poem. Of course, Lowe also represents Gilligan's partner, with both Lowe and Gilligan fascinated by and drawn to this "Mahon/man" in front of them. Their eyes take in the scene. Lowe explicitly wishes he was Mahon; Gilligan take upon himself the responsibility to look after Mahon. The scene stops just short of articulating the implicit queer desires at work among these three men. Margaret Powers intercedes into this queer triangulation of male desire before it can progress to more overt homoeroticism. Powers replaces Lowe in this queer triangle of desire, a replacement early in the novel that effectively stunts any further implications that, minus Powers' arrival on the scene, Lowe and Gilligan would have been the (same-sex) partners who take Mahon home. She mediates any further ostensible development of homoeroticism on the train. Powers and

Gilligan emerge as significantly more emotionally mature than Lowe by the end of Chapter One and decide to take upon themselves the task of returning Mahon to Georgia to die.

After allowing Lowe a childish and idyllic (though unconsummated) courtship of Powers, Faulkner shuffles him off to his mother in San Francisco. He reappears throughout the novel via his dreamy letters to Powers about finding work and a home to support her, but his physical body--and the romanticism embodied therein--are shuffled away at the end of the first chapter to allow the real plot to unfold: Mahon's return, his death, and the efforts of Margaret Powers and others in his hometown to "save" him. That Faulkner allows this prologue with Lowe, however, ever-so-slightly hints that the subtext of the proceeding action is homosexually charged. The novel starts among men with their mutual idolization, jealousies, and sympathies for each other. Margaret Powers enters the scene just as any seeds are sown that might explicitly demonstrate the male-to-male attraction powering the interactions prior to her appearance. Whatever power might animate the interactions of Lowe, Gilligan, and Mahon, Margaret *powers* anew with safely heterosexual animus. Lowe subsequently turns his attentions to her; Powers and Gilligan encourage his courtship. Lowe never entirely disappears, though. His early presence in the novel permeates the rest of the action, an echo of male same-sex possibilities stunted in their progress by the necessity of getting the wounded "Mahon" safely and properly home.

After Lowe's exit, *Soldiers' Pay* turns fully to Faulkner's memories of Bland and begins to rely on his readings of other war literature to formulate a more sophisticated representation of the life of a returning soldier than his previous short story and poem. In this first attempt to enter the larger conversation of World War I literature, Faulkner has to step very far beyond his experiences into the realm of artifice in order to present that life. The whole novel is artifice much more than it is merely apocryphal. Faulkner is not making his actual war experience into

an apocryphal account in this novel; he is extending into the realm of fiction what was already an apocryphal persona. Faulkner travelled by train back to Oxford from Canada, but the closest character in the story to Faulkner's actual-experience-made-apocryphal is Julian Lowe, who never had a chance to serve and whom Faulkner quickly removes from the central plot to become a love-struck boy creating his own fantasy about Margaret Powers from the safe distance of California while the main action of the novel unfolds on the opposite coast. Lowe does not even function as a distant observer or narrator; he writes letters to Margaret that represent the sheer artifice of courtship, far more show than substance. Then he even disappears from his mother's house, to which he has returned and from where he writes his letters, a situation not unlike Faulkner's actual living arrangements upon his return to Oxford. Faulkner turns his attention after Chapter One to an experience he can only vaguely assimilate through other World War I narratives and through the vicarious experience of the war through others: Llewellyn, Bland, and his own wounded brother, though that brother returned in a far less catatonic state than Mahon. The novel is an extended performance, a stylized theater of the post-war South (Faulkner even selectively employs the structure of dramatic dialogue). Into this facade, Faulkner introduces another significant pun. If Mahon is the "man" returning from war, his father, who is an Anglican rector, becomes the "doctor" who will diagnose his disease and propose a cure for it. That the title "doctor" can refer to a clergyman may seem to be an innocent choice of words for the critical scene of diagnosis and recognition, but in the context of contagion and the larger experience of the war on which Faulkner could actually draw--the Spanish Flu--calling the rector "doctor" becomes a means of signifying the double-entendre of Mahon's condition. He is queer, but nobody wants to say as much explicitly. They townspeople can, however, diagnose his condition and prescribe treatment for it in a discourse of disease that quarantines the queer

implications of Donald's return into the medical routine of healing his "wounds."

In Chapter Three, Part Four, Mahon's father meets Cecily's father, Mr. Saunders, in a scene fraught with innuendo about Donald's sexuality. Donald's betrothed, Cecily, has rejected him when she sees his scar. He now appears different, or foreign, to her, and his new foreignness is too much for her to bear. She realizes that she cannot marry him. On a trip to town her father, Robert the elder, then encounters Donald's father, a rector who tends to his flock's moral health and so goes by the appellation "Doctor" in conversation. Deluded by the premise that his son *will* recover from his "scar," the rector/doctor begins to discuss Donald and Cecily's engagement. When Mr. Saunders tries to respond that his daughter cannot be expected to follow through, given the new circumstances, the doctor insists, "[H]e has a scar, you see. But I am confident this can be removed, even though Cecily does become accustomed to it. In fact, I am depending on her to make a new man of him in a short time" (109-10). There is something not quite right about what the Doctor/rector is diagnosing. Donald Mahon has a physical scar on his face that has somehow produced in him a detachment from the world. At no point in the novel does anyone directly explain how the scar on Donald's face may be related to any deeper concussive injury that could cause his loss of memory. Still, he is no longer interested in participating in the world of his Georgia hometown and even fails to recognize Cecily, who in turn is repulsed by him because now when she looks at him, she sees something very different from the attractive young man to whom she was once engaged. Donald's father does not discuss his son's scar as a physical object, though, but as a psychological mark that has unmanned (un-Mahon-ed) him. Thus he completely believes that the scar can be removed by the simplest of means: a woman makes him a new man/Mahon by instituting the treatment of marriage. Marriage is the prescription the doctor recommends to cure his son's ills. Mr. Saunders does not agree with the

rector's plan of treatment and opts instead to try again the next day to convince the rector that Cecily cannot marry Donald, but the rector emphatically repeats his diagnosis and prescription. He continues that his son "is naturally a bit confused right now," though confused about what he never clearly says, "but care and attention, and above all, Cecily, will remedy that," he continues (110). Notably, the rector/doctor even uses the medical term "remedy" to discuss what he hopes will occur when Donald is married. Precisely what is she supposed to remedy? What will marriage remedy? What is *that*?

At this point, Mr. Saunders' curiosity is piqued. He asks, "But what happened to him?" (110). The rector concedes, "He won't talk about it. A *friend* who came home with him assures me that he doesn't know and cannot remember. But this happens quite often, *the young man--a soldier himself--tells me*" (110, italics added). The "friend," who in this case is a "young man" and a fellow soldier touched, presumably, by the same experience even if he does not outwardly express the mark of that experience so plainly on his face, is Joe Gilligan, not Margaret Powers. That soldier friend is, however, familiar with Donald's symptoms and can "assure" the "doctor" that those symptoms are quite common among soldiers. The echo of Julian Lowe also reverberates in the rector's statement. If *two* young male friends had brought Donald home, the homosexual implications of his ailment might overtake the narrative. Since Margaret Powers replaced Julian, the outward appearance of Donald's caretakers matches a discernible heterosexual pattern that mitigates the all-male aspect of Donald's war experience and the early stages of his return on the train. Mr. Saunders originally intended to tell the rector that the engagement was off, but after listening to the rector, he has decided instead, "I wonder if I might stop in to speak to Donald" (110). Mr. Saunders realizes that Donald's "scar" is deeper than a superficial wound and that his daughter's reaction is not simply a product of his external

disfigurement. Mr. Saunders wants to witness this un-manning himself.

At the rectory Mr. Saunders sees for himself what everyone except the rector sees, that Donald Mahon is “scarred” beyond repair. The rector continues to play the role of doctor, however, and insists, “But Donald is in a position to help himself now, provided he gets his medicine often enough,” a statement he directs to Mr. Saunders, concluding “with jovial innuendo” that “[w]e depend on you for this, you know” (113). When Mr. Saunders finally has the opportunity, he corners Margaret Powers and demands, “Why doesn’t someone tell him the truth about that boy?” (113). The “truth” is most likely that Donald is injured beyond repair and will die, but at no point is this “truth” explicitly stated. Donald’s true condition remains unstated, an open secret of implication and metaphor suggesting that his wound is an injury to his supposed heterosexuality since marriage seems to be the best way to fix whatever has been damaged. He has gone off to war and returned as a homosexual detached from all the surroundings that prior to the war seemed to suggest a very different truth about his life.

When Mr. Saunders demands to know what a real doctor has concluded, Margaret Powers answers that “[t]he man that was wounded is dead and this is another person, a grown child. It’s his apathy, his detachment, that’s so terrible” (114). Apathy and detachment are not related to any physical scar. The diagnosis, even from a real medical professional later in the novel, not just the rector, explains that Mahon has removed himself from the expectations of society as much as he has been physically wounded by the mark he bears on his face. Margaret Powers and Mr. Saunders decide to fake the engagement with Cecily long enough to let Donald die in peace. They reason for the virtue of this course because, “Remember, he might have been your son” (115). Mr. Saunders does, in fact, have a son, a miniature version of himself who even shares his name. Below, I will examine Young Robert Saunders’ formative sexual adolescence

and relationship to the main narrative. Here it suffices that Mr. Saunders is convinced that such a possibility--Donald could have been his son!--is so awful to imagine that he finds himself ready to sacrifice his own daughter to cordon off Donald's illness until he can die. Thus Donald may at least passably resemble the outward appearance of normality in the town, lest his still unnamed condition spread.

Mr. Saunders will later explain to his daughter that "we expect you to be [Donald's] best medicine," though she counters, "He brought his own medicine with him" (137). This jab is ostensibly aimed at Margaret Powers, but Donald also brought Gilligan, his "friend," home with him, and nearly brought Julian Lowe as well. Cecily's primary resentment, though, is clearly for "that black woman" Margaret Powers (138), an easier target of jealousy than the young soldier who bears no outward wounds. Cecily eventually refuses to continue the charade of healing Donald with the balm of heterosexual convention. Thus Margaret Powers marries him instead, and Donald, never cured of his "apathy" or his "scar" despite the best efforts of his father and Margaret, dies anyway. The conclusion of the novel, Donald's death, is never in question. He has gone to the war. He has returned wounded. No woman can save him, not even Emmy, whom Donald slept with before the war but now does not even see. As yet another doctor later proclaims, Donald is "practically a dead man now" (150). As this proclamation comes on page 150 in a novel of 315 pages, we might conclude that all the mercurial marriage planning that occupies so much of the action of the novel is purely sound and fury that accomplishes nothing, but the charade does actually accomplish quite a lot. The marriage planning maintains the proper heterosexual order of the town and keeps the townspeople free from Donald's queer condition, at least as much as possible given that so many people want to see Donald, which would expose them to his contagion if Gilligan and Margaret did not do their best to deny people admittance to

Donald's room.

In the midst of the main narrative, Robert Saunders, the younger, swells the progress of characters on the stage of this small town. Robert is Cecily's kid brother, and his as-yet-formless sexuality streaks through the novel in brilliant flashes like heat lightning. He first appears on the evening of Donald's return. Cecily has fled to her home where her moaning histrionics sound in the background the melody of "Ooooh, don't, don't, mamma! I c-can't bear to think of it. [. . .] Not ever, not ever. If I have to see him again I'll--I'll just die. I can't bear it, I can't bear it" (92). Meanwhile, young Robert keeps asking her what Donald looks like. While Cecily's parents put her to bed, Robert sneaks off to the rectory to get a glimpse of the soldiers. As he slides down a fence to cut through the backyards between his home and the rectory, he rips the back of his pants and "sprawl[s] in the damp grass feeling a thin shallow fire across his young behind" (96).⁷ He considers this misfortune "rotten luck" and continues on his mission (96). He is turned away by Gilligan, but he decides that he will have better luck in the morning. He stalks home, where his dinner and scolding parents are waiting; "[t]hen soaped and hungry he clattered into the dining room, accomplishing an intricate field maneuver lest his damaged rear be exposed" (98).

The brilliance of this interlude in relation to the larger action of the adults is a product of Robert's utterly guileless reaction to his *exposed rear*, notably a reference to combat and the rhetoric of war. He tears his pants and exposes his "behind" on his mission to see the returning soldier. He attempts to hide the damage by "accomplishing an intricate field maneuver." He is a little soldier in training, though he is unaware of the full implications of the exposure he has just had to the real soldier who just returned wounded from the war. Such details are rife for a homoerotic reading. Robert transgresses by sneaking out. He exposes himself in a way that would be distinctly horrifying to a homophobic reader on the lookout for signs of the

emasculating power of anal penetration. Robert is unconcerned, however, except to the extent that he knows his parents will be angry that he tore his pants. He continues on his mission, meets one soldier, though not the one he was looking for, and, despite having a “damaged rear,” does not balk when asked where he was by his parents. He immediately tells them that he went to see the soldiers, his torn pants completely forgotten. He is sublimely unaware of himself as a factor in the sexual economy that drives the plot.

Young Robert later appears completely naked, skinny-dipping in a water hole with his friends. Gilligan and Margaret Powers are walking through the woods when they hear noises through the trees. They spy Robert poised “on a limb, balanced precariously to dive” (155). The narrator describes, “His body was the color of old paper, beautiful as a young animal’s” (155). Gilligan calls out to Robert as he prepares to jump. Startled in mid-flight, he crashes into the water and re-emerges long enough to swim out of view. Gilligan has called to him, but he directs his ire at Margaret Powers, who retreats into the woods with Gilligan because she feels that they have ruined his fun. Robert broods on her intrusion, “his malevolent face watching her retreating figure as he swiftly donned his clothes. I’ll fix you! he swore, almost crying” (155). Gilligan is ultimately responsible, however, for spying on him and calling to him, and Gilligan has brought a woman into the space of his adolescent freedom wherein he can swim naked with other boys and feel no shame. A returning soldier himself, Gilligan has caused Robert’s exposure, and in this case he is all-to-aware that someone has seen him fully exposed.

Though his role in the novel remains so minor as to make a full psychosexual case study impossible, this scene does suffice as a moment of awakening at which Robert understands his own body as sexualized. Though significant, the moment proves transient. Later in the novel he is back prowling around the rectory, “bent on a seduction of his own” (214). Over lunch, he

quizzes Januarius Jones about whether or not he served in the war. Robert is still looking for soldiers. They still elicit his curiosity in ways that need monitoring and censoring. Margaret Powers' warning that Donald "might have been your son" sounds an ominous note in regards to young Robert Saunders. His interests in the soldiers and his intricate field maneuvers imply he will grow up to be a "soldier" himself one day if his parents are not careful to steer him on a more appropriate path. Mrs. Saunders finally intervenes in his adolescent machinations. When she notices that he has cornered Januarius Jones, she runs off Robert for his annoying inquisitiveness, thus interrupting his "seduction." Her intervention is well-placed; Robert's curiosity implicates his nascent interests in the company of men. Mrs. Saunders' intervenes to put an end to his attentions just as her husband has conspired to make Donald appear as if he is on the path to proper heterosexuality in the institution of marriage. Nonetheless, Robert's minor role in the novel could not be more crucial. He is the young boy, the "lad" of an A. E. Housman poem or any number of nineteenth-century authors from Walter Pater to Walt Whitman. His attraction is his sheer innocence. In a novel filled with floral imagery and the prepubescence of Spring, he is the budding flower on the very edge of bloom. He is desperate to get a glimpse of Donald (Mahon/man), even going out of his way on his daily trek to school and bringing friends with him, a situation that bothers Gilligan so much that he comments to Margaret Powers, "We got to stop this [. . .] can't have these damn folks in and out of here all day, staring at him" (146). Though a subtle subtext, Robert's always exposed body becomes the contested site over which will play out the great lengths to which the adults will go to in order to re-establish the heterosexual social order that Donald's reappearance has disrupted.

If these details do not fully articulate a homosexual narrative, they also do not articulate a measure of Faulkner's homophobia. The reactions of the characters to Donald's "scar" may be

homophobic, but the conclusion of the novel seems to be far more an indictment of a society for its expectations that refuse to admit queer sexualities into them. Yes, Donald's death is a foregone conclusion from the beginning of the novel; but there's the rub. Donald would have been better off had he actually died in the war. His father, Cecily, and everyone else in town, had received word that he was killed in action, and they have been acting under that assumption for some time as the novel begins. They had recreated their ordered reality, putting Donald proverbially a few feet about the stove as an lost idol much the way Mrs. Wheeler and Mahailey do with their memories of Claude in *One of Ours*. Everyone is quite surprised when Donald suddenly returns with his "friend" and the "black" woman. The society to which he has returned does not have the capacity to revise their narrative and envision a place for him in their town except to force him into a marriage for the sake of maintaining order. The society back home, not the scar from abroad, ultimately sentences Donald to death. To that society, he was dead when he left for the war; by leaving, his fate was sealed and the townspeople could mourn and remember him in whatever capacity best suited them. His return forces the town to confront a reality for which they are unprepared. Faulkner's life in gay New Orleans as an alternative to the confines of small town Oxford offers an easy paradigm for the source of the geography of his novel set in small town Georgia and in the larger European theater of War. The binaries structurally at work in the novel include urban to rural, elsewhere to home, open to closed, acceptance to rejection. The townspeople accepted Donald when he was gone. They reject him when he returns (or at least do not mind his dying so long as they can cover up any messy reality of his life).

At the same time, these binaries are encumbered by the larger connotations of contagion and exposure, especially in the historical moment surrounding World War I. Small town boy goes to big city. When he comes back, he has acquired queer big city ways. Or he goes across the

ocean. The home front would seem to have an easier time imagining that homosexuality was bred on foreign shores. Foreign homosexuality poses no threat to the home front when it takes place in a battlefield in faraway France. What happens, however, if it comes home after the war has ended? Faulkner asked that question in *Soldiers' Pay*. He continued to pursue it in his World War I fictions for the next five years until he came home in his own real-life enactment of the apocryphal narrative of the returning queer.

In *Elmer*, "The Leg," "Ad Astra," and *Flags in the Dust*, Faulkner would experiment with various permutations of the basic elements of *Soldiers' Pay*. First, in his effort to bring Donald Mahon home, Faulkner invented a fictitious town in Georgia, a place at some remove from his little postage stamp of native soil. Much of the story is purely invented and represents a significant stretch beyond Faulkner's actual experiences of the war. By moving the action to Georgia, however, he robbed the novel of what minimal connection it might have had to his actual experiences, as if to suggest that, while first experimenting with such latently homosexual elements, he could not put his own identity, even apocryphally, too fully into the text. Of course, Estelle's sister died at an army base in Georgia. Perhaps his memory of that death prompted Faulkner to choose Georgia as a site for the exposure and attempts at quarantine that animate *Soldiers' Pay*. Second, Donald Mahon's catatonic inertia make him an *object* of pity, much like Owen's disabled soldier, but he never becomes a *subject* in the text. Within the time of the novel, Donald is a distinctly flat and static character. What little evidence we have about his character from before the war comes from Cecily Saunders, Emmy, and his father. Cecily's hyperbolic vanity and fickleness make suspect what little she might provide about Donald. Emmy's memory of her courtship and consummation with Donald is told by her, not the narrator, and is distinctly her point-of-view, with no access to the Donald's internal feelings. Donald's father is blind to the

reality of his son's life. We are granted a brief glimpse of Donald's remembering being shot down, much as Faulkner's speaker in "Lilacs" recalls that pilot's experience over Mannheim, but otherwise Donald is a body around which we observe everyone else's actions and motivations, but never his. Neither of these elements represent "flaws" in the plot; rather they serve to limit the way in which Faulkner can tell the story of the returned soldier. Other permutations produced their own limitations but also produced their own insights.

Faulkner began *Elmer* while in Paris in the summer of 1925, though he would never satisfactorily complete it. The final version that he did see through to a completed form would appear in the early 1930s as "A Portrait of Elmer."⁸ What other changes he made to his original text aside, Faulkner included in the original manuscript and in the later story the material concerning Elmer's boyhood crush and adolescent homosexuality. In "A Portrait of Elmer," a third-person narrator attempts a psychological case study of Elmer Hodge. Never an excellent student, Elmer "developed a fine sexless passion for the teacher. But this year he was ravished away from that constancy by a boy, a young beast as beautiful to him as a god, and as cruel" (*US* 616). This first flame of desire dies quickly when the boy pushes Elmer down on the playground, causing Elmer to "transfer[] his sheeplike devotion once more to the teacher" (616). Faulkner includes this detail in Elmer's psychosexual development, but he also cordons it off as part of Elmer's adolescence, out of which Elmer matures to become a functional heterosexual. In the meantime, Elmer grows up and goes to war. He "entrained for Halifax" to serve for the Canadian government (627). Unlike Faulkner, he fights in the war. There he receives a horrible scar on his back from an intense burn and develops the ubiquitous limp of literary soldiers, including the apocryphal soldier William Faulkner. After the war, as a practicing heterosexual, he courts a woman in Houston "where he already had a bastard son" (612). His real passion, however,

prefiguring Quentin Compson's later obsession, is finding his long lost older sister Jo, for whom he harbors an incestuous desire he has maintained since he was a child and she ran away to get married. He thinks once that he sees her while he is walking the streets of New Orleans, a city he returns to often and the city to which Faulkner returned after his own time abroad. The end of "A Portrait of Elmer" has Elmer, in Paris, fleeing wildly to his hotel because of a massive bowel movement that prevents him from courting yet another woman.

The elements of the story never come together. Faulkner never saw the original manuscript nor any later story versions through to publication in his lifetime. To tell in full a *bildungsroman* of a wounded soldier did not work for Faulkner the way it did for Cather in *One of Ours*. In a *bildungsroman* the details become too fixed and compartmentalized. Indeed, later critics--Parini in regard to Faulkner's actual life, Blotner in regard to "Divorce in Naples"--argue for versions of a cordoned off homosexuality as a fleeting moment of one's youth, but no evidence suggests that Faulkner saw homosexuality through the same lens. His inability to complete a satisfactory revision of *Elmer*/"A Portrait of Elmer" could actually be a product of his sense that a neatly partitioned, linear life study does not effectively account for the complexities of consciousness. In *Soldiers' Pay*, the effectiveness of Donald Mahon's character stems from his lack of history. That novel begins *in media res* and offers only vague glimpses of the Mahon from before the war. The novel is primarily a limited third-person account of Donald's life in the immediate aftermath of the war. In "A Portrait of Elmer," an omniscient narrator employs occasional internal monologues, but Elmer has too much history all laid out in precise moments and all in the past. Faulkner could not produce a holistic impression of Elmer from the disparate parts of his experience. In regards to the other element of his war narratives--location--Faulkner is more successful in his second attempt. Elmer Hodge returns from the war to New Orleans. In

Europe, Elmer prefers Paris, which Faulkner also visited and where he first began writing *Elmer* before putting it aside and returning to it in the early 1930s. Faulkner put Elmer Hodge into spheres with which he was familiar, rather than create a fictional place removed from his actual life. This autobiographical geography does represent an effort on Faulkner's part to assimilate his actual experience in the apocryphal details of his fictional creations and so represents a positive step towards his eventual realization of a gay-themed war narrative set in his native North Mississippi.

Faulkner seems to have written at least a draft of "The Leg" while he was in Europe in 1925.⁹ In the story, two British soldiers court a girl before the war. In the war, one dies while the other is wounded and loses his leg. When the survivor returns, he continues his courtship, but he is haunted by his phantom limp and ghostly images of his lost companion, whom he comes to believe takes on bodily form and also continues courting this one woman between them. The story is rife with queer elements, but the setting is entirely European. Structurally, Faulkner also seems to digress in his presentation of homosexuality; the relationship between the two soldiers centers firmly on a single woman between them in a model of same-sex eroticism explicated by Sedgwick in pre-1850s British literature. Superficially, the "between men" structure appears more akin to that earlier model, which, as I have pointed out, even Sedgwick disavows in a twentieth century context. Additionally, the gothic elements of the text--the ghostly figure courting the woman and the phantom limb--seem to borrow from ghost story traditions firmly rooted in nineteenth century horror tales and other gothic forebears. Faulkner modernizes these elements, though, by applying them to a World War I narrative and the trauma of the wounded survivor.

The ghostly figure is a visitation from a battlefield, the shadow of the lost heterosexual

who returns as an apparition to continue his failed courtship from before the war. The surviving soldier has a leg wound, a metaphor for a sexual wound that complicates his courtship when he returns by reminding him of his loss, in this case both his leg *and* his male companion. The woman between them, through whom they mediate their desires, does not function to sanction their inarticulate homoeroticism through the safe site of her feminine body. Rather, she finds herself literally haunted, alongside the surviving soldier, by the casualties of war and the relationships whose previously unfettered histories are decimated by it. Faulkner is experimenting with the elements of his World War I material to create a strikingly complex portrait of the psychology of desire and trauma. Before the war, the two men enact a version of a triangulated courtship similar to older models of same-sex desire between men with a woman in the middle. After the war, the loss of that past haunts and nearly kills those unfortunate enough to have survived. Obviously, the title is not coincidental: “the leg” is the missing member emblematic of a phantom desire (between the two men) beyond what we directly observe (between a man and a woman) that estranges and horrifies. When one man dies, the other is wounded irreparably in the leg. It is a sexual wound. It haunts him.¹⁰

The origins of “Ad Astra” are somewhat unclear, though the narrator of the version Faulkner eventually published very clearly establishes that he is telling this story twelve years after it took place, or in 1930 (408).¹¹ Faulkner attempted to publish the story after his marriage in 1929, but the story possibly dates to earlier as Faulkner began to experiment with the character Bayard Sartoris, the central figure of his first Yocona/Yoknapatawpha novel *Flags in the Dust*. The Bayard who appears in that novel is clearly troubled by his experiences in the war. In “Ad Astra,” Faulkner explores the events at the heart of his wartime experiences to understand what Bayard might have brought home with him and what seems to be the cause of his turmoil when

he returns home without it. The thematic similarities between the novel and the story suggest that whichever one Faulkner wrote first, the other was on his mind at the same time. In the fictional chronology of Faulkner's nascent county, the events of "Ad Astra" immediately precede the events in *Flags*, even if Faulkner only saw the story through to publication much later.

Though Bayard Sartoris will eventually come home in the novel in a homecoming that apocryphizes Faulkner's return to Oxford to court and marry Estelle, "Ad Astra" does not quite bridge the gap between home and abroad. The story is set entirely in Europe immediately after the war has ended. In the story Faulkner provides three characters to perform the charade of masculinity requisite to the theater of war: Bayard Sartoris, Monaghan, and, intriguingly, another pilot named Bland. Of course, Bland appears, as a real person no less, in a prior letter that Faulkner wrote home in 1918. Bayard features as the protagonist of *Flags*. Monaghan will also appear in that novel in a telling moment that links the thematics of the story to the queer subtext of the novel in surprising but powerful ways. For now, though, we should consider the story in isolation, as its own piece in the larger puzzle. In the story, Faulkner articulates a clear homosexual desire, but he simultaneously quarantines that desire away from the developing landscape of Yoknapatwpha County. The homosexuality in the story happens in Europe. Bayard and Bland make sure it stays there even though Monaghan will return home after the war and reappear in Bayard's story right as Bayard prepares for his violent death as a test pilot. Whenever Faulkner did write the story, its connections to a letter from 1918 and a novel published in 1928 thoroughly demonstrate that, in a Faulknerian universe, the past is not dead; it is not even past. The trauma of the war that Faulkner witnessed in New Haven informs his novel about Bayard, whose history he expands in a story set just prior to Bayard's return home.

The genealogy of the letter, story, and novel proves illusive, however, though they do not

inform each other in an isolated triangle. Other influences surface in the story and novel. In his essay “Faulkner’s Crying Game,” John Duvall describes the scene that fractures the heterosexual civilities of Faulkner’s World War I fiction with an allusion to Faulkner’s own queerly loaded reading of Conrad Aiken’s poetry to Ben Wasson on the Ole Miss campus. Duvall relates this queer recitation to “Ad Astra.” He describes how Monaghan, an American, has downed a German pilot and taken him prisoner. Monaghan then proceeds to “violate protocol by bringing his prisoner, who has a bad head wound, into the cafe where his comrades are ‘celebrating’ the end of the war” (56). Monaghan’s intention is to get the man very drunk and “to take him home with me” (CS 412). Bland asks what Monaghan wants with the man, to which Monaghan responds that “he belongs to me” (412). Then Bland asks the German if he wants to go to America with Monaghan. Though he has a wife and child in Germany, he responds that yes, he would like that very much. His head wound has apparently made him forget about his previous heterosexual life, much as Donald Mahon’s head wound made him forget himself (and the psychiatric patient in Cather’s *One of Ours* also forgot himself as well). Needless to say, the French crowd in the cafe collectively responds with “shocked and outraged faces” (CS 412) because, as Duvall argues,

Monaghan is not trying to make a *man* out of the German. Like Billy’s reading poetry to Ben, something seems askew here that, if this were between a man and woman, the reader, like the Ole Miss students, would process as part of the natural and normal. That is, had Monaghan brought in a French woman, tried to get her drunk, and promised her a trip to America, who would think twice? The war’s over; boys will be boys. But what happens in the cafe is a seduction that exceeds the boundaries of this homosocial world, and it is precisely that the war is

over that leads to the homoerotic subtext of this scene. (57)

The premise of Duvall's essay is that in war a man's masculinity is measured by his ability to penetrate the bodies of other men with bullets. After a war, that very penetrative act takes on less glorious connotations: (sexual) penetration as the loss of masculinity. The dichotomy between penetrating with bullets and penetrating with a penis that Duvall constructs is somewhat inelegant but nonetheless metaphorically accurate. Marilee Lindemann's understanding of the larger context of battle and its Janus-faced creation of both an all male (gay) space and a space in which to measure irreproachable masculinity offers a more nuanced version of the abrupt distinction Duvall isolates in the imagery of Faulkner's short story. Duvall echoes her assessment of war in identifying the homosexual subtext of the scene, even to the extent that he recognizes the source of homophobia in the story in the reaction of an affronted society, not in Faulkner's own fraught masculinity.

"Ad Astra," does not have the hate crime ending of "Jealousy," but the characters do attempt to eradicate Monaghan's blatant challenge to the reestablishment of post-war heterosexuality. Bland, Bayard, and the other pilots take the German soldier to a whorehouse where the masculinity established in war can be reestablished in the performance of hyper-masculine heterosexuality. Unfortunately, Monaghan's impulses cannot be so easily removed. In particular, Bayard will find himself touched by Monaghan's queer disease when he finally returns home without his brother John. He watched John be shot down by German planes, their bullets becoming the penises penetrating him of Duvall's reading. Monaghan's German lover only adds to Bayard's notion that Germans want to emasculate/kill American men with their homosexuality. The horror of what he witnessed haunts Bayard, primarily with the impression that he, too, as a pilot may suffer from the same emasculation represented by John's death and

Monaghan's homosexual impulses. When he returns home, Bayard will act out his aggression and outrage. He will despise the rigid confines of home. He will dream of his brother. He will escape home finally, but only to die. His fate is hardly surprising and has been foretold in "Ad Astra." When Bland at one point asks another soldier, "And what will you do now?," since the war is over, the soldier responds "What will any of us do? All this generation which fought in the war are dead tonight. But we do not know it yet" (420, 21).¹² Faulkner bore out this idea in *Soldiers' Pay*. In his subsequent World War I fiction, he simply rephrased it. "Death" is the loss the soldiers suffer of their heterosexual masculinity. If they die in war, soldiers are lucky, for if they return queerly wounded, they face the long, drawn out "death" of failing to find their way back into the heterosexual order of a home that no longer has a place for them.

Faulkner could never escape home, though, and his fiction eventually found itself firmly rooted in those square streets and that small town of his ancestors. In *Flags in the Dust*, he turns his creative attention to a fictional county in North Mississippi that he names Yocona. He transfers the legend of the Old Colonel from Ripley to Jefferson and places his monument high in a new cemetery, and he makes the ~~Oxford~~ Jefferson Depot the central site of the Sartoris family's lore and heritage. Young Bayard, however, will not return triumphantly from the war. As Faulkner faked his return in RAF drag and with pomp, Bayard--actually a veteran--sneaks off the opposite side of the train from the platform and disappears almost unnoticed. Faking a war wound, Faulkner wanted the glory he was not rightly due when he returned home. Bayard shuns the glory he has earned by fighting in dangerous air combat, largely because what he actually witnessed--his brother's death--has so shadowed his impressions of war that he does not feel heroic. Though ostensibly different, these two homecomings, the actual and the apocryphal, are merely inverted versions of each other. To depict the returning veteran in such a familiar setting

and with such heavily--if apocryphally--autobiographical overtones did cause Faulkner pause. Bayard not only marries Narcissa after the war. We also learn that he was married before he left for the war and fathered a son, though his first wife, Caroline White Sartoris, and that son died less than a month before the war ended. Cordoning off Bayard's war experience from his pursuits of heterosexual marriages both draws attention to the queer space of the war that falls between those two marital bookends and mitigates the homosexuality inherent in narratives of the returning soldier by institutionalizing his sexuality as formed and set *before* his departure and *after* his return. If Bayard is an apocryphal version of Faulkner, then Faulkner does not want to cast him into his hometown with too much queer energy. This impulse does not mean that there is no queer energy surrounding Bayard, but only that it is cordoned off--quarantined from the rest of the town--or is at least meant to be.

That quarantine is not entirely successful. The details of Bayard's heterosexual life always carry some hint of other subcutaneous desires. When he returns home, we find him on his first night back, "lying naked between the sheets" and "wak[ing] himself with his own groaning" (45-46). His nightmare begins with him thinking about his wife and their last night together before the war and her death; but that thought can last only so long until his dead twin brother John overshadows her, haunting him and causing his groaning. Later, when Bayard finally courts Narcissa, he does so only after she watches "the long shape of him [lying] stiffly in its cast beneath the sheets," and he wakes up from his nightmares and "beg[ins] talking of his dead brother, without preamble, brutally" (257). The dead brother's presence is necessary to mediate the heterosexual courtship Bayard finally pursues with Narcissa. Aunt Jenny has worked to arrange Bayard and Narcissa's eventual marriage, but Narcissa can only sit by Bayard's bed and wait for him to accept her as the object of his desires by transferring the nightmares of his former

life onto her and the promise of new life she represents (she will, in fact, bear his child). Narcissa must understand John's death in order for her courtship with Bayard to begin. Only after he has spoken to her plainly and "brutally" about John will he court and marry her.

That Faulkner chose to make Bayard's twin brother John the object of his repressed homosexual desire also mitigates the articulation of that desire by binding it up with familial love and "the young masculine violence of their twinship" (45) that connects them as brothers, not lovers, except that the underlying "twinship" also mirrors a tradition of homosexual representation in the figure of Narcissus.¹³ Faulkner's naming the female suitor meant to replace John Narcissa draws in stark relief the underlying homoeroticism of John and Bayard's relationship. John functions as a ghost-like figure whose image, and particularly whose "death," haunts Bayard much as the leg-less soldier in "The Leg" is haunted by his lost companion while he pursues his own courtship. Bayard, though, bears no outward wounds. Unlike Donald Mahon's and Elmer Hodge's, Bayard's trauma is entirely psychological, though he does succeed in seriously harming himself by attempting to ride a wild horse out of town only to be knocked off of it by a tree. He is literally in a cast when he wakes up to tell Narcissa about his brother. Bayard has his own outward wounds when he begins to court Narcissa, and he must explain why they are so emblematic and significant.

Aunt Jenny is not unaware of the undercurrent of Bayard's devotion. She explains to Narcissa that Bayard "never cared a snap of his fingers about anybody in his life except Johnny" (52). This explanation necessitates her later realization that "[h]e needs a wife" to help him relieve the energies coursing through him and prompting what for all practical purposes seems to be his death-wish (212). Notably, Aunt Jenny chooses a woman named Narcissa to fill in for the absence of John. As Bayard sees himself reflected in John, perhaps he will see something of

himself reflected in her as well, only this obsession with his reflection will hopefully be free of the homoeroticism that brought the original Narcissus to his doom. Aunt Jenny unwittingly misinterprets the story of Narcissus, though. Narcissus has a female enamored of him, the nymph Echo, herself a kind of reflection of her beloved but of a different type from the one that Narcissus fixates on. She is a voice, he an image; she is a woman, he a man. Narcissus does not return Echo's attentions. Her voice echoes futilely through the cave as she mourns her unrequited love; furthermore, she only echoes itself, much as Narcissus only loves his own image.¹⁴

Conversely, Narcissa does make progress with Bayard, even marrying him and having a son by him whom she wisely names Benbow Sartoris rather than naming him after Bayard. Narcissa's success effectively allows for a reflection after the war of the image of Bayard from before it, with a wife and son. The reflection is inferior to the original, though, and only a fetish object for the town, and specifically for Aunt Jenny, to allow them to believe that proper order has been maintained even after Bayard abandons his wife to pursue his violent self-destruction. Bayard is not cured by Narcissa's attentions or by reproducing his previous heterosexual life. His memories of John overwhelm him, and he never sees his son but lights out for new territory before his birth. Narcissa is a reflection, but the wrong reflection, though unlike Echo, she saves herself if not Bayard.

Bayard can never find peace in Jefferson, but does find peace in the surrounding Yocona County right before he leaves it. He finds peace, at least briefly, with the MacCallum's, poor white hill country people living near what Faulkner will soon transform into Frenchman's Bend. The father there shares his name with Aunt Jenny, or Virginia Du Pre. He is Virginius MacCallum. If Miss Jenny is the shrewd matchmaker of Jefferson, Virginius is the detached patriarch of Yocona County, reflections of each other as well, though inverted versions each with

his/her own distinctly inverted sense of the proper social order. Virginius works to comfort Bayard in a rural pastoral setting, a space Faulkner eulogizes as lost in the mad modernization of the world throughout his fiction. Virginius allows Bayard to stay at his home and room with his own youngest son, Buddy, himself a returned veteran from the war and younger than Bayard. Buddy and Bayard share a room where, as they prepare for bed, Bayard watches “Buddy undress in the lamplit chill” (340). The two soldiers talk easily and openly, even about John. Less troubled than Bayard by his war experiences, Buddy eventually “ceased talking and presently he sighed again, emptying his body for sleep” (342). He will not be the only returning soldier in Faulkner’s canon who prepares for sleep this way; a neighbor in nearby Frenchman’s Bend will also perform the same emptying in *As I Lay Dying*. Bayard stays with Buddy and the MacCallums as long as he possibly can. Though this interlude in the novel proves brief, especially in relation to the focus Faulkner gives to Bayard and Narcissa, what it lacks in development it makes up for in silence, peace, and understanding. At least for the few weeks he is there, Bayard ceases to pursue his dangerous exploits and calmly participates in the life of the MacCallum family, even though he has no blood ties to them and never marries into it. His primary relationship there is with Buddy. His fellow soldier provides Bayard with his much sought-after peace. Virginius provides Bayard what Virginia cannot. Her machinations to get Bayard a wife fail to comfort him. Virginius’ allowing Bayard to stay with his son offers Bayard the last peace he will ever know.

Bayard cannot ultimately maintain the peace that he finds with the MacCallums, however, or at least he feels that he has worn out his welcome. Furthermore, the MacCallums at least pretend that they have not heard the news from town about old Bayard’s death. They do not partake of town affairs, and as long as their home remains free of word from town, Bayard feels

safe there. Unfortunately, at all moments the threat of this infiltrating knowledge shadows Bayard's stay. He knows that eventually the MacCallums will go to town and return informed about his transgression. His incessant need to speed around county roads in his car brought about his grandfather's death from a heart attack when Bayard momentarily lost control of the car and it spun off into the unregulated freedom of unbridled momentum and briefly left the road. The symbolism of the accident that cost old Bayard his life is rife for a metaphoric reading in relation to Faulkner's young life. Faulkner was a young man given, metaphorically, to cutting across back alleys and yards and not respecting the well-laid plan his forefathers laid for him in Oxford. Bayard kills his grandfather when his reckless pursuit of speed causes him to lose control and leave the defined path of the road. Old Bayard's death usurps all the well-laid marriage arrangements and future life young Bayard has tacitly made with Narcissa, under Aunt Jenny's direction. Bayard flees to the MacCallums. He eventually leaves Yocona County. Narcissa may bear his son, but this life is not his life, this world his world. He runs away.

Bayard never sees his son. Simon, the Sartoris' black retainer, best sums up Bayard's problem: "wid all dese foreign wars en sich de young folks is growed away fum de correck behavior; dey dont know how ter conduct deyselves in de gent'mun way" (112). Though Simon's character and diction throughout the novel are Faulkner's nod to the incoherent *non-sense* of minstrelsy, a product of the banal racism that plagues the novel, his commentary at this moment proves an astute diagnosis.¹⁵ Something has happened to Bayard abroad. When he returns, he at best only suffers through the town, primarily driving his new car around its compact streets, the "[t]own among its trees, its shady streets like green tunnels along which tight lives accomplished their peaceful tragedies" (117). Bayard can barely make the city limit before he wants to slam down the gas pedal and high-tail the backroads of the county, desperate to escape the conformity

and expectation of the tunnels and peaceful tragedies of the well-laid grid pattern of the town. He can barely suppress his contempt at having to stay in the defined patterns of the streets. The novel is something of a captivity narrative with Bayard the captive of the town in which he finds himself a prisoner of expectations which his war experience can no longer allow him to maintain. Bayard does not escape tragedy, but he certainly escapes a peaceful one.

After Bayard flees Jefferson and Yocona County, Faulkner includes a telling scene in a bar in Chicago just before Bayard agrees to test pilot the experimental aircraft in which he will die. In the scene, Bayard

was sitting among saxophones and painted ladies and middle aged husbands at a table littered with soiled glasses and stained with cigarette ash and spilt liquor, accompanied by a girl and two men. One of the men wore whipcord, with an army pilot's wings on his breast. (384)

This "aviator," as he is described throughout the rest of the scene, is Monaghan, the same man who in "Ad Astra" wanted to bring a German soldier home with him. The other man is an older, "shabby" man who is explaining to Bayard the test aircraft that he wants Bayard to fly. The girl is Bayard's companion, but how long she has been with Bayard remains unspecified. She confesses to Monaghan on the dance floor that she is scared of Bayard and has witnessed him assault a police officer. She worries he has no limitations and could harm her while he is trying to harm himself. She begs Monaghan to help her escape.

The scene in the Chicago bar mirrors much of the scene from the French cafe in "Ad Astra," though with several significant revisions that alter its quality. The cafe has become a bar, for starters. The roaring 'Twenties appear in full swing in Chicago, whereas in France the cafe is a ruin surrounded by the destruction of the war. Monaghan's male German has become Bayard's

girl. The German's seeming willingness to follow Monaghan to America, however, has transformed into the girl's fear of staying with Bayard. She prefers Monaghan instead. Bayard's relationship with the girl emulates the trip at the end of "Ad Astra" to the whorehouse. Bayard has a wife, but this girl allows him to act out a form of violent hyper-masculinity that he could not pursue in the confines of marriage. The girl knows something is amiss in Bayard's hyper-masculine heterosexual courtship of her. In fact, he is not courting *her*. He is courting death and taking her with him. She recognizes that his desires are far beyond the pale of mere heterosexuality. Significantly, she chooses Monaghan, wearing his aviator's wings, to save her. Monaghan teases her about her fears at first, but only until he can confide in her that Bayard is dangerous and her desire to leave him could set him off. Monaghan is scared of Bayard. The girl does not court Monaghan as an alternative lover to Bayard. She only wants his help.

In "Ad Astra," Monaghan needed lessons in how properly to perform his heterosexual masculinity. He seems not have have learned his lesson, but he does seem to have developed a healthy fear of overtly challenging the hyper-masculine displays of his fellow pilots. Just as Monaghan was willing to bring his German soldier into the French cafe in the first place, he is far more well-adjusted to his American scene once he returns home than Bayard. The homophobic reaction Monaghan's fellow pilots in "Ad Astra," including Bayard, display in regards to his open homosexuality reappears in *Flags in the Dust* as Bayard's violent death-drive, as if he is trying to kill part of himself and is completely incapable of re-assimilating into the expectations of home. The girl finally breaks away from Bayard by staying seated when Bayard gets up to leave the bar. Monaghan never actually agrees to help her, but instead, when Bayard realizes that the girl is staying behind, Monaghan made of point of being "discreetly interested in the bottom of his glass" (388) rather than making eye contact with him.

Bayard knows that Monaghan has no intention of stealing the girl from him. Monaghan's sexual preference is not for women. The girl is staying to get away from Bayard. Monaghan and Bayard do not need to make eye contact to understand the transaction occurring between them. The girl is abandoning Bayard's violent heterosexuality for Monaghan's calm homosexuality. Bayard was one of several pilots who denied Monaghan his companion in the French cafe by employing a forceful camaraderie to remind Monaghan of his endangered masculinity and the expectations of heterosexuality. Monaghan in turn complies with the girl to deny Bayard the continued erroneous pursuit of his violent exploits under the guise of a heterosexual relationship, though Monaghan prefers a non-confrontational resolution to an enactment of hyper-masculine violence. For Monaghan, the war has ended. Bayard cannot rest, however, until he is dead. Unlike Monaghan, he cannot accept that the war has damaged his proper heterosexuality by exposing him to its queer disease of homosexuality. As John Duvall explains of Bayard, he panics in the face of this homosexuality. Of course, in *Epistemology of the Closet*, Sedgwick explains that the "homosexual panic" defense Duvall cites in his study is predicated on the notion that there are "latent homosexuals" whose fraught relationship with their own masculinity engenders their panic. "Gay panic" assumes that the person panicking is attempting to suppress his own homosexual desires through a violent display of his hyper-masculinity. Thankfully, Bayard decides not to assault Monaghan but instead leaves the bar with the shabby man who wants him to test pilot his new airplane.¹⁶ He will no longer fight his impulses. He will simply and finally "die." The metaphor of "death" from *Soldiers' Pay* holds in this final scene of *Flags*. "Death" and "dying" are synonymous with the loss of proper heterosexuality that a soldier suffers in the war. He has gone to war and has "died." Bayard's death-drive is merely his performance of what he assumes is already accomplished. He is dead already, only he certainly

knows it. When he finally leaves Monaghan in the bar in Chicago without challenging him, he is accepting that his masculinity has been “lost.” He is effectively accepting that heterosexuality is no longer for him. He certainly does not embrace homosexuality, but he accepts it. Immediately thereafter, he dies.

In “Ad Astra,” Faulkner articulated the trauma of the queer soldier by placing Monaghan and Bayard into a dichotomy of homosexual identity: the one who has accepted his desires versus the one who cannot. The story, though, keeps Monaghan’s explicit homosexuality safely in Europe. Bayard returns home after the war and attempts to suppress his latent homosexual desires by performing a proper heterosexual role. That performance proves too difficult to continue, however, and Bayard finds himself frustrated and driven to acts of extreme violence in a death-drive for peace and an end to his increasingly uncontrollable impulses. The heterosexual at home and the *queer* abroad can only maintain at best a tacit separation. When Bayard leaves Yocona County, he even encounters the very person who most embodies his fraught sexuality from abroad: Monaghan, the pilot who wanted to bring his German lover home with him. The queer disease of war cannot be cured by continuing a hollow performance of heterosexuality that attempts to suppress the new knowledge and experiences gained away from home--in the war in Europe for Faulkner’s fictional soldiers, in New York and New Orleans for Faulkner himself. As Faulkner began writing *Flags in the Dust*, a novel in which he turned his attention to a county that closely resembled his own home town, he also returned to that town and began his courtship of Estelle that would culminate in their marriage in 1929. In *Flags*, Faulkner places the conflict of home/away and hetero/homosexual into an apocryphal geographic space but one with clear and significant autobiographical elements. Bayard will have his final encounter with homosexuality in Chicago, however, not in Jefferson. In Jefferson, Narcissa will raise Benbow

Sartoris. Bayard's body will find a final resting place in the the family plot in the cemetery, his life abroad forgotten, his legacy entombed beside his first wife and child, but also not too far from the remains of his brother.

Location was not the only variable in Faulkner's experiments, though. His sense of narrative perspective evolved as well through his World War I narratives. From his failed *bildungsroman* about Elmer Hodge, Faulkner crafted narratives of the returning soldier that moved away from the static presentation of Donald Mahon to more complex psychological portraits of soldiers still participating in society, though often that participation reads like a version of shell shock not caused by actual shelling but by attempting to re-submerge oneself in one's home after having experienced the world outside of small-town Georgia, or Yocona County, or Oxford. In *The Sound and the Fury*, the novel he wrote immediately after *Flags*, Faulkner would experiment with internal monologues, with three first-person narrators each with approximately ninety pages of narration followed by an omniscient third-person narrator for the fourth part of the novel. Though not a war narrative, *The Sound and the Fury* does shed light on the evolution of Faulkner's experimental style and would prefigure his next war novel, *As I Lay Dying*, and its formal arrangement. Using fifteen narrators and their shorter monologues, Faulkner would find a way both to explore the complex psychology of the returned soldier from his point of view and to present the deeply woven complexity of the reactions of others to him.

So finally we arrive at the last great act of Faulkner's queer drama that began in 1918. In 1927, he returned to Oxford. In 1929, he married Estelle and began to pursue a life much more closely related to the one he diverged from in 1918 to go fight his war. He simultaneously turned his creative attention to Yocona county, though he renamed it for the first time as Yoknapatwapha in the wake of his marriage. In the first novel he wrote after his marriage, he

would bring his soldier home and wind the clock forward. Darl has not just returned home in *As I Lay Dying*; he has been home nearly ten years. Faulkner would also employ a narrative technique that takes us to the heart of Darl's character. The detail that matters most, however, is the one word Faulkner relegated to Darl and Darl alone: queer.

CHAPTER 6: GAY DARL

Darl Bundren is called “queer” five times in *As I Lay Dying*: twice by Cora, twice by Tull, and once by Cash. Darl uses the word himself once to describe Cash in a kind of projection when he remembers Cash giving Jewel a “queer look” as Jewel was sneaking out at night to earn money to buy a horse. This exception to the rule that Darl, and only Darl, is “queer” is the exception that proves it. Otherwise, the word charts in miniature the movement in the novel: as the family moves away from their farm on their journey, Darl becomes increasingly “queer.” The first to comment on this specifically are the Bundrens’ neighbors as they report on the general perception of Darl in the community and eventually concede their own feelings toward him as he leaves their sphere. Cash, Darl’s brother, uses the word only in the final pages of the novel, in town, when he too sees how his brother, part of the family on the farm, is queer in the city. Thus Cash determines, “This world is not his world, this life his life,” a conclusion he reaches in regard to Darl in the final sentence of the penultimate paragraph of the last section of the novel, just before Cash introduces the new Mrs. Bundren (261). The word appears only these six times.

At the end of the novel, Darl seems to have gone insane and is last heard from while he is riding a train South to Jackson to the asylum. Only at this late stage of the novel does Darl allude to “the little spy-glass he got in France at the war” (254). This minor detail does much to explain what might be ailing Darl. He is a shell-shocked soldier who has returned from the trenches in France. He is “queer,” an adjective which the *Oxford English Dictionary* defines as “[s]trange,

odd, peculiar, eccentric. Also: of questionable character; suspicious, dubious,” and even supplies as an example for this definition of the word:

1930 W. Faulkner *As I Lay Dying* xxxi. 81 He don't say nothing; just looks at me with them queer eyes of hisn that makes folks talk.

The example is taken from one of Tull's narrative sections (125). Certainly, this definition of *queer* applies to Darl and creates meaning in the novel. The *OED* is incomplete, however, in consideration of the definition of *queer* in the context of *As I Lay Dying*. Darl is a “wounded” veteran of World War I, his wound a mental rather than a physical scar. In a larger Faulknerian context, his queerness is not a generic peculiarity. Darl continues a tradition of wounded soldiers beginning with Donald Mahon and continuing in Faulkner's World War I narratives prior to his marriage. These queer soldiers also belong to a specific cultural moment in the history of *queer*. In its late-1920s cultural context, *queer* also meant homosexual, a definition it maintains to this day. Faulkner's life experiences up to his writing the novel would have given him ample actual exposure to queer/homosexual men and firmly establish his capacity to use the word with a full awareness of its homosexual implications.

The action in *As I Lay Dying* takes place contemporary to Faulkner's composing it. Darl has been home from the war for nearly eleven years when his mother dies. Her death forces him into a confrontation with his “wounds” that his isolated life on the family farm had precluded in the intervening years since he returned from the war. Addie's death prompts the family to “get up and move then,” as Addie herself puts it (35), and casts each member of the family, with his and her “secret and selfish life” out into the open world beyond the limited, unchanging life of the farm (170).¹ Once the family leaves the farm, each member transforms his/her secret, selfish desires into the one unified goal of getting her buried, which in turn leads Anse to obtaining a

new wife whose presence functions as the “shape to fill [the] lack” caused by Addie’s death (172). Darl seems to be the exception to this transformation, however, and stands out for trying to stop the journey and force the family back to the farm without seeing Addie to her grave nor enabling Anse to find a new wife to replace her. He stands in the way of the family’s completing its singular task of burying Addie. In short, Addie’s death is the catalyst; Darl’s queerness provides the tension; the family journeys to Jefferson; and the novel follows this journey to its conclusion with the burial of Addie, the remarriage of Anse and the removal of Darl, whose presence represents the *queer* tension trying to stop the journey from progressing forward, most dramatically by setting Gillespie’s barn on fire.

Eleven years after the war, a marriage forces out the queer tension and so allows the journey to end. One might be forgiven for feeling that the novel bears relevance to Faulkner’s actual life, especially in relation to the apocryphal gay identity he fashioned throughout the 1920s. Though certainly long after the word, as an general adjective, had begun to circulate in English, this appearance of *queer* occurred sixteen years after *queer* began to signify homosexuality as well. The *OED* dates *queer* as a noun to identify a homosexual as early as 1914 and cites adjectival uses of the word (“Of a person: homosexual”) also as early as 1914 in relation to “‘queer’ people [. . .] who sometimes spent hundreds of dollars on silk gowns, hosiery, etc. At these ‘drags’ the ‘queer’ people have a good time.” A 1915 example of the word as an adjective refers to “[a]n immense reunion of art students, painters, and queer people,” also in reference to “homosexual” people. These citations of *queer* are apropos of the Conrad Aiken poetry Faulkner read aloud to Ben Wasson in 1919. Furthermore, as Dan Pigg has noted in his explication of Wilfred Owen’s poem “Disabled,” as early as 1922 the term was being used in “government-authored documents” to refer to a specific childhood pathology recognizable in

young boys who, untreated, might grow up as homosexuals.² These examples establish a history of the word as signifying homosexuality well in advance of Faulkner's writing *As I Lay Dying* in 1930, the first novel he wrote after his marriage to Estelle.

I will argue in this chapter for a simple but profound revision of our understanding of Faulkner's shortest novel. While understanding Darl as "peculiar" or "suspicious" allows a reader to create meaning in the novel--which is no small feat in this particular novel--such a reading does not take into account the cultural specificity of *queer* and so loses a critical insight into Darl's motivations. Because the word is used so specifically and so intentionally to refer to Darl, who proves to be the most significant narrator of the novel with by far the greatest number of narrative sections and often the most important information about events, a revision of our understanding of his queerness greatly shifts the traditional notion of how the novel is structured and what we should find significant in its conclusion. In this chapter, I will read Darl as queer, but in this case meaning "homosexual." First, I will explore the way previous critics have "queered" Darl out of their readings for his seemingly destructive and counter-productive actions and knowledge. Then, I will explore how the other characters in the novel construct Darl's queerness and how Darl attempts to form bonds during the journey through his own queer erotics, a concept I will root in historical and theoretical precedent. His motivations emanate from the same desires (or erotics) that propel his family, only his erotics are queer in relation to theirs. Finally, I will consider the implications of Darl's character in Faulkner's greater body of work and in relation to his life at the critical juncture of his marriage. Darl's fate apocryphizes a radical psychic shift in Faulkner's perspective, though it was no easy shift for him to make. In the wake of his marriage, Faulkner's apocryphization of his queer life takes a savage turn. He removes the homosexual from the narrative, but at a great cost and with no assurances that the

path of proper heterosexual expectations will lead inevitably to good and properly reproductive heterosexual families.

Meaning, Form, and Misconstruing Darl

Undergirding basically every reading of *As I Lay Dying* are two often unstated assumptions about its structure: first, that the form of the novel is intricately bound to the journey at the core of its action and, second, that the plot of the novel is fundamentally a marriage plot. As to the former, the novel is composed of fifty-nine interior monologues, told by fifteen different narrators, which span nine days. Told through the private thoughts of private minds, these distinct and discreet monologues create the unified whole of the journey to Jefferson to bury Addie Bundren. Darl narrates nineteen of these narrative sections, including the first. Darl is the second oldest of the five Bundren children, roughly thirty years old, and for much of the novel his is the central voice ordering the chaos of the other narrators by anchoring them to a steady, consistent depiction of the action as it unfolds, including his narration of Addie's death, though he is not present to witness it. The last narrator is Cash, the oldest, who has five narrative sections, including one of the most impressionistic, and who is responsible for explaining what happens to Darl and introducing the new Mrs. Bundren. Vardaman, the youngest, narrates ten sections, second only to Darl, though he is only between six and eight years old and can barely make sense of his feelings or articulate his grief. He famously declares, "My mother is a fish" (84), but he also quite cogently remarks that "*Jackson is further away than crazy*" when Darl is taken off to the asylum (252). Indeed, to understand Darl and to understand the novel, we have to venture "further away than crazy" in our assumptions about the underlying cause of his

surprisingly erratic behavior as the family reaches Jefferson. Other narrators include Dewey Dell, Jewel, and Anse, the surviving Bundrens, and Addie, who narrates her one section some one-hundred pages after she dies. An assorted cast of neighbors (including Cora, Tull, and Dr. Peabody) interject their voices to flesh out other details of the rest of the journey. These tangential characters generally narrate sections that coincide with their encountering the Bundrens as the Bundrens move from their farm across the countryside and into Jefferson.

Over the course of the actual journey, each of the Bundrens, with the supposed exception of Darl, undergoes a trial by fire and flood that purges him/her of his/her individual motives for making the journey and supplants them with the collective goal of burying their mother and re-establishing the lost structure of the family caused by her death. Cash breaks his leg and loses his precious tools; Dewey Dell sacrifices her abortion money; Jewel gives up his horse and suffers severe burns in Gillespie's barn; Vardaman does not get his train set. The whole family does get a gramophone and a bushel of bananas--a marriage plot is fundamentally comic, and in this case, certainly provides a good laugh. Anse gets his new teeth and also gets a new wife. Darl gets sent away to an asylum in Jackson after he tries to stop the journey by burning down Gillespie's barn with Addie's coffin in it. For this destructive (and expensive) act, his family turns him over as crazy to the authorities. His final narrative section seems to prove his insanity, but Cash actually admits that the family only turned him over to avoid paying for Gillespie's barn, whether or not he is actually crazy. If Darl is crazy, they are not culpable for the barn and cannot be made to pay for it. The Bundrens cannot sacrifice their precious resources to restore Gillespie's barn. All their resources must come together in the pursuit of burying Addie, even to the extent of using Dewey Dell's abortion money and trading Jewel's horses as the only commodities with which they can barter. They are a family of poor whites. Darl hinders their progress and might even prevent their

returning home if Gillispie were to file charges to sue them to replace his barn. Darl must be cast off by the family to bring about fruition to their journey. Once the old Mrs. Bundren is buried, Cash introduces a new one. Darl is gone. The family can return home. All is well.

Structurally speaking, Darl represents the tension that must be resolved in order for the conclusion of the novel to take place--or, more formally, for the disparate voices of the novel to coalesce into a unified plot. As the rest of the family make sacrifices, Darl fails to sacrifice his desire, which seems to be to end the journey that is desecrating his mother's remains. This desire is at such odds with the desire of his family that it cannot be reconciled to it. Since his desire cannot be sublimated into the family's greater good, he must be removed. I will argue later that there is more to his desire than simple opposition and that he does try to contribute to the family's goals. His contributions go unnoticed, however, because, *a priori* to his efforts, he has already been labeled queer. That label precludes any recognition of his efforts because it precludes any discursive space in which to articulate his desire as anything other than "queer," as if he is trapped in a tautology that has doomed him before the journey even begins. In a way, he is the price the family will pay for their ultimate goal. They need him to be against them to justify that price. They queer him to justify their payment of his physical presence for their goals, but they can queer him so easily because he is already queer and has been since he returned from France and the war.

If Darl is insane, we cannot trust any of his motives or any of his information. That we do not discover his "insanity" until his nineteenth narrative section should trouble any reader, but our understanding of the plot of the novel is so dependent upon so much of his earlier information that rarely do we discount everything he has said. Despite his clear unreliability, we still think that we know how Addie died. We still think that we understand the basic family

structure. We still trust that the other Bundrens, in their self-serving, insular ruminations, reveal something about how “family,” love, or sacrifice works, though without the third of the novel Darl narrates, we would have very little framework on which to place Anse’s complaining, Jewel’s rage, Cash’s nearly autistic precision (though his final narrative sections prove to be as surprisingly straightforward as Darl’s final section proves to be surprisingly inchoate), Dewey Dell’s desperation, or Vardaman’s impressionism. That Darl is the family’s ultimate sacrifice never registers as significantly as Jewel’s giving up his horse, Dewey Dell’s her money, Cash’s his tools, or Vardaman’s his train set. Readers find themselves willing to sacrifice Darl and his contributions to the journey in order to make the novel unified and restore familial order, though without Darl the novel would be effectively incoherent. As with “A Rose for Emily,” we find ourselves unwittingly participating in the communal opinion that something is not right about Darl. With the journey complete, he must go, though we could not have gotten rid of him any sooner (he even helps dig Addie’s grave before the agents take him away). As with Faulkner’s prior World War I fiction, we find a community unable to place Darl’s queerness into its order. His queerness proves too destructive to the unified ending to which the novel has progressed. The novel resolves itself by ending in a marriage, thus repudiating any queer elements that might taint it and threaten its internal coherence.

If we read Darl’s queerness as homosexuality, the problem he poses in the novel crystalizes: could a gay character desire the unity implicit in a marriage plot? The answer is a resounding *No!* for Faulkner and for the critics who first tried to explicate his fiction. Queerness stands in opposition to marriage. Apocryphal Jefferson (and actual Oxford) is not big enough for both, at least not for Faulkner as he left the gay space of New Orleans where he could imagine that a same-sex partnership might prove more ideal than in an isolated environment and returned

to his small hometown to face the expectations of marriage to his long-lost promised bride. In this Faulknerian universe, there is marriage and there is queerness, two paths that are mutually exclusive in the Victorian order of actual Oxford and apocryphal Jefferson, county seat of Yoknapatawpha, a name which only appears for the first time in *As I Lay Dying*, despite its being the fourth novel set there. For eleven years, Faulkner had followed the queer path, but in 1929 he married Estelle. In his fiction, he apocryphized the collision of two competing narratives of himself in one word deftly repeated six times in one novel in relation to one character. From his postage stamp of native soil, he removed the competing homosexual self in a scene of stark violence and in such a way as to make it seem as if that self never really controlled the narrative at all.

Faulkner depicted that apocryphal self, however, with a great deal of empathy, hard-won after eleven years of performance. Though he wanted to (perhaps even needed to) remove it from his life, Faulkner could not portray gay Darl as a outcast unworthy of empathy and disconnected from the verities of the human heart. Darl is a man in conflict with himself as much as he is in conflict with his family. He is as significant a main character as any Faulkner created. In his struggle and final removal, we see how very Faulknerian he is as he encounters the verities of his heart in conflict with the inviolable and invincible order of his home. Though Faulkner had his own deeply personal reasons for depicting and removing Darl as he did, critics have had a much more difficult time articulating Darl's presence in relation to the plot that centers around him. This difficulty is largely a result of their not seeing Darl's relation to Faulkner's own queer life in the 1920s but instead relying purely on a general sense of oddity or peculiarity to account for Darl. The critical rhetoric betrays itself, though, when critics attempt to understand Darl and explicate the unsettling vision the conclusion of the novel presents.

The problem of Darl troubles the heart of the long history of critical responses to *As I Lay Dying*, a problem that surfaces in the foundational work that established its critical significance and inaugurated its place in the Faulknerian canon. Irving Howe claims that the novel is “[a] story of a journey, an account of adventures on the road,” but that “the journey proves exceedingly curious and the adventures disconcert” (127). He calls Darl’s fate “excessive,” but he also admits that Darl “raises problems” because his madness “does not follow ‘inevitably’ from what has preceded it” (137-138). Howe solves the conundrum by declaring that “the book is a triumph of fraternal feeling, and because it is that, a triumph, as well, in the use of idiom” (141). Basically, Howe claims that the competing idioms (voices) of the novel eventually condense into a singular kind of familial unity--in this case among the Bundren brothers only.³ That the removal of Darl, a brother, could lead to any kind of *fraternal* feeling is somewhat disconcerting, but Darl’s prolific talking at least allows him to participate in the “triumph in the use of idiom,” even if his removal at the end of the novel is anything but fraternal, unless by fraternal Howe means for everyone except Darl.

Olga Vickery explores the implications of Addie’s separation of word and deed, a separation that Vickery claims “is dramatized in the journey to Jefferson” (55). Darl’s knowledge of events that have not been put into words, such as Jewel’s parentage and Dewey Dell’s pregnancy, makes him a threat to any reconciliation of word and deed the journey can accomplish for the Bundrens. She argues two conditions are necessary for the journey/novel to progress to its nicely unified conclusion: “with [Darl’s] departure and the burial of Addie’s corpse, the period of tension ends” (63). Melvin Backman similarly claims that “the backbone of the story is the journey” (53), which represents the family’s struggles and is set in motion by Addie’s death. He further claims of this family struggle that “[u]nderlying and penetrating

through their secret selves is the tension that divides the family” (58). This tension he epitomizes in the struggle between Darl and Jewel because Darl knows the secret of Jewel’s parentage. Thus to remove the tension, the family must remove Darl. Then the journey will be complete.

Michael Millgate buries his understanding of the novel as a journey below the surface of his criticism, but his default use of this structure emerges in two key places. First, while trying to debunk the idea that Faulkner wrote the novel based on anecdotal material he collected from the real Lafayette County, Millgate states in an appositive phrase that “the actual plot of the book” is “the story of the slow journeying with the decaying corpse” (111). Second, this understanding of plot-as-journey accounts for Millgate’s deductions about Darl’s devolution into madness, starting with his opening monologue, the first in the book, that creates the “initial impression of absolute rationality and clarity of vision which is progressively dissolved as the book proceeds” (105). The progress and procession to which Millgate alludes are delineated by the journey of Addie’s corpse. Cleanth Brooks also defaults to the notion of the journey and progression in his chapter in *The Yoknapatawpha Country* entitled “Odyssey of the Bundrens.” Though Brooks never directly states that the narrative is a journey, his chapter title alludes to Faulkner’s assertion that the title of the book derives from Agamemnon speaking in Hades in Homer’s epic poem about journeys and the passage of time (*AILD* 266, note 1.1). Brooks’ choice of title alludes to the connections he sees between the “heroic” tradition embodied by Odysseus and the journey of the Bundrens. Brooks does not explicitly state, however, that Odysseus’ epic twenty year “odyssey” is fundamentally a marriage plot in which suitors come to claim Penelope, who puts them off for twenty years until Odysseus returns and removes the tension of their presence by killing them. Odysseus then reclaims his marriage bed, a peculiar bed built into a tree which in the epic serves as the object his knowledge of which allows Penelope to recognize him through his disguise as a

simple country shepherd. Brooks' connection between these two works establishes that the marriage plots of both are a significant part of the "heroic" tradition that he finds embodied in them.

Brooks approaches Darl with a degree of skepticism about his being the "insane" Bundren and the rest sane. He goes so far as stating, "With regards to the burial journey, Darl, the lunatic, is indeed the only one of the three brothers who is thoroughly 'sane'" (145). By the end of the journey, however, Darl has failed to demonstrate a fundamental humanity despite his early sanity. Brooks claims that "Darl's truth is corrosive and antiheroic, and in its logic perhaps finally inhuman" (145). To call the logic of Darl's truth "finally inhuman" suggests that as the narrative progresses, whatever was once rational about Darl's character has undergone a fundamental change. Darl goes crazy and the other brothers, despite appearing crazy at first, are actually the more sane. The revelation of this "corrosive" truth about Darl bears itself out on the journey. Darl corrodes his own claims to "sanity" because he opposes the progression of the heroic journey that will lead to a new marriage and a reformation of the basic unit of the family. For the marriage to take place, and the tension in the novel to end, Darl must be removed. Then the odyssey of the Bundrens can be complete. Brooks seems inadvertently to suggest that the heterosexual expectations of the institution of marriage may be "insane," objectively speaking, but Darl's "sanity" that allows him to see the flaws in the institution and its expectations does not excuse his actions. To expose the "insanity" of a heterosexual order is "corrosive and antiheroic, and in its logic perhaps finally inhuman." Darl is insane for thinking that he can usurp the proper social order, whether or not that social order is illogical, at least objectively.

Though *As I Lay Dying* is one of Faulkner's most taught, most read, and most critically discussed novels, I highlight these five critical responses for two reasons. First, Howe, Vickery,

Backman, Millgate, and Brooks represent the giants of early Faulkner studies; and if their New Critical reading methodologies are outdated now, the work they did to create the basis for subsequent Faulkner studies cannot be over-estimated. Their close readings form the backbone that later, more nuanced theoretical and historical studies flesh out. Second, when we revise these critics, we do not supplant them. The oversights of their readings become the blind spots in our own, much as the reliance on an incomplete published biographical record of Faulkner compounds itself when it is reiterated to a fault in reference to his interactions with homosexuals and his own homosexual identity. When these critics fail to articulate the full implications of their critical perspectives, later critics who build on their early work exacerbate their elisions into readings that, if insightful, move further and further away from understanding what, precisely, is the matter with Darl. An excellent example of the long-term effects of this process of revision is John Limon's essay about the influences of World War I in the novel. According to his essay "Addie in No-Man's-Land," when Limon identifies the references to Darl's World War I experience to his students, he also dismisses them as red herrings that do not shed any light on the novel. He explains, "It is from Addie's autobiography that we learn almost everything we need to know to understand the Bundrens and the novel and the world they are in. From Darl's war experience, we surmise nothing" (45). Even if we "learn almost everything" from Addie, a suspect claim that implies we do not learn everything from her and begs the question of from whom do we learn what remains, Darl's war experience does force a profound revision of the third of the novel that he narrates and from which we learn more-or-less everything that Addie's section fails to clarify. This dismissal of Darl does, however, serve a purpose for Limon. His critical stance saves him from having to account for how corrosive, antiheroic, and inhuman Darl seems to be, and saves his reading from having to account for the copious narrative detail Darl

has provided throughout the novel. Such a critical move helps to shore up the communal (fraternal) feeling of the end of the novel and allows the journey to reach its promised end, whereas accounting for this queer soldier and the threat he poses to the unity of the newly (re)formed Bundren family proves too disconcerting and even corrosive to the truths on which the conclusion is based.

Another recent critic, Donald Kartiganer, borrows from the same critical tradition but makes explicit, even if only accidentally, the problem posed by Darl as a problem of sexual economy and ties that problem, and its resolution, to events from Faulkner's actual life.

Kartiganer connects the pressures Faulkner faced in his first few months of marriage with the structure and content of the novel he wrote in the wake of that marriage. Faulkner found himself needing a steady income and a real job to support his new family, so he took a job at the coal plant on the campus of the university. He walked there every evening to oversee the boilers, and by his own testimony from his later introduction to *Sanctuary*, he wrote *As I Lay Dying* in the early morning hours--when the boilers needed less attention--over the course of six weeks as one effort, start to finish, with very little revision. Though the job in the coal plant did not last long, it does represent one of the few moments in Faulkner's life when he did hold regular employment; especially in the shadow of his bohemian years in New Orleans and throughout the 1920s, such regimented work was in stark contrast to his (queer) pre-marriage life.

Connecting the circumstance of its writing to what Faulkner wrote, Kartiganer identifies the primary impulse in the novel as *Eros*, and the drive that drove Faulkner to write it as his erotic drive. This concept of erotics, borrowed directly from Freud's *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, refers to Faulkner's suppression of his multiples desires and his pursuit of pleasure into one central, heterosexual drive for union and familial life, even if that meant working hard in

a coal plant rather than devoting unstructured time to writing and extensive revision. Kartiganer even finds explicit reference to Freud's theory in Addie's cryptic statement from her father that "the reason for living was to get ready to stay dead a long time" (*AILD* 169), which does sound strikingly similar to Freud's aphorism, "*the aim of all life is death*" (*BPP* 32). Kartiganer argues that the Bundrens undergo the same fundamental process of transforming their individual desires into the singular drive, *Eros*, to bury Addie so that Anse can marry his new wife and (re)create the normative family structure in which erotic desire can find its highest fulfillment in the intimations of immortality that is licensed procreative sexual reproduction ("By It" 439). Kartiganer even identifies Anse as "'pure' *Eros*," and directly links his pursuits to Faulkner's marriage to Estelle. Of course, in this formulation, Kartiganer can only account for Darl as representative of *Thanatos*, the competing death drive:

Having nothing of *Eros*, Darl has no neurotic need to exploit his inherent masochism in aggressive pursuits. He functions out of a perfect detachment that is the source of his exactly objective vision that registers the world as it is, divested of desire. (439)

This accounting of Darl is not a compliment to his objectivity. Kartiganer removes Darl from any action in the plot because he lacks all desire, a lack that makes him "the supreme agent of violation in the novel. He invades the people around him, not for sex but for secrets, the private interior world, the residue of inanimacy that survives in life not as an intimation of immortality but of the death we all harbor, seek to protect and to delay" (439). Darl is the death to the Bundren's life, the *Thanatos* to their *Eros*, and so,

He is expelled in the name of erotic quests: the Bundrens' to complete their mission, however compromised by ulterior motives, to get to Jefferson, to get the

body into the ground, no matter its condition or scandalous treatment; Faulkner's to complete the novel, to build what Cash praises as a "tight chicken coop" rather than a court house, "shoddy" or "built well" [AILD 234], methodically pushing it out on swing-shift power-plant breaks, the novel of compromise itself compromised by the contract he and Estelle had entered into June 20, 1929. (442)

In short, Darl is death; he served in World War I; he is queer; he is expelled for his challenge to the family's erotics; and his expulsion emulates Faulkner's erotic impulses after his eleven queer years of journeying to the destination of his marriage to Estelle and the establishment of a respectable family. That journey, of course, included its own soldiering, if only in performance, and, as I argue, his own homosexuality, if only apocryphally. Homosexuality, and its repudiation, are at the heart of this understanding of Faulkner and his novel. Kartiganer's use of Freud incidentally lays bare what other critics have so assiduously avoided: Darl's *Thanatos* is shorthand for his homosexuality.

This homosexuality is implicit in Kartiganer's argument, and, by extension, implicit in structuralist reading strategies that view the novel as a journey and Darl as the tension that must be removed at journey's end. Kartiganer's terms come directly from *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, a study with tremendous heterosexual bias in its biologically essentialist argument. Freud argues for an erotic drive, which he also calls the life drive and the sex drive, as a condition emerging as the natural outcome of bi-cellular reproduction and the instinct for self-preservation. He deduces that since no single cell can live forever but since all life wants to continue itself, cells reproduce. Asexual reproduction among single-celled organisms allows for that "cell" to live forever by duplicating itself: same genetic material, new body. For organisms that do not reproduce asexually, however, sexual reproduction is necessary and is the central

drive that motivates life, even beyond the simpler drives to attain “pleasure” and avoid “pain.” Without a sex drive, an organism would desire to stay completely inert and would avoid all stimulation, sexual or otherwise. Effectively, Freud considers this inertia as a metaphoric death, or at least an imitation of death that an organism which opts out of sexual reproduction will pursue until it actually does die. This death drive is a desire to shut down and stop and is, in Freud’s theory, directly in opposition to *Eros*, which seeks stimulation as a continual condition of “life.” These drives compete with each other for supremacy and, in a properly “educated” individual, lead to the pursuit of sex as a means of reproduction (heterosexuality) rather than as a means of physical gratification without procreative import.⁴

Lee Edelman bases his argument in *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* on precisely this underlying premise of Freud’s theory, though he translates Freud’s Greek term *Thanatos* to the more prosaic “death drive” of his title and explicates the concept largely through Lacan’s extended discussion of the death drive in his lectures (Lacan was troping on Freud, who first articulated the basic premise of *Eros/Thanatos* as valuable terms for psychoanalysis). Unlike Freud, who implicitly privileges *Eros*, Edelman, in his discussion of queer theory, “privileges” the death drive “as the inarticulate surplus that dismantles the subject from within” and “names what the queer, in the order of the social, is called forth to figure: the negativity opposed to every form of social viability” (9). By “social viability,” Edelman means literally the “life” of society as opposed to the (mortal) life of any individual within it. When Darl empties himself for sleep or questions what he is, his queer presence becomes the negativity to which Edelman alludes; Darl’s queer identity could kill the family itself. His queer desires must be removed for the family to have life. More generally speaking, queer sexualities do not hold any prospect for a future for society. To the extent to which “society” is an organism, it dedicates itself to the

suppression of queer desires as distinctly undesirable because they threaten the immortality of that organism (if the “cells” of a society--the individuals--fail to reproduce, does that mean the organism will die?).

Edelman roots his argument in provocative statements about anti-abortion activists and the way they cherish unborn babies as if one abortion would signal the end of civilization.⁵ He also argues that much of Western literature and film serves to codify and represent proper sexuality by depicting tragic outcomes for people who fail to ascribe to the gender and sexual norms of society in order to “educate” readers/viewers about the perils of queer sexual expression. Edelman does not spend time explicating Faulkner specifically, but armed with Kartiganer’s essay, we can apply his theories to *As I Lay Dying*. Armed with the specific connotative context of *queer* at this cultural moment, we can even identify which queer sexuality most pertains to Darl and his tragic removal.⁶ Freud’s construction obviously biases (hetero)sexual reproduction as the erotic drive. Anything opposed to sexual reproduction must be a manifestation of the death drive in his figurations. Because it precludes the prospects of sexual reproduction, homosexuality must not have intimations of immortality; rather, it must be a desire for death. According to Kartiganer, the other Bundrens must suppress their ulterior desires into the one unified desire to bury Addie, which allows Anse, pure *Eros*, to re-marry. The version of marriage implicated here is one in which heterosexual reproduction is the goal: man, wife, and kids. The idea that this order is necessary for our society has long, deep roots and holds powerful sway over Western ideology. Freud did not invent it; rather, his supposedly objective and scientific ruminations are merely an attempt to justify it. While justifying this particular social order, Freud implicitly repudiates queer sexualities in a scientific jargon that Edelman simply explicates in artistic productions and their own discursive gestures, which may be less scientific

but implicate the same repudiation as part of the same social order and its strict regimentation of proper and illicit sexuality. Literature and film become “productive” grounds for regimenting proper *Eros* and punishing illicit *Thanatos*.

Unfortunately, when literary scholars apply these Freudian terms to their criticism, they tend to carry with them their heterosexist legacies.⁷ The New Critics I cited above certainly do not mean to invoke this tradition. They do, however, invoke it when they dehumanize Darl in order to make room not for any conclusion but specifically for the unified conclusion of the novel in the resolution of its marriage plot, and, of course, in denying Dewey Dell an abortion that would “forgive” her sin of extra-marital sex. Unlike Darl, Dewey Dell begrudgingly but ultimately accepts this denial of her queer desire for an abortion. When asked by Anse for her money that Rafe gave her, she donates it to the family cause. Her pregnancy promises at the end of the novel the new birth that will perpetuate the Bundren family. The marriage plot quite unsurprisingly ends with the promise of actual new life. That the new Mrs. Bundren is not yet pregnant is not particularly significant: the organism that is the Bundrens will reproduce. The queer element supposedly opposed to that new life and reproduction has been removed.

What the family removes is Darl’s homosexuality. As Faulkner wrote his novel, the word *queer* was coming very specifically to mean homosexual, and we have seen that Faulkner lived an apocryphally homosexual life prior to his marriage, based on specific performances in specifically homosexual contexts. His previous fiction and poetry also depicted homosexuality as the “queer” disease embodied in his World War I characters, all of whom suffer wounds to their proper heterosexuality in the same cultural context in which *queer* shifts toward a distinctly homosexual connotation. Merely to say that Darl is gay, however, does not resolve the conflict in the novel. That recognition reveals the conflict, but as Darl looks through his spy-glass from the

war and we realize that those six appearances of *queer* all involve him, our entire understanding of the novel faces a profound and undeniable revision. We must re-read the narrative to account for this new information. The problem of Darl is not that he lacks an erotic drive. The problem with Freud's construction--and with any critical response that relies on it without analyzing its rigid dichotomy--is that it assumes that unity and futurity are heterosexual. This assumption is shared by the Bundrens, certainly, but their sense of family order is no more justified in its rigid expectations than Freud's scientific ruminations or critical responses that dehumanize Darl.

Homosexuality cannot be erotic and Darl represents death only if heterosexuality is privileged as the ultimate and proper pathway to life. If we expand Freud's original use of the words, though, we see in Darl a character who is, in fact, motivated powerfully by an erotic drive for union, only his is a *gay* erotics. He was exposed to homosexuality in the war and returned to his home on his isolated farm far removed from interactions with other men who might share his desires. When his mother dies, he faces competing impulses: to enter the broader world again knowing that he desires a sexual union that he does not believe he will find in Yoknapatawpha or to force his family to stay isolated out on the farm where he need not confront his desires at all, as he has done since his return. Admittedly, the tension drives him crazy. Being gay in so rigidly defined a community is more than he can bear.

Darl's Gay Erotics

Darl's journey maps a coming out story, for himself and in how others perceive him. He moves from farm to city, from life among his immediate family to life in a wider world. On this journey, he encounters people who have long since determined that he is "queer," but who have

differing notions about what his queerness entails. By the end of the journey, the competing definitions of *queer* will have solidified into one meaning: he is a homosexual whose queer desires motivate him to work against the proper goals of his family. Simultaneously, Darl experiences his identity anew--he has experienced it before, but he has also isolated himself on his family's farm for many years and buried his identity after his previous experiences abroad. When he leaves that farm for Addie's funeral journey, he begins to articulate his own homosexual identity again, through memory and through attempts at communion with others. His efforts are thwarted, but he nonetheless attempts to define himself in his immediate geographic and cultural space, not simply be defined by others.

Darl is a soldier who has returned to rural Mississippi, a site that John Howard identifies as "gay America's closet" (63). "In Mississippi," Howard explains, "spatial configurations--the unique characteristics of a rural landscape--forged distinct human interactions, movements, and sites" that define the "shape and scope" of gay life as a *concept* that differed from the idea of gay culture rooted in a *community* such as the Vieux Carre in New Orleans (15). The other Bundrens seek admittance into Jefferson as members of its heterosexual community bound by its rigid family structure and narrow definition of proper erotic desire. Darl is queer, and his desires do not conform to the communal expectations of the town, which does not mean he does not seek union with other men like himself. Rather, his journey to erotic unity passes through a different understanding of the landscape connected to the specific rural geography of his home. Howard explains that this rural gay experience was not unique to Mississippi; his interest, though, is in exploring it in Mississippi, where its patterns emerge through the testimonials that he collected from the actual gay men who defined their lives in their rural space as opposed to abandoning their rural lives for the enclaves of New Orleans or other urban gay communities.

Faulkner experienced the urban (New Orleans) and the rural (Oxford). He places Darl into a rural landscape and allows Darl to shape, through his copious narration, what Andre Bleikasten identifies as the atmospheric effect of that landscape on the narrative. Bleikasten asserts, "The setting of the book is invented in [Darl's] look, created through his words," though he continues, "That Darl should see images of uprooting everywhere need not surprise us: they reflect his own rootlessness" (285). Bleikasten prefers to link this rootlessness to Darl's "nonidentity," but as with so many other critics, this claim does not account for the prospect that Darl's "rootlessness" may, in fact, be a mark of a specific identity defined by movement and mobility through the landscape and conceptualized through a specific historical articulation of gay culture. That his identity is not the same as the core heterosexual identity to which his family ascribes does not mean that Darl has no identity, only that he has a different identity. He does, in fact, desire to find "roots" of his own throughout the novel, though different roots from those his family seeks. His erotics are different than theirs, but he does not lack *Eros*.

Second-wave feminists have long-since reclaimed *Eros* as a term relevant to homosexual desire. Audre Lorde in particular, but also Adrienne Rich and Alice Walker, argue for an understanding of erotics that transcends procreative sexual contact and extends to the communities of women that emerge in response to oppressive regimes. In their view, heterosexist erotics are part of the compulsory heterosexuality that limits the full articulation of non-procreative desire and in which women lose many of their basic rights as property passed among men for the propagation of a phallogocentric order. Sometimes, the relationships forged between women in response to oppressive regimes become sexual; sometimes they do not. They are always motivated, however, by a version of non-heterosexist erotics and should not be viewed as discreet units but as a continuum that erases sexual versus social stratifications for a

larger sense of union and community forged through bonds between members of the same sex, which can always move toward sexual union and often are originally rooted in sexual desires suppressed by the regimes of compulsory heterosexuality. In their formulations, lesbianism is a form of protest in which women find erotic fulfillment in each other and outside of the confines of an erotics which must be focused on reproduction with a member of the opposite sex and is codified in heterosexual institutions such as marriage.⁸

We need not, though, limit the brilliance of the insights of these theorists to a political lesbianism from a handful of women writers. Rich's formulations in particular prove difficult to transfer to a gay male context because she purposely ironizes the Freudian assertion that homosexuality in men emerges from too close a relationship between a boy and his mother. Rather than argue that this assertion is false, she argues that if it is true, then the root of lesbianism must also be a girl's close relationship with her mother as well. Rich proceeds from this basic premise to assert that lesbianism is rooted in the mother/daughter relationship and exceeds purely sexual impulses for a broader sense of union and intimacy. She goes so far as to ironize Freud's assertion that breast feeding implants in young boys a sexual desire for women as a returning to the breast; indeed, since baby girls are also breast fed, Rich posits that all women must share the same fundamental desire to return to the breast as well. Therefore lesbian desire is the origin of all subsequent female sexual expression, if Freud's theories are followed to their logical conclusions. Therefore, if men are inherently heterosexual, then women must actually be inherently lesbian. Obviously, to argue that Rich's theory allows for a re-evaluation of gay male erotic attachment carries with it the implications that Freudian theory explains some fundamental truth about the origins of sexual identity, homosexual or otherwise. Rich does not, however, mean to uphold Freudian sexual theories. She means instead to deconstruct the premise that

Freud's theories apply across gender lines, and in so doing she actually implicates the degree to which those theories fail to have universal applicability or even any applicability at all. If those theories lack universal applicability, then they must only have contingent and exceptionally specific application, which is to say that they really have no applicability except for strictly within a limited Freudian perspective which does very little to explain the complexities of desire that circulate among members of a community in whatever way that community conceives of itself. Basically, she uses Freud in order to dismiss him, but she nonetheless proceeds to explain a version of *Eros* applicable to lesbian desire. She offers a theoretical framework to justify Lorde's earlier theorizing about the multiple bonds that form between women, which Lorde places under the umbrella term *erotic* and in which she finds a source of power for women to define and shape their lives beyond being bound to men. Lorde and Rich claim *Eros* as a term for lesbian-identified women, and in so doing, they free it from its negative associations with Freud's heterosexist rhetoric and make it a term with applicability to a broad range of desires beyond strictly heterosexual confines.

The extraordinary capacity these thinkers had to see beyond a heterosexually based erotics ultimately serves to justify all same sex desires, between a man and a man and between a woman and a woman, as legitimate and productive. Though he never calls it *Eros* or *erotic*, Howard delineates the same concept in reference to rural gay men when he attempts to explain the dynamism and movement that give "shape and scope" to the "queer life" of his study (15). Indeed, though Mississippians in particular had easy access to the nearby gay community in New Orleans, Howard pauses to explain that for gay men in rural Mississippi,

a more sporadic, on-the-ground, locally mediated queer experience prevailed.

Tracking this experience and integrating the concept of networks with desire and

pleasure finally allow a consideration of the human desire for friendship, companionship, love, and intimacy, as well as often unrelated, overtly sexual contact--*homosocial* as well as *homosexual* realms. (15)

This list of “human desire” is his version of a gay erotics applied to male same-sex identity. As a version of gay erotics, it uses sexual identity and desire as a way to imagine and create new, non-heterosexist communities. Gay erotics are a response for all queer-identified people to the oppressive regimes of compulsory heterosexuality that compel individuals into preset gender expectations and sexual roles. In the case of women (and men) who define themselves as, or find themselves defined as, queer/lesbian/homosexual, these erotics powerfully shape the way they define themselves in relationship to their surroundings and articulate their senses of self in relation to their own understanding of community and connection. *Eros* is still at the heart of homosexual identity, only this *Eros* is not one of compulsory reproductive utility but of seeking likeness in an environment that defines one’s erotic drive as *different*. It is an oppositional drive, but one no less committed, and in fact driven, to unity than the heterosexual erotics articulated by Freud. In that formulation, gay desire is death. In this, it is life.

Faulkner did not need an advanced theoretical understanding of gay erotics to have experienced it and to include it in his fiction. From the gravity that drew him to Ben Wasson and drew them to sequestered spaces in their rural environments, to the different lives of Stark Young and William Alexander Percy at home and away from home, to the gay communities in New York and New Orleans, Faulkner had seen and participated in the ersatz configurations that emerged from the shared sense of difference among *queer* men of his time. He would have understood the different performances required by different environments, from the closeted oppositionality of spending time with Wasson at the Stone home to the revery of enclaved

oppositonality in the Vieux Carre. He would have also understood the tensions caused by moving between these different environments. His actual experiences gave him much on which to base a character such as Darl.

We can begin to access how Darl sees himself in relationship to his surroundings in one of his most important and often-quoted ruminations about emptying himself for sleep. In his famous soliloquy, he states, “I dont know what I am” (*AILD* 80). This is not the lament of a man who has no identity; it is the cry of a man who has *lost* his identity. The subtle difference in this perspective pertains to the part of his ruminations that rarely proves the focus of explications of this passage. He ends this monologue with a curious memory: “How often have I lain beneath rain on a strange roof, thinking of home” (81). What roof? Just a strange roof, a *queer* roof? That is not the question that needs to be asked, though. Not *what* roof, but *whose*? Whose roof has Darl lain under, thinking of home? Why does this memory make him feel as if, at home, he does not know what he is? Why does home alienate him from who he is? Furthermore, why would he have longed so much for that home nonetheless, in fact seem still to long for it since it is, ultimately, what he cannot attain except if he can empty himself to dream about it? Darl has memories of a self that he has lost. Deep in the heart of his ruminations lies a desire to find that self again.

We know that Darl has been to war because of his reference to his “little spy-glass he got in France at the war” (*AILD* 254). His exposure to cultures beyond Yoknapatawpha County contributes to his difference from his hill-country family. He returns from France with expressions such as “cubistic bug” (219), which, according to Watson Branch, demonstrate how the War “has so marked [Darl’s] view of life and his mode of vision that Faulkner reveals it through his identity: dislocation and disorientation are the reflection of maddening chaos”

(Branch 111). Branch also notes that Darl's post-War knowledge "seem[s] highly inappropriate for a country boy" (113). The war plays a tremendous role in shaping Darl's separation from the other members of his community. Darl's sense of dislocation and disorientation, however, have resulted less from the world Darl witnessed in France than from the world he returns to in Frenchman's Bend, where he cannot know himself anymore except by his abstractions into memories of a time now eleven years past. His memories have given him access to an inappropriate knowledge, or at least inappropriate at home, where there is no room for its articulation. His sense of self is suffering from dislocation; the effects of that dislocation are thoroughly disorienting. As Bleikasten asserts, this dislocation may cause Darl's vision to appear "rootless," but such an assertion misses a key element of Darl's character: he is rooted to his home. Darl's problem is that he cannot both be home and be queer. The social order of his home has caused this problem, but he must find a way to bear it. One of his solutions is to empty himself and dream of a rain on a distant roof and how he used to think of home. Now he is home and can only "think" about the rain on that distant roof. The profound split his life abroad and his life at home has caused him is fundamentally an articulation of desire to reconcile the two parts of his life.

Had Darl never left for the war, who knows how his desires and his sense of place in the world would have unfolded. He should be just a backwater country boy on a backwater farm, but the war pulled him out of his isolated life and thrust him into a new world among new men, and exposed him to a new world of possibilities of the type of life that he could lead. As with Claude Wheeler, Darl encounters homosexual desire in that new world; indeed, if Darl never names whose roof he lay under while listening to the rain, we know Claude's lover and can even point to the Joubert's roof. Claude dies, though, and never has to return to the marriage he left or the

family farm he was meant to inherit. Darl does return, though he never married before the war. With the exception of trips to sell goods, such as his and Jewel's when Addie dies, he leaves the farm only on rare occasions, though he is the one who insisted on making the particular trip away from Addie's deathbed. He is avoiding the reality of his mother's death by insisting on this trip, but her death is inescapable. He narrates her death as if he is there to witness it. His mother's death forces Darl to confront the secrets that his isolated life on the farm have buried deep in his memories to become the stuff of his dreams. He knows what he is as much as he knows whose roof he slept under in France; but until Addie's death, he can treat this knowledge as abstraction and empty himself for long nights of vague dreams about rain on foreign rooftops. His mother's death forces him to face the reality of his present world. On that journey, he confronts what it means to be *queer*. The plot of the novel charts the progress of his confrontation.

We can trace Darl's journey and the narrative progression towards formal unity by mapping out the six occurrences of the word *queer* in the novel. The five times the word is used to describe Darl chart his increasing distance from the safe confines of home. They also chart how other people in his community define his queerness. They appear as follows:⁹

1.) Cora (6/2): It was the sweetest thing I ever saw. Sometimes I lose faith in human nature for a time; I am assailed by doubt. But always the Lord restores my faith and reveals to me His bounteous love for His creatures. Not Jewel, the one she always cherished, not him. He was after that three extra dollars. It was Darl, the one that folks say is *queer*, lazy, pottering around the place no better than Anse, with Cash a good carpenter and always more building than he can get around to, and Jewel always doing something that made him some money or got him talked about, and that near-naked girl always standing over Addie with a fan

so that every time a body tried to talk to her and cheer her up, would answer her right quick, like she was trying to keep anybody from coming near her at all. (24)

2.) Tull (31/4): He [Darl] is looking at me. He dont say nothing; just looks at me with them *queer* eyes of hisn that makes folks talk. I always say it aint never been what he done so much or said or anything so much as how he looks at you. It's like he had got inside you, someway. Like somehow you was looking at yourself and your doings outen his eyes. (125)

3.) Tull (36/6): When I told Cora how Darl jumped out of the wagon and left Cash sitting there trying to save it and the wagon turning over, and Jewel that was almost to the bank fighting that horse back where it had more sense than to go, she says "And you're one of the folks that says Darl is the *queer* one, the one that aint bright, and him the only one of them that had sense enough to get off that wagon. I notice Anse was too smart to been on it a-tall." (152)

4.) Cora (39/3): Because it is not us that can judge our sins or know what is sin in the Lord's eyes. She has had a hard life, but so does every woman. But you'd think from the way she talked that she knew more about sin and salvation than the Lord God Himself, than them who have strove and labored with the sin in this human world. When the only sin she ever committed was being partial to Jewel that never loved her and was its own punishment, in preference to Darl that was touched by God Himself and considered *queer* by us mortals and that did love her. (168)

5.) Cash (53/4): But the curiouesest thing was Dewey Dell. It surprised me. I see all the while how folks could say he [Darl] was *queer*, but that was the very

reason couldn't nobody hold it personal. It was like he was outside it too, same as you, and getting mad at it would be kind of like getting mad at a mud-puddle that splashed you when you stepped in it. And then I always kind of had a idea that him and Dewey Dell kind of knowed things betwixt them. If I'd a said it was ere a one of us she liked better than ere a other, I'd a said it was Darl. But when we got it filled and covered and drove out the gate and turned into the lane where them fellows was waiting, when they come out and come on him and he jerked back, it was Dewey Dell that was on him before even Jewel could get at him. And then I believe I knowed how Gillespie knowed about how his barn taken fire. (237)

As Darl moves out from the farm and toward Jefferson, he becomes queerer. These five appearances of the word track the shift through which competing notions of his queer identity condense to a single vision of his queer desire: his lack of proper work/grief and his interest in men.

When Cora first uses the word, Addie is still alive and the Bundrens are still on their farm. This inert state serves as the exposition to the changes wrought by Addie's death and the subsequent journey. For all practical purposes, this view of the Bundrens, and specifically of Darl, represents the *a priori* condition; this general "queerness" is the cloud that has hung over Darl since he returned from the war. For Cora, though, *queer* is simply a measure of one's work ethic. The ever-righteous Cora considers that Darl loves Addie most because he "just looked at her" on her death bed while Cash and Jewel seem distracted by their work. Cora's first characterization of Darl's queerness juxtaposes *queer* with the adjective *lazy*, separating the words by only a comma and following both adjectives with the participial phrase "pottering about the place no better than Anse." Meanwhile, Jewel and Cash work too hard, so Cora

believes that they are not properly grieving for their mother. Darl is the queer brother in this figuration because he stands in opposition to Jewel and Cash, whose similarities make their response the normative against which Darl's difference is measured. Cora's moral vision falters, however, in determining which brother is acting properly. Jewel and Cash are not grieving properly but at least they are (properly) hard-working; Darl is lazy but properly grieves. If queer Darl's grief is proper, then there is reason to believe that he could function as the moral center of the novel. He could possibly win over either Cash or Jewel or both to his proper sensibilities in response to death. If the scales do not shift in his favor, however, then it will be the (un)grief of his two brothers that stands in opposition to his grief. The balance of normativity will weigh by consensus. Darl begins the novel as the queer one; he will end it queer as well.

Tull uses the word next, disconcertingly and in significant contrast to Cora's moral judgment. For Tull, Darl's "queer eyes [. . .] got inside you, someway." Tull figures queerness as an ability to penetrate. Equating queerness and penetration sends him into fits of homophobic discomfort similar to the anxieties Faulkner depicted in "Jealousy" and "Ad Astra." Though Tull never directly says that this penetration is a sexual violation, he has previously established that Darl's problem--the source of those penetrating queer eyes--is that "he just thinks by himself too much" (71). Naturally, he agrees with his wife that the solution to Darl's problem is a simple introduction to proper heterosexuality:

Cora's right when she says all he needs is a wife to straighten him out. And when I think about that, I think that if nothing but being married will help a man, he's durn nigh hopeless. But I reckon Cora's right when she says the reason the Lord had to create women is because man dont know his own good when he sees it.

(71)

Tull thinks that marriage would provide Darl with a (female) companion to keep him from “thinking” by himself so much. Tull solves Darl’s problem by proposing that Darl direct his erotic drives into the appropriate avenue of marriage, rather than getting inside other people, namely Tull. Tull hardly seems enamored of the idea that a man’s only chance of “knowing his own good when he sees it” is with the help of a woman, but he accepts this status quo as the Lord’s judgment, or at least as Cora’s wisdom, which he confesses is probably better than his own simple opinions could ever determine. Tull’s true opinion is more direct: he would prefer that Darl “sees it” with a woman, rather than stare him down with queer eyes. If a woman will preoccupy Darl, Tull is quite pleased to see him marry. Really, Tull just wants Darl to stop staring at him because Tull thinks that Darl’s staring is queer.

Though the third appearance of the word comes in one of Tull’s monologues, he can only have second-hand credit for it. He is actually quoting his wife, Cora, who, of course, attributes the word to Tull. Cora still regards the word primarily as a measure of work, and equates Darl with Anse in that Darl jumped clear of the wagon, whereas “Anse was too smart to been on it a-tall.” Cash and Jewel, she determines, are still not grieving properly. When Cash and Jewel exert so much effort to save Addie’s coffin, Cora sees their actions as wasted energy, as *cash* spent that should have been saved or as work done on a system, measured in *joules*, that does not return the energy. Her assessment speaks to the fact that Darl, at this point halfway through the novel, has failed to convince anyone that his actions are the proper response to grief. He leaps clear of the wagon, which is effectively a leap away from his brothers. They do not share a desire for similar ends--and the crisis of the river crossing fails to sway either Jewel or Cash, even as it causes the broken leg that becomes the measure of Cash’s love for his mother and willingness to sacrifice for the family. Such a vicious measure of love would be queer indeed except that it

actually serves to mark Cash's willingness to sacrifice for the family, misguided journey and all, even to the point of his own suffering. Thus his love is not queer; his love is like his family's. Also, since the mules drown in the crossing, and Anse has to replace them by bargaining away Jewel's horse, this crisis forces Jewel to his first significant sacrifice as well. Later he will suffer severe burns while saving Addie's coffin from the fire. Jewel and Cash suffer together as a result of the river crossing. Darl jumps clear, essentially denying himself solidarity with his brothers and, by extension, the rest of his family. That his actions are the most practical and logical does not matter. They are the queer actions of a queer man in relation to his surroundings and those surrounding him.

These two appearances of the word come five monologues and roughly twenty-five pages apart, at the beginning and the end of the river crossing. In between them, at the point in the narrative when the family should be crossing the river, Darl uses the word himself, as I will explicate below. The river is a boundary between the isolated world of the Bundrens out on their farm and the open countryside around Frenchman's Bend and the rigidly defined world of Jefferson. Though the family does not physically cross the river, they do cross a threshold represented by the failed crossing in that Jewel and Cash fully commit to the journey, but Darl leaps clear. From this moment forward, his queerness begins to transform into something more concrete and troubling.

Cora's and Tull's uses of the word in its first two appearances in the novel allude to how "folks say [Darl] is queer" and his queerness "makes folks talk." Clearly, Darl's queerness circulates through the community, but not until after the failed crossing do we actually witness the way two people--Cora and Tull--quote each other and bring their different understandings of Darl into a singular form. Tull is citing Cora, who measures Darl's queerness in direct relation to

his brothers. Cora is attributing the word in this instance to Tull, who measures Darl's queerness as a kind of disconcerting sexual penetration. When Tull quotes Cora, he consolidates the two measurements. Darl's sexual queerness puts him at odds with his brothers, and though he may grieve properly, his decision to leap clear of the wagon separates him from the aims of the family. He is not willing to work to bring about the proper unity of the family (and its eventual marriage rite) that his brothers are willing to support, even through their own physical pain. *Eros* is, of course, beyond the pleasure principle--the desire for unity exceeds the desire for pleasure, forcing the suppression of that desire if it is counter to the aim of continuing life. At this moment in the narrative, Darl appears to fail to suppress his desires. His brothers properly accept pain for the sake of the quest. As the family passes into the regimented sphere of Jefferson (metaphorically here, though they will cross the actual bridge towards it near Mottstown and pass its gatekeepers in a scene I explicate below), Darl is separating himself from the erotic drive of his family by his sexual otherness.

The fourth appearance of the word technically comes out of time, but it still occupies a central place in the forward progression of the novel. Kartiganer explains, "Each monologue, with the significant exception of Addie's (expressed at no identifiable time) and the two monologues surrounding hers by Cora Tull and Whitfield, follows the previous one in terms of the temporal progress of the action" ("By It" 433). In the fourth appearance, we have Cora using the word as she might have used it during the exposition of the novel, before Addie's death. We are encountering the word anew, however, well after that death and after the river crossing. We must, then, re-evaluate our original perception of what the word means, even prior to the journey. Cora uses the word again to signify that Darl loves Addie most, but that does not matter. Cora concedes that Darl will not save Addie from her "sin" of preferring Jewel over him.

Addie's actions have brought about the necessity of the "punishment" of this journey. Darl cannot save her from it. His lack of working to continue the journey becomes, thanks to Cora, a measure of his opposition to the moral order of the universe: Addie must suffer this punishment and Darl must not save her. If his lack of working is unnatural to the flow of universal causality, that in the aftermath of Cora's timeless words he actively attempts to oppose the journey by setting the barn on fire means that he *does* work in opposition to that natural order. His sin against the natural order becomes a sin of commission, not a sin of omission. As he works against the supposed natural order--Cora's version of it--his queerness becomes a direct, acting threat to the unfolding "natural" plot of the novel and any chance for its proper conclusion in Anse's remarriage.

It should come as no surprise that Cash finally concedes that his brother is queer, though only indirectly as if he is just another member of the community who is repeating what everyone knows: "I could see all the while how folks could say he was queer." Because Cash "believed he knew how Gillespie knew how his barn taken fire," he realizes just how queer Darl appears to other people and how unlikely they will be to forgive his transgressions. Cash and the other Bundrens have no choice but to reject Darl because they can no longer explain away his actions as "the very reason couldn't nobody hold it personal." Now, even Cash understands why people react so personally to Darl's actions. Cash narrates Darl's violent seizure almost indifferently and effectively replaces Darl as the clairvoyant, rational narrator of the novel at the moment of Darl's rejection. Darl has failed to convince the family that his grief is proper, his failure of which effectively signifies that his love is improper as well. Cash signals the final repudiation of Darl's grief and love by deciding that they are queer. Darl is denied participation in the erotics of the Bundrens, and he never meets the new Mrs. Bundren, whom Cash introduces as a way of

accepting her into the family, or at least the family as it stands after Addie's death and Darl's removal.

Though Cash offers the final verdict that Darl's actions are improper and he denies Darl a right to participate in the heterosexual erotics of the family, this verdict does not mean that Darl lacks an erotic drive, only that he lacks the proper heterosexual one. Also, that five of the appearances of the word occur in the monologues of other characters who are effectively queering Darl does not mean that Darl does not also define himself as queer through his own actions and his own perspective, of which we have ample record in his copious narration. If Cash's final use of *queer* marks the moment of Darl's ultimate rejection, Darl's use of *queer* marks the opposite, a primary attempt to bond with his brothers Jewel and Cash and name for himself what he is by finding others who can share in his sense of identity as someone other than the lone *queer*:

6.) Darl (32/11): And so a few nights later I heard Jewel get up and climb out the window, and then I heard Cash get up and follow him. The next morning when I went to the barn, Cash was already there, the mules fed, and he was helping Dewey Dell milk. And when I saw him I knew that he knew what it was. Now and then I would catch him watching Jewel with a *queer* look, like having found out where Jewel went and what he was doing had given him something to really think about at last. But it was not a worried look; it was the kind of look I would see on him when I would find him doing some of Jewel's work around the house, work that pa still thought Jewel was doing and that ma thought Dewey Dell was doing. So I said nothing to him, believing that when he got done digesting it in his mind, he would tell me. But he never did. (133-34)

Darl's monologue would, technically, be the third use of *queer* in the novel, but his use is fundamentally different from the other five. Darl is recounting Jewel's acquisition of his horse, a pivotal episode that prompts Darl's later question, "Your mother was a horse, but who was your father, Jewel?" (212). Darl realizes that Jewel is the queer one, at least as far as queer is strictly a measure of difference, because Jewel is not Anse's son. Certainly, exposing Jewel's paternity could endanger the familial unity of all the *Bundrens* (the father's last name) working together, but only insofar as Jewel is a Bundren instead of a Whitfield, his actual father's name. Darl never outs Jewel. He asks questions, challenging and dangerous questions, but he never exposes this knowledge or participates in the communal transfer of allegations that eventually work to convince people that he, not Jewel, is queer, like folks are always saying.

Though it occurs in a flashback, Darl's use of *queer* appears in a monologue at the height of the river crossing that so profoundly separates him from the rest of the family. This scene includes the moment when Darl jumps clear of the wagon and of the family itself. He is the brother who does not participate in rescuing Addie's coffin. He has made his first active break from the family, but at this moment he recalls a moment of similar disconnection when he had attempted familial unity and failed. Darl claims, "I dont know what I am," but the community calls him queer (80). In this memory, he calls Cash queer. His usage marks the one moment when he tries to take control of the label applied to him and apply it to others--a critical moment of reaching out to find others in his immediate surroundings who are like him in his difference, his fellow "queers." At this moment, Darl is watching the interactions of two other people, his brothers no less, and hoping that he might be included, or that they might be like him. He never is and they are not.

Cash and Darl originally think Jewel is sneaking out to meet a woman. When Cash finds

out otherwise, he violates the work order of the farm. He begins to take over Jewel's chores since Cash knows that Jewel is working in another man's field to make money. Darl does not know what is really happening until later. What he believes is that Cash is taking up Jewel's slack to allow Jewel to pursue sexual experimentations. Darl envies his brothers' transgressions, and he wants to know what Cash knows (and what Jewel is discovering). Darl does not know what Cash knows; he only "knew that [Cash] knew what it was." This scene is not the first in which Darl has felt removed from Cash's sexual knowledge nor the first time he tried to imagine if Cash and he might *know* the same thing. In one of the earliest monologues, Darl recalls nights in his childhood when he should have been asleep, but stayed awake instead so that he could experience his own developing sexuality:

Then I would wait until they all went to sleep so I could lie with my shirt tale up, hearing them asleep, feeling myself without touching myself, feeling the cool silence blowing my parts and wondering if Cash was yonder in the darkness doing it too, had been doing it for the last two years before I could have wanted to or could have. (11)

Darl sees Cash as a repository of sexual experiences since, as far as Darl knows, surely Cash experienced the same sexual awakenings Darl has experienced, only two years previously since Cash is two years older than Darl. Thus, when Cash follows Jewel, presumably to see whom he is meeting, Darl hopes that Cash is following Jewel for the same reasons that Darl wonders about Cash. Darl calls Cash queer because he wants to see Cash as someone similar to himself. He waits for Cash to share his knowledge, but Cash never does. Cash and Jewel form a silent, fraternal bond, even as Darl knows the real secret, that Jewel is not actually anyone's brother. Darl remains outside of this bond, too queer for admission into their secret fraternity of work

and, as far as Darl ever knows, (hetero)sexual initiation.

Similar attempts to form bonds structure Darl's trip to Jefferson. Leaving the farm, he enters the road, a space outside of the boundaries of the family farm. The family's journey offers Darl the opportunity to meet a larger group of people than he lives among on the farm in Frenchman's Bend. Darl has previously had just such an experience, when he left home to go to war. Now, after Addie's death, he finds himself embarking on what should be a similar journey, but which ultimately proves much more confining. In *Men Like That*, John Howard explains the importance of the road (and the car and the roadside park) as a meeting ground for gay men in the rural South, specifically in Mississippi. Howard explains in his introduction that "[l]argely homebound, living in familial households, these [gay] Mississippians nonetheless traveled," and that these "queer movements more often consisted of circulation rather than congregation" (xiv). Howard argues that gay men defined their lives by movements and shared interactions, but he does not suggest that merely moving from home guaranteed that one would find gay male companionship. Howard begins Chapter One with an account from rural Jasper County in 1953 when a Methodist preacher picked up a teenager walking alongside the road. After the preacher rebuffed a coded advance from the teenager, he let the teenager out and shared the incident with Ted Harrington, a fellow pastor. Obviously, the boy's advances failed, as Darl's do in Faulkner's fictional account of life on a rural Mississippi road, but Howard suggests that the scenario was not an isolated event. He then explains the desires at work that day in the Methodist preacher's car:

Perhaps through a combination of verbal and body language, utterances and silences--utterances and silences that would be perpetuated and complicated by subsequent retellings, including this one--the young man communicated his

desire. But like so many taboo expressions of sexuality at that historical moment, that desire was frustrated. (4)

Though there are many moments when Darl attempts to form communities with his family and with the other people he encounters on the road, I want to highlight two of these. The first, in particular, parallels Howard's description of the coded gay exchange.

Darl does not set Gillespie's barn on fire in order to bring about a potential meeting with a sexual partner, but he takes advantage of the opportunity that arises as a result. First, Darl watches Jewel run into the barn to rescue one of the horses. Darl then narrates Jewel's actions with special emphasis on Jewel's body: "Jewel thrusts [the stall door] back with his buttocks and he appears, his back arched, the muscles ridged through his garments as he drags the horse out by its head" (219). By watching rather than helping, Darl alienates Jewel, who "gives [Darl] across his shoulder a single glare furious and brief," a stare to express severance, as opposed to Darl's queer eyes penetrating Tull in a search for communion (219). Darl only briefly mentions Jewel's angry look, however, because his attention is distracted by the bodies of Gillespie and Gillespie's son Mack. Gillespie and his son wear "knee-length nightshirts," Gillespie's "rush[ing] ahead of him on the draft, ballooning about his hairy thighs" (219). When Gillespie emerges from the barn, he "passes [Darl], stark-naked, his nightshirt wrapped about the mule's head" (220). If watching male bodies pass into and out of the burning barn has distracted Darl to the point of inaction as he ponders what their nightshirts only suggest, then seeing Gillespie emerge "stark-naked" pushes Darl beyond the limits of sexual suggestion into the prospect of sexual gratification. Therefore, when Darl sees Mack struggling with a mule of his own, he "lean[s] to Mack's ear" to tell him, "Nightshirt. Around his head" (220). In response, "Mack stares at [Darl]. Then he rips his nightshirt off and flings it over the mule's head, and it becomes

docile at once” (220). Mack’s stare is a measure of his pause. He is contemplating what Darl has told him and does not understand Darl’s motives at first. Then, as he realizes that Darl might be telling him how to save the mule, he undresses in front of Darl.

Darl breaks more than just a homosexual taboo at this moment. Darl describes Mack with “freckles [that] look like english peas on a plate” (220), suggesting that Mack is still fairly young, possibly in his early teens. Darl is not, however, enacting a simple pedophilic desire. Such a reading of this scene would not take into account the historical context. Darl’s sexual arousal exceeds the reductive label of *pedophile*, and we might remember Howard’s account of the teenage boy and the Methodist preacher in order to contextualize Darl’s desires. Age and attraction form a complex matrix in negotiating taboo homosexual desires in the isolated, rural South. Darl actually directs his desires toward Gillespie again after he tells Mack to undress. As Darl watches Gillespie wrestle with Jewel to prevent his returning to the barn to save Addie’s coffin, Darl describes, “They are like two figures in a Greek frieze” (221). His reference to art is also a reference to “Greek” love, the two figures engaged in some action, possibly wrestling, and frozen there before him as if before a climactic fall. Faulkner often borrowed imagery from John Keats’ poem “Ode on a Grecian Urn.” Here he recalls Keats poem bitterly, for though the poem praises the “still unravish’d bride,” that this “Bold lover” can never kiss his prize proves tragic, not titillating. Shortly after all the animals and Addie’s coffin have been saved, Darl will literally weep for the opportunity that he might have won at this moment with one of the men dancing naked in and out of the flames. Darl returns to the reality before him with an image of Mack using his nightgown to put out the flames on Addie’s coffin as Jewel rescues it. In this scene, Darl’s sexual attraction fluctuates between the available men, of any age, but none ever return his attention in their focus on saving the animals (and the coffin) in the barn. Their desires and

his do not coincide, but Darl nonetheless cannot take his queer eyes off of them. Afterward, Vardaman finds Darl crying. Darl cries most obviously because he has failed to save Addie's body from the desecration of the journey he wants to end. We are not over-reading, however, to imagine that he is crying because, ever so briefly, he might have forged a connection with Mack, or with any other man in this rural environment. He fails. Darl cries because his desires isolate him. Darl cries because he is alone.

Darl attempts to form one final bond between himself and his brothers, not a sexual bond but an erotic bond nonetheless. As the family enters Jefferson, the only black characters in the novel speak from a porch beside the road to town to exclaim, "Great God [. . .] what they got in that wagon" (229). Darl does not react to this exclamation. After crying over his failure to stop the journey, he seems to have grown resigned to the journey, despite his supposedly queer desire to stop it. Jewel does react, yelling back, "Sons of bitches" (229). Instead of the poor blacks hearing Jewel's response, a white man passing in the other direction hears it and challenges Jewel. As queer as Darl is and as remote as he is growing from his family, Darl comes to Jewel's defense. Darl steps in to say, "He dont mean anything mister," because the man holds a knife and Darl wants to diffuse the situation (230). Meanwhile, Jewel is muttering that the man is "a goddamn town fellow." The family is on the edge of Jefferson. Identifying the man as a "town fellow," Jewel situates him as a gatekeeper who has come out to guard the entrance to the town. Jewel effectively challenges this gatekeeper to a fight. Jewel's reaction to the man could not be more dangerous to the family's immediate goals. Just as they crossed a threshold when they crossed the river, to enter the town the Bundrens must successfully negotiate their way past this gatekeeper to cross the threshold into Jefferson. Jewel's anger will not suffice to cross that threshold. A bloody fight could easily bring out the authorities in the town, who might easily,

regardless of whomever they arrest, would effectively end the Bundren's journey and bury the rotting corpse as a danger to public sanitation. Darl proves to be the only Bundren with the guile and skill to disarm and pass the man and so gain access to the town for his family without any problems to the furtherance of the family's goals.

The great reversal Darl manipulates in this situation is crucial to understanding his attempts for unity and their failures. As soon as Darl convinces the man to pocket his knife, he starts to urge Jewel to apologize, but he stops short. Instead, he turns to the man and asks, "Do you think he's afraid to call you that?" (231). Suddenly finding himself on the defensive, the man can only respond, "I never said that" (231). The disarmed man lets the Bundrens pass. Darl has resolved the situation and gotten past the knife-toting man at the outskirts of the city, but he also defends his brother so that his family will not lose face in front of these "goddamn town fellow[s]." Darl's negotiation of this threshold is brilliant and symbolic. He should at least somewhat regain his family's trust. He has, after all, essentially negotiated their way past a sentinel guarding the border of the town. In doing so, he sacrifices any bond he might form with this new man by putting him on the defensive. Darl's actions should shore up his relationship to the family at this critical moment of their journey, but Darl still fails to form the necessary familial bond that will ultimately include him in the family's reformation with the new Mrs. Bundren. In fact, the very next monologue recounts Darl's seizure by his family. Cash narrates how Jewel and Dewey Dell turn on Darl. Though Darl's handling of the town gate-keeper might not entirely neutralize his burning of Gillespie's barn, Faulkner does not even provide time in the narrative action for us to consider if Darl's presence is as harmful as his barn burning would make it seem. Mere pages previous to his rejection, Darl works to help the family. So why does no member of his family object to his seizure?

The answer is simple: Darl's fate is the Bundrens' necessary sacrifice, and they must make that sacrifice quickly now, lest queer Darl reintegrate their ranks by these efforts of his to prove that he is not so queer after all. Yes, he still is queer, because even if he wants to be part of the family, his queer desires have no place in that family. He has not merely tried to stop the journey. He has challenged the heterosexual regimen that will see its fruition in the proper marriage at the conclusion of that journey. Even if he makes efforts to help to bury Addie, and he does help dig her grave, his queerness is not just a measure of *work for* or *work against*. As Tull explained, Darl gets inside people and needs to find a wife. He will not take a wife, though. The companion he wants is beyond the realm of possibility in his rural Mississippi, at least from the perspective of his family and other members of the communities in Yoknapatawpha County. He wants it but cannot find it; they want to guarantee that he never will find it and that it will never even have the remotest chance of ever being found. He is queer; his family queers him. Perhaps in the war he could have a lover and his masculinity and his place in the community would be safe. He is at home, though, and has been there eleven years. He is queer, and in this community there is no place for him. His expulsion allows for a marriage. In a world where two mutually exclusive paths compete for supremacy, there is no middle ground nor room for the rejected path when one chooses the other way. An erotic drive in opposition to what the community deems proper has no place in the community. Darl, and all he represents, must go.

The Successful Quarantine

Not surprisingly, when we next encounter Darl in Faulkner's canon, he is simply insane and belongs in an asylum. The young boy from Jefferson who narrates "Uncle Willy" never once

alludes to Darl's "queerness." As that young boy is at a critical age when his own sexual awakening might be on the verge of occurring and as he also finds himself drawn to an older man with a dubious reputation in town, his inability to identify Darl's queer disease speaks to the successful expulsion of his homosexuality from the heterosexual expectations of the town. When we consider that, at this cultural moment, *queer* meant homosexual, there is little doubting what troubles people about Darl, why people talk about him, and what they are expelling when they expel him.

In "Uncle Willy," written in March 1935, Faulkner recounts the exploits of the town dope-fiend, an old bachelor, as told from the point-of-view of an unnamed fourteen-year-old boy who idolizes Uncle Willy's determination to live for pleasure, even if it might kill him. As the narrator describes, Uncle Willy's ultimate desire was to break free from "the old terrified and timid clinging to dull and rule-ridden breathing which Jefferson was to him" (CS 239). Unfortunately for him, Mrs. Merridew and the Rev. Schultz conspire to send him to a sanitarium to clean him up from his bad habits. They succeed in weaning him from drugs, but he returns to Jefferson as an alcoholic, buys a car, has that taken away, then goes to Memphis, and returns married to an obese prostitute, whom the town pays to abandon Willy and return to her job. As if part of a grand card game with the opposing forces countering each other's bets, Uncle Willy ups the ante and manages to buy a plane to replace his lost bride. He wins the game for his freedom when he kills himself in a fiery crash, which the narrator celebrates as emblematic of Uncle Willy's liberation from the confines of Jefferson against which he defined himself.

Uncle Willy marries a woman; his addictions to Dionysian pleasure are manifested in drugs and alcohol. The narrator's idolization of him at times seems motivated by a boyish crush on the narrator's part, but the interactions between the boy and Uncle Willy never come to

fruition nor are articulated as sexual. Uncle Willy's appeal to the boy is his free-spirit, which does not necessarily mean he is a homosexual, even if his predilection for inebriation makes him different in town. The word *queer* never appears in the story. Uncle Willy's inability to fit into the prescribed confines of Jefferson are measured in his addictions, not in his sexual identity, at least until he returns with his overweight "whore" (236) in defiance of Mrs. Merridew and the other "high-nosed bitch[es] in Jefferson" (237) who want to reform him. In Part II of the story, however, as he narrates the first intervention by Rev. Schultz and Mrs. Merridew, the narrator makes a curious reference. First he belittles the patronizing Sunday school lesson of Rev. Schultz as having a tone that "I don't believe even pansy boys like," leaving one to wonder if he is himself a "pansy boy" or if he just cites them as an example (227). When Uncle Willy realizes the lesson is about him and realizes his fellow church members are about to take action to "help" him, he reacts with a resigned terror which makes the narrator "[think] about one day last summer when they took a country man named Bundren to the asylum in Jackson but he wasn't too crazy not to know where he was going, sitting there in the coach window handcuffed to a fat deputy sheriff that was smoking a cigar" (228). As Mrs. Merridew forces Uncle Willy into a car to drive him to his own kind of asylum, the narrator pictures her and Uncle Willy "in the car like Darl Bundren and the deputy on the train" (229). Darl may not have been "too crazy," but the narrator simply assumes that he was crazy, nothing more. His insanity is why he was sent to the asylum, not his "queerness." Darl's particular queerness has been successfully exorcised out of Jefferson, and a young boy on the cusp of puberty has no sense of Darl as sexually other, but simply as insane.

That boy, therefore, can translate Darl into Uncle Willy, Darl's insanity becoming Uncle Willy's addictions and the "pansy boy" narrator becoming an enabler of Uncle Willy's

subsequent attempts at freedom, with no clear reference to gay sexuality and only a defiantly heterosexual marriage to an obese whore. At the end of the story, the narrator's father explains to his son that "[n]obody blames you" for Uncle Willy's death, despite the narrator's helping him board the plane that kills him (247). The narrator closes his story with the frustrated cry, "And now they will never understand, not even Papa, and there is only me to try to tell them and how can I ever tell them, and make them understand? How can I?" (247). The problem the narrator faces is not his lack of effort but his lack of words. He cannot tell us because he does not even know what he is trying to say. At no point in his story is he even able to say the word that matters: *queer*. Darl had gained knowledge in the war that no country boy was supposed to have. With Darl's removal from Yoknapatawpha, that knowledge has ceased to circulate. The narrator of "Uncle Willy" cannot even reiterate Darl's conundrum, "I don't know what I am." He does not even know that he does not know. He cannot make anyone, even himself, understand.

Faulkner seems, though, to have understood even as early as 1918, while he was in Canada, that there would never be a place for someone deemed *queer* at *home*. In the letter he wrote home through quarantine in response to the death of Estelle's sister from Spanish Flu, he ruminates on the irony of dying young: "It's queer how the people one thinks would live forever are the first to go" (*Thinking* 117). Then he pauses and moves outward from the ironies of war and disease to a greater sense of irony about who loves home and who does not and who ends up inhabiting that home and at what cost. He ponders,

Isn't it queer that the ones to whom home life has been everything, beginning and ending both, are the ones who go when the time comes [. . .]. It isn't so queer, though, for only he whose heart and soul is wrapped about his home can see beyond the utterly worthless but human emotions such as selfishness, and know

that home is the thing worth having above every thing else, and it is known that what is not worth fighting for is not worth having. (118)

Away from home in Canada, training to be a pilot in World War I, Faulkner would return home himself not long after he wrote this letter. He would not truly come home, however, until eleven years later, and he would recognize how queer his journey had been and how far from the path of expectation it had taken him. So in 1930, his “heart and soul” fully immersed in Oxford, he would compose an apocryphal casting out of the queer element that had kept him away for so long. Darl is the casualty of his acceptance of home, the queer part of himself that he cannot rectify with his new actual life, at least without profoundly changing how he performed it.

Savage Epithalamion

None of this is to say that Faulkner cast off Darl as a purely creative artistic exercise. Darl may be the ultimate sacrifice in *As I Lay Dying*, but he is not the only major sacrifice necessary to introduce the new Mrs. Bundren. Addie dies relatively early. Her death prompts the journey. That journey comes to an end only when three goals are accomplished: Addie is buried, Darl is removed, and the new Mrs. Bundren is introduced. Darl’s removal occurs *after* Addie’s burial. Measured in the physical work that he does in the cemetery to dig his mother’s grave, his significance as a part of the family exceeds Addie’s presence. She is buried, *then* Darl can be sent away. He does not exceed her by much, though. Just because she is dead does not mean that Addie is not a speaking, acting part of the family on the journey. She narrates her one section well into the journey and long after her death, and she clearly establishes that she had planned the journey as her “revenge” nearly thirty years prior to its actual progression. In fact, she made

up her mind to exact this particular revenge directly in response to Darl's birth. When she realized that she was pregnant with Darl, her sense of violation prompted her ruminations that culminated in her decision: "[M]y revenge would be that [Anse] would not know I was taking revenge. And when Darl was born I asked Anse to promise to take me to Jefferson when I died" (173). When Darl was born, Addie "realized [her] father had been right," that the reason for living was to get ready to stay dead a long time (173). Darl's very existence ignites all the *Eros* and *Thanatos* that ensues in the journey, though no one except Addie understands his particular vitality and its centrality to the journey that proceeds from her death though has its origins in Darl's birth thirty years earlier. As soon as Addie is buried, however, Darl's existence can be obviated. A new *Eros* will move the family forward now.

Even as they did not see the full implications of Darl's queer erotics, the foundational structuralist critics whom I cited above certainly understood that Darl's and Addie's fates are intrinsically united. Vickery best epitomizes this connection when she explains that "with [Darl's] departure and the burial of Addie's corpse, the period of tension ends" (63), only she reverses the order of operations of the particular mathematics of this conclusion. Though both are subtractions, the tension can only end after Darl's departure, which must occur *after* Addie is buried, not alongside it nor before it. The old family, including Darl, must bury Addie; Darl is the reason for this trip to begin with, the source of Addie's vicious decision to exact a dying wish (a death wish?) thirty year before her death. The new family, however, need not only kill and bury its old wife, but also must remove the queer element from its new formation, lest that element become as central to its new *Eros* as it proved to be to the thirty-year erotics of the previous version of the Bundrens. Nonetheless, though I have so far privileged Darl's removal as the ultimate end to the tension of the plot, Addie's burial must also occur for the new Mrs.

Bundren to arrive on the scene. Taken together, Addie's burial and Darl's removal suggest that Faulkner had a deeply troubled vision of his new marriage, but not the troubled vision that has long been established as the source of his anxiety about marrying Estelle.

Faulkner wrote *Sanctuary* first but published it after *As I Lay Dying* for reasons I will detail in the next chapter. *Sanctuary* was the last novel he wrote prior to his marriage; *As I Lay Dying* was the first he wrote after it. Judith Wittenberg has called *Sanctuary* Faulkner's "bleak epithalamion" because of what she believes it reveals about Faulkner's anxieties concerning his marriage to Estelle, the promised bride who had married another man. Wittenberg claims that "all was not psychically serene in the writer's inner life" when he wrote *Sanctuary* (91). To verify her impressions, she points to Faulkner's behavior as he wrote the book, including his dismissive comments that the book was "bad" and his frequent trips to Memphis, "the city of brothels, in order 'to do a lot of research on it.'" (91). Wittenberg considers that Faulkner "had always spent a moderate amount of time on the fringes of the demimonde" and interprets his trips to Memphis as evidence that he had "severe doubts about his sexual adequacy with 'respectable' women, as well as the kind of ambivalence about women in general that Faulkner's work and life had already demonstrated," namely his depictions of "evil" women and their negative influences on men (91). While I do not doubt that there is much truth in Wittenberg's assessment, there is more to Faulkner's "anxieties" about marriage at this moment in his life than his possible nervousness about his (hetero)sexual adequacy. He depicted those anxieties much less bleakly but much more savagely in the other key works he wrote in the immediate aftermath of his marriage, namely *As I Lay Dying* and "A Rose for Emily."

Among Faulkner's less-than-generous earlier depictions of women include his unfavorable depictions of lesbianism in his early poems and in *Mosquitoes*. Wittenberg does not

cite Faulkner's disregard for lesbianism in her list of Faulkner's evil women characters, but this absence points to the missing element of her larger argument. When Faulkner spent his time on the "fringes of the demimonde," he spent it largely in openly gay communities with openly gay men, not just on trips to brothels in Memphis. Any anxiety he might have felt in regard to his sexual adequacy with women should also be considered alongside his successful courtships of and intimate friendships with gay men, such as Wasson, Young, and Spratling. While certainly the Estelle he married in 1929 would figure differently in his mind than the idealized "Estelle" of his earlier courtship of her in the late 1910s, courting her and marrying would not only be a challenge to Faulkner's sense of her sexual propriety but also to his sense of sexual freedom. To marry Estelle meant to end his active submergence into gay cultures and his free pursuit of his own erotic drives, directed towards other women, other men, other pursuits in general, or to whatever or whomever he felt the desire to pursue throughout the long years between her rejection of him and his eventual acceptance of her. Marrying Estelle forced Faulkner to give up his previous life for the rigid expectations of marriage. As much as this effort required him to reassess Estelle as his promised bride, it also required him to suppress his own queer *Eros* for the proper heterosexual erotics of his hometown.

Immediately after his marriage, Faulkner channeled his anxieties about marriage into "A Rose for Emily." In that story, he depicted the metaphoric death of Homer's queer sexuality as the actual death and decay of his body in Emily's bridal chamber. Without access to the outside world and to the young men at the Elk's club and the young boys on the Square, Homer rots in the marriage bed to which Emily forced him and from which he cannot escape. The town queer entered through her back door one evening; when he emerged thirty years later, he was a grotesque disfigurement bearing the marks of his married life in his flesh much the way the

“real” Dorian Grey’s image rots away in his attack as the emblem of the real effects of his lifestyle, though on the outside his life looks so perfect and enviable. The savagery of “A Rose for Emily” serves Faulkner as an epithalamion as much as the bleak imagery of *Sanctuary* and its concluding passage set in the Luxembourg Gardens in Paris--where Faulkner visited Wilde’s tomb once--on “a gray day, a gray summer, a gray year” (316). Faulkner continues this savage depiction in the closing scenes from *As I Lay Dying*, the elegy for the former life he left behind to marry Estelle.

At the end of *As I Lay Dying*, the original family utterly disintegrates. The mother has died and is buried. Two sons are physically scarred and face long periods of recovery. The daughter is unwed and pregnant. The youngest son, whose grief throughout the journey inspires some of Faulkner’s greatest poetry, narrates seemingly incoherent descriptions of his immediate surroundings. The other son has been violently seized, beaten, and sent by train to an asylum. To end the period of tension, Faulkner not only brutalizes the queer member of the family, but he also kills the first wife in order to introduce the new one, whose entire identity emerges in just three words: “Meet Mrs. Bundren” (261). Anse does not even bother to introduce her as the “new” Mrs. Bundren; and at least Addie had a first name. If Faulkner’s heterosexual erotics spawned his writing of *As I Lay Dying*, then he was not channeling a joyous sense of new union, new possibilities, and hopeful futurity, all elements that a traditional reading of Freudian erotics should engender in a text. He was suffering the psychic rift alongside Darl and painfully clearing away the debris of his former life--its queer performances and its lost sense of promised heterosexual gratification with an idealized wife. If Estelle informs any character in the novel, then is she Addie, the wife Faulkner killed, or Mrs. Bundren, the new and nameless insertion at the conclusion who has no identity of her own beyond her prescribed role as wife and mother in

a rigid heterosexual order with no place for any individual desires beyond the compulsory demand for strict heterosexuality? *As I Lay Dying* is not a novel in praise of a wife, despite Tull's half-hearted and folksy recitation of Cora's prescription for Darl's ailment, his "thinking." Marriage requires sacrifice, and in this Faulknerian universe, those sacrifices are begrudging and vicious. Faulkner seems at least as anxious about losing his former life as he seems uncertain about the new life he is beginning. He sacrifices his queer self and embraces marriage, but he does neither easily.

After *As I Lay Dying*, there are certainly homosexual elements to Faulkner's fiction, but they are categorically different than those he depicted in the first eleven years of his literary career. Throughout the 1930s, in particular, his participation in homosexual subcultures recedes into a queer depiction of mediated sexuality that has drawn copious critical attention but that never fully emerges in the overt ways of his fiction prior to his marriage. Some of his depictions of latent homosexual elements would be mediated through representations of racial impurity; others would be mediated through triangulated desires similar to the outmoded "between men" model of nineteenth century literature and earlier, though Faulkner would present these relationships in challenging and provocative contexts rooted in his contemporary scene and experiences. Faulkner married Estelle in what proved to be almost the exact middle of his life (1897-1962). Prior to his marriage and prior to *As I Lay Dying*, he depicted homosexuality and performed homosexuality in the ways I have discussed so far in this study. As he entered what would prove to be the magical years of his prime as a writer, Faulkner continued his performances of homosexuality, though sometimes with more anxiety than his previous life allowed. His performances changed just as gay life was changing throughout the twentieth century. Faulkner recorded and enacted that change.

CHAPTER 7: LA VITA NUOVA

After his marriage to Estelle and after publishing *As I Lay Dying*, Faulkner's fiction took a turn that would have far-reaching effects on his overall literary reputation, a turn that parallels the turn in his life to marriage, the responsibilities of his new family with Estelle's two children, and the birth of his own daughter, Jill, in 1934, after the death of his first daughter, Alabama. Though by 1932 Faulkner had long since turned to his fictional county as the primary focus of his apocryphal creations, with *Light in August*, *Absalom, Absalom!*, and later with *Go Down, Moses*, his role as recorder of Southern history shifted from a story of poor country whites in which only one African-American character appears, in the case of *As I Lay Dying*, to narratives that confront the challenges of race in its multiple and problematic dimensions. At no point in this turn did his eye ever fail to see the significance of sexuality in the constructions of race and the larger social and cultural emanations of its deeply rooted presence in Southern life and identity, but Faulkner's perspective on homosexuality did shift from the clearer representations of his early poetry and fiction to a more obscured and closeted paradigm related to the larger insight of his vision but not always as celebratory or unmediated within it. Faulkner's commitment to critique structures of homophobia in his New Orleans sketches and World War I fiction survived in his great fictions of the 1930s in his critiques of race, but in his effort to present the realities of his postage stamp of native soil, he lost some of the control he had previously demonstrated over his representational landscape and seems to have found it difficult

to present any sexuality unmediated through a more complex cultural matrix of heterosexuality and its stifling demands and conventions.

Two key events in the early 1930s actually go so far as to paint a picture of Faulkner as troubled by homosexuality because of the degree to which it posed a threat to his new and seemingly begrudging acceptance of heterosexual life. One of these events involved a performance of homosexuality that disgusted and disturbed Faulkner for its overt hedonism and effeminacy; the other involved the intersection of race and sexuality in a setting that challenged Faulkner's previously easy association of sexual otherness (namely homosexuality) and whiteness. Conversely, these two events occurred in a milieu into which Faulkner nonetheless chose to immerse himself, if less enthusiastically than he had in the previous decade. What emerges from a survey of Faulkner's life in the 1930s is an image of Faulkner confronting performances of homosexuality identity that troubled him. While he continued to carry on his friendship with Ben Wasson and explored the gay culture in New York--a culture at times almost directly transplanted from New Orleans--he also encountered alternative performances of homosexuality that would profoundly affect his depictions of gay themes.

Mixed Encounters

To best understand Faulkner's new life in the years after his marriage, we can follow his relationship with Ben Wasson, whom he formerly courted in place of Estelle. From the late 1920s to the early 1930s, Wasson helped Faulkner navigate the difficult transition of changing publishers after Boni and Liveright rejected *Flags in the Dust*. That rejection and the publication of *Sanctuary* in 1931 mark the bookends of Faulkner's professional life as it overlays the period

of his successful courtship of and eventual marriage to Estelle. At the same time that Faulkner courted Estelle, his relationship with Wasson shifted as Wasson moved from being Faulkner's close intimate to being his agent. The gay Ben Wasson with whom Faulkner often found like-minded companionship would, in his new role as agent, witness Faulkner's entrance into new gay environments and even escort Faulkner through the two key events of Faulkner's immediate post-marriage gay life. The duality of Faulkner's confrontation with a version of homosexuality that challenged him while being joined by his gay best friend created tensions that would animate the fiction produced during these years.

In 1931 Faulkner had a new book coming out, *Sanctuary*, his fourth Yoknapatawpha novel, certainly his darkest, and his first novel after *As I Lay Dying*. Of course, the novel actually predates *As I Lay Dying*. In an introduction to *Sanctuary* that he wrote for the 1933 Modern Library edition, he explained of its creation that after the beautiful but unprofitable aesthetics of *The Sound and the Fury*,

I began to think of books in terms of possible money. I decided I might just as well make some of it myself. I took a little time out, and speculated what a person in Mississippi would believe to be current trends, chose what I thought was the right answer and invented the most horrific tale I could imagine and wrote it in about three weeks and sent it to [Hal] Smith, who had done *The Sound and the Fury* and who wrote immediately, 'Good God, I can't publish this. We'd both be in jail.' (S 322-23)

The novel, which Faulkner also called "a cheap idea, because it was deliberately conceived to make money," (S 321-22) fell to the wayside, and he turned his attention instead to *As I Lay Dying*, a decision that Kartiganer claims was directly related to his erotic drive to support his

new family. Only after that novel, and its depiction of the repudiation of gay Darl, did Faulkner return to *Sanctuary*, revise it, and publish it. Of all the books that he published prior to his Nobel Prize, *Sanctuary* sold the best.

One must consider Faulkner's Modern Library introduction with a grain of salt. The final version of *Sanctuary* attains a high degree of the Modernist aesthetic that Faulkner valued so dearly and even praised for his successful attainment of it. In that same introduction, Faulkner would admit of the revisions, "I made a fair job of it" (S 324), which implies that Faulkner did not see the book simply as a cheap idea when he completed it, even if he originally conceived of it as a means to make money. The introduction serves mostly to make the book the tantalizing, illicit object that the introduction claims it is--in short, the introduction is its own speech act, creating a sensationalism that may not otherwise have been associated with the novel. We might consider such tricky sophistry the mark of a great salesman. The worry over money and the production of art as a means to pay bills and support his family, however, does seem to be an honest anxiety on Faulkner's part, even if Faulkner presented his anxiety over his new demands as a husband and step-father in a rather sensational way. He wrote *Sanctuary* originally in 1929, as his marriage approached and the weight of his impending responsibilities began to make their impression on him. He was honest when he admitted that his publishers rejected it. He turned instead to *As I Lay Dying*, the first novel he wrote after his marriage. He returned to *Sanctuary*, however, convinced that it would sell *and* convinced that it belonged in his canon as worthy of the novels that preceded and followed it.¹

Wittenberg considers *Sanctuary* a bleak epithalamion. Alongside *The Sound and the Fury* and its depiction of Caddy's sexual transgressions and attempt to fool her husband into believing he is the father of her child, these novels suggest Faulkner's tremendous anxiety and even

ambivalence about his pending marriage. Perhaps in both Faulkner apocryphized some deep impulse he did actually feel regarding marrying Estelle despite her previous marriage.

Symbolically, that previous marriage serves as a version of adultery to the new husband. Estelle becomes the fallen woman rather than the promised virgin bride. Faulkner intensified what might have been at best a general discouragement to his heterosexual designs and created the brilliantly hyperbolic ruminations of Quentin Compson and the sordid sexual economy of Popeye, Red, and Temple at Miss Reba's. Both novels depict in complex, sordid, and brutal imagery the anxieties of a cuckolded groom. In his actual life, Faulkner saw the sordid economy of *Sanctuary* as a means of improving his financial standing in Oxford. After selling some stories and receiving his advances on *As I Lay Dying*, he had bought a house, Rowan Oak, in which to start his own family and properly raise Estelle's two children. With *Sanctuary*, he found a way to pay his mortgage, but not without some serious advertising to ensure that his book attracted the attention necessary for it to be a commercial success. The Modern Library edition of the novel would not come out until 1933, though, and it was not on Faulkner's proverbial financial radar in 1930. He needed something more immediate. He needed a money-making novel, and he needed it to garner popular attention to make that money. His agent in New York, Ben Wasson, found the perfect platform for the large audience that the novel needed in the weekly radio show of the famous critic and member of the Algonquin Round Table, Alexander Woollcott.

Ben Wasson's tenure as Faulkner's agent had no single original moment, but rather evolved over time. As early as 1924, Wasson assisted in promoting *The Marble Faun* by writing to the Billy Levere Memorial Sigma Alpha Epsilon House in Evanston, Illinois, to include it in the SAE published record of alumni accomplishments. He also sent along Faulkner's picture, which he had convinced Faulkner to have taken in Greenville on 29 March, by Willa Johnston,

whom Wasson identified in an interview as a lesbian.² Wasson had previously introduced Faulkner to William Alexander Percy in Greenville as well. The connections Wasson made on Faulkner's behalf were often with queer members of the artistic communities that Wasson inhabited. This pattern repeated itself often in Wasson and Faulkner's friendship as Wasson moved more firmly into the role of Faulkner's formal agent.

In 1927 Wasson decided to give up practicing law in Greenville and to move to New York to try his hand as an author and literary agent. Describing his apartment on MacDougal Street across from the Provincetown Theatre, Wasson brags in his memoir, "I thought when I became an occupant of that room that I had become a genuine Greenwich Villager. When Bill [Faulkner] first saw it, he remarked, 'Ah, the Bohemian life!'" (83). Wasson's family was less thrilled. He recalls, "My mother and father and my sister Mary Wilkinson and her husband were outraged that I lived in that house and neighborhood. Mary wept and called the room disgusting" (83). Wasson deftly leaves the reasons for these objections unclear except to emphasize the proximity of his apartment to Washington Square, the heart of Greenwich Village. Wasson is advertising that he lived in the gay epicenter of New York, in close proximity to Washington Square and not simply on the fringes of the Village in some out-of-the-way alley. In this apartment Wasson began working on his own novel, eventually published as *The Devil Beats His Wife*. He also went to work for the publishing house of Cape and Smith after Harrison Smith broke away from Harcourt, Brace to form his own firm. Earlier, in 1928, when Boni and Liveright rejected Faulkner's third novel *Flags in the Dust*, Wasson began circulating it to publishers in New York, most notably to the aforementioned Harcourt, Brace, who would accept and publish it with heavy revisions.

Also, in the late 1920s, another gay associate of Faulkner's moved to New York, a

member of the Vieux Carre crowd among whom Faulkner circulated in New Orleans in the mid-1920s. Lyle Saxon took an apartment on Christopher Street, according to Carl and Betty Carmer, two members of the New York set that Saxon established as his personal social milieu once he arrived.³ In 1928, as Faulkner attempted to find a new publisher for his novel, he found himself in New York, couch-surfing among a fraternity of gay Southern men. Owen Crump described Faulkner's arrival and initial nomadic existence to Joseph Blotner in an interview in 1966:

WF had stayed with Stark Young. OC [Owen Crump] remembers a discussion at Lyle's [Lyle Saxon] about where WF should move. He stayed with Lyle a week, but Lyle was so popular that there was usually a crowd there and it wasn't practical, presumably, for WF to stay there. Lyle's door was being knocked on day and night. He always had Southern drip coffee on, which he served with a big to-do.⁴

A Southerner himself, Crump claimed that he took Faulkner in at his apartment on MacDougal Street and 3rd Avenue, just a short way up from the "Provincetown Playhouse." Crump remembered, "We were all poor in those days." He singled out Faulkner, though, for his being so singularly determined to "try[] to get enough done to get an advance, pay his bills, and go home." Crump also described a practice not explicitly mentioned in memories of Faulkner's previous sojourn in New York in 1921. He recalled "making the rounds of all the speakeasies in the Village." Wasson claims in his memoir that he also tagged along on these adventures, but he qualifies that "I didn't attempt to keep up with Bill's activities" (88). Of course, Faulkner had very likely visited his share of bars in his previous trips to New York, but no stories of those excursions survive. In 1928 he "slummed it," if not in Harlem, then at least in the Village.⁵ He was clearly quite comfortable and mobile in the gay and Bohemian set of Greenwich Village, a

comfort and mobility that was likely a product of living in the gay quarter of New Orleans if not a product of his previous short stay in the Village in 1921.

The details from Crump's and the Carmers' interviews are not random. Faulkner was in New York to sell his manuscript for *Flags in the Dust*. He came to rely on his friend Ben Wasson to help in this endeavor. Without much money, he also needed a place to stay and found a place just a block or so from Wasson's apartment near the Provincetown Theater. He found that place with the help of his friend from New Orleans, Lyle Saxon. The system that assisted Faulkner in New York had a name: The Southern Protective Association, an unofficial fraternity of Southern writers and artists committed to looking out for each other in hostile Yankee territory. According to his biographer James W. Thomas, even in New Orleans Saxon had long served as a den-mother for struggling writers. When he moved to New York, he simply transferred his system of fraternal hospitality with him. W. Kenneth Holditch describes the system as follows:

Saxon's support of writers continued after he moved for a while to New York City in the late 1920s and his Greenwich Village apartment became, according to James W. Thomas, a "clearing house" for authors from the South, Faulkner among them, and was nicknamed "The Southern Protective Association." It is worth noting that the tolerance exhibited in the Quarter in the 1920s and later toward those who were somehow outside the mainstream seems to have been exhibited as well by Faulkner, who numbered among his close friends two gay men, Lyle Saxon and William Spratling. (27-28)

Though he did not emerge as a central figure in Faulkner's life in this period, Spratling also moved to New York during the late 1920s. While I may be over-emphasizing the extent to which the Southern Protective Association was primarily a gay male exchange (and it certainly was not

an exclusively gay one), its core were gay men, among them Wasson and later, at least briefly, another young gay Mississippian, Hubert Creekmore, who would take advantage of his connections to Faulkner when he moved to New York in 1930 with his own manuscript in hand and a letter from Faulkner recommending it.

Faulkner arrived in New York in 1928 with the manuscript for *Flags* in a satchel. Wasson introduced Faulkner to the editors at Harcourt, Brace, who had accepted the manuscript pending Wasson's extensive revisions. Wasson revised the manuscript into its eventually published form as *Sartoris*. According to Wasson's memoir, Faulkner declared of the revisions, "You've done a good job" (89). He clearly felt that Wasson earned his keep as an agent in the hard-scrabble publishing world of New York, which was at some remove from the friendly fraternity-based dealings with the SAE record-keepers. The relationship formed in this transaction carried a significant boon for all three parties involved: Harrison Smith, William Faulkner, and Ben Wasson. Smith would soon leave Harcourt, Brace, forming his own company Cape and Smith. He hired Wasson in his first official literary job, Wasson's work on *Flags* being the unofficial agent work of a close friend and fellow Southerner. Faulkner found in Smith a publisher with faith in him. With Cape and Smith at first and then on his own, Harrison "Hal" Smith would publish *The Sound and the Fury*, *As I Lay Dying*, and *Sanctuary*. Wasson eventually left Cape and Smith to take a job at the American Play Company, which would help smooth the way for his move to Hollywood in late 1932 where Faulkner would follow in the mid-1930s and where he would meet Meta Carpenter, with whom he engaged in his first serious and long-term extramarital affair. Clearly, the connections between Smith, Wasson, and Faulkner had a tremendous impact on Faulkner's life and career.

Boni and Liveright were New York based publishers, so to claim that in 1928 Faulkner

conquered New York for the first time is not entirely accurate. He had even lived there before in 1921. When Boni and Liveright rejected his novel, however, Faulkner faced a crisis in his writing and in his prospects for his future as an author with a steady paycheck to undergird his aesthetic intentions. In 1928 he returned to New York to make an entry for himself as he came into his own as the creator of his mythical county and as he approached the new phase in his life marked by his marriage. His success in New York had everything to do with his dependence on the Southern Protective Association, that moveable feast from gay New Orleans held together by his gay friend Lyle Saxon, and his older friend, also a homosexual, who managed to edit his book into a more marketable version that would convince the most important publisher in Faulkner's life to invest in him. Indeed, one can hardly imagine that Faulkner would have ever published *Absalom, Absalom!* with Random House had it not been for the chance Harrison Smith took on *The Sound and the Fury*. In this triumphant march to literary greatness, though, small chinks in Faulkner's armor began to show.

Despite his slumming it in the Village and his embrace of the network that helped him so much in these critical years of his career, Faulkner showed signs of a change. First, when Wasson attempted to edit *The Sound and the Fury* after his success in revising *Sartoris*, Faulkner lashed out at him with his famous invective against Wasson's well-meaning but unwelcome interference. When Faulkner saw Wasson's revisions, he angrily retorted, "And don't make any more additions to the script, bud. I know you mean well, but so do I" (qtd. in Blotner 244). Wasson would make amends for his transgression by recruiting Evelyn Scott to review the novel. Unfortunately, despite her glowing review and numerous acknowledgements from other quarters about the brilliance of the new novel, *The Sound and the Fury* was a commercial failure. As *I Lay Dying* met a similar fate. No longer the wunder-kind who edited *Sartoris*, Wasson moved on

from his role at Cape and Smith. After reading the draft of *The Sound and the Fury*, he even gave up his own career as a novelist, convinced that he could never write a novel as great as that of the man he was working with as his agent. He also realized that he was not helping Faulkner to commercial success, regardless of his literary qualities. Wasson could appreciate Faulkner's aesthetics, but he could not figure out how to make Faulkner's talents pay.

Furthermore, Wasson's virtues as Faulkner's old friend did not hold him in good stead with everyone in the publishing world. In an interview with Joseph Blotner, Leland Heyward would say of Wasson that, "Ben was a little shit, arrogant, undependable."⁶ Morty Goldman, Wasson's secretary who would eventually replace Wasson as Faulkner's literary agent in New York, complained in his interview with Blotner that "[Ben Wasson] was the social contact man. [I] began doing the marketing. BW was Southern & there was a clannishness, t[h]e Southern Protective Assn. BW was a goodwill ambassador." Blotner's notes of the interview explain of Goldman, "He didn't care for BW," and he thought that Wasson handled most clients "badly." Goldman's judgment of Wasson's abilities carried with it a sneering contempt for his sexuality. Later in his interview, Goldman singled out as one of Faulkner's friends in New York "a fag librarian from Miss[issippi] at the NY Pub[lic] Lib[rary]--in the Ref. Dept. Lindley something. He knew WF well. BW would know." Even in typed interview notes, the scornful tone of Goldman's insistence that "BW would know" the "fag librarian" comes through loud and clear, though notably the fag librarian from Mississippi was Faulkner's friend, too. Goldman considered that Wasson's prerequisites as an agent were based on his social skills, not on his business acumen, and that his social contacts were with degenerate types in the Southern bohemian colony clinging to its social order in Greenwich Village, people Faulkner also "knew well," if perhaps too well for Goldman's tastes.

These descriptions paint a picture of an embattled Ben Wasson falling out of favor in the New York literary scene in the early 1930s. Wasson's embattlement paralleled Faulkner's commercial failings. In 1931 Faulkner had a mortgage due. Though the challenges the two men faced occurred ultimately independently of each other, Wasson's reputation as an agent was not bolstered by his failure to capitalize on Faulkner's talents and lead the writer out of the desert of unprofitability. There is no mistaking the tone in Goldman's interview--he thought he could have done better with Faulkner than Wasson had done. So in 1931 Wasson made another attempt in his efforts to increase Faulkner's marketability. If a review by Evelyn Scott would not increase Faulkner's popular readership, a more populist platform was in order. Wasson chose Woollcott's radio show, "The Town Crier." What commercial success this platform might have gained the novel aside, the ensuing meeting between Faulkner and Woollcott stands at considerable odds with Faulkner's previously comfortable immersion in gay culture.

In his memoir, Wasson recounts his adventure trying to contact Woollcott to convince him to feature Faulkner on his radio show. Wasson explains that Woollcott's "circusy radio program" consisted of Woollcott "comment[ing] on matters that struck his fancy, his 'fancy fancy,' I should say" (102). When he succeeded in contacting Woollcott's secretary, she drove home to Wasson the point that everyone wanted to be featured on "The Town Crier" and that such featuring came with a price. Then, to Wasson's delight, Woollcott "not only mentioned [*Sanctuary*], but devoted almost his entire program to the novel, singing praises as only he could sing them" (103). As Wasson was leaving the studio, however, having watched the recording from the sound booth, Woollcott approached him to exact his payment. Accompanying Wasson to a bar, Woollcott "plied me with questions about Faulkner. I had heard he was notoriously merciless and noted for his chutzpah, and he was asking me highly intimate questions about his

favorite new author” (103). This unsettling interview concluded, Woollcott told Wasson, “If the young genius comes to this Sodom and Gomorrah, you are to introduce him to me” (103). Failure to do so, Woollcott politely insisted, would result in Wasson’s “find[ing] yourself in my gem-encrusted dog house” (103). The high-society politics of Woollcott’s expectations were driven home to Wasson by the upswing in sales of *Sanctuary* that resulted from Woollcott’s show. Wasson knew that he owed Woollcott. He knew that he would have to introduce Woollcott to Faulkner.

In the meantime Faulkner moved into the Algonquin Hotel, host site for the Algonquin Round Table of which Woollcott was a member, but he seems to have avoided Woollcott until Wasson finally arranged the meeting due as payment, his proverbial pound of flesh. Wasson records the fateful meeting in his memoir. He begins his account by excusing the “New Jersey Nero” for “not being on his best behavior on the night Bill and I called on him” (119). Apparently, Faulkner did not want to meet Woollcott but allowed Wasson to arrange the meeting as due payment for “The Town Crier” publicity. Wasson’s description of the meeting itself is, quite simply, priceless:

When we arrived, we were invited into the apartment by one of Woollcott’s favorites of the moment. Bill and I were shown into the living room, where a large gathering surrounded our host. He lounged against pillows on a sofa. He was garbed in a rather tattered red brocade dressing gown, the sash untied. His fat belly protruded where the pajama top was not buttoned.

“Ah,” he said, arms extended, his head titled upward in an overalert, inquisitive manner. “So, it’s Master Faulkner, not looking in the least bit sinister. I observe you don’t have your corn cob with you.” Bill remained silent, as

Woollcott looked about to see if those in the room understood the allusion. (119)

What the crowd might understand, of course, was not merely that Faulkner had written a shocking novel. Decked out in his best hedonist garb, all the better for its tattered appearance that suggests the moral decay that the robe could not fully disguise, the sultan was teasing the servant for not coming prepared with his notorious sexual tool.

Faulkner seems to have understood the sexual innuendo--and chose silence as his answer. Woollcott directed his salaciousness to Wasson instead and asked, "How much Negro blood do you have?" (120). He was disappointed, however, that Wasson played along and guaranteed, "Half" (120). To Faulkner, who did not play along, he redirected his attack: "You disappoint me, young Massa. You seem much too harmless to have written that horror of a book. Now, tell me, is Miss Temple a typical Southern belle?" (120). When Woollcott mentioned Southern belles, Faulkner revolted. He turned and exited the apartment, leaving Wasson to trail in his wake and offering no words of parting to his host. When Wasson caught up with him outside, Faulkner simply explained, "I'd prefer to keep company with Frankenstein's monster" (120).

There are legitimate reasons to claim that Woollcott was not a homosexual, so it cannot be homosexuality from which Faulkner was turning away. In a recent internet essay from *Out* magazine, entitled "Inventors of Gay," Joe Thompson considers that Woollcott, though an inventor of gay identity, was "[n]ot technically" gay because "a case of mumps left him impotent." Lacking the ability to perform sex (as an action), Thompson concludes that Woollcott could not, therefore, have a sexual identity as we might recognize it. Thompson places him instead as "gay-adjacent." There is more to this quibbling than a token revival of politically correct Queer Theory double-talk about *being* and *doing*. Woollcott's impotence may have prevented his participating in sexual activities (though as Faulkner's novel illustrates, impotence

may limit but does not preclude one's active sex life). Woollcott, also, never actively declared himself as a homosexual. More significantly, though, Woollcott was of the generation prior to Wasson and Faulkner's and would, therefore, have come of age in a slightly less coherent period of gay identity than the one a later generation would inherit and perform. As with William Alexander Percy, Woollcott, born in 1887, belongs to a generation that created the gay identity later generations would consider predetermined.⁸ Thus, on the one hand, Thompson is not altogether unwise in his cautious consideration of Woollcott. On the other hand, he is very wise to include him in a list of influences on contemporary gay identity.

Herein lies the heart of the matter of Faulkner's meeting with Woollcott. What Woollcott considered his own sexual identity does not matter very much during this moment of encounter. What matters is what Faulkner *considered* Woollcott's sexuality to be. Faulkner saw him at this moment not simply as gay--Wasson was gay, along with Lyle Saxon, Stark Young, and William Spratling. Faulkner saw in Woollcott a "monster." Woollcott's performance of his identity carries with it the markers of a singular and decadent brand of homosexual identity at odds with the self-performance of that identity with which Faulkner had found sympathy prior to this encounter. Even in "Divorce in Naples," his most overtly gay story, neither George nor Carl presents himself as a hyper-effeminate, gender-bending queen. The waiter in "Jealousy" may act prissy at times, but he hardly lounges around in a dressing gown or silk kimono (Charles Bon will prefer the kimono in his college dormitory and his brother Henry will find it quite exotic--Bon, borrowing from Wasson's joke, is a half-blood). Faulkner's World War I pilots confront their fraught masculinity with rage and pain; hyperbolically effeminate gestures stand in direct opposition to the hyperbolically masculine performances they put themselves through. Darl suffers the burden of isolation rather than pursue, say, the "pansy boys" of "Uncle Willy." His

attractions are for men in his local sphere, none of whom present themselves as effeminate. Woollcott is of an entirely different stripe. As Thompson's brief essay explains, "Woollcott's life, work, and acerbic personality formed the basis of a long held negative gay stereotype." Faulkner would agree. When he met Woollcott, he saw a performance of gay identity too far removed from his comfort level for its outrageous ostentation. Moreover, Woollcott's language in the meeting with Faulkner was clearly intended as a type of race-baiting, calling out the Southern writer for his interest in grotesque sexualities by calling him "young Massa" and asking if his friend and companion were part black. Woollcott finally went so far as insinuating that Temple Drake's nymphomania might be typical of all Southern belles. Following Wittenberg's assertions about *Sanctuary* and its relation to Faulkner's anxieties about marriage, such an insinuation would likely have greatly bothered Faulkner's already anxious disposition toward female sexuality and propriety. None-too-pleased, Faulkner turned on his heels and left.

Oddly, Faulkner maintained a modicum of appreciation for Woollcott in spirit, if not in the flesh. This meeting seems to have occurred in 1932. At Christmas of that year, Faulkner wrote to Bennett Cerf, a publisher trying to recruit Faulkner to Modern Library, to thank him for a copy of *The Red Badge of Courage* and to comment on a book by his fellow Southerner Erskine Caldwell, *God's Little Acre*, sent to him by Viking Press as an advanced copy before its 1933 publication. He commented, "I read it with a good deal of interest, but I still think the guy is pulling George Oppenheimer's leg. I believe that Alex Wollcott [*sic*] and Lon Chaney's ghost wrote it."⁹ Faulkner's joke reveals that he was comfortable discussing Woollcott in an abstracted way, as a campy sensationalist akin in his literary sensibilities to Caldwell. In the later 1930s Faulkner also enjoyed the company of the Algonquin Round Table, often preferring to stay at the Algonquin when he was in New York. According to Eric and Rita Devine, in 1935 "Dorothy

Parker gave a party for WF” for the publication of his novel *Pylon*. Renowned master of ceremonies for the Round Table, Parker had an apartment at the Algonquin. The Devines recounted of the party that “[t]hey went from WF’s room down to DP’s aptmt [apartment]. Marc Connelly and Woolcott [*sic*] were there. WF was the guest of honor and loved it.”¹⁰ The Devines did not recount any specific interactions between Woolcott and Faulkner from that party, at which there were many other sophisticates and intellectuals hovering around Faulkner and praising his new novel. Perhaps this social setting diluted Faulkner’s exposure to Woolcott, or else Faulkner had a profound ability to manage context and expectation. Having previously met Woolcott, perhaps he found his presence less disruptive and could enjoy himself.

The curious first encounter with Woolcott was not, however, Faulkner’s only problematic confrontation with a variety of homosexual performance that troubled him. In the pages in his memoir immediately following his account of Faulkner’s meeting with Woolcott, Wasson turns to another incident involving Carl Van Vechten and a drag king named Gladys Bentley. Wasson leaves many of the details of this extremely gay-themed story completely unstated in his memoir, though other sources provide salient details significant for the full context of the incident. Wasson’s memoir version of the story explains that, after *Sanctuary*, numerous publishers, including the aforementioned Cerf but also Alfred Knopf and Harold Guinzburg, were trying to lure Faulkner to their respective publishing houses. Smith’s new one-man firm, which he formed when he broke away from Cape and Smith, was facing financial difficulty. These other publishers could smell the blood in the water and saw an opportunity to secure the up-and-coming talent. After a party that Knopf hosted for him, Faulkner, along with Wasson and the writer Tiah Devitt, decided to follow Van Vechten, who was also at the party, into Harlem for a night on the town. What follows is the only record we have of Faulkner’s

slumming it at a drag bar in Harlem, but his reaction to the distinctive culture is not commensurate with his previous embrace of gay life.

Wasson includes in his memoir the principal figures: Devitt, Faulkner, Van Vechten, and himself. He innocently recounts how, upon their arrival at a club, Van Vechten showed them the ropes and easily gained admission after “he rang a bell and was immediately recognized and invited in” (122). Van Vechten’s love for Harlem is well-known, but Wasson’s picture of his intimacy with the local drag establishments carries a suggestion of more than mere anthropological investment on Van Vechten’s part. They arrived in time to see the show put on by Gladys Bentley, a key figure in the drag scene in Harlem.¹¹ Wasson describes Bentley “[s]waying and clapping her hands” and “dressed in a tuxedo” in which she “worked as hard as a field hand at her act” (122). Of her songs he remarks, “They were filled with double entendres, but the obscenities were supposedly subtle” (122). In this case, so is Wasson’s memoir account. He never mentions that this is a gay bar nor that this is a drag king. Faulkner would have none of the scene played out in front of him. Wasson continues that “Bill got up from the table” (122), paid his respects to Van Vechten, grabbed Tiah Devitt’s arm, and swiftly left. Afterwards, in a cab heading back uptown, Faulkner declared, “Down in Memphis, I wouldn’t spend my time on Beale Street mixing around socially, and I wouldn’t do it in New York’s Harlem” (123). He chides Devitt that “[a] nice, pretty young lady like you hasn’t any business in dumps like that” (123). In light of Wasson’s comment about Bentley’s “work[ing] as hard as a field hand” and Faulkner’s comparing the trip to “mixing around socially” on Beale Street, the account acquires a racial, not a sexual, tone. The social mixing with African-Americans in Harlem is the trouble, not the slumming it in drag bars. Devitt does not belong there because, in addition to being “nice [and] pretty,” she is also white. Faulkner would seem to be protecting her honor.

In regard to this story, Wasson's memoir account is not the best source of what undercurrents were really driving Faulkner's reaction. Race certainly played a part, and Wasson is not just being evasive to dwell on racial concerns rather than on the homosexuality of the situation. He actually implicates himself in the white Southern social order of his era, even though by the time he wrote his memoir in the early 1980s, that order was, if not dead, thoroughly past. His own interview with Joseph Blotner from 1965, however, is considerably more detailed and much more overtly concerned with race *and* (homo)sexuality. The interview with Wasson about the trip to see Gladys Bentley represents one of the few moments of genuine suppression in the biographical record in regard to Faulkner and homosexuality. Blotner and Wasson knew the full story. Neither ever published a full version of it.

Wasson's interview begins with the same context; Alfred Knopf held a party at his apartment for Faulkner to try to secure him for his publishing house if/when Smith's firm failed. The interview involves the same cast, only with one notable exception, a man Wasson leaves out of his later memoir account. Blotner recorded Wasson's oral account as follows:

WF wanted to see Harlem (apparently the party was the Knopfs). Ben Wasson told Bennett [Cerf] that WF wanted to see Harlem so Carl Vanvectum [*sic*] and a girl Ben knew named Tiah Devitt and Ben and WF went to Harlem. The party before they left was the one at which Knopf after dinner asked WF to sign the books which he had collected and WF says Ben answered, "Thank you, Mr. Knopf, but I only sign books to my friends." The visit to Harlem ended at Gladys's. Gladys was an enormous Negress, a lesbian who wore a dinner jacket. She sang a blue version of Sweet Violets which made WF so disgusted the he left. Vanvectum's negro boyfriend was there with him.¹²

Faulkner's leaving the bar in this story is much more directly attributable not to his fear of racial mixing but his "disgust" at the site of "an enormous Negress, a lesbian." He may also have been unnerved not by general mixing but by the specific mixing he witnessed: Van Vechten and his "negro boyfriend." In an odd twist, Blotner included, in decidedly coded fashion, the details of this interview account in his two volume biography, though he cut it completely from the later one-volume edition. In his the two-volume biography, Blotner omits that Bentley was a lesbian and only refers to Van Vechten's boyfriend as "a young Negro man who was a special friend of Van Vechten's" (Blotner, 2 Vol. 743). Wasson leaves these details out of his own published account altogether. The purest form of the story is Wasson's original interview. This chronology seems backwards. Historical studies, and particularly LGBT-themed biographies, tend to progress from less detail to more, from in the closet to out. For this story about William Faulkner, that progress is reversed. Compared to, for example, Blotner's inclusion of Spratling's homosexual encounter in the Genoa jail in his later biography, this closeting stands out in the biographical record.

This reversed chronology has, over time, had a distinct effect on our understanding of Faulkner. Clues to Faulkner's motivations for leaving the bar have moved from possible homosexual to decidedly racial anxieties as the homosexual elements of the story have been siphoned off in order to crystalize Faulkner's complicity in the ideology of Southern racial purity and the protection of white womanhood. Without the "negro boyfriend" and the giant Lesbian, Faulkner was cavalierly saving Tiah Devitt's white womanhood. With them, he was performing a brand of homophobia at considerable odds with his previous embrace of gay life and culture. In truth, racial and homosexual anxieties infuse each other in this story. Perhaps in New Orleans, fancying himself a sexual pioneer, Faulkner could join Spratling while he cruised for (white)

hobos in Jackson Square, and he could ignore the implications of a douche bag hanging in their shared bathroom. Faulkner certainly felt comfortable in the (white) bohemia of Greenwich Village.¹³ While neither space is or has ever been racially pure, in both Faulkner probably found the tacit strictures on social (racial) mixing more akin to his experience and comfort levels. If, in the early 1930s, he wanted to visit Harlem, it follows that he had not previously gone there. This line--a racial line--is one that he had not crossed in his previous explorations. When he crossed it, he apparently found more than he bargained for.

Why he would perform such anxious responses to homosexuality in these two circumstances proves a difficult quandary. Woolcott was a loud and popular voice on the radio. Surely Faulkner was at least somewhat aware of his personality before he met him. Faulkner went to the drag bar with Wasson, Van Vechten, and Van Vechten's boyfriend. Surely he knew what kind of bar he was going to and what kind of performance he was going to see there. Also, throughout the early 1930s Faulkner continued to surround himself with gay men from his former New Orleans (and Oxford) circle. To pretend his reaction to Bentley and Harlem's gay scene was simply a gesture to save Tiah Devitt seems chivalrous to a fault, as if it was more a blustery performance of chivalry and protecting Devitt's delicate womanhood than a real desire to save her virtue. After all, she did join them to begin with. Conversely, we have no account of Faulkner's later claiming the whole evening was a grand joke, an intentional prank wherein he overplayed the role of protector for the humor of it. We also have no later story of Faulkner's returning to Harlem to enjoy the culture again, gay or otherwise. Faulkner clearly felt anxiety about these performances of homosexuality. His anxieties influenced the apocryphal creations that sprang from his actual experiences in these gay settings.

What we do have is Faulkner's next great turn in his life in his pursuit of income to

support his family. In the mid-1930s, Faulkner went to Hollywood. He was joined by Ben Wasson. While there, he met and befriended Clark Gable, whose sexuality included women but also included a closeted appetite for men. The difference between Faulkner's sojourn in Hollywood and his previous trips to New York or New Orleans is that he never liked Hollywood and always, quite famously, did nearly everything in his power to work from "home." In one famous instance he even asked for permission to work from home from his studio boss, who thought he meant his hotel in Los Angeles, and actually drove home to Oxford to work on a screenplay. In the 1930s Faulkner found himself a denizen of Hollywood, but without the zestful embrace of a queer life away from home that he had previously enjoyed before his marriage to Estelle. In Hollywood, he engaged in his most memorable heterosexual affair with Meta Carpenter, but he also refused to divorce Estelle for fear of losing Jill. These complex negotiations with his sense of identity would come to mark his fiction from the period as much as his complex negotiations of homosexuality and race.

The Curious Case of Clark Gable and William Faulkner

Faulkner did not exactly follow Wasson to Hollywood, but Wasson preceded him in moving there, thus transferring to Hollywood the safety net of the Southern Protective Association from Greenwich Village and preparing a path to ease Faulkner's transition in 1933. Though only tacitly Faulkner's agent in Hollywood, Wasson helped clear the way for Faulkner's later arrival and his hiring by a studio as a screenwriter. Faulkner was never happy in Hollywood, but Wasson's experience was considerably more positive. Upon arriving, "a Hollywood friend" helped him find a good house to rent, and "[a] New Yorker lived in the house

across from mine, and together we employed a houseboy, a friendly, shy Philipino, Paul Pagurayan” (Wasson 130). Wasson recounts that he had “[t]wo friends, Dan Totheroh and George O’Neil” who “had a black woman cooking for them” (133). Such subtlety misdirects from the implications of this living arrangement: the cook is employed in Dan and George’s shared house. Maybe they are just roommates, though even that word, *roommate*, has loaded implications in the rhetorical closets of homosexuality (for that matter, so does *houseboy*, but Wasson is mute on the matter of how he and his New Yorker neighbor shared Paul Pagurayan). Also, similar to Lyle Saxon’s Southern drip coffee as a way of reminding Southerners of the comforts of home, two friends with a black cook make up the social set Wasson identifies as his own after his move. Wasson seems to be interested in establishing his own SPA in Hollywood, though whether this association also included the homosexual element of that community remains unclear, or at least unstated, in Wasson’s memoir.

In Hollywood Wasson remained a close friend of Faulkner’s even though his role as Faulkner’s agent was diminishing. In early 1933 Faulkner wrote to Wasson about hoping to approach Howard Hawks when he arrived in Hollywood. At the end of the letter, Faulkner teased Wasson: “Are you married yet? Cho-cho is quite interested; she thinks Thia [*sic*] is quite beautiful; ‘cute,’ she calls it. But that’s the same word she uses for a bouquet of roses or the burning of Rome, so she cant say more.”¹⁴ Faulkner was not asking if Wasson was married. He knows Wasson too well to suspect that Wasson has a romantic interests in Tiah Devitt. Cho-cho wants to know, not Faulkner. In 1933 Cho-cho, or Victoria, Estelle’s daughter, would have been in her early teens. Faulkner’s brief rumination about her use of “cute” implies that he was faulting her lack of astute observation and subtle choice of words. She, apparently, was still in the dark about Uncle Ben. Faulkner’s asking about “Thia” Devitt also had an ulterior motive.

Morty Goldman, who was just becoming Faulkner's literary agent in New York, clarified in his interview with Blotner that Faulkner, not Wasson, "liked Thia Devitt."¹⁵ If Goldman's assessment is accurate, then perhaps Faulkner's motive for asking about her was to keep track of her for his own romantic interests. Those romantic interests may also elucidate Faulkner's reason for acting so chivalrous and protective of Devitt's virtue at Gladys Bentley's drag show. Saving Devitt from the drag club in Harlem may actually have derived from his hope to impress her as a suitor. Surrounded by Wasson, Van Vechten, and Van Vechten's boyfriend, he may have found courting her difficult (perhaps he was even worried that in the group, he would be confused as Wasson's boyfriend and Thia as their mutual fag hag).

At times Wasson and Faulkner's intimacy in Hollywood would prove problematic. Wasson found himself at the center of Faulkner's first serious infidelity to Estelle in his affair with Meta Carpenter, whom Faulkner had introduced to Wasson in the early stages of his relationship with her. Wasson understood that Faulkner was pursuing Meta despite his being married. That Faulkner would share such a potentially damaging piece of information with Wasson, who was also friends with Estelle, suggests that Wasson and Faulkner's relationship, even after Faulkner married Estelle, maintained much of the same tenor as it had during the 1920s. As Wasson confessed to Faulkner that he had kissed Estelle, Faulkner showed Wasson that he was engaged in an extramarital affair. Perhaps Wasson was supposed to respond to Faulkner as Faulkner had once responded to him, "Remember, bud, that Eve wasn't the only woman who handed out an apple, just the first one" (Wasson 81). Meta effectively functioned as the woman through whom these two men continued their previous relationship with each other, though in this case, the triangulation of desire appears strikingly similar to the pattern explicated by Sedgwick in *Between Men*.

The crisis of this relationship occurred when Estelle and Jill visited from Oxford. Estelle hosted a party, and Faulkner decided he wanted Meta to attend. Faulkner's motives for this decision prove difficult to determine. Faulkner seems to have wanted a confrontation, but rather than force that confrontation explicitly, Faulkner arranged for Wasson to attend as Meta's date. In his memoir, Wasson details what ensued. While she served Martinis, Estelle sized up Meta; a veiled exchange of challenging pleasantries passed between the two women. Though Wasson was intended to play the part of Meta's lover, he does not suggest that he fooled anyone, especially Estelle. The next morning, Estelle called Wasson. She was "infuriated" and proceeded to explain: "You didn't fool me for a second, you and Billy. I know that the person you brought to my house last night is Billy's girl out here and not your girl at all! I know about that movie actress you're so crazy about" (149). Estelle was particularly appalled since "all these years you've been like a member of the family" (149). We must recall that once, in 1924, Estelle kissed Wasson as he played the piano in her parents' front parlor. What did she know then? What motivated her to make an advance on Wasson, Faulkner's male intimate? In Hollywood what did she know now? The movie actress she mentioned was likely either Miriam Hopkins or Claudette Colbert, both of whom Wasson names in his memoir as acquaintances, neither of whom he identifies as a girlfriend or lover. Tiah Devitt disappeared from any discussion of potential romantic partners long before Estelle's visit. Her disappearance--and replacement by two new "potential" lovers--suggests that Wasson maintained friendships with several women writers and actresses. No evidence suggests that these friendships advanced to intimacy.

Faulkner knew Wasson well, yet he used him as cover for his affair with Meta. Wasson, though, was poor cover, and Estelle immediately saw through him. Clearly, that Faulkner was willing to carry on an affair in Hollywood demonstrates that he perceived Hollywood as a space

beyond the confines of Oxford and its heterosexual expectations. His decision to force a confrontation between the relationships that he maintained in those separate spaces, however, suggests that he was having trouble navigating the divide between home and away from home. Faulkner may have been troubled by the dichotomy of his queer life in the 1920s, but he never overtly broke down the boundaries between his home life and his queer life--or, if he did, as when he courted Wasson, he chose a private, secluded space where he could court Wasson unobserved. This forced confrontation also suggests that Faulkner was not very good at lying about his actual life to the people most intimately involved in it even if he could tell elaborate falsehoods to acquaintances and strangers. Wasson proves throughout his memoir to be a much more adept manipulator of the veil of knowledge, which is to say that Wasson knows how to negotiate the closet. Faulkner does appear to have mastered those intricacies as well. What Faulkner learned in the 1920s about the spatial conceptualizations of homosexuality he could not adapt to the demands of his new heterosexual life. The other side to this story, though, is that Wasson was not Faulkner's only gay acquaintance, nor his only access to the ways that gay men manipulated the closet in their personal lives and in their public personae. For that, he had as another model: Clark Gable.

Faulkner was a denizen of Hollywood off and on for most of the 1930s and 1940s. He met many artists, writers, movie stars, and other members of the cinema production world while there, from nameless masses of men and women with whom he crossed paths to much more influential figures who would factor into his life more definitively. One of the latter was Howard Hawks, a director who appreciated Faulkner's talents and remained friends with him for the rest of his life, even through several of Faulkner's later alcoholic binges in Hollywood, Egypt, and elsewhere. Meta Carpenter worked for Hawkes; Faulkner first met her in Hawkes' office.

Another of Hawkes' friends also provided a colorful story for the biopic of Faulkner's life. Sometime in early 1933, Hawkes introduced Faulkner to Clark Gable. The two enjoyed each other's company immensely and even went hunting together in the hills around Los Angeles. Hawkes would recall one of these hunting expeditions when Gable asked Faulkner for advice on some good books to read. When Faulkner included himself in the list of worthy living authors, "Gable took a moment to absorb that information. 'Oh,' he said. 'Do you write?' 'Yes, Mr. Gable,' Faulkner replied. 'What do you do?'" (Blotner 310). The humor of this story belies the friendliness of the exchange. As Blotner reports in his endnotes, his source for this story, Bruce F. Kawin, explains "that Gable's and Faulkner's ignorance of each other's career may have been feigned" (n. 735). Yes, they were. They were both jibing each other, and their friendship would survive the feigned ignorance. During Estelle's visit to Hollywood with Jill, "Clark Gable occasionally dropped in for a drink" (Blotner 374). Blotner reports that as late as 1942 Faulkner and Hawkes continued to hunt together with Gable often joining them as a companion and a drinking buddy. Hawkes' wife would recall a 1942 incident after one such hunting expedition when "Faulkner and Gable shared a bottle of bourbon--very jolly and then very sleepy" (445). Blotner recorded this particular memory because Faulkner actually continued drinking long after everyone else and ended up on one of his famous binges.

Gable was very likely not the only man engaged in closeted homosexual activities that Faulkner met in Hollywood, but the friendly interactions between the two make him a good example for a general type of Hollywood homosexual. Understanding Gable's sexuality and self-performance helps open the closet door of Faulkner's purgatorial tenure in that golden land. Though Faulkner's coterie of gay male friends in New York and New Orleans were, to varying degrees, nationally famous, those worlds of bohemian writers stand at some odds to the glamor

and public spectacle of the life of a Hollywood leading man. David Bret describes the sexual maneuvering of Clark Gable, whom Bret chooses to label bisexual because Gable had as many affairs with women as with men and even married. The life that Bret reconstructs of Gable would be one Faulkner would relate to on many levels. According to Bret, Gable's father constantly derided his son for his interest in "sissy" activities, such as the arts and his early penchant for theater. His father also taught Gable to hunt, which Bret suggests Gable embraced as a way to prove his masculinity to his father. Growing up, Gable inherited from his father a disdain for effeminate homosexuality, but nonetheless, he willingly engaged in numerous homosexual affairs throughout his life, from his earliest years in small community theaters to the height of his career as a major movie star.

Gable represents what Bret calls the "lavender ladder," or a well-established sexual trade in Hollywood in which a man such as Gable, trying to advance his career in the business, would trade sex for money or for better theatrical roles. Moreover, despite Gable's disgust with effeminate homosexuality, Bret offers numerous stories that lead him to the conclusion that Gable preferred the passive role in his homosexual relationships. Bret quotes from several of Gable's former male sexual partners to establish that Gable was a "bottom," a role often associated with the effeminate partner in a homosexual relationship and, generally, with effeminacy. According to John Duvall, Bayard Sartoris in "Ad Astra" is motivated by his fear of the emasculating power of anal penetration. Faulkner understood the negative associations of being the passive partner in gay sex and how that role produced effeminacy (though he does not seem to have agreed that such negative associations were warranted). Gable engaged in this most emasculating of gay sexual practices. He preferred that his sexual life not become the focus of popular media attention, but according to Bret's biography, his predilection for being the passive

partner in anal sex was well-known among his closest friends.

Gable did not engage only in homosex. He married women, but he was openly promiscuous even when he was married and many of his relationships with females were with women attempting their own “lavender marriage” (or at least lavender date) to cover their own preference for women. As for Gable, many of his male sexual partners were themselves in lavender marriages to women as a way to cover up their homosexuality. In Bret’s biography, there are moments when it is not always clear in a given matrix of relationships when Gable is simply performing his role as cover for a woman he is supposedly “with” or using her as cover for his own homosexual affairs. The multiple varieties of Gable’s sexuality were part of a well-established system in Hollywood. By the early 1930s, after he had been in Los Angeles for five years, Gable had mastered the system to the extent that his private life remained beyond the purview of the public eye but was well-known among other Hollywood stars. Of course, those stars would not out Gable because they, too, were involved in the system of public/private sexual exchange themselves. The system was Hollywood’s open secret.

Gable’s particular entry into that system largely found its outlet in hyperbolic masculinity. His fear of perceived effeminacy lead him to craft an increasingly hyper-masculine persona so as to distinguish himself as a “regular guy” rather than a “fluff” (Bret 26-27). Still, Gable utilized the gay ladder as a means of advancing his career and engaged in many homosexual relationships despite the negative associations they might entail. The extent to which any Hollywood star defined him- or herself as gay or straight varies tremendously. The line these movie stars blurred, though, was not the same as the line Stark Young navigated between his life in Oxford, where Faulkner biographers assume he was very restricted, and New York, where he could be himself much more openly. The line these movie stars negotiated ran between public

image and private life without much deference to geographic location. These stars mostly lived in Hollywood, a geographic location that allowed them much more leeway than the small towns where people would watch their films, but even within the confines of Hollywood, as Bret repeatedly insists, the stars were allowed much sexual license but only if they were discreet about it in press releases and publicity shoots.

Faulkner's friendship with Gable points to his awareness of this "secret" Hollywood sexual world. Within Hollywood the sexual exploits of movie stars circulated openly, but always well out of the earshot of newspapers and RKO reporters. Faulkner lived in this environment and knew men, such as Clark Gable, who were immersed in it. Unlike Woolcott and Gladys Bentley, though, these men preferred discretion, or at least made an effort to maintain a public persona of being "regular guys." Around a sybarite or a drag king, Faulkner may have faltered in his embrace of gay culture. Around a man who could at least act "regular," with an emphasis on *act*, he was much more comfortable. In fact, Ben Wasson's acting the part of Meta's boyfriend when Estelle came to visit could easily represent Faulkner's own attempt to pull the lavender curtain over Estelle's eyes for his female lover the way he had observed other Hollywood men do for their "other" lovers as well. If this were the case, his failure would seem to be that he did not understand that a lavender wife always knew what her husband was up to in private. The public eye, not the private family, was whom the optics of normalcy were meant to fool.

In the 1930s Faulkner encountered performances of homosexual identity beyond his group of Southern male companions from New Orleans or his close life-long friend Ben Wasson. Sometimes, he rejects these performances. At other times, he seems as easy around them as he was in New Orleans in the mid-1920s or in Greenwich Village in 1921. The multiple performances, however, certainly proved to be a challenge to Faulkner, who was also wrestling

with his new identity in the early 1930s as a married man himself. These new encounters with gay culture caused tension in his apocryphal gay identity that would inform his novels in the 1930s, even when he did not necessarily mean to make homosexuality the focus of his texts as many of his works from the 1920s implicitly did. The representations of homosexuality that emerge in the novels--or, more accurately, never quite emerge but always seem just below the surface--do so through a mediated lens that prevents them from ever coming fully into focus. As Faulkner wrote the masterful novels of the 1930s--*Light in August*, *Absalom, Absalom!*, and *The Wild Palms*--his representation of homosexuality changed and often appears as a troubled vision. His one short story set in Hollywood, "Golden Land," offers a key insight into that troubled vision and the mediated presentation of homosexuality that marks many of the works from the second half of Faulkner's life.

CHAPTER 8: MEDIATED VISION

In the 1930s Faulkner's unflinching gaze that could so astutely record the world around him did, in fact, flinch when it came to seeing homosexuality with the same insightfulness of his vision from his exiting Oxford in 1918 to his marriage in 1929. What resulted from this flinch was a mediated vision of homosexuality, to borrow from Sedgwick's description of homosexuality in the twentieth century and its ability to articulate itself *unmediated* through heterosexuality or homosociality. Faulkner's multiple difficulties in depicting an unmediated homosexuality during the 1930s stemmed from his anxieties about racial mixing and his ambivalence about his marriage and the rigid expectations it carried with it (though he also effectively adopted and raised Estelle's children and surrounded himself with a house and servants and many other trappings of a conventional upper-middle class white heterosexual life in Oxford for no better reason than that he seems to have wanted that life). Fundamentally, Faulkner's vision, mediated ostensibly through racial matrices and non-normative marital arrangements, was mediated through the nexus of heterosexuality. On the one hand, the same-sex possibilities in the "marriage" in *Pylon* or the incongruent opposite-sex pairings in *The Wild Palms* present queer desires in what should otherwise be heterosexual relationships--or relationships between a man (or men) and a woman. On the other hand, the racial anxieties of *Light in August* or *Absalom, Absalom!* stem from the complicated web that links proper heterosexuality to the maintenance of racial categories. After all, the word *race* derives from the

Spanish word *raza*, meaning *family*. The maintenance of a properly heterosexual family equates to the maintenance of racial categories; the maintenance of racial categories equates to the maintenance of proper heterosexuality fixated on the family structure of opposite-sex (same race) partners producing an offspring in a clear line of racial/familial descent. Samuel Delaney expresses this collusion of sex and race in as:

Race exists through potential pollution/procreation.

Same-sex relations threaten to bring pollution/procreation to a halt.

Woman is the cherished/guarded/enslaved ground on which this game of pollution/procreation is played out. (207)

Delaney does not include the obvious fourth point: Cherishing/guarding another man prevents this game of pollution/procreation, which is to say it halts heterosexual reproduction and its possible pure or impure outcomes and (haunted) promises of futurity. Thus, the very idea of same-sex attraction, when cathected onto questions of racial identity, heighten an already dangerous homophobia present in the epistemological construction of homosexuality in the twentieth century. Racial anxiety can be the metaphor through which heterosexual anxiety is depicted. In the 1930s Faulkner's depictions of homosexuality are mediated through such complex lenses.

The seeds of Faulkner's troubled representations of sexuality in the 1930s go back to at least as early as *Sanctuary*, which was the last novel he wrote before he married but which he revised and published after that marriage in 1931. Arguably, evidence of Faulkner's troubled vision can be found in *The Sound and the Fury*, his second Yoknapatawpha novel, which he began writing after his return to Oxford and as he turned his attention fully to Estelle to wait for her impending divorce and the inevitable decision that he would have to make about marrying

her. Frederick Karl identifies Quentin's "malfunction" in *The Sound and the Fury* as "a shadowy homosexuality which is displaced onto Caddy. In Faulkner's eyes, the incest pattern is less personally and socially unacceptable than the homosexual one" (322). There is no reason to assume that Faulkner would consider or present homosexuality as a "malfunction," unless by malfunction Karl means to implicate the tradition of psychologically wounded soldiers in Faulkner's fiction or some similar pattern of characterization. Karl makes no such gesture in his biography. When he calls Quentin's homosexuality a "malfunction," he is propagating an external judgment about homosexuality that does not follow from evidence in Faulkner's life or in the text. Certainly, there are grounds to read Quentin as possibly a latent homosexual, but such a reading does not depend upon labeling that homosexuality as a malfunction. If Quentin has a difficult time understanding his sexual identity, reading broadly into Faulkner's larger canon would align Quentin with Darl or Donald Mahon. The implications of their homosexuality are not, in themselves, *wrong*. The problem these characters face is how society denies them a means to articulate their desires. If Quentin is a homosexual, then he transfers his desires to his sister because, as Karl asserts, heterosexual incest proves less damaging to him than admitting his own homosexuality. His latent homosexuality is not a malfunction of his otherwise proper heterosexual impulses; rather, his anxieties are a product of his recognizing that his particular desires have no place in his particular community. Naturally, he flees to Harvard, though he fails to find peace there as well. Faulkner would return to Quentin and his fraught attempts to articulate his desires in 1936 in *Absalom, Absalom!*. His possible homosexuality would not be a malfunction in that novel either. Rather, his difficult time assessing his identity results from the complex matrix of sex and race that mediates proper sexuality and denies him a clear vision of his place in society.

Sanctuary is more directly linked to Faulkner's marriage and his apocryphal repudiation of homosexuality. The novel surrounded Faulkner's marriage and hung--as page proofs--in Faulkner's writing room while he finished *As I Lay Dying*. The character of Popeye has fascinated scholars because of his *queer* sexuality, but his sexual otherness is not, in his case, necessarily homosexuality. James Polchin has argued that Faulkner created Popeye in response to visiting Oscar Wilde's tomb. According to Polchin, Wilde represents *the* great case study of queer sexualities and their tremendous costs. Polchin also argues that Faulkner's interest in queer sexualities, namely homosexuality, stemmed from his interest in developing psychological models of sexual development, models that relied on popular conceptions of Wilde to justify their conclusions. Polchin goes so far as to claim that Popeye--the impotent corn-cob rapist--is actually a homosexual. He claims that Faulkner constructed Popeye's pathology in ways similar to psychological case studies of "psychopathic inversion," which Polchin also calls a "veiled case[] of homosexuality" (146). I disagree with this interpretation for the obvious reason that it has no biographical or textual basis. Polchin assumes that Faulkner's major exposure to homosexuality would have come through discussions in popular media about the psychological theories of Havelock Ellis and Freud. Polchin disregards evidence that Faulkner actually knew gay men and so could verify or dismiss those theories based on real world experiences that do not accord with those theories. When Faulkner was shooting a BB gun at black nuns in New Orleans with Spratling, little evidence suggests that he was also worried about Spratling's psychosis which led to his preference for sex with men.

The other difficulty of Polchin's reading is that, to the extent that Popeye has sex with anyone, he rapes Temple Drake--a woman--with a corncob.¹ Popeye quite literally never gets his own erection in response to anybody, male or female. He kidnaps a female, though, to hide her in

a Memphis whorehouse and vicariously experience her while watching Red and her actually have sex.² Whinnying in a shallow voice, Popeye hovers over Red and Temple while they have heterosex. The problem, of course, is that we do not know which lover Popeye is watching. He engages in a sexual act with Temple with a corncob and kills another man who stumbles onto them in the corncrib. In the whorehouse, though, the narration leaves ambivalent who, precisely, is Popeye's main interest in the sexual act he arranged. He could be watching Red, and his voyeurism may have a homosexual basis. Then again, it may not. The strange sexual *menage a trois* does, however, fit Sedgwick's formulations from *Between Men* very well. Red and Popeye engage in a "homosexual" relationship with Temple as the woman between them who sanctions their interactions. Admittedly, Sedgwick's formulations about texts from Renaissance to nineteenth-century British literature usually involve decidedly more symbolic sexual transactions than the impotent Popeye watching Red ride Temple in a whorehouse. Popeye will nonetheless kill Red when he worries that Temple favors him too much. Popeye and Red compete for Temple, but in that competition, there is room to believe that Popeye actually feels sexually attracted to Red and grows jealous not that Temple prefers Red over him, but that Red prefers Temple. That Popeye killed Red because of his latent homosexual desires is not an unreasonable conclusion.

John Duvall proposes a different reading of Popeye's queer sexuality.³ He argues that Popeye's black, skin-tight suit effectively gives Popeye black skin. Racialized sexuality haunts much of Faulkner's fiction from the 1930s and 1940s. Duvall asserts that by representing Popeye as metaphorically black, or African-American, Faulkner meant to signal the long and troubled history of representations of black sexuality as other, or *queer*. Homosexuality was also other, or *queer*, in the same period.⁴ If we presume that Popeye has a queer sexuality, then we are not

altogether wrong to pursue a discussion of his potential homosexuality. As I have previously argued, the word *queer* was acquiring its specific homosexual connotations throughout the early twentieth century, so any appearance of a queer sexuality is worth considering as possibly homosexual. Not all queer sexualities will prove to be homosexual, but such a line of inquiry is justified for texts from this period. Furthermore, as I will argue below in regard to *Light in August*, the maintenance of proper heterosexuality in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries tended to construct blackness and homosexuality in similar ways so as to group them together as threats to (white) racial futurity. Popeye embodies numerous possible variations sexual otherness--blackness, homosexuality, impotence--all of which threatened the fertile, proper, white, virgin purity of his victim.

These alternate readings of *Sanctuary*--one that implicates the homosocial/homosexual triangulation of desire, the other that implicates the complex matrix of race and sexuality--define the parameters of Faulkner's fiction from the 1930s. That fiction explores the complexities of (homo)sexuality through a complicated series of sexual figurations that speak to Sedgwick's explanation of the difference between her formulations in *Between Men* and *Epistemology of the Closet*. As I have quoted previously in my study, she explains in the latter,

But certainly the pressingly immediate fusion of feminist with gay male preoccupations and interrogations that *Between Men* sought to perform has seemed less available, analytically, for a twentieth-century culture in which at least *some versions of same-sex desire unmediated* through heterosexual performance have become widely articulated. (15, italics mine)

Certainly they have, but with equal certainty, *some versions of same-sex desire that is mediated* through heterosexual performance have developed as well. In the 1930s Faulkner's

representations of homosexuality filtered through just such mediations. On the one hand, he depicted complex triangular desires among groups of men with a woman to mediate the latent homosexuality of the relationships. On the surface, these triangulated desires appear as simple manifestations of Sedgwick's earlier model. The point of Sedgwick's distinction between nineteenth and twentieth century paradigms of *homosocial* and *homosexual*, however, is that in the nineteenth century, there were no homosexual desires to speak of because the concept had not been invented.⁵ In the twentieth century, when men felt desire for each other, the result is either homosexual or homophobic because the paradigm for these relationships fundamentally changed in the period between the end of her focus in her first study and the beginning of her focus in her second. On the other hand, Faulkner depicted complex interpellations of identity through the matrix of race. Men who wanted to identify as homosexual also had to confront their place in the racial codes of their society; men who were concerned about their racial identity often had to assess the nature of their sexual desires as evidence of their (supposedly) inherent racial status.

In this chapter, I will explore the different ways in which Faulkner apocryphized homosexuality in his fiction from the 1930s. His apocryphal creations were largely mediated visions of homosexuality, whereas in the 1920s, he much more clearly devoted himself to presenting homosexuality without the fraught racial and closeted complexities of his later works. To survey the fiction from this period, I will forgo a simple chronological account in place of a thematic approach. First, I will discuss race as the mediating factor in depictions of latent homosexuality in *Light in August* and in *Absalom, Absalom!*. Then, I will discuss the queer configurations of heterosexuality that mediate the latent homosexuality in *Pylon*, *The Wild Palms*, *Go Down, Moses*, and the two short stories "Golden Land" and "A Courtship."⁶ The

mediating circumstances in Faulkner's actual life were his sense that he had to repudiate his formerly queer life and his anxieties about the demands of his new heterosexual life with Estelle. Of course, he neither fully repudiated that queer life nor fully embraced the monogamous demands of marriage. His apocryphal creations, however, heightened his anxieties and reflected his resistance to his new realities. The fiction Faulkner produced during the 1930s tends toward depictions of anxious sexuality, including anxious homosexuality despite my previous assertions that anxiety is not always a useful model for understanding Faulkner's homosexual representations. The Faulkner with whom most readers are familiar is the Faulkner from this great matchless time.

Race and (Hetero)Sexuality

Joe Christmas has a problem knowing who (or what) he is. Cleanth Brooks describes of Joe Christmas' fundamental conundrum that "very early Joe came to feel that he was a being somehow apart from the other children [at the orphanage], and very early he also became conscious of the fact that whites were somehow different from blacks" (*First Encounters* 173). From his earliest memories, Joe Christmas finds himself troubled by the epistemological vagaries of the one-drop rule, especially since he knows that he has a dark complexion but does not know who his parents are. The synesthesia that cross-pollinates his troubled sense of racial identity with a sense of sexual difference occurs in the first scene from his flashback to his childhood, when he vomits the toothpaste that he swallowed while listening to the dietitian at his orphanage have sex with her (male) lover. Christmas did not mean to witness this scene, but he does and is caught. Mostly as a means of taking revenge on Christmas because she fears he will

turn her in and she will lose her job, the dietician calls him a nigger. This collision of his nascent psycho-sexual development with his nascent sense of racial difference collapses the two categories, making his subsequent violent psycho-sexual development a measure of his racial identity and his racial identity a measure of his sexual otherness.

Faulkner's portrayal of Joe Christmas feels at times heavily and intentionally Freudian. His vomiting while witnessing sex and the psychological scars of that event, his later fear of Bobbie Allen's menstruation and his sense of the uncleanliness of women, and his violent sexual encounters with women, including with Joanna Burden, in which his sexual acts are tinged with a sense of his hatred for all things woman, depict Joe Christmas as something other than a "normal" heterosexual. His abnormality lends itself to the impression that he might be queer and even that he might be specifically a homosexual. Brooks dismisses the possibility of this conclusion: "Though Faulkner makes it entirely clear that Joe is not a homosexual, he has made it equally clear that Joe is thoroughly put off by all female softness and intrigues" (*FE* 176). In regard to Christmas, Faulkner makes very little clear in his history of Christmas' violent, troubled past. Brooks is right to caution, however, that Joe Christmas is not a homosexual, or at least that Christmas is not explicitly homosexual though he certainly is queer. Christmas has sex with only women, for one thing. His violent hatred of them may make for a difficult heterosexuality, but that hatred does not make him a homosexual unless one is looking for homosexuality through the lens of a psycho-sexual discourse that structures homosexuality as a particular pathology of misogyny and fixations. Certainly, such a discourse was readily available for Faulkner in 1932 when he wrote *Light in August*, but no evidence suggests that he thoughtlessly employed it without having the capacity also to question it. Hence, the intrigue of Joe Christmas is his ambiguity. He does not know what he is, nor do we.

In regard to Faulkner, in the larger context of his life, he came of age at a time when definitions of homosexuality were crystalizing into the forms with which we are familiar today; but he also came of age at a time when the discourse of scientific racism was rampant, particularly in his Southern society. As Siobhan Somerville explores in her study *Queering the Color Line*, “it was not merely a historical coincidence that the classification of bodies as either ‘homosexual’ or ‘heterosexual’ emerged at the same time that the United States was aggressively constructing and policing the boundaries between ‘black’ and ‘white’ bodies” (3). Somerville argues that the same anxieties about the pollution and eventual extinction of the white race were responsible for the increased policing of “normal” sexualities in the latter 19th and early 20th centuries, a conjunction that bound “abnormal” sexual practices as all equally threatening to the futurity of whiteness. Thus the “mulatto,” which Joe Christmas believes himself to be, and the homosexual, or middle-sex/invert, equally represent a dangerous subversion of proper heterosexual conduct: that blacks should have sex with blacks, whites with whites, and, often unstated but nonetheless central to this model, men with women. In the discourse of the era, to break one taboo, for example against interracial sex, was structurally equivalent to breaking other similar sexual taboos, such as committing a homosexual act. Both were forms of racial suicide, and equally abnormal as taboo (though race and sexuality certainly have different histories that led them to this cultural juncture).⁷

From this matrix emerged a (pseudo)scientific apparatus that proscribed to sexual abnormalities a pathological discourse in order to allow for the recognition, and thus isolation and possible correction, of these dangerous behaviors. Though few if any details persuasively construct Joe Christmas as a *homosexual*, his behavior is certainly pathological, which proves sufficient grounds to indict him as one. At best Joe Christmas is gay the way Bill Clinton was

our first black president. Competing epistemologies of sexual and racial identity fuse in him, and we are left to construct him along lines of a psycho-sexual pathology that paints him in a very dark (that is to say negative) light indeed. His violent sexual behavior with women removes him from proper heterosexual classification. He comes to embody all the characteristics of the black beast rapist--it would seem he even intentionally brutalizes and murders Joanna Burden specifically so as to prove that he is as black as he thinks he is and the rest of Jefferson will soon consider him to be. This murder brings about the only same-sex scene in his life: the white Percy Grimm touches his penis but only in order to castrate him. Witnesses accordingly vomit at the sight of Joe Christmas' blood running from his loins, a re-enactment of Christmas' first encounter with sex and the subsequent fear of menstrual blood that disturbs his first sexual encounter.⁸

If, however, Toni Morrison meant her claim that Bill Clinton was the first black president as a way to critique, not praise, his public persona and discussions of it, then how much might Faulkner have meant for the melding of Joe Christmas' racial identity with sexual uncertainty to be its own critique as well? Faulkner grew up in a cultural milieu in which such discourse, to be quite frank, ran rampant. In fact, long before he ever sat down to write *Light in August* or curtly exited a black drag bar in Harlem, he received a copy of *The Clansman* from his elementary school teacher as a reward for his precocious talents in water colors (Blotner 20). The same novel, turned into a play, visited Oxford in 1908, mere weeks after the lynching in Oxford of Nelse Patton, about a block or so from "The Big House" that Faulkner's grandfather owned. This lynching is so far the only one which biographers can definitely place in proximity to Faulkner during his adolescence, though none can claim that the eleven-year-old Faulkner actually witnessed first-hand or participated in the larger theatrics surrounding Patton's death. These

nascent confrontations with the sullied discourse of race do not make much of an appearance in *Flags in the Dust* in the black characters whom Faulkner depicts with less-than-human speech patterns and mental capabilities. In *Light in August*, Faulkner turns for the first time to race as the fundamental element of the story, the central character being, possibly, black.⁹ Certainly, the white Quentin Compson encounters and obsesses over race in *The Sound and the Fury*, and John Duvall has explored the degree to which Popeye in *Sanctuary* also melds discursive paradigms of queer sexuality and racial identity because of his skin-tight black suit. Joe Christmas, however, might *actually* be black. The townspeople want Joe Christmas to be black--to know that he is black, not just to believe it--and are all too willing to believe Joe Burch when he confesses Christmas' true racial identity in his effort to evade prosecution himself, though little in the novel suggests that he is trustworthy. *Knowing* Christmas is black allows for the white townspeople to enact the ritual of outrage necessary to the preservation of their social order. Thus, though the men who actually witness Percy Grimm's castration of Christmas are revolted--one even vomits--the townspeople hardly condemn Grimm's actions.

I call this scene between Percy Grimm and Joe Christmas "same-sex" rather than homosexual as a way to separate it from Faulkner's previous depictions of homosexuality, though in the pathologizing discourses that animate the novel, this distinction is tenuous, as perhaps Faulkner intended it to be. This scene is homosexual to the extent that it relies on the same brutal pathologies of the rest of the novel. In the divide that Sedgwick explores in *Epistemology of the Closet*, the scene may most accurately be read as "homophobic," but as Sedgwick also explains in her study, homophobia and homosexuality are often two sides of the same coin. Percy Grimm's absolutely unnecessary act (indeed, he has caught Christmas and no one doubts Christmas' guilt so there should be no problem with the law running its course

without the emasculation of the castration) *is* necessary as far as Grimm is concerned. For Grimm, this castration is even preferable to the natural progression of law as a way to exorcise the sexual threat posed by the black man, even though Christmas may not be a black man. The threat of Joe Christmas' blackness manifests itself in the latent homosexual desire, subsumed in homophobia, that Percy Grimm enacts by wanting both to touch and to destroy what he is touching, the sexual power of a black man's penis. This terrifying depiction of homosexual impulses is not in keeping with Faulkner's previous depictions of homosexuality through *As I Lay Dying*. Perhaps what does remain, though, from those earlier depictions into this one is the indictment of homophobia, though subsumed into the racial speculations and anxieties of Grimm and the town for which his lone impulses serve as synecdoche.

In *Light in August* the depiction of homosexuality that appears in Yoknapatawpha County proves evasive and not-fully-formed *as* homosexuality. Rather, it appears as a phantom around the edges of a larger critique of pathologizing discourses cathected onto a manifestation of homophobia with no clear source beyond the hyperbolic anxieties of a town ready to believe any number of incredulous racial accusations and sexual innuendos to justify their pre-conceived notions of *what really happened* at Joanna Burden's house. After all, she was descended from Northerner agitators and would be, in the parlance of the time, a "nigger lover." The castration scene is hardly a positive depiction of homosexual desires, even if only deeply subcutaneous ones, and certainly does not speak to Faulkner's having found a way to write Yoknapatawpha *with* homosexuality in it. Darl was queer and had to go. Whatever might be the case with Joe Christmas hardly makes room for alternative performative identities within a Southern landscape, whether they be alternatives to preconceived notions about black identity or alternatives to preconceived pathologies for homosexual identities. In Yoknapatawpha everyone

is anxious about what everyone else might be.

This problematic blending of sexuality and race extends to the other, much more visible homosexual confrontation in the novel. Gail Hightower poses a threat to the heterosexual expectations of the town in that he does not mind that his wife is sneaking off to Memphis for extramarital affairs, one of which eventually kills her very publicly and causes the citizens of Jefferson to criticize Hightower and call for his removal from his post. The real problem, however, emerges after his wife's death when Hightower hires a black maid, a woman who is in the house alone with him all day. The townspeople scare her into resigning because of the implication that she and Hightower might engage in a sexual relationship with no one to monitor their interactions. Then, of course, Hightower employs a black male cook who, by virtue of his job, will be alone with Hightower in his house all day. On some level, we might imagine that Hightower's reasoning is that, if a woman in the house poses too much of a suspicion of inappropriate sexual conduct, then having a man in the house should, in theory, remove that suspicion. Hightower reasons incorrectly. Men in the town kidnap and beat the black cook as a way of warning him away. They suspect homosexuality, not a lack of sexuality. Hightower does not understand the perceived inappropriateness of either employee until the townspeople enact their varieties of punishment on Hightower and his cooks to let him know that he has erred. The townspeople quite literally beat homosexuality out of town by beating up the black male cook. This violent severance of the ties between the black male cook and Hightower has perhaps some semblance of being based in a visible homosexual relationship, except that the novel does not provide any evidence that the cook and Hightower have sex or even want to. As with Grimm's castration of Christmas, a pathologizing discourse of otherness has produced the little formless fears of homosexuality that cause the violent reactions of the townspeople. Upon close

inspection, their phobias proves disturbingly mindless.

In 1936, when Faulkner wrote *Absalom, Absalom!*, he encompassed the entire historical span of Yoknapatawpha County in the various stories that are told and retold through time and through the different narrators. More than any other of Faulkner's novels, *Absalom* has attracted critics invested in LGBT/Queer readings of Faulkner's works, and rightfully so, as the novel exhibits many elements significant to LGBT/Queer inquiry. As with *Light in August*, though, those elements never quite develop as homosexuality and instead always fade back into a more general ether of sexual taboo that mitigates their force in comparison to the homosexuality depicted in Faulkner's earlier works. *Absalom*, Faulkner's masterpiece, largely serves as the repository of all thematic concerns ascribed to Faulkner in much the way that *Hamlet* contains everything Shakespeare ever wrote about. If a critic suspects that a new mode of inquiry might elucidate some aspect of Faulkner's works, that critic usually turns to *Absalom* first in order to establish the relevance of that mode to Faulkner. Arguably, LGBT/Queer Theorists' original interests in the novel stem from its place in Faulkner's canon, but the novel also has a history of producing gay-themed chatter, even before the rise of critical perspectives devoted to sexuality studies in the early 1980s and through the 1990s. In early Faulkner studies, scholars were willing to posit the presence of homosexual elements in the novel. The first statement probably dates to 1955, when Ilse Dusoier Lind proposed in passing--as part of one sentence--that there may be "affection, mildly homosexual in basis" between Quentin and Shreve (qtd. in Liles 99). Not until 1983, however, did Don Merrick Liles compose not only the first essay-length treatment of homosexuality in *Absalom*, but also the first essay-length treatment of homosexuality in Faulkner studies in regard to any text. Liles' essay thoroughly established *Absalom* at the center of LGBT/Queer readings of Faulkner for the novelty of the idea that homosexuality could occupy

the substance of any entire essay on Faulkner, not just a note among larger thematic concerns.¹⁰ Since Liles' intervention, a number of critics have expanded on his original premise. While I prefer to be extremely cautious with the body of criticism on homosexuality in Faulkner's novels, the essays explicating gay and Queer themes in this *Absalom* do actually do justice to the complexity of desires it presents. I would not go as far as cavalierly declaring that "They got it right," but the careful, nuanced, thoughtful, and complex considerations that critics have given to the novel do create a broad enough scholarly canon of text to declare that they have done a good job.¹¹

What fascinates me about the discussion of homosexuality in *Absalom* is less what critics have said about it than *how* what has been said by critics has diffused over the years from Liles' original essay to, say, Michael Bibler's very recent chapter on the novel in his study *Cotton's Queer Relations*. Though there have been many steps in the scholarly conversation between these two critics, Liles and Bibler serve as useful bookends to LGBT and Queer studies of the novel and the way that those studies have tried to annunciate the desires central to its plot. Liles intended to claim *Absalom* for a gay reading, with a little prevarication to differentiate "homosexuality" from what he calls the "homoerotic components" of the novel (Liles 99). In 2009, when Bibler joined the conversation, he multiplied the subtleties of his discourse to include homosexuality, homosociality, homoeroticism, same sex intimacy, "men's sexual alterity" (Bibler 64), queer relations, and even "homo-ness," a term he borrowed from Leo Bersani.¹² None of these terms satisfactorily describe the relationships between Shreve and Quentin or between Henry and Bon. These multiple terms do, however, acknowledge the difficulty scholars face in pinning down the "homosexuality" that seems to be in the narrative but never quite articulates itself clearly and always seems to be maybe not quite homosexuality but

maybe also something else.

The root cause of this taxonomic problem is that neither Quentin nor Shreve call themselves gay/queer/homosexual--nor is any single word, such as *queer*, applied solely to them as it was to Darl in *As I Lay Dying*--and the complex of desires circulating among Bon, Henry, and Judith are never singular nor ever articulated from Bon's or Henry's mouth but only speculated upon by Quentin and Shreve from second-hand, and often very biased, accounts that never clearly or objectively state what they mean to describe. As Walt Whitman might have it, if one looks for a desire one place, it appears in another; or, put differently for this particular case, taboo is taboo, but which taboo is it? At any moment, Quentin and Shreve might be talking about incest, a taboo Quentin has some experience with in regard to his own sister in *The Sound and the Fury*. They might be talking about miscegenation, a concern not off the map entirely between them since Shreve is Canadian and, ever so slightly, other to the house of American/Southern whiteness that Quentin claims is his own because he, unlike Shreve, was born there. Of course, they might be talking about homosexuality, theirs or Henry and Bon's, which would also be incest and also, though non-procreative, miscegenation if they are correct that Bon has black blood in him. By the end of the novel, Quentin and Shreve decide that miscegenation, or Bon's black blood, caused the tragedy of the house of Sutpen. As any number of critics have pointed out, though, they have absolutely nothing on which to base their assumptions except the entirety of the context of race and identity that permeates their apocryphal society and the actual society in which Faulkner grew up and eventually wrote his novel in 1936, coincidentally the same year that Margaret Mitchell published *Gone with the Wind*. If, as other critics, including Bibler, argue, Shreve and Quentin are engaged in a kind of sexual act of storytelling and Quentin has what amounts to an orgasm in bed beside Shreve when they reach the point at which they consider

miscegenation as the “ultimate” problem, the novel should “end” at that point since the “story” is “spent.” That the thought of Bon’s black blood is what finally gets Quentin off is, as they say, a whole ‘nother can of worms.¹³ Readers privilege race as the final answer to the mystery because Quentin and Shreve do. The implications of incest and homosexuality that so dominate the novel do not go away, however, just because Quentin, and the story, climax on the question of race.

Critics are not wrong to diffuse the terms used to describe the perceived homosexuality in *Absalom* into a variety of equally unsatisfying terms that produce the need for more terms to try to get at what, precisely, is going on. I would venture, though, that the point is not to find the right term; rather, the point is to realize that no term is right. As with a search for Joe Christmas’ sexual/racial identity, we will never have the answer because the structures that allow us to see identity--sexual, racial, or otherwise--prove insufficient to determine what the text means to show. Is this lack of clear definition anxiety, though? Are Quentin and Shreve, or Bon and Henry, too anxious to admit their desires to themselves? Or are critics guilty of dissimulating a clear discussion of homosexuality because of a general resistance to or institutional anxiety about gay identity? Or is the anxiety Faulkner’s? Was he troubled by the implications of his own apocryphal creation, that the homosexual desire he seemed to be writing proved too close to the cross-racial mixing he saved Tiah Devitt from in Harlem?

In regard to *Absalom, Absalom!*, such questions can compound themselves quickly, and answers prove elusive in the complex matrix of the text and in the complex ways in which critics have attempted to respond to it. This process of compounding questions and elusive answers does, however, actually get us somewhere in regard to how Faulkner apocryphized homosexuality in this novel and, to a degree, in *Light in August*. In the 1930s Faulkner’s life changed tremendously. His previous queer life was subsumed by other pressures and new

anxieties about marriage, which in turn seem to have led to new anxieties about his own queer life. In *Light in August* and *Absalom*, he apocryphized those anxieties into questions of race and its intersection with sexuality. He maintained an active interest in homosexual representation, but that representation was filtered through a racial matrix that makes it decidedly ambiguous for current critical inquiry to decipher. Race, though, was not the only complexity that intrigued Faulkner in the 1930s. He also began to articulate versions of heterosexuality that, even without racial complications, do not appear as simple heterosexual relationships. Rather, they explore varieties of possible same-sex bonding that code implications of latent homosexual desires, or at least code their author's own ambivalent feelings toward proper heterosexuality.

The Trouble with Heterosexuality

Faulkner's other novels from the 1930s (and the early 1940s) most notably verge on homosexual depictions through their complex portrayal of relationships between men and women. The mediation of homosexuality in *Pylon* (1935), *The Wild Palms* (1939), and *Go Down, Moses* (1942) largely pertains to the strange, seemingly heterosexual relationships in each, as those relationships do not link a single man to a single woman and bear forth a single child in a reiteration of "proper" heterosexuality. While these novels do not always explore identifiable--and perhaps do not even qualify as containing latent--homosexuality, they do suggest that Faulkner was ambivalent about the rigors of heterosexual expectations. In 1929 he married and effectively adopted his wife's two children from a previous marriage. That wife was his formerly promised bride who had metaphorically cuckolded him (though arguably, Estelle was never actually Faulkner's to feel cuckolded by). On the one hand, Faulkner was clearly

unsettled despite being married. In the mid-1930s he began his long and passionate affair with Meta Carpenter and even considered divorcing Estelle to marry Meta instead.¹⁴ On the other hand, he adopted Estelle's children and had his own daughter by Estelle. He accepted the role as father and provider and never divorced Estelle despite the strains in their relationship. His fiction apocryphized the tension in his actual life through a series of challenging portrayals of heterosexual relationships. Undergirding his critique of proper heterosexuality, however, lie strains of the apocryphal homosexuality that Faulkner maintained prior to his marriage. When he sought to challenge the normative demands of the institution, his queer sympathies emerged the in substrata of his critiques.

In *Pylon* and *The Wild Palms*, Faulkner left Yoknapatawpha County and returned to his former haunt, New Orleans, to depict the queer relationships in the novels. In *Pylon* Faulkner minimally disguised the city as the fictitious New Valois. He centered the action on the opening of a new airport and the accompanying air show as part of the grand opening festivities. Though he wrote this novel ten years after his brief essay about "What's the Matter with Marriage?", he revisited the premise of that essay in his depiction of the relationship between Roger Schumann, Jack Holmes, and Laverne. Notably, Laverne's son Jack has Roger's last name but Jack's first name, a hybrid that only suggest he is Roger's son if one were to privilege male patronymics as proof of paternity (which is a suspect means of identifying a father). Both Jack Holmes and Roger share Laverne as their mutual lover, and each claims at least a partial stake in considering Jack as his son. The novel never definitively declares which man fathered Jack, even though Roger is *legally* Laverne's husband (legality, in this case, hardly serves to guarantee any rightful legitimacy, and mostly seems to account for the son's last name in only a de jure sense). Also notably, as John Duvall points out, Roger Schumann is far less concerned with little Jack's

paternity but instead seems to function as a kind of “antipatriarch, a man who can love both woman and child without assurances that the child is the fruit of his seed” (*Faulkner’s Marginal* 93). The anxiety over little Jack’s legitimacy resides elsewhere in the novel, imposed from without the immediate family structure among Jack, Roger, and Laverne.

Though not a pure manifestation of the premise of that earlier essay, this strange situation bears out what Cecily Saunders can only imagine in *Soldier’s Pay*, which Faulkner wrote in New Orleans at the same time that he published his essay. In that novel, Cecily imagines what it would be like to have two husbands. One outcome of such a possibility is the relationship depicted in *Pylon*, a heterosexual relationship at least to the extent that the men each seem to sleep with the one woman, not with each other, and have collectively produced a child. Of course, the Sedgwickian implications of the bond between Roger and Jack Holmes saturate the narrative. Their mutual relationship with Laverne easily depicts the premise of *Between Men*, wherein two men with same-sex desire for each other bond through their mutual exchange of a woman. At least according to the unnamed reporter--though perhaps his name really is “reporter” as it perfectly describes his role in the narrative--the two men never demonstrate any anxiety regarding their relationship with Laverne, which could suggest that they harbor no anxiety about their relationship with each other. The narrative does not depict homophobic anxieties between Roger and Jack Holmes. Does that mean that it depicts homosexuality?

Applying Sedgwick to the novel proves tricky business. The novel is not only set in the twentieth century but also clearly fixates on the modernity of its twentieth-century environment--the action takes place at an air show, hardly a location familiar to Victorian readers. When same-sex desires appear in a twentieth-century context, *homosocial* fails to account for the epistemological shift that occurred in the latter nineteenth century. The matrix of desire these

men confront would lead them to understand their connection to each other as homosexual or to panic about the possible homosexual implications (i.e. enact homophobia). The novel does not bear out homophobic anxieties, but it also remains fairly silent on homosexuality as well, at least explicitly. Moreover, the premise of Sedgwick's theories of nineteenth-century fiction--in which two men exchange a woman between them, or compete with each other for the same woman--seems outmoded in a novel in which the two men have sex with the woman and both know the extent of the relationship and that they share her between them. The x-factor in the immediate sexual economy involving Roger, Jack Holmes, and Laverne, however, is little Jack. This strange family has produced a son. Roger, Jack Holmes, and Laverne equally commit themselves to his upbringing regardless of who actually fathered him. Little Jack's presence moulds the three adults into a family structure that resembles in spirit, if not in form, proper heterosexuality. Roger and Jack Holmes take care of him because he represents futurity, if we apply Edelman's premise about queer sexualities and the death drive. Little Jack's presence greatly complicates Edelman's schematics, though. The relationship among Roger, Jack Holmes, and Laverne is hardly properly heterosexual. Their three way love affair (a queer ersatz marriage) should damage the guarantees of futurity represented by little Jack. Their relationship is queer, after all, but little Jack allows for it to prove productive of new life. If a queer relationship can guarantee futurity, then is it really queer? Faulkner provocatively challenges notions of proper heterosexuality in *Pylon*. Deep inside his critique, one must wonder if his formerly queer life is the ultimate source for his queer heterosexual configurations.

The catalyst that destroys the balance of Roger, Jack Holmes, and Laverne's relationship is the reporter. Also an alcoholic, he becomes increasingly obsessed not only with recording the daredevil life of air show performers but also with Roger, Jack Holmes, and Laverne specifically

because of their queer configurations. On one level, the reporter falls in love with Laverne (she has two male suitors, so why not three?). On another level, he begins to worry over what would happen to Jack if one or both of his fathers were to die during a show. Duvall argues that little Jack “forms an almost equal part [to his infatuation with Laverne] of the reporter’s object in his attempt to bond with this strange community” of barnstorming pilots (95). Unfortunately, as Duvall also asserts, “In this relationship between the reporter and the child, much is at stake” (95). What is at stake is the nature of proper heterosexual marriage, the pillar of “community” to the world outside of the triangle-marriage of Roger, Jack, and Laverne. Though his interference in their lives does not actually bring about the deaths at the end of the novel, the reporter’s insistent questioning and worrying about the relationship does function, metaphorically, as the cause of the conclusion. As the reporter starts paying attention to the relationship--ostensibly to write a story that would publicize the relationship to the world--the air show proves increasingly dangerous. Roger and Jack Holmes die while executing increasingly dangerous stunts in increasingly dangerous and improperly repaired aircrafts. The reporter then takes upon himself the task that he sought all along. Though he wanted to court Laverne for himself, he decides instead to help Laverne to deposit little Jack safely with Roger Schumann’s parents in Myron, Ohio. There, the reporter hopes, little Jack will have the stable, single father/single mother family structure that he needs to grow up properly. The reporter assumes that little Jack is probably actually Roger’s son, so the blood ties between grandparent and grandson will bind them. Dr. Schumann is less certain and practically begs Laverne for a guarantee that he is, in fact, offering to raise his own grandson (*Pylon* 318). The reporter has successfully reproduced the semblance of proper heterosexuality and family structure so wanting in the Roger, Jack Holmes, and Laverne’s “marriage.” He may not marry Laverne himself, but he proves his heterosexuality by

fixing the broken heterosexuality of the daredevil pilots' lives.

On yet another level, the reporter's subjective entrance into the affairs of this queer family does not entirely implicate him in purely heterosexual desires. He may ostensibly be attracted to Laverne, but he cannot help but notice that Laverne already has not one but two husbands already. Roger and Jack Holmes can share Laverne without any anxiety, and the reporter is deeply troubled by their relationship. He therefore enacts a variety of homophobia in his desire to free Laverne and little Jack from the troubling implications of their queer familial life. Though Sedgwick's premise from *Between Men* generally refers to *two* men vying for one woman, Faulkner has no difficulty extending that premise in *Pylon* the *three* men and one woman. Roger and Jack Holmes may engage in a same-sex bond that can reasonably be interpreted as latently homosexual. The reporter represents the opposite: the same-sex bond in a twentieth-century context that enacts latent homophobia. Neither the homosexual nor the homophobic elements of the novel surface as explicit depictions. The queer desires fulminate around a nexus of ostensibly heterosexual interactions, though certainly queerly heterosexual in relation to the concept of a proper heterosexual family. The (latently homosexual) elements of that queer heterosexual family would possibly have survived the air show had not the (latently homophobic) heterosexual desires of the reporter broken down his objective reporting of events and found him actively engaged in the queer life of that family, mostly by way of exposing it. The reporter's scrutiny proves to be more than their queer life can bear. Had the reporter simply left well enough alone, that queer life (in New Orleans) would continue. Instead, the homophobic enactment of proper heterosexuality annihilates that queer life. In short, in *Pylon* Faulkner effectively mediated his critique of proper heterosexuality through latent homosexual/homophobic implications.

Faulkner also set *The Wild Palms* in New Orleans--at least that is where Harry Wilbourne and Charlotte Rittenmayer meet and where they return after Harry's botched abortion attempt. In between, they travel to Chicago and Utah. In the second story in the novel, "Old Man," an unnamed prisoner, known only as the tall convict, rescues an unnamed pregnant woman from the 1927 flood in the Mississippi Delta. They proceed to travel through the chaotic expanse of that flood from the confines of Parchman Prison, through the turmoil of the flooded Delta, and as far south as the Atchafalaya Basin in Louisiana and the open Gulf south of New Orleans. Oddly, once in the Gulf, the convict turns around and retraces his journey. Rather than follow the current--a metaphor for allowing what will happen in his life to happen--he fights the current in order to return the woman and her baby to safety and re-secure himself firmly in jail. The tall convict and Harry have in common that they both get rid of a baby. The difference is that Harry wants the baby but helps Charlotte abort it, which in turn kills Charlotte when she develops a blood infection; the tall convict does not want the baby but works to guarantee its safety and to keep its mother alive. Also, Charlotte and Harry fuck like bunnies, to put it mildly. The tall convict turns down any opportunity to have sex with the woman he rescues.

The versions of heterosexuality that Faulkner presents in *The Wild Palms* pertain to questions of futurity and the queer designs that prevent and guarantee it. John Duvall has compared Harry and Charlotte to Joe Christmas and Joanna Burden in *Light in August* to state that "[i]n both novels two sets of women and men form unlikely unions that do not escape, but that do call into question the values of the larger community" (*Faulkner's Marginal* 39). This connection obviously downplays the racial elements that animate the sexual exchanges between Joe and Joanna, but Duvall's commentary serves to situate Harry and Charlotte as a queer reiteration of--not a wholesale destruction of--proper heterosexuality. They fuck, they are a man

and a woman, and Harry, at least, wants to get married and have children. Charlotte and Harry celebrate the zest for heterosex, for their shared desire for each other, and for the conjoining of their male and female parts. They are, effectively, “raging heterosexuals” and madly in love. The problem is that they do not want to get married; at least Charlotte does not want to get married and, as Duvall traces, spends significant energy trying to bring Harry to see her reasons for this aversion to marriage. Charlotte dichotomizes “love” and “marriage” as mutually exclusive. She is already married and has two children of her own by her legal husband, who also sends her money for her affair with Harry. With Harry, she wants only “love.” When she actually gets pregnant by Harry, she wants an abortion. Her queer desire for love without marriage--as opposed to a marriage without love--threatens (heterosexual) futurity, a la Lee Edelman’s theories in *No Future*. According to the supposedly natural order of the Victorian society in which Faulkner grew up, love and marriage were rigidly defined steps in a sexual maturation process meant to guarantee the organic, natural outcome of the proper community. Harry and Charlotte violate this maturation and threaten the supposedly natural outcome inherent in it.

Harry performs two abortions in the novel, one on the camp manager’s wife in Utah, the other on Charlotte. The first is successful; Harry knows how to kill an unborn baby. When he tries to do the same to Charlotte--despite his repeated pleas that he not give her the abortion and even his attempt to find someone else to do it in his place--he slips and cuts her. The cut leads to a blood infection that kills Charlotte. If the goal of proper heterosexuality is not only for a man and a woman to perform sex together but also for that sex to bear the possibilities of producing children, then Harry and Charlotte are not very heterosexual at all. They like the sex, but they do not like all the conventions and expectations that accompany it. They pursue sexual gratification (pleasure) with each other, but expectations encroach on their extended honeymoon. They

discuss marriage, but decide against it. Then Charlotte gets pregnant. When they try to end that pregnancy, Charlotte dies. Harry is sent to prison. The implications are that the confines of heterosexuality are inescapable. One cannot practice heterosexuality without confronting the rigid expectations which society demands of it. Failure to conform leads to death and prison. Charlotte and Harry do not properly “educate” their sexual desires. They destroy the chance of futurity. They are punished for their transgressions because their supposedly heterosexual desire for each other is actually quite queer.

Faulkner parallels Harry and Charlotte’s love affair with the story of the tall convict. While in the Delta on a prison detail to help control the 1927 flood, he is sent to rescue a man on a roof. Instead, he encounters a pregnant woman and rescues her. He never finds the man on the roof. His boat is swept away in the currents of the flood and carries him and the woman into a formless, chaotic region of snake-infested islands and alligator hunters. In this primitive and wild world, the tall convict does everything he can to protect the woman and her child--whom he helps deliver by cutting the umbilical cord with a rusty can. He eventually returns her safely to “land,” or to civilization and society as it exists outside of the wild space of the flood. The tall convict, however, wants nothing to do with the woman or her baby. He gladly accepts the ten years added to his sentence for supposedly trying to escape rather than confront the world and its seemingly absurd insistence on proper relationships between the sexes. In fact, the ten years added to his sentence are appropriately added. He has attempted to escape the expectations of society. He does not want to marry and he definitely does not want to raise a child. Ironically, his relationship with the woman and care for the child prove truly exemplary; he respects her and does not demand sex, and he supports her child. He would make a great husband. He guarantees futurity. His desires seem so perfectly educated for participation in the expectations of proper

heterosexuality that his decision to return the woman, still single and with an un-fathered child, to society, results in his being punished by the addition of ten years to his sentence for trying to escape. Thankfully, Faulkner makes a joke out of the situation. When asked about his adventures by the other prisoners, the tall convict concludes the novel with the comically frustrated insistence, “Women [shi]t!” (339).¹⁵ The tall convict’s convictions in this matter prove rather queer. If Harry Wilbourne famously declares that “*between grief and nothing, I will take grief*” (324) then the tall convict effectively declares, “between marriage and prison, I will take prison.”

Faulkner re-enacts the tall convict’s repudiation of proper heterosexuality in *Go Down, Moses*. Faced with the realization that producing an heir will only perpetuate the system of inheritance that produced the horrifying sexual economy of his grandfather, Ike only has sex with his wife one time and then chooses a form of monastic bachelorhood. He tries to track down his black kin to pay them their share of what he believes is their birthright before he symbolically repudiates his inheritance and his claim to his family’s land. Ike has interpreted his grandfather’s ledger--and the additional accounting in it added by his father and his uncle--to explain that his grandfather sired not only a white family but also sired a black girl on one of his female slaves and then sired a male child on that girl, who was also his daughter. The older female slave kills herself; the daughter dies in childbirth. Ike’s grandfather maintained the son in slavery. The incestuous and terrifying reproductive ends to which Ike’s grandfather put heterosexuality leads Ike to his own fraught identity as the rightful heir. If heterosexuality can bear its misuse and the legal system can justify the queer actions to which Ike’s grandfather used his reproductive heterosexuality, then heterosexuality itself must be flawed. The expectations of marriage and the futurity guaranteed by reproduction are only maintained by the tacit acceptance of legitimacy established by decidedly contingent laws. Race matters more than proper sexual conduct. Ike

repudiates sexuality rather than engage in a system so utterly broken. Ike does not necessarily harbor any latent homosexual desires. He does not bond with another man through their exchange of a woman. In fact, such exchanges terrify him as exactly the same mechanism his grandfather used to further his holdings. Ike's repudiation is only symbolic, however. The rest of the world continues its various uses of heterosexuality and its problematic implementation. In "Delta Autumn," Ike even faces the cold reality that his cousin has borne a child with a black woman, whom Ike knows is actually also his distant cousin from the incestuous rape of that previous generation. Ike's white cousin has no intention of being a father to his black child. Ike sees in the situation a re-enactment of the violation committed by his grandfather. He may repudiate heterosexuality, but he does not change the sum total of heterosexual expectations. Certainly, though, Faulkner intended the stories collected in *Go Down, Moses* to critique heterosexual convention, even if those stories do not depict latent homosexuality as part of their critique.

General Patterns and Oddities

If a general pattern emerges in these novels, perhaps it looks a bit as follows. In *Light in August* Faulkner depicted the confluence of racial and sexual identity in Joe Christmas' confrontation with society and his place in it. In *Pylon* Faulkner depicted a queer iteration of the triangulation of same-sex desire and the problems that ensue when a fourth party--the reporter--interferes with it. In *Absalom* Faulkner depicts the confluence of racial and sexual identity through Quentin and Shreve's anxious discussion about Henry and Bon, who direct their same-sex desire for each other through Judith. In essence *Absalom* blends the differing mediations of

homosexuality from *Light in August* and *Pylon*. In *The Wild Palms* Faulkner depicted two men neither of whom can articulate a full vision of proper heterosexuality--one promotes the sex without marriage or the promise of futurity, the other promotes the futurity without the sex or the proper marriage. Finally, in *Go Down, Moses* Faulkner depicted a man whose anxieties over the history of race and the uses of sex to promote a racist social order lead him to repudiate sex altogether (after one night with his wife). If these novels depict a singular movement in Faulkner's views about sexuality, then they seem to suggest that he moves from considering sexuality to be very complex to deciding to say "To hell with it!" Faulkner does, however, ironize this final conclusion when Ike is confronted with the perpetuation of the social order he has attempted to repudiate. To the degree to which these novels depict anxieties that Faulkner felt in his actual life, he heightens those anxieties to the level of apocrypha to produce these narratives. To a degree, though, they nonetheless trace a general outline for his actual thoughts on these matters through the 1930s and into the early 1940s.

Obviously, *Go Down, Moses* was published in 1942, but it belongs to Faulkner's life from the 1930s as the proverbial dying fall of the grand symphony of the most productive period of his creative life. The so-called "matchless time" or "Heart of Yoknapatawpha" of Faulkner's career is generally considered to have extended from *Flags in the Dust* (1928) to *Go Down, Moses* (1942). The first few novels of this period, up to *As I Lay Dying*, best fit the thematic concerns of his pre-married life. The latter novel, *Go Down, Moses*, fits the general pattern of his fiction from the 1930s. After 1942, Faulkner entered a six-year period in which he wrote very few new works--either as short stories or as attempts at full-length novels--and published even less. He primarily toiled away in Hollywood, unhappy with what he considered the misuse of his creative energies and suffering from what would effectively be "writer's block." As a period

with a general thematic pattern, then, from his marriage in 1929 and through the 1930s and until his publication of *Go Down, Moses*, the general pattern that emerges is one of a mediate vision of (homo)sexuality. That mediated vision does, at times, present anxieties about homosexuality that do not appear in Faulkner's earlier works.

The (homo)sexuality depicted in these novels is often difficult to articulate explicitly, not only for Faulkner when he wrote the novels but also for critics when they attempt to interpret them. Thus, when Noel Polk and Richard Godden attempted to describe the queer sexualities in *Go Down, Moses*, they tied what they claimed to be depictions of homosexuality to bestiality without any pause to consider that these two sexual preference are very different from each other and do not overlay as two sides of one coin. As Polk and Godden do in their essay "Reading the Ledgers," to equate bestiality and homosexuality is as erroneous a confluence of homophobic anxieties from the critics as Faulkner's ham-handed passages about Native American cannibalism, such as in the exposition of "A Courtship," are an erroneous depiction of his prejudices about race. Also, writing on his own in "Ratliff's Buggies," Polk identified homosexuality in *The Hamlet* by pointing out that Will Varner's ass is sore from a night of anal sex with Flem Snopes. This interpretation continues the same erroneous logic as "Reading the Ledgers" in its attempts to identify what, precisely, Faulkner was trying to depict about sexual otherness and the rural South (I will return to *The Hamlet* in Chapter 10). Both essays exhibit the anxieties of the critics and advance the critics' own unwarranted assumptions. Both essays were, in their time, major interventions into Faulkner Studies. Both represent attempts to solve the same problem. Faulkner's depictions of queer sexuality were exceedingly complex in his fiction from the 1930s. Both essays propose unfortunate solutions to the problem of that complexity, but their solutions suffer from an error of interpretation of the complexity of Faulkner's mediated

vision, not from willful ignorance on either critic's part.

Two stories, though, complicate this general pattern of Faulkner's moving from complex mediations to apocryphal repudiation. In 1935 Faulkner published "Golden Land," a response to the sexual economy and self-serving greed of Hollywood. The story has an explicitly gay character, but Faulkner presents that character through a clever scene of mediation with a woman coming between the two competing men. In "Golden Land," Ira Ewing is a Nebraska farm boy, born in a sod-roofed house, who has moved to Hollywood and made himself rich as a realtor. The problem is that the hard-edged, scrape-and-save-every-cent life that he was born into in Nebraska is not commensurate with the life of wealth and decadence that he encounters (and adopts) in his new home. To a large extent, the story is Faulkner's angry response to Hollywood from his own sense of dislocation while working there. He infuses into the story, however, two situations pulled directly from his connections to queer people. First, Ira's daughter Samantha is on trial throughout the story. Her name appears in the newspapers as April Lalear, and she has been caught by the police in what is termed an "orgy" with a big-wig from a movie studio. As Ira explains to his mother, Samantha had to change her name to get better opportunities in Hollywood, but changing her name was not enough. To get more parts in films, she also has to sleep with casting directors. The particular casting director in the story has two girls in his hotel room at once. When he is caught, all three are charged with indecent behavior.

Though the story never describes what sexual activities were occurring in the hotel, that the casting director wanted two girls with him implies that the sexual expression involved was closer to heterosexual than homosexual (though *queer* might be a more appropriate term). Regardless of the type of sexuality involved, the use of sex to advance one's career is directly relatable to Clark Gable and the so-called Lavender Ladder. According to his biographer David

Bret, Clark Gable would have sex with anyone--male or female--if it would help his career. Samantha Ewing seems just as willing to do the same. In "Golden Land," Faulkner explicitly depicts the sexual economy of Hollywood, wherein decent sexual conduct is less important than advancing a career. The catch, however, is not that Samantha should not have engaged in the orgy but that she should not have gotten caught. She later makes a scene in the courtroom, though that scene is never described. She is, though, probably only trying to capture some media attention to help revive her fame. Given that she broke the code regarding keeping sexual practices private, she might as well try to keep the spotlight on herself in case that spotlight leads to better career opportunities. In this attempt she is simply emulating her father, who uses Samantha's trial as a means to advertise his realty company. Her downfall is his capital gain. Ira Ewing did not get rich just by selling houses. He knows a good opportunity when he sees one, even if that opportunity is not particularly "decent."

Ira Ewing's son represents another aspect of sexuality in Hollywood, the open secret of homosexuality and the mediation of its presentation. Ira's son, Voyd, is deposited at home one afternoon, "drunk and insensible by a car full of occupants [Ira] did not see" (706). Ira takes Voyd inside and begins to undress him to put him to bed, but while he undresses Voyd, "he discovered [Voyd] to be wearing, in place of underclothes, a woman's brassiere and step-ins" (706). Ira proceeds to beat Voyd harshly, ostensibly to revive him from his drunkenness but actually in a fit of homophobic rage; he is trying to beat some sense into the boy by beating the homosexuality out. Ira's wife intervenes when she hears the sound of Ira beating Voyd. She refuses to listen to his explanation about Voyd's underclothes. She only wants to protect her son. From that point onward, "the son had contrived to see his father only in his mother's presence" (706), guaranteeing that any future interactions between father and son will be mediated by her

continued intervention between his homosexuality and Ira's homophobia. On the morning when Samantha--as April Lalear--appears in the newspaper for her pending trial, Ira and his wife get into an argument about what is wrong with their children. Ira shouts at his wife that he did not make Samantha what she has become, though he suspects that his wife "will tell me next I made my son a f--" (708). He means to say "fag." The word is simply edited. Clearly, Faulkner had a broader discursive experience of homosexuality than just the word *queer*, though Ira's rejection of his son and Faulkner's opinions about homosexuality should not be confused with each other. Voyd is hardly a noble character, but Ira is the true monster of the story who is willing to sacrifice his children for his personal gain.

The cleverness of the scene of Voyd's unclothing is the way it mediates homosexuality while screaming out its presence. On the one hand, Voyd appears outwardly just drunk, but beneath his clothes, he has hidden his other identity as a cross-dressing homosexual. His father only discovers that Voyd is gay because he physically undresses him, a homosexual act in itself despite Ira's seeming intention merely to take care of the boy and get him safely in bed. The oedipal drama that ensues--the father tries to destroy the son by beating sense into him--is interrupted by Ira's wife. A woman comes between the two men and separates them. Ira tries to explain to her why he is so appalled, thus revealing that he really is beating his son not to revive him from his drunken stupor but in a homophobic rage. Though he does not mind publicizing and capitalizing on his daughter's sexual transgressions, Ira will not have a gay son. Her presence mediates the scene of tension between Ira's homophobia and Voyd's homosexuality, both of which are explicitly exposed in this confrontation. To find a more explicit reiteration of Sedgwick's premise from *Between Men* transferred to a twentieth century context would be difficult.

In due course, however, Faulkner would in fact depict a situation that does explicate perfectly along the lines of Sedgwick's study. In 1942 Faulkner wrote "A Courtship," one of his Indian stories. Though he would not publish it until 1948, he seems to have conceived it while he was writing *Go Down, Moses*, but he could not find a magazine willing to buy it at the time.¹⁶ In the story, David Hogganbeck and Ikkemotubbe compete with each other for an girl only identified as "Herman Basket's sister." She has no name nor any identity beyond being simply the unnamed object of male attention for her beauty. Also, aside from some general statements that she was exceptional in some vague way, the story provides no physical description of her beyond noting her sex. Hogganbeck and Ikkemotubbe compete for her nonetheless. Ikkemotubbe shows interest first, but unlike Spratling and the unnamed narrator of "Out of Nazareth," his attention does not give him primacy of place in the courtship. Hogganbeck arrives, and with very little direct discussion that they are competing with each other, he and Ikkemotubbe find themselves racing each other and challenging each other's endurance and masculinity for Herman Basket's sister's hand. They challenge each other so exhaustively, in fact, that the first night they race, "they both slept in Ikkemotubbe's bed in his house that night" afterward (369). The next night they wear each other out again and "both [slept] in David Hogganbeck's bed in the steamboat" (369). They challenge each other to drinking and eating contests, and even engage in a dancing contest, but Ikkemotubbe cannot bring himself simply to kill his challenger. He likes Hogganbeck too much just to get rid of him. He enjoys the elaborate courtship and considers Hogganbeck a worthy adversary, and even a dear and close friend.

Their courtship climaxes when they challenge each other to an old Chickasaw ritual. They will both race towards a cave that is a hundred and thirty miles away. The cave is notorious for its roof, which will collapse with any sound more than a whisper or from any sudden

movement. The first to arrive at the cave must enter and fire a pistol, thus bringing the roof down on him and killing the “victor,” whose victory lies in proving his superior manhood. The loser will get to marry Herman Basket’s sister, but he will always know that he lost. Ikkemotubbe arrives at the cave first, but when he fires his pistol, Hogganbeck rushes in and holds the collapsing roof up to save him. Ikkemotubbe in turn rushes out of the cave to find a strong cane to hold up the roof and allow Hogganbeck to escape. They both nearly die, but they both also live. On their way back to the Indian village, they learn that Herman Basket’s sister has taken as her husband a harmonica-playing Indian named Log-in-the-Creek, whom neither saw as competition during the courtship and whom is presented throughout the story as comically inert and useless.

The story is ultimately about an open secret. “A Courtship” never specifies which courtship is the most central to its narrative structure. Ikkemotubbe and David Hogganbeck seem to be courting Herman Basket’s sister, but they are actually courting each other. Only, they cannot express their desire for each other so explicitly. The story ends, however, with a depiction of their successful marriage. They sail away together on Hogganbeck’s steamboat. While they pass the new home of Log-in-the-Creek and his wife, they take turns pulling the “crying-rope” that measures the steam in the steamboat’s engine. One might erroneously assume the “crying-rope” represents their tearful recognition of defeat. Quite the contrary, it signifies their departing together as a couple with enough steam to forge ahead. Indeed, John Duvall, in his seminal essay on homophobia, considers Faulkner’s World War I stories to be the “crying game” of his fiction, a reference to the 1992 film about realizing and accepting homosexual desires. David Hogganbeck and Ikkemotubbe’s departure in “A Courtship” is Faulkner’s real crying game. They are moving toward a future together that they had been seeking all along and pulling the

“crying-rope” to announce their own wedding to everyone in the Indian village, including Herman Basket’s sister and her new husband.

Faulkner’s depictions of sexuality throughout the 1930s and to 1942 in *Go Down, Moses* skirt the edges of articulated gay representation. When elements of homosexuality do emerge, Faulkner’s unique experiences with homosexual culture in the 1920s offer the grounds to claim that he was critical of structures of homophobia and rarely generous with the strictures of heterosexual expectation. He used his personal history and former performance of his own apocryphal gay identity as a means to craft more complex and challenging indictments of the oppressive regimes of his native postage stamp of soil. Still, one could be forgiven for assuming there is much anxiety in the works of this period, a general anxiety about sexuality that permeates these works. There is also a clear anxiety about proper heterosexuality and the challenges of embracing it. In the 1940s and 1950s, a series of famous encounters with luminaries of gay literature would exacerbate the sense that Faulkner was troubled by sexuality, particularly by encounters with homosexuality. Those encounters are not the whole story, though, as Woollcott, Bentley, and Van Vechten are not the whole story in the 1930s (there was also the Southern Protective Association; there was Ben Wasson, Hollywood, and men like Clark Gable). By the end of the 1930s, Faulkner even found a means to depict homosexuality in his apocryphal creation without all the fraught difficulties and mediated presentations of his previous novels from his “matchless time,” though he may not have realized what he had accomplished for nearly twenty years. By the 1950s, he would realize it, and he would depict a homosexual right in the heart of Yoknapatawpha, but this one would not end up on a train to Jackson, nor beaten, nor castrated, nor obsessed with racial purity, nor pulling the “crying-rope.” He would, instead, tell stories, travel everywhere, and seem to know everything, the roving vicar of

Faulkner's vision and the central figure holding together the competing forces of a swiftly changing Southern landscape.

CHAPTER 9: THE FAULKNER WE KNOW AND DO NOT KNOW

After *Go Down, Moses* Faulkner fell relatively silent for six years. In 1948 he re-emerged with the publication of *Intruder in the Dust*. Shortly thereafter, he swiftly published another barrage of texts including *Requiem for a Nun* and the short story collections *Knight's Gambit* and *Collected Stories*. Malcolm Cowley first proposed that Faulkner collect his previous stories and even provided suggestions for the framework of that collection, which survives in Faulkner's organization of the stories under the general thematic titles "The Country," "The Village," etc. Faulkner chose to include among those stories "Divorce in Naples" and "Golden Land," two narratives with explicitly gay elements. *Collected Stories* won Faulkner the National Book Award. This significant award would almost be a highlight in Faulkner's career had it not nearly exactly coincided with his winning the Nobel Prize in 1950 (though actually for the year 1949). Largely in response to Cowley's *Portable Faulkner*, the great writer found himself increasingly the center of critical attention and increasingly discussed as exemplary of American cultural values and achievement.¹ The Nobel Prize, two National Book Awards, and two Pulitzer Prizes from 1950 to 1963 attest to the emergence of Faulkner not only as a great American writer from the first half of the twentieth century but as *the* great lion of American letters whose fiction would inspire literary movements around the world and whose Nobel Prize Speech is still regarded as perhaps the greatest speech given in the history of the award.

In the march to place Faulkner at the center of the American canon, however, many of the

queer elements of his narratives disappeared into the folds of what critics wanted to claim as his larger, grander universal vision. The coincidence of the great William Faulkner encountering openly gay men in the 1950s became, accordingly, a history of his revulsion and discomfort. Unfortunately, the surviving biographical record of Faulkner's life in the 1940s and 1950s provides evidence to support such a view. In his research, Joseph Blotner reached out to several prominent gay literary figures whom he learned had encounters with Faulkner and might have a story to tell about it. Though sometimes there is more to the stories that he collected than meets the eye, sometimes there is no way around admitting that Faulkner rejected homosexuality, and not always by quietly turning and exiting the room. On the one hand, Blotner uncovered stories concerning Christopher Isherwood, Truman Capote, Thornton Wilder, and Tennessee Williams. Faulkner's encounters with each of these authors form a complex narrative of his interactions with gay men in the latter years of his life--not a full narrative, but also not an extraneous one. On the other hand, Blotner left a trail of proverbial bread crumbs in his biographical notes that point to a much more complex history of gay interaction and gay literary borrowing than has heretofore been considered in Faulkner's later works. In the 1950s, Faulkner did not cease to perform his apocryphal homosexuality. Instead, he simply found new ways to perform it by using the latest literary models from significant gay authors whose works have been forgotten in American literary history. Nevertheless, these men and their works provided models for Faulkner as he maintained his insidious and challenging critiques of society and its unnecessarily rigid expectations.

These Famous Gay Men

Faulkner met Christopher Isherwood at least twice. In 1955, he, Isherwood, and Gore Vidal saw Tennessee Williams' *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*. According to Jean Stein, after the play Vidal and Isherwood engaged in a "desultory conversation [that] convinced Jean that the day of the literary salon was over," though Faulkner remained distinctly aloof from this conversation and hardly spoke to the others about the play (Blotner 597). Later, no longer in company with Isherwood and Vidal, Faulkner would admit to Stein that he did not care for the play. That the play is about a broken marriage caused by of the possible repressed homosexuality and obvious alcoholism of the husband could certainly have bothered Faulkner, though he would complain aloud only that it dealt with childish themes, which was an enigmatic criticism to be sure.² That the men went together to the play suggests a degree of friendship, but little else survives of what was said that night that might shed light on Faulkner's relationship with Isherwood or Vidal. This play, however, was not the first time that Faulkner and Isherwood met.

Faulkner first met Isherwood in Hollywood at a party in 1945. Isherwood would recall that, despite being warned not to talk about literature with the reticent Faulkner, he and Faulkner had a pleasant conversation "about Auden and Spender, about their work, with a distant politeness in what sounded like a very British accent" (Blotner 2 Vol. 1192). Faulkner later insisted to Malcolm Cowley that the meeting had proceeded quite differently:

The night before I left Hollywood I went (under pressure) to a party. I was sitting on a sofa with a drink, suddenly realised I was being pretty intently listened to by three men whom I then realised were squatting on their heels and knees in a kind of circle in front of me. There were Isherwood, the English poet, and a French surrealist, Helion; the other one's name I forget. I'll have to admit though that I felt more like a decrepit gaffer telling stories than like an old master producing

jewels for three junior co-laborers. (Cowley 35)

Superficially, Faulkner had little to say about this meeting. On closer inspection, however, this recollection proves extremely revealing of a private side of Faulkner that he often worked to hide in interviews and letters. Faulkner seems to have wanted to convey the impression that he vaguely remembered the three men, despite naming two of them and identifying their work, which also implies he was probably familiar with that work. Isherwood's recalling a conversation with Faulkner about W. H. Auden and Stephen Spender, gay poets and friends of Isherwood, implies that Faulkner had also read them, which adds to the implication that he was generally well-read in the works of contemporary writers and not simply beholden to Keats or older writers from before his time. Ever fretful about revealing too much about himself, Faulkner transformed his literary discussion about gay poetry into the "stories" of a "decrepit gaffer" when he reported the encounter to Cowley. One might almost miss the acknowledgement that, though he felt like a decrepit gaffer, he was actually thoroughly the "old master producing jewels for three junior co-laborers." He may have been just "sitting on the sofa with a drink," but Faulkner also clearly engaged in a deep and memorable conversation, despite his efforts to pretend for Cowley that he had been accosted and had nothing really to say about the party at all.

Obviously, Vidal and Faulkner met when they went together to see *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*. Knowledge of this encounter probably prompted Blotner's inquiry letters addressed to Vidal asking if he might have other recollections worth adding to Faulkner's biography. Vidal declined, politely claiming that he had nothing much to add. Similarly, Blotner collected numerous stories about Faulkner and Tennessee Williams, but Williams never seems to have responded to Blotner's inquiries. Blotner was forced to tell the story of Williams and Faulkner's most famous encounter entirely through third-party interviews.³ That both men were from

Mississippi, both heavy drinkers, and both chroniclers of the South--one in novels, one on the stage--would suggest that they shared at least a kindred spirit that would make a meeting between them mutually positive. Such a meeting never seems to have occurred. The famous meeting between them was anything but positive. Rather, that meeting is one of the most damning stories about Faulkner's interactions with gay men, and is certainly a story that exacerbates the critical impression about Faulkner's sexual anxieties.

Approximately six months after seeing *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, which would go on to win the Pulitzer Prize for drama alongside *A Fable*, Williams and Faulkner met at a party hosted by Jean Stein.⁴ Blotner records in his two-volume biography that Williams attended with "a young friend of his from Italy" (1576). Monique Lange, who was present at the party, would be less evasive in her actual interview with Blotner about the evening: she told him plainly that "Tennessee Williams and his Italian boyfriend were there."⁵ The "boyfriend" identified in the interview transforms into only the "young friend" in Blotner's two-volume biography. He disappears altogether from the later one-volume revision. The story remains in all three sources, however, complete with Faulkner's devastating dismissal of Lange and Williams later that night. According to Lange, Williams made Faulkner very uncomfortable when they met. Lange attributes this discomfort to a "a question Williams asked him about Negroes in the South. He refused to answer and remained silent for what seemed two hours" (Blotner 611). Williams' question troubled Faulkner probably much as he had been previously troubled by Alexander Woollcott and his race-baiting in 1932 and by Van Vechten and his negro boyfriend at Gladys Bentley's drag show. In this instance, Faulkner would not turn and leave the party as he had extricated himself from those previous confrontations. Nor would he stay silent all night. Later, when Lange decided to leave the party, "she asked [Faulkner] if he minded if she went with the

others to another party” (611). The “others” were Williams and his boyfriend. Faulkner apparently “laughed” at her for asking his permission to leave and dismissed her succinctly, exclaiming, “Go with your queers” (611).

No reading of Faulkner’s response to Lange can escape the invective in those four words. Those words articulated what Faulkner merely acted out in his rejection of Woolcott and Gladys Bentley. No understanding of gay Faulkner can be complete without admitting that in this well-documented account we have evidence of his using a word to identify homosexuals, but using it as a slur. Ample evidence readily suggests that throughout his life, Faulkner was quite comfortable around homosexuals. The few examples of his rejecting homosexuality come with caveats: Woolcott’s hedonism and Bentley’s and Van Vechten’s racial crossings. Faulkner’s reaction to Williams stands out, though. Something about Williams got under Faulkner’s skin as deeply or more deeply than anything else in the surviving record, apocryphal or not. Perhaps the question about “Negroes” bothered Faulkner. Perhaps Williams’ Italian boyfriend was the problem. Faulkner would later explain to Ernest Hemingway that when he met Williams at the party, “his eyes haunted me. Those terrible, distraught eyes. They moved me to tears” (Blotner 2 Vol. 1576). Actually, Faulkner was moved to call Williams a nasty name, but when he wrote to Hemingway, perhaps he was explaining a deeper impulse that his cruel dismissal was meant to cover. Faulkner had seen Williams’ play and thought that it was immature in its depictions of a closet-homosexual and alcoholic. Maybe his rejection of Williams stemmed from his connecting the character in the play to the man before him at the party. Whatever his ultimate motive, Faulkner acted out a clear homophobia toward Williams. No fancy critical contortions can deny that Williams caused Faulkner deep psychic discomfort. That discomfort appears to be directly related to Williams’ homosexuality.

With Truman Capote and Thornton Wilder, similar, if less vitriolic, patterns of discomfort emerge. In a lengthy interview with Blotner, Albert Marre recounted arranging a meeting between Faulkner and Wilder at Wilder's apartment and at Wilder's request. When Marre approached Faulkner about the meeting, Faulkner established the tone the meeting would eventually take by asking Marre, when he named Thornton Wilder, "Who's that?" (Blotner 2 Vol. 1401). Marre understood the insult and called Faulkner's bluff. When the two writers met, Faulkner continued his insolent performance. The "disastrous interview" consisted of Faulkner's putting on his "super Southern country boy routine" and sitting at some distance and at an angle from the partially deaf Wilder. Faulkner's spatial manipulation forced Wilder to lean in and cup his hand over his ear to hear Faulkner, who intentionally spoke in a low voice in response to Wilder's questions (1401). Faulkner seems to have wanted to make the interview uncomfortable, though why he would act so immaturely remains unclear in Marre's account. When Wilder tried to explain what he thought was the meaning of the title *Light in August*, Faulkner rudely rejected his interpretation. Marre explained that he "saw Wilder flush. He rose and departed," clearly upset that his praise of Faulkner elicited such a boorish response. Marre's anger at Faulkner only increased when Wilder wrote Marre a few days after the incident to ask, "Why did he hate me?" (1402). Many surviving stories demonstrate that Faulkner never felt comfortable around praise or literary discussions, but in this instance, Wilder's homosexuality may very well have influenced Faulkner's treatment of him. Faulkner may have recalled Woolcott's desire to meet him in 1932. As with that previous meeting, when he met Wilder, Faulkner may have been rejecting what he perceived as a come-on from the critically acclaimed author. Though there may be more to this story than merely a manifestation of Faulkner's discomfort around gay men, the open secret of Wilder's sexuality deserves consideration in accounting for Faulkner's actions. Similar

discomfort motivated his name-calling and fretful interaction with Williams. Similar discomfort marked his most significant interaction with Truman Capote.

Faulkner's treatment of Capote parallels his treatment of Wilder, though with the slight variance that with Wilder Faulkner was interacting with a well-established literary giant in the wake of his Nobel Prize, whereas with Capote Faulkner took on the role of correcting mentor to Capote's less disciplined posturing. In 1950, after a party at the home of Leo Lerman, Ruth Ford, Truman Capote, and William Faulkner shared a cab to her apartment to have a drink. Blotner describes what ensued. In a role increasingly familiar, Faulkner sat silently while Capote carried on his endless chattering. When Capote turned the conversation to Ernest Hemingway's *Across the River and into the Trees* in order to lampoon it, however, Faulkner suddenly spoke up. "Young man," Faulkner patronized, "I haven't read this new one. And though it may not be the best thing Hemingway ever wrote, I know it will be carefully done, and it will have quality" (514). Blotner concludes, "For a few moments there was silence in the taxi," an impressive silence, to be sure, given Capote's reputation for loquaciousness (514).

Faulkner's rejoinder of Capote with the title "Young man" situates himself as the superior in relation to Capote's aesthetic taste and level of maturity. Given Capote's reputation, however, there are other implications to consider in Faulkner's response. Just two years earlier, the elf-like Capote's first novel, *Other Voices, Other Rooms*, appeared, complete with an image on the back cover of Capote "languidly sprawled on an ornately carved Victorian settee" and "turning a provocative, pouting face to the camera," as Gary Richards describes the pose in his study *Lovers and Beloveds* (32). Richards asserts that this image was meant to present "a brazen performance of one of the most frequently recurring gay types: the passive, effeminate, foppish gay man" (32). The extent to which this posture formed the basis for Capote's general public

performance of himself would also allow that Faulkner's "Young man" was meant to belittle Capote's effeminate foppery, especially in comparison the Hemingway's hyper-masculinity. Faulkner's rebuke of Capote may have stemmed from his sense that this young, prissy man did not have the right to critique the older, far-more established, manly Hemingway and his manly aesthetics. Capote would later claim that he had no recollection of this incident. The two men would not meet again and certainly never stuck up any friendship.⁶

Faulkner did return to Capote in the abstract, though, if not in the flesh. In 1954, while acting as cultural ambassador for the United States on a visit to Brazil, Faulkner remarked, "Generally, I don't read my countrymen's books. In fact, I read little." In the same statement, he paused to single out Capote: "The few times I've tried to read Truman Capote, I had to give up . . . His literature makes me nervous."⁷ To read *one* author--an *American* author with a huge popular following--a *few* times undermines Faulkner's claim that he read little and did not read books by his countrymen. Indeed, when Faulkner corrected Capote in that taxi in 1950, he claimed that he had not read "this new one" by Hemingway, but he certainly implied his awareness of Hemingway's works, one novel of which he had adapted as a screenplay in the 1940s while he worked in Hollywood. Still, in his few attempts to read Capote, Faulkner claimed that "[h]is literature makes me nervous." Although not all of Capote's "literature" is as explicitly gay as his first novel, his short stories and *Breakfast at Tiffany's* certainly contain their share of effeminate men with easily-identifiable gay characteristics. That Faulkner's "nervousness" was a response to Capote's hyper-feminine homosexual self-performance and literature seems a reasonable conclusion to make. Faulkner's "nervous" reaction to Capote implicates a latent homophobia. Capote's hyper-effeminate foppery was a performance of sexuality that made Faulkner anxious, much as Woolcott's sybaritic display had bothered Faulkner nearly twenty years previously.

When Faulkner encountered these gay men certainly accounts for some of Faulkner's reaction to them. American culture progressed between the 1920s, when Faulkner first submerged himself in large gay communities and nurtured his most intimate gay relationships, and the 1950s, during the Cold War and at a time of ideological crisis for the United States as it assumed its position as the dominant capitalist nation in the world. Capote in particular, but to a large degree Williams, Vidal, and Isherwood, all participated in a cultural movement of gay visibility that paralleled the cooling national entry into the Cold War with the Communist Soviet Union. Hard-right conservatives did not fail to see a connection between increasing gay visibility in cultural productions, particularly in the fine arts, and a plot by Communist infiltrators to undercut the strength of masculine capitalist American industrial might. Two strains converged in a peculiar cultural perception of gay artistic production. On the one hand, gay artists rose to places of prominence in the 1940s and 1950s as leading figures in the arts. In *Gay Artists in Modern American Culture*, Michael Sherry goes to great lengths to explore the ubiquity of known gay men who functioned as arbiters of American culture during this period, despite cultural myths, mostly a product of later decades, that revise homosexuality out of history and pretend that the closet door was as tightly fastened or almost as tightly fastened in the 1950s as it was in the 1960s and 1970s. On the other hand, with increased visibility came increased criticism, culminating in the ersatz appropriation of the term Comintern as "Homintern," or the belief that gay men secretly meant to take over American culture and acculturate the youth of America to their perverted designs. The Communist witch-hunts of the McCarthy era, Sherry explains, were as often as not gay witch-hunts as well.

The increasing anxiety over the ever-present threat that gay men were suddenly everywhere lead to the perpetuation of the medical establishment and government officials

classifying homosexuality as abnormal and attempting either to treat it or to punish it. (The closeting of the 1950s accounts for the structures of the closet that Sedgwick would explicate in *Epistemology of the Closet*, but according to Sherry's history, that closet--and its attendant epistemology--are not diachronically applicable to the entire twentieth century). That anxiety also led, of course, to its own self-perpetuating problem: the more people discussed homosexuality, the more homosexuality became a topic of discussion. These anxieties would develop, in literary representation anyway, into increasingly problematic presentations of feminized, and even hyper-feminized men, the representative homosexual so perfectly crystalized in Capote's infamous book-jacket picture. Thus, depending on how one views homosexuality, Joel Knox, the protagonist of *Other Voices, Other Rooms*, finds himself either at the mercy of a grotesque queen intent on corrupting him or in the nurturing care of a father-figure emblematic of his own nascent desires. In the cultural milieu of the 1950s, the former impression far outweighed the latter. "Degenerate" homosexuality came to threaten healthy masculinity. The crisis manifested itself in depictions of men emasculated by the confines of the new, postwar world of domesticated masculinity always one step shy of putting on the wife's frilly-laced apron and cooking neatly prepared meals. Robert Corber thoughtfully explores this phenomenon in the works of Williams, Vidal, and James Baldwin, but Susan Donaldson has recently argued that V. K. Ratliff from the latter two Snopes novels embodies Faulkner's own anxieties over this crisis in masculinity. *The Town* and *The Mansion* are certainly properly read as Cold War novels, and Faulkner's comments about Capote's works making him nervous certainly lend credence to Donaldson's argument. There is, however, more to Faulkner's statement about Capote than meets the eye.

As with all of his public statements, the complexities of Faulkner's comments about

Capote mount on closer examination. Capote's works made him nervous, yet he tried to read them a few times. Why did he keep trying to read them if they made him nervous? Maybe he tried to read them but failed because they made him nervous. If they made him nervous in the first place, though, why did he try again? Similarly, Faulkner claimed that he did not want to attend a party in Hollywood, but he did attend and had a pleasant conversation with Christopher Isherwood. He also acted as if he did not want to meet Thornton Wilder, but he met with him anyway. In this instance, he acted out his discomfort and alienated Wilder, but he still met with him, privately and upon request, not at any party as a chance encounter. Unlike with Woolcott, Faulkner owed Wilder no debt of gratitude.

Throughout this period of his life, Faulkner clearly had trouble negotiating the gay identity of these men in relation to his own sense of identity. For someone so "nervous" about homosexuality, however, he quite often found himself in the middle of it, thinking about it, and reading about it (or trying to anyway). Faulkner's evasiveness in regard to his conversation with Isherwood, his boorishness when he met Wilder, his haughtiness (and nervousness) toward Capote, and his dismissal of Williams and his "queers" all portray a man surrounded by and reacting to homosexuality. Surely, if Faulkner genuinely hated gay men, he could have found some way to avoid some, if not all, of these encounters. Despite his discomfort, though, Faulkner seems to have been as immersed in gay life in the 1950s and he had been in the 1920s, though his new immersion was not necessarily *living* with gay men but *reading* and, at times, *working* with them. Upon deeper inspection of some lesser explored biographical details of Faulkner's life, the Faulkner we know from the 1950s runs headlong into a Faulkner we do not yet know. The Faulkner we do not know proves to be an elusive and enigmatic figure, certainly, but not always as homophobic a figure as these famous stories imply.

And These, Who Were Homosexuals, but Who Were Not Famous

Though Faulkner had minimal contact with Williams, Capote, Isherwood, and Wilder, what stories survive of their meetings help elucidate Faulkner's conception of homosexuality in the latter years of his life. These men were not, however, the only gay men with whom he had contact nor the only possible homosexual influences on his apocryphal creation. Evidence suggests that Faulkner read other contemporary writers in addition to Capote, including Calder Willingham and Charles Jackson, met other gay figures, such as Thomas Hal Phillips and Charles Henri-Ford, and possibly even helped start the career of one gay author from the nearby town of Water Valley, about twenty miles south of Faulkner's Oxford. While Faulkner's connections to these men (and their sisters) do not amount to the same degree of participation in gay culture as does his earlier living in New Orleans or his courtship of Ben Wasson, they provide evidence for the continuing influence of homosexual themes in his life and in his work. Even at the moments of his greatest anxious homophobia, a small sea of other gay voices surrounded him.

An off-hand photocopy in Blotner's notes suggests that Faulkner owned a signed, first edition of Calder Willingham's novel *End as a Man* (1947).⁸ Though this novel is not exclusively a gay novel--rather, it details a variety of "perverse" sexual practices at a military academy in the deep South--it is often listed alongside gay novels in bibliographic studies of the genre. Also, Willingham was not a homosexual, at least not openly so. That Faulkner might have read this lesser-known novel proves an enigmatic intersection between Faulkner and gay literature in the 1940s and 1950s. Faulkner's owning the novel suggests that he did, in fact, stay abreast of

contemporary fiction, including fiction adjacent to the rising genre of gay novels that was developing through this same period. If Faulkner actually read Willingham's novel, though, what did he garner from it? What attracted him to it in the first place? The sadism at the heart of the novel might attract the author of *Sanctuary*. Faulkner certainly never turned his eye from depictions of aberrant sexualities, even necrophilia, in his own writing, so perhaps the sexuality depicted in *End as a Man* piqued his curiosity. Also, the all-white students at the military academy in the novel often engage in the white supremacy of their generation. Willingham depicted race relations as part of a social order that Faulkner would recognize and as a theme intrinsic to the novel itself, not as a random scene with no relation to the plot as a whole. Willingham's locating Southern racism in a group of troubled and sadistic young men certainly served to critique the racial institutions of the South. Faulkner shared this critique in novels such as *Intruder in the Dust* and much of his later fiction, but he would have no dearth of sources to inform his own critiques. Willingham's novel does not seem to have had much of an influence on Faulkner, or at least no obvious or discernible influence.

Faulkner not only owned lesser-known books by contemporary writers with vaguely homosexual themes. He also knew more openly gay men than the current biographical record includes. Christopher Isherwood recalled a longer guest list from the night in 1955 when he, Faulkner, and Vidal went to see *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*. He included Carson McCullers and Marguerite Lamkin as well. Blotner identifies Lamkin as a employee of the director Elia Kazan, whom Kazan "had hired to coach his actors in simulating Southern accents" (2 Vol. 1529). One could reasonably argue that Faulkner's attraction to Joan Williams and Meta Carpenter, two of his known lovers after his marriage to Estelle, stemmed largely from their Southern backgrounds. Lamkin makes a minimal appearance in the biographical record, but Lamkin could

have attracted Faulkner for similar reasons, though no evidence suggests that they engaged in an affair. Still, Shelby Foote would claim that Lamkin was responsible for introducing Faulkner to Jean Stein, a friendship that would prove more significant in Faulkner's life and in the record we have of him thanks to Stein's interview of him for the *Paris Review* in 1956.⁹ Though Faulkner may not have courted Lamkin, he certainly courted her friend.

Stein journeyed to Mississippi in late 1955 along with Lamkin, who was working with Kazan as he filmed *Baby Doll*. Faulkner introduced both of them to Ben Wasson and another famous Greenville native, Hodding Carter. Stein would recall how highly she regarded Carter. Conversely, she explained of Wasson that he "seemed very effeminate, homos[exual], old when she saw him."¹⁰ Faulkner did not share her disregard for his old friend; nor, for that matter, would Lamkin have shared Stein's opinions either. Foote took a moment in his interview with Blotner to characterize Lamkin: "Her brother, Speed, the writer, was apparently King of the perverts. Apparently she was the Queen." Blotner included in his interview notes that Foote's wife "admired [Lamkin] extravagantly," but that Foote himself "seemed to think she was disgusting."¹¹ Foote's disgust clearly emanated from his opinion of her sexual taste, an opinion he extended to Lamkin's brother. Similarly to Stein's opinions, little evidence suggests that Faulkner would have agreed with Foote, given Faulkner's long history of friendships with openly gay men. As for Lamkin, she eventually married and does not seem to have been a lesbian. When Foote calls her queen of the perverts, he probably meant to imply something similar to what we might call in contemporary parlance a "fag hag," or that Lamkin was a ring-leader comfortable in surrounding herself with a coterie of flamboyant gay men.

That so brief an episode in Faulkner's life could elicit such a strong response from Foote, himself a native of Greenville who was present during the filming of *Baby Doll*, ten years after

the filming and three years after Faulkner's death suggests that Wasson's homosexuality and Lamkin's acceptance of "perversion" in general were no minor sidelines to this excursion South. No report exists that Faulkner was bothered by Wasson or Lamkin on this trip. Of course, no report exists that suggests Faulkner read Speed Lamkin's books, which, though they are salacious, are not as explicitly gay as many other works Faulkner to which was exposed. Lamkin's novel *The Tiger in the Garden* (1950) gained enough success that Faulkner may well have heard of it, and having met Speed Lamkin's sister as a more-than-simply-passing-acquaintance, he had grounds to read it. Nonetheless, the anecdotal evidence that links the Lamkins to Faulkner is, at best, a near miss in Faulkner's interaction with gay culture and literature during this period. Blotner's notes about Lamkin merely demonstrate that Lamkin and Faulkner crossed paths. Beyond that fact, the rest remains purely speculation, though provocative speculation to be sure.

Another near miss occurred in 1950, at Rowan Oak, in Oxford. Shortly after being awarded the Howells Medal in American Literature, Faulkner received as visitors Thomas Hal Phillips and Ernest E. Leisy, faculty members at Southern Methodist University, in Dallas, Texas. Phillips would write about the visit for *The Dallas Morning News* shortly after his returned from Mississippi.¹² A native of Mississippi, Phillips described a view of Faulkner completely in line with his public persona as a shy, reclusive farmer living a simple life in the Mississippi Hill Country. Phillips' only subjective appraisal of the great man in what is otherwise a narrative of his visit depicts Faulkner as free from the confines of being "tamed into a drawing room lion: He remains an individual, a great one I think, a lover of the Deep South who has seen more clearly than anyone else the South's virtues as well as its social disintegrations and decay." Significantly, these themes also inform Phillips' own novels,

primarily *The Bitterweed Path*, which was published almost simultaneously with his visit to Rowan Oak. In fact, a review of Phillips' novel was scheduled to appear in *The Dallas Morning News* the week after his Faulkner essay, according to the editor's note.

The Bitterweed Path takes the implicitly homoerotic material Faulkner explored in *Absalom, Absalom!* between the generations of male Sutpens and makes it the focus of an explicitly homosexual narrative. John Howard identifies the main theme of Phillips' novel as "the trope of brotherhood" as the two male protagonists, though of different class backgrounds, love each other and channel their same-sex desire into a desire to be actual brothers. The conflict is tentatively resolved when Darrell, the tenant, marries Roger's sister, thus entering the white planter class through marriage as "brother-in-law," which is metaphorically a kind of marriage, the *de jure* union that links "in law" a familial unit with no other means of legal articulation (Howard 190-91). Though he removed the racial element from Faulkner's narrative to craft his own, Phillips managed to bring about the same-sex union *Absalom, Absalom!* denies when, unable to bear Bon's intentions to marry Judith, Henry shoots him at the gates of Sutpen's Hundred. Given Phillips' praise for Faulkner in his essay, we can easily trace the influence of Faulkner on Phillips. What proves more difficult is tracing whether Phillips would have influenced Faulkner in return, assuming Faulkner would have read the forthcoming book by the Mississippian who interviewed him in his home in the spring of 1950.

Throughout his life, Faulkner read contemporary fiction. While his major influences included Dostoyevsky and Conrad, Shakespeare, the Bible, Balzac, and any number of other literary figures from generations prior to his own emergence as a literary giant, Faulkner continued to read other authors and continued to grow and experiment with his writing throughout his long and prolific career. While Faulkner greatly influenced a whole generation of

Southern writers, rarely do scholars contemplate that Faulkner, in his long career, might have found material that influenced his fiction in the fiction produced by the generation that came after him. Though Willingham, Lamkin, and Phillips prove minor footnotes in Faulkner's life, their presence signals the ubiquity of younger writers in the life of the old master and begs the question of whether they were alone in their encounters or were, instead, just the tip of the proverbial iceberg. An often-overlooked coincidence of Faulkner's literary career was that it paralleled the development of another literary genre, the gay novel, which began to take a toe-hold in American letters in the early 1930s with such books as Henri-Ford's *The Young and the Evil* and books by Richard Meeker, Lew Levinson, and Andre Tellier, among others. Through the 1930s and 1940s this genre grew until, in 1948, it reached its cultural apex with the publication of Vidal's *The City and the Pillar* and Capote's *Other Voices, Other Rooms*. Explicitly gay narratives about explicitly gay lives formed a niche market in the mid-1940s and onward until well after Faulkner's death. Willingham, Lamkin, and Phillips were among just a few of the writers of that genre whose paths would cross Faulkner's. If these three men prove elusive in their possible influences, then three others would seem to have played a much greater role in Faulkner's late career.

The Lost Week(end)

In 1948 Faulkner published a new book, *Intruder in the Dust*. His publishers were so pleased that they asked him to come to New York to celebrate its publication. Though in the late 1920s and early 1930s, Faulkner regularly visited New York, in 1948 he had not been to New York in ten years. Bennett Cerf not only invited Faulkner to New York to celebrate *Intruder*, but

he also went so far as to extend an invitation to Faulkner to stay at his home while he was in town. Faulkner accepted the invitation to New York; he declined the invitation to stay with the Cerfs. Instead, he wrote to request that Cerf book him a room at the Algonquin Hotel. Cerf complied with Faulkner's wishes and made the arrangements. Faulkner then wrote to Cerf that he had tentative plans to meet "a Mississippi friend, an actress, Ruth Ford" when he arrived.¹³ Faulkner's friendship with Ford had a long history which I will detail shortly; for now, I will focus instead on this particular trip, the record of which can be found in multiple places, compiled and detailed by Blotner and also alluded to by Cowley in his memoir, *The Faulkner-Cowley File*.

Thanks to Cowley's memoir, we can date the trip precisely. Faulkner arrived in New York in late October. On Saturday, 23 October, Cowley noted that he had joined Faulkner for dinner on the previous "Tuesday [19 October] evening at the Park avenue apartment of Robert Haas" (103).¹⁴ On 25 October, Cowley composed a brief sketch from a personal interview with Faulkner that he conducted at his home in Sherman, Connecticut. In the meantime, Faulkner had arrived at Cowley's home for unfortunate reasons. On the evening of 23 October, Cowley was called to New York to retrieve Faulkner from the Algonquin. On 26 October, three days after his arrival at the Cowley's home, Faulkner returned to New York. According to Cowley, Faulkner took with him Cowley's copy of *The Lost Weekend*, by Charles Jackson. Faulkner asked to borrow it only, but Cowley insisted that he keep the book. On Saturday 30 October, Cowley's wife received a dozen long-stemmed roses which Faulkner ordered from the nearby town of New Milford on his way home to Mississippi. By the time these arrived, Faulkner had already boarded a train to Oxford, his celebratory trip to New York concluded. Faulkner intended these roses to represent his gratitude to the Cowleys for the time he spent in their home, which even included

Faulkner's borrowing clothes from their son while he was there since he had none of his own to wear besides those in which he arrived.

What really happened on Saturday, 23 October, is detailed in interviews with Ruth Ford and recorded by Blotner in his biography. After dinner on Tuesday night at Haas' apartment, Faulkner began drinking alone in his room at the Algonquin. Ford called on him the next day to invite him out, but, as Blotner explains, "When he declined she thought his voice sounded strange. She called him the next day, and again he wouldn't go out, and his voice sounded even stranger. There was no answer at all when the operator rang his room on Friday" (498).

Recognizing that something was wrong, Ford went to check on Faulkner. Along with her friend Harvey Breit, she found Faulkner in his room, semi-conscious from his extreme drinking, and called an ambulance. The doctor insisted on hospitalizing Faulkner, but Faulkner begged not to be confined in what he called a "cage," or the alcoholics' ward (Blotner 498). Ford devised a plan: send Faulkner to the Cowley's home in Sherman where he could recuperate for a few days and dry out under the watchful eye of Malcolm and Muriel Cowley. The Cowleys agreed. As payment, Faulkner allowed himself to be interviewed at length by Cowley. He even signed many of Cowley's copies of his novels, still largely out-of-print but soon to make a hugely successful commercial comeback.¹⁵ He also began reading a book on Cowley's bookshelf ostensibly about an alcoholic on a five day bender but implicitly about a closeted homosexual attempting to numb his erotic desire for other men. Faulkner asked Cowley if he might borrow the book, but Cowley gave it to him instead. *The Lost Weekend* is one of the few novels that we know, thanks to Cowley's memoir, that Faulkner not only read but by which he seems to have been deeply and genuinely moved. In fact, he would try to write his own version of it as a short story.

By 1948, when he read the novel, there is good reason to believe that Faulkner was

already aware of its basic premise. Upon its publication in 1944, *The Lost Weekend* became something of a cultural phenomenon. In 1945 it was made into an immensely popular and critically acclaimed film. That Faulkner was a denizen of the Hollywood community in the mid-1940s, just as Jackson's novel exploded into the filmic realm, increased the likelihood that Faulkner had at least heard of the story before he found the book on Cowley's shelf. Perhaps he had not read the book, though, until his period of recovery with the Cowley family. If he had, by chance, seen the movie at least prior to his stay in 1948, he would not have known about the homosexual narrative embedded in Jackson's novel, as the screenwriters conveniently buried that element of the plot and also secured a heterosexual salvation at the end of the film that is not present in the novel. Whatever the case may have been, Faulkner found *The Lost Weekend* on Cowley's shelf, read it, asked to borrow it, and kept Cowley's copy as a gift.

In his crucial study of the homosexual element present in all of Jackson's works, Marc Connelly explains the double-case study that the novel explores, before the film version excised the psychological elements for the happier elements of a movie plot. First, the novel most clearly is a case study of alcoholism that is greatly indebted to the contemporary psychological understanding of alcoholism as explicated by top medical doctors and psycho-analysts of the time. For Connelly to call the novel a "case study" is to align it with the structure of the medical documentation of the practices of alcoholics as a pathological condition. Connelly goes one step beyond this typical reading of the novel, however, to implicate the degree to which the subconscious motivation for Don Birnam's drinking is his avoidance of recognizing his deeper psychological abnormality, his suppressed homosexual desire. Though Jackson's second novel, *The Fall of Valor* (1946), is overtly a case study of homosexuality, Connelly reads *The Lost Weekend* for its implicit structure as a case study of homosexuality in order to demonstrate the

discursive parallels between discussions of alcoholism and of homosexuality, twin pathologies with similar root causes, according to the medical establishment at the time.

After explaining the debt that Jackson's novel owes to a well-established discourse, Connelly proceeds to read the novel not as a study of a five-day binge by an alcoholic but as a gay chronology wherein Don Birnam re-enacts the critical moments of his developing homosexual desires in the internal monologues that motivate so much of the action. Two of the key moments in Birnam's life where his interior desires take external form include his recounting of his expulsion from his college fraternity for having an inappropriate crush on a fraternity brother. The other key moment is his confrontation with Bim, the nurse in the alcoholics' ward, who secures Birnam's address under the auspices of testing his memory, forces Birnam to get dressed in front of him, and then provocatively comes on to Birnam while he is leaving the ward: "'Listen, baby.' The voice was so low and soft he could scarcely hear it. 'I know you'" (Jackson 139). Mixed with these moments are memories of a precocious childhood, his horror at his sexual maturity during adolescence, and a nightmare about his being bullied by the boys at school. Throughout the novel, Birnam constantly finds himself watching other men in the bars that he inhabits, as Connelly points out, always with an eye towards their physiques and sexualities. The additional element in the novel that might most have appealed to Faulkner is that Don Birnam harbors dreams of literary greatness. He couples his memories of his sexual development with memories of being a bookish, literary youth. He conglomerates his failures as a writer with his mishaps among other boys/men, primarily his embarrassed withdrawal from college, and his constant need for a drink to steady himself. He has a sometime-girlfriend, Helen, but she functions primarily as nothing more than a mother-figure to help take care of him when he is deep in a binge.

According to Connelly, the autobiographical elements in the novel parallel Jackson's own struggles with alcohol and his homosexual desires, but those parallels extend as well to Faulkner's life, especially in 1948 as he finally published a novel after a long drought in his publishing career and was, generally speaking, completely out-of-print and still struggling in the shadows of literary greatness. That Don Birnam drinks to avoid facing his literary failures (unlike Faulkner, Birnam only dreams about the great books he would write but never writes them) would certainly register with Faulkner, the alcoholic writer struggling through his own troubles. Faulkner's reading *The Lost Weekend* while he was recovering from his own lost week of heavy drinking clearly suggests that he saw the parallels between the action of the novel and the events of his own life. That Don Birnam harbors an awareness of his homosexual inclinations, however, would not have been lost on Faulkner. He had, after all, spent the first half of his life labeled "quair" and queer and often immersed himself in gay cultures to the extent that, even while he was courting his own Helen (Baird), his social set would take for granted that his roommate William Spratling might also be his lover much as his college peers had given him queer looks for reading Conrad Aiken to Ben Wasson on the plush and verdant campus of Ole Miss.

The Lost Weekend had such an effect on Faulkner that by 1953 he had written a short story based on it. Originally titled "Weekend Revisited," but later retitled as "Mr. Acarius," the story follows a much older man than the thirty-three year old Don Birnam as he meets with his doctor to plan a weekend binge, an intentional relapse into his old ways.¹⁶ He tries to let himself "revisit" his former habits, but being in a bar overwhelms him and he drinks far more than he should have allowed himself. He regrets his decision to go on a planned drinking binge after "accidentally" getting in a police car when he flees the bar. The darkly humorous story does not

succeed in painting a realistic picture of alcoholism. Mr. Acarius has far too much control over his urge to drink, or at least believes he does, and his planned binge may provide comedy but points to the unsettling reality about the compulsive behavior of alcoholics. Don Birnam believes that he plans his actions while he is drinking, but Jackson clearly demonstrates that Birnam's sense of self control is entirely an illusion meant to justify his continued drinking. Birnam has no control. Faulkner depicted Mr. Acarius as having control with far less awareness of the illusion. Also, Mr. Acarius, significantly older than Don Birnam, is not haunted by memories of adolescent homosexual impulses. The omission of this element costs Faulkner any underlying motive for Mr. Acarius' actions and makes Mr. Acarius a character driven by a plot rather than a character driving a plot, as Jackson's protagonist proves to be. Mr. Acarius has successfully given up drinking, but for no apparent reason he decides to give drinking one more try. His actions make no sense beyond being a story-board that gave Faulkner an attempt to depict the doings of an alcoholic. Faulkner wanted to write about an alcoholic but without the laborious recitation of a deeply psychological reason to explain why he *really* drinks. Of course, Faulkner's omission of a motive effectively served to separate the often, though erroneously, paired "pathologies" of alcoholism and homosexuality, a separation that the field of psychology would not fully make until the 1970s when homosexuality was removed from the list of psychological disorders.

Faulkner seems to have consciously revised much of Jackson's novel. Faulkner was nearly fifty when he read *The Lost Weekend*. Mr. Acarius is much closer in age to Faulkner than Don Birnam. "Mr. Acarius" also lacks the homosexual subplot so entirely as to suggest that Faulkner very consciously recognized that element of Jackson's novel and removed it from his own retelling. This omission either speaks to Faulkner's wish that his own drinking did not

harbor in it seeds of his former life or, just as likely, demonstrates that he saw no reason for those anxieties to force a man to drink. After all, Tennessee Williams' mixing of homosexuality and alcoholism in his play *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* troubled Faulkner as being childish and lacking a sense of a mature handling of more important themes. Generally, Williams, a gay alcoholic, deeply troubled Faulkner. Even though Faulkner's story fails, that failure results from Faulkner's having removed the erroneous pathological pairing of the "illnesses" at the heart of the novel it revises. Unfortunately, Faulkner failed to find a suitable replacement to fill in the void left behind by the absence of a motive for Mr. Acarius' behavior--contemporary medical diagnostics would firmly declare that alcoholics do not need a motivation to drink, but the absence of "motivation" for a character can seriously disrupt good narrative, even if that motivation is erroneously tied to its outcome. Faulkner's "failure" in regard to "Mr. Acarius" actually stems from a depiction of alcoholism that was ahead of its time. Mr. Acarius' sense of control is misplaced, but the randomness of his decision making proves tellingly accurate.

Jackson's gay-themed novel would not be the only gay-themed influence on the apocryphal creations that Faulkner fashioned from the results of his own lost weekend. The other central figure from this episode in 1948 also provided Faulkner access to close bonds with gay life in the post-World War II decades. Ruth Ford's connection to Faulkner did not begin in October 1948, though her actions during Faulkner's lost weekend lionized her presence in his life. Ford entered Faulkner's life much earlier, as a co-ed at the University of Mississippi in 1929-30. A native of Hazlehurst, Mississippi, Ford attended Ole Miss at approximately the same time as Faulkner's brother, Dean. Estelle claimed that Dean and Ford dated and that Dean, a talented painter, had Estelle and Ford sit for him. Victoria (Cho-cho), barely a teenager at the time, disputed that any relationship existed between Dean and Ford, but Estelle would tell

Blotner in 1963 that this relationship, though it “never became truly serious apparently,” is why Faulkner not only wrote *Requiem for a Nun* for Ford, but also why he gave her the stage rights with very little requirement on her part for payments to option it until it finally appeared ten years after his initial offer.¹⁷ Ford told Blotner that Dean introduced her to his brother, a struggling writer at the time. Barbara IZard, whose work on the history of the production of *Requiem* also serves as the best biography of Ford, recounts, however, that Faulkner introduced himself to Ford, roughly around the time he was composing *As I Lay Dying*. According to IZard’s account, Faulkner approached Ford in the local Oxford landmark, The Tea Hound, to tell her “‘You have a very fine face,’ Then without further comment, he turned and went back to his table” (31). Though these are, technically, competing narratives, all accounts establish that Ford and Faulkner knew each other in Mississippi in the late 1920s and early 1930s, even if they do not agree on how, precisely, the two met.

Ford would consistently claim that Faulkner promised to write her a play during that week in October 1948, but his earlier acquaintance with her probably laid the groundwork for the promise. Certainly, Ford was a beautiful woman, and if memories of what precisely transpired in Oxford in 1929-1930 are inconsistent, what emerges of Ford is an image of her as a popular campus socialite who attracted Faulkner’s eye. In Hollywood in the 1940s, Faulkner would again encounter Ford, this time embodying the idealized Southern girl expatriated from the South toward whom he gravitated in his extra-marital courtships. Ford would go so far as to claim that, during this period in Hollywood, Faulkner tried to court her. As Blotner records: “They were never quite lovers, but once he said to her, ‘I’ve been your gentleman friend for quite a while now. Ain’t it time I was promoted?’”¹⁸ Faulkner also gave Ford’s daughter, Shelley, a hand-bound copy of his unpublished children’s book, *The Wishing Tree*.

In 1948 Ford was living in New York and working in Broadway productions but traveling often to Boston to work for the Brattle Theater Company, where, in the early 1950s, she would first attempt to stage *Requiem* with the help of her brother's lover as the set designer. The novel appeared in 1951. On 15 September 1951 *The New York Times* would announce that Faulkner was working with producer Lemuel Ayers on a stage version of the play to feature Ruth Ford, whom, according to the columnist, Faulkner "had in mind for his leading feminine character."¹⁹ The play would not appear for nearly ten years, unfortunately, largely because of a falling out among the members of the Brattle Theater Company. Albert Marre, who was supposed to direct the production in 1951, would cite trouble between Ford's vision and the Brattle's interests as the source of the problem. Ford insisted that her brother's partner, Pavel Tchelitchew, be the set designer.²⁰ According to Marre, in the spring of 1952 Tchelitchew, Ford's brother Charles, and Ford had a falling out over their creative differences that signaled the death of this first attempt at producing a stage version of the play.²¹

Faulkner did not share Marre's view of the situation. Marre claimed that "W[illiam] F[aulkner] didn't concern himself" with Ford's decision to turn over set design to her brother's homosexual partner.²² The record does not support Marre's claim. In early 1952 Faulkner wrote to Saxe Commins about the play and its production costs, which he asserted that he would cover for a run of the play in Europe. In a detailed discussion of the financing involved in the production, Faulkner paused to write: "The old-Russian painter, [Tchelitchew], will design the sets, getting back to my original version of the script." Faulkner even spelled the difficult name correctly. He took such concern to get it right that, in the typescript of the letter, he left a blank for the name and went back in pencil to write in the name by hand. He went so far as to specify that his faith in the investment to produce the play was based in part on Tchelitchew's

involvement: “I am inclined to risk it, since the Russian’s idea sounds like me, but mainly on Miss Ford’s account, who to an extent has suffered from the delay.”²³ The delay and the disagreement that caused it was financial. The creative differences, however, were between the management of the Brattle Theater Company and the Fords (including Charles’ life partner Pavel), not between Ford and Tchelitchev. Faulkner sided with the Fords.

Through the years-long process of producing the play, Faulkner ultimately let Ford make the decisions about its production. Ford probably told Faulkner that she wanted Tchelitchev to design the sets. Faulkner was happy to agree and put that decision in writing with his own endorsement. Indeed, Faulkner had surely met both Tchelitchev and Charles Henri-Ford during his frequent trips to New York from 1948-1952, most likely at the famed social gatherings hosted by the couple in their apartment. Izard charts the history of the weekly salons hosted in Henri-Ford’s apartment in the New York landmark, The Dakota, where Ruth Ford would also live until her death in 2009. Though these salons originally started as low-key gatherings of friends, they eventually “included Salvador Dali, Carl Van Vechten, William Carlos Williams, John Huston, and Virgil Thomson” (Izard 38). Modeled after the weekly salons that Gertrude Stein and Alice B. Toklas hosted in Paris, which Henri-Ford had attended in the early 1930s, these salons became legendary, so much so that in her memoir *Just Kids* Patti Smith would lament that by the time she attended the salon in the 1970s, it had lost the luster that made her so excited to attend in the first place (Smith 150). Faulkner attended the salon in its prime. There he would have met Henri-Ford, the young pioneer of surrealism whose first novel, written with his homosexual friend Parker Tyler, stands as one of the original novels of the gay genre in American literature, *The Young and the Evil* (1933). The reputation of that novel would precede it, having been praised by no less than Djuna Barnes and Gertrude Stein. The playful stream-of-

consciousness in the novel aligns it with the other great American novels with similar experimental structures from the same time period: Jean Toomer's *Cane* (1923), Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury* (1929), and Barnes' *Nightwood* (1937).

The Young and the Evil details aspects of a gay life in Greenwich village and Harlem with which Faulkner would have been all too familiar. His own life-long gay friend Ben Wasson was in the center of that life when Faulkner stayed with him in the late 1920s and early 1930s to revise his novels. We also know that Faulkner slummed it in Harlem at least once. We cannot absolutely verify that Faulkner read this landmark of gay fiction, but he certainly met its author at a salon devoted to discussions of art at that author's home. What most stands out about Faulkner's interactions with Henri-Ford and Tchilitchew is that nothing stands out about them. He was comfortable with the bi-national gay couple and trusted them to "get[] back to my original version of the script" of *Requiem*. Charles Henri-Ford was a key figure that linked Faulkner to Ruth Ford (to Charles Henri-Ford) and to Pavel Tchilitchew. So pervasive was his place in this relationship that in both instances where Blotner references Tchilitchew in his biography of Faulkner, he includes Henri-Ford as a collaborator on the project, not just as Ruth's brother or as an anonymous "special friend" (2 Vol. 1409, 1419).

Faulkner's interest in Charles Jackson's gay-themed, alcohol-themed novel and his professional relationship with Charles Henri-Ford and Pavel Tchilitchew provide evidence that Faulkner was not singularly homophobic in the latter decades of his life. Perhaps the most immediate influence on Faulkner's life, however, was much closer to home, in fact just twenty miles south of Rowan Oak on the railroad, just across the Yocona River (Yoknapatawpha on Faulkner's mythic postage stamp). In 1948 Faulkner published *Intruder in the Dust*. In 1948 the two landmarks of the gay novel were published, *The City and the Pillar* and *Other Voices, Other*

Rooms, the latter a Southern gay novel that made Faulkner “nervous.” Another gay-themed novel was published in 1948, though, by an author from Water Valley, Mississippi, a gay author whom Faulkner not only knew but had once even endorsed to his then publisher Harrison Smith. In 1948 Hubert Creekmore published *The Welcome*. More than his other influences, this novel may have most influenced Faulkner’s depiction of homosexuality in the 1950s because it provided an element lacking in Faulkner’s previous works and in the other major gay fiction of the period: *The Welcome* places open homosexuality in the heart of Faulkner’s immediate South.

The Nearby Gay South

The Welcome tells the story of Don Mason and James (Jim) Furlow, two young men from the fictional town of Ashton, Mississippi. As teenagers in the late 1920s, Don and Jim were best friends and were always together. In the mid-1930s, as the novel begins, Jim is married to Doris, a co-ed from Ole Miss, though they sleep in separate beds. Don has been living in New York, where he moved just before Jim and Doris’ wedding, but he is returning to Ashton to take care of his ailing mother. We discover over the course of the novel that Don’s flight was predicated on Jim’s rejection of him. As young men, they had fallen in love but could not articulate that love. Don, finally, tried to express it, but only after Jim had met and courted Doris. Don flees to New York, that bohemian city not unfamiliar to Faulkner, to escape his desires when Jim fails to acknowledge that he feels the same way. In the wake of Don’s departure, however, Jim comes to realize too late what he felt for Don. He marries, but his marriage is horrifying. Doris turns out to be a monster, representative of all the worst aspects of heterosexual unions between two people who marry because marriage is expected rather than because they love each other. Jim and

Doris' relationship speaks directly to Faulkner's editorial from 1925 on what is the matter with marriage. If Creekmore never read that brief essay, his novel nonetheless shared the spirit of its thesis.

When Don returns, Jim's marriage is coming apart. Don, though, has returned not only for his mother, but also because he could not make a life for himself in New York. To return, he has decided to accept the life of expectation in his small Mississippi town. He courts Isabel, the local tomboy-turned-woman, who was also Jim's girlfriend in high school before he married the more conventional Doris. As Jim comes to accept and articulate his love for Don, Don in turn rejects Jim for the comfortable, quiet life of the institution of heterosexual marriage in Ashton that Jim has realized is not what he ever wanted at all. The final scene of the novel is one of utter devastation and tragedy. Don leaves with his new bride, but Jim must return upstairs to Doris, who has grown increasingly grotesque in her representation of all the evils of conventional "woman" as the plot progresses. Jim's misery has been amplified by Don's return. He makes one last move for Don, a move that signifies his willingness to leave Doris, but Don's rebuff at that critical moment relegates Jim forever to the stifling confines of the marriage he had chosen long ago, before he realized the true love of his life, Don, was slipping away.

The Welcome is a novel of error and punishment. Creekmore begins it with a quotation from Marlowe's *Faustus* and ends it with the living death of Jim sinking into the inescapable confines of the inflexible conventions of small town life, as if swallowed up by the earth itself for his transgressions against his true desires. The homosexual element of the novel becomes its fulcrum, despite its not being the focus of the novel in Creekmore's original drafts. When Creekmore first began *The Welcome*, under the title *Fulcrum*, he wrote as part of the synopsis of the novel for his publishers that

The theme of the novel is the responsibilities of the man and the woman in a marriage, to each other and to their contract. A second but equally important theme will be the relation of marriage to the environment in which it occurs, in this particular case a small southern town. These themes will be objectified by the attitudes of two couples, one already married and another moving toward marriage.²⁴

Creekmore apparently did not originally intend for the plot to revolve around the problem of homosexual desire, but around the crisis of marriage by contract rather than marriage by love in a town stifled by convention and forcing young men and women into a preset mold that does not fit them. After completing the novel, Creekmore was more direct about the central problem the novel actually explored: not the loveless marriage of a man and a woman, but the loveless marriage of a man and a woman when the man loves another man. In an summary of the novel from shortly after he wrote it, Creekmore explained that “the choice of not marrying” was predicated on “submerged homosexuality to dramatize the negative choice” of marrying without love or even desire.²⁵ Creekmore’s shift from a general critique of marriage to a critique predicated on homosexual desire developed simultaneously to his other significant editorial decision as he wrote the book. He decided to revise the setting of the action.

Originally, Creekmore set the action after World War II, more or less contemporary to when he wrote the novel. He changed that setting to the pre-war 1930s as he wrote the novel. This decision parallels Creekmore’s own life to the extent that he, too, graduated from Ole Miss in the late 1920s and would have been, therefore, about the same age as Don and Jim, his two protagonists, in the fictional time of the action. Creekmore’s actual life was probably closer to Don than Jim. He had attempted to move to New York in 1930 and failed, and the early 1930s

saw Creekmore return to Mississippi. The parallel of Don to Faulkner's life holds as well. In the early 1930s Faulkner had returned to Mississippi and married. His extramarital affairs in the mid-1930s, however, suggests that even in its early years, Faulkner's marriage was troubled. Perhaps Faulkner would have recognized patterns relevant to his life in Jim and the struggles he encounters when he marries and tries to make a life for himself in his hometown. Conversely, perhaps he would have felt drawn to Don, who renounced his own bohemian life in New York to come home and marry. Though by 1948 Faulkner would have long-since moved forward in his life from those earlier tensions, he may still have recognized elements of his life from the 1930s in Creekmore's novel. Indeed, in the late 1920s and early 1930s, Faulkner and Creekmore knew each other in Oxford. Faulkner even recommended Creekmore's first novel to his publisher. Creekmore's novel certainly emanated from his own life experiences from that time nearly twenty years distant when he wrote *The Welcome*. Significantly, twenty years prior to its publication, Creekmore was friends with William Faulkner.

The late 1920s and early 1930s found Creekmore in Oxford working on his first, and ultimately unpublished, novel, which explored very similar themes about the problems of marriage only without the homosexual element of the *The Welcome*. In *The Elephant's Trunk*, Creekmore detailed the rebellion of Ruth Anderson, who explores her sexuality with her first boyfriend, Walter, falls in love with a young man named Robert at the university, but ultimately marries the lower class Drake Mullins. The novel is set in Mississippi and largely in the town wherein is located the state university. Rather than name that town Oxford, however, Creekmore called the town Lowry.²⁶ Walter and Ruth part ways when Walter leaves to fight in World War I. The novel ends approximately ten years later, in the late 1920s, contemporary to when Creekmore wrote it, with Ruth having two young sons whose ages place the climax of the novel

around 1928. Ruth marries Drake out of pure lust because he represents the proverbial “bad boy” of whom her parents would not approve. He also looks very much like Robert, Ruth’s second boyfriend who replaced Walter as the object of her affections, only Drake has rougher edges and stronger hands. Ruth embraces the scorn of her town and the rejection of her parents in her delight that she has broken away from convention and married “the wrong man.” Of course, after the initial romance wears off, she finds herself poor and miserable. After years of a miserable, abusive marriage, she begins to fantasize about Robert, the emblem of a more polished version of Drake whom she could have married instead. When she runs away to Jackson to find Robert, Drake follows her and kills her in a fit of jealous rage.

The moral of the story is that marriage is a contract, and an inescapable one. Creekmore devastatingly critiqued this contract, especially when a couple enters into for the wrong reasons. Ruth attempts to escape the expectations of a “proper” marriage by making an “improper” marriage. Her mistake is largely that she marries at all. Once she has married, the town expects her to follow through with her obligations, even if they kill her. Those obligations do, in fact, kill her. Robert, her “proper” beau, refuses to help her when she tries to run away from Drake. He actually contacts Drake when Ruth appears in Jackson to re-court him. His sense of the proprieties of marriage--Ruth belongs to Drake in his view--directly causes Ruth’s death. That death, then, is the inescapable fate that Ruth chose when she married in the first place. Creekmore repeated this critique of marriage almost exactly in *The Welcome*, only Ruth becomes Jim and Robert becomes Don. The prior heterosexual relationship that might have proven better for Ruth becomes the prior homosexual desire that could have saved Jim from his disastrous marriage and signals impending tragedy for Don for not recognizing that his own marriage will probably be similarly flawed. Don refuses Jim and instead decides that he will marry Isabel and

leave Jim to his chosen fate, though the bitter irony is that Robert's punishment of Ruth and Don's of Jim stems from their own slighted feelings from before Ruth married Drake or Jim married Doris. In both novels the chosen marriage is a responsibility that stifles the free expression of a better, prior love.

The key difference is that Ruth *could have married* Robert. Don and Jim could not marry, but Creekmore does not suggest that Don and Jim could not find peace together. In fact, they might find more peace than Ruth would ever attain even with Robert. Marriage is the problem, not love. Even between two people who love each other, marriage confines expectations and demands rigid duties and obligations. Marrying Robert would not have saved Ruth from the tragedy of her life. Robert's decision to inform Drake about Ruth's presence in Jackson does more than simply make him a maintainer of the status quo. Ruth dies; Robert helps bring about her death. Don's marriage implicates his decision to maintain the status quo, but he does not kill Jim. Oddly, Don most clearly understands the problem with marriage. He summarizes the tragedy of an institutionalized (married) life as he walks around his town in the wake of his return, before he begins to court Isabel:

All around his horizon, the houses he no longer felt close to, the houses that must already have shut him away, lifted their roofs above the trees along the two ridges of Ashton. They secretly guarded their inhabitants and held them silent in their walls and made those mysterious in the night who in the day were trivial. The warm breeze brushed over the town, like an ineffectual blessing; in the east the deep yellow arc of the moon had thrust above the hills. But only he saw it tonight. And only he saw the houses imprisoning the people, the people imprisoning each other and each person imprisoning his own heart in the dark silent fear of

community. (79)

Unfortunately, Don believes he can re-enter the mystery of his hometown by embracing the very expectations that he recognizes as the prison of the heart. Don's sensibilities address the same anxieties that Ruth Anderson encounters, but transferring them to a homosexual couple alters the implications of Don's actions and makes them truly tragic, in the classical sense of the word. Unlike for Ruth, who would have married someone, Don and Jim could have escaped and could have made a new world for themselves. Don even sees the nature of the tragedy before him and then inexplicably embraces it for himself. That Don can recognize that there is a way out for him and Jim--a way for the two of them to save themselves--signals the "recognition" of classical tragedy. The conclusion, wherein Don departs for his honeymoon while Jim returns to his wife upstairs, models the "reversal." Don's blindness--his *hamartia*--prevents his connecting his recognition to his own fate. His fault is a form of *hubris*. He thinks he can make a better marriage and not find himself as shattered as Jim. In truth, he and Jim together have the best chance at happiness, but they miss the proverbial mark. As a tragedy, *The Welcome* is masterful.

The question, of course, is did Faulkner read *The Welcome*? He read *The Elephant's Trunk*, but would he have followed Creekmore's developing career beyond that first novel? He recommended that first novel, and the connections between Creekmore and Faulkner suggest a far deeper connection than merely as passing acquaintances. Proof that Faulkner read Creekmore's first novel comes from a letter that Creekmore wrote to Phil Stone, but the long road to that letter implicates the Creekmores, Faulkner, and the Stones in a complicated history that would bind them as friends and co-conspirators beyond the rebellious fervor of an incident at Ole Miss in 1920. Hiram Hubert Creekmore, Jr., was born in 1907 in Water Valley, the third son of an established family (his father was a judge). As a thirteen-year-old, Creekmore would

watch a series of events unfold on the Ole Miss campus in the fall of 1920 from the safe distance of the neighboring county. The events significantly influenced the course of Faulkner's life and involved Creekmore's father and his two older brothers. The ripples of those events would stretch out and later allow Creekmore the entry to follow his own literary aspirations.²⁷

The connection between Creekmore and Faulkner began in a fraternity and ended in the Southern Protective Association. When Faulkner enrolled at Ole Miss on a special dispensation for returning veterans, he befriended Ben Wasson, a young man whom he had met briefly before the war. Wasson had subsequently left Ole Miss to attend Sewanee for the remainder of his undergraduate career. At Sewanee, Wasson joined the Sigma Alpha Epsilon fraternity. He returned to Ole Miss for his law degree after the war, where he also re-established his friendship with Faulkner and began to pressure Faulkner to rush SAE as well. Faulkner was also pressured to rush SAE by his other close friend in Oxford, Phil Stone, a member of the fraternity from his own undergraduate days at Yale. In fact, the entire Stone family, the male members anyway, were all SAEs and active in the Ole Miss chapter even after their matriculations. Furthermore, Faulkner's uncle John Wesley Thomas Falkner, Jr., had rushed SAE in his own attendance at Ole Miss for law school. Family pressures convinced Murry (Jack) Falkner to rush SAE when he enrolled at Ole Miss in 1919. William joined his brother and went through the initiation ceremony at the home of Jim Stone, Phil Stone's father, just north of the campus. As I have previously argued, the walk back through the woods with Ben Wasson after the initiation ceremony would inform Faulkner's early poem "Portrait." William and Jack were not the only two young pledges initiated that night, however. They were joined by Rufus Creekmore, a star tackle on the Ole Miss football team and, generally, a campus socialite and former member of the extremely exclusive Red and Blue Club. Rufus was beginning his law degree when he rushed

SAE. His younger brother Wade joined him. Two Creekmores and two Fa(u)lkners rushed SAE at the Stone home, also site of Faulkner's "musical sessions" with Ben Wasson when the Stones were away.²⁸ The deeply ingrained commitments to fraternity brothers forged in the uniquely hierarchical world of Ole Miss is difficult to explain to outsiders; one must witness it first hand to believe it. In the case of the bonds forged among this group of Ole Miss SAEs, however, more would come to link them than their mere attendance at Ole Miss and predilection for a common social group.

The reason this initiation occurred off campus was because in 1919, fraternities were banned on the Ole Miss campus. This ban extended from a 1912 law passed by the state legislature barring all "secret societies" on the campus. The ban itself had its origins ten years earlier, in 1902, when a young country boy from Lafayette County named Lee Russell attended Ole Miss for his own law degree before going to work for a local lawyer and politician in Oxford, Faulkner's grandfather, J. W. T. Falkner, Sr.²⁹ In 1902, Russell had been denied entry into the campus system of elite social clubs because, despite his admittance to Ole Miss for law school, he was a poor white who lacked the appropriate social status. Enraged at being snubbed, Russell began a campaign to ban what he called "secret societies" on the campus. By 1912, he managed to get a law passed to that effect, but the *de jure* limitations on active practices by these societies simply resulted in a *de facto* continuation of their practices in a "sub rosa" capacity. A perfect example of this sub rosa activity was the fraternity SAE, which continued to initiate members but did so off campus at the home of a well-to-do lawyer and SAE alumnus, Jim Stone.³⁰

Lee Russell was not fooled by the de facto situation on the campus. When he completed his meteoric political rise in 1920 by winning the governorship of Mississippi, he traveled to Ole

Miss to exact his revenge. Understanding the system that had spurned him all too well, Russell went after members of the legal campus group, the Red and Blue Club, a group of 20 seniors chosen by the previous year's 20 senior members and sponsors of a university dance. The head of this group, Lowery Simmons, found himself the brunt of a blistering attack by Russell in a private interview in the Chancellor's office that quickly turned from a discussion of the Red and Blue Club to a general assault on the elitist fraternity system. At one point, Russell, now governor of the state, asked if he would be allowed entry into any of these clubs given his current status. Simmons assured him that he would not with the insolent but marvelously witty rejoinder: "Governor, you still wouldn't get in."³¹ In response, Russell greatly curtailed the plans for the Red and Blue dance, a staple event of the campus social scene. Outraged by Russell's actions, the student body rose up in a spontaneous protest and burned the governor in effigy in the Grove on campus. In response to the protest, Russell pulled his ace out of his sleeve. Simmons was also a member of SAE. Despite lacking proof that any one social group was responsible for the burning, Russell proceeded to declare that the "secret societies" he abhorred, namely the sub rosa fraternities, were responsible and demanded that all students sign a pledge stating that they were not members of any such groups. Russell's ace was that he knew the same gentlemanly code that refused to grant him entry into these societies would also bar students from swearing on oath that they were not members of a society when, in fact, they were. Failure to sign the pledge would result in dismissal from Ole Miss.

With their backs against the wall, the SAEs met nightly at the home of Jim Stone. Central to these meetings was the nightly presence of Hiram Hubert Creekmore, Sr., who came up from Water Valley to advise his sons and the other members of SAE on the wisest course of action.³² Finally, as the 10 November deadline for signing the pledge approached, Judge Creekmore

advised the SAEs to withdraw from the university rather than be dismissed. His own sons withdrew, both transferring to the University of Alabama for the remainder of the school year.³³ Wade returned to Ole Miss for his junior year and listed his membership in SAE with his yearbook picture, relying on the claim that he had joined legally at Alabama though he had, in fact, joined the fraternity while he was at Ole Miss.³⁴ Rufus would transfer to Yale in the fall of 1921 to finish his law degree. Legally an SAE from Sewanee, Ben Wasson was not obliged to withdraw. William and Jack Fa(u)lkner withdrew under the advice of Judge Creekmore. Jack later re-enrolled and finished his degree. William Faulkner never returned to Ole Miss as a student, though he did maintain his close ties to the theater group on campus, The Marionettes. In the fall of 1921, when he first attempted to leave Oxford for New York, with the encouragement of Stark Young, Faulkner found himself temporarily in New Haven, Connecticut. While there he re-encountered Rufus Creekmore and wrote home to his mother that, "I saw Rufus Creekmore across the street yesterday. Law school, I imagine" (*Thinking of Home* 148). In later interviews, Rufus recalled spending time with Faulkner in New Haven during that fall semester.³⁵ Their shared rebellion and exile gave them much in common beyond the usual fraternal bonds.

Faulkner made little effort as a student, and he likely did not feel as strongly as his fellow SAEs did about the crisis of 1920. His walk back to campus through the woods with Ben Wasson following his initiation, along with Wasson's account of Faulkner's reaction to the ceremony, suggest that Faulkner was not particularly dedicated to the fraternity itself. He seems to have joined at the behest of his friends and family. He certainly did not speak of his membership or the crisis that forced his withdrawal very often in his later life. One of the few times in his later life when he would mention his SAE membership, though, came in 1951 when Jeff Hamm,

another SAE from 1920, asked Faulkner to convince a young student at the time named Billy Ross Brown to rush SAE at Ole Miss. Brown would recall Faulkner's advice: "[F]raternities didn't mean a whole lot," Faulkner explained, "you got out of fraternities what you put into them, but that if he [Faulkner] had any influence on him, he'd appreciate his going SAE."³⁶

Faulkner's tacit acceptance for his commitments to fraternity brothers would extend to more than just Brown. He also extended that commitment to the younger brother of his fellow SAEs Rufus and Wade Creekmore. Their younger brother Hubert attended Ole Miss from 1923 to 1927.

When Hubert made his own attempt to conquer New York in 1930, with a manuscript of a novel in hand, he turned to Faulkner for assistance.

The extent of Hubert Creekmore's relationship with Faulkner at Ole Miss proves as enigmatic to detail as Faulkner's relationship with Ford from her undergraduate days. Creekmore attended Ole Miss beginning in the Fall of 1923, during William Faulkner's tenure as the university postmaster. Faulkner's job would have made him a central figure on the campus (one can only surmise how important the postmaster was on a university campus without wireless internet and email). As for Creekmore, he would establish himself on campus as something of a literary nerd, even earning a reputation akin to Faulkner's "Count No 'Count" nickname.

Creekmore fashioned himself as the campus "literary vagabond,"³⁷ but whereas Faulkner rushed the social fraternity SAE with Creekmore's brothers, Hubert Creekmore preferred to join the campus literary fraternity, the Scribblers, which had rejected Faulkner during his days as a student. Creekmore did not rush SAE, or at least he did not claim that he had on his list of affiliations in the yearbook. During Creekmore's tenure on campus from 1923-1927, Faulkner was in and out of Oxford, and no evidence remains of a meeting between the two in the Tea Hound or the post office. Creekmore did, though, contribute to and eventually assistant edit the

campus humor magazine *The Scream* to which Faulkner contributed three drawings in 1925. He also joined The Marionettes, starring in their productions throughout his undergraduate career.³⁸

By 1930, three years after his graduation, Creekmore had completed a novel and wanted to sell it to a publisher in New York. Notably, he did not turn to Ben Wasson, a former SAE with connections to The Marionettes and also active in the the Southern Protective Association. Wasson left Greenville for New York in 1927, the year Creekmore graduated. From 1927-1930, Wasson spent little time in Mississippi. Conversely, Faulkner spent much of his time in Oxford during those years, returning from New Orleans in 1927 to begin his serious courtship of Estelle. Faulkner's only significant trips away from Oxford from 1927-1930 included his honeymoon and his trips to New York to work on drafts of his novels *Sartoris* and *The Sound and the Fury* for his publisher Harrison Smith (Faulkner's regard for Hal Smith survives in the dedication to *As I Lay Dying*), but generally, Faulkner was in Oxford for those three years. Still haunting Oxford himself, Creekmore would befriend Phil Stone and William Faulkner, friends of his brothers from SAE and literary men with whom he could discuss the latest literary trends and share drafts. In fact, in *The Welcome*, Creekmore depicted Stone's influence on his writing in the character of Horace Saxon, the town newspaper editor. Saxon refused one of Don Mason's childhood poems to protect him because "[t]hink what might have happened if [Saxon had] printed that poem" in all its youthful ineptitude. Rather, when Saxon realized that Don had a taste for literature, he "gave [Don] books to read instead of encouraging him to write bad ones" (103). These books and other reading materials included "*The New Republic*, and a literary [magazine], *The Dial*, and *Poetry* and other strange and wild publications" (26). Don dutifully shared these materials with Jim during their courtship as teenagers, part of their shared dreams about moving on to bigger places than Ashton and its provincialism. The reading list is curious,

of course, because of its similarities to the one Stone also shared with a young William Faulkner in the 1910s and early 1920s. Significantly, Horace Saxon's name blends two influences, though it suggests a third. The first, Lyle Saxon, was the central figure in the Southern Protective Association in New York in the early 1930s. In 1930, Creekmore was headed in Saxon's direction. The second, Phil Stone, appeared in Faulkner's fiction originally as the character Horace Benbow, though he reappeared later and much more fully as Gavin Stevens. Stone was the man in Oxford who was trying to help Creekmore make his big move. In the reference to Stone, however, Faulkner's presence emerges. Horace Benbow was a central character in Faulkner's 1928 novel *Flags in the Dust*. The bridge between Saxon and Stone is Faulkner. He was also the bridge between Mississippi and New York.

As Creekmore finished his manuscript, Stone asked Faulkner for help introducing his new local protege to the publishing world in New York. Faulkner apparently read Creekmore's manuscript and offered to introduce the young literary vagabond to Harrison Smith. Writing from the Stevens Hotel in Chicago on 24 May 1930 on his way to New York, Creekmore reminded Stone that he still needed that letter:

Dear Phil:

I meant to write to you just before I left to ask Bill Faulkner to send me the letter to Harrison Smith. But I got off in such a rush that I hadn't time. I have my book completed and typed and am now on my way to New York to storm the publishers. I'd never know how to thank both of you enough if you could help me with Mr. Smith. I can imagine it's a pretty hard task for an outsider to break through the book publishing game. At present I don't know where I shall stay in New York but you can address me in care of Miss Judith Page, 11 Van Dorn

Street, until I wire you where I am.

Hastily but sincerely,

Hubert Creekmore³⁹

Faulkner's role in this relationship was to play the mediator between Oxford and New York. He took an interest in Creekmore and seems to have offered to help smooth his transition. This help very likely included introductions to Wasson and Saxon, who very likely helped solve Creekmore's other problem that he mentioned in his letter: where he would stay once he arrived. Though Wasson would not have been in Oxford during Creekmore's maturation towards his first novel from 1927-1930, he would have been the contact man in New York. Lyle Saxon would have provided the slow-drip coffee. Faulkner, however, provided the glue that held these pieces together. Though it requires significant speculation, I think it is entirely plausible to conclude that Creekmore appreciated the help.

Recommendation aside, Creekmore's first and eventually his second manuscripts would not be accepted for publication. He would spend most of the 1930s in Jackson, Mississippi. He would publish poetry, if not fiction, including selections in a 1933 volume *Mississippi Verse*, where his poems would appear alongside a selection of Faulkner's poems. He would eventually pursue a Master's Degree at Columbia University. In 1946 he would finally "break through the book publishing game" with his first published novel *The Fingers of Night*. In 1948 he would follow that novel with *The Welcome*, and then publish a third novel in 1952, *The Chain in the Heart*. It is entirely reasonable to assume that Faulkner followed the career of this former fellow literary vagabond from Ole Miss. It is equally reasonable to assume that when Faulkner read *The Welcome*, he recognized the themes of marriage that Creekmore included in all of his novels, beginning with his first novel, which Faulkner recommended to the most important publisher in

his life. In *The Welcome*, however, the problem of marriage revolves around a fulcrum of suppressed homosexual desires deep in the heart of North Mississippi, the landscape with which Faulkner was so familiar, with which he is now so universally associated, and in which, on a hillside in Oxford, he has come to his eternal rest.

What makes Creekmore's gay novel so thematically pertinent to Faulkner's writing is a matter of geography. Creekmore modeled Ashton after his hometown of Water Valley, just over the border from Lafayette County in neighboring Yalobusha County. On Faulkner's map of Yoknapatawpha, he transforms Water Valley into Mottstown, the next town south on the railroad and over the Yoknapatawpha River. The real Water Valley lies slightly to the southwest of Oxford, over the Yocona River, but it is the next incorporated town south on the now-defunct rail line. Don and Jim inhabit a town wherein nearly everyone owns a car (Gus Traywick, their mutual friend, owns a car dealership); where jazz music plays in the movie theater before the nightly show begins; where townswomen meet at the drug store during the day to drink ice-filled Coca-Colas; and where Isabel nonchalantly displays on her walls prints by Marie Laurencin, a French Cubist painter. These mass market prints, however, serve as something of a stark contrast to Darl Bundrens' utterly out-of-place reference to a "cubistic bug" during the river crossing scene of *As I Lay Dying* (the Bundrens are crossing the Yoknapatawpha/Yocona River). *As I Lay Dying* and *The Welcome* are set in the same temporal moment, more or less, the former in approximately 1929, the latter in the early 1930s. In the former, Darl is alone and cannot find someone else like him to share his life and his desires. In the latter, two men have the opportunity to find happiness together and miss it because they are too blind to see the love that they could embrace. Darl searches for union but never finds anyone close to his home to unite with. Jim and Don fail and their story is a tragedy, but that tragedy is rooted in the hope that they

could be together, if they could escape their blind acceptance of tradition. Jim and Don are not alone.

The utter modernity of Ashton is striking, especially in comparison to Faulkner's nearby Jefferson. Unfortunately, though, Ashton also remains a town clearly rooted to its stifling traditions. What Faulkner could see in Ashton was a reflection of Jefferson, a town troubled by the same conventions and equally inescapable for the rigidity with which one must adhere to its expectations. If, however, Faulkner could never find a way to place homosexuality in his Jefferson without also having to represent its troubled presence and its eventual necessary removal from the community, in Creekmore's novel, he would see a different image. In Creekmore's novel, the setting is thoroughly modernized and the young people are eager to embrace a new world. Jim even comes out to Gus Traywick on a hunting expedition and explains the tension between him and Don. Though Gus is shocked by the revelation, he nonetheless continues to consider both Don and Jim as his friends. The problem in *The Welcome* is not that gay people attempt to live in the rural South at all, but that they fail to realize that they could find each other in that landscape if they would only open their eyes to the possibility that someone else there feels the same way. In Creekmore's gay novel, Faulkner would find homosexuality at the heart of a narrative set in his own backyard. His own gay narratives set in New Orleans or Europe, or his "queer" characters beaten down and sent away by their families in Jefferson, had never been so daring. Explicit gay narratives, such as Capote's *Other Voices, Other Rooms*, made Faulkner nervous. Creekmore's novel, however, would have allowed Faulkner to face homosexuality in rural North Mississippi and not be made nervous by it; for this world *is* his world, this life *his* life.

Given Faulkner's gay exposure in the 1940s and 1950s, we should not be surprised that

he would return in his later career to the themes of his early prose and poetry. He had before him numerous models. He did not warrant all of these models as correct and some of them even made him “nervous.” Some, however, gave him entry into a way of viewing and expressing homosexuality that was not so burdened by rigid spatial dichotomies and created an imaginative space in which to place homosexuality despite the challenges that seem to encumber it there. Faulkner’s early gay writings do not demonstrate a blind acceptance of the anxieties of homophobia; rather, even when he depicted homophobia, he did so by way of implicit critique. Thus when he had at his disposal a basis to continue his explorations of homosexual themes in the latter 1950s, he embarked on a project to complete his great epic of Yoknapatawpha and evolved in that epic a character whose implicit critique of the rigid structures of sexuality saturates the *The Town* and *The Mansion*. As a character present in the earliest stories that Faulkner wrote about his apocryphal county, V. K. Ratliff is an ever-changing but ubiquitous figure thoroughly at the heart of Yoknapatawpha and, in his final incarnations, decidedly emblematic of Cold War homosexuality. Ratliff is one of Faulkner’s greatest achievements, his Falstaff with a pressed shirt and apron, and even Faulkner would admit that he simply fell in love with him.

CHAPTER 10: V. K. RATLIFF, A BIOGRAPHY

The character who would come to be V. K. Ratliff is as old as Yoknapatawpha County, there from its conception in one form or fashion, there in the major works of the 1930s, and there finally in his own novel in 1940, *The Hamlet*, and again a major character in the latter two Snopes novels, *The Town* and *The Mansion*, the third to last and second to last novels of Faulkner's career. Of all of Faulkner's characters, Ratliff is the most ubiquitous, though his ever-changing presentation makes him more the great trickster figure of Yoknapatawpha than its vicar or its spokesperson. Originally named Suratt, Ratliff came to occupy such a central place in Faulkner's imagination that in 1945 Faulkner would explain to Malcolm Cowley that, as he began laying the groundwork for what would become *The Hamlet* in the mid-1920s,

[It] was incepted as a novel. When I began it, it produced "Spotted Horses," went no further. About two years later I had "The Hound," then "Jamshyd's Courtyard," mainly because "Spotted Horses" had created *a character I fell in love with: the itinerant sewing-machine agent named Suratt*. Later a man of that name turned up at home, so I changed my man to Ratliff for the reason that my whole town spent much of its time trying to decide just what living man I was writing about, the one literary criticism in town being "How the hell did he remember all that, and when did it happen anyway?" (26 italics mine)

This explanation is, in miniature, the process of apocryphization for William Faulkner, with one

minor detail misremembered. A man named Suratt did not show up after the character; the character was based on a man named Suratt. When the real Suratt objected to Faulkner's using his name, however, that critical moment in the life of the character forced the crucial shift when Faulkner changed Suratt into Ratliff, for legal as well as literary reasons, sometime in the late 1930s. The moment of that critical change sparked a revision of *Ratliff* so compelling that even Faulkner may not have realized at the time what he had done, though by the late 1950s, he seems to have understood it. When Faulkner changed Suratt to Ratliff, he created a gay character, fully realized in a Southern landscape and central to its very existence.

In the Beginning

J. M. Coetzee offers a succinct, if somewhat reductive (though only somewhat), overview of the moment when Faulkner first realized the artistic vision that would become his mythic county. Describing the young writer after his return from Europe in 1925, Coetzee epitomizes the general impression of Faulkner that he was a "would-be writer of unusual doggedness but no great gifts" (192). Though *Soldier's Pay* and *Mosquitoes* proved he could write novels, the lightning bolt of genius had not built up the charge in these early works to impress as more than just promising. Then, as if out of nowhere, Faulkner "would sit down and write a 14,000 word sketch bursting with ideas and characters which would lay the groundwork for the series of great novels of the years 1929-1942. The manuscript contained, in embryo, Yoknapatawpha County" (192). Coetzee's summary elides a few key details. First, that groundwork would produce novels until 1962, not just 1942. Second, those 14,000 words were just broad brushstrokes for a collage that would change much and to which Faulkner would add a great deal, in characters and history,

as the mood struck him for each new novel that he produced. Those 14,000 words were not in themselves the entirety of Yoknapatawpha. Nonetheless, Coetzee's implicit comparison between Faulkner's sketch and the Big Bang holds true. In that sketch, Faulkner's vision emanated as a proverbial series of sub-atomic particles and other loose radicals that would, as they cooled in the expanding ether, condense to form larger, more complex particles that would, in turn, support the structure of his entire fictional universe.

That original 14,000 word manuscript was the outline of a never-completed novel called *Father Abraham*, a story about the rise of poor whites into positions of power in the South, primarily in the figure of Flem Snopes. At roughly the same time, Faulkner began working on the inverse story, the decline and fall of an old aristocratic Southern family, the Sartoris. The former he put aside to pursue the latter, which he saw to completion as *Flags in the Dust*, though it would be rejected by his publisher Boni and Liveright. With the help of Ben Wasson's editing, that "first" Yoknapatawpha would appear under the impress of Cape and Smith as the much shortened novel *Sartoris*. Faulkner would then turn his attention to newly created characters for newly conceived novels set in the same geographic location: the Compsons, the Bundrens, Temple Drake, Joe Christmas, the Sutpens, etc., none of whom featured in that original manuscript but all of whom grew from it much as the biblical tradition explains that God promised to Abraham of his descendants that they would number more than the stars. Alongside the novels he wrote in the 1930s, though, Faulkner also continued to tinker with stories directly related to the original manuscript of *Father Abraham*. This tinkering eventually producing a series of stories from the late 1920s and into the mid-1930s that would become, after numerous and extensive revisions, the picaresque novel *The Hamlet* in 1940.

The central influence in the creation of the Snopes/Sartoris material, originally two sides

of one larger story of the “South,” was Phil Stone, in whose front office of his law firm on the Square in Oxford Faulkner would spend many an afternoon trading and embellishing stories of the townspeople that he and Stone observed around them every day. Though especially later in his life, Faulkner was reluctant to credit Stone’s influence too emphatically, he dedicated both *The Town* and *The Mansion* to Stone, the former with the note: “To Phil Stone: He did half the laughing for thirty years” (*T* 352).¹ Though elements of Stone informed the creation of Horace Benbow in the early novels, Stone’s greatest presence in Faulkner’s apocryphal county is clearly reflected in Gavin Stevens, not only the counterpoint in Jefferson to Flem Snopes and “Snopesism” but also the confidant and co-conspirator of V. K. Ratliff. The suggestive relationship between the apocryphal Stevens and Ratliff implicates the degree to which Ratliff, the man Faulkner fell in love with, was, in large part, an apocryphal version of Faulkner himself.

From the collusion of these two minds in that front office, the young writer of “unusual doggedness” created Yoknapatawpha. Though the two men talked Yoknapatawpha into existence in the late 1920s, Faulkner he would finally articulate his creative process from that earlier time in 1955 in marvelously poetic description:

Beginning with *Sartoris* I discovered that my own little postage stamp of native soil was worth writing about and that I would never live long enough to exhaust it, and by sublimating the actual into apocryphal I would have complete liberty to use whatever talent I might have to its absolute top. It opened up a gold mine of other peoples, so I created a cosmos of my own. I can move these people around like God, not only in space but in time too. (*Lion* 255)

In considering this genesis moment of Faulkner’s creative vision, Coetzee explains the debt that Faulkner owed for the philosophical origins of this perspective not just to Stone but to a book

Stone recommended to him, *The Creative Will*, by Willard Huntingdon Wright. In his study, Wright claimed that the artist must be “an omnipotent god who moulds and fashions the destiny of a new world” (qtd. in Coetzee 192). Intriguingly, Coetzee establishes that Wright’s aesthetic principles derive from his being “a disciple of Walter Pater,” the nineteenth scholar of same-sex desires in Renaissance art (192). This genealogy--Pater to Wright to Faulkner--found subcutaneous to the original inspiration of Faulkner’s genius actually implicates the degree to which the entire so-called Southern Renaissance, of which Faulkner is considered a prime progenitor, can trace its origins to same-sex erotic influences. Such a genealogy, an erotics of aesthetic patrimony, lends some credence to Eve Sedgwick’s claim that we will recognize a renaissance by “where and how the power in them of gay desires, people, discourses, prohibitions, and energies were manifest” (*Epistemology* 58). In Ratliff/Suratt’s “bland and affable” but ever-changing face, Faulkner would produce a manifestation of these “desires, people, discourses, prohibitions, and energies.” Thus, in the twilight of *The Mansion*, at the end of Faulkner’s brilliant career, as Ratliff leads Gavin Stevens to find Mink Snopes, we can recognize that this cosmos of Faulkner’s own is a gay cosmos and the heart of Yoknapatawpha is a gay voice still talking beyond the end of its world and into ours.

Conception

V. K. Ratliff was born on 27 April, 1894, in the pages of the now defunct local newspaper, the *Oxford Globe*, when “a wholesale dealer in sewing machines advertised for a local man with a suitable rig of horse and wagon to become his traveling agent in the countryside around Oxford” (Williamson 133). A man named James Suratt answered that add, though in

town he seems to have gone by the nickname Junius, or June for short.² Maud Faulkner would remember in an interview in 1953:

We had a June Suratt here who sold sewing machines in Lafayette County from about 1910 to 1925. He lived in a little house just off the Square. On the bed of his wagon, he had a little doghouse painted to look like a sewing machine as advertising. We used to see his wagon whenever he was in town. Billy used him in quite a few of his early stories. Later, I guess he thought he ought to change the name to Ratliff.³

Though only minimally useful for identifying a person's living situation, census records imply that this man was a family man, probably not native to Lafayette County but rather an itinerant worker, and left little trace of himself in Oxford after his death in the early 1930s. He had several children, though the one who would most significantly factor into the life of the character created from him was his son, Hugh Miller Suratt, born some time in the early twentieth century. That June Suratt was married and had several children does little to prove or disprove whether or not he might have carried on extra-martial affairs, with either men or women. At least from a distance, however, which seems to be how Faulkner observed him, his large family and marital status does not make him a likely candidate for a gay character in a novel.

The part of this real man that Faulkner apocryphized into the character Suratt, however, was not his family ties but the wagon that James Suratt used to sell his sewing machines. The fictional Suratt appears in a handful of short stories: "Spotted Horses," "Lizards in Jamshyd's Courtyard," "Fool about a Horse," and "A Bear Hunt." He also appears in *Flags in the Dust*, *As I Lay Dying*, and *Light in August*. "A Bear Hunt," which was published in 1935, marked the final appearance of Suratt as Suratt, though when Faulkner published the story in *Collected Stories* in

1951, he changed the name to Ratliff to signify the name change that actually came about in the late 1930s as he was composing *The Hamlet*. This name change also demonstrates most clearly that Suratt and Ratliff are, effectively, the same character, only revised with a new name. One feature of his character remains consistent, though: his housing for selling his sewing machines.

Suratt first appeared in “Spotted Horses,” the short story Faulkner eventually composed out of a fragment of *Father Abraham* and published in 1931, but earlier versions of the story have survived that predate the heavily revised 1931 version. The oldest version of “Spotted Horses,” as its own story, after Faulkner sprung it from the head of *Father Abraham*, is actually a short narrative entitled “As I Lay Dying.” Suratt appears in that story as a witness who explains to the narrator the events of the botched horse trade. The narrator describes his first view of Suratt/Ratliff in an image that will define him for the next thirty years of Faulkner’s career:

Tethered to a veranda post was another rig: a sturdy mismatched team and a buckboard, to the rear of which was attached a thing like a sheet-iron dog-kennel.

“There’s Suratt,” my uncle said, “with his sewing machine.” The sewing machine was his demonstrator. It fitted neatly into the dog-kennel, which was painted to resemble a house with two windows in each side, in each of which a woman’s painted head simpered above the painted sewing machine. “Something can happen forty miles away, but he’ll be there by the next morning.” (174)

With one minor change of detail, this description matches the appearance of Suratt in Faulkner’s 1928 novel, *Flags in the Dust*. In the novel, the third-person omniscient narrator describes an automobile that young Bayard has “impressed” into service for his purposes of drinking corn liquor with the boys and then serenading Narcissa’s bedroom window with a jazz band:

It was a ford body with, in place of a tonneau, a miniature one room cabin of

sheet iron and larger than a dog kennel, in each painted window of which a painted housewife simpered across a painted sewing machine, and in it an actual sewing machine neatly fitted, borne thus about the countryside by the agent. The agent's name was V. K. Suratt and he now sat with his shrewd plausible face behind the wheel. (131)⁴

Both descriptions come from material Faulkner wrote at the same time, but the difference between the two pertains to when the action of the stories takes place. The events in "As I Lay Dying" are set at the turn of the century, when the events in *The Hamlet* would also take place.⁵ *Flags in the Dust* is set immediately after World War I. Between the two stories, Suratt trades his buckboard and team for a car, but he keeps the housing for his sewing machine.

The implicit danger of deciphering these details is that Faulkner so profoundly revised so much of the material that appears in the various Snopes novels and Frenchman's Bend stories that clear connections between earlier and later versions can prove difficult to trace or trust. In fact, thirty years after these two descriptions, in the late 1950s, Faulkner's editors had no end of trouble attempting to edit the inconsistencies of *The Town* and *The Mansion* to fit, at least modestly, with events and the chronology of *The Hamlet* and the earlier Snopes material. Faulkner even went so far as writing an *apologia* at the beginning of *The Mansion* to assuage their fears, offering that, though the characters might have changed some, it is only because the author "knows the characters in his chronicle [now] better than he did then" (M 677). Given Faulkner's supposedly faulty memory and "better" knowledge of his characters, it is quite significant that on the first page of *The Town*, Chick Mallison pauses to explain that, in the past, Ratliff "had to spend most of his time in his buckboard (this was before he owned the Model T Ford)" (353-54). Though there are many inconsistencies between the early and later Snopes

material, how very striking that Faulkner remembered and repeated this detail so accurately, not just the painted dog-kennel but the consistency of its appearance across time and atop different modes of transportation! Indeed, from the moment of his first appearance in Yoknapatawpha, one feature most clearly defines V. K. Ratliff under any name and at any time. His buckboard or his car carries his housing for his sewing machines. Both carry him because, above all else, the central feature of Suratt/Ratliff is his mobility.

Much else about the man changes over the course of his fictitious life, largely as a result of Faulkner's continual revisions of the stories about him. In particular, the original description of Suratt's buckboard disappears entirely from the published version of "As I Lay Dying," when Faulkner changed the narrator from the unnamed speaker of the earlier story to Suratt for the 1931 version "Spotted Horses." Obviously, Suratt would not pause to describe his own buckboard. When Faulkner made Suratt the narrator of the story, he traded the external signifier so vital to his character for the intimacy of crafting a first-person narrative voice. Similar problems confronted Faulkner as he crafted various narratives concerning Suratt in the early 1930s. In his early incarnation, Suratt proves to be more of a sarcastic commentator in these stories than a shrewd participant in the economic dealings of Frenchman's Bend, as the later Ratliff proves to be. In her marvelously titled essay "Suratt to Ratliff: A Genetic Approach," Joanna Vanish Creighton argues that the Suratt who appears in the early stories fails to prove up to the task of outwitting Flem Snopes, the central figure of *The Hamlet*. Especially in relation to Suratt's commercial dealings, Creighton asserts emphatically that the dealings of the stories and the dealings of the later novel do not match because "the extent of the complications that Faulkner introduces into [the confrontations between Flem and Ratliff] is a measure of the shrewdness he attributes to Ratliff and Flem, shrewdness Suratt clearly lacks" (103). Suratt is

loud and funny, but his commentary as narrator in these early stories fails to take the measure of a situation with the keen sense of discerning judgment that defines the later Ratliff. Mostly, Suratt just talks.

Creighton's underlying argument is that the Suratt of the early stories, though a humorous local figure whose colloquial expressivity allowed Faulkner to explore a particular country idiom, fails to live up to the keen and purposeful character that Faulkner would need him to be in order to craft the story of the dangers of Snopesism. Snopesism is not dangerous just because it can outwit a country bumpkin. In the early stories, Faulkner fails to create from Suratt a character with enough depth to fill a novel as the capable antagonist to the anti-hero poor white Flem Snopes. Therefore, Creighton offers that the name-change of Suratt to Ratliff coincides with Faulkner's attempt to craft a more keenly intellectual and subtly thoughtful character. The new name stands in for the new man. Faulkner changed the name to break with the past representations. This Ratliff, though *genetically* kin to and in fact spawned from Suratt, is his own being. Thus Faulkner could maneuver Ratliff more deftly while revising his early stories than he could by anchoring the character to a real man and his stylized buckboard as a flat character who is part of the scenery, not as a dynamic character capable and shaping the realities of the world around him. The literary ends to which Faulkner needed to put Suratt called for his revision into Ratliff. This revision, however, carried with it the side effect that it moved Faulkner's already-apocryphal character deeper into the realms of apocrypha and myth. The outline and suggestion from the general impression of the character as based on a local figure identifiable by a bombastic advertising ploy becomes, in Faulkner revisions, the subtle and entirely original creation of the Snopes novels, V. K. Ratliff. Whatever Faulkner changed in this evolution, however, Suratt/Ratliff's mobility remained unchanged. To follow from the metaphor

of Creighton's essay title, this mobility is the deeper mitochondrial DNA intrinsic to the character's genetic make-up. Despite other mutations, this part of his character stays consistent and can be used to link his many emanations in his long evolution, allowing us to trace the story of his multiple apparitions across the great distances of Faulknerian time.

Creighton limits her argument to only the stories that eventually make up *The Hamlet*. In so doing, she does not consider Suratt's appearances in any novels nor his role in "A Bear Hunt," a story wherein he does appear more directly involved in the action and capable of manipulating a situation in deep and subtle ways than in the stories she explicates. In the novel *As I Lay Dying*, Suratt appears briefly as a man whom Darl claims that "Cash aimed to buy that talking machine from" (190), a reference to the gramophone Cash wants. This reference suggests that Suratt functions as a general salesman in the rural parts of the county, not only as a sewing machine agent. Cash could have bought a gramophone from him rather than go to town for it. Joel Williamson off-handedly mentions that, at the end of *Light in August*, we find "V. K. Suratt comfortably settled in bed with his wife telling her about Lena and Byron between episodes of making love" (367). The driver at the end of that novel has no name in the text, but Williamson's deduction that the man is Suratt makes sense. The driver seems to be a traveling salesman on his way north to Jackson, Tennessee. By 1932, Faulkner had already established that Suratt was his token traveling salesman in his apocryphal cosmos, so this traveling salesman is likely Suratt. Of course, since the driver at the end of *Light In August* is "in bed with his wife," he makes a pretty poor homosexual. Thankfully, as Williamson also points out, "When V. K. comes on stage again as a major character in 1940, his family name had shifted to Ratliff, and he was and always had been a bachelor" (367). As revisions go, it is difficult to determine why making Suratt a bachelor should coincide with making him the more intelligent Ratliff, but Faulkner made this revision

nonetheless as he turned the former into the latter, changing his surname the way a wife changes her name when she is married. In these novels, Suratt retains his primary characteristic, though. He is a traveling salesman in both. He retains his mobility.

Suratt, as Suratt, last appears in “A Bear Hunt,” at least in the early versions of the story from the mid-1930s, though he is transformed almost seamlessly into “Ratliff” for the versions of the story that appear in *Collected Stories* and *Big Woods*, both of which transcribe *Ratliff* for *Suratt*. “As I Lay Dying/Spotted Horses” and “Lizards in Jamshyd’s Courtyard” do not appear in the published record with this change except as they are subsumed into and greatly altered for *The Hamlet*, a process of revision that Faulkner seems to have begun in the late 1930s for two reasons. First, as alluded to above in relation to Creighton’s argument, the character of Suratt from the early stories failed to contain the keen and subtle characteristics Faulkner needed as a match for Flem Snopes. Second, Hugh Miller Suratt threatened to sue Faulkner for the use of his family’s name.

Blotner suggests that Hugh Miller Suratt, not his father, might have been the primary source for Faulkner’s character (2 Vol. 545). The son was a local salesman who sold “Home Comfort Ranges,” a feature that certainly aligns him with Faulkner’s apocryphal Suratt as the generic traveling salesman. According to Judge Taylor McElroy, however, Hugh Miller Suratt “liked his liquor but didn’t drink to excess.”⁶ Implications of a drinking problem largely disappear from Faulkner’s apocryphization. Hugh Miller Suratt would have been roughly the same age as Faulkner and a contemporary denizen of Oxford through the 1930s. His proximity to Faulkner could have made him a likely candidate for Faulkner to transform into his fictional character. Other locals at the time doubted altogether whether either Hugh or June were the real Suratt. Emily Whitehurst Stone claimed that the father was the real “prototype” and a local

named Joe Parks was the prototype for Flem Snopes.⁷ Blotner himself offers as an entirely different source for Suratt, a man named Rusty Patterson, whose “English was colloquial but grammatical, and some said that Rusty and V. K. Suratt had the same kind of aphoristic style” (2 Vol. 658).⁸ Faulkner hired Patterson to help restore Rowan Oak in the early 1930s, so if Patterson figures into the genetics of Ratliff, he very likely did so from the earliest stages of Ratliff’s development as Suratt in the early stories from the 1930s as well. Nonetheless, Hugh Miller Suratt threatened to sue Faulkner for using his name. As Blotner narrates it,

Hugh Miller Suratt had heard about his namesake and decided the resemblance was too close. It was intimated, Faulkner would later say, that if a sewing-machine agent named V. K. Suratt of Yoknapatawpha County appeared again, the next voice he would hear would be that of a lawyer representing H. M. Suratt of Lafayette County. (2. Vol. 1010)

The specious element of this account comes from Blotner’s own admission that “Faulkner would later say.” Faulkner was given to embellishing and apocryphizing details of his life and experiences (we might recall his story about staying in Stark Young’s apartment in Greenwich Village in 1921). Judge McElroy confessed to Blotner, “Maybe [Hugh] didn’t actual[ly] intend to sue [William Faulkner], maybe he just hoped to get a little money.”⁹ That the local judge remembered Hugh Miller Suratt’s threats implies that those threats were real, not simply later Faulknerian embellishments. Still, no biographer has found evidence that anyone actually filed a lawsuit against Faulkner about the name Suratt. Faulkner changed the name and a few key details anyway.¹⁰ Perhaps Hugh Miller Suratt threatened legal action but never actually filed a motion with the court. Faulkner’s decision to change the name resolved the matter before any legal action was actually taken.

In *The Hamlet*, Faulkner transformed Suratt into Ratliff and his origins entered the realm of speculation and local legend, leaving the townspeople to wonder, “How the hell did [Faulkner] remember all that, and when did it happen anyway?” The one key element of Suratt that survived into Ratliff is his mobility. The one key element that changed is that Ratliff is undeniably and eternally a certified bachelor. This change would effectively prevent any Oxford locals from ever claiming that Ratliff was his father since Ratliff had no children. In this revision, however, Faulkner crafted a figure with excessive significance of which Faulkner may have been entirely unaware in 1940 but which nonetheless greatly altered all that would ensue involving V. K. Ratliff.

Adolescence (or “Conception,” Part 2)

John Howard defines the movement and patterns of gay life in Mississippi in the the 1940s as a “concept” rather than as a single, rooted community. After Faulkner conceived of the revisions of Suratt to Ratliff, he depicted a character whose basic patterns substantially approximate the concept of gay life that Howard explores. From that concept(ion), gay Ratliff was born. The Ratliff that emerges in *The Hamlet* bears a striking resemblance to a particular pattern of gay life in the 1940s and into the later twentieth century, the pattern explicated in *Men Like That*. Howard uncovers the means by which gay men in rural Southern environments--specifically in Mississippi--used mobility and the liminal space of the road as an avenue to pursue their erotic lives. To an extent, this pattern is relevant to understanding Darl Bundren as a homosexual, though admittedly, Howard places the beginning date of his model roughly ten years after Darl emerged in Faulkner’s canon in 1930. By 1940, Howard’s study demonstrates,

the patterns of mobility were already established, so there is reason to believe that those patterns elucidate gay life from a decade earlier or more. Certainly, by the time Faulkner revised *Suratt* as *Ratliff*, those patterns were stable and discernible, even if they offer contemporary readers only vague impressions for understanding the earlier patterns that shape Darl's sense of place. The patterns of mobility fit *Ratliff*'s character extremely well. That Faulkner depicted those patterns as early as 1930 suggests that he was at least minimally aware of the queer lives which they defined. Even in *The Hamlet*, however, the extent to which Faulkner fully understood those patterns and their implications is difficult to verify. Nonetheless, *Ratliff*'s mobility clearly aligns him with those patterns and frames him as a homosexual whose specific conception of his native landscape is tied to his sexual identity.

Ratliff first appears midway through the first chapter of *The Hamlet*. He is still "a sewing machine agent," but though "[h]e live[s] in Jefferson" in a house with his widowed sister, he is also a bachelor who "travel[s] the better part of four counties with his sturdy team and the painted dog kennel into which an actual machine neatly fitted" (*H* 16). *Ratliff*'s introduction continues:

On successive days and two counties apart the splashed and battered buckboard and the strong mismatched team might be seen tethered in the nearest shade and *Ratliff*'s bland affable ready face and his neat tieless blue shirt one of the squatting group at a crossroads store, or--and still squatting and still doing the talking apparently though actually doing a good deal more listening than anybody believed until afterward--among the women surrounded by laden clotheslines and tubs and blackened wash pots beside springs and wells, or decorous in a splint chair on cabin galleries, pleasant, affable, courteous, anecdotal, and impenetrable.

(H 16)

From the onset of his emergence with this new identity, Ratliff is presented as a complex character, one who seems to talk, but who really listens, one as at home among a group of men as among a group of women, and one constantly on the move. As David E. Evans explains, “Throughout *The Hamlet*, [Ratliff’s] greatest resource is his mobility--at once his capacity for bodily movement and his discursive shiftiness, his sense of the provisional and revisional character of his stories and relations” (470-71). Ratliff’s mobility defines both his literal capacity to move and, as Evans explains, his capacity metaphorically to alter his self-presentation. According to Evans, “[Ratliff] constantly shifts and revises, resisting a single, definitive version” of the stories he carries across the countryside, making them over for each new audience and for each new setting in order to give what information is necessary and to gain the most information in return (470). To further Evans’ reading, one can imagine Ratliff as a chameleon of sorts, able to blend in for being “pleasant, affable, [and] courteous” but at the same time “impenetrable,” as if there is something below the surface of his character that he does not want his audience in Frenchman’s Bend to discern. His shape-shifting capacity allows him to retain final control of knowledge, including the secrets of his own identity. His shrewd demeanor does not reveal the deeper nature of his desire.

At first glance, Ratliff’s “shrewdness” is almost as notable a characteristic as his actual mobility. Ratliff can hardly appear without the nearly ubiquitous description of his “shrewd brown face” and “shrewd impenetrable eyes” (H 18), his “shrewd intelligent eyes in his smooth brown face” (19), “his pleasant, courteous, even deferent voice” (28), his “shrewd humorous voice” (68), and “the smooth, impenetrable face with something about the eyes and the lines beside the mouth which they [Bookwright and the other men in front of the store] could not

read” (156). Clearly, there is more to Ratliff than meets the eye, but Ratliff remains “shrewd” enough in his rural Southern environment not to show what lies beneath the surface because he is shrewd enough not to announce it to just anybody. Though only a slight reference, *The Hamlet* provides a reason for Ratliff’s reticence. When the Texas horse trader Buck Hipps trades Flem for the “runabout buggy with bright red wheels and a fringed parasol top” (88), he reveals his peculiar anxieties about the buggy. Given its effeminate appearance, he “out to have a powder puff or at least a red mandolin to ride it with,” (184). Though he traded for it, he decides not to ride in the buggy on his way home to Texas. As he explains, “I wouldn’t get past the first Texas saloon without starting the vigilance committee” (184). Making a spectacle of oneself, especially an effeminate spectacle, can draw unwanted, sometimes hostile, attention. Buck Hipps recognizes this problem immediately, but that there are vigilance committees at all suggests that communities in general are on the lookout for queer spectacles. In this case, “vigilance” does not signify acceptance--they are not on the lookout for queer spectacles so as to welcome queer energies into their communities. Thus, keeping a low profile becomes part of gay identity, at least in extremely rural settings. Though Ratliff seems all too pleased to advertise his sewing machines with the display on his buckboard, he otherwise guards himself against revealing too much about his desires. In this regard, he differs from the talkative Suratt of the early stories who often blurts out more than he means to say, making him less than a fitting rival for the reticent Flem Snopes.

The narration does, however, give one look at the inner Ratliff behind his impenetrable face. As Ratliff looks through the spy-hole to see Ike Snopes and his cow, his shrewd character undergoes a telling reversal:

He did look, leaning his face in between two other heads; and it was as though it

were himself inside the stall with the cow, himself looking out of the blasted tongueless face at the row of faces watching him who had been given the wordless passions but not the specious words. (*H* 188)

The novel does not support a reading that would argue that Ratliff wants to have sex with a cow, thus prompting his moment of empathy with Ike. Rather, as Mrs. Littlejohn challenges, and Ratliff does not deny, the viewing, the publication, of the act troubles Ratliff. “It’s all right for it to be,” she asserts, “but folks mustn’t know it, see it” (190). Ratliff empathizes with the spectacle of being found out, not the bestiality. For Ratliff, sexual expression is not meant to be a spectacle. Behind Ratliff’s impenetrable face, he empathizes with Ike’s outing to the point of putting “himself inside the stall with the cow,” looking out on the faces gathered to watch him. Despite Ratliff’s shrewd inscrutability, he demands scrutiny at this moment. Something about his new characterization does not fit, or rather, too much about his characterization does not fit. There is something excessive about his empathy, and something excessive about his character, than meets the undiscerning eye. A discerning eye can spot immediately the enigma of V. K. Ratliff: he is a bachelor with a buggy, but that does not mean he spends his nights alone. Noel Polk’s essay “Ratliff’s Buggies” intricately explores all the aspects of Ratliff pertinent to understanding him as a gay character. Polk ultimately defers from Ratliff as a possible homosexual, however, positing that Ratliff “simply opted out of sexual life” (187) because he cannot find evidence of Ratliff’s sexual encounters, even though the title of his essay so strikingly names precisely where Polk should look. In Polk’s defense, his essay predates Howard’s landmark study, which makes visible what previous histories ignored about gay male erotic practices, and which, when put alongside Polk’s essay, reveals what has lain in plain sight all along.

Howard's study discusses the ways in which "mobility--both physical and social--[was] linked to sexual practices, meanings and regulations" and the ways in which "homosexual desire manifested" in rural Southern environments between World War II and the 1980s (4). As he argues, there developed "a dialectical relationship between historical actors and their surroundings" (xix), which in the rural South led to a gay culture marked by its congregation and circulation, "but more often consisted of circulation than congregation" (xiv). Dually, the sense of space and place in the South led to the uses of certain sites for homosexual encounters and the sense of isolation for rural gay men led to a need for movement, or mobility, in order for gay men to navigate the socially sanctioned places in their environment and maintain anonymity, while also finding other men like themselves. As Howard explains, "[f]riends and sex partners, longtime acquaintances and strangers relied on technologies of transport to enable not just congregation but circulation" (78). He also documents that this movement is "constant," "multidirectional," and "enabled by multiple means of conveyance" (79). Furthermore, he includes that "just as the car [or the buggy in this case] moved between sites and was itself a site, roads served as avenues and venues, as arenas of circulation and congregation" (101) for gay men. Therefore, if "the rural South--rural space generally--functions as gay America's closet" (63), there is also no doubt that "[e]ven in Mississippi's smaller cities and towns, queer sex seemed to be going on with great frequency" (86). Indeed, if we substitute buggy for car as the mode of transportation that could allow for this circulation, Ratliff's relationship to this gay social pattern overflows from the novel. Also, as I have explained elsewhere, that the novel is set at the turn of the century does not preclude applying Howard's study about the 1940s to the patterns that emerge in it. Faulkner published the novel in 1940. As with all historical novels, *The Hamlet* is much more attuned to its specific cultural moment than it is an accurate portrayal

of the past (though, thankfully, Ratliff will eventually trade his buggy for a car, though that is getting ahead of myself).

Polk describes Ratliff with his buggy as the “roving vicar of Varner’s economic tradition” (169). Polk means to explain that Ratliff is the high priest of the sexual economy of Frenchman’s Bend in which Will Varner means to use his daughter Eula as a means to secure a financially fortuitous alliance (marriage), but the bachelor Ratliff, more a Catholic priest in this sense than an Anglican vicar, never shows interest in Eula himself. Will Varner turns, therefore, to Flem Snopes instead. Polk notes that “Ratliff is more upset about Varner’s loss of the Old Frenchman place than about what nearly everybody in *The Hamlet* would call Eula’s shame” (180). Additionally, *The Hamlet* provides no solid evidence that Ratliff is ever sexually attracted to Eula, as it seems that every other man in all of Yoknapatawpha County is or will be at some point. That he notices her is not the same as saying that he desires her. Polk does point out how “Ratliff thinks about those courting buggies” parked outside of the Old Frenchman place to court Eula, which, according to Polk “evoke in Ratliff all of youth’s dangerous passions” (186-87). The narration in the novel explains Ratliff’s reaction to those buggies in decidedly more ambiguous terms: “That would have never been for [Ratliff], not even in the prime summer peak of what he and Varner both would have called his tomcatting’s heyday” (*H* 153). Despite his “tomcatting,” Ratliff has remained a bachelor. The burden of evidence just as easily suggests, therefore, that he did his share of tomcatting with men as with women. That he never married does not mean he courted women and failed. Perhaps he never courted women. If he tomcatted, it follows that he must have tomcatted with other men.

Polk discusses Ratliff’s “perennial bachelorhood,” but he does not pause to explain that Ratliff is not the only bachelor in Frenchman’s Bend. There are different types of bachelors, and

each seems to be a bachelor for different reasons. Bookwright is a bachelor, and a close friend of Ratliff's who even joins Ratliff's economic venture at the end of the novel when he and Ratliff are duped by Flem Snopes. Uncle Dick Bolivar is also a bachelor, though on his mantle at home he has "a faded daguerreotype of a young man in a Confederate uniform which was believed by those who had seen it to be his son" (*H* 328). If the young man was his son, perhaps Uncle Dick is simply a widower, not a bachelor. People only "believe" the young man was Uncle Dick's son, though. No one knows for sure. In 1861, forty to fifty years prior to the action, the relationship between Uncle Dick and the young man could have been of a number of different kinds, including homosexual. The novel leaves the reader to believe what he/she will about the young man and the hermit bachelor Uncle Dick. Most notably, in the first description of him in the novel, Jody Varner "emanate[s] a quality of invincible and inviolable bachelordom" (*H* 10). Like Ratliff, Jody is a bachelor, but he's not necessarily the same kind of bachelor as Ratliff. As the narration explains of the "bridgeless difference" between Jody and Ratliff:

[Jody] would become an old man; Ratliff, too: but an old man who at sixty-five would be caught and married by a creature not yet seventeen probably, who would for the rest of his life continue to take revenge upon him for her whole sex; Ratliff, never. (*H* 303-04).

The difference between bachelors in Frenchman's Bend is that some will marry and just have not yet managed to do so while some never will. Ratliff is the latter kind of bachelor, a genuinely perennial bachelor. In fact, he does not even seem to be the marrying kind at all.

That the other "bachelors" live far and wide across the landscape of Yoknapatawpha County proves no difficulty for a man like Ratliff. Indeed, in the very first description of him in the novel, Ratliff is "the man in the buckboard" (*H* 16), as perennially sitting atop his buckboard

as he is perennially a bachelor. He is a man “moved by his itinerary” whose “route embraced four counties” (55) but takes him as far north as Tennessee at times. He knows every back road in the county, from the “little-travelled section near Frenchman’s Bend village” (67) where he spots the goats that he tries to use to outwit Flem, to the path to Uncle Dick Bolivar’s isolated cabin. Even more tellingly, when Ratliff gets sick and is bed-bound for several months during his recovery, what most pleases him about the end of his confinement is “the sheer happiness of being out of bed and moving once more at free will” (68). More than the illness, what Ratliff explains that he minded most about the ordeal was the doctor’s order that he “spend so much time setting down” (77). The list goes on; descriptions of Ratliff’s shrewd face and impenetrable eyes are only half as ubiquitous as references to his “buckboard.” Even when no one knows that Ratliff is in Frenchman’s Bend, someone is bound to spot not Ratliff but his buckboard and then realize that Ratliff, in his travels through the countryside, has returned. When Ratliff is not moving, he is unhappy. Perhaps his displeasure with stasis stems from his erotic desire for union with other perennial bachelors like himself. Unlike Darl, who prefers to isolate himself out on the farm rather than confront the complex challenges of his queer life, Ratliff celebrates his mobility and the *community* it forms for him in his environment--though his *concept* of community is contingent upon understanding the cultural and geographic landscape of his native region. We never see him with those other bachelors in a compromising act, but Ratliff is too shrewd to be caught doing his tomcatting. We do know, however, that he is incredibly mobile. Beyond the shrewd calculations of his mobility may well be the secret to understanding his inner life.

When Faulkner first saw a married man named Suratt with his odd painted dog-kennel for selling sewing machines, he probably did not intend, years later, to make that man emulate in

outline a mode of homosexual life that, though actually quite common, remained subcutaneous to more visible histories for a great many years (in an academic sense, Howard's study is a landmark, even if, from the perspective of gay men living in rural communities, it simply let a well-kept cat out of the proverbial bag). A keen observer of his surroundings and recorder of his moment in history, Faulkner continually revised Suratt/Ratliff through the 1930s. When he arrived at *The Hamlet*, Faulkner's revisions led him to stumble upon signifiers of gay identity in his rural Southern space. In an effort to make the actual into the apocryphal, he fashioned in outline the image of a gay character actively engaged in a gay cultural practice for which we now have a recorded history to make it visible to our critical eyes. This circumstance should not shock us, of course. Faulkner began the long evolution to create Ratliff in the mid-1920s, when he was heavily invested in queer/gay-themed creative endeavors. He continued to revise Ratliff through the 1930s, when he was troubled by aspects of gay identity but also troubled by the rigors of marriage--perhaps Faulkner's decision to make Ratliff a bachelor stemmed from nothing more than his frustrations about depicting men interacting with women in various romantic and heterosexual scenarios. Nonetheless, that bachelor did not opt out of sexuality. He simply acquired a different sexuality than a traditional heterosexual one.

To the extent to which Ratliff can be read as a homosexual in *The Hamlet*, he points to the presence of homosexuality in rural Southern environments--a theme Faulkner would also see explored in Hubert Creekmore's 1948 novel *The Welcome*, where Jim and Don court each other in high school in a car, driving all over the back roads near Ashton (Mottstown? Water Valley?), Mississippi. If Faulkner was not aware of Ratliff's latent homosexuality in *The Hamlet*, in *The Town* and *The Mansion*, he not only seems to have become aware of it, but he also intentionally crafted it as an ever-present and fundamental aspect of the plot of both novels. For this last

apocryphal gay character, however, Faulkner also infused in his representation a specific Cold War context to layer his critique through a nexus of signifiers for difference.

Maturation

Faulkner turned out to be a victim of his own success in his transformation of Suratt into Ratliff. In the Snopes Trilogy, Flem *must* beat Ratliff so that he can move from Frenchman's Bend to Jefferson, where he will compete with Gavin Stevens for supremacy. The latter two novels of the Trilogy depict this conflict, and Ratliff seems to become a minor character with little or no direct participation in the plot that unfolds in either *The Town* or *The Mansion*. The problem is that Faulkner was so successful in creating a smarter, more subtle Ratliff for *The Hamlet* that Flem's old "salted mine" trick, which fools him into buying the Old Frenchman Place, is far too simple a trick to fool the sophisticated Ratliff. Creighton states quite succinctly that "it is shocking and disappointing that [Ratliff] could be taken in so easily." Though she argues that the version of this story that appears in the novel is marginally different from the version of the same salt-mine trick that is played on Suratt in "Lizards in Jamshyd's Courtyard," the ending of the novel nonetheless feels unbelievable. Ratliff is too shrewd to have fallen for Flem's trick.

Fifteen years later, when Faulkner returned to the Snopes trilogy, this inconsistent characterization of Ratliff from the earlier novel troubles his depiction in the latter two. Faulkner wrote *The Hamlet* over the course of the 1930s and published it in 1940, before World War II. He did not return to the trilogy until well after the end of World War II and well into the early years of the Cold War. Susan Donaldson rightly places the latter two novels in a Cold War

context in her essay “Ratliff and the Demise of Male Mastery,” but she predicates her reading of Ratliff’s “defeated manhood” (240) on the ending of the earlier novel and asserts that all three novels paint “a somewhat unsettling picture of Faulkner’s own complicity in the discourse of cold war masculinity” (236). She reads Ratliff’s well-pressed clothes and other signs of his domestic self-sufficiency in a Cold War context as signs of “a masculinity signaling in some respects an acknowledged loss of mastery.” Donaldson even goes so far as to conclude that the “loss of mastery” in question signals a loss of mastery for “the men in the Snopes novels and for Faulkner himself” (236). Similar to Robert Corber’s in his study of Cold War masculinity, her premise is that in the Cold War, commodity culture and mass market capitalism threatened to emasculate strong, returning World War II soldiers and transform them into soft, middle-class, and thoroughly domesticated husbands. The Cold War amplified the paranoia about domesticated masculinity because of the continued martial sense during this “war” that the United States needed to prove its dominance over the world, primarily over the Communist Soviet Union, by its masterful and unbridled masculinity. Weak and effeminate men (and effeminate men are always weak) could not lead American cultural expansion nor defeat America’s enemies. Thus depictions of men who were domesticated by consumer culture and who subsequently could not demonstrate masculine mastery over their home environments represented the negative outcome of American consumer culture. A sewing machine salesman who sews his own shirts, Ratliff does not prove to be up to the task of defending American values and, in fact, represents precisely the fearful domesticated consumerism that Donaldson means to explicate.

There is much merit to Donaldson’s argument, but her argument assumes that the excess of Ratliff in the trilogy, namely his domestication and defeat, are beyond Faulkner’s control and

so, as the title of her essay asserts, represents the demise of Ratliff's economic mastery. Also, since Ratliff's domesticity proves to be beyond Faulkner's control, it represents Faulkner's loss of formal narrative mastery as well. Basically, Faulkner's inability to create a convincing conclusion to *The Hamlet* implicates the demise of his formal mastery; that demise is later embodied in Ratliff's hyper-domesticated presentation. Although there is excess signification in *The Hamlet*, I would counter that, by the time Faulkner wrote *The Town* and *The Mansion*, he had control over that excess and masterfully used it to critique the very aspects of Cold War paranoia that Donaldson finds him complicit in advancing.

The unstated sideline of Donaldson's argument (and Corber's, though he deals much more directly with it) is that effeminate men were often equated with homosexuality and homosexuality was often equated with effeminate men. As Michael Sherry argues, this fear of effeminate gay men proved to be a sticky subject for the cultural milieu of the mid-1950s. Sherry emphasizes the large degree to which gay men were cultural icons during this period. This seeming ubiquity of gay men in the arts lead to consternation by conservatives who *imagined* that homosexuality posed a threat to American masculinity and dominance. Sherry frames his study around the joking question-and-answer:

Is there a gay sensibility and does it have an impact on our culture?

No, there is no such thing as a gay sensibility and yes, it has an enormous impact on our culture. (7)

Behind this joke, Sherry finds a rhetoric of homophobia similar to that used to identify threats of communist infiltration. In the 1950s, he argues, the Red Scare had as its corollary the Lavender Scare. Just as one communist in the CIA, per se, was one communist too many, one fag in the cinema or theater or literary marketplace was one fag too many as well. Also, just as certain

politicians believed that anyone might be a communist and that they were everywhere, many conservatives genuinely believed that the artistic community was replete with homosexuals and needed to be flushed clean of their insidiously prurient influences. In reality, the reactionary fear of communists and homosexuals rarely represented the actual effects gay men and communists were having on the country. As Sherry argues, much of our contemporary sense that the 1950s were a time of intense worry and crisis has slightly later roots, as the so-called closing of the American mind tightened strictures on sexual difference in the later 1950s and into the 1960s. In the late 1940s and early 1950s, he contends, these fears were significantly less pervasive and much more formless.

All of this is to say that evidence of an effeminate man in two of Faulkner's novels does not mean that Faulkner was scared of effeminate (or gay) men or complicit in a cultural resignation about lost mastery. In fact, he did not much care for the immature presentation of homosexuality in Tennessee Williams' *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, which is to say that he might very well care for a more perspicuous and careful presentation of homosexuality not as a woe-begotten anxiety but as a means to critique the increasing small-mindedness of 1950s political life. After all, if we are to read *The Town* or *The Mansion* as Cold War novels, we are immediately faced with the obvious conundrum that Linda Snopes Kohl, a good Southern girl, moves north, marries a Jew, fights on the side of the Communists in the Spanish Civil War, where her husband is killed and she loses her hearing, and returns to Jefferson intent on helping to educate rural African-Americans. It would be difficult to find a more specific representation of everything feared by Southern conservatives in the post-World War II Civil Rights era, nor a more explicit critique of that conservatism. In fact, in all their efforts to defeat Flem Snopes, neither the foppish Gavin Stevens or the affable V. K. Ratliff succeed as well as Eula in *The*

Town and Linda in *The Mansion*. The former is an unfaithful wife who repeatedly and unapologetically cuckolds her husband. The latter is a “nigger-lover” who married a dead Jewish communist freedom fighter. Neither implicate Faulkner’s woeful sense of lost masculinity as much as they implicate his interests in depicting intensely powerful women characters whose proficiency in attaining their goals vastly outshines the lesser concern in the novel with the inefficiency of the male characters to do more than talk to each other about the dangers of Snopesism. More specifically, if Flem embodies the cut-throat and less-than-virtuous side of cold-blooded capitalism, then it is the communist sympathizer Linda who finally brings about Flem’s demise. capitalism and its association with masculine American values do not win the day at the end of the trilogy. Flem’s demise critiques assumptions about the virtue of a purely acquisitive capitalism, and the woman who finally arranges his death certainly represents the possible virtues in supporting communism, at least as a fellow traveler and freedom fighter in a struggle against pernicious fascism. I would argue that Faulkner’s using communism as a plot device to produce a narrative critical of a Cold War Red-phobia suggests that he could as easily have used homosexuality to produce a narrative critical of Cold War homophobia as well.

Little evidence suggests that Faulkner was radically liberal, much less Communist, in his political beliefs. He very likely voted Democratic because he was Southern and in the 1950s, Southerners voted Democratic. He once told Phil Mullins, however, that he was going to vote for Eisenhower for president. Asked why, Faulkner responded, “You give us another president on the left and Joe McCarthy will be our next president.”¹¹ Beneath the humor of this aphorism lies a sense of Faulkner preference for a moderate middle ground. In August 1955, speaking to the Tokyo Correspondents Club, Faulkner was adamant that “there is a general ‘misunderstanding of how much Communists do to win their points.’”¹² Conversely, at almost the same moment he was

beginning to write a novel in which he made V. K. Ratliff the descendant of a Russian veteran of the Revolutionary War. The key to understanding the degree to which Faulkner had mastery over the signifiers he used for V. K. Ratliff in the latter two novels of the Snopes Trilogy is in his refiguring of Ratliff's name and the very conscious way in which Faulkner specified his origins in *The Town*. Despite his public statements, Faulkner maintained a thoroughly complex political philosophy, and his fiction bore out the finer points of its liberal leanings more than his public statements ever did.

Between *The Hamlet* and *The Town*, Faulkner did much to explore the characters of Chick Mallison and Gavin Stevens, primarily in the stories collected in *Knight's Gambit* and the novel *Intruder in the Dust*. He did not leave Ratliff by the wayside, however. Ratliff, or at least one of his progenitors, appears in *Requiem for a Nun*, which Faulkner published in 1951 and turned over to a gay Russian set designer for its eventual stage production. The Ratliff that appears in *Requiem* is actually named Ratcliffe, and he is very distinctly identified as "Ratcliffe, son of a long pure line of Anglo-Saxon mountain people and--destined--father of an equally long and pure line of white trash tenant farmers" (37). This "destiny" is ungenerous of Faulkner. One of Ratcliffe's descendants would be a traveling salesman, not just a white trash tenant farmer. Roughly six years later, in *The Town*, Faulkner made the decision to revise this "long pure line of Anglo-Saxon mountain people." He transformed that blood line into a female line in which a man of Russian descent named Vladimir Kyrilytch Radcliffe fought for the British army in the Revolutionary War, was captured, then:

"--[he] was sent to Virginia and forgotten and Vla--his grandfather escaped. It was a woman of course, a girl, that hid him and fed him. Except that she spelled it R-a-t-c-l-i-f-f-e and they married and had a son or had the son and

then married. Anyway he learned to speak English and became a Virginia farmer. And his grandson, still spelling it with a c and an e at the end but his name still Vladimir Kyrilytch though nobody knew it, came to Mississippi with old Doctor Habersham and Alexander Holston and Louis Grenier and started Jefferson. Only they forgot how to spell Ratcliffe and just spelled it like it sounds but one son is always named Vladimir Kyrilytch. Except like you said, nobody named Vladimir Kyrilytch could make a living as a Mississippi country man--." (628)

Unless, of course, his name were simply V. K. Ratliff, and nobody knew the truth about him because that would change entirely how we perceive him in his rural Southern environment as the master of his mobile world. Among the secrets that Ratliff hides behind his shrewd face is that he is not descended from a male Anglo-Saxon line. He is the descendent of a Russian with an English surname. His "American" heritage stems from an unnamed woman who bore a child for that Russian and established a tradition of naming one son in each generation after his progenitor. The "joke" embedded in this history of his name, though, is that in late 1950s, when Faulkner wrote the novel, a (communist) Russian probably would not succeed in business in Mississippi. In the time of the novel, that name may not have been as much as a liability--in fact, Eula also suggests that Ratliff's reticence in telling people his name is simply that it would sound funny with a colloquial Mississippi accent. V. K. has a nicer ring to it.

This genealogical change to Ratliff suggests that Faulkner consciously meant to critique trends in the arts and letters and in rhetoric by men like Joseph McCarthy (elsewhere in the novels, Faulkner has Gavin Stevens articulate a nearly explicit critique of the House Un-American Activities Committee¹³). I would further this critique to posit that, at the same time that Faulkner made Ratliff a secret Russian in a Mississippi country-man's clothes, he also well

understood the implications of Ratliff's domesticated effeminacy. In *The Town* and *The Mansion*, Faulkner intentionally crafted Ratliff as a gay man to critique a discourse of fraught masculinity.

Fruition

As he appears in the latter two Snopes novels, Ratliff differs from his predecessor in the degree to which Faulkner crafted him as an overly feminized, domesticated male. This shift in his character follows from Faulkner's masterful maneuvering of Ratliff into a role as a recognizable gay figure in a mid-1950s Cold War context. This shift serves to critique the extreme conservatism of the cultural moment, though the critique is subtle enough to avoid being itself a radical liberal vision. In *The Town* and *The Mansion*, Faulkner re-dressed Ratliff and even sent him to Greenwich Village. He also made Ratliff the driving figure--literally the *driving* figure-- of unity and coherence in both plots.

In his Cold War emanation, Ratliff no longer only wears the faded blue, tieless shirts, as he did in *The Hamlet*, but he makes, washes, and presses them himself. He does the same for "the immaculately clean, impeccably laundered and ironed handkerchief" that he hands to Stevens in the final scene of *The Mansion* (M 1061). This Ratliff no longer lives with his widowed sister. He lives on his own in a house with "a tea tray and Ratliff had a teacup and a cucumber sandwich" at four in the afternoon as a small meal. These accoutrements in his home and the delicacy of his palate are signifiers of a refined domesticity that is alien to "the country where Ratliff came from" (T 446). He is also now "a damned good cook, living alone in the cleanest little house you ever saw, doing his own housework" (M 863). He makes a habit of

sitting in “the immaculate room he called his parlor, with the spotlessly waxed melodeon in the corner and the waxed chairs and the fireplace filled with fluted green paper in the summer but with a phony gas log in the winter” (M 885). He does his cooking and cleaning while wearing “a spotless white apron over one of those neat tieless faded blue shirts which he made himself, cooked the meal, cooking it damned well, not just because he loved to eat it but because he loved the cooking, the blending up to perfection’s ultimate moment” (885). These elaborate descriptions transform Ratliff into a housewife over the course of the latter two novels, but another way to view these descriptions is to consider Ratliff not merely as domesticated but urbane, a model of clean sophistication in his rough, rural world, or, in short, as a gay man. His alien virtues register as distinctly queer in his immediate environment. His version of effeminacy signals his queer sexuality, a stereotypical but nonetheless germane sexuality compounded by the cultural context when Faulkner wrote these descriptions in the 1950s, at a time of severe anxiety about their significance.

Ratliff’s urbanity is put to the test, though, not in Yoknapatawpha, but in Greenwich Village. While in Greenwich Village for Linda’s wedding, he meets Barton Kohl and is given a statue of an Italian boy doing something that the text never reveals but that Ratliff recognizes. As in “Out of Nazareth” when the young man praises A. E. Housman’s *The Shropshire Lad*, this statue of an Italian boy is meant to signal to readers what perhaps cannot be stated aloud but should be easily inferred. It represents the open secret of homosexuality permeating the scene. The Italian boy in the statue is probably naked, which would make him an object of homosexual fascination, and probably in a suggestive pose that Ratliff, as a homosexual, recognizes, but that others--namely Gavin Stevens and Chick Mallison--do not. In his Greenwich Village apartment, Barton Kohl pulls Ratliff aside at the wedding reception to show Ratliff his sculptures, including

the one of the Italian boy. Ratliff is neither “[s]hocked” nor “[m]ad” at what he sees, only surprised because he has “never seen it before” (M 833). Barton responds in disbelief that someone “at [Ratliff’s] age” (833) has not seen something like this before. Barton then decides to give the sculpture to Ratliff in his will because, as Stevens explains, “Bart liked him. He said he hadn’t expected to like anybody from Mississippi, but he was wrong” (858). Then, as Stevens continues to explain,

You remember it--the Italian boy that you didn’t know what it was even though you had seen sculpture before, but Ratliff that had never even seen an Italian boy, nor anything else beyond the Confederate monument in front of the courthouse, knew at once what it was, and even what he was doing? (858)

What Barton likes about Ratliff is that he gets to show Ratliff an aspect of life in Greenwich Village that Gavin does not--and probably cannot--show him. When Ratliff says that he has “never seen it before,” he means the statue, or the open display of homosexual desire, in fine artistic expression no less. In Mississippi, the signifiers between men are much less overt, such as the daguerreotype in Uncle Dick’s cabin with its somewhat ambiguous sense that maybe it is of Uncle Dick’s long lost son, maybe not. Ratliff’s entire sense of gay identity would be vastly different from what he witnesses in Greenwich Village. Rural Mississippians had a concept of gay identity related to the multiple spaces in which they expressed their (often closeted) desires. Greenwich Village is a gay *community*, and it does not have the same strictures on visible gay expression as Mississippi, where Ratliff explores his sexual identity through his knowledge of back-roads and through his constant mobility. In Greenwich Village, one can express and view much more explicitly what in Mississippi one is not allowed to show to the world. The statue stands out to Ratliff because it embodies a variety of gay experience that, until that moment, he

has not known.

Of course, Faulkner was well-aware of the culture value of Greenwich Village and uses it as his own version of the “open secret” in this scene. Just as Ratliff’s special eye can see something in the Italian boy that others cannot, discerning readers can detect something in the setting of this scene that Faulkner quite deftly left unstated. In the penultimate novel of his life and career, Faulkner returned to the setting in which he made his first attempts to define his own apocryphal gay identity away from Mississippi. Faulkner pulled his characters from the confines of Yoknapatawpha County and placed them in Greenwich Village, a site that Stevens describes as “a place with a few unimportant boundaries but no limitations where young people of any age go to seek dreams” (*T* 652), and a site that historian George Chauncey identifies at length as a center of gay culture from as early as the 1910s. As Chauncey also demonstrates, Greenwich Village was so popularly acknowledged as a center of gay culture that by the late 1940s, magazine guides to New York City had to point out that “not all New York’s queer (or, as they say it, ‘gay’) people live in Greenwich Village” (qtd. in Chauncey 20). In this setting, Barton Kohl recognizes something about Ratliff. After first mistaking him for a Texas oil millionaire because of his seventy-five dollar Allantown necktie, Kohl realizes that Ratliff is no ordinary Mississippian and wants to show him a collection of private sculptures; but Kohl is “a sculptor so advanced and liberal that even Gavin couldn’t recognize what he sculpted” (*M* 866). That Barton, in his will, should send the statue to Ratliff to be placed in Ratliff’s splendidly refined home is only fitting. Barton’s decision metaphorically moves to America’s gay closet an emblem of the open secret of homosexuality from one of America’s gay epicenters. The statue links Ratliff’s domesticated home to the gay space of Greenwich Village and makes that home, for all practical purposes, a little bit of Greenwich Village in Mississippi. Once the homosexual

leaves Mississippi and becomes visible within another gay space, then when he returns to Mississippi, we can follow him back there and recognize what the signs have been pointing to all along as having been present in that landscape: the confident, comfortable gay man.

Most significantly, Faulkner did not craft Ratliff as a gay, somewhat Russian figure merely for the purposes of demonstrating his representational mastery to no useful end. By crafting Ratliff in this way, he also pulled a masterful slight-of-hand to make good the seeming incongruity of the ending of *The Hamlet*. In *The Town* and *The Mansion*, Ratliff may seem to function primarily as a commentator and may never seem to involve himself directly in the battles between Flem Snopes and Gavin Stevens. He even seems to be a secondary figure in these novels, mostly present as the glue that binds Flem's former life in Frenchman's Bend to his current life in Jefferson (few characters from *The Hamlet* appear in the latter two novels). Thus, as Donaldson argues, he has been defeated and now plays a minimal role in the remaining action, or so it would seem. These assertions, however, while superficially true, do not account for the utter centrality of Ratliff's role in both of the latter novels. That role is laid bear at the end of both novels when Gavin Stevens seeks to understand how first Eula, then Linda, with Mink's help, manage to defeat Flem, each in their own fashion and each without his knowledge of how they managed what he has been trying to do all along in his own fashion as well.

In *The Town*, Gavin cannot quite understand what, precisely, Flem is after in Jefferson. Ratliff supplies the answer: Respectability. He has understood this goal all along and has simply waited for Stevens to work it out for himself. Moreover, Ratliff proves to be more than just a residual character linking the hamlet and the town symbolically; he actually transports Flem out to Will Varner's store in chapter eighteen of *The Town* for the fateful meeting that will prompt Eula to play her trump card in the complicated game between her lover, Manfred de Spain, and

her husband, Flem: her suicide to rescue Linda if not herself. Gavin watches these events unfold in stunned horror. Ratliff participates in them. He invites Flem to join him on his ride out to Frenchman's Bend, where Flem will work to secure his share of the Varner family fortune now that he has evidence to use against Eula and force himself into a major share of the local bank. Eula, who has long since considered Ratliff a confidant and even has managed to find out his real name, goes to Stevens to explain the situation before going home to kill herself. Stevens fails to understand what has transpired between these major players on the stage of Jefferson's economic fortunes. Ratliff arrives and explains to him all the extraneous detail that he--Ratliff--has collected and that the forensic Stevens needs help compiling into the proper conclusions. As with the matter of respectability, Ratliff has tried to allow Stevens to reach his conclusions on his own, but Stevens would not be able to do so were it not for Ratliff's assistance. Ratliff knows the whole score, not just the partial highlights. When he finally tells Stevens the missing details from Stevens' narrative, the novel itself can come to its end.

In *The Mansion*, after Linda has duped Gavin into helping her free Mink, Ratliff arrives--his timing as perfect as always--to escort Gavin through the ritual of realization, the *peripeteia* of the mammoth revenge tragedy at the heart of the Snopes trilogy. In the final pages of *The Mansion*, Ratliff is the one who first reasons through Linda's motives for freeing Mink to kill Flem. Then he literally leads Stevens down the overgrown road to Mink's cabin to find Mink, an emblematic display of his role in the entire trilogy as the guide who helps bring others to the knowledge they will need to allow the events their full conclusion. Gavin is overwhelmed by the sheer gravity of what has occurred and how it has all finally played out on the vast mythic stage of Yoknapatawpha County. So, as they leave Mink's cabin, "[g]entle and tender as a woman, Ratliff opened the car door for Stevens to get in" (*M* 1063). Throughout the latter two novels

Ratliff is the all-knowing seer and guide, but also an effeminate one. In this final description of him in all three novels, Faulkner uses those three telling words to describe him: “as a woman.” Not only has he guided Stevens to his final recognition of events, but he also gently guides Stevens back to his home and back to the peace of the denouement necessary at the end of this grand tragedy. Though the ending of the Snopes Trilogy is chilling in its brutality, the ending also restores the modicum of order necessary for the proverbial “All is well” of an aristotelian structure. Ratliff’s womanly touch is the sign that all is well now that all has ended. Mink will lay down on the earth to rest in a symbolic death. The rest of the characters will go home and continue their lives. Ratliff has guided them through the horror and signaled the proverbial Fortinbras on the horizon. He has done so “tender as a woman” because the deep knowledge that he carries throughout Yoknapatawpha is a queer knowledge. His particular touch is needed. That touch is a queer, which is to say gay, touch.

In the context of Cold War paranoia over Communists and homosexuals, Faulkner places at the heart of his great trilogy a coded gay figure as the one who brings about the vital revelations necessary to the plot and ultimately the conclusion of each novel and the conclusion of the trilogy as a whole. In this case, Ratliff may actually be less Faulkner’s Falstaff, more his Prospero. The knowledge and control exhibited by Ratliff over the significant events of these novels makes him the great purveyor of truth and finality in Yoknapatawpha, and as a side note, Faulkner also chose to craft him as a character who is legibly gay. In the long arc of Faulkner’s career, in the long arc of Faulkner’s life, Ratliff’s presence and identity in the closing pages of *The Mansion* are a fitting tribute to span of that arc and a fitting conclusion to a long and complex story of Faulkner’s own apocryphal gay life. Ratliff’s biography is perhaps the best apocryphal autobiography Faulkner ever wrote. For the young man who could never quite fit in

in his hometown and sought to make himself different from it, and the young man who once saw two paths, seemingly irreconcilable, before him and so started on a long and complex journey, beyond the eleven years of his queer life and into the thirty-three years of his marriage and fatherhood, but really across the whole span of his sixty-five years until his death in 1962, the one feature of Faulkner's life that most defined him was that he was always, not despite but because of his gestures, a man who entirely belonged to and masterfully recorded the actual history of his home. In his way, Faulkner was always the insidious guide through the epic of his apocryphal creation. In the extraneous details of the apocrypha of his life, a new and dynamic figure emerges to suggest to us new possibilities of interpretations and to leave clues to an open secret about the actual man that have been overlooked for too long.

Finis

10 July 2013

Oxford, Mississippi

ENDNOTES

I have made use of four archives in my research for this project. Lacking a better way of citing them in-text, I have used these endnotes as my primary means of identifying them. The archives that I consulted include:

- The William Faulkner Papers from The Harry Ransom Center at the University of Texas at Austin. (abbreviated as HRC below).
- The Hubert Creekmere Collection from the Howard Gotlieb Archival Research Center at Boston Univeristy (abbreviated as HG below).
- The University of Mississippi Special Collections in the J. D. Williams Library at the University of Mississippi in Oxford, Mississippi (abbreviated as UMSC below)
- The BP, from the Louis Daniel Brodsky/Faulkner Collection, at Southeast Missouri State University in Cape Girardeau, Missouri (abbreviated as BP below)

Also, in my in-text citations, I often abbreviate the the mostly commonly cited titles of Faulkner's novels as follows:

Absalom, Absalom!--*Absalom*

As I Lay Dying--*AILD*

Collected Stories--*CS*

Flags in the Dust--*Flags*

Faulkner in the University--FIU

Essays, Speeches, and Public Letters--ESPL

Light in August--LIA

Lion in the Garden--LIG

Sanctuary--S

Selected Letters of William Faulkner--SLWF

Soldier's Pay--SP

The Hamlet--H

The Mansion--M

The Town--T

Uncollected Stories--US

CHAPTER 1: "QUAIR" FAULKNER

1.) Williamson and Karl give the two most detailed accounts of William Clark Falkner, and both agree that whereas the Civil War ruined numerous white landowners in Mississippi, W. C. Falkner capitalized on the war and its aftermath. With the joint-investment of the man who would eventually gun him down in the streets of Ripley, he used the postwar Reconstruction and Reconciliation policies aimed at modernizing the rural South with railroads and industrial development in order to make himself a small fortune. Frederick Karl refers to the Old Colonel, in his economic dealings both before and after the Civil War, as a "man on the make" and aligns that expression with a larger context of immigrants to the former American Southwest (areas within the Jackson Purchase in West Tennessee, extreme western Kentucky, and north Mississippi now very much considered part of the "Southeastern United States"), immigrants

largely of Scots-Irish descent with mythic histories like those Faulkner ascribes to the Compson's in "The Compson Appendix." Karl makes this claim with only a minimal reference to the stories of W. C. Falkner's early economic difficulties when he arrived in Mississippi from St. Genevieve, Missouri. Indeed, the context of Scots-Irish immigration to the area often has a mythic and romantic quality that does not fully account for the explosion of wealth that followed their arrival in the 1840s and 1850s. Most of those immigrants were not always the richest heir to an Eastern fortune but they also were not landless poor whites. As James Cobb points out in his history of the antebellum Mississippi Delta, a man such as Faulkner's later creation Thomas Sutpen from *Absalom, Absalom!* was not typical for his initial poverty. Seldom did men rise from utter destitution to the heights of the planter aristocracy.

The frontiersmen in the Jackson Purchase tended to have some degree of capital--my own family history involves two grandsons of a Revolutionary War veteran cashing in on promised land-grants under the claim of their grandfather and uprooting their families from Montgomery County, North Carolina to move to Madison County, Tennessee and then north to Gibson County. Men such as Davy Crockett make for excellent stories about pioneers in coonskin caps, but Crockett was also a politician and landowner in present-day Gibson County, a few miles up the road from my family's "ancestral" land. As Williamson and Karl detail, though the Old Colonel arrived in Mississippi destitute and possibly as a fugitive, he came to live with a fairly well-established uncle, John Wesley Thomas, after whom he would name his first son--William Faulkner's grandfather. He certainly had to work hard to make a living, but he did not come into the world with nothing. After the war, he used his modest means to take advantage of the opportunities around him and established a postbellum dynasty of modest regional significance.

2.) Basic geography about the location of such places as "the Big Place" and "Quality

Ridge” come from the well-established biographical record. My two primary sources include Blotner and Williamson, who collectively recreate the lay of the land in which Faulkner grew up, including information on New Albany, Ripley, and Oxford, the three places that Faulkner lived between his birth and age five. Similarly, there are many instances in my study where basic facts about north Mississippi and about Faulkner’s life I do not directly cite with page numbers and author because they are now so established in the many biographies as to be considered general knowledge. That being said, Blotner and Williamson are the two biographers most responsible for uncovering and recording what is now generally accepted information. I follow their lead when it comes to locations and dates, and unless I mean to intervene into their record with either additional information or a new look at what they have established, I do not cite every single fact that they have already amply secured in the record. That does not mean, however, that I cite them in blind faith.

To a large degree, I accumulated the information in this study not merely by reading books in academic isolation and not merely by default of living in Oxford, Mississippi, for seven years while I worked on it. Rather, I have made a point of slowly and methodically using Blotner and Williamson as the basis for leads on information which I then went to verify for myself. Examples of this include the cemetery in Ripley, which I have visited numerous times. One can read Williamson’s book and get a general impression of the cemetery. Actually visiting the cemetery, however, lays bare how strikingly close the African-American side of the Falkner family is in death to the white side of the family that conveniently forgot its existence in life. The black Falkners are buried not quite fifty yards from the mammoth statue of the Old Colonel and on a direct line with the front side of the white Falkners’ family plot. Also, on the ground exploration greatly advanced my understanding of St. Peter’s Cemetery in Oxford and the history

of the town it contains, a history central to this study. Williamson writes about that cemetery as well, but without actually going to see it and spending time exploring it, the stunning degree to which the cemetery functions as an idealized hierarchy of the class and racial matrix of the town is lost.

In other regards, an on the ground approach to the local and regional landscape greatly influenced this study and is at the heart of my research methodology. A particularly germane example comes from the recent study by Sally Wolff, *The Ledgers of History*, wherein she explores the debt Faulkner owed to an actual plantation diary by a Mississippi planter named Francis Terry Leak. The Leaks lived in a now-deserted town called Salem in formerly Tippah, now Benton, County. Wolff interviewed a descendant of F. T. Leak's who no longer lives in North Mississippi. She also offered an excellent reading of the typescript of the diary--now housed in Chapel Hill, North Carolina--in relation to Faulkner's works. Wolff also claims to have been to Oxford and explored north Mississippi prior to her writing the book. Nonetheless, when my friend Melanie R. Anderson and I decided to follow up on Wolff's lead, we inadvertently uncovered a hole in her study: she never went to Salem itself. We drove to Ashland in Benton County and had lunch at the Square Cafe where the waitress and owner of the cafe, Debbie Renick, not only knew the Leak history but knew the Leaks. She went home to retrieve her family's land deed, which included copies of the original deed from a Chickasaw chief named Tush-Kin-We-Wah to Francis Terry Leak and then in succeeding generations to her husband's family. Then she told us how she grew up as the best friend of the daughter of Francis Leak, the great-granddaughter of F. T. Leak and still resident of nearby Lamar, Mississippi. A man named John McKenzie--a descendant of the Hamer family, who were the neighbors of F. T. Leak and who are mentioned often in the diary--gave us a tour of his family's old homestead and

family cemetery. Not a single person we met had ever heard of Woolf or her book, though her already phenomenal study would only have been more phenomenal had she also done on the ground research rather than interviews and textual analyses only.

While that trip to Ashland did not produce any information directly pertinent to Faulkner and homosexuality, it stands as the most potent example of the research methodology that animates much of this study--on the ground experience and exploration. Notably, Judith Sensibar employed similar research in her study *Faulkner and Love* when she relied on a graduate student to help conduct interviews with the usually reticent local African-American population of Oxford to obtain fascinating new insights into the history of the Barr family and their matriarch “Mammy” Caroline Barr, Faulkner’s former housekeeper. The critical methodologies of academic inquiry and archival research also greatly animate my study and certainly have a well-deserved and well-established place in scholarly work. They are not, however, the only ways of knowing.

3.) In her 2011 memoir, *Every Day by the Sun*, Dean Faulkner Wells, William’s niece, confirms Williamson’s history and adds to it further evidence of where Charles Butler Jr. went when he abandoned his family with his local octoroon mistress. She highlights family letters and other ephemera from the 1880s and 1890s which suggests that the family knew the “real” story. Williamson includes no information about the mistress but assumes only that young William knew his grandfather had disgraced the family by stealing the tax revenues and running away. I am synthesizing Wells and Williamson’s stories here to assume that William knew the full story growing up (Wells’ version) and felt a keen stigma because of it (Williamson’s point).

4.) In Williamson’s biography and in most documents and books about historical Oxford, Van Buren Avenue is referred to by its former name, Depot Street.

5.) The “sidewalks” for which the younger Charles Butler oversaw upkeep were wooden boardwalk-style walkways. The sidewalks would not be replaced with concrete until the early twentieth century. This history is also explained, in wonderful detail, in Williamson’s biography.

6.) Reference to this contemporary usage might seem out-of-place, but I include it to highlight a point about acoustics. As recent anti-bullying campaigns (and recent highly-publicized teenage suicides) demonstrate, this particular expression in our contemporary context has a distinct but layered resonance. Whereas people use the expression almost thoughtlessly as just an acquired and general way of demeaning any number of things that they find trifling, annoying, or disgusting, to kids who already feel “different” and may even be contemplating their own developing sexual identities, these words sting and feel far more directly derogatory than the off-hand ubiquity of their use usually is meant to imply. Though separated by time, the label “quair” and our contemporary expression “that’s so gay” do bear similarities in the degree to which someone already sensitive to his/her sexual identity in relation to his/her peers may, in fact, hear such language much more acutely than most people would. We can understand the import of the term by way of a syllogism: If Faulkner had any nascent or latent homosexual desires, and since the word “queer” (or “quair”) was in fact gaining a homosexual connotation during this period, then it follows that Faulkner would hear the term as a derogatory statement about his perceived (homo)sexuality. In this regard, the experience of contemporary teenagers facing anti-gay bullying may serve as a useful and germane model to understand how the word might have sounded to Faulkner and the reaction he might have had to it.

7.) Another useful commentator on the Victorian ideology in which Faulkner matured is Daniel J. Signal. In *William Faulkner: The Making of a Modernist*, especially in his introduction, Signal traces the full range of influence of a Victorian world view on the turn-of-the-century

South, from views on “animal” and “human” to a discussion of industry and work. Signal singles out the South, though, as a place where Victorianism “was certainly not riddled with morbid introspection” (5). Rather, he explains that for Southern families, such as the Falkners, attaining “proper” values was directly linked to attaining rewards for industry and labor in a model perhaps more nuanced than Williamson’s model (though not in relation to sexual mores and order) but nonetheless the same in its general understanding of the patterns of north Mississippi life. Signal argues that the South embraced these values in a way distinct from much of the rest of the country.

8.) Sensibar uses three interviews to compile her overview of Estelle’s different versions of “falling in love” with William Faulkner. The more common story about seeing him out of her bedroom window when he was six, she seven, comes from an interview with a reporter in Richmond, Virginia, and then, a month later, from an interview with Joseph Blotner, both from 1964. The latter story about falling in love after returning from Mary Baldwin, her boarding school, comes from an interview for the University of Virginia student newspaper in 1972.

9.) Of all the major biographies, Karl’s is the best source for a nuanced reading of the influences of these poets and Stone’s influence on Faulkner in regard to them. See also Snell’s biography of Stone for more information about Stone and Faulkner’s shared literary education.

10.) For more on Young, see Pilkington and Young’s memoir, *Pavilions*. Young was actually born 1881 in Friars Point, Mississippi, and grew up in Como, a small town in neighboring Panola County. Throughout his youth, long before the construction of Sardis Dam, there may have been more direct routes connecting Oxford and Como, though most travel between towns of such distances apart (roughly thirty miles) probably took place by train through routes often quite circuitous. Young’s father, Dr. A. A. Young, moved his family to

Oxford in 1895, when he married a local widow. Stark enrolled at Ole Miss the same year. In his memoir, he refers to Oxford as his hometown, though in 1925, both his father and step-mother died within days of each other. Subsequently, his trips to Oxford would become increasingly rare. Stark Young would outlive Faulkner, but when he died, he chose to be buried in Como near the rest of his family, including his mother, who died when he was six.

The house Young called “home” in Oxford is now part of the university museums, the Walton-Young House, on University Avenue, across the street from the Catholic church, up the hill and to the northeast of the baseball stadium, Swaze Field, and immediately to the north of Bailey Woods. The path through the woods between the Walton-Young House and Rowan Oak winds about half a mile and speaks to the proximity of neighbors in Oxford before the town expanded west out Jackson Avenue around the university. Notably, the “Big Place” where the Young Colonel lived with his family and where Faulkner spent much time growing up was on the corner of University Avenue and South Street (now South Lamar), not quite half a mile due east of Young’s home.

11.) Of Young and Faulkner, Blotner would write, “There were tastes they did not share, as with the work of D’Annunzio” (104). Blotner’s source on this matter were interviews with Emily Whitehurst Stone now collected in BP.

12.) One could further claim, as Ellen Crowell has, that one of the sources for how gay men in Mississippi crafted their identities can be found in Oscar Wilde, whose American Tour in the 1882 included stops in Memphis on 12 June and Vicksburg on 14 June (Ellmann 189). Of course, Young would have been an infant, Percy not yet born when Wilde made these appearances. Though as a matter of the proverbial six degrees of separation, surely there is someone who attended one of Wilde’s lectures who later met Young or Percy, who both later

met Faulkner, there is no known direct genealogy from Wilde to Faulkner. As I will detail in Chapter 2, Faulkner visited Wilde's grave, but in Mississippi, Wilde was an idea, not a reality. The performances of homosexual identity Young and Percy eventually fashioned might have been influenced by him in the abstract, but never in person, despite his tour through the Delta in the early 1880s.

13.) This history, explained through the example of a handful of men, would seem to lend credence to the myth of homosexual isolation in the rural South, which in turn could lend credence to the notion that homosexuals might live in the South, but only a few of them. Young's move away from the South (and Percy's many travels to Europe) would further create the image of homosexuality as not welcome in the rural South of North Mississippi, even in the rare instances when it occurred in a native of the area. Of course, we know such a model is not true--there were many homosexuals living in the South--or at least we feel confident intuiting such a conclusion from recently compiled historical data, especially in work by John Howard. It is worth noting, however, a report from the Williams Institute at UCLA concerning marriage data gathered during the 2010 census (*United States Census Snapshot 2010*, authored by Gary J. Gates and Abigail M. Cooke). The 2010 census was the first census to collect data on same-sex marriage, well over a hundred years after Faulkner entered his teens. Thus, this census gave us our first "official" record of the same-sex presence in the South beyond accounts hidden in the complex negotiations of oral histories. By recording "married" same-sex couples, the census made a numerical tally of the number of gay people in the South (twice the number of couples, obviously), though this number is incomplete as it does not account for LGBT people who are not in relationships.

In 2010, Mississippi ranked 6th in the nation in highest percentage of same-sex couples

who identify as “spouses” (husband/wife), with 30% of same-sex couples preferring this designation (1,050), as opposed to identifying as “unmarried partner couples” (2,434). These numbers rank Mississippi ahead of California (ranked 7th), where same-sex marriage was, briefly, legal in 2008. The five states ranked ahead of Mississippi (Massachusetts, Vermont, Connecticut, Iowa, and New Hampshire) have all legalized same-sex marriage. Mississippi is one of many states wherein the state constitution has been amended to define marriage as between one man and one woman. Alabama (11th), Arkansas (12th), South Carolina (16th), and Louisiana (20th) all rank in the top 20, all ahead of New York (25th), which legalized same-sex marriage in 2011, and Maryland (26th) and Washington (36th), which both took steps to legalize same-sex marriage in 2012. On the other hand, Mississippi ranks 48th (in data including the District of Columbia) in number of same-sex couples of any distinction per 1,000 households. The far more populous states of Florida, Georgia, and Texas are the only three Southern states in the top 25 of this ranking, with the District of Columbia ranking 1st and Maryland ranking 19th. For comparison, the District of Columbia has 4,822 same-sex couples, which equates to 18.02 per 1,000 households. Mississippi has 3,484 same-sex couples, or 3.12 per 1,000 households. Of course, gay marriage is legal in the District of Columbia, and the closest approximation in Mississippi to, say, the gay district near Dupont Circle in Washington DC are a few unofficial gay bars on the Oxford Square.

These census numbers are important because, even in states that do not recognize same-sex marriage and even though the Defense of Marriage Act still prevents the federal government from recognizing all same-sex marriages regardless of state laws, the institution of marriage, under a variety of competing taxonomies, has given members of the LGBT community their first entry in national census data and, thus, their first visible presence in population studies

conducted by the government and reported as official data on US demographics. Census data does not currently include people who identify as LGBT but are not in a same-sex relationship in a single household (a distinction that matters on federal tax returns, where no same-sex couples can file jointly, regardless of their living or financial arrangements). Still, this census data proves more useful and tangible than various “scientific” estimates that range from high numbers of same-sex contact and desire recorded in the original Kinsey Report to other patchwork studies unified by their proclivity to assert that “the total number of LGBT people could be as high as . . .” or “statistically, probably less than one in ten people are gay.”

This census data confirms that there are, in fact, LGBT individuals in Mississippi (at least 6,968 of them, plus all the ones who are not living in a single household in a same-sex relationship--such as myself). We know we are not the first generation of pioneers, but we must also remember that we, at least, are the first to be able to prove that we are not an anomaly in our particular landscape. Some of us are even in the census.

CHAPTER 2: QUEER FAULKNER

1.) For the most detailed account of when Estelle was in Oxford between 1918 and 1929 and Faulkner’s reaction to her presence there, see Sensibar, *Faulkner and Love* (pp. 237-500).

2.) See Watson, *William Faulkner: Self-Presentation and Performance*, Sensibar, *The Origins of Faulkner’s Art*, and Williamson, *William Faulkner and Southern History*.

3.) Letter, Paul Rogers to Joseph Blotner; April 7, 1980. BP. This quotation and the subsequent quotations from Rogers’ letters and Blotner’s response come from a series of correspondences that passed between the two men beginning in March 1980 and lasting until June. All of the letters from the correspondence are included in BP, materials Blotner sold to

Southeast Missouri State University in the late 1980s. Rogers initiated the correspondence on 6 March; Blotner responded on 22 March; Rogers again wrote Blotner on 7 April; Blotner wrote back again on 21 May. Rogers completed the correspondences on 3 June.

These letters are more than a passing interests, and as the correspondents are deceased, I quote from them under the auspices of their being in Blotner's archived papers. Rogers willingly provided his version of events to Blotner in a correspondence interview. On pp. 77 and 82 of the revised edition, Blotner references Rogers. Therefore, I consider these letters a matter of the archival record and use them as such here. I do not believe they could be considered "private" since Blotner cited Rogers publicly during Rogers' life for the 1984 revisions. Rogers originally wrote to Blotner in an effort to clarify certain parts of Blotner's original account (many surviving acquaintances of Faulkner did the same in response to the 1974 biography). Rogers intended his corrections to see their way to print. They are effectively the same as the oral interview notes that Blotner elsewhere recorded.

The letters seem to have had some impact on Blotner's revisions. In his responses, Blotner clearly attempted to coax information out of Rogers about Faulkner's poems published in *The Mississippian* and the response to those poems on campus. Also, these letters serve as a backdrop to Wasson's own writing of his memoir *Count No 'Count* in the early 1980s. A quick flip through Blotner's revised second edition shows the extent to which his revisions were based on Wasson's memoir, which he often cited in that second edition. Blotner was so keen on seeing Wasson's memoir that he requested to see it as proofs before its actual publication (see letters between Blotner and Hunter McKelva Cole).

4.) Letter, Paul Rogers to Joseph Blotner; 3 June 1980. BP.

5.) Ibid. BP. "pundonor" appears in Rogers' original.

6.) Letter, Paul Rogers to Joseph Blotner; 21 May 1980. BP. The recollections that Wasson was angelic and very beautiful appear in interviews that Blotner conducted and that I quote from in the remainder of this chapter.

7.) Letter, Paul Rogers to Joseph Blotner; 3 June 1980. BP.

8.) For more on the codes and constructions of gay memoir, see Bertram J. Cohler, *Writing Desire: Sixty Years of Gay Autobiography*. Cohler's study begins with men born in the 1930s and follows gay memoir from early book narratives to contemporary web blogs. His study is not designed to account for the lives of gay men born at the turn of the twentieth century (gay men born in the 1930s would have come of age after World War II, which is when Cohler's study begins its overview of how those men ordered their lives into narratives).

Cohler's insights, however, are useful for the extent to which he actually picks up a running history (in his introduction, he even mentions Henry James' memoir writing, though he defers from talking about it in the same consciously gay rhetoric of later autobiography). He is keen to declare that "[h]istorical and social change enters into the individual life story but in somewhat different ways for life-writers of different generations" (13). We can couple this historical/social sensitivity to another assessment: "Being part of [a] hidden world" as gay men were until very recently in their social movements,

gave men an identity counter to that of the larger social world. [. . .] Gay men tell about these experiences in coded narratives, which [. . .] are often told or written as a kind of confession. Writing about these experiences provides a way of remembering and making sense of a past and helps these men overcome feelings of shame. (12)

In regard to Wasson's memoir, the "feelings of shame" and a sense of "confession" that

Cohler identifies in later gay memoirs run into the older rhetorical patterns of Wasson's generation, gay men born prior to World War I. We can deduce backwards from Cohler's study to argue that Wasson's memoir, though not a full confession, nonetheless asserts a relationship in a way meant to claim Faulkner as Wasson's true friend, a claim that mitigates any shame Wasson may have felt in his life for his affection for Faulkner or the relationship they carried on in the early days of their friendship. Although Wasson wrote his memoir well into the period of more open and honest discussion of homosexuality in gay memoirs that Cohler traces in his study, the lingering "gentlemanly code" of his earlier life stops him short of being explicit in his rhetorical posturing. Nonetheless, we can read Wasson's memoir as a gay memoir in a long tradition of gay memoirs, a perspective on his account much to our benefit in understanding the key relationship animating his story. That memoir is from a different historical moment, but it serves the same end for the author as gay memoirs served other authors from different generations.

9.) Interview, Robert Farley to Joseph Blotner; 3 April 1965. BP. None of the interview notes I cite throughout this study should be read as direct transcriptions of the words of the interviewee. Blotner interviewed his subjects then typed up his notes afterwards. As this quotation demonstrates with the repetitive "seraphic like a seraphim," which reads as if it is Blotner's attempt to reconstruct the direct quotations from hand-written notes taken during the interview, these notes are best understood as approximations of direct quotations from the interviewee. I also will not use the haughty insertion (*sic*) to correct Blotner. His notes were exactly that: notes. His clarity and skill with proper English is amply displayed in his published writings. I am giving Blotner the credit for attempting to transcribe these quotations accurately, and I trust that they are correct in spirit and have the majority of the wording correct. Blotner

also kept his handwritten interview notes, which are part of his collected papers in the Brodsky-Faulkner Collection. They are very difficult to parse, so I have chosen the typed version of those notes for clarity.

10.) Photocopy, Essay, Ben Wasson *The Delta Democrat-Times*; 1962. BP. The quotations in this paragraph, with the exception of the quotation by Farley, come from Wasson's 1962 essay. I found a copy of the essay in BP where it had no pagination but was a photocopy of the original. In general, Blotner made copies of most of his newspaper sources and other ephemera that I will quote from at length where, in his biographies, he quoted from in more moderation. I will cite such borrowings as from BP rather than from their original sources, though where possible, I will also identify the original source.

11.) Letter, Hunter McKelva Cole to Joseph Blotner; 2 July 1982. BP. I had the pleasure of communicating with the now retired Mr. Cole in February 2012 concerning this letter and the publication of Wasson's memoir. In the exchange between Mr. Cole and myself, he verified the challenges the publishers faced but also spoke to the care and diligence that the editorial team exercised in their commendable attempt to revise Wasson's memoir posthumously while maintaining as much of his own voice as they could.

12.) Wasson's attempt to set the record proverbially straight shares similarities with Meta Carpenter's memoir *A Loving Gentleman*. When Blotner first interviewed Carpenter, she refused to kiss-and-tell about her long intimate affair with Faulkner, but after the original biography was published, she felt compelled to insert herself into the narrative by writing her own memoir (notably after Estelle's death as well). Carpenter's memoir shed profound light on part of Faulkner's life that Blotner had a lot of difficulty reconstructing in his original biography. The similarity with Wasson is that Wasson, after the original biography, was also making an effort to

insert himself into the narrative of Faulkner's life--the difference being that he was extensively interviewed by Blotner for the original biography. Nonetheless, his memoir contains information not found in those interviews and, obviously, not included in the original biography. It may not be too much of a stretch to imagine that Wasson's memoir is his own late-arriving love-letter to his own "kind and loving gentleman," his friend and former courtier, William Faulkner, Count No 'Count.

13.) Faulkner's familiarity with Malory is difficult to establish (and unlike so many contemporary Americans, he did not have the benefit of the Disney movie *The Sword and the Stone* to introduce him to Malory's story--for that matter, he also did not have Monty Python's version on which to draw). His familiarity with Tennyson is much easier to prove. Twice in the 1984 edition, Blotner mentions Tennyson; first as a favorite poet of Maud Falkner, Faulkner's mother (16); second in reference to Faulkner's poetry from the 1920s to say that those poems contain "shades of Tennyson" (70). Parini also confirms Tennyson's influence on Faulkner's early poems (29). Signal comments that "what [Faulkner] knew initially of Browning and Tennyson concerned their poetry and public selves, not their private anxieties," which clearly implies that Faulkner read Tennyson.

Faulkner verified his appreciation, sort of, at the University of Virginia. When asked if Hightower's opinion of Tennyson in *LIA* were also his opinion, Faulkner explained,

No sir, that was Hightower's opinion, and I'm not responsible for his opinion. I have a different opinion of Tennyson myself, that when I was younger, I read Tennyson with a great deal of pleasure. I can't read him at all now. (*FIU* 93)

14.) John Duvall, in "Faulkner's Crying Game: Male Homosexual Panic," recounts this same scene, only in one modestly long paragraph. My reading here is an expansion of his with

much more attention given to the details to which Duvall only alludes while building to his own arguments about Faulkner's World War I stories. I will attend to that part of Duvall's essay in Chapter 5.

15.) I am borrowing the word "homosex" from John Howard (*Men Like That*, p. xvii), as a short hand for the "action" of homosexual sex, as opposed to the identity of being homosexual.

16.) Article, Oxford *Eagle*; 15 September 1921. BP.

17.) Article, Oxford *Eagle*; 8 September 1921, with accompanying notes, same page, from Blotner. BP.

18.) Interview, Emily Whitehurst Stone and Joseph Blotner; 30 November 1965. BP.

19.) Ibid.

20.) Undated note, Joseph Blotner. BP.

21.) Article, Oxford *Eagle*; 6 March 1924, with accompanying notes from Blotner, same page. BP.

22.) Summary of article, Stark Young, Oxford *Eagle*; 30 November 1950. BP.

23.) Photocopy, Essay, Stark Young, "New Year's Crow," *The New Republic*; 1938. BP.

To verify that Young had long been a central figure in Faulkner's life, Young wrote this brief piece long before Faulkner's reputation was lionized by his Nobel Prize. Blotner dutifully maintained a full photograph copy of this essay in BP.

24.) There is no fuller account of the history of Greenwich Village and its association with homosexuality than George Chauncey's *Gay New York*.

25.) Wasson does not provide a specific date for this incident. Rather, he includes it in a chapter entitled "Greenville," which covers his life from his entry into his father's law firm in 1921 to his move to New York in either late 1927 or early 1928. He narrates this specific

incident right before the end of the chapter and immediately before a brief digression about the great Mississippi flood of 1927. Blotner uses the incident (citing *Count No 'Count*) in his one-volume biography. He places the incident in the chapter covering Faulkner's life from "October 1926-June 1927," but Blotner does not actually assign a date to this incident either. Rather, he uses it as a undated flashback in his discussion of Horace Benbow and Belle Mitchell in *Flags in the Dust*, which Faulkner was writing in the period covered in Blotner's chapter. Blotner refers to the incident as something from Faulkner's past that he draws on while writing in the present of the chapter.

I assign this incident to 1924 because of textual (and contextual) evidence in Wasson's memoir. It occurs after his move to Greenville in 1921 and likely happened at a later date when both he and Estelle were in Oxford at the same time. He describes Cho-cho (Victoria, born 1919) as still small enough to be picked up but also old enough to walk on her own. He makes no mention of Malcolm (born in 1923). When Estelle came home in 1924, Cho-Cho came with her. The editors of Wasson's memoir even place, immediately congruent to Wasson's story of this incident, a 1924 picture of Cho-Cho and Estelle in Oxford with Cho-Cho's Chinese nursemaid. In 1927, when Estelle was home again, Cho-Cho would have been eight years old and likely would have been too big to be picked up and too old to function as an innocent child witness, whereas in 1924, she was just five, an age more conducive to Wasson's description of her. Since Estelle was only home at very specific times, we can deduce that this incident occurred in 1924.

26.) See W. Kenneth Holditch.

27.) Newspaper article, "Marriage Is Not at Fault," New Orleans *Item-Tribune*; 4 April, 1925. BP. All quotations from same. This letter is collected by James Meriwether in *William Faulkner: Essays, Speeches, and Public Letters*, but Meriwether identifies the newspaper as the

Times-Item. He does not include the introductory material to the letter also published in the paper when the essay first ran. This letter appears in the revised edition of Meriwether's volume, added in 2004, pp. 337-38.

28.) My citations of Spratling's story come from his full memoir, *File on Spratling*. Both Williamson and Blotner used the shorter "Chronicle of a Friendship" that Spratling had published in *Texas Quarterly* while he was writing his longer memoir. The pieces are so identical as to be substituted for each other with no deciphering their subtleties as with the two versions of Wasson's first meeting with Faulkner, which are very different and were published twenty years apart.

29.) Interview, Ben Wasson and Joseph Blotner; 28 March 1965. BP.

30.) The Blotner papers are thorough and extensive, but despite repeated efforts, I have been unable to find the reference to Spratling's homosexual encounter that Blotner includes in the revised one-volume biography (but did not include in the original two-volume version). Blotner cites his interview with Spratling, which proved to be his only interview with Spratling since Spratling would die in a car accident shortly after that interview and before the original biography was published. Blotner typed up his notes for that interview on six pages, none of which include reference to a homosexual encounter. The handwritten interview notes total nine pages and do contain information not found in the typed notes, but no reference to any homosexual encounter in jail is included there either. Blotner also jotted down interview notes in small, hand-held notebooks, but his handwriting in these is quite simply illegible.

31.) In an extensive and detailed note in *Uncollected Stories*, Blotner gives the history of the many versions and false starts of the novel. Of the original version, Blotner records that "when it had reached 31,000 words, probably in October or November [1925], he [Faulkner] put

it aside for good” (710). Blotner does claim that parts of the novel would appear in altered form in *Mosquitoes*, *The Wild Palms*, and *The Hamlet*; later--long after Blotner published “Portrait of Elmer”--other scholars would publish the original 31,000 word incomplete version of the novel as a special edition of the *Mississippi Quarterly*. Blotner, however, would identify “Portrait” as the most complete version of the story, which Faulkner returned to in “the middle 1930s,” specifically when Faulkner sent it to his then agent Morty Goldman on 5 October 1935. Bennett Cerf, Faulkner’s publisher, turned down the story as too underdeveloped but commented that it exhibited fine writing that could eventually see publication. Faulkner responded instead by tabling the story. It never again saw the light of day until Blotner dusted it off and saw it to publication in 1979.

I will use the version from *Uncollected Stories*, “Portrait of Elmer,” when I return to the story in Chapter 3 for three reasons. First, it represents Faulkner’s “final” version of the story, which I will take to be its most complete, much as I assume for the multiple versions of “Moonlight” and other varieties of Faulkner’s early poems, some of which he hand-bound in personal copies but cleaned up for publication in *The Marble Faun* and much later in *The Green Bough*. Second, this version is the most readily accessible. *Uncollected Stories* is still in print from Vintage International as part of the larger available Faulkner canon. Much as with Noel Polk’s decision to change dates in his revisions of *Absalom, Absalom!*, scholars tend to give deference to the currently published versions of Faulkner novels (including *The Wild Palms*) as the authoritative text. Third, and most importantly, the few directly relevant passages from the original *Elmer*, as published in the special edition, are maintained in “Portrait of Elmer.” Neither version amounts to a “gay novel” or a “gay story.” Rather, the gay themes in the story remain in both forms.

32.) Unfortunately, Polchin uses this biographical material to argue that Popeye, the impotent rapist in *Sanctuary*, was inspired by Faulkner's knowledge of psychological case studies and sexual deviance. Polchin thus compares homosexuality to sexual deviance with no pause to consider that Faulkner may have had--in fact did have--objective and actual experience with real homosexuals that would allow him to see beyond merely medically constructed discourses of homosexuality.

33.) Interview, Harold Levy with Joseph Blotner; 5 February 1965. BP.

34.) Interview, William Spratling with Joseph Blotner; 28, 29, and 30 January 1965. BP.

26.) Ibid.

CHAPTER 3: GAY FAULKNER

1.) Blotner explains the publication history of the story in the endnotes of *Uncollected Stories*. In general, while Blotner was compiling his material for his biography of Faulkner, he divided that material into three general categories still preserved in the arrangement of the Blotner Papers. He made folders for each year of Faulkner's life and put relevant information from multiple sources into its respective year. He also compiled copious files of extraneous information--letters and additional interview notes--that either did not fit anywhere else, appertained to a specific place (as opposed to time), such as his folder for New Orleans, or that never made it to the final published biographies.

The notes on the publication histories of Faulkner stories--compiled in the endnotes of *Uncollected Stories* and in the chronological framework of the two biographies--are compiled in a third set of folders. Blotner made a separate folder for each story/novel (the notes for some novels, such as *Requiem for a Nun*, occupy numerous folders). The notes and, at times, multiple

versions of stories he compiled in those folders form the basis for his publication history of Faulkner's various works.

I have no further information to add to Blotner in regards to when a story or novel was written, revised, and published (each of these are separate steps for Faulkner; in the case of "Moonlight" those steps occur over several years). In this study, I defer to Blotner in regards to the timeline of Faulkner's writing. I assume that anyone interested in the nuances of specific dates can refer to Blotner's published record and archival material for verification of his timelines.

2.) Karl is unquestionably one of Faulkner's most significant biographers, but he pulls a slight-of-hand in this assertion. He writes, "if Faulkner did indeed write ["Moonlight"] in the Fall of 1921," which is a conditional assertion which Karl makes in order to justify his reading that the story bears biographical relevance to Faulkner's courtship of Estelle. Karl's "if" is a careful and thoughtful "if." Blotner's notes for the story--notably a much later version of the story--from *Uncollected Stories* rather cagily declares the story was originally written "around 1919 or 1920 or 1921." One could not accuse Blotner of lacking a sense of humor. He is implying that the history of this story is unclear, though since Faulkner identified it as one of his earliest stories, Blotner is willing to place it in the general period of Faulkner's early post-World War I writing. Less humorously than Blotner, Karl concedes that in regard to "Moonlight", "precise dating cannot be made," though he proceeds to date it for the purposes of his assertions about its meaning (178).

If the story was written in 1919 or 1920, instead of in the fall of 1921, then it might not have to do with Estelle at all. In *Faulkner and Love*, Sensibar places Estelle in Oxford at very specific moments after her marriage to Cornell Franklin. To claim that Faulkner was turning the

tables of rejection on Estelle in regard to a specific moment in their shared history crumbles if Faulkner wrote the story before that moment took place. Of course, Karl quite thoughtfully employs “if” to qualify his assertion. Karl knows he is speculating, but he is able to create a highly plausible reading from his speculation. This instance is not evidence of Karl’s underhandedness; rather, this instance demonstrates how thoughtful, well-researched speculations can lead to profound insights into the genesis and meaning of a literary work.

3.) See Sensibar, *The Origins of Faulkner’s Art*. She reiterates the same the chronology and the contents of the various collections in *Faulkner and Love*. There are many similarities between these two studies, but the former remains the seminal work on Faulkner’s early poetry both for Sensibar’s archival research to find them and establish when Faulkner first wrote which poems and for her close readings of those poems. In the latter, she reiterates her basic chronology as a means of advancing her larger biographical project about Estelle Oldham Faulkner, though with less attention to close readings of the poems themselves and with more attention to their biographical significance.

4.) I prefer the double citation here to draw attention to the published version of the poem versus its earlier manuscript versions. In her study, Sensibar reproduces the poems from manuscripts; Collins published “Sapphics” as it appeared in *The Mississippian*. I use Collins’ collection *Early Prose and Poetry* as my source for these quotations, though I am using Sensibar’s study to discuss those quotations, which relies on the manuscript version collected at the Harry Ransom Center in Austin, TX. There may be no difference here to speak of, but for the sake of being thorough, perhaps the possibility of difference is worth noting (see note 8 below).

5.) This evidence, of course, is the subject of my study. As I will explore throughout this study when I come to critical responses to homosexuality and Faulkner, Sensibar would have a

difficult time finding this evidence in those responses. Many of the current critical responses to homosexuality and Faulkner tend toward a reiteration of Sensibar's underlying claim: homosexuality caused Faulkner anxiety, and there is no room for any other interpretation. In this study I am making that room, which does not currently exist in Faulkner Studies, generally speaking. In this particular instance, Sensibar's claim is predicated on her conflating all queer desires into one generic representation with one clear psychological stimulus: anxiety. Other scholars articulate the basic premise about anxiety in other ways. Such a premise is one-sided and does not account for the complexity of Faulkner's gay life.

6.) See Sensibar, *Faulkner and Love*. I am aware that I am relying in my reading on a gesture quite similar to Karl's (see note 2 above). As did Karl, I make this gesture to offer the speculative but reasonable assertion that the poem does, in fact, pertain to Faulkner's relationship with Estelle. The poem also, however, pertains to Faulkner's relationship with Wasson. Whatever the specific dates of composition may be, the general atmosphere of the time in Faulkner's life easily supports both assertions.

7.) Monroe's column was actually nationally syndicated, and she was herself a lesbian, which may have influenced her (dis)regard for Percy's sapphic poems. Faulkner likely read her in the *Commercial Appeal*, where she was published (and where Wise quotes her from) and which was the largest-circulating regional paper in the Mid-South during Faulkner's lifetime. North Mississippians commonly took the *Commercial Appeal*. If Faulkner did not read his parents' copy at home, he could have easily read someone else's copy (Phil Stone's most likely) in Oxford. It is reasonable to deduce that he was familiar with Monroe's column and read it in the *Commercial Appeal*.

8.) The double citation is useful here because of a minor difference in how Collins and

Sensibar transcribe the text of the poem. Collins transcribes “Portrait” from *The Double Dealer*. Sensibar transcribes the poems in the sequence from manuscripts collected at the HRC (see note 4 above). Collins’ produces the last line of this stanza as recorded here. Sensibar records the same line with the minor difference: “And your laughter breaks the r[h]ythm of our feet.”

This small manuscript “error” is the one of two minor differences between the poem in manuscript and the poem as published, suggesting the existing manuscript version is an already-highly revised version of a well-crafted poem, not a careless early draft (the other difference pertains to Sensibar’s placing a semi-colon where Collins places a comma). In the longer sequence *Vision in Spring*, Sensibar brackets occasional additions--her editing but with the cautious reminder, via the brackets, that the additions are hers. This caution is likely due not simply to deference to Faulkner as a young poet writing by hand in pen, but to the likelihood that minor “errors” such as writing “rythm” for *rhythm* might well be intentionally stylized spellings rather than genuine misspellings. An example of such a stylized misprint is recorded by Noel Polk, in his reprint of *The Marionettes*. Polk chose to reproduce Faulkner’s original pen-and-ink lettering, complete with its stylized reversed S.

I believe these differences are minimal and do not alter the interpretations of the poem, but I feel it best to note that these are minimally different texts, which some readers may feel allows for discussion of how best to read them.

9). See Reed and Chauncey. Certainly, other historians have written geographically specific studies of the gay presence in various cities. Howard’s *Carryin’ On in the Lesbian and Gay South* includes studies of gay life in Memphis, Atlanta, and Charleston, among other locations. Martin Duberman’s study *Stonewall* explicates a specific time *and* place in history. One could reasonably argue that Randy Shilts *And the Band Played On* offers a time and place

specific history of gay life in New York, Los Angeles, and San Francisco. Howard's *Men Like That* pays particular attention to Jackson, Mississippi as the prime gay habitue in the state. Few locations, however, can claim such precise and lengthily-developed historical/sociological studies of local gay life as seminal as Chauncey's *Gay New York* or as detailed as Reed's *Dixie Bohemia* (admittedly, Reed writes less than three pages about "Gay Men" in preference of a general "bohemian" sexual otherness," but his geographic focus is nonetheless admirable and germane). Though there are other gay sites in the United States, New Orleans and New York hold special, nearly mythic significance in gay history. Conveniently, Faulkner's gay life incorporated both locations.

10.) This role as recorder of gay life may not be precisely what Toni Morrison had in mind when she identified Faulkner's "unflinching gaze" (pun not intended, surely), but her assertion that Faulkner recorded what he saw unflinchingly, regardless of his own ideological posturing, holds in the case of New Orleans as much as it holds for his view of any other aspect of Southern history or location.

11.) The biographical material I uncover in this study may not necessarily dissuade Richards, Sensibar, or any other scholars from their positions that Faulkner was anxious about homosexuality. I single out these works, though, because, in addition to the scholarly conversations about homosexuality in "A Rose for Emily" and *Absalom, Absalom!*, they represent significant scholarly inquiry on the topic of Faulkner's sexual identity. *Faulkner's Sexualities*, a volume of papers presented in 2007 but published in 2010, never once makes reference, even in a footnote, to the New Orleans marriage essay. That essay may not completely reverse any of the readings presented in the volume, but surely it would at least complicate them. Polk's essays "Ratliff's Buggies" and "Reading the Ledger," the latter of which he co-authored

with Richard Godden, represented upon their publication truly original insights into Faulkner's treatment of sexuality; the former, however, identifies homosexuality from evidence that Will Varner's ass hurts when he tries to sit down, the latter from evidence that includes bestiality as part of the sexual practices of the presumed homosexual. For the sake of argument, if my assertions about the extent of Faulkner's gay life prove to be too all-encompassing or are ever dismissed for their holistic deductions, then so be it. But surely, that Faulkner knew and was intimate friends with Wasson and Spratling would have allowed him to understand homosexuality beyond the supposed pains of anal sex or as one step down the slippery slope towards sex with animals, if it allowed him no other insights into gay life. If this study fails to convince anyone of Faulkner's gay desires, then at least it should cancel out the current canon of scholarship that is so misguided in its conception of homosexuality in Faulkner's work.

12.) As to the pattern of anxiety in studies of homosexuality and Faulkner, Polk's essays other homosexuality into such a severe aberration as to reduce gay sexual practices to bad humor or bestiality. Under the guise of objective consideration the demons of homophobia shine through. Polchin (see note 32, chapter 2) falls into the pattern of anxiety by reducing Faulkner's interaction with gay men to a reproduction of scientific/medical discursive practices, a reduction that denies that Faulkner felt genuine empathy for gay men but rather that he simply observed them but could not escape limiting paradigms despite his actual experiences to the contrary. For more on "A Rose for Emily," see note 25 below. For more on *Absalom*, see note 11, Chapter 8.

I am intentionally not including John Duvall's essay "Faulkner's Crying Game: Male Homosexual Panic" in this list. Obviously, his essay discusses Faulkner's anxieties about homosexuality; gay male panic is the short-hand way of naming the most extreme variety of homophobia (Duvall uses Eve Sedgwick's understanding of homophobia and homosexual panic

from *Epistemology of the Closet*). After Duvall's essay was published, the murder of Matthew Shepherd and the subsequent defense of his killers predicated off of "homosexual panic" as a means of excusing them for Shepherd's death offered a sober reminder of the actual dangers of homophobia beyond the realm of academic inquiry. Duvall, however, does not use the concept with no self-conscious awareness of its being a "concept." In his essay, he argues that Faulkner channeled his understanding of homophobia into his World War I stories, not that Faulkner was himself unconsciously homophobic. In other words, Duvall understands "homosexual panic" as a literary device that Faulkner used, not as an emotional response he, in fact, actually felt and wanted to advance in his stories.

The subtle details of my study and Duvall's study would highlight some differences in our approach to this topic. Though his study pre-dates mine, however, I can safely assert that his claim follows very naturally from mine, or more accurately, mine follows from his: If Faulkner could perform an apocryphal homosexual identity, then he could also perform an apocryphal homophobia. Duvall intuitively structures this notion into his essay, which makes it substantively different from other essays in the field.

13.) Meriwether misidentifies the editorial as coming from the *Times-Item*, though he faithfully reproduces the editorial in his study. Blotner identified the editorial as coming from the *Item-Tribune* in the two-volume edition (411).

14.) "Cruising" is not a gay male practice exclusively. It has a long history in gay communities that has made it the source of critical attention. For the best treatment of "cruising" in fiction, see John Rechy's *City of Night*, though the preference of the protagonist for anonymous sex often puts him at odds with the sexual orientation of the men he picks up (or who pick him up, as he prefers to have it). Chauncey discusses cruising (see note 15 below), as does

Howard in *Men Like That*. For a more recent study of Howard's paradigm in a contemporary context, see Brock Thompson, "Where the Action Is: Interstate Rest Areas, the Creation of Gay Space, and the Recovery of a Lost Narrative."

Also, one reader of this study questioned the expression "cruising the park together" as redundant. Actually, no, it is not. The narrator and Spratling are not cruising the same park but as two separate people who happen to cross paths. They are cruising the park *together*, not necessarily as a couple but certainly with mutual interests in mind.

15.) The specific type of cruising and gay sexual exchange of "hobo culture" is described at by George Chauncey in *Gay New York*, specifically in "Chapter 3: Trade, Wolves, and the Boundaries of Normal Manhood."

16.) See note on "Don Giovanni" from *US*, 705.

17.) In light of the recent popularity of Lady Gaga's hit single "Born This Way," I ask this question in good faith and with only a minimal degree of humor. Currently, the debate about homosexuality has steered towards acceptance predicated on a genetic cause--we are born this way. However uplifting such an opinion of homosexuality might be, if one day scientists definitely prove that homosexuality is entirely a product of environment with no genetic causes, does that mean that people are (once again) right to call it unnatural and persecute homosexuals?

Eve Sedgwick targeted fundamentally the same argument in *Epistemology of the Closet*, in her introduction: "Axiom 4: The immemorial, seemingly ritualized debates on nature versus nurture take place against a very unstable background of tacit assumptions and fantasies about both nurture and nature" (40-44). I also borrow my attempt at humor from discussion of this axiom. Among her more memorable passages includes her assurance that "[a]dvice on how to make sure your kids turn out gay, not to mention your students, your parishioners, your therapy

clients, or your military subordinates, is less ubiquitous than you might think” (42). Unable to find a guidebook for “how to make a gay character,” Faulkner had to rely on that old standby of an actual gay man as his model. He borrowed generously.

18.) This sentence appears in the final version of the novel, but Minrose Gwin points out that in the original typescript, a subsequent conversation between Julius and Fairchild is deleted, see Gwin 133.

19.) For more on Narcissism and homosexuality and male eroticism, see Steven Bruhm, *Reflecting Narcissus: A Queer Aesthetic*.

20.) Interview, Ben Wasson and Joseph Blotner; 28 March 1965. BP.

21.) See Blotner, 1984 edition. In Chapter 20, Blotner cites John Falkner’s assertion that his brother was primarily working on short stories in the early months of 1926 after his return from Europe. Blotner specifically writes of “Divorce in Naples” that “[i]t would be years before [it] appeared, but as the manuscripts show, there were several versions” of this story and others from this period (175). Later, Blotner supplies “Equinox” as the name for the original version of the story, submitted and rejected for publication in early 1930 and renamed for *Collected Stories* as “Divorce in Naples” (260).

22.) See Blotner, the 1984 edition, p. 247. After marrying Estelle and moving into their first shared home at 803 University Avenue in Oxford--where Faulkner would also live while he worked at the Power Plant on the Ole Miss campus and wrote *As I Lay Dying*--Maud Falkner gave her son a writing desk. Blotner asserts that this desk--a wedding present--is most likely where Faulkner wrote “A Rose for Emily.” Blotner dates the first reference to the story to a letter Faulkner wrote on 7 October 1929, the day on which Harrison Smith published *The Sound and the Fury*. Blotner dates the composition of *AILD* to 25 October 1929, according to the dateline

Faulkner added on the top of the first page of his manuscript. Faulkner had previously written and submitted to his publishers *Sanctuary*, though as I will detail in later chapters, that novel was returned to him for revisions and he would not publish it until 1931, after the 1930 publication of *AILD*. Blotner also notes that the manuscript for *AILD* was completed on 12 January 1930 (252)

“A Rose for Emily” would be accepted by the magazine *Forum* and published in the April 1930 issue (Blotner 256). This timeline precisely places “A Rose for Emily” and *As I Lay Dying* as written from October 1929 to January 1930, two coextensive works proverbially sitting beside each other on Faulkner’s new writing desk, the wedding present from his mother Maud.

23.) As it turns out, “A Rose for Emily” and *As I Lay Dying* are two of Faulkner’s most anthologized works, along with “Barn Burning” and “The Bear,” both works from the later 1930s and early 1940s.

24.) In “Moonlight,” we hear the expression in the italicized portion of the narration, a formal entry into the actual consciousness of the protagonist. In “A Rose for Emily,” the royal we of the narrator tells us that “Homer himself” said these words, but they are not delivered as a direct quotation from Homer himself, only repeated as, technically, hearsay. We, as readers, have to assume that the narrator is accurately reporting this phrase. However he intended for us to read the phrase, Faulkner included it in both stories.

As a useful point of reference, when Elma, Jr., in the iconic gay movie *Brokeback Mountain* is pressed by her father’s waitress girlfriend about why her father, Ennis, will date her but not marry her, Elma, Jr., explains that Ennis is “not the marrying kind.” Unlike her mother, who catches Ennis and Jake kissing and so discovers her husband’s “secret,” Elma, Jr., never witnesses her father in a compromising situation. The power of this phrase, though, rests in its acoustic value as a signifier of the open secret of homosexuality. Elma, Jr., is signaling that she

“knows” about her father even if he never tells her and despite his attempts to perform outwardly heterosexual courtship rituals, such as introducing a woman he is sleeping with to his daughter. On a more literary level, this open secret of men who are not the marrying kind animates much of Gary Richard’s *Lovers and Beloveds*, especially his chapter on *To Kill a Mockingbird*.

25.) For more of this conversation about Homer Barron’s homosexuality, see: Fick and Gold, “‘He Liked Men’: Homer, Homosexuality, and the Culture of Manhood in Faulkner’s ‘A Rose for Emily’”; Blythe and Sweet, “A Rosey Response to Fick and Gold”; and Robertson, “Response to Fick and Gold’s ‘He Liked Men’: Homer, Homosexuality, and the Culture of Manhood in Faulkner’s ‘A Rose for Emily’.” None of these essays elucidate Homer’s homosexuality. I would go so far as to suggest that they all partake in an institutional homophobia that seeks to find any way it can to identify male same-sex desire as anything except homosexuality. I would also stress that James Wallace makes the most cogent remarks about Homer in his short *Explicator* essay.

26.) Morrison probably also did not mean to praise Faulkner’s “gays” when she acknowledged his “gaze,” but her comments about his keen vision do apply to his understanding of homosexuality and prove worthy of the pun.

27.) In his life and in his fiction, Faulkner would often return to John Keats’ “Ode on a Grecian Urn” as his favorite poem. One could make a study of Faulkner dedicated entirely to finding its various manifestations in his fiction. I am implying that Homer was never ravished while he was alive.

28.) The connection of Homer Barron to Charles Butler, Jr., Faulkner’s grandfather, proves difficult to make in a holistic way. Homer’s being in town to build sidewalks in the late nineteenth century, however, does accord with Charles Bulter’s duties as tax collector and

overseer of sidewalks and street lamps, among other responsibilities. Charles Butler also ran away with his octroon mistress, leaving a wife and two children in Oxford to fend for themselves. According to Joel Williamson, the town made small gestures to free Lelia Swift, Charles' abandoned wife, from some of her fiscal responsibilities and from culpability in her husband's crime. On a general level, some of these details may very well animate "A Rose for Emily," though no evidence suggests Lelia Swift ever planned to poison her husband and sleep next to his body in an attempt to get him back after he left. Rather, the town's decision to exempt Emily from taxes vaguely suggests the real events in Oxford as the town chose not to hold responsible Lelia for her husband's theft nor expect her to support her family with no source of income.

As for necrophilia, Emily sleeps next to Homer's body for thirty years. The extent to which that "sleeping" involved any varieties of sexual practice with the corpse the story remains unclear in detailing. Certainly, Emily was attempting a kind of perverse erotics in bringing Homer into her bedroom and dressing him up as her husband, but whether or not she was ever able to consummate their marriage bed is considerably more debatable. One could argue that Emily's heterosexual design did not require physical sex; it just required that she had a husband in bed with her every night.

CHAPTER 4: CADET FAULKNER

1.) Cowley first published his account of uncovering Faulkner's "real" wartime experiences in 1966, while Blotner was collecting information for his biography. Blotner, however, goes beyond just the rumors that attracted Cowley's attention. In his interviews, Blotner compiled a long series of reference to war service, all of which he followed up with the

appropriate offices in various branches of the US and British militaries. His extensive cache of inquiries letters fills up several folders in BP. Usually, these letters were met with polite answers to the effect that no record of any such person or enlistment existed. Blotner would spend a great many years reconstructing the actual extent of Faulkner's wartime activities. The biographies, along with the work of James G. Watson and the collection of letters compiled in *Thinking of Home* give the best overall picture of Faulkner's experiences with the RFC.

2.) For more on how Cowley's *Portable Faulkner* helped establish Faulkner's reputation, see Lawrence H. Schwartz, *Creating Faulkner's Reputation*.

3.) His New Deal story is "The Tall Men"; his World War II stories include "Two Soldiers" and "Shall Not Perish"; his new World War I novel that would take ten years to write would finally appear as *A Fable* in 1955.

4.) A reader corrected my original use of "RAF" as the branch of the British armed services in which Faulkner served. When Faulkner first enlisted, that branch was still known as the Royal Flying Corps, of the RFC. The name change occurred later: the RFC became the RAF, or the Royal Air Force. In 1948 in his letter exchange with Cowley, Faulkner used the abbreviation RAF. Cowley had no qualms about using that name for the service in his original essay. These two abbreviations name the same branch of service, effectively, though RFC seems the more historically accurate for scholars to use even as the actual people involved were fairly unconcerned with the finer points of the distinction. Faulkner did, in fact, "belong to the RAF/[RFC] in 1918," as he claimed to Cowley. He simply failed to mention that he was a cadet in flight training in Canada and never received his wings. Nonetheless, that flight training was to become an RFC/RAF flyer.

5.) I am purposely leaving the implications of Faulkner's language in his response to

Cowley uncommented upon in regard to this rejoinder. To “bugger up” something, or to “bugger,” is an expression often associated with deviant sexuality, usually as a colloquial way of naming sodomy. That Faulkner is admonishing Cowley not “to bugger up” his biography by mentioning his war service would seem to lend weight to the argument I am making in this chapter that service in the war carried with it [homo]sexual connotations. That Faulkner used his war experiences throughout his life but did not want his stories recorded could speak to his negotiations with a proverbial closet; his war experience was his open secret. His primary motivation for not wanting Cowley to print the material was that he knew that once it was in print, later inquirers could verify it, or in this case fail to verify it and thus expose Faulkner’s lie. The real open secret was that Faulkner was never in the war. In 1948, Cowley allowed himself to become complicit in maintaining Faulkner’s open secret of not serving. Cowley would not publish these letters until after Faulkner’s death.

The problem with following this lead on “bugger up” in this context is that Faulkner’s reference does not quite fit. If Faulkner had served, then the “truth” about that service could very well “bugger up” his biography with the implications that perhaps in the war he had a homosexual romance. Faulkner, however, did not serve. When Cowley chose to comply with Faulkner’s wishes and omit reference to his service, Cowley effectively maintained the open secret about Faulkner’s lack of service. Maintaining that secret also “buggered up” our understanding of Faulkner’s life. One might reasonably argue that Faulkner wanted Cowley to omit war details so they could never be proven false and so Faulkner could maintain his ambiguous status as a war hero, a status that would link his self-presentation to precisely the kind of connotations that would bugger up his biography.

The twists and turns of Faulkner motivations and the implications of his choice of words

in this instance prove difficult to unravel. I am inclined to assume that Faulkner inadvertently used the expression “bugger up” without meaning to invoke its connotations for homosexual activities. Elsewhere in this study, I prefer to leave open the extent to which Faulkner purposely used selected phrasing and imagery, though I am inclined to believe much of his queer writing was purposely and consciously crafted. Therefore, I leave “bugger up” out of the body of this study because it strikes me as an unconscious Freudian slip. It deserves comment, but generally I prefer that this study not become a psychoanalysis of Faulkner’s subconscious impulses. I am sticking to what he knew and experienced, not what his *id* might have screamed from the opacity of his un/subconsciousness.

6.) Lindemann employs a variety of means to discuss Cather’s use of *queer* to mean *lesbian* in her letters, but Lindemann does not directly quote from those letters in her study because Cather’s estate forbid direct quotation from those letters when Lindemann was writing her study (though some people might claim that Lindemann’s phrasing in certain passages sounds very Catherian). The embargo that Lindemann faced, however, has finally been removed. In 2013, Cather’s letters were published by Knopf. This book does quote from those letters and finally verifies what scholars have long known but have been unable to affirm: Willa Cather had intimate and loving relationships with women. We can call her a lesbian, at least with an appropriate degree of freedom to understand that her self-identification is culturally contingent on her historical moment and that we should be careful not to stereotype her. To say this another way, we can call her a lesbian, not as a slight on her character or reputation but as a way of discussing her connections to a larger multifaceted sense of identity shared by many women and as a way to understand her writings anew, more fully, and ultimately for the better.

7.) For more on nativist identity in this period, see Walter Benn Michaels *Our America*,

which, of course, Lindemann cites in her study. Indeed, Cather occupies a great deal of Michael's attention.

8.) The sexual wound motif is certainly still relevant, even in contemporary story-telling about World War I. As an item of curiosity, the source of much of the conflict in Season Two of *Downton Abbey*, or at least one of the many plot twists in the season, is when Matthew is "paralyzed" from the waist down by a German shell and sent to convalesce at home at Downton. The paralysis accordingly sterilizes him--as the doctor tells Lord Grantham, the "sexual reflex" is below the area where Matthew suffered his wound. Lord Grantham is heartbroken that his heir can produce no heir. Matthew rejects Lavinia, his fiancée, after explaining to her that they cannot be "properly" married and he will not doom her to a life of celibacy as the nurse of a crippled husband. Mary emerges as Matthew's chief caretaker, though Lavinia returns in time for Matthew's miraculous recovery. As soon as he can walk again, Matthew and Lavinia begin to plan their wedding, though the really important scenes in regard to their forthcoming "proper" marriage occurs when Matthew, still an invalid, registers shock as he "feels something" in his legs as the nerves repair themselves. The look on his face at these moments suggests his returning sensations might very well involve a muscle not in his legs but rather a twitch in his pajama bottoms elsewhere.

Moreover, Matthew only confides his suspicious twinges to Bates, himself a wounded veteran of an unspecified African war. Of course, Bates wants to marry Anna, but he cannot do so because his current wife refuses to divorce him, causing he and Anna no end of sexual frustration until Mrs. Bates dies and Anna and Bates can finally marry and have their own romantic honeymoon scene in a spare bedroom that Mary arranges for them. Bates' cannot "properly" marry Anna because he already has a wife, whom he met while he was in the army;

but his leg wound is no minor detail. He was wounded in the war. Subsequently, he married a woman determined to ruin him. She is his sexual wound, metaphorically embodied in his leg injury that makes everyone treat him like a cripple.

Julian Fellowes, the head writer for the series, is clearly borrowing from the World War I tradition of wounded soldiers, only adding the romantic twist that Matthew recovers miraculously whereas Jake Barnes and Clifford Chatterley never do (and Mrs. Bates' puts rat poisoning in her pie to kill herself--which vaguely reminds one of events in "A Rose for Emily"). To guarantee that Matthew and Mary end up together, Fellowes then employs another element of World War I narratives, the Spanish Flu, to kill off Lavinia so Mary and Matthew can finally properly marry each other and produce the male heir who eventually appears at the end of Season Three (his purpose fulfilled, Matthew dies in a car wreck on his way home from Mary's bed in the maternity ward of the local hospital). The implausibility of many of the plot devices in the series are made plausible by their being rooted in a well-established tradition of World War I narratives.

9.) In Shakespeare's poem, Adonis suffers a puncture to his thigh when a boar tries to kiss his crotch in an image of fellatio. Venus laments that the boar's tusks were not her lips instead. In *The Odyssey*, Odysseus suffers a leg wound from a boar while on a hunt during his childhood. That wound becomes the key identifying mark on his body when he returns in disguise to Ithaca to reclaim Penelope from the suitors attempting to usurp his marriage bed. In both Shakespeare and Homer, the leg wound becomes a metaphor for sexual injury that proper heterosexuality can heal (had the boar not attempted to fellate Adonis then he might have lived; Odysseus' old wound proves fundamental to his restoration as rightful husband and king, though the wound is no longer important once he is restored, only while he is seeking restoration).

Not only did Faulkner name his novel after a line from *The Odyssey*, he also took a Shakespeare class while he was enrolled at Ole Miss. He was likely aware of the symbolic value of the wounds represented in each.

10.) For more on the implications of Faulkner's marriage and how the responsibilities changed his outlook, see Kartiganer, "By It I Would Stand or Fall," which I will return to in Chapter 6 as I turn my attention directly to Darl.

11.) For more on the hyacinth letters used against Wilde, See Richard Ellmann, *Oscar Wilde*, pp. 390, 436-37, and 446-47. For more on Apollo and Hyacinthus, see Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, Book X.

12.) It is worth noting a distinction between my interest in how homosexuality influences literature versus Fussell's. Though his study is a masterful work on WWI writing, Fussell is more interested in "homoeroticism" as a literary device than in homosexuality as an actual practice during the war. As he states, "I use that term [homoeroticism] to imply a sublimated (i.e., 'chaste') form of temporary homosexuality. Of the active, unsublimated kind, there was very little at the front" (272). He refers often in his study to "school homosexuality" from which men, as they grow up and mature, "recover," as he claims is the case for Robert Graves, among others. As for actual homosexuality, when he is forced to discuss it, Fussell reverts to less majestic rhetoric, such as when he declares of Uranian Greek love and of men like Walter Pater who wrote about *and* practiced same-sex love that "very frequently such highmindedness was impossible to sustain, and earnest ideal pedophilia found itself descending to ordinary pederastic sodomy" (284).

It would be wrong to dismiss Fussell as a homophobe when, in the larger view, his rhetoric is a product of institutional homophobia rampant even among the Liberal Arts and

among liberal-minded intellectuals who can discuss the “idea” but refuse to humanize the reality of gay lives because of their personal aversion for the actual sexual practices of gay males. Oddly, Fussell’s reticence costs him a great deal in his chapter “Soldier Boys,” from which both of the above quotations come. Though elsewhere in his study, he is modestly more open about Owen’s homosexuality, in the actual chapter “Soldier Boys,” in which Owen becomes the central figure of interest, not once does Fussell ever identify Owen as homosexual. Fussell instead prefers to discuss Owen’s “de-sexed” imagery and his “poetic crush” on Siegfried Sassoon (a minor rhetorical distinction that allows him elsewhere in his study to discuss Sassoon without having to concede that he, too, had homosexual leanings which he never recovered from after his school days).

Other scholars are more willing to discuss both Owen’s sexuality and the “descen[t] to ordinary pederastic sodomy” on the front. As an example, Jonathan Cutbill reads a letter Owen wrote to Sassoon in October 1918 as “talking (or hinting) about [. . .] a sexual encounter” in the trenches with a “seraphic lance corporal” (qtd. in Kerr 212). Always a victim of the institution of Liberal Arts, this speculation is downplayed by Douglas Kerr, who argues that, among the carnage of war, just “to speak in privacy and as equals” with the corporal would have been “what mattered most” (212). Kerr asserts that speculating about actual sex between the two men “seems to underestimate the potency of language itself to thrill the poet” (212). Such de-sexualized thrills may have been rampant on the front, but it is reasonable to suggest that Owen might have both had sex with men and remained a high-minded, intellectual poet. Elsewhere, Kerr speaks quite openly about Owen’s sense of homosexual identity, but it is odd that scholars are so reluctant to agree that words *and* actions might be equal parts of the experience of homosexuality in the war.

13.) In *Men Like That*, Howard actually makes this narrative of gay identity and going to war explicit with several interviews and one provocative picture of two young marines joyously playing with their penises together in their naval uniforms. Howard, however, explains this narrative in relation to World War II and interviews veterans of that war who first encountered homosexuality and found a space in which to be openly gay in that war and in the large cities (Los Angeles, San Francisco, San Diego, and New York) where the armed services gathered personnel to transport them to their various martial theaters. James Barr's novel *Quatrefoil* (1950) explores a homosexual relationship that emerges in the months immediately following the end of the war--the young protagonist is from a rich family in a small midwestern town and can only act on his homosexual impulses while away on various military assignments. Barr's novel merits mentioning because it is often considered one of the most literary gay novels of its generation, the post-war 1950s. The novel participates in the same narrative of movement and urbanization and precedes the non-martial but nonetheless similar narratives of later generations, such as *Beebo Brinker* and *Tales of the City*.

CHAPTER 5: QUEER SOLDIERS

1.) For more on the history of the Spanish Flu, or the Great Influenza, see John Barry; another accessible history is the documentary *Influenza 1918* aired on PBS as part of the series *American Experience*. Both give good, if popular, overviews of the history of the extremely deadly outbreaks of influenza in the late 1910s and early 1920s.

2.) For more on how the Spanish Flu influenced the post-war era, see Crosby.

3.) As a matter of basic epidemiology, mobility and relative population are critical factors in the spread of any disease, from viral contagions such as the Flu to bacterial infections such as

the Bubonic Plague. The basic patterns of contemporary epidemiology were intuited by civilizations long before microscopes were invented that could reveal the existence of cells, much less before more powerful technology allowed scientists to understand the small semi-organism known as a virus. In Medieval Italy, Boccaccio took for granted that ten people with the means to travel would isolate themselves in a rural villa during an outbreak of plague because experience, even without the scientific method, bore out the basic communicability of the disease. His collection of stories, *The Decameron*, is one of the benchmarks of Western Literature.

Other diseases share the same patterns of communication and dissemination. In his series *The Civil War*, Ken Burns often cites the staggering death rates due to illness in army camps and goes so far as explaining that the spread of disease was particularly harmful to young men who had spent their whole lives on rural farms and only in camp found themselves exposed to many basic childhood diseases for the first time. My own interest in epidemiology stems from AIDS research. The accepted history of AIDS and its spread charts a colonial path as a virus that probably existed in small isolated populations in Western African as early as the 1880s slowly and moved into the larger populations centers of colonial capitals as those rural populations underwent mass migrations in search of work (or at times, forced to move in order to work). For more on AIDS and its spread--which serves as an excellent contemporary epidemiological case study--see Pepin *The Origin of AIDS*.

According to notes in the BP, Oxford suffered at least two cases of the flu in 1918. Other newspaper clippings that Blotner collected from North Mississippi imply that some towns in the area considered imposing quarantines when outbreaks occurred in the area. Even to the present, fear of especially potent strains of the flu re-emerge. In 2009-10, a particularly vigorous version

of the flu, nicknamed “Swine Flu,” spread through the population at Ole Miss. Student Health took steps to quarantine potential flu patients from other patients in their waiting room. Students diagnosed with the flu were ordered to stay home from class, preferably isolated in their dormitories with minimal contact with other students, for up to a week. Other colleges and universities considered shutting down all together. The model of a large student population consisting of individuals from a broad geographical area condensed on a small campus precisely parallels the circumstances most conducive to the rapid spread of communicable diseases, much as war service in World War I was conducive to the spread of the disease for similar reasons of mobility and population.

4.) William Faulkner, Review, *The Road Back*, by Erich Maria Remarque, *The New Republic*; 20 May 1931. Photocopy in BP.

5.) From “Disabled,” lines 11-12. Line 13 contains the passage about the invalid’s “queer disease.”

6.) This moniker for the manuscript comes from a series of telegraphs passed between Phil Stone and Faulkner. See Blotner 135.

7.) In “Ratliff’s Buggies,” Noel Polk argues that Will Varner has allowed Flem Snopes literally to fuck him in the ass because Will Varner refuses to sit on Ratliff’s buggy, which Polk concludes must mean his ass is sore. Polk’s reading is unfortunate for LGBT studies in Faulkner, but if we were to follow his particular brand of exegesis from that scene in a reading of this one, then we could conclude that the “thin shallow fire across [Robert’s] young behind” is a provocative description of anal sex. The language could be construed as describing the feeling of ejaculate on his butt or possibly the early moments of penetration, since the fire is shallow rather than deep.

While I certainly believe that Faulkner was capable of and aware of such imagery, I also do not think it behooves critics to construe such imagery in vulgar and erroneous ways. Polk's conclusions carry with them a deep homophobia and a sheer lack of knowledge about the mechanics and after-effects of anal sex. Those conclusions reveal Polk's homophobia, not Faulkner's. Indeed, this passage from *Soldiers' Pay* presents a far less painful description of anal sex than Will Varner's refusal to sit down because his ass is sore. Should we assume this more poetic and sexual description meant that Faulkner could speak of this sensation from experience? Does he mean to imply that he enjoyed it? Neither of these questions deserve an answer. The passage is provocative, intentionally so; but it does not prove anything about Faulkner's thoughts on anal sex. Any reading that attempts to extract from this passage--or the passage Polk reads in "Ratliff's Buggies"--a general assertion about physical homosexual acts are more important for what they say about the critic than what they say about Faulkner.

Will Varner's ass does not hurt because he had anal sex with a man (Flem Snopes is impotent, also, an important point that Polk misses). Young Robert Saunders exposes his ass, but he is not getting fucked in it.

8.) See Chapter 2, Note 31.

9.) See Blotner, p. 169. Faulkner wrote home to his mother from Dieppe about a story he had just completed. Blotner identifies that story as "The Leg." The story would not appear in finished form, however, for at least nine years. Faulkner later included it in *Collected Stories*.

10.) For a different queer reading of "The Leg," see Catherine Kodat, "Unhistoricizing Faulkner."

11.) In the one volume edition, Blotner provides that the story was influenced by a serialized anonymous war diary titled *War Birds*, published in 1926. Therefore, the story

probably was written after 1926 and well after Faulkner's return from his trip to Europe. In the two volume edition, Blotner also offers that the story was told from the point of view of 1930 in a frame narrative (648), which would suggest that Faulkner wrote it long after *Flags in the Dust*, which he wrote in 1926-27. In general, Faulkner did not set stories in the future. He told stories either set in the past or in his contemporary moment. If Blotner is right, then the story was written in 1930. Indeed, in the published version of the story, the narrator explains that "[a]fter twelve years I think of us as bugs on the surface of the water, isolant and aimless and unflagging" (408). Twelve years after 1918, when the war ended and when the story is set, would be 1930. Clearly, the version Faulkner published was written in 1930. Bayard Sartoris and the other characters in the story, however, all appear in *Flags in the Dust*, suggesting that Faulkner was already drafting material that would appear in the later published story.

I am placing this story here because of this interior chronology, though that placement privileges a coherence to my narrative that may be false. Had Faulkner written the story entirely in 1930, relatively from scratch, the timing would suggest that he was performing in that story a form of quarantine similar to what he does to Darl Bundren (see Chapter 6). Darl is carted off to the asylum in Jackson. The explicitly homosexual material Bayard confronts in "Ad Astra" is firmly placed on foreign shores in Europe. In this alternative timeline--which bears a closer resemblance to when Faulkner most likely wrote "Ad Astra"--the tensions in the story add to the overall impression that I mean to construct, that his actual marriage led Faulkner to cordon off the queer elements of his life and remove them from his immediate surroundings. This cordoning off, coinciding with Faulkner's marriage, figuratively removes Bayard's encounter with homosexuality from Yoknapatawpha County and places it in distant Europe in the past. This displacement in location and time bears striking similarities to Darl's tragic life.

12.) If Faulkner wrote the story in 1930, this statement does not foretell anything.

Faulkner killed Bayard in a plane wreck in manuscript for his novel in 1927, so if he wrote this passage in 1930, he is simply reminding readers what they already know: Bayard is dead. The elliptical nature of this passage--to write in the present a past statement that foretells a future just shy of the present in which the past statement was written--is a decidedly complex element of the story.

13.) See Bruhm, *Reflecting Narcissus*.

14.) See Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, Book III.

15.) For more on *non-sense* and minstrelsy, see Houston Baker, *Modernism and the Harlem Renaissance*.

16.) Sedgwick critiques the “homosexual panic” defense far more deeply than Duvall, who merely applies the premise to his reading. Sedgwick explains that the underlying tension of the defense--that there are openly homosexual men and latently homosexual men--additionally endorses a “minoritizing taxonomy” of homosexuals as other (there are still two types of gay men, both demonstrably different from the population at large). On the one hand, Sedgwick’s critiques are extremely warranted and should serve to make any critic pause before discussing homosexual panic or looking for it in works of literature. On the other hand, her study--and Duvall’s--preceded one of the most publicized instances of the defense in the trial of the murderers of Matthew Shepherd. The reality of this defense being offered before the public in 1998 should demonstrate that, theory aside, the discourse surrounding “homosexuality” has dramatic real world consequences and does shape the lives of those who interpellate it. Ideally, we would do away with discourse all together and live in a happy Marxist utopia where labels and identities do not matter anymore, everyone lives in peace in harmony, and no one suffers the

burden of a minortizing taxonomy that others them into a subordinate place in society at large. In theory, this outcome would be marvelous.

No homosexual would ever believe it is likely to occur and could probably offer numerous first-hand testimony that speak to how improbable its realization is or ever will be. In short, that the gay panic defense reasserts a minortizing taxonomy should not be construed to deny the significance of discussing homosexual lives. The so-called double-bind of homosexual identity--that it both identifies and minoritizes at the same time--should not be construed as a reason to dismiss the concerns faced by LGBT-identified people nor to group LGBT-identified people into the same discursive position as people who manifest their homophobia in violent acts against homosexuals.

CHAPTER 6: GAY DARL

1.) See Kartiganer, "The Farm and the Journey: Ways of Mourning and Meaning in *As I Lay Dying*" for an excellent reading of the plot of the novel along these lines.

2.) Notably, in his essay Pigg used the print edition of the *OED* from 1989 to craft his chronology of the word *queer*. By 2007, in the online edition of the *OED*, the 1922 government reference had been supplanted as an example of the word to mean "homosexual" by the earlier 1914 and 1915 examples. The example Pigg cites may be more germane to understanding Darl's character. The earlier examples, however, establish a longer and more thorough pedigree for the term and its long-standing cultural relevance as a way to describe homosexuality.

3.) Howe and Cleanth Brooks are both guilty of almost completely ignoring the female voices in the novel, including Dewey Dell's, though she is the sister who is also a Bundren and should exhibit the same "fraternal" feelings for Howe's (and Brooks') reading to make sense.

4.) In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, Freud writes, “The pleasure principle long persists, however, as a method of working employed by the sexual instincts, which was so hard to ‘educate,’ and, starting from those instincts, or in the ego itself, it often succeeds in overcoming the reality principle, to the detriment of the organism as a whole” (4). He means to say that “educating” the desire for sexual gratification into a proper use of sex as a means of procreation requires a learning process. We can easily spot the nature/nurture divide that Freud implicates in this structure. If *Eros* is a biological principle that originates in basic cellular reproduction, then how can it also be something “learned” through education, a process that involves trial and error experimentation in a social setting? Why would we need to learn a biological necessity?

Freud is not actually failing in his logic at this moment. According to his logic, the basic biological drive that he discusses in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* is basis for the later sociological “education” that is actually the subject of his next study, *Civilization and Its Discontents*. These two studies are best read side-by-side, one the biological study, the other the sociological version of the same argument; one the study of basic cellular impulses, the other a much fuller accounting of the complexities of human desire in a complex social world. The education he refers to early in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* becomes the basis for the “discomfort/discontentment” of *Civilization and Its Discontents*. As he points out when he first discusses “education,” the problem is that the sex drive (*Eros*) is *not* the same as the pleasure principle but can easily be confused with it because sexual arousal can be pleasurable. One must be careful, though, because pleasurable sexual arousal can also be non-procreative. One must be educated to distinguish between these two basic biological impulses (for pleasure and for sexual reproduction). The pursuit of sexual pleasure could lead to the death of the species. The repression of pleasure leads to a more stable society in which proper sexual function can occur,

even if the members of that society are faced with a degree of discomfort in their lives for the rigid expectations of the sexual order. Alas, the “pain” of that discomfort stems from the difference between *Eros/Thanatos* and pleasure/pain. *Eros* is not pleasure; *Thanatos* is not pain. They are drives beyond the pleasure principle.

In Freud’s theories, there is no separation between the biological and the sociological. The latter grows out of the former. Reading *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* and *Civilization and Its Discontents* together helps bridge the divide that seems to emerge with this early reference to “education” in a primarily biological study. Freud wants to assert that all sociological conditions have a biological basis, or that even what appears to be a product of “nurture” has a base in “nature.” Thus Freud can assert that the rigid structures of heterosexual relationships in his highly gendered and normative Viennese society are “natural.” Later post-structuralist critics would see the distinctions much more clearly than Freud did. His desire to naturalize social expectations are precisely what undoes his theories. He believed that men and women had natural roles to play in sexual relationships. We are currently more keen on distinguishing that oppressive sexual regimes are purely a product of convention, not a natural outgrowth of deeply biological impulses.

5.) A fellow graduate student at the University of Mississippi, Ann Marie Schott, succinctly and powerfully reduced Edelman’s theory to a single aphorism in a class on Cold War literature. Speaking about John Updike’s *Run, Rabbit, Run* and the homoerotic imagery that saturates the text, Schott deduced that the ending of the novel--the death of the baby--follows from that homoeroticism as a consequence of it (she wrote about this in her Master’s thesis, defended in Fall 2011). On the spur of the moment in class, she phrased her deduction simply: “There’s nothing gayer than a dead baby.” Though a pithy statement on the surface, on close

inspection, it does, in fact, bear out the entirety of Edelman's theory. To follow Schott's insights to their logical conclusion in *As I Lay Dying*, had Dewey Dell succeeded in having an abortion, her dead baby would represent a continual pursuit of her singular desire and would have proven a detriment to the overall goals of the family (they would not have had her money to help Anse get his new teeth, which enable him get a new wife). Had she not sublimated her desires, then she likely would have been far less vicious to Darl for failing to sublimate his. Darl would have stood a far better chance of remaining in the narrative; Anse would have stood less of a chance of finding a new wife. The queer element (Darl) would overshadow the futurity of the heterosexual relationship between Anse and the new Mrs. Bundren. The dead baby would have kept the gay man in the story, the new marriage out. As Schott said, "There's nothing gayer than a dead baby."

6.) Lest my meaning in this sentence by misconstrued, I refer to Darl's "tragic ending" specifically in relationship to the marriage plot of the novel. In classical literature, a marriage plot is a comedy. To the extent that comedy and tragedy are diametrically opposed to each other, then Darl's queer fate suggests that his story is a tragedy. His "flaw" is his homosexual desire. This desire precludes his participation in the heterosexual designs of the rest of his family and nullifies his value as emblematic of futurity. That lack of a future (death or some other equally horrifying end) marks the fate of the tragic hero. In a tragedy, there is no marriage; there is no future. Comedies end with a new beginning; tragedies just end with "a promised end," to quote from *King Lear*. One could reasonably argue of *As I Lay Dying* that the elements of comedy (the marriage plot) mixed with tragedy (Darl's fate) make this novel similar to one of Shakespeare's problem plays. To pursue this connection would be beyond the scope of this study, but there is precedent for such a conversation. As early as the Winter 1931 edition of *Southwest Review*,

Henry Nash Smith, in his review entitled “A Troubled Vision” notes William Faulkner’s “kinship with the Elizabethans” for his blending of morbid and poetic, dark and light into the fabric of this particular novel. For a sample of Smith’s essay, see *The Norton Critical Edition of As I Lay Dying*, ed. Michael Gorra, pp. 160-161.

7.) See Peter Brooks *Reading for the Plot*, particularly his chapter “Freud’s Masterplot: A Model for Narrative” (pp. 90-112). He also has a chapter devoted to *Absalom* (pp. 286-312), but he does not, unfortunately, write about *As I Lay Dying*. Brooks’ study is masterful, and I do not mean to critique it as unworthy of consideration for what I am calling its heterosexist legacies. Rather, if Lee Edelman uses the basic assumptions of *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* with a sense of irony to demonstrate how Queer Theory can be bound to images of death and the lack of futurity, Brooks does not ironize his use of Freud’s premise. He explores instead how useful Freud’s theory is to understand why some novels provide such excellent plots. He argues that our greatest literature (including *Absalom, Absalom!*) relies on a version of Freudian poetics to undergird its basic structure. A knee-jerk reaction to Brooks would be to dismiss his study as an example of the pitfalls of structuralist criticism (after all, his study has a distinct focus on dead white authors from a Eurocentric tradition). Unfortunately, the novels in his study have, in fact, been given prime placement in the Western Canon, exclusive of his explications of them. Brooks is guilty of accepting the status quo, but he cannot be blamed for establishing it. Furthermore, his argument does offer a thoughtful entry into more problematic and nuanced discussions of the heterosexist bias of literature, the canon, and other critical methodologies. If the great novels of the Western Canon are united by their interests in the sexual drives of their protagonists--none of whom are gay in Brooks study--then the Western Canon would seem to be built on novels about heterosexuality, either in the form of marriage (comedy) or the failure to marry (tragedy).

8.) For an overview of this feminist erotics, see Audre Lorde's "Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power" and Adrienne Rich's "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence." Alice Walker most clearly expresses her version of this erotics in her differentiation of the terms "Womanism" and "Lesbianism." Rich specifically cites Lorde in her essay. Though certainly a well-read critic, Walker comes to her constructions largely on her own terms, though how she constructs her terms coincides nicely with Rich's and Lorde's theorizing. For the best account of Walker's theories, see *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens*. I am expanding on the exegeses of these second-wave feminist critics in order to formulate a broader, non-gendered form of gay erotics. I believe they would warrant my use of their term.

9.) These notations identify the passage according to the order of the occurrence of the word *queer*, followed by who says that word, in which monologue of the overall 59 that character says it, and in which of that character's monologues it appears. So, in the case of 1.) Cora (6/2): This is the first appearance of the word *queer*. Cora says it in the sixth monologue of the novel, her second monologue. Also, the word itself is boldfaced and italicized for emphasis.

CHAPTER 7: LA VITA NUOVA

1.) By the time that Faulkner wrote the introduction to the Modern Library edition, he had already published *Light in August*, the true successor to *As I Lay Dying* in the chronology of Faulkner's aesthetic creations. Therefore, when Faulkner made his case for *Sanctuary*, he was not merely placing it in relation to *As I Lay Dying* and *The Sound and the Fury*, but to *Light in August* as well.

2.) Interview, Ben Wasson by Joseph Blotner; 28 March 1965. BP. All the details of this paragraph stem from one notecard by Blotner dated 1925, though he subsequently crossed out

that date and concluded in pencil that these events actually appertained to 1924.

3.) Interview, Carl and Betty Carner by Joseph Blotner; 23 August 1965. BP.

4.) Interview, Owen Crump by Joseph Blotner; 9 June 1966. BP. All subsequent quotations from this paragraph from the same interview. Stark Young and Lyle Saxon are known homosexuals. Owen Crump's sexuality is less clear. He may not have been homosexual. The gay Southerners I reference are Young and Saxon.

5.) "Slumming it" is the common slang expression for the practice of middle-class whites venturing to Harlem (primarily, though also to the Village at times) to experience the distinct cultures there. Chauncey describes this practice in *Gay New York* and explains that it pertained to similar ventures in the Bowery and the Lower East Side as well (for the Village, see pp. 233-34, 236, 314; for the Bowery and the Lower East Side, see pp. 36-41, 44). Chauncey reduces the expression to the verb "slumming," but I prefer the more colloquial "slumming it" as the complete phrase. Harlem in particular became a site for "slumming it" because it was a predominantly black community where city officials allowed for greater sexual licentiousness. The black community became a place where middle-class whites could go to experience something outside of the norms allowed in their essentially segregated areas of the city. In fact, Chauncey begins his study with an image of a black drag queen from a bar in Harlem. Drag culture flourished in Harlem in the 1920s as a result of its economic appeal to slumming whites. Simultaneously, black culture flourished in the jazz halls of Harlem and eventually infiltrated African-American literary production. When whites slummed it in Harlem in the 1920s, they were inadvertently experiencing first hand the cultural explosion of the Harlem Renaissance. Beneath the surface of that Renaissance, a strong homosexual presence permeated the artistic productions that sprung from it. The unique economy that drew white middle-class disposable

income into the black community in Harlem had a gay as well as a musical basis. Synergistically, the gay element and other aesthetic elements of the Harlem scene in the 1920s promoted and enhanced each other.

Chauncey devotes significant attention to slumming. A complete reference can be found in his index. Almost beside the entry for “slumming,” in the right-hand column on the same page, that index includes a lengthy entry for Chauncey’s discussion of “speakeasies,” including specific discussions of “as gay meeting places” and “in Greenwich Village” (index, p. 474).

6.) Interview, Leland Heyward by Joseph Blotner; 21 January 1965. BP.

7.) Interview, Morty (Morton) Goldman by Joseph Blotner; 21 February 1967. BP.

8.) See Benjamin Wise. Also, see discussion of Percy and Stark Young from Chapters One and Two of this study.

9.) Letter, William Faulkner to Bennett Cerf; undated. BP. Blotner supplies in pencil on the side, in reference to *The Red Badge of Courage* that it was autographed by WF at “Xmas 1932.” At this time, Cerf was courting Faulkner to put out an edition of *The Sound and the Fury*, a proposal which Faulkner alludes to in the same letter to help date it.

10.) Interview, Eric and Rita Devine with Joseph Blotner; 15 August 1965. BP.

11.) An image of Bentley in her white tuxedo, top hat, and cane appeared on the cover of the May 2009 edition of *PMLA*. Patricia Yaeger, the editor of the volume, included a note about Bentley as an embodiment for the “Cluster on Queer Metaphor” that was the issues focus. See “Editor’s Note,” pp. 721-26.

12.) Interview, Ben Wasson by Joseph Blotner; 28 March 1965. BP.

13.) Though Chauncey does not dwell extensively on the racial make-up of the Village, he clearly aligns Harlem with an extensive African-American presence. Greenwich Village may

have been home to “Bohemians,” but in this case the name seems to refer to people who lived a particular brand of artistic life, not necessarily to people of Bohemian origin. Those people were mostly white. To slum it among a large African-American population required going to Harlem.

14.) Letter, William Faulkner to Ben Wasson; 12 Feb. 1933. BP.

15.) Interview, Morton (Morty) Goldman by Joseph Blotner; 21 Feb. 1967. BP.

CHAPTER 8: MEDIATED VISION

1.) Popeye rapes Temple with a corncob because he is impotent. Oddly, Polchin’s interpretation of Popeye as a homosexual, who also happens to be impotent, accords with Noel Polk’s interpretation of Will Varner and Flem Snopes as gay lovers in *The Hamlet*, as detailed in Polk’s study “Ratliff’s Buggies.” Flem is impotent, but that fact does not prevent Polk from deducing that Will Varner’s ass is sore because Flem fucked him in it. Perhaps Polk means to imply that Flem also used a corncob. If Flem is impotent, he would not have been able to penetrate Will Varner with his penis.

There is something unfortunate in the predilection of Faulkner scholars--Polchin and Polk--to align male homosexuality with impotent characters. Of course, to the degree that impotence implies a lack of reproductive capability and an end to the futurity promised by proper heterosexual unions, these scholars are simply reiterating the premise Edelman deconstructs in *No Future*. Homosexuals and impotent men are fundamentally the same from this perspective; both are incapable of real (hetero)sexual fulfillment and reproduction. Conversely, in his *Out* magazine essay, Joe Thompson denies that Woolcott could be a homosexual *because* Woolcott was impotent and therefore could not participate in sexual activity. For Thompson, sexual “identity” is associated with sexual activity. Without the activity, there can be no identity, at least

not as a homosexual. Polchin and Polk are far too invested in homosexuality as a larger state of being--even without physically being able to have sex, Popeye and Flem are homosexual because they do not want to engage in reproductive sex. They come to represent a case study of homosexual identity (Polchin) or an image of cold-blooded but destructive acquisitive capitalism that happens to also be gay (Polk). The identities overshadow any possible sexual activity in which these men might engage. Thompson is too invested in sexual identity as an action, not as a state of being. Men who are not actively having sex with other men can still consider themselves homosexuals. One is not gay only when one is having gay sex. All three scholars over-simplify the complexity of sexual identity.

2.) Polchin pauses briefly to consider that Popeye projects his own desires for Red onto Temple and that projection accounts for his motivation for bring Temple to Memphis. He does not explain this interpretation in great detail. The reading that follows, in which I align Popeye, Temple, and Red with Sedgwick's triangulated pattern from *Between Men*, is my own interpretation, but it grows out of Polchin's brief discussion of "projection." There is reason to believe that Popeye might have some latent sexual desire for Red. Polchin implies that such desire exists, but he does not develop this theme.

3.) See Duvall, "Faulkner's Black Sexuality"; also, *Race and White Identity in Southern Fiction*.

4.) See note 7. Also, see Somerville, *Queering the Color Line*.

5.) Sedgwick cites Foucault to verify her chronology. Following Foucault's theories in *The History of Sexuality*, sometime between 1850 and 1890, psychologist invented the word *homosexual* and effectively made a species to study out of what had formerly been just an action between men. I disagree with Foucault's theory to the extent that everything fundamentally

changed in the latter nineteenth century; I would argue instead that the process was *much* more gradual and that scholars can productively read for homosexuality in much older texts and as part of a much older tradition than Foucault allows. Be that as it may, for the purposes of this study, my focus lies entirely in the twentieth century, well after the supposed “invention” of homosexuality almost universally accepted by Queer Theorist. Thus, to argue with Foucault on this matter is a mute point.

Sedgwick exploits the rigid distinction of Foucault’s theory in her formulations in her two studies. In *Between Men*, male same-sex desire was homosocial. In *Epistemology of the Closet*, that desire became either homosexual or homophobic (see *Epistemology* pp. 8-15). Thus we cannot apply the premise of *Between Men* to twentieth century texts unless we also change its terminology. If desires in twentieth century fiction are triangulated through two men and one woman, the bonds between the men are no longer simply homosocial, but *must* be read as homosexual or homophobic based on the premise that men in the twentieth century would conceive of these bonds differently than their forebears because of different discursive practices.

6.) “A Courtship” and *Go Down, Moses* were published in the 1940s, but I am putting them in this chapter because they belong, thematically, to the concerns and mediated vision of Faulkner in the 1930s and can be read as extensions of his perspective during that period. As I will argue in Chapter 10, Faulkner began to reassess this vision in 1939 when he wrote *The Hamlet*, but in the 1940s, he maintained a double-vision where his depictions shifted and remained unclear. Not until the 1950s will he finally articulate a clear and unmediated vision of homosexuality again. Therefore, the 1940s serve as a transitional period, and works written during the early 1940s can belong to his earlier vision.

7.) Two other worthwhile touchstones for the connections between race and queer

sexuality at this time are: Mason Stokes, *The Color of Sex*, in which Stokes links whiteness to heterosexuality to anxiety along a vector of race preservation and as part of the program of white supremacy at the turn of the twentieth century; and Samuel Delaney, "Some Queer Notions about Race," in which Delaney posits that "race" is a familial distinction measured in the transmission of genetic features (family, or *raza*, the Spanish root of the word *race*) and "homosexuality," as the end of sexual reproduction, is thus diametrically opposed to race since it precludes the continuation of "racial" features.

Also, the history of race in this country, which was even codified in the Constitution and harkens back to a long colonial history of racial hierarchization, truly does differ from the history of sexuality, which is not explicitly codified in the Constitution and only relatively recently entered the legal sphere in the form of Privacy Laws, amendments to state constitutions to define marriage, and the Defense of Marriage Act (which is the only federal statute defining marriage and has been declared unconstitutional by the Supreme Court). I do not mean to suggest that oppression based on race and oppression based on sexuality are the same, but in the twentieth century, there may be grounds to claim they are equal. At this cultural moment, their paths crossed in violent, powerful ways.

8.) For a thoughtful discussion of "blood" and Joe Christmas, see Watson, "Writing Blood: The Art of the Literal in *Light in August*."

9.) One could argue that *Sanctuary* ends with a lynching, but the man who is lynched is white. Faulkner may well have been reversing the depiction of lynching in that novel so as to challenge his readership. *Light in August* is his first novel in which he depicts a lynching of a black man, if we assume that Christmas is black. The town wants to lynch him because they think that he is black, whether or not he actually is. Obviously, Faulkner intended the lynching in

Light in August to challenge his readers as well.

10.) As a passing curiosity, Jay Watson mentioned to me in conversation once how unfortunate it is that in *Epistemology of the Closet*, even Sedgwick chose to end her study with Proust when the most obvious next novel for her to consider would have been *Absalom*, which would also have fit perfectly into her overview of white male authors in the aesthetic tradition she establishes. I could not agree more.

11.) For an overview of the history of LGBT/Queer readings of *Absalom*, see: Crowell, Jones, Peterson, Entzimminger, and Harker. This critical canon stands at significant distance from the conversation that has developed concerning Homer Barron in “A Rose for Emily,” the other work that has produced significant queer inquiry in Faulkner’s canon. My caution in regards to LGBT/Queer readings of Faulkner stems from my impression that most of these readings defer to an anxiety model of homosexuality. The list of essays about Homer Barron amply justifies my impressions. No essay on homosexuality in Faulkner--that I am aware of--advances the claim that I am explicating in this dissertation: that Faulkner embraces gay men and gay culture and was *not* nervous about it. This impression may seem like something of a broadsword approach to what might better be dissected with a critical scalpel, but the ubiquity of this default position proves a cumbersome way to approach my subject. As a case in point, I submitted an earlier version of the Ratliff material in Chapter Ten to *GLQ* for consideration and was rejected in large part because a third of the essay was spent picking apart Noel Polk’s essay “Ratliff’s Buggies” rather than making my own point about Ratliff. Moreover, at the 2010 Society for the Study of Southern Literature Conference, I received a generous and emphatically positive reception for a paper entitled “Why Gay Faulkner Now: Notes on a New Perspective” devoted entirely to picking apart the widespread problem of anxieties and homophobias underlying gay readings of

Faulkner. I never said a word about Faulkner, however, only a lot of words about his critics, which is not good scholarship, just hum-drum academic snarking.

Moreover, in regards to the body of scholarship on *Absalom*, while any individual essay may have a moment or two devoted to this anxiety model, I would also generally concede that such a model may not, in this case, stem from the critical response as much as from the text itself because of the clear anxieties circulating between Shreve and Quentin. Oddly, the one essay out of place in the list above is Harker's essay. Her essay is so odd because it uses the anxieties surrounding Quentin and Shreve and male homosexuality to articulate the hidden-in-plain sight Lesbian relationship between Judith and Clytie at Supten's Hundred. Harker offers their affection as miscegenated, incestuous, and lesbian, but points out how productive and safe is the lesbian space they create but which critics have so far overlooked for their investment in the fraught and worrisome parley between Shreve and Quentin when they try to talk about Henry and Bon. Odder still was the Q&A which followed Harker's paper when she delivered in at the 2007 *Faulkner and Yoknapatawpha Conference*, where she was met with what could be called politely "skepticism." The questions culminated in one particularly offended attendee raising his hand, and not waiting for the microphone, shouting belligerently, "What do you mean by lesbian?" The MC decided at that point to end the Q&A.

Earlier in the week, Gary Richards met a similar, if less overtly belligerent, reception to his paper "The Artful and Crafty One's of the Quarter," in which I have identified some residual of the anxiety model in my reading of it in Chapter 3. Two responses to his paper stood out from among the audience. One attendee took the microphone to clarify that heterosexuality is not always normative and could be queer, too, which though a true statement, was nonetheless awkwardly out-of-place and even defensive, as if suggesting that there were no need to worry

about the homosexual implications of Faulkner's New Orleans life when ultimately heterosexuality was where the focus should always be. Another attendee, claiming that he had been a student at the University of Virginia in the mid-1950s when Faulkner was writer-in-residence there, took the microphone not to ask a question but to state that, since he knew Faulkner nearly fifty years prior, he could guarantee that Faulkner was definitely not a homosexual.

These anecdotes may not serve as the best forensic evidence, but they speak to a pattern in Faulkner studies and a worried reaction that any discussion of homosexuality in Faulkner often meets, though my reception at non-Faulkner conferences, such as SSSL, disproves my own point, or would seem to except that they have happened outside of the purview of Faulkner scholars and were generally attended by a general audience, not self-identified Faulknerians. The onerousness of these encounters should not, however, become the mud through which a study of homosexuality in Faulkner must sludge in order to articulate itself. The demand to qualify every minor term to an exhaustive and pedantic degree (such as the belligerence of "What do you mean by lesbian?") is, as often as not, a means of preventing the articulation of an idea rather than a legitimate query, a stalling tactic rather than a way to foster new understanding.

12.) See Bersani, *Homos*.

13.) A corollary story here would be James Baldwin's "Going to Meet the Man," in which a sheriff tries to have sex with his wife after a bad day of trying to subdue a black man accused of a crime. The sheriff cannot get an erection, though, until he recalls witnessing a lynching when he was a child during which the black man being lynched was castrated. The sheriff becomes highly aroused by this memory, specifically by the memory of the black man's penis. Baldwin's extremely provocative story roots the sheriff's heterosexual relationship with

his wife in his homosexual longing for the lynched man's black penis. While clearly the sheriff harbors a latent homosexuality, he engages in heterosexual with a woman when he is aroused. Similarly, that Quentin might have an orgasm when he thinks about Bon's potential blackness does not mean that Quentin would consciously recognize the homosexual impulse of his arousal. Quentin's potential homosexuality in this scene remains, therefore, latent.

14.) The best source for information about this affair is Meta Carpenter's memoir, *A Loving Gentleman*. When Blotner first pursued Carpenter because he had heard rumors that she and Faulkner were close friends, she rebuffed his inquiries and pretended that there was no substantial relationship to speak of. After Blotner published his two-volume biography, and after word got back to Carpenter that the Faulkner family had effectively erased her significant role in Faulkner's life from the record, Carpenter decided to write her memoir to set the record straight. Her title is intentional and precise. In her memoir she meant to establish that she and Faulkner shared an intimate and significant relationship. They respected each other and even loved each other. She was not simply his girl-on-the-side. Blotner would include much information from that memoir in his revised one-volume biography.

15.) The edition of *The Wild Palms* that I am citing--an older edition--maintains the original published version of this line, "Woman ****t!" The newest re-edition of the novel, edited by Noel Polk, transcribes the missing letters, which were apparently included in the original typescript. At this point, I also need to clarify why I am using the title *The Wild Palms*. The novel was originally published under this title, though when Polk oversaw its re-edition in the 1990s, he argued that Faulkner originally intended to title the novel *If I Forget Thee, Jerusalem*. For a decade, that title widely circulated among Faulkner titles as the "corrected" and appropriate title. The newest edition of the novel, however, re-corrects the title to *The Wild Palms*. This re-

correction is part of a general trend. Noel Polk's work to edit the corrected texts of Faulkner's works in the 1980s and through the early 2000s represents a major turning point in Faulkner Studies, and a major scholarly effort on Polk's part. In recent years, however, that trend has reversed in favor of a consideration of the texts *as they were originally published*. Faulkner approved all publication copies of the works published in his lifetime, even if he did so begrudgingly. Therefore, some skepticism has emerged about whether Polk's "correction" are fully justified. I have no intention of resolving this debate--in fact, I strongly encourage its continuance, though I prefer older, non-corrected editions (close inspection of my works cited will demonstrate--quite ironically--that I use corrected editions as my major sources as they are now so ubiquitous). Rather, I mean only to explain why I am using the title *The Wild Palms*.

16.) For more on when Faulkner wrote and published "A Courtship," see Blotner, 2-volume edition, pp. 1101, 1253.

CHAPTER 9: THE FAULKNER WE KNOW AND DO NOT KNOW

1.) See Schwartz, *Creating Faulkner's Reputation*.

2.) While Writer-in-Residence at the University of Virginia, Faulkner explained of Williams' play, "I saw *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* and that was about the wrong people--the problems of children are not worth three acts. The story was the old man, I thought, the father. That's all I know of Williams" (*Faulkner in the University* 13). This and his comments to Jean Stein are essentially consistent.

3.) BP contains letters from Blotner to Williams (2 March 1966) and Blotner to Vidal (28 September 1969). There is no significant responses from either included in BP. In both versions of the published biography, stories that include Williams and Vidal come from other interview

sources.

4.) We can assume that Williams and Faulkner at least crossed paths at the award ceremony for the Pulitzer Prizes for their respective works in 1955. The story of that meeting failed to survive in the record and likely provided no significant interactions.

5.) Interview, Monique Lange by Joseph Blotner; January 1964. BP.

6.) Interview, Truman Capote by Joseph Blotner; 29 December 1967. BP.

7.) Photocopy, "Faulkner Speaking," *Time Magazine*; 23 August 1954. BP.

8.) Scattered throughout his notes, Blotner made lists of novels, usually from cut-outs of a publisher's book list. Their placement in the notes generally coincides with what evidence exists in the record elsewhere to suggest that Faulkner might have read a certain book at a certain time. In the case of Willingham's novel, the note on the signed edition is from the folder for 1947 in BP. This method of identifying Faulkner's reading interests is obviously unreliable. The suggestion that Faulkner read Willingham, and even ordered a signed first edition, is enough to verify considering the implications of that reading, but this data should not be construed as a certain fact, only a provocative possibility.

9.) See *Lion in the Garden*, pp. 237-56.

10.) Interview, Jean Stein by Joseph Blotner; 10 November 1964. BP. Wasson did not think highly of Stein either. In his interview with Blotner from 28 March 1965, Wasson said of Stein:

Jean Stein was a salonier, liked to collect names. She finally turned WF against Ben. She was with the company shooting *BABY DOLL*. She said she was going to go to E and scratch her eyes out, or something of the sort. Ben quickly phoned WF with a stratagem to avoid trouble. He said, "Can we come over?" Then he

filled in a group around her and got them out as soon as he could. She was hoping to linger to the end to make a scene.

She also went around telling stories about WF in bed, that he was inadequate.

In his memoir, Wasson mentions Stein in passing and even records a lunch he had with her and Shelby Foote in New York after the filming of *Baby Doll*. He neither affirms any friendship or caustically attacks her. Of Lamkin's visit to Greenville for the filming, he simply mentions that she was present (195).

11.) Interview, Shelby Foote by Joseph Blotner; 20 November 1965. BP.

12.) A photocopy of the essay by Phillips, titled "Faulkner of Oxford: A Brief View," is housed as part of BP. The one page facsimile has no date on it nor a full title for the newspaper it appeared in. To date the essay, I have relied on clues in the essay itself--the reference to the Howells Medal, which prompted Blotner to write in the margins "Spring 1950, WF didn't go." Also, Phillips' novel *The Bitterweed Path* was published in 1950, and the editor's note cites that "first novel" and explains that it will be reviewed the following week. I have labeled the paper as *The Dallas Morning News* because, also in that editor's note, the paper refers to itself as "The News" and contains a pen-and-ink drawing of Faulkner "by Dallas Artist Ed Bearden." Phillips worked at SMU in Dallas as well. As *The Dallas Morning News* seems to have been the only major newspaper in Dallas that could abbreviate itself as "The News," it seems very likely that this essay appeared in this paper in mid-1950.

13.) Letter, William Faulkner to Bennett Cerf; 1948. BP. The narrative that I sketch in this paragraph is compiled from a series of letters between Faulkner and Cerf that are photocopied in BP in the folder for 1948. Most are undated but clearly fit together as an extended

conversation. The letters are generally personal, not professional, which explains the lack of formal datelines.

14.) In his memoir, Cowley dates his being called to New York on Sunday, October 23. He later reproduces a letter from Faulkner written on the Monday after Faulkner left New York and dated by Cowley in brackets as from 1 November 1948 (114). The math here obviously does not add up. If the 23rd were a Sunday, then November 1 would fall on a Tuesday. In 1948, as Cowley's bracketed date for the later letter shows, 1 November fell on a Monday. In addition, in his biography Blotner refers to Friday 29 October as the day Faulkner was back in New York after his stay with the Cowleys. Cowley's dates here are slightly incongruent, but we know the episode began in New York on Tuesday, 19 October and lasted until Monday, 1 November, when Faulkner wrote Cowley from Oxford, to which he had just returned by train. He left New York on Friday, 29 October for that return trip. He ordered the roses for Muriel Cowley the day before they arrived. I have corrected the dates to accord with Blotner's calendar.

15.) The copy of *Absalom, Absalom!* that Faulkner signed for Cowley is now housed in the Brodsky-Faulkner Collection. People familiar with Faulkner's handwriting are familiar with the microscopic, almost cramped precision of it and can attest to the difficulty in reading it. His signature is generally fairly clear, though in the same hand-writing. The one exception to this is his signature in the front cover of the copy of *Absalom* that he inscribed to Cowley in Sherman, Connecticut, on the weekend he was there recovering from his bender and experiencing at least a mild version of delirium tremens as a symptom of his withdrawals. The signature is strikingly different, though recognizably Faulkner's. The hand that wrote it was clearly shaky. The signature is unsteady, the product of Faulkner's condition at the time. This one signature testifies more clearly than any verbal account of the extremity of Faulkner's alcoholism. The signature is,

in its way, a disturbing witness to the events of this lost week of Faulkner's life.

16.) Joseph Blotner collected "Mr. Acarius" in *Uncollected Stories*. He explains its publication history in the endnotes at the end of that volume. The story was eventually published posthumously in 1965.

17.) Interview, Estelle Faulkner by Joseph Blotner; August 1963: Interview, Victoria Fielden by Joseph Blotner; 27 October 1964. BP. A full account of Faulkner's allowing Ford financial leeway with the play can be found in the numerous letters, largely from the late 1950s, between Faulkner and his publishers in which Faulkner asks that Ford be given special options for payment schedules and keep the American rights to the play. Copies of all of these letters can be found in BP.

18.) Interview, Ruth Ford by Joseph Blotner; June 1964. BP. In that same interview, Ford claims that Faulkner also hand-bound a copy of his children's story *The Wishing Tree* for Shelley, her daughter, when she was nine or ten years old. Izard's study contains a portrait of Faulkner holding Shelley when she was still married to Peter Van Eyck, dated from 1942 while Faulkner was in Hollywood.

19.) Photocopy, Lewis Funke, "Gossip on the Rialto," *The New York Times*; 9 September 1915. BP.

20.) Interview, Albert Marre by Joseph Blotner; 22 September 1967. BP.

21.) In his diary, published as *Water from a Bucket* in 2001, Henri-Ford recounted his and Tchelitchev's departing for Europe in 1952 and hinted at a family drama, but he offered no account of the specifics about what happened regarding *Requiem*.

22.) Interview, Albert Marre by Joseph Blotner; 22 September 1967. BP.

23.) Letter, William Faulkner to Saxe Commins; January 1952 (Blotner's date, no date on

the actual letter). BP.

24.) From the Hubert Creekmore Collections, HG. Underlining in original.

25.) Ibid.

26.) Manuscript of *The Elephant's Trunk* in HG. At times in the novel, Creekmore mistakes his location and refers to Oxford when he means Lowry. Elsewhere in the novel, Water Valley is identified as the town just south of Lowry, another clue to the switch of Lowry as the renamed Oxford. The novel only exists as a typescript at the HG at Boston University. It never went to page proofs and so contains minor errors that reveal much about its construction.

27.) There is no authorized biography of Creekmore. I gathered the biographical details of this study from a variety of sources, including the BP, Suzanne Marrs' biography of Eudora Welty, and the yearbooks for the University of Mississippi from the years 1915-1930. In these notes, I will identify as accurately as possible the source of information, though sometimes information was derived from multiple sources as I attempted to reconstruct sometimes conflicting or very vague information regarding Creekmore's life.

28.) Wade's son, Jimmy Creekmore, has confirmed with me that his father did rush SAE at Ole Miss before the showdown with Governor Russell. This membership would explain why Wade also withdrew from the university. *When* Wade was initiated is more difficult to verify, though he would have likely participated in SAE functions in 1919 and 1920 and would have had numerous interactions with Faulkner through their mutual association with SAE. Faulkner rushed in 1919 along with Rufus. Even if Wade were not initiated until 1920 as a sophomore, he was probably involved in SAE affairs as early as 1919 as a freshman. In 1927, when fraternities were allowed back on campus, SAE listed "pledges" on the membership roles in the yearbook. Thus, in the Fall of 1919, Wade would have been a pledge and would have participated in the social

aspects of the fraternity in some capacity. He would certainly have been privy to information about the sub rosa meetings of the fraternity and would have been making plans to join.

Since the majority of sub rosa activity took place at the Stone home, Wade would have met Faulkner there on numerous occasions. Some archived evidence in BP suggests that certain dorm rooms on campus were occupied by secret SAE members who made their dorms into ersatz meeting chambers as the situation required. Wasson and his roommate were both SAEs and their dorm room was supposedly one such meeting place.

29.) For more on Russell and his interaction with and influence on Faulkner's life, see Blotner, one-volume edition, pp. 14-15, 47, 73-74, 76, 86, 91, 192, and 234. The original two-volume edition contains additional information that was eventually cut from Blotner's revised edition, but that accords with the material collected in BP. Russell's relationship to the Faulkner's family is well-established in the biographical record.

30.) The story of the crisis of 1920 and the fraternity ban exists in several sources, most of them collected by Blotner in BP. In the folder for 1920, Blotner compiled interview notes with several members of the fraternity, among them Rufus and Wade Creekmore, whom he interviewed in Jackson, Mississippi, on 25-26 March 1965. In those notes are also photocopies of *The Mississippian*, the weekly campus newspaper, for November 1920. Additionally, Blotner collected a term paper, most likely written in the mid-1960s, by a student at either Ole Miss or the University of Virginia, where Blotner taught, named Sarah Eva Furr Butts. The paper is entitled "Lee Maurice Russell and His Attempt to Democratize the University of Mississippi" and can be found in full in BP. To my knowledge, this paper has never been published, nor is it available in any library beyond BP. For that reason, I am not directly quoting from it--nor did Blotner, who used it extensively in his own overview of the crisis in the biographies but never

directly cited it. Butts' essay, though, is one of a very few sources that explore this event in great detail. The most detailed published version of these events is in the original two-volume biography in Chapter 18.

31.) Interview, Lowery Simmons by Joseph Blotner; 15 November 1966. BP.

32.) Hiram Hubert Creekmore's central role in these meetings is confirmed by three different interview sources in the BP. Interview, Jeff Hamm by Joseph Blotner; 16 November 1966: "Creekmore and other fathers came over & decided it was best for the boys to withdraw". Interview, David Callahan by Joseph Blotner; 25 March 1965:

Wade and Russell [*sic*] Creekmore got their father to come up and talk with them about the situation. Mr. Creekmore advised them to withdraw from school before they were dismissed and thus avoid losing credit for work they had done.

Interview, Lowery Simmons by Joseph Blotner; 15 November 1966:

Mr. Hiram Creekmore was the father who would come up every night during the crisis and give advice. SAE was the only fraternity to carry out initiation and pledging there [the Stone home/Ole Miss]. The KAs and others wouldn't initiate there. There was a move under way to bring the fraternities in again. Creekmore would come up from Water Valley every night.

33.) In his interview, Rufus named the University of Alabama as where he went after his withdrawal. Blotner records in his notes of his interview of Wade that he and several others went to Mississippi State. In the two-volume biography, Blotner claims that both Creekmore brothers transferred to Mississippi State. In his junior yearbook (1922), however, Wade listed among his affiliation that he attended Alabama the previous year. Blotner mistakenly grouped the Creekmore's in with other students who transferred to Mississippi State. Jimmy Creekmore

confirmed that his father attended Alabama. For his junior year, Wade returned to Ole Miss. Rufus transferred to Yale to complete his law degree.

34.) See note 28.

35.) Interview, Rufus Creekmore by Joseph Blotner; 25 March 1965, BP.

36.) Interview, Billy Ross Brown by Joseph Blotner, 27 November 1965. BP.

37.) Image, "Glorifying the American Male," *Ole Miss Annual* 1926. UMSC.

38.) All three drawings can be found in *William Faulkner: Early Prose and Poetry*. One can be found as the cover for the recent proceedings of the Faulkner and Yoknapatawpha Conference, *Faulkner's Sexualities*. Images of Creekmore dressed as a dapper young courtier in suit and tie and as a clown--literally, in circus clown attire--can be seen in *The Ole Miss* for his years of attendance. UMSC.

39.) Letter, Hubert Creekmore to Phil Stone; 24 May 1930. HRC. The letter is part of the "Burned Papers" that were recovered from Stone's home after a fire in the 1940s destroyed Stone's nearly priceless collection of first editions and letters from William Faulkner. Surely other letters passed between Stone and Creekmore, but they have not been found and were likely destroyed. Faulkner's surviving letters do not contain one to or from Creekmore, though Faulkner notoriously did not keep letters nor make carbon copies of letters he wrote. This dearth of letters with Faulkner's signature has frustrated critics and biographers for the entire span of Faulkner Studies. For now, this letter is the only surviving memento of the connection between these two men beyond the interview notes with Creekmore's older brothers.

CHAPTER 10: V. K. RATLIFF, A BIOGRAPHY

1.) The sometimes difficult, sometimes intimate relationship between Stone and Faulkner

is best explored in Susan Snell's biography of Phil Stone, *Phil Stone of Oxford: A Vicarious Life*. I think it is important to stress that, as I began to compose this study, Snell's book, along with Wise's study of Walker Percy, functioned as the most significant influences on my own understanding of critical biography and of the particular nuance of Faulkner's life and friendships. In particular of Snell's biography, its chief virtue--along with being well-researched and thoughtful--is that it presents a view of Faulkner that is not beholden to the great man mythos of many Faulkner-specific biographies. Snell reports Stone's life objectively, and in so doing, she constructs an image of Faulkner as a flawed and difficult man. She rehabilitates Stone significantly, as well, and explains how events that occurred in the final years of Faulkner's life, left unresolved by his sudden death, effectively cut Stone out of the more central place in studies of Faulkner's life and literary development that he rightfully occupied. No understanding of Faulkner's life is complete without also reading Snell's biography. Unlike the memoirs written about Faulkner, Snell's biography has the advantage of academic objectivity. As such, it is one of the few academic biographies pertinent to Faulkner that is unapologetically ungenerous about several unsavory incidences in his life in relation to Stone and Stone's widow.

2.) I have gained my information on "the real Suratt" from a genealogy webpage of the Suratt family in Mississippi. Though the record keepers composing the genealogy are, technically, amateur historians, they rely on census data, complete with citations, to construct their family history. What is not disputed is that a man named James Suratt lived in Oxford in the early years of the 1900s and had several children, one named Hugh Miller Suratt. What is more difficult to determine is whether or not "James" was his real name. Descendants, who can trace their genealogy back to James Suratt's children and can claim James Suratt as a great-grandfather, all assert that his name was Junius and he went by June. These descendants includes

people who claim direct kinship to Hugh Miller Suratt, and who claim that Hugh Miller told them his father's name was Junius, though on census records, Hugh Miller is listed as a son of a man named "James."

Moreover, one participant in the discussion offers that the man, under whichever name, should be buried in St. Peter's Cemetery in Oxford, Mississippi, the same cemetery where Faulkner is buried. Finding a headstone would be ideal to verify the name, as it seems likely the family would order the correct name on the headstone without the possibility of a misprint by a census-taker. Unfortunately, my repeated and dogged searches of the cemetery have produced no grave stone. This lack might be due to a few reasons: 1.) James/Junius Suratt is not, in fact, buried in that cemetery. None of his children are; nor his parents. He moved his family to Oxford; his children moved on, some to nearby Water Valley, Mississippi, others farther afield. He may be buried in a different county cemetery or a different county all together. 2.) His grave stone has broken or eroded so completely as to be unreadable, as is the case with many tombstones in St. Peter's especially on the top of the hill (where are older burials from before 1940) and on the back side of the central hill (traditionally where African-Americans were buried). Mississippi heat and humidity in the summer and cold and damp in the winter is not conducive to preservation, especially of the soft marble and limestone that dominates the geology of St. Peter's Cemetery. 3.) He is in an unmarked grave. The cemetery is old and nearly full, but there are curious empty stretches, especially near the older parts of the cemetery, that imply that whatever tombstones were there have crumbled so much as to have been removed all together.

3.) Photocopy, "A Faulkner Reminiscence: Conversations with Maud Faulkner," by James Dahl. *Journal of Modern Literature*; April 1974. BP.

4.) Despite the heavy revisions of the novel into its eventually published form *Sartoris*, this description survives, verbatim, in *Sartoris* and in *Flags*.

5.) It is the bane of any Faulknerian's existence to date accurately the events of *The Hamlet*. The chief complaint about Faulkner's inconsistency in the Snopes Trilogy is that his chronology simply cannot work out, unless some of his characters lived very long lives and aged very slowly. I tend to rely on Cleanth Brooks' reconstruction of various chronologies and dates within the novel as he works them out in *William Faulkner: The Yoknapatawpha Country*, but with a degree of skepticism, not that he is "wrong," but that the texts are simply quite often incongruent.

6.) Interview, Judge Taylor McElroy by Joseph Blotner; 18 Nov. 1967. BP.

7.) Interview, Emily [Whitehurst] Stone by Joseph Blotner; 27 March 1965. BP.

8.) In a series of reports from the mid-1930s titled "Moonbeams," which appear to be from a weekly column in the *Oxford Eagle*, the unidentified author offers on 21 May 1936 that

Paperhanger Rusty Patterson by ruse drops an overgrown crawfish into my shirt pocket and says something about not writing him up. I am told that Rusty has been written up by one much more adept in the art than myself. Much of his homily wit--they say--can be found between the covers of Faulkner's books.

Beside this entry, Blotner has written in the margins "Suratt" in reference to the implications of where in Faulkner's novels Rusty can be found. BP.

9.) Interview, Judge Taylor McElroy by Joseph Blotner; 18 Nov. 1967. BP.

10.) Frustratingly, Shelby Foote would recall in his interviews with Blotner a dinner that he and Ben Wasson had with William Faulkner in 1941 and at which Foote asked Faulkner to sign his copy of *The Hamlet* (interview; 12 Nov. 1966. BP.). At that dinner, the three men talked

about Faulkner's changing Suratt to Ratliff (interview; 24 Nov. 1965. BP.). In no place, either in notes or in the published biographies, does Blotner record what Faulkner had to say about this change to Foote and Wasson in 1941. As Foote and Wasson have died, what miracle of insight Faulkner might have explained the them at that dinner has been lost forever.

11.) Interview, Phil Mullens by Joseph Blotner; 18 Nov. 1966. BP.

12.) Photocopy. *American 'Misunderstanding': Faulkner's Speaks on Reds*, from *The New York Times*; 23 August 1955. BP.

13.) In *The Mansion*, Gavin Stevens laments the existence of certain organizations in American society with seemingly fascist intentions: "the ones right here at home: the organizations with the fine names confederated in unison in the name of God against the impure in morals and politics and with the wrong skin color and ethnology and religion" (*M* 823). Among the groups that Faulkner probably had in mind included the Ku Klux Klan and the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC).

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VITA

Phillip Andrew Gordon

Doctor of Philosophy, English

Frances Bell McCool Fellow for Faulkner Studies

University of Mississippi

Education:

Ph. D. in English (Literature): University of Mississippi August 2008-2013

Dissertation: *Gay Faulkner: Uncovering the Homosexual Presence in Yoknapatawpha and Beyond*, prospectus defended March 29, 2011; defended June 25, 2013

MA in English: University of Mississippi August 2006-August 2008

Thesis: "Gay Darl: A New Reading of Erotics in Faulkner's *As I Lay Dying*," defended July 17, 2008

BA in English *Summa Cum Laude* (minor in Spanish): University of Tennessee at Martin, August 2002-December 2005

University of Oklahoma, August 2000-August 2001, no degree obtained

Conferences/Presentations:

Public Lectures:

“Thinking about Faulkner’s Delta.” Delta Literary Tour, Greenwood, MS. March 17, 2013.

“The Man from Mottstown: Hubert Creekmore’s Debt to and Influence on William Faulkner.”

Frances Bell McCool Lecture in Faulkner Studies. Oxford, MS. November 12, 2012.

Papers delivered at conferences:

“Not Your Typical Southern Town: The Modern Sensibility of Ashton, Mississippi in Hubert Creekmore’s *The Welcome*.” The Annual Meeting of the Mississippi Philological Association, Hattiesburg, MS, February 8-9, 2013.

“Naples Re-Visited: A New Perspective on Same-Sex Desire in ‘Divorce in Naples’.” Faulkner and Robert Penn Warren Conference, Cape Girardeau, MO, October 26-28, 2012.

“*Maggie: A Girl of the Streets* and the ‘Pathetic Fallacy’: Gender, Feeling, and Literary Naturalism.” Stephen Crane Society Panel. American Literature Association Annual Conference,

San Francisco, CA, May 27-30, 2012.

“*The Color Purple* and ‘The Wine-Dark Kiss of Death’: Alice Walker’s Prescient AIDS Narrative,” Society for the Study of Southern Literature Bi-Annual Conference, Nashville, TN, March 28-31, 2012.

“Quentin Compson and AIDS Narratives: A Speculative Reading of *Absalom, Absalom!*”: SCMLA Annual Conference, Hot Spring, AR, October 27-29, 2011.

“Following the Trail of Ratliff’s Buggies: Unearthing a Gay Presence in Faulkner’s *The Hamlet*”: Southern American Studies Association Bi-Annual Conference, Atlanta, GA, February 17-19, 2011.

“Gay Ratliff: William Faulkner, the Cold War, and Homosexuality in *The Town* and *The Mansion*”: Faulkner and Morrison Conference, Cape Girardeau, MO, October 28-30, 2010.

“Why Gay Faulkner Now: Notes Towards a New Perspective”: Society for the Study of Southern Literature Bi-Annual Conference, New Orleans, LA, April 8-11, 2010.

“Alternative Speaking: Hearing/Feeling the Subaltern in Ann Petry’s *The Street*”: College Language Association Annual Convention, Charleston, SC, April 9-12, 2008.

Panel Chair/Proposal Writer:

“Finding Hubert Creekmore.” Annual Meeting of the Mississippi Philological Association. Hattiesburg, MS, February 8-9, 2013. Wrote Panel Proposal. First panel on Creekmore at an academic conference.

“Things Faulkner Liked: How Gay Men, Huey Long, and College Football Influenced the Writing of William Faulkner.” Faulkner and Robert Penn Warren Conference, Cape Girardeau, MO, October 25-27, 2012. Chaired panel and wrote panel proposal.

“Black/Southern Identities Panel,” Society for the Study of Southern Literature, Nashville, TN, March 28-31, 2012. Named chair by conference program committee.

“*Transgressive Souths, or Looking for the Myth of an Isolated South in All the Wrong Place,*” Southern American Studies Association Bi-Annual Conference, Atlanta, GA, February 17-19, 2011. Chaired panel and wrote panel proposal.

“Ann Petry’s *The Street,*” College Language Association Annual Conference, Charleston, SC, April 9-12, 2008. Chaired panel and wrote panel proposal.

Graduate Conference Participation:

“John Rykener and the Problem of Names: A Critique of Discursive Practices”: Gender Studies Conference (Graduate/Undergraduate), Oxford MS, February 2008.

“Off the Path of the Straight and Narrow: Darl as Faulkner's 'Metaphorical' Queer”: Southern Writers, Southern Writing Graduate Conference, Oxford, MS, July 2007.

Other Presentations:

Brief Comments on Faulkner in Oxford, delivered to members of the University of Georgia Alumni Association, University Club, Oxford, MS, September 23, 2011.

“Being at Peace: A Lecture on Reconciling Christianity and Homosexuality,” deliver at the University of Tennessee at Martin on three occasions:

--Spring semester, 2004, Introduction to Philosophy Class, Guest Lecturer

--Fall semesester 2004, Introduction of Philosophy Class, Guest Lecturer

--Summer 2006, Tennessee Governor’s School for the Humanities, Guest Lecturer

Publications:

Circulating:

“Not Your Typical Southern Town: The Modern Sensibility of Ashton, Mississippi in Hubert Creekmore’s *The Welcome*.” **Submitted** to POMPA, The Publication of the Mississippi Philological Association, March 2013.

“Naples Re-Visited: A New Perspective on Same-Sex Desire in ‘Divorce in Naples’.” Submitted to the conference publication (book) for the Faulkner and Warren Conference, Southeast Missouri State University Press. **Submitted** January 2013.

Fellowships/Grants:

Frances Bell McCool Fellowship for Faulkner Studies, the only dissertation fellowship in the United States devoted to the life and work of William Faulkner, University of Mississippi, Fall 2012-Spring 2013

Graduate Student Council (GSC) Research/Travel Grant, for archival research at the Kent Library, Southeast Missouri State University, in Cape Girardeau, MO, to view the Brodsky Collection/Joseph Blotner Papers, awarded by the University of Mississippi, September 2012

Graduate School Semester Dissertation Fellowship, University of Mississippi, Spring 2012

Graduate Student Summer Research Grant, for research related to William Faulkner/Francis Terry Leake Plantation Diary, University of Mississippi, Summer 2010

Service:

Community:

Coordinator (August 2011-July 2012), A Faulkner Remembrance LOU Community Event

(Lafayette-Oxford-University), Marathon Reading of *The Reivers*, Oxford, MS, July 6, 2012

Academic:

Writing 100 Steering Committee, Fall 2009-Summer 2011

Other Honors/Assistantships:

Teaching Assistantship/Graduate Instructorship, University of Mississippi, Fall 2008-present

Teaching Assistantship, University of Mississippi, Fall 2006-Spring 2008

English Departmental Scholarship, University of Tennessee at Martin, Fall Semester 2005

Ohio Valley Conference Student-Athlete Medal of Honor, highest conference-wide GPA for sport, University of Tennessee at Martin, 2003, 2004

Athletic Scholarship, Cross Country, University of Tennessee at Martin, Fall 2002-Spring 2005

National Merit Scholarship, University of Oklahoma, Fall 2000-Fall 2001

Research Travel/Archival Visits:

The Hubert Creekmore Papers, The Howard Gottlieb Archival Research Center, Boston University, Boston, MA, Jan. 2013.

Brodsky-Faulkner Collection/Blotner Papers, Kent Library, Southeast Missouri State University, Cape Girardeau, MO. Sept. 9-21, 2012. (Funded by GSC research/travel grant).

Brodsky-Faulkner Collection/Blotner Papers, Kent Library, Southeast Missouri State University, Cape Girardeau, MO. Feb. 5-10, 2012. (self-funded).

Teaching/Professional Experience:

Teaching:

Teacher of Record: University of Mississippi: Writing 100, English Composition 101, English Composition 102, English 250 Applied Writing

Teaching Assistant: University of Mississippi (teacher of record listed with each class)

American Literature 1865-present

American Literature pre-1865

World Literature 1600-present

World Literature to 1600

Other:

Writing Assessment Scorer, University of Mississippi, Fall 2007-Fall 2008

Writing Center Instructor, University of Tennessee at Martin, Spring 2006 (post-graduation;
position required BA degree)

Organizations:

Professional:

Modern Language Association (MLA), 2012-Present

Society for the Study of Southern Literature (SSSL), 2010-Present

South Central Modern Language Association (SCMLA), 2011-Present

English Graduate Student Body Vice President, University of Mississippi, Fall 2007-Spring 2008

