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**“The Women, the Indomitable, the Undefeated”:
The Mammy, the Belle, and Southern Memory in William Faulkner**

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Abstract

This thesis considers William Faulkner and Southern memory through the author's representation of Southern femininity, both black and white, in the figures of the mammy and the Southern belle. It argues that the mammy and the belle not only coexist and interact in Faulkner's work, but are structuring elements of the same Southern mythology. This thesis reads Faulkner's women in conversation with the development of Lost Cause mythology, plantation and popular fiction, psychoanalytical accounts of racial difference, gender and race as performance, and Faulkner's biography, and argues that doing so creates new spaces to develop the critical conversation around Faulkner's female characters and, in turn, his fiction's relationship to Southern memory, race, and gender.

This thesis explores the relationships that exist between women in two sets of paired texts—*The Sound and the Fury* and "That Evening Sun," *Sanctuary* and *Requiem for a Nun*—along with the overtly masculine narrative of *Absalom, Absalom!*. It also considers what these relationships mean for masculinity and gender identity under the complex and dangerous racial conditions of the postbellum American South. Faulkner's own relationship to Southern memory and memorialisation is also central to this thesis as it explores his personal and political investment in the mammy figure via his relationship with Caroline Barr and the representation of this relationship in the essay "Mississippi" and novel *Go Down, Moses*.

Drawing on the work of historians and theorists of memory and memorialisation, as well as the critical body of Faulkner studies, I argue that Faulkner's texts reveal a conflicted relationship to Southern history and memory. Faulkner at once accepts and rejects the stories, characters, and myths of the Southern past in his body of work. So while the mammy and the Southern belle exist as stock characters in Lost Cause mythology, and superficially in Faulkner's Yoknapatawpha, at other significant moments these women unsettle, disrupt, or even revolutionise the Southern world. Reading moments in which women conform to the social, racial, and gendered boundaries of the Southern world and the moments in which they reject or disrupt these boundaries, reveals the South's ongoing struggle to resolve its vexed history, the role of race and gender and the place of memory and memorialisation within it.

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Faulkner, American South, mammy, southern belle, race, gender, sexuality, America, memory, history, autobiography

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Introduction

Southern History, Memory, and the Mammy and the Southern Belle

*...a young man grown up and living in a milieu where the other sex is separated into three sharp divisions, separated (two of them) by a chasm which could be crossed but one time and in but one direction – ladies, women, females – the virgins whom gentlemen someday married, the courtesans to whom they went while on sabbaticals to the cities, the slave girls and women upon whom that first caste rested and to whom in certain cases it doubtless owed the very fact of its virginity. (Faulkner, *Absalom* 109)*

Through a kind of free indirect discourse Faulkner memorably offers his readers insight into the mind of the young white Southern gentleman and his relationship to the women that inhabit his world. While this passage could easily have been written about Quentin Compson or Gowan Stevens, here it describes *Absalom*, *Absalom's* Henry Sutpen, son of the determined and brutal plantation owner Thomas Sutpen. Central to this description of the role of women in the South is a set of boundaries or “sharp divisions” which separate “ladies,” “women,” and “females.” The binaries highlighted in this passage are familiar tropes of womanhood, with the female body defined by its sexuality and/or maternity. But in the South and particularly in the fictional South of Yoknapatawpha, these divisions and boundaries are escalated by a complex set of gendered and racial conditions borne out of the historical trauma of slavery. In his fiction, Faulkner's women are abandoned, abused, sanctified, sacrificed, vilified, and idealised. Yet amongst this vast variation of women thematic repetitions occur and coalesce into recognisable and recurring Southern characters.

The mammy and the Southern belle are two figures that appear repeatedly in some form or another in Faulkner's fiction. This thesis does not seek to record each instance in which a woman appears in the Faulkner canon as some version of either the self-sacrificing mammy or the pure Southern belle. Instead, it explores moments in which Faulkner's characterisation merges with these archetypal female figures to create moments of disruption and revelation within his fictional Southern world. In doing so it also explores the relationship between black and white women in the South. How do versions of belle and mammy participate in families, mother their

children, or exist in friendship or even in attempted sisterhood? I consider the historical conditions which create these stereotypical women and explore Faulkner's personal and historical investment in engaging with, and appropriating these figures in his fiction. Moreover, this study extends and complicates other studies of gender in Faulkner by demonstrating that the mammy and the belle are not only mutually constitutive figures, but that together, they enable and sustain a particular version of white masculinity in the Southern context.

Any critical work that considers Faulkner's representation of women comes up against the contradictory body of scholarship around his attitude toward them. Early criticism was divided, with critics such as Maxwell Geisman and Leslie Fiedler arguing for Faulkner's misogyny, insisting that his texts reveal his hatred and fear of women.¹ But other critics rejected these accusations, including Sally R. Page in *Faulkner's Women: Characterisation and Meaning* (1972), the first full study of Faulkner's representation of women in his novels. Page rejects the notion of Faulkner's misogyny and declares the earlier criticism to be "the product of a misunderstanding of the fictional purpose behind his characterisation of women" (xxii). In his introduction to Page's book Cleanth Brooks, perhaps the most influential Faulkner critic of the 1960s and 1970s, also insists that Faulkner's attitude toward women has been misunderstood (xii). Page, Brooks, and others argue that Faulkner's portrayal of women is largely sympathetic rather than misogynistic. The existence of this critical gap and the failure to reach a consensus about Faulkner's fictional attitude toward women which extends to the present speaks to the complexity of his fictional society and women's role in it.

While speaking at the University of Virginia in 1957, Faulkner was asked by a student which he found easier to create, male or female characters. He responded:

It's much more fun to try to write about women because I think women are marvellous. They're wonderful, and I know very little about them, [audience laughter] and so I—it's much more fun to try to write about women than about men. More difficult, yes. (Tape T-110)

Critics who believed in either Faulkner's misogyny or his sympathy for women found little to make them change their minds from this comment. By calling women

¹ See Maxwell Geisman's *Writers in Crisis* (1942) and Leslie Fiedler's *Love and Death in the American Novel* (1960).

marvellous here, and later in commenting that he thinks “women are much stronger, much more determined than men” (Tape T-110), Faulkner’s sympathy takes on the troublingly paternalistic tone which haunts his work and the larger body of Faulkner criticism.

John N. Duvall highlighted this paternal voice in Faulkner’s texts and in the tone of his critics in his article “Faulkner’s Critics and Women: The Voice of the Community” (1986) as well as in his later book *Faulkner’s Marginal Couple: Invisible, Outlaw, and Unspeakable Communities* (1990). Duvall draws attention to the “sexism of the interpretative discourse” in Faulkner studies, citing Brooks as one of the key figures who appropriated the paternalistic tone of male characters in Yoknapatawpha in their criticism (“Faulkner’s Critics” 44). By taking on the voice of the patriarchal Southern community of Yoknapatawpha and attributing it to Faulkner himself, critics misappropriated Faulkner’s “message about human interaction to the play of acting males and acted upon females” (“Faulkner’s Critics” 55). It is this message that makes much early criticism of Faulkner and particularly of his female characters, unsettling reading.

This paternalism is manifested in the way critics repeatedly place Faulkner’s women in binary positions. Page rejects the opinion of critics such as Irving Howe and David Miller who suggest Faulkner’s women exist as forces of destruction or evil or, alternatively, as saints. However, she does argue that Faulkner’s female figures ultimately do fall into “two extreme character types; they are creative, or they are destructive” (xxii). There are, of course, obvious limitations to these kinds of blanket statements about Faulkner’s women as they fail to account for the diversity of his characters and narratives: Women as creators like Lena Grove, women who endure like Dilsey Gibson, destructive women like Nancy Mannigoe and, in some ways Caddy Compson. My own examination of Faulkner’s women is informed by Southern history and memorialisation which combine to create the popular figures of the mammy and the Southern belle. In reading women through the gaze of these popular, mythologised figures, I seek to broaden critical understanding of Faulkner’s representation of women, rather than contain these women within a strict set of binaries.

My approach to reading Faulkner's female characters in conversation with the stereotypical figures of the mammy and the belle is informed by Diane Roberts's method in *Faulkner and Southern Womanhood* (1994). Roberts questions critics who dismiss Faulkner's women as mere stereotypes, citing the complex and often contradictory nature of Faulkner's fiction (*Southern Womanhood* xi). But, Roberts insists, "stereotypes can be useful," particularly in the interpretation of Southern authors like Faulkner, who "inherited the images, icons and demons of his culture." Roberts argues that stereotypes are "part of the matter of the region with which [Faulkner] engages, sometimes accepting, sometimes rejecting" (*Southern Womanhood* xi). Roberts's reading of Faulkner's women is ripe for reinterpretation through an exploration alongside contemporary critical race and whiteness studies. My thesis brings together Roberts's focus on Southern icons and female stereotypes with race, memory, and trauma studies, as well as Faulkner's biography – reanimating her consideration of Faulkner's women.

Interpreting Faulkner's women through his ongoing fascination with and implication in the myths, stories, and characters of the South, or what Roberts calls Faulkner's position as a "product, as well as a producer" of the South, develops rather than diminishes readings of his female characters (*Southern Womanhood* xi). The stereotypical figures of the mammy and the Southern belle provide a useful point of departure for my examination of Faulkner's female characters, both black and white. How Faulkner rejects, embraces, and develops the figures of the mammy and the Southern belle illuminates a variety of aspects of his relationship to the complex issues of race, gender, and sexuality in the Southern world. Moreover, reading Faulkner's women in conversation with the development of Lost Cause mythology, plantation and popular fiction, and Faulkner's biography, creates new spaces in which to develop the critical conversation around Faulkner's female characters and in turn, the relationship of his fiction to Southern memory, race, and gender.

In the closing pages of Faulkner's novel, *The Sound and the Fury* (1929), the severely disabled Benjy Compson becomes distressed when the carriage he is travelling in circles the town monument in the "wrong" direction.

For an instant Ben sat in an utter hiatus. Then he bellowed. Bellow on bellow, his voice mounted, with scarce interval for breath. There was more than

astonishment in it, it was horror; shock; agony eyeless, tongueless; just sound, and Luster's eyes backrolling for a white instant. (199)

Benjy's memory throughout the novel is triggered by sounds, smells, and images, seemingly disordered and random, but almost all connected to his sister Caddy in some way – golfers calling for their "Caddy" (5, 35) and the smell of trees (3, 16, 28) for example. But this moment of distress is more difficult to pin to a memory of his lost sister. Instead, it is the disruption of a ritual connected to Southern memory which triggers Benjy's distress, the failure to follow the correct path around a monument dedicated to the Southern dead.

This moment of white male distress in response to a site of Southern memorialisation reveals the troubling relationship between white men and Southern history and memory. It reveals the fragility and the highly ritualistic nature of Southern memory and memorialisation and is indicative of not only of the power of such rituals for white Southerners but of Faulkner's implication in these systems of exchange. A similar moment occurs in *Go Down, Moses* (1942) where the funeral procession of an executed black man "slowed into the square, crossing it, circling the Confederate monument and the courthouse" (287). The repetition of this ritual of circling the town monument reveals Faulkner's understanding of the inescapable and inexorably cyclical nature of history and memory in the South.

These moments provide the context for Faulkner's treatment of Southern history, Lost Cause mythology, memorialisation, gender roles, racial identity, and concepts of Southern honour that is central to his rendering of mammy and belle figures in his novels, short stories, and essays.

Faulkner's fiction is intimately concerned with the problems and complexities of Southern history and memory. While *Absalom, Absalom!* (1936) is Faulkner's most self-consciously historical novel, all Faulkner's fiction is in some way engaged in thinking through the South's violent and troubled racial inheritance. Born in Mississippi in 1897 and publishing fiction from 1919 to 1962, Faulkner lived in a period of Southern history that is caught between the contending forces of memorialisation and modernisation, and his fiction reflects this tension between the Old South and the New. My thesis considers Faulkner's implication in and contestation of Southern memory through his representation of Southern femininity,

both black and white, in the figures of the mammy and the Southern belle. Cognisant of the mythic position of these figures in the South, in this chapter I explore the versions of Southern history and memory that gave rise to the figures of the sexless mammy and pure Southern belle.

Faulkner's writing of the South as an historical entity in his fiction is rooted in the Southern defeat in the Civil War and the memorialisation and memory-making that occurred around that loss. The realities of the Civil War defeat are thus less important for my project than the memorialisation of the South after the defeat and in particular, the Lost Cause, the mythology of faithful slaves, and the memorial movement which are all alluded to in the moment of Benjy's distress when circling the monument in *The Sound and the Fury*. Southern mythology after the Civil War focused on the justness of the Southern cause and aimed to challenge the idea of slavery as an horrific institution, while at the same time it sought to distance slavery from the causes of the war: Southerners went to war in defence of states' rights rather than to protect and maintain slavery.² In *Ghosts of the Confederacy*, Gaines M. Foster suggests that the Civil War defeat might have impelled the white South to "question the morality of slavery and, in the process, of Southern race relations. It might have led Southerners to be more sceptical of their nation's sense of innocence and omnipotence. But it did not" (196). Instead, Foster suggests, the memory of the Civil War and its causes were "sanitized and trivialized" (196).

The figures of the mammy and the Southern belle were created in Southern memory as part of this process of sanitising and trivialising the Southern past. The meaning of the mammy and belle cannot be understood in isolation but instead become acceptable versions of black and white womanhood in the South because they do not threaten the primacy and power of white masculinity. The Southern white lady is idealised due to her presumed purity, both sexual and racial, and the supporting role (physical, social, emotional) she plays to white men. The Southern belle and the Southern lady (or matron) are necessarily interconnected figures who exist on a continuum in the Southern context, as white women are expected to transition through marriage from the position of Southern belle to that of the Southern lady. The mammy figure is also a suitable version of black femininity in the

² See "Chapter 1: The Dead and the Living" in David W. Blight's *Race and Reunion*, and Gaines M. Foster's *Ghosts of the Confederacy*, pages 22-24.

South: sexless, maternal, and devoted to the white family. Both belle and mammy figures depend upon the existence of the converse representation of black femininity: the sexually insatiable Jezebel. The Jezebel figure provides a counterpoint to the white woman's sexual purity and the mammy's sexless maternity, as well as providing an excuse for white men's (often violent) sexual contact with black women. As Victoria E. Bynum argues

[t]o link female honor to purity would have proven sexually inconvenient for Southern white men... had they not bifurcated the sexuality of white and black women. The creation of Jezebel provided the rationale for allowing sexual relations between white men and black women. (9)

Deborah Gray White highlights the necessarily dual nature of black female identity suggesting that "on the one hand there was the woman obsessed with matters of the flesh, on the other was the asexual woman. One was carnal, the other maternal. One was at heart a slut, the other was deeply religious. One was a Jezebel, the other a mammy," and that "many Southerners were able to embrace both images of black women simultaneously" and to "switch from one to the other depending on the context of their thought" (46).

These limited and limiting versions of womanhood (Jezebel, mammy, belle) do not accurately represent the realities of Southern life for either black or white women, but they are central to the larger project of Southern remembrance that occurred around slavery, the Civil War, and their aftermaths. This is due to the way in which they bolster the popular "moonlight and magnolia" version of the South: happy slaves, paternalistic slaveholders, and united plantation families. These themes were promoted by plantation fiction, such as that of Thomas Nelson Page, Joel Chandler Harris, and others, which appeared after Reconstruction and which reimagined the plantation as a sanctuary of black/white relations. These stories were often told, in conspicuous dialect, by a loyal ex-slave who mourns the end of slavery, and with it the Old South generally. Southern literature is therefore comprised of a "myth-making as much as place-making narrative" (Monteith 1). The features of this type of Southern literature include

the figure of the loyal ex-slave speaking sincerely of his love for the old plantation and its proprietors... the cataloguing of the beautiful elements of plantation life: the slaves singing joyfully, the big house provisioned

handsomely, the master's conducting himself authoritatively and the mistress elegantly, and so on. (Wells 85)

The mammy and the belle are postbellum constructions born out of this Southern memory-making that occurred in both Southern fiction and public memory.

Only as children had writers like Joel Chandler Harris, Thomas Nelson Page, and the myriad other depictees of those happy prewar days experienced plantations or slaves. Individual desire for childhood innocence converged with a regional longing for racial harmony. The making of modern Southern whiteness began, then, within a time and space imagined as a racially innocent plantation pastoral, where whites and blacks loved and depended upon each other. (Hale 54)

Faulkner's fiction probes and critiques these figures and modes of memory, even as his texts reveal his deep investment in them.

In *Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory*, David W. Blight charts the creation of Southern Civil War memory and emphasises the importance of race in producing the sentimental rather than realistic memory of the War and its aftermath. Blight suggests that three overall visions of Civil War memory were apparent in the aftermath of the conflict:

one, the reconciliationist vision which... developed in many ways earlier than the history of Reconstruction has allowed us to believe; two, the white supremacist vision, which took many forms early, including terror and violence.; and three, the emancipationist vision, embodied in African Americans' complex remembrance of their own freedom, in the politics of radical Reconstruction, and in conceptions of the war as the reinvention of the republic and the liberation of blacks to citizenship and constitutional equality.

(2)

The reconciliationist emphasised the commonality between sides and while it was a less violent vision of the past than the white supremacist vision, it still sought to reimagine the reality of the war's causes and outcomes. These competing visions of Southern history and memory collided and combined over time and clearly influenced Faulkner's fiction in which characters are tormented by familial and regional memory and history. So while Sarah Gleeson-White argues that Faulkner's South "emerges out of a tradition that crosses both temporal and regional

boundaries or frontiers,” (391) Faulkner’s novels can be placed distinctly within the South itself and his connection to history emerges from his experience as a Southerner, influenced by competing visions of the past.

Most obviously, Quentin Compson is haunted by time and memory in both *The Sound and the Fury* and *Absalom, Absalom!*. Quentin’s obsession with time crosses temporal boundaries but it is also inextricably linked to geography. In the same way that Southern nostalgia requires specific geographical placement, so too do Quentin’s musings on time situate him in the geographical place of the South. This concern with regional time is also central to *Requiem for a Nun* and is revealed not only in the story that the text tells, but also in its very narrative structure. In *Requiem*, Faulkner’s use of interspersed sections of prose (which provide a comprehensive history of Jefferson) and play (in which the story of Temple Drake and Nancy Mannigoe is told) makes intimate the connection between the general and the personal in the South. Tammy Clewell defends Faulkner’s (often criticised) structure in this novel, arguing that,

[f]ar from a pointless case of aesthetic experimentation, the juxtaposition of narrative history and dramatic dialogue not only clarifies that Temple’s private crisis has public significance but also demonstrates that Jefferson’s history includes a set of violent acts and unacknowledged losses suffered by groups of people because of their ethnicity, race, and gender, losses that have been obscured by the historical record. (80)

The historical and dramatic sections of *Requiem* can be read, like much of *The Sound and the Fury* and *Absalom, Absalom!*, as texts that highlight the necessarily transgenerational nature of Southern history.

The competing versions of the South’s history that Blight catalogues reveal the racial divisions in the South with which Faulkner’s fiction contends. Blight’s extensive investigation of Civil War memory closes with a consideration of such memory fifty years after the end of the war. He suggests that by the early twentieth century the war had become a national memory in which race and slavery had played only a very minor role.

In this collective victory narrative, the Civil War, followed by an interlude of bitterness and wrongheaded policy during Reconstruction, became the heroic

crisis survived, a source of pride that Americans solve their problems and redeem themselves in unity. (383)

Blight demonstrates that fifty years after the war, Southern memory of the defeat made hardly any note of the institution of slavery or of black people themselves. Instead, “the Civil War had become the nation’s inheritance of glory, Reconstruction the legacy of folly, and the race problem a matter of efficient schemes of segregation” (Blight 387). The development of such a public memory was no doubt influenced by the popular literature of the plantation. The transition of Southern Civil War memory from defeat in 1865 to sentimentalisation fifty years later influences Faulkner’s representation of the South in his fiction and the tension of these competing memories is at play in much of his fictional work.

Southern memorialisation after the war found its most solid footing in the Lost Cause movement which sought to perpetuate an idealised memory of the Confederacy through public rituals and the celebration of Confederate soldiers. Proponents of the Lost Cause celebrated the pre-war South as economically powerful and socially and racially benevolent, and memorialised its Civil War losses. Lost Cause memorialisation was driven by a very specific form of nostalgia or “the yearning for a past imagined wholeness now perceived as lost” (Jaffe Schreiber 53). For most white Southerners, the Lost Cause generated “a language of vindication and renewal, as well as an array of practices and public monuments through which they could solidify both their Southern pride and their Americanness” (Blight 266). Moreover, Foster suggests that the tradition “developed out of and in turn shaped individuals’ memory of the war, although it was primarily a public memory, a component of the region’s cultural system, supported by various organisations and rituals” (5).

While at all times the Lost Cause movement aimed to shape public memory about the war and its aftermath, the specifics of the movement, as with all mythologies, changed over time with succeeding generations and shifting political circumstances (Blight 258). Yet Lost Cause mythology continued to be the most prevalent and compelling version of the Civil War for Southerners, and its rewriting of Southern history proved a powerful social and cultural force for Southern writers such as Faulkner. However, Faulkner’s fiction reveals an uneasy relationship with this ideology and his engagement with Lost Cause mythology includes exploring its

effects for the South generally, and critiquing its means and its outcomes through characters such as Quentin and Caroline Compson who are ultimately destroyed because of their commitment to versions of memory that are invested in Lost Cause mythology. Faulkner's fiction is therefore both implicated in Lost Cause mythology and at the same time, deeply critical of it, performing the uneasy relationship between Old and New South thinking for Southerners of this period.

The creation of public sites of memory was one of the key goals of the Lost Cause movement. The memorial movement was the "first cultural expression" of the Confederate tradition and as such "began the process in which Southerners interpreted the meaning and implications of defeat" (Foster 37). The erection of monuments functioned as rituals which helped Southerners cope with loss on a "profound scale" (Blight 77). Such monuments were a key part of what Leeann Whites terms the "second front," that is, the cultural war that took place after the Civil War:

[T]his white cultural war began formally as soon as the military war was lost, with the formation of such groups as Ladies Memorial Associations across the South. These associations were dedicated to the proper burial of their men, and with those burials, ceremonies rich in respectful symbolism. (Whites 97)

The rituals of the Ladies Memorial Association (LMA) and other similar groups were dedicated to the promotion of white heroism and sacrifice during the war and included the erection of monuments to the (white) Civil War dead. Significantly, groups such as the LMA reveal that it was women who were especially active in preserving Southern Civil War memory.

The ritual of burial and the memorialisation of the Southern dead during the war was the responsibility of women and was celebrated as a means through which they could support the war effort and, in turn, the Southern cause.

While men at the front hurried their slain comrades into shallow graves, women at home endeavoured to claim the bodies of dead relatives and to accord them proper ceremonies of burial. Woman's role was not simply to make sacrifices herself but also to celebrate and sanctify the martyrdom of others. In the Confederacy mourning became a significant social, cultural, and spiritual duty. Through rituals of public grief, personal loss could be redefined as transcendent communal gain. Women's tears consecrated the deaths of

their men, ensuring their immortality – in Southern memory as in the arms of God – and ratifying soldiers' individual martyrdom. (Faust 1214)

While the return of men after the war limited the responsibility women had for burying the dead, their key role in ritual and memorialisation continued. After the war's loss, white men were confronted with "myriad military, political, and economic defeats" and white women therefore

found themselves in a critical position. Would they continue to pursue the apparently independent roles the war had opened to them? Or, would they 'stand by their men'; and in that way play a critical role in the reconstruction, rather than the further deconstruction, of Southern white manhood. (Whites 86)

Through groups such as the LMA, white women did indeed "stand by their men" and became central to the process of Southern memorialisation.

Faulkner's fiction considers specifically women's role in supporting Lost Cause mythology and the Civil War dead. This occurs particularly through his use of the Confederate Woman figure in texts such as *The Unvanquished*, the short story "A Return," and his semi-autobiographical essay "Mississippi." In each of these texts Faulkner makes reference to the Confederate Woman: a white Southern lady who takes on a traditionally masculine role during the war in support of the South, but with "no sacrifice of what the culture identifies as essential white femininity: maternal feeling, sexual chastity, adherence to a male economy where property (land) is all-important" (Roberts, "Precarious" 235). The Confederate Woman was a "story designed to ensure [white women's] loyalty and service" (Faust 1201). Faulkner's use of the Confederate Woman (along with the mammy, belle and others) evidences the influence of these stereotypical or mythical Old South figures on Faulkner as a Southerner.

In "Mississippi," Faulkner speaks of the Confederate Woman figure and makes reference to almost all the myths surrounding her. The Confederate Woman was

the major's or colonel's wife or aunt or mother-in-law, who had buried the silver in the orchard and still held together a few of the older slaves, fended him [a Yankee soldier] off and dispersed him, and when necessary even shooting him with the absent husband's or nephew's or son-in-law's hunting

gun or duelling pistols, - the women, the indomitable, the undefeated, who never surrendered, refusing to allow the Yankee *minie* balls to be dug out of the portico column or mantelpiece or lintel, who seventy years later would get up and walk out of *Gone with the Wind* as soon as Sherman's name was mentioned. (15)

Faulkner identifies the Confederate Woman as a figure constructed through a series of specific and oft-repeated stories. By linking her to fiction like Margaret Mitchell's, Faulkner reveals his awareness of the inauthenticity of such characters and the necessarily constructed nature of some aspects of Civil War memory.

In *The Unvanquished* the representation of another Confederate Woman, Rosa Millard (or Granny), and her counterpart, the tomboyish Drusilla, further highlights Faulkner's use of Old South mythology (and the gender roles attached to this mythology) in his fiction. Roberts suggests that in *The Unvanquished* Granny is "associated with the virtue of the plantation as a closed feudal system" while Drusilla is identified with a post-plantation landscape, that of the invaded "world of burned towns and houses and ruined plantations and fields inhabited only by women." In both cases, the woman's body stands in for the landscape of the South itself, connecting women's physical presence to the geography of the South ("Precarious" 239). Moreover, women's bodies become the landscape onto which Southern struggles over gender and race can be played out. As Roberts argues in the case of Drusilla and Granny, the "body become the battleground where the competing constructions of lady, woman and man struggle" ("Precarious" 239). These representations reiterate Faulkner's complex relationship to Southern mythmaking, in which he both endorses aspects of Southern memorialisation and rejects others. As Roberts argues, in Faulkner's fiction "the Confederate Woman's revered body is invested with both the grace of the Old South Eden and its catastrophic history" ("Precarious" 236) in the same way that the figure of the belle becomes complicated by the transgressions of Caddy Compson and Temple Drake and the mammy figure is turned upside down in the case of Nancy Mannigoe, whose sexuality and bodily violence transcend the ideology of mammy.

While Faulkner's characterisation of the Confederate Woman reveals white women's complicity in the process of Southern (mis)remembering that is similarly embodied by the LMA, he is also critical of those for whom attachment to the Lost

Cause is total, such as Quentin and Caroline Compson in *The Sound and the Fury*. Caroline Compson's investment in the virtues of the Old South render her ineffective as both a woman and a mother, and leave her bedridden with hypochondria and anxiety. For Caroline, the desire to maintain an idealised version of the past leaves her unable to face the present or the future. Faulkner's fiction does not resolve the question of how to deal with the traumatic memories of Southerners. Instead, his fiction and his essays continue to struggle with the Southern inheritance of a violent and oppressive history.

The public monuments erected by the Southern white community represent one of the ways in which the South tried to create appropriate memories about their history. Groups such as the LMA recognised the power of monuments in shaping Southern memories of the past through their very permanence.

Public monuments are the most conservative of commemorative forms precisely because they are meant to last, unchanged, forever... Monuments attempt to mould a landscape of collective memory, to conserve what is worth remembering and discard the rest. (Savage 4)

In the South, monuments were erected in memory not only of the Civil War dead, but also of the Confederate Woman and the mammy, highlighting the importance of these characters to the fiction of the Lost Cause.³ The creation of monuments to the Confederate dead was a means for white Southerners who had lost the war, to win the battle over the memory of why that war was fought, and how it was lost.⁴

Initially, monuments to the Confederate dead were erected in cemeteries, at a distance from town centres and therefore symbolically placing "distance between [Southerners'] daily lives and their lost cause" (Foster 45). However, over time more

³ See Faust, "Altars of Sacrifice" for an exploration of the Confederate Woman monument and Johnson, "Ye Gave Them a Stone" and "Chapter 5: Slavery's Memorial" in Savage's, *Standing Soldiers, Kneeling Slaves* for the mammy monument.

⁴ This Southern memorialisation of military defeat is echoed by the mythmaking that occurs in the Australian context regarding the Gallipoli conflict. In the case of the Australian and New Zealand Army Corps (Anzacs) their defeat at Gallipoli has become a defining moment for Australian nationhood in spite the realities of this expedition and its importance to the War.

In public mythologising, Gallipoli has become a sacred place, consecrated land, which the sovereign Turks disturb at their peril. Anzac Day is our national day, so the legend now asserts, because Australians fought there for our 'freedom and democracy' – even though the Anzacs landed at Gallipoli to assist our great ally and the world's greatest autocracy, Russia. The diggers did not invade Turkey to defend democracy. (Lake 7)

As in the South fifty years earlier, public memorialisation and sentimentality are central to Australian memories of the Anzacs. "Sentimentality and nostalgia are now the prevailing modes of relating to Anzac Day" (Lake 96). For further details of the Australian Anzac myth see: Marilyn Lake, Henry Reynolds, Mark McKenna, Joy Damousi. *What's Wrong with ANZAC?: The Militarisation of Australian History* and Robin Prior's "The Myths of Gallipoli."

and more monuments were built within town centres, testifying to the “growing importance of the Confederate tradition” to the daily lives of Southerners (Foster 129). These monuments are physical representations of Southern loss and act as reminders of Southern sacrifice and renewal. The significance of Confederate monuments, as revealed by Blight, Foster, and others, is central to the moment from *The Sound and the Fury* considered earlier in this introduction, where the Confederate monument in Jefferson features explicitly as a traumatic site of memory for Benjy Compson.

Lost Cause remembrance took shape through organisations, rituals, and public sites of memory that seemed simply to commemorate the fallen, but as Blight and others have noted white supremacy was also central to Lost Cause mythology. Although one of the key goals of Lost Cause remembrance was to deny that the defence of slavery was a key motivation for the war, race was still essential to the mythology around the Lost Cause:

It is telling to observe that virtually all major spokespersons for the Lost Cause could not develop their story of a heroic, victimized South without the images of faithful slaves and benevolent masters – the ‘sovereigns’ of a state had to be protecting something besides principles on a parchment. And so, in such reasoning, was the Civil War about and not about slavery. (Blight 260)

The faithful slave figure was central to the South’s reimagining of the Civil War and its aftermath and was essential to the process of idealising the pre-war South as a land of abundance in which honourable white men and women protected happy and devoted slaves. “The Lost Cause imagined millions of willing and contented slaves in its nostalgic remembrance, with slaveholders in the role of providers and mentors for African bondsmen” (Blight 283).

Faithful slave narratives gained momentum in the literature of the South, during and after Reconstruction, as well as in memorials and public memories. Plantation romances were littered with faithful slave figures who lamented the loss of slavery and supported American reconciliation. In Thomas Nelson Page’s short story “Marse Chan,” ex-slave Sam insists that: “Dem wuz good ole times, marster — de bes’ Sam ever see! Dey wuz, in fac’! Niggers didn’ hed nothin’ ’t all to do” (10). In Susan Dabney Smedes’s *Memorials of a Southern Planter*, the faithful slave appears most regularly in the character of “our faithful old nurse, Mammy Harriet” (20), who

even narrates a chapter of the text. In a scene that seems almost farcical, the benevolent white master gathered his slaves and told them

he did not mean to take one unwilling servant with him. His plan was to offer to buy all husbands and wives, who were connected with his negroes, at the owners' prices, or he should, if his people preferred, sell those whom he owned to any master or mistress whom they might choose. No money difficulty should stand in the way. (48)

Memorials insists that “without an exception, the negroes determined to follow their beloved master and mistress. They chose rather to give up the kinspeople and friends of their own race than to leave the white family” (48). Mammy Harriet’s recollection reiterates the willingness of the slaves to follow their benevolent master, “I shall foller my marster” her narration insists, “our people say, 'Ef you got a husband or a wife who won't go to Mississippi, leff dat one behind. Ef you got a good marster, foller him” (28).

A similar scene occurs in Belle Kearney’s autobiography *A Slaveholder’s Daughter* (1900). When her father assembled and freed his slaves, she explains:

There was no wild shout of joy or other demonstration of gladness. The deepest gloom prevailed in their ranks and an expression of mournful bewilderment settled upon their dusky faces. They did not understand that strange, sweet word – freedom. Poor things! (12)

Caroline Gillman’s *Recollections of a Southern Matron* is littered with stories about “faithful servant... Good old Jacque” (10) and Nanny, Jacque’s sister, who was “herself a fine specimen of that quiet graceful respect often discerned among our elder servants” (27). Indeed the devotion of these slaves was so complete that even on his death, Jacque’s concern was for the white family: “we were told one morning that he had died, breathing a prayer for his master’s family” (80).⁵

These fictions promote slavery as a benign and even natural system in which white and black people live in harmony, each knowing their appropriate place. This nostalgic reimagining of the past also invokes the erotics of the other. As Jaffe

⁵ Jacque’s death and his tombstone which reads: “Sacred/To the memory of/Jacque/a faithful slave/his master bears this testimony to his worth” (83) significantly correlates with the public rituals and remembrance surrounding the death of the Faulkner family’s domestic servant, Caroline Barr who was similarly remembered for her service to the white family. See chapter one of this thesis for an extensive reading of Caroline Barr and Faulkner’s memories of her.

Schreiber has argued, “by providing a screen that preserves the power of patriarchal structures, [nostalgia] serves to eroticise the other for the dominant culture. That is, nostalgia utilises an imagined, diminished other to fulfil desire for dominant society” (2). But these examples from plantation fictions also reveal a more insidious aspect of the plantation romance genre – the disavowal of the black family and community. In the plantation fictions of Page, Smedes, Gillman, and others, faithful black people are loyal to the white family and by extension the white community at the expense of the black family and community. This replacement of black family for white is made most emphatically by the mammy figure, whose service to the white family includes her body – her breast is offered to the white child rather than the black. As Kimberley Wallace-Sanders argues, in plantation fiction and other popular culture representations, mammy’s “biological (black) children function only to reaffirm her attachment to her surrogate (white) children” (19). Howard Weeden’s collection, *Bandanna Ballads* (1899), is dedicated to the “memory of all the faithful mammies who ever sung Southern babies to rest” and includes poems such as “When Mammy Dies” and “Mother and Mammy” that memorialise the mammy figure and insist upon her attachment to white children and families. Sentimental plantation fiction promoted black devotion through characters such as Jacques, Sam, and Nanny as well as a legion of loyal and steadfast Uncles and Aunties whose interest was in providing support for white reconciliation. Consequently, they had neither internal lives nor any concerns about racial equality or freedom. In fact, often these characters were actively resistant to racial equality. In *Recollections of a Southern Matron* one such faithful slave noted that his “only wish on earth was to live and die in his master’s service” (236).⁶

The mythology around faithful slaves also took root in the monument movement and in personal reminiscences. Blight makes note of the “outpouring of loyal slave narratives” published by the newspaper the *Confederate Veteran* in “reminiscences collected by the UDC [United Daughters of the Confederacy], and in popular musical entertainments [which] produced the vernacular equivalent of Page’s fiction” (284).⁷ He argues that from the mid-1890s to as late as 1930, this

⁶ Blight’s *Race and Reunion* (211-254) provides an extensive exploration of Southern plantation literature.

⁷ The *Confederate Veteran* was the official monthly magazine of the Daughters of the Confederacy, the Confederate Veterans, and other Southern memorial associations. It was published from 1893 to 1932. Its masthead states that it is published “in the interest of Confederate Veterans and Kindred topics.” The 1906

newspaper published hundreds of “tributes to faithful slaves, often written by former masters” and suggests that the “zeal with which white Southerners marshalled the faithful slave idea to support the Lost Cause tells us more about the tensions in the Jim Crow South than it does about antebellum history” (286). Examples of mammy remembrance published in the *Confederate Veteran* include Captain James Dinkins’s “My Old Black Mammy” (1926); Reverend G.L. Tucker’s “Faithful to the Old Mammy” (1912); and Julia Porcher Wickham’s “My Children’s Mammy” (1926).

This desire to memorialise and celebrate loyal slaves is particularly important to my reading of Faulkner’s remembrance of his own black caretaker, Caroline Barr, in chapter one of this thesis. Moreover, Blight’s investigation of published faithful slave narratives (and their questionable validity) illustrates that the mammy is an idealised stereotype, rather than an historically accurate representation of black womanhood. Faulkner wants to remember Caroline Barr in the same way that former slaveholders want to remember their slaves – as faithful, devoted, and loving. Faulkner in this sense evidences Blight’s suggestion that “loyal slaves, who never really wanted their freedom, were far more prominent in the Southern imagination in 1915 than they had ever been in 1865” (286).

Not content with faithful slave celebrations confined to the pages of newspapers and novels, supporters of the Lost Cause also wanted the faithful slave memorialised in the same way as the Confederate soldier – through physical monuments. Driven by women’s groups such as the UDC, monuments to the mammy were erected from 1905, some forty years after the end of the war. Blight notes that support for mammy monuments was widespread within the UDC and that “many elite white women believed that they must remember the best friend of their childhood” (288). The erection of monuments to mammy highlights the centrality of this figure to Southern mythmaking and memory. Joan Marie Johnson suggests that both black and white people in the South “understood that the images they promoted, the texts they wrote, and the monuments they erected legitimized collective memories” (63). The erection of monuments, the writing of fictional texts,

masthead also provides its ideology and backers, stating that: “though men deserve, they may not win success; the brave will honor the brave, vanquished none the less.” It also declares that “the *civil* war was too long ago to be called the *late* war.” The term they will use is the “War between the States.” Furthermore, it states that the “terms ‘New South’ and ‘lost cause’ are objectionable to the *Veteran*.” By 1906, the journal cost a dollar a year; it was probably a fixture in both the Faulkner and Oldham [Faulkner’s wife Estelle’s family] households. Its sole purpose was to memorialise the war and mythologise the pre-Civil War South” (Sensibar 512).

and the (often false) public memories of mammy combine to show the collective power of the faithful slave narrative to the defeated South, which surfaces repeatedly in Faulkner's fiction and in his memorialisation of mammy through the representation of Dilsey Gibson as a "monument" in *The Sound and the Fury* and Nancy Mannigoe as a "nun" in *Requiem*.

Like the faithful slave narrative, the idealisation of white women that occurred as part of the myth surrounding the Old South was largely an invention. The reimagining of the Southern past that took place during and after Reconstruction involved aligning white women with innocence and purity, both sexual and racial. The figures of the Southern belle and her married counterpart, the matron, became the images of white womanhood that shored up the South's vision of itself. Barbara Welter in the foundational "The Cult of True Womanhood 1820-1860" notes the key goals of white womanhood, the "four cardinal virtues – piety, purity, submissiveness and domesticity. Put them all together and they spelled mother, daughter, sister, wife – woman" (152). While in the North the cult of domesticity promoted male dominance over femininity by advocating male strength over female piety and submissiveness, this equation is complicated by race in the South. Thavolia Glymph argues that "evolving notions of civilisation and domesticity proved particularly problematic in the South" because in the Southern setting such notions

had to grapple with different cultural, social, and material impediments.

Northern and Western European models could only be reproduced on Southern ground in aberrant forms but Southerners understood that they could not afford to ignore the call to domestic order. (65)

Marli Weiner similarly highlights that in the South there was a more "complex intellectual task than simply identifying women's physical inferiority and men's superiority as the source of women's domestic and men's public responsibilities" (57). Instead, she argues, Southerners had to prove that white women were physically inferior to men but that superior strength did not automatically convey public superiority, because of the implications that this would have for constructions of race and gender (57). That is, one could not argue that physical strength alone equalled social power, because then, black men and women of considerable physical strength could lay claim to power that should only be afforded to white men. The South, therefore, "had to find a way to demonstrate both white women's

inferiority (in terms of gender) and their superiority (in terms of race). Their often convoluted efforts to resolve this dilemma reflect a uniquely Southern ideology of domesticity” (Weiner 57). It is out of this “uniquely Southern” climate of interlinked gender and race ideology that the figures of the Southern belle and the matron emerge. White womanhood in the South not only carries the burden of upholding sexual purity but also racial purity, with the body of the white woman threatened not only by sexuality but also by racial miscegenation.⁸ Southern understandings of gender and race are, of course, linked to social class. Poor white women were not expected to uphold the ideal of womanhood in quite the same way as upper class white women, and as such, the position of the Southern belle is tied distinctly to a certain class of white family. My focus in this thesis is limited to this particular kind of Southern family in which women are expected to play out the role of the Southern belle

The Southern belle shored up Southern masculinity by allowing white, unmarried women only one “respectable” identity which they could inhabit, that of the sexually pure belle who required protection by white men against “outsiders” who would seek to harm her. W.J. Cash suggests that the white woman comes to embody the “very notion of the South itself” (118). The belle’s innocence, purity, selflessness, and devotion are emblematic of the mythic vision of the South celebrated by white Southerners, particularly white men. As Roberts argues, “[t]he body of the belle was inscribed with the integrity and glamour of the South itself” (*Southern Womanhood* 102). Roberts goes on to argue that the pedestal upon which white women were placed was a

notoriously small space in which to manoeuvre – yet many things were done in their name, on their ‘behalf’; Jim Crow laws, lynchings, and a rigid class system were maintained in the South partly out of a fear that the purity of white women would somehow be compromised. (*Southern Womanhood* 103)

The belle was used to validate a system of white patriarchy which positioned black men as a threat to white female bodies, but also to the South as a whole. As a result,

⁸ See Marli F. Weiner’s *Mistresses and Slaves: Plantation Women in South Carolina 1830-80*; Elizabeth Fox-Genovese’s *Within the Plantation Household: Black and White Women of the Old South*; and Thavolia Glymph’s *Out of the House of Bondage: The Transformation of the Plantation Household*, for more detailed explorations of the differences between Northern and Southern women’s experience of domesticity and the role of race in this disruption.

the belle justified the need for white men to enact violence and maintain their dominance over others who would violate the body of the belle, and, indeed, disrupt the Southern body politic. She thus functioned as an apologia for racial terrorism and the continued adherence to a strict social and class system.

As with the faithful slave, this version of white womanhood gained momentum in Southern memory and became a key part of the language of Old South idealisation after Reconstruction. Southerners wanted to believe in the sexual and racial purity of their young white women in the same way that they wished to believe in the loyalty and diligence of black people within the slave system. Plantation literature is again a central part of creating this language of sentimentality. However, in reality, the existence of white women who unquestioningly held to such stereotypes is ambiguous. Anya Jabour's *Scarlett's Sisters: Young Women in the Old South*, Laura F. Edwards's *Scarlett Doesn't Live Here Anymore: Southern Women in the Civil War Era*, and Victoria E. Bynum's *Unruly Women: The Politics of Social and Sexual Control in the Old South*, all reveal examples of white women who failed or chose not to fit in with the social model of white womanhood promoted by the white South and idealised by fiction and popular culture. Edwards argues that few Southern women

were belles like Scarlett and Melanie in either the novel or the movie version of *Gone with the Wind*. They were a diverse group, who occupied very different positions in Southern society, had very different experiences, and possessed very different interests. They also had very different levels of commitment to the existing social order. (5)

Jabour, who focuses on the role of young women in the Old South, agrees:

young women in the Old South were both critical to and critical of their culture and their place in it. Their unique situation gave them the ability and the desire to comment upon, to challenge, and, ultimately, to change the American South's narrow definition of Southern womanhood. (4)

Jabour, Edwards and other historians reveal that in reality Southern womanhood was much more complicated and diverse than the mythology surrounding it would suggest. Yet this mythology itself was complex. I am interested in the necessary connection between black and white women in this mythology and, in particular, in how this mutual imbrication is rendered in Faulkner's fiction.

The creation and maintenance of the idealised white Southern woman was, ultimately, about maintaining masculine honour for white Southern men. These men viewed their defeat in the war as great injustice to their honour, and therefore any memory making about the war involved the reinforcement of this masculine honour. “Southerners did not so much feel shame as they feared dishonor. They were determined that the honor they prized be acknowledged” (Foster 35).

Faulkner critiques Southern conceptions of honour through his representation of Quentin Compson in *The Sound and the Fury*. Quentin’s anxieties about his masculinity stem from his commitment to Southern gender roles which see him emasculated by his sister’s sexual action in contrast to his own inaction. Quentin perceives that both he and his sister have failed to adequately perform their sexual and gender roles, and Caddy’s sexual activity and subsequent pregnancy challenge Quentin’s conception of his honour. Kenneth Greenberg examines the slippery language of honour in the Old South and provides a frame that helps to understand Quentin’s uneasy relationship to honour in *The Sound and the Fury*. Quentin’s response to Caddy’s pregnancy is to announce himself to their father as the father of her child. Quentin believes that incest is a more favourable option than his sister having engaged in sexual activity with an outsider. Greenberg argues that:

[m]any cultures concerned with honor highly value appearance. Their members project themselves through how they look and what they say. They are treated honorably when their projection is respected and accepted as true. The central issue of concern to men in such a culture is not the nature of some underlying reality but the acceptance of their projections. (7)

Greenberg highlights here that gender roles in the South are performative, an idea that is repeatedly revealed in Faulkner’s representation of male and female characters in his novels. At the moment that he announces that he is the father of his sister’s child, and at a later moment when he challenges the real father of the child to a duel, Quentin is attempting to regain his masculine honour through a projection, or a performance revealing his investment in the Southern myth’s gender roles.

One of the key aspects of the uniquely Southern concept of masculine honour was alcohol consumption. Faulkner himself was already a heavy drinker at age sixteen and alcoholism was a huge part of his adult life. Alcohol features significantly in his fiction, especially in relation to characters positioned as Southern gentlemen,

including in *Absalom, Absalom!*, *Sanctuary*, and *The Sound and the Fury*. Judith Sensibar suggests that Faulkner was “one of the few modernist writers to push beyond the macho mystique of alcohol to explore its role in the class, racial, and sexual politics of Southern culture and history” (31). She highlights Faulkner’s complex relationship to alcohol as revealed in his fiction, arguing that in *The Sound and the Fury* and *Sanctuary*:

Alcohol is the weapon of choice of those in charge, like the Compson children’s father and uncle and all of Temple Drake’s would-be and actual rapists. Characters as dissimilar as Benjy Compson and Temple Drake are force fed bootleg liquor in scenes that portray the ways the strong literally force alcohol on the weak to obliterate their identity or selfhood by disorienting them so that they lose their grasp on reality. (31)

Alcohol is just one of the ways in which Southern honour manifests itself through attempts to gain or maintain power for white Southern men.

Greenberg highlights the importance of slavery to Old South masculinity and argues that “since Southern gentlemen defined a slave as a person without honor, all issues of honor relate to slavery” (xiii). Bynum reiterates this point when she argues that the Southern version of honour was grounded “in the need to maintain racial distinctions within institutions of the family, law, politics, and the economy” (4). The myth of the faithful slave is also clearly part of this reinforcing of masculine honour through race. Greenberg and Bynum update Bertram Wyatt-Brown’s 1986 suggestion that “over the course of a parallel and mutually sustaining existence, white man’s honour and black man’s slavery became in the public mind to the South practically indistinguishable” (16). As a result, white men who failed to live up to conceptions of honour became equated with blackness, just as white women who failed to conform to the image of pure white womanhood (such as Caddy Compson and Temple Drake) are blackened by sexual experience. Quentin Compson’s perceived failure to maintain both his own and his sister’s honour blackens him in a similar way. He has a “dishonoured status” like black men and slaves (Greenberg 40). Therefore, Quentin’s anxiety regarding his manhood is not only sexual but also racial, and reveals the intertwined nature of gender and race in the South for both men and women, black and white.

The figures of the mammy and the Southern belle are largely inventions of the postbellum period and when they appear in fiction, they almost always appear together. They are necessary counterparts in fiction of the South and were created and promoted because they provide support to the ideal of white masculine power which was so important to Southern men after the Civil War. Mammy and belle are versions of black and white womanhood which ultimately support white masculinity, and Southern masculine honour. Rarely seen without one another in mythologising literature of the South, the mammy and the belle are necessarily connected and reliant upon one another. The most famous example of this is found in Margaret Mitchell's *Gone with the Wind* (1936). The relationship between Scarlett O'Hara and her mammy – tellingly known only as “Mammy” – is emblematic of the celebrated relationship between white women and their female slaves in literature of the Old South and reveals the complications and subtleties of this relationship between white and black women. The mammy takes on the physical burdens of femininity and maternity and allows the white woman to successfully inhabit the position of the belle. *Gone with the Wind*'s popularity within American culture situates Scarlett and Mammy as the most recognisable example of the mammy and belle in Southern fiction and popular culture.

Some of the most iconic scenes from both the novel and the film versions of *Gone With the Wind* are of Mammy trying to contain Scarlett's femininity. Early in the novel Mammy admonishes Scarlett for being impolite (25), her choice of clothing (25), and her eating habits (69), and the novel tells us that Mammy “frequently adjured her to ‘ack lak a lil lady’” (60). In the film adaptation, the image of Mammy fastening Scarlett's corset, her face a mask of disapproval, is perhaps the most easily recognisable scene (see fig. 1). In each of these moments and countless subsequent instances throughout the novel, Mammy chastises Scarlett for her failure to perform white femininity correctly.



Fig. 1. Still from *Gone with the Wind* (1939). Bogle, Donald. *Toms, Coons, Mulattoes, Mammies, and Bucks: an Interpretive History of Blacks in American Films*. 1973. 87

Tara McPherson argues that, “Mammy’s physical labour and supporting role *allows* Scarlett to perform femininity” (55). And while Scarlett’s performance of femininity is in many ways transgressive (her desire for power and economic gain on her own terms is the most obvious example), it is the very presence of Mammy that allows Scarlett to perform this identity. Mammy removes the burden of motherhood and domestic duties from Scarlett and therefore creates and supports Scarlett’s position as belle – the black woman carries out the supporting role to the white woman and allows her to perform white femininity. In this sense mammy is a staple figure of Toni Morrison’s “American Africanism” – that is, a black figure who exists as a “cipher forced to bear the moral and psychic burdens cast aside by white characters” (Stringer 60). While Morrison’s American Africanism is an important jumping off point for readings of the mammy, this thesis considers not only mammy’s position as a “vehicle by which the American self knows itself” (Morrison, *Playing* 52) but also as a complicated figure whose necessary connection to white women evidences the historical and cultural power of racial and gender categories in the South.

Central to most renditions of the belle/mammy relationship is the issue of maternity. In many instances the mammy exists not simply as a surrogate mother to the white woman’s children, but as a mother substitute for the white woman herself.⁹

⁹ See *Gone with the Wind* and Chapter XVIII in Gilman’s *Recollections of a Southern Matron*.

Mammy is the desexualised mother who is powerful in a familial sense, but powerless in any real social, political, or racial sense.

The mammy's role is that of a mother substitute to the usually motherless belle. She is a loving character who has common sense and is often the only assertive female model in the belle's life; but ultimately she has no real power because she is not the belle's mother and because she belongs to a disenfranchised race. (Seidel 21)

This issue of mammy's maternal power extends to include the relationship between the mammy and her biological children. In almost all versions of her character mammy has no biological children of her own. This simplifies the possible issue of mammy's loyalty to white children by removing the possibility of children of her own (often this is helped by mammy's advanced age). Wallace-Sanders argues that in instances where mammy does appear to have biological children she is represented as dismissive, harsh, or even cruel toward her black children in contrast to her love and affection toward white children.

While the mammy figure is largely a postbellum construction promoted in texts created after the conclusion of the war, a number of pre-war texts begin the representation of black mothers as favouring white children. Recall Aunt Chloe's preferential treatment of Marse George in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852). In George Tucker's *The Valley of Shenandoah* (1824) and Isabel Drysdale's *Scenes in Georgia* (1827), a mammy figure is loving toward the white child or children in her care in contrast to her lack of interest in her own children. The preference of the mammy for white children is made explicit in *Scenes in Georgia*:

Those who have never witnessed it can scarcely conceive of the affecting tenderness displayed by the Negro nurse to her little charge. It seems even to exceed the force of natural affection for her own offspring, combining strong maternal love with the enthusiastic devotedness of loyalty. (37)¹⁰

Toni Morrison echoes this depiction in *The Bluest Eye* (1970) where black Pauline Breedlove treats her white charges with more affection than her own daughter Pecola, emphasising Pecola's desire for the blue eyes of the novel's title.

¹⁰ See "Chapter One: A Love Supreme: Early Characterisations of Mammy" in Kimberly Wallace-Sanders's *Mammy: A Century of Race, Gender and Southern Memory* for an examination of mammy's dual maternity in literature and popular culture. Chapter two of this thesis updates Wallace-Sanders's reading of mammy's biological maternity and considers the social and racial issues that complicate mammy's dual maternity.

The historical disenfranchisement of black mothers during and after slavery highlights the black mother's powerlessness in regard to her biological children. And while mammy was similarly powerless when it came to the political, racial, or social structures of the South, she is extremely powerful in a familial and social sense in relation to the white children for whom she cares, particularly white female children who grow into Southern belles. Mammy is essential to the development of the young Southern belle and not only creates the space for her to perform the role of belle, but is also the key figure in transferring the social rules and cues which pertain to the correct performance of white womanhood. In *Requiem for a Nun*, the mammy goes so far as to murder the white infant to protect her from her mother's failure as a wife and mother. By performing this role, mammy is positioned as invested in and supportive of the Southern boundaries that would keep women and black people in their prescribed social place. In other words, mammy enforces the rules that disenfranchise not only the white woman, but mammy herself and her family and community. Mammy therefore works as an apologia for the racist, patriarchal Southern system – her imagined support of this system forms part of its defence. Ultimately, the figures of the mammy and the Southern belle are reliant upon the one another within the Southern setting – the white woman succeeds as belle because a black woman successfully plays the supporting role of mammy, bolstering the systems that ensured white male dominance.

Informed by the complexity of history and memory in the South, this thesis considers Faulkner's relationship to the Southern past through his representation of mammy and belle figures. Chapter one examines Faulkner's biographical investment in Southern memory and myth-making by considering his own relationship with the black woman who worked in his family home, Caroline Barr. This chapter considers the ways in which Faulkner's experience of memory and race as a white Southerner complicates his fictional representation of black women. It reads Caroline's presence in the semi-autobiographical essay "Mississippi;" in Faulkner's public memories of her; and in *Go Down, Moses*, and reads these texts alongside James Scott's notion of "hidden" and "public transcripts" and psychoanalytical accounts of racial difference to reveal how Faulkner's experience of memory and race as a white Southerner complicates his fictional representation of black women. This chapter also considers how black and white boys come together at the breast and in the home of black

women throughout Faulkner's fiction, emphasising the importance of the mammy figure to Faulkner and the white South.

Chapter two considers the short story "That Evening Sun" which is, in many ways, a precursor to *The Sound and the Fury*. In both texts, the white Compson children have adult sexual and racial knowledge traumatically revealed to them. I chart the development of the children's knowledge through their interactions with Nancy Mannigoe and Dilsey Gibson, two very different versions of the mammy. In *The Sound and the Fury* each of the Compson brothers are violently shaken by their sister Caddy's failure to fulfil her prescribed social role, specifically, her failure to perform the role of Southern belle correctly. Each brother's reaction evidences their reliance on female performance to shore up their privileged position in the social order.

Chapter three again takes up the notion of a young white woman who fails to fulfil her prescribed social and sexual role by examining the character of Temple Drake as she appears in both *Sanctuary* and *Requiem for a Nun*. This chapter tracks Temple's development across the two novels and explores how and why she fails to conform to the role of belle in *Sanctuary* as well as her attempted reformation in *Requiem*. It also reads gender performance through Temple Drake and the male characters who surround her in both *Sanctuary* and *Requiem for a Nun*. This chapter also considers the most transgressive of Faulkner's mammies, the murderess Nancy Mannigoe, who appears to reject the position of mammy categorically through an act of violence against a white child but who is ultimately returned to the mammy's pedestal of black sacrifice by the white community.

Chapter four considers what is arguably Faulkner's most self-consciously historical novel *Absalom, Absalom!*, as it engages with Southern memory and myth. In particular, it reads two key moments in which the reality of Southern gendered and racial boundaries are revealed. The first, in which a young Thomas Sutpen is turned away from a plantation home by a black servant, is an originary moment which sets in action the violent course of Sutpen's life and the rise and fall of the Sutpen dynasty. The second, in which a black woman blocks the path of a white woman and then touches her, causes a catastrophic break for the white woman and reveals the unsettling reality of familial relationships in the South.

This thesis concludes by considering Faulkner's public persona and his politics in conversation with James Baldwin's "Faulkner and Desegregation" before opening my discussion of the mammy and the belle out into an exploration of contemporary Southern nostalgia. By examining the popularity of Kathryn Stockett's novel *The Help*, and its film adaptation, I argue for the ongoing pervasiveness of Southern memorialisation and in particular, the continued attraction of the figure of the mammy in the white literary imagination.

Chapter One

Faulkner's Biographical Investment in Mammy: Caroline Barr, "Mississippi," and *Go Down, Moses*

At the beginning of the essay "Mississippi," Faulkner writes that "Mississippi begins in the lobby of a Memphis, Tennessee hotel and extends south to the Gulf of Mexico" (11). As this first sentence suggests, the essay is something more than a straightforward geographical description of the region. From the hotel lobby it opens out into an imagined historical encounter:

the wild Algonquian – Chickasaw and Choctaw and Natchez and Pascagoula – looking down from the tall Mississippi bluffs at a Chippeway canoe containing three Frenchmen – and had barely time to whirl and look behind him at a thousand Spaniards come overland from the Atlantic Ocean. (13)

This history of Mississippi unfolds throughout the essay and includes the arrival of white settlers, the enslavement of African men and women, the Civil War, and American industrialisation. Yet despite the chronology by which Faulkner maps its action, "Mississippi," published in *Holiday Magazine* in 1954, is hard to define aesthetically and generically. And while its publication in a travel magazine accounts for some of the fluidity of the essay's genre, Faulkner takes this instability to a distinctly more complex level by his inclusion of both historical and personal memory.

The naming and classification of the text as essay, history, or even historical essay is soon complicated by the introduction of a collection of characters easily recognisable to those familiar with Faulkner's fictional Yoknapatawpha: "the Sartorises and De Spains and Compsons...and the McCaslins and Ewells and Holstons and Hogganbacks" (12). The introduction of these fictional characters extends the mapping of the personal onto the geographical suggested by the opening image of the hotel lobby, into a blurring of the historical, autobiographical and the fictional.

At the same moment as the Sartorises and De Spains and Compsons are introduced as part of the landscape of Mississippi so too is the figure of the boy: "the land was still virgin in the early nineteen hundreds when the boy himself began to hunt" (12). The story of the boy is intertwined with the history of Mississippi and his growth and experience anchors time within the essay. Historical events are linked to

the boy and his age or experience: “even in the boy’s middle age” (14), “in the boy’s time” (15), “in the child’s time and case” (16). The essay unfolds as a simultaneous history of Mississippi and the experiences of the boy who, as the essay continues, is revealed to be Faulkner himself.

“Mississippi” is thus complicated not only by the blurring of history and fiction through the amalgamation of the fictional Yoknapatawpha and the historical South, but also, importantly, by the inclusion of autobiography. The construction of Southern memory is for the boy, even more important than revelling in childhood myths such as Father Christmas, evidencing the centrality of a specifically Southern version of memory to Faulkner and other Southerners:

even in the boy’s time the boy himself knowing about Vicksburg and Corinth and exactly where his grandfather’s regiment had been at First Manassas before he remembered hearing very much about Santa Claus. (16)

Faulkner repeatedly reminds us of his connection to the South and of the centrality of “the Mississippi which the young man knew” (31). Throughout “Mississippi” Faulkner links memory to history in the Southern context, not only memory in an abstract or fictional sense, but in a deeply personal, autobiographical way. “Mississippi” therefore plays out the often unsteady connection between history and memory explored in the introduction of this thesis.

“Mississippi” is often overlooked in discussions of Faulkner’s historicity which usually focus on his better-known fictional examinations of the South: *Absalom, Absalom!* and *The Sound and the Fury*. However, the intersection of history, memory, and autobiography that occurs in “Mississippi” situates it alongside *Absalom* as central to Faulkner’s examination of the South’s troubled past. Judith Sensibar refers to “Mississippi” as a “slippery, perplexing read: part political polemic condemning racism, part demeaning sentimentalism toward the black people who worked for the Faulkner family, part autobiography, part fiction” (111). The essay reveals Southern history to be a historically verifiable set of actions and reactions, moments and responses, even as the South is also an imagined space peopled with Snopeses, Compsons, and Sartorises. “Mississippi” gives us a South lived and breathed by Faulkner – “the boy,” “the young man,” “the man” – interspersed with moments of fiction – “Colonel Sartoris dead on a Jefferson street” (20) – giving

perhaps Faulkner's most obvious gesture toward his understanding of the slipperiness and the necessary inauthenticity of Southern history.

In "Mississippi," Faulkner links Southern history and memory generally to his own memories and experiences as a white Southerner, and in doing so, the essay represents the intersection of personal experience and the collective memory of the postbellum American South.¹¹ "Collective memory," also known as "social" or "cultural" memory, refers to the shared memory of a group or community and is especially relevant where the collective memory is of a crisis or traumatic historical moment. The introduction to this thesis highlighted the power of cultural memory in the American South, particularly through the promotion of Lost Cause mythology and the myth of the faithful slave. "Mississippi" is Faulkner's most self-conscious textual engagement with the social or collective memory of his culture and reveals the power of the collective to influence his representation of his own personal experience. The structure of "Mississippi" makes clear the connection and often conflict between the historical and the personal for the Southern white man. The movement between the stories of Faulkner's development and the history of Mississippi evidences the idea of collective memory as an "orientating force" for community members (Irwin-Zarecka 9).

In *Reading Autobiography* Smith and Watson argue that it is inevitable that life narrators refer to the world beyond the text that is a part of the narrator's lived experience, even "if that ground is in part composed of cultural myths, dreams, fantasies, and subjective memories or problematized by the mode of its telling" (12). In "Mississippi" much of what is presented as either history or memory is fantasised or imagined. This is particularly true of Faulkner's reminiscences about Caroline Barr, the Faulkner family domestic, who is a central character not only in the essay but also in Faulkner's life. And while "Mississippi" does not outwardly define itself as "autobiography" its publication in a travel magazine does suggest that it should be an accurate representation of the region. The fictionalisation of the region and the misrepresentation of Caroline Barr and her family lead us to the questions: "What is

¹¹ The concept of collective memory was first introduced by Maurice Halbwachs in *La Mémoire Collective* (1950), but has been developed and refined by Olick, Erll, and others. See Olick, *States of Memory: Continuities, Conflicts, and Transformations in National Retrospection*; Erll, *Memory in Culture and Cultural Memory Studies: An International and Interdisciplinary Handbook*; and Assmann and Czaplicka, "Collective Memory and Cultural Identity."

the truth status of autobiographical disclosure? How do we know whether and when a narrator is telling the truth or lying? And what difference would that make?” (Smith 15). “Mississippi’s” merging of collective and personal memory and its narrativisation of the past (both of the region and of the author) speak to the constructed nature of all life-writing, autobiography, or memory. That is, “all memory partakes of falsification, to the extent that it is necessarily a transformation of the remembered event or experience” (Saunders 323). The deliberate blurring between fiction, history, and autobiography in “Mississippi” reveals Faulkner’s awareness of the conflicted nature of memory, particularly in the South, where collective memory is so actively constructed and promoted. It is helpful then, to read “Mississippi” as Smith and Watson suggest we read all autobiographical writing – as a “performative act” (61) – one in which Faulkner confronts the conflicted and troubled history of his region, his family, and himself.

Faulkner represents Caroline Barr in both “Mississippi” and in his public memorials to her through the filter of his memory, yet the content of these remembrances is not just individual, but deeply embedded in the shared cultural memory of his region. In doing so, Faulkner provides an insight into his representation of mammy figures in his other fiction. “Mississippi” is thus the jumping off point for my investigation of mammy as a version of Pierre Nora’s *lieux de memoire* or “site” of memory for Faulkner. This chapter, which begins by reading Faulkner’s public memories of Caroline (using “Mississippi” as a point of departure) reads Faulkner’s texts alongside James Scott’s notion of “hidden” and “public” transcripts in *Domination and the Arts of Resistance* and psychoanalytical accounts of racial difference to reveal how Faulkner’s experience of memory and race as a white Southerner complicates his representation of black women in his fiction.

Critics are often ambivalent about reading literature via author biography; however, in the case of Faulkner’s representations of mammy figures, it would be an oversight to exclude Caroline Barr from discussions of Yoknapatawpha, especially as Faulkner himself did not. Sensibar, whose biography *Faulkner and Love: The Women who Shaped his Art* (2009), is essential to this chapter, argues that “[i]t is unfashionable to assert a relationship between an artist’s moral life and his art, but “‘Mississippi’ demands it” (117). Caroline’s appearance in “Mississippi” alongside the Snopeses, DeSpains, and Compsons situates her as a part of Faulkner’s creative

space. But she appears elsewhere too: *Go Down, Moses* is dedicated to her, Faulkner gave the eulogy at her funeral and then published it, and she was, according to Faulkner's mother Maud and others, the inspiration for Dilsey in *The Sound and the Fury*. I suggest that Faulkner's memories of Caroline are an important way in which to begin to understand his representation of mammy figures in his fiction. Faulkner's memorialisation of Caroline reveals his implication in Southern mythmaking and his exploration of Southern history in relation to memory.

In 1940 Faulkner gave the eulogy at Caroline Barr's funeral. This is Faulkner's first public memorialisation of Barr, but it is not the last.¹² What is immediately striking about Faulkner's eulogy is the simple fact that he gave it. William Faulkner, the white employer of the deceased, gave a eulogy celebrating the life of the black woman who worked for his family. Where is this woman's husband? Her parents? Her brothers and sisters? Her biological children? Faulkner's eulogy gives no indication that these people were present, or that they even existed. Their absence in Faulkner's eulogy is not simply a matter of primary focus on her life, but is in line with the stereotypical depiction of the mammy figure who is represented in isolation, cut off from any biological family or larger black community. Mammy is only allowed space within the literature of the South when her "energies were expended on whites" (Gray White 60). Therefore, as Lisa Anderson argues, mammy is "not an active individual and she is never granted her own womanhood and seldom her own family" (39). In other words, mammy is

the caretaker of the whites' homes and children first, and her own second. Her primary duties are to the whites for whom she works. She must sacrifice the needs of her own family for those of the white family that employs her. Usually she is not shown to have a family of her own at all. (Anderson 10)

In his eulogy Faulkner tells us that "[a]fter my father's death, to Mammy I came to represent the head of that family to which she had given a half century of fidelity and devotion. But the relationship between us never became that of master

¹² Two versions of Faulkner's eulogy exist. The first is the original version published in the *Memphis Commercial Appeal* on February 5, 1940 (one day after the funeral). The second, an announcement of the death and a revised version of the sermon, were sent by Faulkner to Robert K. Haas at Random House on February 7 1940 (three days after the funeral). In his letter to Haas, Faulkner said: "This is what I said, and when I got it on paper afterward, it turned out to be pretty good prose" (118). There are only minor differences between the two versions, with the revised sermon being slightly longer. For this reason I have used this version for my analysis. Full text of both versions of the sermon can be found in the appendix to this thesis.

and servant.” He assures us that he was not Caroline’s “master” despite the social bindings that indicate that his relationship to her existed in exactly this manner. Underpinning his image of Barr in the eulogy is “the formulaic characterisation... of the ex-slave turned faithful servant as Christ figure. The dominant image is of Barr’s selfless service” (Sensibar 106). This description of Barr’s place in the white family destabilises Faulkner’s claim that they were never master and servant and instead highlights her presence in the white home as a socially controlled service. The woman that Faulkner describes in his tribute embodies the mammy’s role as devoted teacher:

From her I learned to tell the truth, to refrain from waste, to be considerate of the weak and respectful to age. I saw fidelity to a family which was not hers, devotion and love for people she had not borne.

The Caroline Barr about whom Faulkner speaks here appears as a traditional mammy, a black woman who taught the white child how to grow successfully into a white man.

Faulkner’s memories of mammy are steeped in affection; she was, in his reminiscence, a fount of “active and constant affection and love.” Faulkner tells us that Caroline assumed “cares and griefs which were not even her cares and griefs” and admits that “she was paid wages for this” but quickly adds that “pay is still just money. And she never received very much of that.” The relationship between mammy and white family is therefore not just a “social and public arrangement” (Weinstein, *What Else* 7) but, Faulkner wants us to assume, the site of genuine love, care, affection, and devotion. Faulkner’s assertion that “pay is just money” is particularly troubling because he turns the meagreness of Barr’s pay into a claim for the authenticity of her love and in doing so dismisses the inequality at the heart of relationships between black domestics and their white employers.

After her death, Caroline was buried in the “colored section” of St. Peter’s Cemetery in Oxford, Mississippi. Her gravestone was erected with an inscription selected by Faulkner which read “Callie Barr Clark/1840-1940/’Mammy’/Her white children bless her” (see fig. 2). Even in her final resting place Caroline is “mammy,” blessed by the “white children” who nonetheless manage to get her name incorrect. Sensibar’s biography of Faulkner highlights a particularly revealing comment of Faulkner’s regarding gravestones: “my idea is, a tombstone in a public cemetery is

set up as a true part of the record of a community. It must state fact, or nothing” (19). The “fact” of Caroline’s life as perceived by Faulkner is that she was “mammy” and loved by her white children. Sensibar notes that “according to Barr’s relatives, he was wrong about her last name [which was just Barr rather than Barr Clark]” (19). Both the eulogy and the gravestone can be read as part of the Southern mythology of the faithful slave, from which the mammy figure emerges. In both instances Faulkner reduces Caroline and her relationship to his family to a series of stock images that highlight the black woman’s devotion, dedication, and affection.

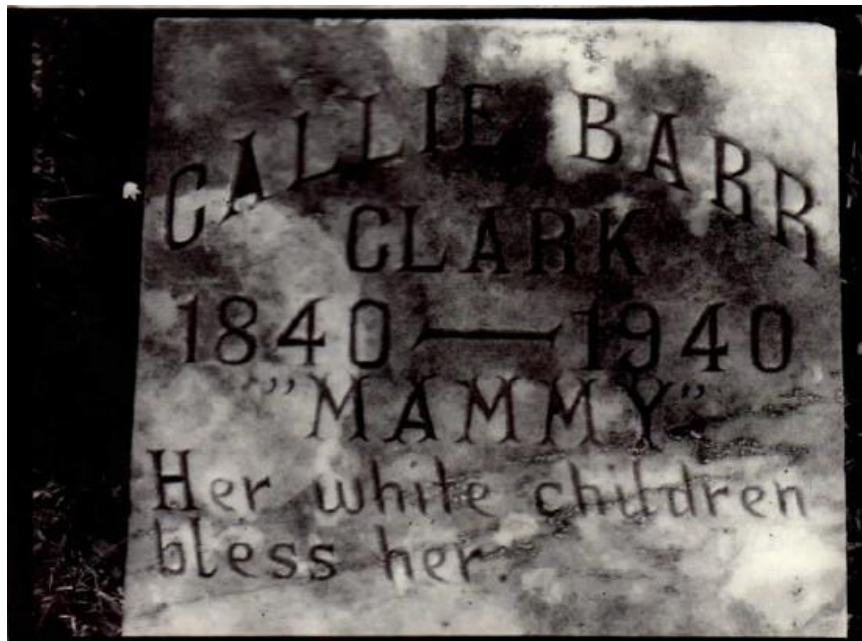


Fig. 2. Caroline Barr’s gravestone, erected and with an inscription by William Faulkner, 1940. St Peter’s Cemetery, the “colored section,” Oxford, Miss. (Photo: Amy C. Evans). Sensibar, Judith L. *Faulkner and Love: The Women who Shaped his Art*. London: Yale University Press, 2009. 18.

Faulkner’s representation of Caroline Barr in these moments of memorialisation mark her as mammy rather than as a fully realised subject. Faulkner participates in the erasure of her individual identity as a woman, wife, and mother. The mammy acts as “a role instead of a person” (Kent 57) and therefore the figure of the mammy is not reality, but fantasy – an imagined servant of white desires and dreams, a celebration of all that is good and easy and harmonious about the Southern past. In the same way that Hortense Spillers has demonstrated that slavery was about transforming “personality into property” (78) the postbellum mammy continues this erasure of black identity by creating a space for black women only in

so far as they perform a service to white families. By misrepresenting Caroline Barr's life through a series of stereotypical and nostalgic images of devotion and by naming her "mammy," Faulkner participates in the appropriation and interpretation of the mammy figure to achieve white goals. Caroline Barr is contained within the role of mammy, erasing the reality of her experience and her individuality.

Two years after Caroline's death *Go Down, Moses* was published and the dedication that opens the book rehashes much of the tone and content of Faulkner's eulogy and gravestone inscription.

To Mammy/ Caroline Barr/Mississippi/ (1840-1940)/ Who was born in slavery and who gave to my family a fidelity without stint or calculation of recompense and to my childhood an immeasurable devotion and love. (xi)

Like the eulogy and the gravestone, again this is Caroline Barr at her mythical best, the dedicated and loving mammy who is the devoted teacher of the young Faulkner. This celebration of mammy has corrected the error of her name that occurred on the tombstone ("Clark" is now absent) but, as Sensibar points out, "'Mammy' appears now as Barr's given name" (105). For the third time, Faulkner has memorialised Caroline in terms of her relationship to the white family. She is "mammy" not "Caroline" here, as she was similarly misnamed on her gravestone and claimed for her "white children" in her eulogy. Faulkner in all three instances participates in the Southern tradition of idealising and misremembering mammy.

The picture painted by Faulkner of Caroline Barr in these three moments of public memory and again in 1954's "Mississippi" is a one-dimensional version of mammy. Faulkner reduces Barr to a series of stock images: the hardworking domestic, the devoted maternal surrogate, the black woman loyal to the white family at the expense of her own. However, Sensibar's biography suggests that the reality of Caroline's life and Faulkner's experiences with her is decidedly more colourful than his eulogy, inscription, essay, and dedication would lead us to believe. Sensibar's *Faulkner and Love* considers not only information from the Faulkner family, but Caroline's biological descendants as well. This research reveals an image of Barr that is at odds with the idealised version of mammy drawn by Faulkner's public memories.

Members of Caroline's biological family recall her as "bossy and stubborn" and Caroline's great-grandson declares that his great-grandmother was so mean that she would "fight a snake" (Sensibar 53). Moreover, the biography reveals that both Barr and her daughters (the biological children missing from Faulkner's memory) had reputations as "fighters" (53). Faulkner himself says very little of these aspects of Caroline's personality and his brothers are similarly silent regarding Barr's stubbornness and fighting spirit.¹³ In "Mississippi" Faulkner claims Caroline as a devoted ex-house slave who refused to leave the family after the war, but in reality Caroline Barr had left her white owners and made sure that her freeborn daughters lived nowhere near the white family for whom she worked (Sensibar 119). In this sense, "Callie Barr lived two lives – one with the Falkners, whom the brothers say she called 'mah white family,' and one with her own family, about whom [the Falkners] chose to remember very little, if anything" (Sensibar 63).¹⁴

Sensibar notes that as a child Faulkner frequently accompanied Caroline into the community in which her extended family lived and he therefore saw Caroline participating in both the white spaces of his family home and in the spaces of her black community. Sensibar suggests that watching Caroline in both black and white spaces taught Faulkner that race "was performative and that its performance changed in response to place and audience" (62). Scott similarly argues for the necessarily performative nature of relationships that are socially, politically, or racially unequal. Noting the public performance

required of those subject to elaborate and systematic forms of social subordination: the worker to the boss, the tenant or sharecropper to the landlord, the surf to the lord, the slave to the master, the untouchable to the Brahmin, a member of a subject race to one of the dominant race. (2)

Scott argues that in these instances there are two transcripts at play, the public transcript and the hidden transcript (3).

In *Slave in a Box: The Strange Career of Aunt Jemima*, M. M. Manring highlights the performative but also the changeable nature of the mammy figure:

¹³ William Faulkner's brother John was also an author who wrote novels as well as a memoir about his childhood and Jack (Murry) Faulkner similarly penned reminiscences on his childhood and family.

¹⁴ William Faulkner's family name is actually Falkner. There are multiple and contested stories regarding the reason for the change, including a typographical error, a deliberate change to a more "British" spelling after his rejection from the U.S. army, or as an assertion of independence from his family. Therefore, this thesis will refer to the "Falkner" family when speaking about William's broader family, as is the case here.

mammy is shorthand for a set of behaviours used to explain diverse concepts such as slavery, love, service, motherhood. When so much meaning can be bundled into a single term, the word itself is inherently imprecise, subject to new interpretations each time it is used, depending on who is using it. This is true for advertisers as well as historians and novelists. (59)

Manring points to the variety of ways in which mammy can be drawn into the service of regional or cultural identity. While in his public memorials to Caroline Barr, Faulkner presents a stereotypical image of the mammy, limiting her identity to her service to the white family, in *Requiem for a Nun* and elsewhere, Faulkner engages with the diverse concepts of the inherently imprecise mammy figure that Manring highlights. That is, at different points mammy can be historical, fictional, or marketable, or some combination of the three.

Faulkner considers racial identity as performative explicitly in *Go Down, Moses*. On speaking to a white man, the mixed race Lucas Beauchamp, without changing the inflection of his voice and apparently without effort or even design... became not Negro but nigger, not secret so much as impenetrable, not servile and not effacing, but enveloping himself in an aura of timeless and stupid impassivity almost like a smell. (52)

Lucas here performs the movement between his hidden and public transcript necessary to his position as a black man in the American South. His public persona requires a change in his voice and his behaviour which, as the passage notes, is not even by design but automatic or unconscious as he interacts with a white man. That such a change exists highlights the break between public and private identities for black people in the South in which they are forced to perform the role, or the public transcript of “nigger” to the white community at the expense of their own identity.

But Faulkner’s sensitivity toward race, revealed in this moment from his fiction is strangely absent from his public memories of Caroline Barr. In both “Mississippi” and in his other public memorials to her, Faulkner instead misreads and misrepresents Barr’s performance of the faithful and devoted servant as an authentic expression of her character. And indeed, Caroline’s role as mammy was a *performance* – she is aware of the need for her to embody the *role* of mammy outside of her identity as Caroline Barr. So while Barr may well have loved her white charges and felt a strong connection to the Faulkner family, evidence, such as the

tension around her payment and her insistence that her biological children do not perform the same work as her suggest that she was more ambivalent about the white family than Faulkner cares to acknowledge. Or to use Scott's language – the public transcript of Barr's performance (the one that Faulkner reads and accepts) diverges from her own hidden transcript.

Faulkner's rendering of Barr in these acts of public memory reduces her solely to her connection to the Faulkners and pays no attention to the complexity of performance and the ways in which the role played can pass into authenticity. One of the contradictions of "Mississippi" thus lies in the tension between truth and fiction when it comes to remembering Caroline Barr. In fact, Barr is at the very centre of the tension between truth and fiction in the essay. As Sensibar argues Faulkner "invents just where he claims to be most factual, in his account of Callie Barr's connections with the Falkner family" (114). Moreover, Faulkner's public memories of Caroline Barr are key pieces of memorialisation that feed into his representation of other black women and other relationships in a variety of his texts. The questions of race and performance and the disavowal of authentic black identity raised by Faulkner's memorialisation of Barr in his eulogy and elsewhere are identifiable in the representation of childhood and Southern history in the essay "Mississippi," in the representation of black and white brotherhood in "The Fire in the Hearth" and grief's violent potential in "Pantaloon in Black" (both from *Go Down, Moses*), as well as in his representation of Dilsey in *The Sound and the Fury*.

When Caroline Barr first appears in "Mississippi" she is aligned explicitly with the Old South and Southern memory. Faulkner recalls,

the indomitable unsundered old women holding together still, thirty-five and forty years later, a few of the old house slaves: women too who, like the white ones, declined, refused to give up the old ways and forget the old anguishes.
(16)

These women, both white and black, are very obviously similar to the women who appear in fiction and reminiscences of the same time – recall Mammy's investment in the values of the Old South in *Gone With the Wind*, and similarly, in Gilman's *Recollections of a Southern Planter*. These women are the devoted caretakers of the Old South. In "Mississippi," Caroline Barr is introduced as one of these unsundered old women and aligned with the myth of the Old South: "[t]he child

himself remembered one of them: Caroline: free these many years but who had declined to leave” (16). Again, Faulkner’s memories of Barr commemorate her as a devoted servant to the white family.

Faulkner highlights Barr’s refusal to accept wages as further proof of her devotion to the white family, suggesting that she would not ever accept in full her weekly Saturday wages, the family never knew why unless the true reason was the one which appeared: for the simple pleasure of keeping the entire family reminded constantly that they were in arrears to her. (16)

This moment in “Mississippi” is the second time Faulkner’s public memorialisation has mentioned Barr’s pay with his eulogy also insisting that “pay is just money” and that Barr received very little of it, producing such a comment as evidence of her loyalty to the white family. While Faulkner had wilfully ignored Barr’s refusal of payment as a possible moment of her pushing back against the systems which kept her in service to the white family in his eulogy by returning to this point in “Mississippi,” he does try to grapple with its more complex and troubling implications. By suggesting that Barr’s refusal of payment was enacted to keep the white family reminded constantly that they were in arrears to her, Faulkner shows some recognition of the hidden transcript implicit in Barr’s action and the possible agency that this reveals. However, there is a slippage here that reveals that Faulkner’s recognition is ultimately inadequate and that his interpretation of Barr’s action is just that – an interpretation – and one that may not be entirely accurate. This scene, in which a black woman refuses payment for her (no doubt) laborious efforts in the white home highlights both Barr’s agency and the significant and complex issue of debt in the Southern context. What do white families owe their black employees in the Southern context? The legacy of slavery and the debt of abuse and violence that marks the figure of the mammy and any black woman working in a white home complicates the simple matter of payment.

In *What Else But Love?: The Ordeal of Race in Faulkner and Morrison* (1996) Philip Weinstein begins his exploration with a consideration of his own relationship with Vannie, the black woman who worked in his family’s home during his childhood. Like Faulkner, his reflections are concerned with the issue of debt and repayment:

When does a more or less forced labour (she had to work, to accept our meagre wage) turn into love? To what extent is what I took for a gift of self better understood as the best of a necessary bargain? What can you know of someone when you never meet that person's family, never even consider broaching the unspoken barriers that construct the contact itself? How can my knowledge of her count as valid when it lacks virtually every element of the knowledge of her that her own friends and family possessed? (*What Else* 9)

Faulkner's memories of Barr skirt around the questions that Weinstein advances here and they do not acknowledge the social, racial, and economic restrictions that necessarily informed Caroline Barr's presence in his family's home. Barr's refusal to accept her pay as a means to remind the white family of the debt that they owed her reveals that while Faulkner could not recognise the larger conditions informing their social arrangement perhaps Caroline Barr did.

Barr's refusal of payment can be read as an assertion of agency from a largely disenfranchised woman and as evidence of her understanding of the performance required by her position in the South. She understands that the white family owe her a debt and that this debt is not just (or even) financial and she reminds them of this in the only way available to her, by refusing the (no doubt insufficient) remuneration they offer. Faulkner turns Barr's possible act of defiance, her recognition of the unequal power structures inherent in her position in the Faulkner household, into evidence for her idealisation, further removing her agency and her identity and again reducing her to the role of mammy. Even as he attempts to grapple in "Mississippi" with the hidden transcript at work in Caroline's purported refusal of higher wages he ultimately shies away from facing the difficult and painful questions that Weinstein asks of himself and his own family in *What Else But Love?*

Faulkner's representation of Caroline in "Mississippi" is at odds with the rest of the essay which is frequently deeply critical of race and racism in the South. This criticism is most obvious in his declaration that:

most of all he hated the intolerance and injustice: the lynching of Negroes... because their skins were black... the inequality, the poor schools they had... the hovels they had to live in, who could worship the white man's God but not in the white man's church; pay taxes in the white man's courthouse but

couldn't vote in it or for it; working by the white man's clock but having to take his pay by the white man's counting. (37)

Here is Faulkner the "middleaged" anti-segregationist, angry about inequality and injustice. His anger toward the South's racial policies is at odds with his nostalgic and formulaic representation of Barr. In the essay Faulkner is self-conscious of his own experience of Southern history but is unaware of Caroline Barr's on a personal level. Sensibar notes this contradiction in "Mississippi" and concludes that the "essay is radical in its general and abstract pronouncements about racial inequality but reactionary in its telling of the story of Faulkner's childhood and adulthood" (113). In other words, the contradiction occurs between the public or civic and the personal.

The power of collective memory is again exposed and Faulkner is at once highly critical of social, racial, and political structures designed to maintain Southern racism yet his representation of his own life and particularly, his relationship to Caroline Barr is undoubtedly nostalgic and stereotypical of the cultural myths of the region. Therefore, the essay is "hybrid" not only formally, but politically (Sensibar 113). The hybridity of "Mississippi" reveals the complexity of relationships between personal memory and myth, black and white, and the Old South and New and it is Faulkner's most self-conscious attempt to represent the Southerner's conflict between cultural myth and personal memory.

Faulkner's representation of Caroline in "Mississippi" iterates his troubled relationship with Lost Cause mythology and Southern history as he keeps critical distance from many aspects of the mythology but embraces others. The essay is framed by Caroline's appearance in the young Faulkner's life and closes with her death. Caroline is present throughout the essay as it follows the boy as he becomes the middleaged and covers broad issues around Southern race relations. The essay closes with Faulkner's daughter and Caroline, who by this time is over a hundred years old and a repository of all family memory (having "forgotten nothing"), piecing together a patchwork quilt:

There was electricity in [Caroline's] cabin now, but she would not use it, insisting still on the kerosene lamps which she had always known. Nor would she use the spectacles either, wearing them merely as an ornament across the brow of the immaculate white cloth – head-rag – which bound her now hairless head. She did not need them: a smoulder of wood ashes on the

hearth winter and summer in which sweet potatoes roasted, the five-year-old white child in a miniature rocking chair at one side of it and the aged Negress, not a great deal larger, in her chair and the other, the basket bright with scraps and fragments of cloth between them and in that dim light in which the middleaged himself could not have read his own name without glasses, the two of them with infinitesimal and tedious and patient stitches annealing the bright stars and squares and diamonds into another pattern to be folded away among the cedar shavings in the trunk. (40)

Barr's refusal to use electricity or her glasses attaches her to the past in the same way as Faulkner's description of her as indomitable and unsundered earlier in the essay does. This moment appears as timeless, an image removed from history. In this scene the black woman and the white child are gathered around a smouldering hearth, an image that recurs in Faulkner's fiction, where white children find safety and comfort in the warmth of the black home. The always burning hearth itself represents love for black couples and families (particularly in "The Fire and the Hearth" and "Pantaloon in Black" from *Go Down, Moses*). Simply by her age, race, and position in the Faulkner household, Caroline Barr is a figure of an unchanging Old South.

Barr's position as a marker of the Old South is also reflected in her dress particularly, the "immaculate white head-rag" that she wears in this scene. The head-rag or headwrap is a marker of black womanhood for both slave women and post-bellum black women and in post-bellum popular culture is specifically a marker of a mammy figure. The most obvious example is the Aunt Jemima trademark which popularised this image of black women from 1893 to the present. Historians have questioned the origin of black women's use of head coverings in the South, with some evidence pointing to traditional African dress as their inspiration. However, in the American context such head coverings became markers of racial, gendered, and class positions, with the headrag of the style that Caroline Barr wears in "Mississippi" worn only by black women. While initially such dressings may have been worn by slave women for practical or traditional reasons, during the eighteenth century, headwraps specifically became legislated badges of servitude and poverty for black women. A portion of the 1786 dress code issued by the Governor of Louisiana forbade "females of color ... to wear plumes or jewelry [sic]" and specifically required

“their hair bound in a kerchief” (Bradley Foster). The headrag or wrap as a badge of servitude and as a way to differentiate the Black female from her white counterpart continued in the postbellum period as Helen Bradley Foster argues in her detailed study of African American clothing in the antebellum South.¹⁵

Caroline Barr wears a traditional mammy-style head rag in this scene from Faulkner’s essay and in one of the few photos that exists of her. In the photograph she appears with William Faulkner’s younger brother Dean and wears not only the head rag, but also the checked dress and white apron that is the uniform of the black female domestic in popular culture (see fig. 3). In another photo, taken by Faulkner of his daughter and Caroline she again wears this same uniform (see fig. 4). Yet, as Bradley Foster’s study goes on to demonstrate, the wearing of the headwrap was often an act of resistance for black women, even during slavery:

For the enslaved woman, the headwrap acquired significance as a form of self and communal identity and as a badge of resistance against the servitude imposed by whites. This represents a paradox in so far as the whites misunderstood the self-empowering and defiant intent and saw the headwrap only as the stereotypical ‘Aunt Jemima’ image of the Black woman as domestic servant.

It is not surprising that black women pushed back by reclaiming forms of behaviour and dress forced onto them as markers of servitude by the white community. But once again for Southern white people such as Faulkner, this hidden transcript is incomprehensible. It is impossible to discern whether Caroline Barr’s decision to wear these clothes was due to her desire to maintain tradition within the household, or simply for practical reasons. But given what we know of her performativity around issues of payment and her slippage between black and white communities, it is possible to suggest that she used her traditional dress as part of her deliberate performance of mammy.

¹⁵ For a detailed account of the history of the head wrap in the South see “Chapter 6: Crowning the Person” in Helen Bradley Foster’s *New Raiments of Self*.



Fig. 3. Caroline Barr, c. 1909, with Faulkner's youngest brother, Dean (b. 15 August 1907). Sensibar, Judith L. *Faulkner and Love: The Women who Shaped his Art*. London: Yale University Press, 2009. 44.



Fig. 4. Faulkner's photograph of Callie Barr and Jill Faulkner, 1939. Sensibar, Judith L. *Faulkner and Love: The Women who Shaped his Art*. London: Yale University Press, 2009. 122.

The passage from “Mississippi” in which Jill and Caroline make a quilt insists upon an intimate connection between the black woman and the white child. Caroline Barr and Jill Faulkner appear as a pair— one white and one black – with a single goal and a shared intimacy that is reflected by their physical similarity (Barr is “not a great

deal larger” than the child). This moment in “Mississippi” commemorates the relationship between the black mammy and the white child and represents this communion as natural and untroubled. It mirrors similar moments that occur throughout the plantation fiction discussed in the introduction to this thesis. In particular, Jill and Caroline’s quilting in front of the fire is strikingly similar to the familiar positioning of former slave Uncle Remus and the white boy John. Joel Chandler Harris’s *Uncle Remus His Songs and His Sayings: The Folk-lore of the Old Plantation* opens with a description of this black man and the white child:

One evening recently, the lady whom Uncle Remus calls ‘Miss Sally’ missed her little seven-year-old. Making search for him through the house and through the yard, she heard the sound of voices in the old man's cabin, and, looking through the window, saw the child sitting by Uncle Remus. His head rested against the old man's arm, and he was gazing with an expression of the most intense interest into the rough, weather-beaten face, that beamed so kindly upon him. (19)

Uncle Remus tells the white child stories while they are seated together in front of the fire just as Faulkner recalls Jill and Caroline together in front of the fire in “Mississippi.” At another moment, Remus is seen “adjusting his spectacles so as to be able to see how to thread a large darning-needle with which he was patching his coat” (31). Harris’s example reveals Faulkner’s key memory, in which he identifies a distinct connection between his daughter and Caroline Barr, as existing as part of a larger nostalgic literary tradition of creating moments of tenderness and connection between white children and black caretakers. As such it reveals how the intense personal memory belongs in fact to a collective “script” – a social mythology, regardless of its basis in actual experience.

This moment of connection speaks to the mutually constitutive nature of the relationship between the mammy and the belle. That is, the intimate relationship between the mammy and the white child feeds into the connection that occurs later between the mammy and the belle (the white child now grown). The mammy and the white Southern belle are necessary counterparts in the gendered mythology of the South created through Lost Cause mythology and memorialisation and their connection can be read as stemming from this childhood intimacy that enacts and confirms the white child’s innocence.

The Faulkner persona (“the middleaged”) is not a part of this scene. Instead, he is looking in from the outside, his view of the scene compromised by the “dim light” in which he “could not have read his own name without glasses.” Importantly, the connection here, the intimate relationship between black and white, is between the black woman and the white *child*. The “middleaged” cannot read this scene (although, of course, Faulkner himself is the narrator) nor participate in its intimate action because as an adult he exists outside the boundary of the intimate relationship between white child and black caregiver. As Sensibar suggests “only the young white girl and the old black woman can see to work in this light. Faulkner’s lesser, raced, and racist sight excludes him” (123). While Sensibar highlights Faulkner’s racialised sight as the key to the unreadability of the scene for him, it is the space of relation between the mammy and the child, their exclusivity and co-dependence that excludes Faulkner from participation or understanding of this moment.

This is another moment in which Faulkner struggles to read the hidden transcript. He is gesturing towards its existence but failing, once again, to render it legible. However, it is Faulkner (the author) who interprets and represents this moment and it is he who excludes William (the persona) from its intimacy – it is the author’s interpretation and representation of this moment that gives it its power. The mammy’s relationship to the white child is represented in the South as unchanging and exclusive and Faulkner’s interpretation of this moment participates in this idealisation. Because of the importance of the relationship between white children and black women for the white community, mammy is almost always presented without a biological family of her own.

Faulkner is reverential towards the key relationship between a white child and the black mammy and its very inaccessibility to him reiterates its cultural value. Faulkner’s investment in this relationship can be read as stemming from his own experience as the white child in connection and collaboration with the black mammy. As a white man who views himself as a part of this uniquely Southern exchange, Faulkner idealises this moment of connection between the black woman and her white charge. Faulkner’s memory celebrates this relationship and this moment appears as part of the canon of loving reminiscences about mammy given by white Southerners during slavery, the Jim Crow period, and beyond.

Moments such as this one in “Mississippi” prefigure the Southerner’s initiation into white adulthood and highlight the complications of mammy/child relationships in the Southern context. Sensibar suggests that in this moment Faulkner is

portraying a time in his daughter’s life when love was not colored – when, as his fictions describing this period constantly reiterate, white children did not differentiate between black and white because they had not yet been taught in brutal initiation rituals that they were *not*, as he repeats over and over again, ‘the same.’ (123)

The state of imaginary racial plenitude that Sensibar is suggesting here is structurally analogous to the psychoanalytic concept of the fantasy of maternal plenitude. In psychoanalytic theory, the imaginary refers to that state whereby the white child still exists in concert with the mother’s body. What we are presented with here is a racialised maternal imaginary in which that plenitude comes about not simply because of the imagined continuity of the child’s and mother’s bodies, but via a fantasised disavowal of racial difference. We might read this passage then as Faulkner reconstructing a moment of maternal plenitude with his black caretaker via the figure of his daughter in order both to overwrite his own separation from this figure and thereby confirm his connection to it. This is a fantasy of the adult Faulkner who has lost the connection due to his entrance into a racialised, segregated order. It is a two-fold fantasy of maternal plenitude in that there is no pre-racialised space between the child and the mammy – the mammy is always in a servile relation to the child and the connection between white child and black caretaker is always one between unequals.

The devotion of the black domestic to the white family was a key part of the propaganda used to defend slavery and segregation. Faulkner’s representation of Caroline Barr’s loyalty and her devotion to his daughter reveal his need to uphold this mythology around black women and white children. This representation of white/black connection speaks to the desire of the Southern white community to see the mammy’s love as always authentic. The essential authenticity of the black woman’s love for white children sustained the belief that these women happily worked for almost no pay. As Faulkner suggests in his eulogy for Barr: “pay is just money” but the love of the black woman for white children represents something more valuable. The unwavering service of these black women in white homes is

explained by white people as evidence of these black women's love, loyalty, and dedication to the white family and white children, rather than a service performed as a requirement of an unequal social system. In short, it proves the essential goodness of white people. At her inception, mammy "played a significant role in [the] campaign to shift emphasis from slave labour to slave loyalty" (Wallace-Sanders 97), and this focus on the loyalty of black people continued throughout the Jim Crow era.

Soon after the scene in which the mammy and the child make a quilt together Caroline Barr has her first stroke: "it should have been the last, the doctor thought so too. But by daylight she had rallied" ("Mississippi" 41). Caroline, well over 100 years of age, was "conscious and sitting up in the bed: who had forgotten nothing: matriarchial and imperial, and more: imperious" (41). Caroline recovers from this stroke and was "walking around again presently... all the way in to town to sit with his, the middleaging's [sic] mother, talking, he liked to think, of the old days of his father and himself and the three younger brothers" (41). Faulkner's admission here betrays his consciousness of how much his version of Barr is a projection. Faulkner is trying to have it both ways in this moment – to be self-aware but in doing so, to get away with being nostalgic. His desire is that even at the end Caroline is loyal to the Faulkners, and that the family are at the very centre of this loyalty.

According to Faulkner's account in "Mississippi," Caroline's health continues to improve until "almost Christmas":

She insisted on sitting in the parlour until the meal was ready, none knew why, until at last she told them, through my wife: 'Miss Hestelle, when them niggers lays me out, I want you to make me a fresh clean cap and apron to lay in.' (42)

Caroline's final wish, as represented in "Mississippi," is to be dressed in her headrag and apron, the traditional uniform of the mammy. Regardless of the truth or artifice of this memory, one can hardly imagine a more stereotypical final request for a mammy. Caroline, in Faulkner's remembrance, is devoted to the white family until the very end. This devotion is reflected even by her clothing. She does not, in this anecdote, wish to be remembered or represented as anything other than mammy, proudly wearing her headwrap.

Caroline Barr died in 1940. Her age at the time of her death is uncertain, but she was almost certainly over 100.¹⁶ Soon afterwards Faulkner wrote to his publisher:

Do you want to consider a collection of short stories, most of them from magazines since 33 or 34, perhaps one or two unpublished yet? Could get it together in a month. Also, Ober has four stories about niggers, I can build onto them, write some more, make a book like *The Unvanquished*, could get it together in six months perhaps. (*Selected Letters* 124)

This motley collection of stories would become *Go Down, Moses*, published in 1942. Faulkner dedicates *Go Down, Moses* to Caroline Barr, his mammy who was “born in slavery and who gave to my family a fidelity without stint or calculation of recompense and to my childhood an immeasurable devotion and love.” Caroline’s influence on Faulkner can be seen throughout *Go Down, Moses* particularly, in “The Fire and the Hearth” and “Pantaloon in Black,” and many of the themes and problems of the text can be read as precursors to Faulkner’s meditation on his relationship to black people generally and Caroline specifically, in 1954’s “Mississippi.” Sensibar claims that Faulkner “began forming his mental picture for *Go Down, Moses* within hours of Callie Barr’s death, as he wrote her eulogy” and she calls *Go Down, Moses* Faulkner’s “first elegy” to Caroline Barr (90).

Go Down, Moses is a collection of linked stories that revolve around two branches of the same family, one white and one black: the McCaslin/Edmonds and the Beauchamps. Throughout *Go Down, Moses* Faulkner explores the troubled and troubling familial connections forged during and after slavery in the South. Caroline Barr’s presence in the text can be seen most obviously in the character of Molly (or Mollie) Beauchamp, the wife of Lucas Beauchamp and carer to the white Carothers (Roth) Edmonds. In “The Fire and the Hearth” Molly’s striking resemblance to Caroline Barr is physical: “a small woman” whose flesh and bones had “begun to wither and shrink inward upon themselves” (44). Later, Molly is described by the now adult Roth Edmonds as:

a small woman, almost tiny, who in the succeeding forty years seemed to have grown even smaller, in the same clean white headcloth and aprons

¹⁶ See “Chapter 2: Caroline Barr’s Origins: A Speculative Reconstruction” in Sensibar’s *Faulkner and Love*.

which he first remembered, whom he knew to be actually younger than Lucas but who looked much older, incredibly old. (82)

Here Faulkner could very well be describing Caroline Barr as he recalls her in "Mississippi" and, like Roth, Faulkner remembers Caroline's advanced age: "to the child... she seemed already older than God" (16). In the final story of *Go Down, Moses*, Molly is again described in a similar way to Barr: "a little old negro woman with a shrunken, incredibly old face beneath a white headcloth and a black straw hat which would have fitted a child" (278) and again as "the old Negress sitting in the only rocking-chair beside the hearth on which even tonight a few ashes smouldered faintly... Stevens thought: *Good Lord, she's not as big as a ten-year-old child*" (285).

But Molly's resemblance to Barr is not just physical. Just as Faulkner emphasises Caroline's role as substitute mother to him in "Mississippi" and in his public memorials to her, in "The Fire and the Hearth" Molly is, to Roth, "the only mother he ever knew" (82). Molly is imbued with the characteristics of the stereotypical mammy right down to the delivery of the white child and the physical act of providing her milk for him:

She had not only delivered him on that night of rain and flood when her husband had very nearly lost his life fetching the doctor who arrived too late, but moved into the very house, bringing her own child, the white child and the black one sleeping in the same room with her so she could suckle them both until he was weaned, and never out of the house very long at a time until he went off to school at twelve. (82)

The near death of Molly's husband is mentioned, but dismissed, and instead the black woman's concern is not for her own husband, but in caring for the white child. This moment reinforces the devaluation of mammy's personal life in favour of her service to white people – mammy's family and community is peripheral to her main objective of supporting white families, even at the expense of her own.

Molly's supporting role as surrogate mother to Roth is reiterated later when he insists that it was Molly

who had raised him, fed him and from her own breast as she was actually doing her own child, who had surrounded him always with care of his physical body and for his spirit too, teaching him his manners, behaviour – to be gentle with his inferiors, honourable with his equals, generous to the weak and

considerate of the aged, courteous, truthful and brave to all – who had given him, the motherless, without stint or expectation of reward that constant and abiding devotion and love which existed nowhere else in this world for him.

(96)

Here, Faulkner reproduces, almost exactly, the words of his eulogy to Caroline Barr:

From her I learned to tell the truth, to refrain from waste, to be considerate of the weak and respectful to age. I saw fidelity to a family which was not hers, devotion and love for people she had not borne.

As Barr did for William, Molly teaches young Carothers about manners, proper behaviour, consideration, and the importance of the truth, helping him grow from a white boy into a white man. But importantly, Molly's relationship to Carothers is more intimate and sensual than Caroline and William's. Carothers's mother is dead, and he was delivered by Molly, who then breastfed him, moving into his father's home to care for him, leaving behind her husband, her home, and her family.

Through the character of Molly, Faulkner presents a version of Caroline Barr, but Faulkner's fiction romanticises the relationship between the black woman and the white child in a much stronger sense than in his more consciously autobiographical text "Mississippi." In doing so he participates in the idealisation of the bond between black women and white children that occurred in the postbellum South to counter charges of racial disharmony. But while the fantasy of intimacy between white children and their mammies is the most significant of the fantasies of racial plenitude that Faulkner's texts consider, it is not the only one. Faulkner also engages with intimate relationships between black and white children forged at the breast and ultimately mediated by the body of the mammy.

Faulkner repeatedly creates black and white children who are born and raised together. In *The Unvanquished* Bayard Sartoris has a black "brother," Ringo: "Ringo and I had been born in the same month and had both fed at the same breast and had slept together and eaten together for so long that Ringo called Granny 'Granny' just like I did" (9). The connection between the two boys is so strong that Bayard suggests that as a result:

maybe he wasn't a nigger anymore or maybe I wasn't a white boy anymore, the two of us neither, not even people any longer: the two supreme undefeated like two moths, two feathers riding above a hurricane. (9)

In this version of black/white brotherhood, the connection between the two boys is represented as not only intimate, but natural and powerful – something that erases racial difference and exists outside of the boundaries of other social or familial relationships.

In the final story of *Go Down, Moses*, the twinning of black and white occurs between two women – Miss Worsham and Mollie Beauchamp – with Miss Worsham insisting that “Mollie and I were born in the same month. We grew up together as sisters would” (281).¹⁷ In “The Fire and the Hearth” the connection is again between a black and a white boy. Carothers recalls his black “family,” Lucas, Molly, and their son Henry, who is described as Carothers’s foster-brother:

Even before he was out of infancy, the two houses had become interchangeable: himself and his foster-brother sleeping on the same pallet in the white man’s house or in the same bed in the negro’s and eating of the same food at the same table in either, actually preferring the negro house, the hearth on which even in summer a little fire always burned, centring the life in it, to his own. (92)

For the white boy, the location of the black home and the black family become the central part of his childhood experience. Jaffe Schreiber highlights the hearth as the site at which Roth’s desire is fulfilled, arguing that “for Roth, Molly’s hearth fulfils his desire for the (m)other and supplies what he lacks” (36). The intimacy here is not only between the black and white boys, but extends to include the entire black family and the physical space of the black bed, food, and home.

Carothers recognises this relationship as “part of his family’s chronicle” (92), this twinning of generations of white and black boys under the same roof. Carothers and Henry’s relationship is a repetition of the relationship between their fathers.

Lucas, Henry’s father, describes Zack Edmonds, Carothers’s father, as:

the man whom he had known from infancy, with whom he had lived until they were both grown almost as brothers lived. They had fished and hunted together, they had learned to swim in the same water, they had eaten at the same table in the white boy’s kitchen and in the cabin of the Negro’s mother; they had slept under the same blanket before a fire in the woods. (48)

¹⁷ This Mollie is the same “Molly” from “The Fire and the Hearth” and the change in the spelling of her name is not explained.

The language in all of these descriptions of white and black boys is strikingly similar. In each case the childhood friendship is recalled in nostalgic and idyllic terms, with the boys learning and eating together, sharing their lives. These black and white boys come together in the home of the black family and their relationship in these recollections (which, importantly, take place once the boy has become a man) is connected to the hearth – the centre of the black home and its heart. The warmth of the black home is reiterated by the focus on the sharing of beds, blankets, and meals.

These recollections insist on an intimate and familial connection between the boys, but this intimacy almost always takes place in the black home rather than the white. The location of these scenes is “the cabin of the negro’s mother” with the black home defined as a feminine space. White men particularly recall the black home of their childhood as the home of the black woman, even if, as in many cases, there is a black husband or father also living there. In contrast to this feminisation of the black family’s home, the white home is understood as “the white man’s house.” This distinction highlights an important disparity in Southern conceptions of family across racial lines.

Slavery was at its heart an institution that devalued and destroyed black families. The reality of the sexual abuse of black women, the displacement and removal of family members, and the insistence that children follow the condition of the mother into servitude all contributed to the breakdown of black families under slavery. In the postbellum South, this devaluation of black home life continued with inequality, poverty, and violence against black men and women. Faulkner’s representation of black and white homes in these moments speaks to the inequality inherent in Southern families because of race. By defining black homes as matriarchal and white homes as patriarchal, Faulkner participates in the devaluation of black families central to Southern thinking in this period. But like Derrida’s “supplement” the black home reveals a gap or lack in the white home that is exposed by the idealisation of the black home in white memories. In the deeply patriarchal society of the South, representing black homes as the purview of women further

disenfranchised black men and reiterated white supremacy through the idealisation of male-led white homes.¹⁸

Faulkner's fictional representations of black and white brotherhood reveals the necessarily intertwined nature of families across racial and social lines in the South. But Faulkner takes his investment in these relationships a step further. In "Mississippi" Faulkner invents his very own black twin, one of Caroline's descendants:

a boy too, whether a great grandson or merely a grandson even she did not remember, born in the same week with the white child and both bearing the same (the white child's grandsire's) name, suckled at the same black breast and sleeping and eating together and playing together. (17)

This memory is a fiction, invented by Faulkner as much as Bayard and Ringo are. But it is also a self-conscious construction and a wish-fulfilling fantasy. Faulkner fictionalises his own childhood – he was not breastfed by Caroline Barr and there is no evidence that Barr's "grandson or great grandson" born in the same week as Faulkner himself, ever existed. However, by placing himself at the centre of a cross-racial partnership, Faulkner exposes his fantasy of racial plenitude, in which black and white boys come together at the breast of a black mother. This fantasy is repeated in "Mississippi" in the scene in which Faulkner watches Caroline Barr and his daughter Jill making a quilt.

¹⁸ This deeply problematic construction of white families as male-led and therefore successful and black families as female-led and therefore dysfunctional regained clout in 1965 with the release of The Moynihan Report "The Negro Family: The Case for Federal Action." In the report, sociologist Patrick Moynihan argued that black poverty and social disenfranchisement was largely the result of a lack of two-parent, nuclear families, and the proliferation of female-led, single-parent households. The report was criticised for its failure to recognise the social and political conditions which disenfranchised black people in a racist society and the stereotyping of black men and black families. Aliyyah Abdur-Rahman summarises the key problem of the Report, arguing that "through a series of manoeuvres, Moynihan denies the centrality of structural racism in the perpetuation of poverty in urban black communities, and he denies ultimately the extent to which racism itself undermines the cohesion and sustainability of black family life" (16). In "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book," Hortense Spillers also criticises the Report and cites the devaluation of black identity under slavery as evidence for the spilt between white and black families and the resultant inability for white terminology such as "patriarchy" and "matriarchy" to be used in relation to the black family. Spillers argues that the transportation of Africans to America under slavery "marked a *theft of the body* – a wilful and violent...severing of the captive body from its motive will, its active desire" (67). This theft, therefore, situates the individual as simply a body and removes the distinction of gender: "under these conditions, we lose at least *gender difference in the outcome*, and the female body and the male body become a territory of cultural and political manoeuvre, not at all gender-related, gender specific" (67). Spillers and others highlight the failure of the Report to recognise the variety of external and historical factors that contribute to the construction of black families and the playing out of black family life. We can read Faulkner's representation of black and white homes as "gendered" as part of the process in which whites misread or ignore the devaluation of black paternity under the racist conditions of Southern society.

The repeated representation of an intimate and natural connection between black and white boys in *Go Down, Moses* and elsewhere in Faulkner's texts speaks to the complex and often ambiguous racial boundaries of the South. Faulkner presents the childhood closeness of Roth and Henry, Zach and Lucas, and Faulkner himself and the unnamed grandson or great-grandson of Caroline Barr, as existing for a time outside of the troubling and dangerous codes and boundaries of race and violence. This set up reproduces a trope that Leslie Fiedler, in his foundational account of American literature, identifies as the fantasy of "the mutual love of a *white man and a coloured*" ("Come Back" 29). In what he terms "childhood texts" such as *Moby Dick* (Ishmael and Queequeg) and *Huckleberry Finn* (Huck and Jim), relationships between black and white boys and men are presented and celebrated by readers and critics as "doctrine[s] of ideal love" ("Come Back" 30). Faulkner's pairings appear similarly idealised and are revealing moments in which white masculinity both courts and rejects blackness. Yet unlike Huck and Jim and Ishmael and Queequeg, Faulkner's white and black boys come together in mutual connection at the breast and in the home of the black mother.

In each of the Faulknerian examples discussed above it is the black woman – usually the mother of the black boy and the surrogate mother or mammy to the white boy – whose presence cements the relationship between the children. Zach and Lucas gathered as boys in the "kitchen and in the cabin of the negro's mother" (48). For Roth and Henry, Bayard and Ringo, and for Faulkner and the unnamed black descendent of Caroline Barr, their connection begins at the breast of the black mother: "[she] raised him, fed him and from her own breast as she was actually doing her own child" (*Go Down* 96); "[they] had both fed at the same breast" (*Unvanquished* 9); "[they] suckled at the same black breast" ("Mississippi" 17). The language in these examples reveals a separation of the woman from her body – in each the emphasis is on the woman's breast – and therefore a dehumanising of the black woman. She becomes the breast at which children feed and a body to be possessed rather than a person to be valued. Faulkner's fantasy in which he and a black boy nurse at Caroline Barr's breast – and it is a fantasy, Sensibar's biography insists that Barr did not ever breastfeed Faulkner – is suggestive of an erotic desire for a closeness and connection between himself and the black body, both that of his black brother *and* his black mother.

Faulkner's representation of black and white boys being fed and raised together in the same home and with the same mother speaks to the simultaneous desire for and rejection of black bodies by white men. Both Fiedler and Eric Lott highlight this desire and rejection in their very different explorations of race.¹⁹ Lott's exploration of blackface minstrelsy leads him to argue that minstrelsy "arose from a white obsession with black (male) bodies" and that similarly such performances acted out white "racial fantas[ies]" about black bodies (4). Through his fictional representations of black and white boys in idyllic childhood brotherhood, Faulkner represents Southern white men's desire for proximity or intimacy with black bodies as highlighted by Lott, Ravenscroft, Butler, and others, and this desire is ramped up by his self-conscious positioning of a version of himself participating in one of these intimate relationships in "Mississippi."²⁰

In Faulkner's versions of these black and white relationships it is the black mother who is the conduit for cross-racial, homoerotic desire between boys. That is, it is at the black mother or the mammy's breast that black and white men can come together in unity in a version of Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's famous model of the triangulation of desire "between men" in Victorian fiction through the figure of the shared female love interest. Sedgwick suggests that women are "exchangeable" and exist as property for the purpose of "cementing the bonds of men with men" (25). But what happens when the woman through which male desire is routed is not simply the love object but the mother, or, more accurately, the mammy? In Faulkner's

¹⁹ See Leslie Fiedler's "Come Back to the Raft Ag'in, Huck Honey!" and Eric Lott's *Love and Theft: Blackface Minstrelsy and the American Working Class*.

²⁰ Alison Ravenscroft considers Lott's reading of the fear and desire at the heart of blackface minstrelsy in the Australian context, arguing that "whiteness is made in proximity with blackness, a proximity which the white subject desires and must deny" (133). Further, Ravenscroft argues that the white community's need for assimilation of black or indigenous people into white society and simultaneously for the segregation of these groups is borne from the contradiction of white love and fear of black bodies:

assimilationism is a desire for proximity, always disavowed, and... segregation is propelled by the anxiety that such proximity arouses. Segregation in turn brings about a renewed anxiety: what is it that we have excluded? What is out there? What can we not see? (131)

Judith Butler's reading of Nella Larsen's *Passing* also highlights the danger of "proximity" for white men, arguing that in the context of that novel "race" itself is figured as a contagion transmissible through proximity (*Bodies* 126). For the white husband of the mixed race Clare (who is passing as white), anxiety about racial proximity is tied to his own racial identity:

if he were to associate with blacks, the boundaries of his own whiteness, and surely that of his children, would no longer be easily fixed. Paradoxically, his own racist passion requires that association; he cannot be white without blacks and without the constant disavowal of his relation to them. It is only through that disavowal that his whiteness is perpetually – but anxiously – reconstituted. (Butler, *Bodies* 126)

Abdur-Rahman's *Against the Closet* and Sharon Patricia Holland's *The Erotic Life of Racism* both consider these boundaries alongside the intersection of eroticism and racism and highlight the dangerous power of this coming together. Chapter four of this thesis considers *Absalom, Absalom!* and the erotics of racism.

formulation in *Go Down, Moses* and “Mississippi,” the mammy is the object of exchange which connects white and black boys and it is the black (surrogate) mother who allows white boys and men to perform the racial fantasy of black proximity. For Faulkner’s black and white boys, the body of the mammy can be read as a “conduit of a relationship in which the true *partner* is a man” (Sedgwick 25). Or to use Sharon Patricia Holland’s words, mammy “marks the place of *access*” to black bodies (50). However, this connection is complicated in this instance by the intersection of race and maternity, and the necessarily unequal relationship between the white and black players in this scene.

This black and white unity at the breast of the mammy can therefore be read simultaneously as an erotic wish fulfilment in which the white boy seeks an impossible harmony between himself and the black family and as a performance of white masculinity as it both courts and rejects blackness in the South. In both these figurations the mammy is put into service to bind cross-racial relationships. Critics and historians of the mammy figure have long highlighted her use in mediating Southern domestic relationships.

[Mammy] soothed white guilt over slavery and uplifted white womanhood through sheer contrast and by keeping white women out of the kitchen. She saved them from work but also from worry and seemingly cleared up tensions between white men and white women, between masters and servants, by clarifying sexual and work roles as well as racial lines. (Manring 23)

In the case of *Go Down, Moses* and “Mississippi” mammy’s body provides a link connecting black and white boys, an essential connection that is represented as idyllic for the children involved, particularly for the white boy.

However, while Faulkner represents an idealised connection between white and black boys via the mammy, he is not blind to the contradictions and dangers of such relationships in the South. Faulkner’s experience as a white Southerner gives him insight into the necessarily precarious nature of black-white relationships and in *Go Down, Moses* both versions of the relationship between black and white boys is, at some point, irretrievably broken. For Carothers, the realisation that his black family is not his “family” occurs in a fairly banal way. He recalls that one day

he knew, without wondering or remembering when or how he had learned that either, that the black woman was not his mother, and did not regret it; he

knew that his own mother was dead and did not grieve. There was still the black woman, constant, steadfast, and the black man of whom he saw as much and even more than of his own father, and the negro's house, the strong warm negro smell, the night-time hearth and the fire even in summer on it, which he still preferred to his own.... He and his foster-brother rode the plantation horses and mules... they were sufficient, complete, wanting, as all children do, not to be understood, leaping in mutual embattlement before any threat to privacy, but only to love, to question and examine unchallenged, and to be let alone. (90)

The connection between the two boys in childhood is in this passage revealed as mutual, unchallenged, and complete. Importantly, these reflections are those of the white boy – we do not hear how Henry Beauchamp recalls his childhood friendship with Carothers and we can only guess at where and how it might (and surely would) deviate from the white boy's loving recollection.

Carothers's reminiscence of his childhood experiences with both his black "brother" Henry and the whole Beauchamp family highlights the white community's desire to idealise childhood as an idyllic, pre-racial, space. Robyn Bernstein reads this idealisation of childhood in racial terms and argues that childhood innocence is itself raced white, itself characterised by the ability to retain racial meanings but hide them under claims of holy obliviousness – secured the unmarked status of whiteness, and the power derived from that status, in the nineteenth and into the early twentieth centuries. Childhood innocence provided a perfect alibi: not only the ability to remember while appearing to forget, but even more powerfully, the production of racial memory through the performance of forgetting. (8)

Carothers's memories of his childhood with the Beauchamp family play out this performance of racial forgetting or denial. In the white boy's memory, childhood is a time in which he is "sufficient," "complete," and "unchallenged" and appears unaware of his own racial status as white. However, this idyllic childhood innocence does not last.

In a key scene, seven year-old Carothers decides that he does not want to sleep with Henry at his family's home as he had done to this point. Henry decides to go with him back to the house. Usually, Carothers and Henry sleep together on the

pallet on the floor, but instead Carothers insists on sleeping on the bed, without Henry, and when Henry goes to join him, Carothers said:

harsh and violent though not loud: 'No!' Henry didn't move. 'You mean you don't want me to sleep in the bed?' Nor did the boy move. He didn't answer, rigid on his back, staring upward. 'All right' Henry said quietly and went back to the pallet and lay down again. (92)

After Henry falls asleep on the pallet the white boy:

didn't sleep, long after Henry's quiet and untroubled breathing had begun, lying in a rigid fury of the grief he could not explain, the shame he would not admit...They never slept in the same room again and never again ate at the same table because he admitted to himself it was shame now and he did not go to Henry's house and for a month he only saw Henry at a distance. (92)

At this moment the white boy has asserted his authority, an authority he has been invested with simply because of the colour of his skin and in doing so he has insisted upon the powerlessness and social and political isolation of Henry because of his blackness.

In this primal scene of the recognition of racial difference, the idealised relationship between the two boys mediated through the body of the mammy is broken. Carothers's "grief" and "shame" at this moment is inexplicable to him but to us it indicates that this moment cements his knowledge of the racial difference between himself and his black "brother" and the inequality that this necessarily entails. Carothers fatalistically calls this the "old curse of his fathers, the old haughty ancestral pride based not on any value but on an accident of geography, stemm[ing] not from courage and honour but from wrong and shame, descended to him" (90). Carothers assumes a mantle of guilt that is figured as his inevitable inheritance as a white man in the South. This moment evidences Faulkner's repeated representation of white Southerners as guilty and shamed and black Southerners as enduring, noble martyrs. This distinction is made clear by Henry's guiltless sleep, his "quiet and untroubled breathing" while Roth lies "in a rigid fury of the grief he could not explain, the shame he would not admit."

This simplification of Southern historical trauma also occurs in a similar way in *The Sound and the Fury* and *Requiem for a Nun*, and is criticised by James Baldwin in "Faulkner and Desegregation." Baldwin suggests that the guilt of white people and

the martyring of black people reveals that “Faulkner is not trying to save Negroes, who are, in his view, already saved...He is trying to save “whatever good remains in those white people” (“Desegregation” 152). Baldwin’s contention structures the conclusion to this thesis and is key to my consideration of the ongoing struggle over racial memory in the South throughout this thesis.

The moment in *Go Down, Moses* in which Carothers refuses to sleep with Henry is Carothers’ first entrance into the murky waters of racial knowledge. But this realisation is compounded and clarified by his attempt to re-enter the black home. After some time Carothers “knew it was grief and was ready to admit it was shame also” that caused him to act out in anger toward Henry, so he comes to the Beauchamp house and tells them: “I’m going to eat supper with you all tonight.” Carothers believes that this will recapture the previous closeness of his relationship to the black family. Molly responds: “Course you is...I’ll cook you a chicken” (92). But when it has been made Carothers has a second moment of realisation, one that cements his previous recognition. He sees that:

It was too late. The table was set in the kitchen where it always was and Molly stood at the stove drawing the biscuit out as she always stood, but Lucas was not there and there was just one chair, one place, his glass of milk beside it, the platter was heaped with untouched chicken, and even as he sprang back, gasping, for an instant blind as the room rushed and swam, Henry was turning towards the door to go out of it. ‘Are you ashamed to eat when I eat?’ he cried. Henry paused, turning his head a little to speak in the voice slow and without heat: ‘I ain’t shamed of nobody,’ he said peacefully. ‘Not even me.’ So he entered his heritage. He ate its bitter fruit. (92)

This scene is a powerful moment of recognition of the racial trauma inherent in Southern racial relationships, and Carothers experiences first an oedipal blindness, unable to see the truth, followed by his entrance into knowledge which manifests as a biblical recognition as his ancestral “bitter fruit.”

In Faulkner’s representation, it is white people who suffer in the aftermath of slavery just as it is Carothers who suffers from the entrance into racial knowledge that occurs in this scene. The reaction of the black family is not explored and instead Faulkner represents white racial trauma rather than the more destructive trauma experienced by black people in the South. This key scene speaks to Faulkner’s

ongoing representation of Southern white people as fallen and suffering while Southern black individuals are sanctified and enduring.

The rupture that occurs in the relationship between Carothers and Henry when racial distinction is revealed occurs again in the relationship between the two boys' fathers and for the Faulkner persona in "Mississippi." In each case, the close relationship between a white and black boy is broken by the white child's entrance into the racial knowledge that is his cultural and familial heritage, and in each case this knowledge cements the relationship as deeply and unquestionably unequal. In "Mississippi" Faulkner recalls his (imagined) childhood friend and highlights this inequality through the games that they played:

Over again in miniature the War, the old irremediable battles – Shiloh and Vicksburg, and Brice's Crossroads...the boy, because he was white arrogating to himself the right to be the Confederate General – Pemberton or Johnston or Forrest – twice to the black child's once, else, lacking that once in three, the black one would not play at all. (17)

For Zach Edmonds and Lucas Beauchamp – Carothers's and Henry's fathers, respectively – the distinction between childhood friendship and adult knowledge manifests in a violent and symbolically loaded scene in which the black man holds a razor to the white man's throat, seeking acknowledgement of his rightful place within the family genealogy (*Go Down* 46-48).

The traumatic entrance into racial knowledge in *Go Down, Moses* is part of a larger trope in which both white and black individuals come into knowledge of their place within the deeply unequal social system of the post-slavery South. One of the most powerful versions of this occurs in James Baldwin's short story "Going to Meet the Man," in which a white man, Jesse, recalls his traumatic entrance into racial knowledge. Upon arriving at the home of one of his customers, a black woman known only to the white man as "Old Julia" Jesse asks a black child sitting out the front of the house for "Old Julia" to which the boy replies, "you might know a Old Julia someplace else, white man. But don't nobody by that name live here" ("Going" 234). The boy's refusal to play by the (white) rules of naming and etiquette on the property of his black grandmother, and particularly, his naming of the intruder as "white man," causes a cataclysmic break for Jesse, who tells us that he began to have:

the feeling he had been caught up in a nightmare, a nightmare dreamed by a child; perhaps one of the nightmares he himself had dreamed as a child. It had that feeling – everything familiar, without undergoing any other change, had been subtly and hideously displaced: the trees, the sun, the patches of grass in the yard, the leaning porch and the weary porch steps and the cardboard in the windows and the black hole of the door which looked like the entrance to a cave, and the eyes of the pickaninny, all, all, were charged with malevolence. White man. (“Going” 234)

He repeats again the words the black child uses to name him: “white man.” His physical response, his fear – later described as “a weird, uncontrollable, monstrous howling rumbling up from the depths of his own belly” (“Going” 235) – reveals that he has never before had to think of himself as white and has never been named as a “white man” – a dehumanised naming such as that of “Old Julia.” Later in his reminiscence, the white man recalls that, like Faulkner’s white protagonists – he “had a black friend, his age, eight, who lived nearby. His name was Otis. They wrestled together in the dirt. Now the thought of Otis made him sick. He began to shiver” (“Going” 240).

Baldwin’s insightful rendering of the white man’s traumatic entrance into racial knowledge and his representation of racial performance in “Going to Meet the Man” and elsewhere, offers lucid confrontation with issues of race in the South that Faulkner repeatedly grapples with in his essays and fiction. Baldwin’s text makes clear the necessary space between the public and the hidden transcript of racial performance in the South, and the painful implications of this structure. It is this break between personal identity (the hidden transcript) and public persona (the public transcript) that Faulkner fails to articulate in his remembrances of Caroline Barr and in his representation of other black Southerners in his fiction.

Faulkner’s depiction of the troubling inheritance of race and of scenes in which white men come into knowledge of their race reveals his uneasiness with the social and racial codes of the South and can be read as exposing his implication and investment in these constructions. Moreover, Faulkner’s sentimental portrayal of white men’s journeys from racial ignorance to painful knowledge can be read as representative of his own journey, where, like Carothers and Zach Edmonds, and Baldwin’s Jesse, he too must have transitioned painfully into the reality of racial

knowledge. What complicates this transition is that Faulkner and other Southerners present racial knowledge as traumatic for white people, with little or no consideration of the very real trauma suffered by black men and women in the South. Instead, in these renderings black individuals become idealised as enduring and noble, pushed into the limiting categories of Sambo, Uncle Tom, mammy and Jezebel.

Chapter Two

The South's Primal Scene: *The Sound and the Fury* and "That Evening Sun"

Faulkner's fascination with the white Southerner's entrance into painful adult knowledge considered in *Go Down, Moses* and elsewhere, is also taken up by two texts from the Faulkner canon that feature the Compson family. The short story "That Evening Sun" and the novel *The Sound and the Fury* both deal with the Compson children – Quentin, Jason, Caddy, and Benjy – coming to terms with the reality of their racial and sexual identity in the fraught Southern context. Little critical attention has been paid to "That Evening Sun" and much of the criticism that does exist only deals with the short story as a passing detail before a larger consideration of *The Sound and the Fury*. In this chapter, I consider "That Evening Sun" not only as it relates to *The Sound and the Fury*, but also as an important Yoknapatawpha text in its own right that adds to discussions of Faulkner's representation of race, gender, and sexuality in the South.

In the little known short story, published 1931, a black woman comes to work in the Compson family household. Nancy, the ex-prostitute, "hellborn" by her own summation, comes to the Compson family to help while their usual cook, domestic, and mammy, Dilsey, is unwell. Throughout "That Evening Sun" Nancy is terrorised by the fear that her husband will kill her and the conclusion of the story leaves her survival ambiguous. The story is not among Faulkner's most celebrated, and critics have paid little attention to it beyond an initial flurry in the 1960s and 1970s largely in reference to its connection to *The Sound and the Fury*. Much of the early criticism surrounding "That Evening Sun" is problematic, often sexist and racist, with many critics simply dismissing Nancy's complexity as a character because of her social position and alleged sexual promiscuity and drug use. Scottie Davis is perhaps the most vitriolic, describing Nancy as "vindictive, masochistic, [and] irresponsible" (31).²¹ While contemporary critics have since softened their judgement of Nancy's personal shortcomings and highlighted her social and racial disenfranchisement as key to her position and actions in the story, there is still uncertainty about how to read "That Evening Sun." Laurence Perrine lists 21 questions that are left

²¹ See: Davis, Scottie. "Faulkner's Nancy: Racial Implications in 'That Evening Sun'" (1972), and Lee, Jim. "The Problem of Nancy in Faulkner's 'That Evening Sun.'" (1961)

unanswered in the story, including: "Who fathered Nancy's unborn child?...Why does Jesus leave Nancy?...Does he come back?....For what does Nancy feel guilty?... What happened to her child?" (297).

The largest, most pressing question that remains unanswered by the story is whether Nancy is alive at the end of the text. Does she survive the night? Perrine argues that, in a general sense, Faulkner's "creation of uncertainties is deliberate" (298) and specifically that "Faulkner *meant* the story to end with a question mark to which no train of inferences would supply a truly reliable answer" (297), but others are not so sure.²² That Faulkner resurrects Nancy for 1951's *Requiem for a Nun* does little to clarify her survival in "That Evening Sun." For while Faulkner himself confirmed that it is "That Evening Sun's" Nancy that appears as the domestic turned murderer in *Requiem*, his confirmation of this fact does little to clarify her fate in the short story. In 1957, he told a class that "she is the same person actually" before continuing, "these people I figure belong to me, and I have the right to move them about in time when I need them" (Tape T-115).

But it is not only Nancy who has been moved about in time for an appearance in "That Evening Sun." The story is narrated by the adult Quentin Compson who, according to the chronology established by other works of Yoknapatawpha, should be three years dead. Critics have placed the events of "That Evening Sun" in approximately 1898 and its narration to have taken place fifteen years later, in 1913. By this chronology, the story is narrated from beyond the grave, with Quentin Compson, according to *The Sound and the Fury*, having committed suicide in 1910 (Perrine 295). While early critics failed to note this chronological inconsistency, those who do recognise it fail to put much symbolic stock in Quentin's resurrection or feel the need to account for it in any complete way, suggesting that it has little influence or meaning in regard to the larger aims of the story and the narrative of the Compson family generally. Noting that "critics...have failed to answer the question," Kuyk et. al. ask: "Does it make a difference that the narrator has been dead for four years? Should there be a new interpretation based on the implications of this ghostly

²² Perrine's 1985 article helpfully lists, in an extensive footnote, those critics who believe Nancy lives and those who believe Nancy has died. He suggests that if his count is correct "critics who believe that Nancy will be murdered outnumber their opponents by almost three to one" (296). While Perrine's article only considers scholarship to 1985, continued reading of "That Evening Sun" scholarship (which is fairly limited, in any case) continues to reflect the division highlighted in Perrine's article.

narration?” (35) They conclude that there is no need for a completely new interpretation and that instead it is necessary to take Faulkner at his word and view Quentin’s narration of “That Evening Sun” as less symbolic of some larger theme of resurrection than an author’s practical use of an appropriate narrator. In other words, Faulkner uses Quentin Compson as “That Evening Sun’s” narrator because he is the Compson child with the most insight into the conditions of the South. As in *The Sound and the Fury*, it is Quentin who is able to represent his memories in the most nuanced and powerful way, so Faulkner resurrects him, moves him about in time, and makes him the narrator of “That Evening Sun.”

Many of the uncertainties that arise from “That Evening Sun” occur because of the behaviour of Nancy and the white family and white community’s failure to understand her actions, fears, and position. In her first appearance in the story, Nancy is described carrying a bundle of washing on her head: “She was tall, with a high, sad face sunken a little where her teeth were missing” (79). We soon learn that Nancy is married to Jesus, a black man from whom the Compson children have been told to stay away. When Nancy becomes the cook for the Compson family while Dilsey is sick, the children recall that they would “have to go down the lane to Nancy’s cabin and tell her to come on and cook breakfast...we would throw rocks at Nancy’s house until she came to the door, leaning her head around it without any clothes on” (79). Throughout the story, Nancy’s behaviour confuses the Compson children and they repeatedly question her actions and her explanations. They are confused by the absence of Jesus, who according to Nancy, has “quit me...done gone to Memphis...Dodging them city po-lice” (83), as well as her subsequent fear of Jesus, and their parent’s reactions to Nancy’s predicament. Caddy asks her parents: “why is Nancy afraid of Jesus....Are you afraid of father, mother?” (89)

The story indicates that Nancy is a casual prostitute, possibly a drug user, and an unreliable worker. However, these opinions come largely from the white community and their interpretation of Nancy’s behaviour. When the Compson children go to her cabin to insist Nancy cook breakfast at the beginning of the story, Jason Compson, the youngest child, tells Nancy “I bet you’re drunk...Father says you’re drunk. Are you drunk Nancy?” an allegation Nancy denies (80). Later in the story, her drug use is also alleged by a white man, the jailor who witnesses Nancy’s attempted suicide after she has been arrested: “He said that it was cocaine and not

whisky, because no nigger would try to commit suicide unless he was full of cocaine, because a nigger full of cocaine wasn't a nigger any longer" (81). Early critics of the story took these assumptions by white men as facts, seeing Nancy as a doomed, drug-addicted prostitute, but it is important to note that there is no evidence of Nancy drinking or taking drugs, and she herself denies it throughout the story.

What is also confusing is the relationship between Nancy and Jesus, which oscillates throughout the story between love, commitment, jealousy, and fear. So while a key part of the story is Nancy's terror that Jesus has returned to kill her, when Mr Compson suggests that Jesus is "probably in St Louis now. Probably got another wife by now and forgot all about you," Nancy is furious and protective of the relationship, threatening a strangely specific form of violence, the exact details of which remain unclear: "If he has, I better not find out about it," Nancy said. "I'd stand there right over them, and every time he wropped her, I'd cut that arm off" (85). Polk highlights the "intensity and complexity" of the relationship between Nancy and Jesus and argues that "they do, in fact, seem to love one another very much; but their relationship is thwarted by a variety of forces, some of which they have no control over, others which perhaps they do" (*Children* 239).

It is striking in itself that Nancy's violent husband, the black man who she fears will kill her, is named Jesus. The original version of the story titled "Never Done No Weeping When You Wanted to Laugh" included the name Jesus for Nancy's husband. When the short story was published in 1931 in *American Mercury*, the editor, H.L. Mencken suggested that the name be changed from Jesus to Jubah for publication. Mencken also suggested removing some of the more sexually explicit material from the story:

This is a capital story and I certainly hope to use it, but it leaves me with doubts...one has to do with the name of Nancy's husband. I see no reason why he should be called Jesus – it is, in fact, a very rare name among Negroes, and I fear using it would make most readers believe we were trying to be naughty in a somewhat strained manner. Don't you think the story would be just as effective if it were changed to some more plausible name?
(Manglaviti 651)

Faulkner made the changes suggested by Mencken for the original publication, but quickly changed them back for subsequent publications of the story (now "That

Evening Sun”) later in 1931 and again in 1950. This reinstatement of the name Jesus suggests that unlike Mencken, Faulkner did feel there was an important reason for Nancy’s husband to be named Jesus.

At the University of Virginia in 1957 Faulkner was asked directly to explain his decision regarding the naming of Jesus:

That was probably a deliberate intent to shock just a little. That's a—it's a valid name among Negroes in—in Mississippi. That is, you don't see it too often, but it's—it's nothing unusual. It's not uncommon. But there may have been a little, not so much to shock but to emphasize the point I was making, which was that this—this Negro woman who had given devotion to the white family knew that when—when the crisis of her need came, the white family wouldn't be there. (Tape T-120)

This explanation repeats the suggestion that was rejected by Mencken that Jesus is a common name within black families of that period. Faulkner suggests here that his use of the name Jesus has less to do with the character himself than with his relationship to Nancy. By naming her husband Jesus Faulkner was making a point about Nancy. This is significant if we consider that Nancy, as Jesus’s wife is therefore the bride of Christ and that later, when Faulkner resurrects her character, she is also confirmed as the nun of *Requiem for a Nun*. Nancy’s relationship to biblical sources and her spirituality in both texts is at odds with her social and racial position. Moreover, while Nancy may be a bride of Christ, she lives in fear that her husband will kill her. The relationship between Jesus and his bride in “That Evening Sun” is perverse in a similar way to the perversion of Nancy’s character in *Requiem* in which her belief in God and her support for Southern memory and myth allows her to murder an infant.

The various contradictions in Nancy’s behaviour are what led early critics to read the story as ultimately about a black woman’s descent into madness. Lee’s argument that “we can read the story as one which deals with insanity caused by Nancy’s guilt” (49) is an example of this critical position. But by dismissing Nancy’s fears, these critics fail to recognise the systems of oppression which force Nancy into her social position in “That Evening Sun.” That Nancy refuses to conform to the limited role made available to her by the white community and instead behaves in

ways that challenge this position confuses critics who take the story's white characters' interpretations of Nancy at face value.

One of the most powerful scenes in "That Evening Sun" (so powerful in fact, that it reappears *Requiem*) is Nancy's confrontation of a white man which leads to her arrest and attempted suicide.²³ Cryptically, the scene begins with the police taking Nancy to jail, but no explanation is given for her arrest. On the way to the jail "they passed Mr Stovall. He was the cashier in the bank and a deacon in the Baptist church" (80). Nancy confronts Mr Stovall asking him:

'When you going to pay me, white man? It's been three times now since you paid me a cent –' Mr Stovall knocked her down, but she kept on saying, 'When you going to pay me, white man? It's been three times since –'until Mr Stovall kicked her in the mouth with his heel and the marshal caught Mr Stovall back (80)

Nancy responds to the white man's attack with laughter: "Nancy lying in the street, laughing. She turned her head and spat out some blood and teeth and said, 'It's been three times now since he paid me a cent'" (80).

How can we read Nancy's behaviour in this scene? Lee uses this scene as evidence for his argument that Nancy is insane, suggesting that confronting a white man in the streets "is something no Southern Negro would dare do in Mississippi at the turn of the century" (49). For Lee and other early critics, Nancy's behaviour in this moment is unreadable and their confusion mimics the confusion of the white community and the Compson children at this and other moments in the story. However, it is possible to consider Nancy's confrontation as an act of resistance, not the careless actions of a mad woman but the deliberate and conscious attempt to challenge the social order or at least, simply to get what's owing to her.

We might read this as another moment in which a black woman causes a break between the hidden and public transcript of her lived experience in the South. Polk hints at this reading when he argues that surely Nancy knew that "under the circumstances he was more likely to beat her than pay her. Perhaps she thought her own pain, even her death, was a small price to pay for the public humiliation of Stovall" (*Children* 239). Nancy's behaviour in this moment is confusing for the white

²³ Chapter three of this thesis revisits this scene as it occurs in *Requiem* at length.

community because it is an act of agency by the disenfranchised against the powerful. Nancy demands payment for the services she has provided, challenging social and cultural norms in which a black woman's body acts as an object to be taken and used by white men.

The assumption of free access to black women's bodies for white men in the South is the legacy of slavery, which granted "all whites – slaveholders and non-slaveholders – the full-fledged, legal right and unchecked personal authority to exploit, consume, and destroy the slave's psyche and body in whatever ways they chose" (Abdur-Rahman 39). This of course included and was largely made up of sexual exploitation which was so common that it was understood as an "unspoken but normative condition" in the South (Hartman 85). So while Nancy works as a prostitute in the post-slavery South, white men's attitude toward her body is underpinned by the presumption of free access that stems from slavery under the conditions of which slave women "existed only as an extension or embodiment the owner's rights of property" (Hartman 82). By demanding payment for her services Nancy disrupts the assumption that her body can be used freely by white men. She wants payment for her services, a demand that is similar to Caroline Barr's refusal of payment from the Faulkner family which seeks to remind the white family of their debt to her. For both women, payment and debt act as the physical markers of the larger debt that the South owes them and their families.

Laurel Bollinger highlights Nancy's "disruptive potential" through the story and links her acts of resistance to the indecipherability of the story itself, which she calls the "implicit evasion of definitional language," arguing that Nancy "evades the classifications society would impose upon her" ("Narrating" 59). Ethel Young-Minor similarly recognises Nancy's unreadability but focuses on the contradictions in her character. Arguing that she "continually embodies polarised cultural norms. She is both a wife to her black husband, Jesus, and a whore to local white men. She is servant and free" (173). Young-Minor's use of the term "free" to describe Nancy is important, because she is, of course, not a slave and therefore superficially free. But the story reveals the many and varied way in which Nancy is bound by her position as a black person and as a woman. That Nancy is so disruptive within white society further evidences the boundaries in place to control black women and their bodies.

Nancy's acts of resistance throughout "That Evening Sun" give her a personal control that is not readily available to those in her social and racial position. Nancy's prostitution is not shocking in a society that views black female bodies as objects, but her decision to demand payment for her services is. By exercising this control over her own sexual body, Nancy is positioned alongside Harriet Jacobs who, in *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* chooses the means by which her body will be accessed by white men. Stephanie Li argues that Jacobs demonstrates that "despite her enslavement, she made choices for herself; she did not passively accept the domination of others" (6) and Nancy does the same. For both women "their sexual choices become sites of resistance" (Li 28).

The representation of Nancy in "That Evening Sun" speaks to the disparity that Faulkner witnessed both as a child and adult with Caroline Barr and his own grappling with history and memory. Faulkner portrays Caroline Barr as a dedicated employee and loving mother figure in his family but as chapter one of this thesis revealed, this one-dimensional representation failed to account for the reality of Caroline Barr's life and what Faulkner witnessed with her. The unknowability of Nancy's life, highlighted by criticism of "That Evening Sun," speaks to Faulkner's own lack of understanding about the reality of Caroline Barr and her family.

While "That Evening Sun" is undoubtedly about Nancy and the action of the story circles around her character, it is also, critically, very much about the white family and particularly, the Compson children. Quentin's narration is his adult retelling of his childhood experience and, as such, it provides a connection between childhood innocence and adult knowledge. As John T. Matthews explains:

The child Quentin doesn't fully understand the events and stories circulating above his head, while the older Quentin has learned more about the South's ills than he wants...The two points of view create a double perspective – naïve and knowing at once. (78)

With this in mind, some of the questions left unanswered at the end of the story can be understood as unanswered because the adult Quentin does not wish to face the realities of his childhood experience, now revealed to him by adult knowledge.

But what the text does reveal is that Nancy's story is inevitably tied to the development of the Compson children and Quentin recalls these memories because

they are powerful moments in his and his siblings' development. Throughout the story the Compson children question what is going on around them. Quentin asks Nancy "What is it?" when she sits unmoving in the Compson kitchen (82), while Caddy has many questions for Nancy and the other adults. She wants to know why Nancy talks about a vine to her husband: "Off of what vine?" (81); why there are certain ways that Jesus cannot talk around the children: "Talking what way?" (81); and against who Nancy threatens violence: "Slit whose belly, Nancy?" (85). For Jason, the youngest Compson child, the most important question relates to his own identity. He wants to know if he is "a nigger" (87, 88, 100).

Jason's concern with his own identity begins after Nancy declares "I aint nothing but a nigger...God Knows. God Knows" (87). From this point on he becomes obsessed by knowing who is and is not "a nigger" declaring "Jesus is a nigger," then "Dilsey is a nigger too" before turning to himself: "I aint a nigger" (87). This naming and classification is important for Jason and he is less certain about his own identity in other moments in the story, seeking clarification from Dilsey: "I aint a nigger...Am I?" (88). Ellen Bonds argues that "each time Jason repeats 'I aint a nigger' represents a progression in the development of his racism" (65). Throughout "That Evening Sun" Jason is learning the difference between nigger and not nigger and all the dangerous and loaded potential attached to these two identities. Jason's repeated questioning about his identity is another instance in which a white boy comes into knowledge of his own racial position in Faulkner. Like Carothers and Zack Edmonds, and the Faulkner persona in "Mississippi," Jason is learning about his own whiteness as he questions Nancy. Jason understands the stakes of racial identity, reflected in his distress at the prospect of being named "nigger." The trauma for Jason lies in the possibility of being labelled as black. He fears not rejection from the black home and family (as is the case in *Go Down, Moses*) but the more dangerous rejection from society that would result from being identified as black.

For all the Compson children, their experience with Nancy reveals their initiation into racial and sexual knowledge. Bonds, Hambin, and Sensibar have all highlighted "That Evening Sun" as a story largely about the white children's "education-initiation into racism" (Sensibar 86). It is through Nancy that the Compson children learn that being a "nigger" means being subject to disenfranchisement and violence in way that white adults are not. But this initiation extends further,

introducing them to the inequalities associated not only with race, but also with gender. Nancy's position as a prostitute reveals to the children an economy in which women's bodies can be used, and the violence enacted against Nancy is not only racial, but sexual in its nature. So while throughout the story Caddy and Quentin seem keen to understand Nancy and the complex relationships circling just above their heads, for Jason it is only important to him that he is not a "nigger" and, I would argue, also not a woman, and therefore that he remove himself from the position that would allow you to be kicked in the street, attacked in your home, or fear for your life.

Nancy's experience not only provides the children with an insight into the realities of race in the South, but her story, and their interaction with her also reveals the complex gender politics both within and between black and white communities. Nancy's sexuality reveals to the children the sexual economy at play in the South. Nancy is pregnant at the beginning of the story, the children could "see her apron swelling out" (81), which Jesus tells them is a watermelon. When Nancy quips to Jesus that "it never come off your vine though" (81), the children are confused, particularly Caddy who wants to know "off of what vine?" (81). Nancy comes to her door "without any clothes on" when the children knock (79) and they know about Mr Stovall kicking Nancy's teeth out. These incidents are representative of the complicated and necessarily unequal sexual politics of the South, and while the children are not sure about what each of these incidents means it is through Nancy that they begin to understand both race and sexuality in the Southern context.

The Mr Stovall story reveals to the children the inequality at the heart of relations between white men and black women, but so too does Nancy's presence in the white home. This sexual and racial complexity is revealed by Mrs Compson's anger at Nancy's presence in her home and her husband's interaction with the black woman. When Mr Compson tells his wife that he will walk Nancy home because she is frightened of Jesus Mrs Compson suggests that he cares more about the black woman's safety than that of the white family. Quentin's narration tells us that it was "[l]ike she believed that all day father had been trying to think of doing the thing she wouldn't like the most, and that she knew all the time that after a while he would think of it" (84).

When Nancy's fear becomes even greater, Mr Compson allows Nancy to stay in their house, sleeping with the children, before Mrs Compson again voices her anger, declaring that "I can't have Negroes sleeping in the bedrooms" before refusing to allow Nancy to stay over again (89). At the heart of Mrs Compson's concerns is the unspoken sexual exploitation of black women by white men. Nancy is not the typical sexless mammy figure who women like Caroline Compson are comfortable to let sleep in their homes. Polk goes so far as to suggest that it is possible that Mr Compson is the father of Nancy's unborn child and therefore the "author of her miseries" (*Children* 239). Although there is no firm proof that Mr Compson has had a sexual relationship with Nancy, Mrs Compson's concerns about Nancy's presence in her home speaks to the fear of sexual exploitation and miscegenation, and while she couches her protest in racial terms, it is also gender that she fears.

Mrs Compson's refusal to let Nancy stay in the house despite her fear that she will be killed is indicative of the larger split between women across racial lines in the South. Mrs Compson's rejection of Nancy in "That Evening Sun" is the legacy of slavery which "literally turned some women into the owners of other women, and so rendered their common position as women null" (Whites 5). In the postbellum South the power inequality between black and white women continued, as did the fear of miscegenation between white men and black women. In part, the mammy figure soothed these fears, by providing a space for black women to exist in white homes and within white families without the fear of sexual misdeeds. But while Nancy replaces Dilsey as the Compson family domestic and cares for the Compson children in "That Evening Sun," her failure to conform to the position of the mammy leads to the racial and sexual panic induced in Mrs Compson. In "That Evening Sun" instead of acting in solidarity with Nancy as a woman she rejects her because of both her race and gender.

Each of these moments teaches the white children how race and sexuality are intermingled in the Southern context and, particularly, how certain people are disempowered in these systems. That Nancy is the one who is taken to jail after asking Mr Stovall for payment, and that Mr Compson tells Nancy that it would not have happened if she would "just let white men alone," teaches the white children that it is important, even lifesaving, to know that you "aint a nigger" (84).

“That Evening Sun’s” focus on the Compson children links it explicitly with *The Sound and the Fury*. While “That Evening Sun” was published after *The Sound and the Fury*, its story occurs chronologically before the events of the novel, with the action of “That Evening Sun” occurring in approximately 1898, while the action of *The Sound and the Fury* happens from 1910 to 1928. *The Sound and the Fury* is also concerned with the theme of the Compson’s children’s entrance into adult knowledge both racial and sexual. In *The Sound and the Fury*, the realities of racial identity and sexual knowledge that were suggested to the children by their interaction with Nancy Mannigoe are revealed more fully especially for the male Compson children, by their sister Caddy. *The Sound and the Fury* develops upon the themes of “That Evening Sun” and presents Caddy Compson as a version of the Southern belle with Dilsey her counter-point as mammy. Throughout the novel both women reveal to the Compson brothers the reality of gender and race in the South.

In a crucial early scene of *The Sound and the Fury*, Caddy Compson climbs a pear tree. As her brothers look up into its branches, they not only see her “drawers,” but see that they are muddy. Faulkner has declared that this is the moment from which the whole story of the novel sprang (Tape T-120). Benjy’s narration tells us that the black boy Versh “went and pushed Caddy up into the tree to the first limb. We watched the muddy bottom of her drawers. Then we couldn’t see her” (31). While critics have long read this scene as a prediction of Caddy’s future sexual transgressions – her dirtied underwear symbolising her future social and sexual “soiling” – what I find more revealing are the reactions of each of her brothers to this moment.²⁴ At the sight of their sister’s underwear each brother is distinctly troubled – Benjy is distressed, Quentin appalled and Jason furious. The scene itself is relatively innocuous – a girl climbs a tree – but the subsequent reactions of each of the boys give the scene its retrospective power. This scene does not simply prefigure Caddy’s sexual fall, it also reveals that it is masculinity that is put under pressure when female sexuality is revealed. This moment is powerful not because of the *action* that occurs, but because of the *reaction* that it inspires. It is yet another moment in which white Southern boys are shaken by the revelation of adult knowledge and their place

²⁴ See Andre Bleikasten’s *The Ink of Melancholy*, and John T. Irwin’s *Doubling and Incest/Repetition and Revenge* for readings of this scene as foreshadowing Caddy’s future sexual transgression.

in the world. This moment is the primal scene that demonstrates that in order for her brothers' masculine subjectivity to hold, Caddy must behave in a certain way.

It is therefore possible to read this moment as an originary revelation of the belle's position as a figure created to shore up Southern masculinity. I argue that the belle exists in parallel to the black mother figure, cementing the relations between black and white boys that were explored in chapter one of this thesis. In this case it is the white woman that allows Southern men to steady their own position in the world. The Compson brothers need Caddy to behave in a certain way to assure their position as Southern white men. As Michael Warner argues, the "modern system of sex and gender would not be possible without a disposition to interpret the difference between genders as the difference between self and other" with the "male as subject and the female as Other" (190). This categorisation of male/subject, female/other, he notes, is the "elementary structure" of sexual and gender roles. In the South, this structure is complicated by race. So while in a sense white men define their masculinity against white women, there is an unsteadiness to this connection because black men threaten white male primacy. White men therefore need to define themselves against black men. In the South, gender roles play out a kind of "adjacency" with white women acting as a guarantee of white male masculinity in the face of racial difference.

Judith Butler has famously investigated women as "object[s] of exchange" (*Gender Trouble* 49). Butler uses the figure of the bride to identify woman's body as a site of exchange, arguing that the bride "functions as a relationship term between groups of men, she does not *have* an identity...she *reflects* masculine identity precisely through being the site of its absence" (*Gender Trouble* 50). It is possible to read the figure of the Southern belle as enacting a similar function. Like the bride, the belle is defined by her sexual purity and functions to support masculine identity. Both belle and bride figures are mobilised in relation to masculine identity and are objects of exchange in masculine culture. Moreover, the very nature of brides and belles is that they are not yet wives. That is, they exist as liminal figures passing from father to husband. The belle exists in a constant state of suspension – caught between purity and marriage and motherhood. The belle's position as something in between – as part of a transaction – is part of what makes embodying this identity so difficult for the young white women of the South.

The belle is an object of social, cultural, and gendered exchange for the South and particularly, for Southern men. So while Quentin's and Jason's desire to maintain Caddy's position as belle is more obviously linked to their own social position, Benjy, the so-called "idiot" whose development is seemingly arrested in a pre-pubertal phase, still participates in this process of self-definition vis-à-vis Caddy.²⁵ Benjy's reaction to finding Caddy with Charlie (30), and the subsequent moment at which she loses her virginity (55) are both indicative of Benjy's recognition (on some level) of Caddy's sexual transgressions. At both moments Benjy is distraught. At the sight of Caddy and Charlie, Benjy's narration tells us "I cried loud" forcing Caddy to abandon her lover and return with her brother to the house (30). Similarly, after Caddy loses her virginity Benjy senses that something has happened and his narration reveals that "I saw her eyes and cried louder and pulled at her dress" (56). Benjy's distress in each of these moments is narratively linked to the revelation of Caddy's sexuality and mirrors his similarly troubled reaction after seeing Caddy's muddy drawers.

While Quentin and Jason rely on Caddy's performance of the role of the belle in order to maintain their subject positions in social, cultural, racial, and economic terms, Benjy's disability puts pressure on Caddy's ability to perform the role of belle alongside a kind of maternity. The lack of effective parental authority or adequate maternal care for Benjy within the Compson home leads Caddy into a position of early maternity.²⁶ Caddy's position as a mother surrogate destabilises familial roles within the Compson home:

'Look at me.' Mother said

'Benjamin.' She said. She took my face in her hands and turned it to hers.

'Benjamin.' She said. 'Take that cushion away, Candace.'

'He'll cry.' Caddy said.

'Take that cushion away, like I told you.' Mother said. 'He must learn to mind.'

The cushion went away.

'Hush, Benjy.' Caddy said.

²⁵ Interestingly, Benjy does not appear in "That Evening Sun." Rough calculations seem to suggest that if he is 33 years old in 1928 (as *The Sound and the Fury* tells us). Therefore, he should be three years old in "That Evening Sun," but he does not appear at all.

²⁶Both Mr and Mrs Compson are dysfunctional as effective parental figures for the Compson children. For an exploration of this see Philip Weinstein's "If I could Say Mother": Construing the Unsayable about Faulknerian Maternity."

'You go over there and sit down.' Mother said. 'Benjamin.' She held my face to hers.

'Stop that.' She said. 'Stop it.

But I didn't stop and Mother caught me in her arms and began to cry, and I cried. Then the cushion came back and Caddy held it above Mother's head.

She drew Mother back in the chair and Mother lay crying against the red-and-yellow cushion. (52)

Not only does Caddy act as a maternal surrogate to Benjy in this scene, she is also seen moments later mothering Mrs Compson.

'Hush, Mother. 'Caddy said. 'You go upstairs and lay down, so you can be sick. I'll go get Dilsey.' She led me to the fire and I looked at the bright, smooth shapes. I could hear the fire and the roof. (53)

These scenes reveal that Caddy's performance as belle is undermined by her mother's maternal inadequacies. Benjy's need for a high level of care makes it difficult for the parental figures of the Compson family. Yet because of the ineffectuality of both Mr and Mrs Compson, the responsibility of care for Benjy falls to Caddy and Dilsey. But ultimately Caddy cannot exist as Benjy's mother because of the suspension necessitated by her role as belle – she cannot be his mother because she is caught in that liminal space of Southern belle.

Interestingly, Mrs Compson's ineffectuality as a mother can be directly linked to her "success" as a Southern belle. Mrs Compson is obsessed with maintaining the position of "lady" as laid out by the Old South. The power that Old Southern values regarding femininity hold for Mrs Compson is revealed when she declares that "I was taught that there is no halfway ground that a woman is either a lady or not" (86). Mrs Compson's desire to exist as a "lady" causes her to fail as an effective mother. The Southern lady (or matron) and the Southern belle exist on a continuum in the South, in that women are expected to transition through marriage from the position of young Southern belle to that of the Southern lady or matron, and as such the two identities are necessarily interconnected. Being a lady requires that Caroline be an eternal bride, her desire to maintain the suspension that being a Southern belle requires does not allow her space for effective maternity. She is the eternal bride and therefore unable to be a mother. Caroline's failure in turn creates the maternal absence that Caddy, to some extent, seeks to fill, especially in regard to Benjy. His

need for effective mothering raises particularly interesting questions regarding the relationship between the mammy and the belle in the context of this novel. Caroline Compson exists as a good belle but a bad mother, while Caddy is arguably a good mother but a bad belle. Faulkner seems to be suggesting in this dichotomy surrounding Benjy, that effective motherhood is antithetical to effective ladyhood. It is at this juncture that mammy is required to pick up the maternal slack – and this occurs later in the text where scenes depicting Dilsey caring for Benjy point to the mammy as the most effective mother of the three women who could claim this role.

The Compson family is representative of the tragic quandary that emerges in the South as a result of the strict gender codes required of Southern women. While the white woman is required to exist as the eternal bride one cannot be both pure and maternal. So Caroline Compson cannot mother her children because she is a belle and Caddy's potentially effective mothering excludes her from effectively performing the role of Southern belle. The implications of this structure reveal the limitations of the South's gendered roles and the tragedy of *The Sound and the Fury* is the characters' inability to break free of the South's social, sexual, and racial codes.

Caddy's transgression from her position as belle sets in motion the disintegration of Quentin and Jason's masculine identity. Quentin and Jason are each reliant on Caddy's adherence to the principles of the Southern belle in order to maintain their own masculine identity. For Quentin, a focus on Caddy's sexual purity stems from his own virginity and his desire to preserve the perverse form of "honour" that defines his moral system, so that when she fails to live up to these expectations, he sees no other option but suicide. For Jason, it is power – both economic and racial – which informs his understanding of Caddy, her daughter Quentin, and ultimately all women. Both Jason and his brother Quentin play out the concerns of Southern masculinity on the body of their sister.

The second section of *The Sound and the Fury* is narrated by Quentin Compson as he slowly loses his grip on reality. In this section, his troubled mind keeps coming back to images of Caddy – splashing her with water (115), her revelation that she is pregnant (93), her wedding day (67). Quentin even refers to a little girl he encounters as "sister" (105). Quentin's preoccupation with Caddy reveals

the complex relationship between the two siblings, and just how reliant Quentin is on her to define himself particularly, the notion of her sexual purity. In the Compson appendix, written sixteen years after *The Sound and the Fury*, Quentin's section opens with:

QUENTIN III. Who loved not his sister's body but some concept of Compson honour precariously and (he knew well) only temporarily supported by the minute fragile membrane of her maidenhead as a miniature replica of all the whole vast globy earth may be poised on the nose of a trained seal. (637)

The appendix suggests that Quentin's desire to maintain Caddy's sexuality and therefore his family's honour is merely conceptual. Yet the language of the passage is visceral and sensual. It is the membrane of Caddy's hymen that assures the family's honour for Quentin. Moreover, Quentin struggles with both the inevitable temporality of Caddy's sexual purity – he knows it must be lost – but also the creative potential of her sexuality – her ability to replicate the whole vast earth. Quentin's desire to uphold a fragile concept of honour leads him to try to keep Caddy for himself and confine her to the life of the belle. Her failure to conform to these unattainable standards ends in his madness and suicide.

Quentin's final hours before his suicide are haunted by images of Caddy evoked by the smell of honeysuckle (inextricably associated with Caddy in Quentin's mind) that pervades the Harvard campus and its surrounds. A cursory reading of this section suggests that Quentin is driven to madness and suicide because of his sister's promiscuity, pregnancy, and subsequent banishment. And while this is in many ways true, Quentin's suicide comes about not simply because he cannot live in a world where his sister's sexuality is tainted, but because *his* identity is explicitly tied to his sister's performance of Southern belle. Quentin is invested in protecting his sister's honour because under the ideology of paternalism her honour is a cognate of his own (Breu 113). Quentin is traumatised by Caddy's sexual "fall" not for her own sake or because it goes against the moral system which he holds dear, but because the failure of Caddy as belle causes the erasure of his own identity as Southern gentleman. Quentin cannot exist in a world in which his sister's purity is compromised – if he has not successfully acted as her moral protector he ceases to exist.

The torment that Quentin suffers throughout the narrative of the novel is lodged in the disparity between the reality of his situation and the moral system so paramount to his conception of self, family, and region. Central to Quentin's complex and troubling system of "honour" is the notion of virginity. In the Southern setting traditionally the white male was expected to be sexually active and the woman sexually passive and the inversion of these roles in the case of Quentin and Caddy throws the whole system off kilter.

Quentin is obsessed with the idea of his sister's lost virginity. But he is also equally concerned by the fact that while his sister is not a virgin, he is. Caddy's status as "un-virgin" is of great concern to Quentin, and is in large part responsible for the shaking of his moral system. But specifically, Caddy's sexual activity highlights Quentin's own inactivity. When Caddy asks "you've never done that have you" and exposes Quentin's sexual naivety, Southern gender constructions are turned on their head (125). As much as Caddy's sexuality is a marker of her failure as a Southern woman, Quentin's status as virgin similarly positions him as outside the model of the Southern man. Specifically, in opposition to female sexuality, male sexual activity was "not even disapproved, but almost sanctified" (Wyatt-Brown 95). Moreover, in the South, "sleeping with a woman was an informal rite of virilisation" (Wyatt-Brown 97). But if white women are off-limits for these men, then how do they act out their rites of virilisation? White men's honour relies upon the sharp divisions of women that Henry Sutpen identified in *Absalom, Absalom!* and that opened this thesis. That is, the strict division of women into the virgins who men married and the courtesans and slave girls and women with whom men were sexually active.

Masculine honour in the South is predicated on action, which frequently manifests as sexual action. The denial of sexual impulses by men could be seen as "prissiness" or "effeminacy" in the Southern view and as such destabilised masculine honour (Wyatt-Brown 96). Quentin's honour is therefore compromised by his sexual inaction in contrast to his sister's activity. Quentin and Caddy's inversion of their gender roles can be considered a threat to the Southern system deeply predicated on issues of sexuality. Judith Butler has described the effects of the social disruption brought about by those who fail to "do their gender right," suggesting that such individuals are "regularly punished" for these transgressions ("Performative" 522). If we read gender as what Butler calls a "constructed identity, a performative

accomplishment” and accept that gender “is only real to the extent that it is performed” (“Performative” 520, 527), we can read the Compson siblings as failing to perform their gender correctly. In “That Evening Sun” Nancy also fails to perform her gendered role correctly and is witnessed doing so by both Quentin and Caddy.

Gender is necessarily performative in the South and this performance is not a singular act but a “reiteration of a norm or set of norms” (Butler, *Bodies* 12). And Black and white individuals undertake this same repetition in Faulkner’s South as they perform race. That is, just as Caroline Barr’s position as mammy requires a racial performance, so too do men perform white masculinity in the Southern context in “Mississippi” and *Go Down, Moses*.

The Compson siblings disrupt the South’s conception of gender identity by switching places – Caddy as sexually active and Quentin as sexually passive – unsettling the Southern social and sexual world. Moreover, Caddy and Quentin’s disruptive performance of gender calls into question their very identity in the Southern world:

Inasmuch as “identity” is assured through the stabilising concepts of sex, gender, and sexuality, the very notion of “the person” is called into question by the cultural emergence of those ‘incoherent’ or ‘discontinuous’ gendered beings who appear to be persons but who fail to conform to the gendered norms of cultural intelligibility by which persons are defined. (Butler, *Gender Trouble* 23)

For Quentin particularly, “incoherence” in the face of sexual expectations is key to the destabilisation of his identity. Quentin relies on the concepts of Southern honour to form his self-definition, but this identity comes unstuck with the revelation of his own gendered “discontinuity.” For Caddy, her gender performance is not necessarily “incoherent” in the terms that Butler lays out. That is, she does not perform the wrong gender – she is not un-female in her sexual performance. Instead, while her performance is feminine, it manifests as promiscuity and therefore is the “wrong” kind of femininity.

Quentin’s complicated and unsteady gender identification does not cause him to abandon the system of Southern honour that would position him as outside of its boundaries. Instead, Quentin clings to the ideals of the Southern gentleman. With

increasing vigour he heaps importance on his sister's sexuality, in the vain hope that if he protects her sexuality, if he contains any further performative slippage on her part, his own masculinity will be assured. Caddy's successful embodiment of the role of belle would shore up Quentin's identity and particularly his masculinity. But her (inevitable) failure to live up to these standards pushes Quentin into imagined incest, attempted murder-suicide, and finally death.

Quentin's focus on morality is at odds with the attitudes of other key players within the Compson drama. Particularly revealing is the ongoing dialogue between Quentin and Mr Compson regarding not only Caddy, but women in general. Mr Compson is dismissive of Quentin's distress in regard to Caddy's sexuality, telling him:

Women are never virgins. Purity is a negative state and therefore contrary to nature. Its nature is hurting you not Caddy and I said That's just words and he said So is virginity and I said you don't know. You can't know and he said Yes. (97)

For Mr Compson, virginity does not exist, while for Quentin it is everything. Mr Compson goes on to argue that virginity "means less to women" and that "it was men invented virginity not women" (65). Quentin recalls that, "Father said it's like death: only a state in which the others are left" (65). Mr Compson's indifferent approach to women's sexuality is at odds with the enormous importance that it holds for Quentin. Kristin Fuije argues that for Quentin, Mr Compson's insistence that women's virginity is meaningless and therefore that his sister's virginity never mattered is "more distressing that the violation of his sister's virginity by all the Dalton Ameses of the world." This revelation "threatens him with nothing short of annihilation, because it seems to render everything not only...irredeemably dirty, but also utterly meaningless" (122). The revelation causes the whole system of Southern honour and sexual relations that Quentin uses to structure his identity to become pointless.

In childhood it is Quentin who acts out most aggressively toward Caddy when she is disobedient. Quentin's desire to control the limits of his sister's body reaches its peak when, upon learning of his sister's pregnancy, he tells his father that he is the one who has impregnated Caddy. "*I have committed incest I said Father It was I it was not Dalton Ames*" (66). Quentin's claim to incest represents his desire for a world in which her sexuality is entirely within his control. Moreover, Quentin's claim

to incest would not only fend off Caddy's "uncontrollable" sexuality, it would also position him as an active sexual being. If Caddy must lose her virginity than so too should Quentin be defined by his sexual (mis)deeds.

Quentin tells Caddy that if they claim incest it would be "*only you and me then amid the pointing and the horror walled by the clean flame*" (98). The horror of incest is preferable to the idea that his sister has been sexually active with other men but it would also allow Quentin to continue to define his identity via Caddy. Concurrently, if Caddy's sexual indiscretions were the result of incest, Quentin could claim a position as sexually active (and therefore quasi-honourable in the sense that Wyatt-Brown suggests). Once Caddy has failed to fulfil her prescribed role, Quentin attempts to reclaim both of their identities through an act which, though taboo, would allow them to exist in coalition once more. Quentin's desire to rehabilitate both Caddy and himself through incest is not only ineffective but perverse. Quentin attempts to link himself to Caddy again when he suggests that they die together, in a murder suicide, even getting so far as holding the knife to her throat, "It won't take but a second I'll try not to hurt" he reassures her (96). Both his false admission of incest and his attempted suicide pact with Caddy reveal Quentin's desperate desire to claim some form of identity out of a contract (social, sexual, or physical) with Caddy.

For both Quentin and Caroline Compson, Caddy's virginity is definitive (recall that for Caroline a woman is either a lady or not) but this is not the case for either Mr Compson or Caddy herself. Mr Compson's relaxed attitude in regard to his daughter's purity is antithetical to his presumed paternal role in the South. This paternal absence forces Quentin (and in different ways, Jason) into the position of moral judge of Caddy's character. After Caddy reveals herself to be pregnant, with the vague warning that "I'm sick" (67), Quentin begs her to "say it":

Say it to Father will you I will am my fathers Progenitive I invented him created I him Say it to him it will not be for he will say I was not and then you and I since philoprogenitive. (78)

Quentin's language betrays his obsession with procreation and his distress at the creative power of Caddy's body. Caddy's pregnancy disrupts Quentin's belief system which relies upon the power of the white male patriarch. For Quentin creative power stems from the father ("I am my fathers Progenitive") but Caddy's pregnancy runs at odds with this structure. Quentin hopes that revealing the pregnancy of the daughter

to the father would make it not so. But what Quentin's account fails to consider is that fact that neither Caddy nor his father are proponents of the same moral principles that he holds essential. Mr Compson fails to provide the intensive moral authority of the white father of Southern myth and thereby creates another parental absence within the Compson household.

Caddy, like her father, is less concerned with her own virginity than either Quentin or Mrs Compson. When Quentin desperately asks her "have there been many Caddy" she responds dismissively, "I don't know too many" (73). Later, when Quentin decides to confront the prime suspect in Caddy's pregnancy – Dalton Ames – Dalton is, like Caddy and Mr Compson, dismissive of Quentin's fanatical defence of feminine virginity, telling Quentin that if it hadn't been he who had impregnated Caddy it "would have been some other fellow" (101). Quentin cannot comprehend the sanguine attitudes of Mr Compson, Dalton Ames, and Caddy toward sexual morality. Instead, for Quentin, purity is paramount – not only to his understanding of his sister, but to his sense of self. When Caddy inevitably fails to live up to the perfection expected of her, Quentin's self-conception is shattered and he tries to reclaim himself through attempted incest, murder, and finally successful suicide.

Ultimately it is Quentin's own revelation that illustrates most about his relationship with Caddy. Toward the end of the section "June 2nd, 1910" Quentin muses about one of Caddy's lovers (presumably Dalton Ames) concluding: "he wasn't thinking of me at all... but was thinking of her when he looked at me was looking at me through her like though a piece of coloured glass" (111). Quentin's language here calls to mind the biblical reference: "through a glass darkly" (1 Corinthians 13). Quentin sees Dalton's view of Caddy as an obscured or imperfect version of reality. But this recognition about Dalton's obscured view is actually a profound recognition of Quentin's own distorted view of both Dalton and Caddy. Quentin argues that Dalton sees Caddy in Quentin, but when Quentin looks at Dalton he is seeing an active masculinity that is both desirable and dangerous. Dalton's masculine action disrupts Quentin's social and sexual moral code, but at the same time he is a man who has acquired what Quentin desires: active Southern masculinity. Through the glass between Quentin and Dalton one can see the conflict of southern masculinity, drawn together by Caddy Compson, the failed belle whose position stabilises each of these men.

Like his older brother Quentin, Jason Compson is deeply troubled by his sister's sexuality. Jason's childhood response to seeing his sister's soiled underwear as she climbs the pear tree is anger and, indeed, it is some form of rage that drives his experience throughout *The Sound and the Fury*. In particular, it drives his attitude toward women. To Jason Compson, all women are "bitches" (153). In the same way that Quentin's masculinity is called into question by the feminine purity Caddy rejects, Jason's identity is unsettled by both Caddy's and, later, her daughter Quentin's failure to maintain the power structure which would recognise Jason as patriarch. However, while Jason, like Quentin, is distressed by Caddy's sexuality, his concern for Caddy does not stem from his outraged commitment to an unrealistic ideal of feminine purity. Rather, he seeks feminine submission as a cover for his own perceived masculine inadequacies. Jason is concerned particularly with what association with a failed belle would mean for his social, economic, and racial position. Jason is shaken by Caddy's failure to perform her gender and race correctly because her failure threatens both his masculinity and his class position.

For Jason, Caddy's failure to inhabit the role of belle causes anxiety because of the way it shakes traditional familial and social structures. It is Caddy's failure to "mind" that precipitates his rage which is again triggered when women fail to act in accordance with his conception of feminine submission. We see this rage in two significant moments from childhood and adulthood. At the key moment by the pear tree Caddy, seven years old, tells her brothers that father "said to mind me tonight. Didn't he say to mind me tonight" (31). But Jason is angered by this, declaring that "I'm not going to mind you" and that "Frony and T.P. are not going to either" (31). Jason's fury at the suggestion that he should "mind" his sister continues into adulthood when, after Caddy returns home to try and see her daughter and Jason stops her, he declares to Caddy, "I wouldn't put anything past you. You don't mind anybody. You don't give a damn about anybody" (172). In each incidence, the meaning of "mind" is slightly different. In the childhood context, Caddy's minding takes the form of looking after or taking care of her brothers, which Jason strongly rejects. In adulthood, he uses the term "mind" in its more aggressive form – to give heed or to obey – and it is Caddy's failure to do so that upsets him. Jason therefore rejects Caddy's assertion of the maternal caring role that would allow her to mind her brothers, but then, in adulthood, punishes her for failing to respect his patriarchal

power. Jason's anger stems from his desire for authority and his refusal to be dictated to by a woman who should know her place. For Jason, Caddy disrupts the social, economic, and racial order by refusing to "mind" him and his position of authority.

This attitude is similarly central to Jason's relationship with Caddy's daughter Quentin. Quentin's teenage promiscuity angers Jason, to the point that he admits it "kind of blinded me" (118). However, Jason does not object to Quentin's behaviour because he fears for her wellbeing, nor is he even particularly concerned by the morality of her actions. Instead, he is angry because of what her behaviour means for his social standing and, significantly, how it disrupts his social place:

Like I say it's not that [the sex] I object to so much; maybe she can't help that, it's because she hasn't even got enough consideration for her own family to have any discretion. I'm afraid all the time I'll run into them right in the middle of the street or under a wagon on the square, like a couple of dogs. (150)

This "lack of consideration" for the family particularly, for Jason himself, is at the root of his fury. It is not Quentin's sexual transgression but the publicity of her disobedience that angers Jason. As Wyatt-Brown notes regarding the Southern concept of honour generally, "[t]he chief aim of this notion of honour was to protect the individual, family, group or race from the greatest dread that its adherents could imagine... the fear of public humiliation" (viii). He goes on to argue that

[t]his vulnerability was distressing not only in itself, but, and more important, because it forced the humbled party to admit the shame to himself and to accept the full implications. With his loss of autonomy, he had betrayed kin folk and manhood, in fact, he had betrayed all things he held dear. (viii)

In Jason's eyes the publicness of Quentin's actions renders his social position and hence his very manhood vulnerable. His honour exists "in intimate [and therefore precarious] relation to its opposite: shame" (Wyatt-Brown viii).

After Jason leaves his car and sets off on foot to catch Quentin and the man from the carnival whom she is dating, he returns to find that the air has been let out of his tires. Jason's response is to rail against Quentin's disregard for the status of her family:

I kept thinking, Let's forget for a while how I feel toward you and how you feel toward me: I just wouldn't do you this way. I wouldn't do you this way no

matter what you had done to me. Because like I say blood is blood and you can't get around it. It's not playing a joke that any eight year old boy could have thought of, it's letting your own uncle be laughed at by a man that would wear a red tie. (152)

Jason is deeply distressed by the affront to his pride; but more acutely, it is the issue of publicity which alarms him. Public action threatens his masculinity by exposing him to shame. Of course, what is most distressing about this fear of publicity, both in reference to Jason and to the Southern setting more generally, is that what takes place behind closed doors in the South is infinitely worse than what might take place publicly.

While many of the horrific aspects of slavery (the rape of black women by white men particularly) do not explicitly take place in the Compson home over the course of the text privately the Compson home is still terrifying. Consider the physical and sexual violence implicit (or even explicit) in Jason's words and actions when he confronts Quentin for skipping school. After his mother warns him to not be too harsh with his niece, telling him to, "remember, she's your own flesh and blood" Jason muses "that's just what I'm thinking of – flesh. And a little blood too, if I had my way" (154). The confrontation then becomes physical. "I dragged her into the dining room. Her kimono came unfastened, flapping about her, damn near naked. Dilsey came hobbling along. I turned and kicked the door shut in her face" (156). While this scene does not culminate in the sexual violence to which Jason's language speaks, and there is no explicit revelation of such activity in the text, there is an undercurrent in the Compson home that suggests violence both physical and sexual. When Jason speaks of Quentin's flesh and blood he conjures up the loss of virginity: the pleasures of the flesh and the blood of the hymen. Jason's focus on Quentin's body repeats his brother Quentin's interest in maintaining the "frail membrane" of Caddy's maidenhead. Both brothers wish to control the bodies and sexuality of their female relatives. Quentin wishes to maintain Caddy's virginity in an attempt to salvage his family's honour, while Jason's attempts to control the younger Quentin's body act out his desire and his anger. Importantly, in both cases the brothers try to keep female sexuality within the boundaries of the family. Quentin attempts to contain Caddy's sexual identity by claiming incest, while Jason is concerned most explicitly by the publicness of the younger Quentin's sexuality.

The scenes in which Jason disciplines the younger Quentin speak to a potential for private violence infinitely more terrifying than anything that she might do outside of the home. So, like many others in the South, Jason is interested in controlling the public narrative about his family but his interest does not extend to curbing the private horrors of the Compson home. In fact, his position in the family depends on the same kind of domestic terrorism that characterises the home that Nancy and Jesus share in "That Evening Sun." However, the violence against Nancy in "That Evening Sun" is largely public. She expresses her fear of her husband openly to the Compson family and is attacked in the street by a white man. These incidents provoke little reaction from the white community. Only Mr Compson takes action, agreeing to walk Nancy home at night. But Mrs Compson demands to know "how much longer is this going to go on? I to be left alone in this big house while you take home a frightened Negro?" (85). Eventually, even Mr Compson runs out of patience for Nancy's fear as well, telling her: "He's not here...I would have seen him" and that she should "lock the door and put out the lamp and go to bed" (97-98). He then leaves Nancy in her cabin waiting to be killed.

In "That Evening Sun" no one is shocked that a white man might beat a black woman, or that a black husband might be violent toward his wife. Violence within black families and against black women is normalised in a culture that dehumanises black women and position black men as sexually and physically aggressive. So while the violence in the homes of Nancy and Jesus and the Compson family are similar, Jason is able to control the public narrative about his family in a way that is not available to black families like Nancy's.

Jason's rage at feminine insubordination is manifested first in economic and then, more intriguingly, in racial terms. Throughout the section narrated by Jason – "April 6th, 1928" – he is preoccupied with making money, investing money, and losing money. For Jason, social standing, and the money required to sustain it, are key to his self-definition, more so given that his status is so questionable. The scion of a family once of great repute that is now falling apart, his economic position is precarious, and he works as a lowly store clerk and swindles money from his absent sister. Jason reconciles the disparity between the belief as to what is owed to him and the reality of his situation by scapegoating his sister and niece. Jason holds Caddy accountable for his own fall in stature; her social and sexual failings have led

to the ruination of the family. In his eyes, he is forced to maintain his ignominious position as a clerk because of the cost of raising the younger Quentin. As neither Jason nor Caroline will let the wayward Compson women forget, the loss of the job in the bank promised to Jason by Caddy's erstwhile fiancé Herbert Head was brought about by Caddy's revelation that her baby may not have been his. From this moment forth Jason blames Caddy for his social and economic problems – if it weren't for her licentiousness, he would be working in a bank and a man of great social standing. Jason's unscrupulousness with money particularly, his defrauding of Caddy throughout the novel, is defended as deserved payback for his suffering. Caddy and her daughter have failed to show Jason the respect and deference that his social and gendered position warrants and therefore he is entitled to financial restitution.

The structure of the South during and after slavery was conducive to an extreme sense of economic entitlement for white men. Jason's belief in his deserved social power and economic gain comes about because "the assumption of the rightfulness of ownership was a social fact built into the Southern way of life" (Wyatt-Brown ix). But of course this ownership could in fact only be enjoyed by a small number. Jason represents white masculine honour as it transitions from Old South to New. In the Old South version of masculine honour personal wealth was required by white men but "only as a means to an end" (Wyatt-Brown 21). That is, financial success was only part of the criteria for attaining high social status. Jason's focus on financial gain positions him as a proponent of New South masculinity which held "money, not honour, as its chief god" (Wyatt-Brown 21). While Quentin Compson could be seen as an adherent to Old Southern masculinity (despite his ultimate failure to embody this idealised role) and Jason (and even Dalton Ames) can be seen as men of the New South, both positions are distorted and ultimately ineffective. Scapegoating femininity as the reason for his failure to attain the high social and economic position that he sees as essential to his masculine identity, Jason is able to comfort himself for his economic and social failures by convincing himself that he has failed because of his sickly mother, promiscuous sister, and his uncontrollable niece and particularly, because they have failed to adhere to the gendered positions required of them by the South, including the position of the Southern belle. The failure of these women to conform to their social positions in

particular, their failure to “mind” their place in the social order of the South undermines Jason’s power and as a result they incur his wrath and also his blame.

But while it is perhaps unsurprising that Jason’s disappointment manifests itself in a vicious misogyny, what is even more complicated about his scapegoating of femininity is the way that this then becomes manifested in racial terms. In particular, Jason repeatedly racialises his niece Quentin’s sexuality. In doing so, Jason participates in the propagation of two of the Southern myth’s key tenets: the presumed innate (and barely controllable) sexuality of black people and the fear of miscegenation. In this distinct equation of sexuality and blackness that occurs in Jason’s mind, we see an adult manifestation of his childhood fear that “I ain’t a nigger, am I?” Here is reiterated the power of Jason’s witnessing of Nancy’s experience as a black women in “That Evening Sun.” That Jason refers to his niece Quentin’s sexuality in racial terms speaks to his belief in black women as sexually insatiable, but also illustrates an underlying fear of miscegenation. While Jason does not explicitly suggest that Quentin will become sexually involved with a black man, his equation of sex and blackness points to this, the Southern man’s greatest fear.

He tells Quentin: “I’m not going to have any member of my family going on like a nigger wench” (119). Similarly, during a fight with Mrs Compson about Quentin’s behaviour he declares that “[w]hen people act like niggers, no matter who they are the only thing to do is treat them like a nigger” (114). In these two moments female sexuality is equated with blackness. It is outside of patriarchal bonds and therefore illicit: sex is for black women, not white. Again, what is destabilising to Jason is less the sexual act and its implications for his niece, but the implications of such behaviour for his social standing. Quentin is acting like a black woman in the eyes of Jason and the Southern patriarchy and is thus compromising Jason’s identity. If his niece is acting “like a nigger woman” it could be assumed that she is acting in such a way with other black people, black men specifically, and as a result, the Compson bloodline risks being “mixed” with the black blood that Jason fears so absolutely. Caddy is similarly subject to comparisons between her sexuality and blackness when, earlier in the text, her brother Quentin recalls pleading with Caddy “[w]hy must you do like nigger women do in the pasture the ditches the dark woods hot hidden furious in the dark woods” (77). Quentin, as Jason does in relation to the younger Quentin, equates sexuality with race – racialising Caddy as black. Caddy

and Quentin are coloured black by both brothers because of their failure to conform to the sexual structures of white femininity and specifically, the need to conform to a performance of the Southern belle.

As Roberts argues, “the very nature of sexuality in the South is defined as illicit and ‘Negro’” (*Southern Womanhood* 116) and in *The Sound and the Fury* both Quentin and Jason racialise women’s sexuality in their critique of Caddy and the younger Quentin.²⁷ Moreover, the racialisation of Caddy and the younger Quentin’s sexuality compromises Jason’s identity. Jason is not concerned by how sex might damage either of his female relatives, even if such activities make them “black.” Instead, he is concerned by what their actions mean for him, for his social standing, and economic position. Ann Anlin Cheng reads this juggling act via the Freudian concept of the melancholic:

Racist institutions... often do not want to fully expel the racial other; instead, they wish to maintain the other within existing structures. With phenomena such as segregation and colonialism, the racial question is an issue of *place*... rather than of full relinquishment. (12)

Racism becomes a vehicle for Jason’s misogyny. By racialising the women in his life, he attempts to maintain their positions and his own. Thus, Jason is motivated by a desire to maintain *place*, a maintenance which requires, in turn, the maintenance of the *place* of sexual and racial Others. That is, he wants to ensure that those who are “niggers” and those who are not stay that way. Jason utilises the language of race in his attempt to limit the movement of both Caddy and Quentin from their designated social place. This has the intended secondary effect of reinstating the similarly subordinated position of those other Others: black characters.

Cheng mobilises Butler’s identification of gender melancholia in relation to heterosexuality to show that race works in the same way in relation to whiteness. Therefore, the “existing structures” by which racial (or, for Butler, gendered) Others are maintained have the result not only of limiting these Others but also of bolstering the position of those who profit from these structures (white men). Jason’s desperate desire for women to maintain their place in the social order reveals that his

²⁷ See Tara McPherson, *Reconstructing Dixie: Race, Gender, and Nostalgia in the Imagined South*; Diane Roberts, *Faulkner and Southern Womanhood*; Kathryn Lee Seidel, *The Southern Belle in the American Novel* for readings of this equation.

masculine identity is intimately tied to the structures of the South. Particularly revealing in this regard is Jason's remark to Dilsey:

You're a nigger. You're lucky, do you know it? I says I'll swap with you any day because it takes a white man not to have any more sense than to worry about what a little slut of a girl does. (152)

Jason's here rejects the traditional set up in which the mammy is the gatekeeper of the belle's social and sexual position. Instead, he highlights the belle's position as foundational in Southern mythology because of what she means for white men.

Jason suggests that Dilsey does not have to worry about what Quentin does because her identity is not threatened by what a white woman does or does not do sexually. Jason (and Quentin, and other white Southern men) need white women to exist as pure Southern belles because it is against this image that their masculine identity is constructed. Jason has to worry about the younger Quentin because her activity has the potential to sabotage his gendered (and raced) identity.

Throughout *The Sound and the Fury* Jason requires the submission of women to maintain his social and familial power. Jason's anger extends to all the women in his household including Dilsey and his mother. However, while Jason is infuriated by and dismissive of his mother and Dilsey, they are not subject to his rage in the same obsessive way that Caddy and Quentin are. Jason is annoyed by Dilsey and calls her an "old half dead nigger" (117). He grumbles that, "[s]he was so old she couldn't do more than move hardly. But that's all right: we need somebody in the kitchen to eat up the grub the young ones cant tote off" (116). With his mother, Jason is similarly frustrated, not with her age so much as with her constant illness. He forces Mrs Compson to come down to supper declaring that "If Mother is any sicker than she was when she came down to dinner all right...but as long as I am buying food...they'll have to come down to the table to eat it" (160). There is a distinct difference between Jason's frustration toward Dilsey and Mrs Compson and the obsessive rage that he directs at Caddy and Quentin. So while he finds Dilsey and Mrs Compson irritating (they are, after all, still women) both women ultimately exist in positions in the household that Jason accepts and understands: Dilsey as the devoted mammy and Mrs Compson as the aging Southern matron.

Jason exemplifies the tension that exists in Southern gender constructions whereby a particular version of masculinity is dependent upon the performance of

certain kinds of femininity. Thus, any failure on the part of a woman like Caddy or Quentin shakes the very foundation of masculinity. Given Faulkner's understanding of the volatility of gender performance in the post-Reconstruction South, is there any surprise that in his representation of such the failure of one woman, Caddy Compson, leads to the suicide of one brother and the vicious, if often impotent misogyny of the other? Quentin and Jason reveal the masculine reliance upon feminine purity and female subordination, and when these structures break down, so to do the men who rely on them.

Dilsey is one of the women who is required by the Compson men to perform her gender in a particular way and throughout the novel she largely adheres to the role required of her by the white family. However, there are moments in which her performance slips. In "That Evening Sun" the substitution of Dilsey for Nancy while Dilsey is sick explicitly invites comparison between the two women. If we consider Dilsey across both "That Evening Sun" and *The Sound and the Fury*, Nancy's appearance in "That Evening Sun" reveals her as a foil for Dilsey. The two women are overtly very different. Nancy's prostitution and alleged drug use and her careless approach to her work in the Compson home highlights Dilsey comparative conscientiousness and devotion to the white family. However, the circumstances surrounding Nancy's arrival in the Compson household reveals the potential for a slippage which would bridge the gap between the two women. "That Evening Sun" gives no indication of what causes Dilsey to be unwell. Quentin's narration only vaguely reveals that "when Dilsey was sick...Nancy would come cook for us," or that "Dilsey was sick in her cabin," and later "Dilsey was still sick. It was a long time" (79, 80, 82). The ambiguity of these explanations reflects the child's ignorance about the exact details of Dilsey's illness. While there is no direct evidence to point to pregnancy as the cause of Dilsey's unexplained and lengthy illness, it is a possibility that cannot be totally rejected.²⁸

The Sound and the Fury confirms that Dilsey is a mother to a number of children and also a grandmother. But it is impossible to be certain if she is pregnant during the events of "That Evening Sun." The fact that the Compson children notice

²⁸ This ambiguity in regard to the black woman's maternity reflects the Falkner brothers' actual or feigned ignorance about Caroline Barr's biological family highlighted by Sensibar. See *Faulkner and Love* 56-57 and 63-65.

Nancy's apron "swelling out" seems to indicate that if Dilsey was also pregnant they would notice changes in her body too (81). But Dilsey's actual maternity in *The Sound and the Fury* and her potential maternity in "That Evening Sun" link her to Nancy in a way that is often overlooked. Both of these women are not only mammies, but also mothers. In "That Evening Sun" and *The Sound and the Fury* the narrative centres on the white Compson children, but in both texts a black woman in their home who acts as mammy but is also a mother is central to their development and steers them toward adulthood.

Dilsey's characterisation in *The Sound and the Fury* overtly conforms to the traditional or stereotypical mammy, although she is distinctly more practical and less concerned with maintaining the belle's morality. Dilsey seems to realise the impracticality of Southern moral codes, perhaps because she has seen Mrs Compson destroyed by her adherence to the trappings of womanhood. Dilsey is strict toward Caddy when she misbehaves as a child, but she does not try to change her behaviour on the grounds of morality. Early in the novel after she catches Caddy climbing the pear tree she calls out: "'You, Satan.' 'Come down from there'" (36). And while Dilsey refers to Caddy harshly here, she is not invested in the symbolic significance of the scene in the same way that Caddy's brothers are. In this moment, it is not the mammy who is outraged by the belle's failure to maintain the standards of sexual virtue but her brothers. When Dilsey sees Caddy's muddy drawers, she exclaims "[j]ust look at your drawers," and then warns her: "[y]ou better be glad your ma ain't seen you" before putting Caddy to bed without a bath (61). What concerns Dilsey is the labour required to clean the clothes and bathe the child, while the white Compsons are outraged and in turn disturbed by Caddy's muddy underwear.

Later, once Caddy has been exiled from the Compson home and has had her child out of wedlock, Dilsey is again unconcerned by the moral panic that grips Mrs Compson. Dilsey argues with Jason about letting Caddy see her child, Quentin, asking him, "I like to know whut's de hurt in lettin dat po chile see her own baby" (176). Dilsey fails to see Caddy as irrevocably broken by her transgression of the social and sexual boundaries of the belle. Dilsey's response to Caddy's muddy drawers is indicative of her position as a practical caretaker of the Compson children. Quentin recalls that as children, "[w]hen Mother stayed in bed Dilsey would put old clothes on us and let us go out in the rain because she said rain never hurt young

folks” (143). It is clear that this invitation to play in the rain included not just the male Compson children, but Caddy as well. It is difficult to imagine Scarlett O’Hara being dressed in old clothes and sent outside by her Mammy. Instead, she is more concerned with teaching Scarlett how to become a “gentlewoman:”

‘Young misses whut frowns an’ pushes out dey chins an’ says ‘Ah will’ an’ ‘Ah woan’ mos’ gener’ly doan ketch husbands... ‘Young misses should cas’ down dey eyes an’ say, ‘well, suh, Ah mout’ an’ ‘Jes’ as you say, suh.’ (61)

In *The Sound and the Fury*, it is the white mother who is concerned with her daughter’s social position, not the mammy.

Throughout the novel Dilsey acts as the practical mother – giving physical and emotional support to the white children, caring for them, loving them, holding them – in contrast to the distinct maternal absence of their actual mother, Mrs Compson, who spends most of her time confined to her room to “be sick” (53). Cynthia Dobbs argues that Dilsey is the “fantasy mother realised: the centre of sanity, constancy, and compassion in a house of raging internal and external decline, chaos and cruelty” (39). Mrs Compson is consumed by the values of the Old South and insists on her daughter’s adherence to the role of belle, while Dilsey is too busy actually mothering all of the Compson children to concern herself with issues of sexual morality. Instead of a mammy and belle relationship predicated on black adherence to and promotion of masculine constructions of white femininity, *The Sound and the Fury* is about a black woman as the only effective parental force within a crumbling white family.

Dilsey ultimately fails to embody the idealised version of the mammy because she does not protect the belle from premature sexuality and maternity, but she is rendered ideal in a different way within the text of *The Sound and the Fury* and the critical conversation surrounding it. Faulkner himself was an integral part of the idealisation of Dilsey, most startlingly exposed in his strange remark that Dilsey is “the best” of his fictional characters (*Lion* 126). And while the representation of Dilsey and Caddy’s mammy/belle relationship is doing something different from, say, Margaret Mitchell’s fictional black/white pairing, it would be erroneous to suggest that because Faulkner shows Dilsey as the true “mother” to the Compson children he is actively transgressing the troubling history of the mammy. Instead, it is the very celebration of Dilsey, the very fact that she is understood as the “best” of humanity

which cements her place within the mythology of the mammy. Sharon Desmond Paradiso sums it up well when she argues that Dilsey “represents the fantasy of the good mammy, selfless, giving, wholly devoted to the wellbeing of her charges, and taking up the (considerable) slack left by her employer” (26). So while Dilsey is transgressive because she is dismissive of her cultural role as arbiter of white womanhood, in her devotion to the Compson family she nevertheless subordinates her own needs, desires, and concerns to bolster the white family unit.

Further, the traditional mammy/belle relationship is complicated in *The Sound and the Fury* by the fact that Dilsey is not only responsible in a maternal sense for the Compson family, but also has biological children of her own – Frony, Versh, and T.P – and grandchildren (Luster), who are present throughout the novel. Few studies of *The Sound and the Fury* consider the complicating fact that Dilsey’s motherhood is twofold – that she is both surrogate *and* biological mother. The novel is not particularly interested in the Gibsons, except in how they function in relation to the Compsons. Throughout the text, members of Dilsey’s family play supporting roles to each of the white Compsons, the most obvious example being the role of caretaker to Benjy, which is filled by different Gibsons at different times. *The Sound and the Fury* is a novel about the disintegration of the Compsons, but in reality there are two families struggling to survive on the deteriorating plantation. Dilsey’s husband, Roskus highlights the struggle of the Gibsons when he tells his daughter, Frony “Clean that udder good now...you milked that young cow dry last winter. If you milk this one dry, they ain’t going to be no more milk” (20).

It is Dilsey’s interaction with her grandson Luster that is most illuminating in regard to her biological maternity.²⁹ Throughout the novel Dilsey is terse and impatient with Luster, calling him “fool” (228), “nigger boy” (45), and a “vilyun” (268). Luster’s position as caretaker for the adult Benjy positions Dilsey’s white child (Benjy) in comparison to her black child (Luster). Early in the text Luster antagonises Benjy, telling him: “Beller. You want something to beller about. All right, then. Caddy.’ He whispered. ‘Caddy. Beller now. Caddy’ (45). When Benjy’s distress is made known to Dilsey the following interaction occurs:

²⁹ While Luster is technically Dilsey’s grandson and not her son, their relationship plays out as that of mother and child, with Dilsey as Luster’s main guardian while on the Compson property. The text gives no insight into the relationship between Luster and his mother, Dilsey’s daughter, Frony.

'You bring him on here.' Dilsey said. She came down the steps.
'What you done to him now.' She said.
'Ain't done nothing to him.' Luster said. 'He just started bellinging.'
'Yes you is.' Dilsey said. 'You done something to him. Where you been.'
'Over yonder under them cedars.' Luster said.
'Getting Quentin all riled up.' Dilsey said. 'Why can't you keep him away from her. Don't you know she don't like him where she at.'
'Got as much time for him as I is.' Luster said. 'He ain't none of my uncle.'
'Don't you sass me, nigger boy.' Dilsey said.
'I ain't done nothing to him.' Luster said. (45)

In this moment Dilsey admonishes Luster not just because of his mistreatment of Benjy, but because of the possibility of upsetting Quentin as well. And overtly, Dilsey's impatience with Luster is in defence of the white children, Benjy and Quentin.

This pattern of Dilsey's harshness toward Luster and defence of the Compson children continues throughout the novel. Later, her anger is again directed toward Luster:

'Huh,' Dilsey said. She looked at Luster again. He met her gaze blandly, innocent and open. 'I don't know what you up to, but you ain't got no business doin hit. You jes tryin me too dis mawnin cause de others is, ain't you? You git on up dar en see to Benjy, you hear?' (231)

Here, Dilsey is suspicious of Luster, but uninterested in the details of his actions. She simply wants to tell him that she knows he's up to something and then tells him to "see to Benjy." The moments in which Dilsey's treatment of Luster is markedly more severe than her treatment of the white Compson children evidence one of the features of mammy mythology – mammy's necessary preference for white children over black, and there are many more moments in the novel such as Dilsey not letting Luster go to the show, Dilsey comforting Benjy while reprimanding Luster, and more accusations of Luster upsetting Benjy (216, 245, 268).

Wallace-Sanders highlights the tradition of mammy's preference for white children, arguing that "one of the most consistent traits assigned to the stereotypic mammy character is that these women demonstrated a strong preference for the

white children of the families that own or employ them over their own children” (122). She indicts Faulkner’s portrayal of Dilsey on these grounds, arguing that Faulkner’s “gesture toward a humane, dignified mammy character is truncated by his inability to transcend the mammy stereotype so ingrained within his imagination and within his own personal life” (122). Wallace-Sanders sees Faulkner’s representation of a transgressive black mammy as coming unstuck at the moment of dual motherhood. Arguing that Faulkner cannot seem to represent the mammy’s biological motherhood as anything other than secondary to her position as surrogate mother to white children.

However, Wallace-Sanders’s framing of Dilsey’s maternity fails to take into account an aspect of black maternity and discipline that has been reanimated by recent incidents in contemporary America. In particular, the celebration of Toya Graham, the black mother who was caught on camera beating her son as he participated in riots against police brutality in Baltimore in 2015. Following the airing of the images of Graham attacking her son, the media hailed her a “hero mom” (*The Baltimore Sun*) and she was given the title of “Mother of the Year” by media outlets including television programme *The View*. Graham’s aggression toward her son can be read as part of a genealogy of strict black matriarchs that includes fictional black mothers like Dilsey. Even Caroline Barr participated in this kind of fierce black maternity with her ancestors describing her and her daughters and nieces as “commanding women whom their communities and their families respected, loved, and feared” (Sensibar 48).

The legacy of representing black mothers as overbearing and often violent toward their children has been used as evidence of the presumed dysfunction of black mothers and their children, and Wallace-Sanders’s reading of Dilsey is informed by this troubling history. However, In the case of Graham, her violence against her son was celebrated by the white community who lauded her for punishing her son in such a public manner. Critics like Stacey Patton, Julia Craven and others, highlight the troubling ongoing reality at the heart of white celebration of this black mother’s violence. Patton argues that the “celebration of Graham reflects a belief that black youths are inherently problematic, criminal and out of control.” Joan Walsh agrees, suggesting that by applauding her actions the white media is suggesting that violence is the “only way to discipline a black child.”

Centralising the assumed dysfunction of black families justifies violence against them and dismisses the social, historical, and structural conditions that disenfranchise black individuals and families. In other words, “white supremacy is let off the hook” (Patton). Instead of reading black women’s violent maternity as a dysfunction on the part of either the mother or the child, what happens when we read aggressive black maternity in response to the structural conditions that bind African Americans? Julia Craven argues that the celebration of Toya Graham is built on a “misunderstanding of her motivation.” Walsh and Patton call her violence “desperate” and “helpless.” It is fear and not anger that drives the black mother to beat her child, attack him, or call him a “vilyun.” In their aggression, women like Graham and Dilsey are trying to keep their children alive.

Critical responses to the Graham incident frame Faulkner’s representation of Dilsey’s maternity in a new way, one that is at odd with Wallace-Sanders’s reading. Dilsey harshness toward Luster can be viewed as her attempts to prepare him for his life as black man in the South. She disciplines him because she knows that the white community will do so much more harshly, and likely, if he does not “behave” they will kill him. Walsh calls Graham’s beating of her son the act of “a desperate mother being forced to wield the club of white violence, ‘in loco’ white cops.” For Patton, Graham’s actions say: “I will teach my black son not to resist white supremacy so he can live.” The disparity in Dilsey’s disciplining of black and white children, in Faulkner’s representation reflects the social gap in which black lives matter less than white. Dilsey “cannot permit Luster to be as inquisitive, mischievous, and disobedient as Caddy or any other white child” (Milloy 71). Instead, she must prepare him for a world in which disobedience equals punishment, or even death. Given Faulkner’s demonstrated perception of race as a performance and the behaviours it demanded of both white and black Southerners, it is plausible to read Dilsey’s violence against her own children as protective. Therefore, what Wallace-Sanders identifies as Dilsey’s “preference” for white children in Faulkner’s fictional representation, is actually a necessary act of parental protection brought about by the racial conditions of Faulkner’s South.

The beginning of the final section of *The Sound and the Fury* opens with a description of this black mother, Dilsey, and is the first in-depth account of her physical body that the text has given us. Notably, Dilsey had “been a big woman

once but now her skeleton rose, draped loosely in unpadded skin... only the indomitable skeleton was left rising like a ruin or a landmark above the somnolent and impervious guts" (165). Cynthia Dobbs's article takes its title from this revealing description of Dilsey: "'Ruin or landmark'? Black Bodies as *Lieux de Memoire* in *The Sound and the Fury*." For Dobbs, the black bodies in *The Sound and the Fury* exist as examples of Pierre Nora's "*lieux de memoire*" and she highlights the paradox inherent in the suggestions that Dilsey's body is both a ruin and a landmark. She suggests that "the word 'ruin' denotes decline, whereas 'landmark' suggest duration, an abiding location that marks a continuation through time" (41). Dilsey's body therefore comes to "represent" or "stand for" history. As such,

Dilsey is rather dubiously 'exalted' to a position outside of history. She becomes a monument, a myth, a *lieux de memoire* not only for the characters within the novel who are stabilised by her presence, but also for Faulkner and his generation of readers. (41)

Dilsey becomes a stabilising myth through the rejection of personal power and an acceptance of her social and racial position. The Compson family and Faulkner himself do not seem to recognise the hidden transcript taking place in her dual maternity and instead she is idealised in *The Sound and the Fury* because she endures without changing the status quo of the Southern world. And while her decaying body suggests the gradual disintegration or disappearance of the system which would require mammy, Dilsey herself fails to act as a revolutionary for this change. Instead, her body is the skeletal remains of Scarlett's Mammy but, like her more abundant predecessor, she remains, until the end, on the plantation in service of the white family.

The memorialising of Dilsey in *The Sound and the Fury* repeats the memorialisation of Caroline Barr that Faulkner creates when he reimagines her life and character in public sites of memory. Just as Caroline Barr is remembered as "mammy," so Dilsey is a myth signifying black endurance. But, as Lee Jenkins notes, this endurance is deeply vexed in so far as Dilsey's "dignity" and "endurance" come about because she is a "victim who conspires in her own victimisation" in a time and place where "the terms of her creation are not her own" (163). Dobbs reiterates this point when she argues that "a sort of nineteenth-century Christian mythology prevails in Faulkner's novel, exalting its black characters only through a transcendence of

their blackness and an acceptance (under the guise of forgiveness) of their social place" (45). Dilsey is a *lieux de memoire* memorialising black endurance and forgiveness, but forgiveness and endurance is celebrated only as it maintains the structures of sexual and racial privilege.

The end of *The Sound and the Fury* leaves Dilsey's decayed frame at the Compson home, continuing to care for the doomed white family. However this is not the ultimate end of the Compsons, or of Dilsey. The Compson appendix which was written sixteen years after *The Sound and the Fury* revisited each of the members of the Compson family, including Dilsey. This was the chance for us to see what became of Dilsey. Did she die soon after the novel's close? Did she leave the Compson family? Some of these answers are revealed in the "Caddy" section of the appendix in which a librarian visits Dilsey to try and get her to identify a picture of Caddy with a Nazi general and then (somehow) to "save her." However, Dilsey's own section in the appendix is less forthcoming and is striking when considered in regard to the idealisation of the mammy figure. Dilsey's section in the appendix reads simply: "DILSEY: They endured" (647). The white Compsons are given pages of description, but Dilsey gets two words. It is not "she" endured but "they." Who are these mysterious they? Black people? Mammies? Those who believe?

Roberts has argued that "Dilsey does not die but struggles on demonstrating the stoicism Faulkner expected from, and admired in, black women" (*Southern Womanhood* 59). However, the novel itself seems littered with what Wallace-Sanders calls the "conspicuous warnings that [Dilsey] will not endure," her age, her health, and her diminished frame (120). So if we agree with Wallace-Sanders that Dilsey's mortality is very much at the forefront of the final sections of the novel, the appendix's assertion that "they endured" gains a more monumental meaning. At the University of Virginia, when speaking about Dilsey, Faulkner said that although her life was tragic it "might have dented her head a little... [but] it never beat her to her knees" (Tape T-143B). Dilsey is not broken by her suffering, she endures despite it, but as her endurance is not "hers" but "theirs" ("*they* endured"), the appendix seems to suggest that it is *all* black people who are enduring.

The very notion of endurance is itself problematic. As Roberts points out, "enduring implies no rebellion, no real resistance, only acceptance" (*Southern*

Womanhood 66). Dilsey survives because she maintains the status quo; she remains a black woman dedicated to the white household until the end. “They endured” provides no explanation for exactly what happened to Dilsey as an individual; instead, she becomes a marker for blackness generally. Faulkner means for Dilsey to endure because she is, in his words, “a good human being” (Tape T-122B). Her endurance is intended as a positive sentiment. However, because this endurance is undoubtedly linked to continuation, to stasis, it becomes another version of white Southern paternalism in regard to race issues and Dilsey’s celebration and her endurance add further weight to Baldwin’s critique of Faulkner, in which he wishes to save white people rather than black. Dobbs reads Dilsey’s endurance in a particularly critical light, suggesting that she “comes to stand for Faulkner’s vision of an African American, communal ‘endurance’ of racism – a submission no less tragic for its masquerade as spiritual transcendence” (“Desegregation” 45). Both the appendix and the final sections of *The Sound and the Fury* reveal Dilsey as morally and spiritually superior amidst the ruins of the Compson family, but this endurance and religious revelation does not make her a revolutionary character who transcends the mythology of mammy or the spectres of Southern racism. Instead, the Dilsey character reveals the intricacies of the racial trauma of the South and the difficulty of breaking free of these bonds.

Chapter Three

“The Past is Never Past”: Temple Drake and Nancy Mannigoe in *Sanctuary* and *Requiem for a Nun*

The sensationalised narrative of bootleggers, sharecroppers, and rape found in Faulkner’s *Sanctuary* (1931) is, on the surface, at odds with *The Sound and the Fury*’s complex and intense exploration of family, race, and history in the South.

I wrote *Sanctuary*. I needed money badly at that time, and so I thought of the most horrific story I could and wrote it. I sent it to the publisher, and he said, ‘Good God, we can’t print this. We’d both be in a jail.’ (Tape T-120)

Faulkner encourages a separation between his other fiction and *Sanctuary* when he suggests he wrote the book to create controversy and make money. But despite its sensational narrative, *Sanctuary* explores Southern gender politics and performance through the characterisation of, and relationships between Temple Drake, Popeye, and Gowan Stevens.

Temple Drake appears twice in the Faulkner canon: first, in *Sanctuary* as the coquettish Southern belle involved in a car accident, abandoned by her male protector, raped, and kidnapped and held in a whorehouse; secondly, in *Requiem for a Nun* (1951) where she appears some eight years later, married, outwardly reformed, and the mother to two children, one of whom has just been murdered by her black nanny—the act that sets this play-novel in motion. In both of these renditions of her character Temple Drake complicates the traditional image of the belle. Like Caddy Compson, she fails to conform to the social and sexual restrictions to which white Southern women are subject. In *Sanctuary*, Temple is the belle damaged and defiled. In *Requiem* she has seemingly been rehabilitated, only to be implicated in the murder of her child because of her lingering social and sexual “guilt.” In both *Sanctuary* and *Requiem*, Temple’s failure to maintain her position as Southern belle is unsteady to the white men who surround her and who, like the Compson brothers, are threatened by her failure to perform Southern femininity correctly.

Temple’s reappearance in *Requiem* happens alongside another, that of the black domestic worker and alleged prostitute Nancy Mannigoe, a version of whom appeared with Caddy and the other Compson children in “That Evening Sun.” In

Requiem Temple and Nancy appear as transgressive versions of the Southern belle and the mammy, with the belle a rape victim who seeks to run away from her family with her lover and the mammy the killer of a white child in her care. However, by the conclusion of the novel Faulkner returns each of these women to their rightful place in Southern society: the white woman returned to her position as dedicated wife and mother and the black woman dead in the service of the preservation of the white family.

Temple's performance of femininity in *Sanctuary* and *Requiem* reveals the complex gender constructions deeply embedded in the South. *Sanctuary* also presents perverse versions of masculinity and sexual violence that highlight the disjunction between Southern gender expectations and reality. In both novels, white men seek to steady their own gender and sexuality through Temple's performance of the role of belle. In *Requiem* as in *The Sound and the Fury*, race and gender merge to produce a situation in which black femininity stands for sexual degradation. I argue that what is complicated about this representation is Temple's complicity with this intricate and imbricated set of gendered and racial structures and that, by the end of *Requiem*, both women involved in the crisis of the novel – Temple Drake and Nancy Mannigoe – end up perpetuating troubling renditions of Southern femininity.

The performance of gender in *Sanctuary* and *Requiem* is informed by the conditions of the Southern myth, and Temple's characterisation, in particular, plays out the concerns of a rapidly modernising South. In *Requiem*, the importance of Southern history to the story of Temple and Nancy is made clear by the novel's structure in which long historical chapters are interspersed by play sections that show Nancy's trial. The historical sections of the novel – "The Courthouse," "The Golden Dome," and "The Jail" – frame the story of Temple and Nancy and insist on reading the entire play-novel as implicated and concerned with the complicated history of the South. While my analysis of *Sanctuary* and *Requiem* in this chapter is largely concerned with gender and race as performance, this performance is necessarily the result of the conditions of Southern history and memory laid out in the earlier chapters of this thesis and insisted upon by the structure of *Requiem*.

In *Sanctuary*, Temple's characterisation highlights the complicated sexual position of the belle of the Southern myth. The novel makes clear that Temple is

involved in sexual performativity even before the action set in motion by her relationship with Gowan Stevens. Temple attends “formal yearly balls” and dances where she “passed in swift rotation from one pair of black sleeves to the next, her waist shaped slender and urgent in the interval, her feet filling the rhythmic gap with music” (25). She also travels in cars with “town boys,” and is described by the narrator as having a “bold painted mouth” and her eyes are “blankly right and left looking, cool, predatory and discreet” (29). Later, Gowan describes her mouth as “boldly scarlet” and her head adorned with “a curled spill of red hair” (31). Temple Drake as Southern belle is involved in a coquetry that isn’t quite innocent and her behaviour suggests the difficulty inherent in embodying the liminal space of the belle. As revealed in my analysis of Caddy Compson and her mother in *The Sound and the Fury*, the belle position requires a suspension of identity in that she is in the process of passing from father to husband. For Temple, this involves her being flirtatious and therefore accessible to white men, but necessarily without actual sexual experience. Betina Entzminger highlights this balancing act for the belle:

Though the southern lady was regally asexual, the young belle was supposed to be beautiful and flirtatious, but only within carefully prescribed limits. Her flirtations excited male passions, but she was supposed to be, and perhaps often was, innocent of the true nature of those passions. (*Belle* 10)

Temple’s performance of her femininity in the early stages of *Sanctuary* plays out this sexual balancing act but with the added complication of modernisation where women now attend college, get jobs, and vote.

Temple’s dramatic fall from the pedestal of white womanhood occurs when she is raped by the white criminal Popeye and then held in a brothel. It is this act of violence by a white man that violently forces Temple from the pedestal built for her by the white community. Temple’s fall is facilitated by a white man whose protection she has been taught to expect, the upper class white gentleman Gowan Stevens. Gowan, Temple’s date who crashes his car in his search for alcohol and strands Temple at the house in which her rape will occur, is the “Virginia gentleman” and the “nice, well-bred young man” on whom Temple and other white women are taught to rely on for protection (23, 131). But Gowan Stevens is both alcoholic and unreliable, first passing out and failing to collect Temple from her train, and then crashing the car that carries both himself and Temple. Gowan is a perversion of traditional

Southern masculinity under the conditions of the Southern myth. He fails to embody the idealised version of virile Southern masculinity and instead crosses social and class boundaries. He “wore a cheap blue workshirt beneath his dinner-jacket. His eyes were bloodshot, puffed, his jowls covered by blue stubble” Temple observes (32). Temple calls out Gowan’s inadequacies calling him a “filthy pig” and telling him “you can’t go anywhere like this. You haven’t even changed your clothes” (31).

Both Temple and Gowan reproach the other for their failure to perform their social role correctly. Temple is upset by Gowan’s drunkenness and his dishevelment, while Gowan is angry at Temple’s flirtatiousness and reputation:

Trying to come over me with your innocent ways...You’re pretty good aren’t you? Think you can play around all week with any badger-trimmed hick that owns a Ford, and fool me on Saturday don’t you? Don’t think I didn’t see your name where it’s written on that lavatory wall. (32)

Both Gowan and Temple fail to live up to the social expectations of the Southern myth which requires them to play out the roles of Southern gentleman and belle. *Sanctuary* represents the devaluation and decay of the ideals of the Southern myth as the South modernises and the fragility of Southern history and memory. This is particularly evident in the decaying plantation – the Old Frenchman place – that is occupied by Goodwin, Popeye, and the bootleggers.

Gowan goes to the plantation house in his search for alcohol, bringing Temple along with him, and by crashing the car he strands them at the home. The plantation house is dilapidated and unkempt:

Set in a ruined lawn, surrounded by abandoned grounds and fallen outbuildings. But nowhere was any sign of husbandry – plough or tool; in no direction was a planted field in sight – only a gaunt weather-stained ruin in a sombre grove through which the breeze drew with a sad, murmurous sound. (35)

The derelict grounds and the lack of planted fields signals the absence of slave labour and along with it the systems that support the Old South. This plantation home as a ruin is the remnant of the crumbling Compson home in *The Sound and the Fury*. The idealised Southern past dying in *The Sound and the Fury* is further decayed in *Sanctuary* where the dominant symbol of white patriarchal power, the plantation home, is decayed and overrun by criminals.

It is in this setting that Temple's rape occurs. Temple's cultural expectation of protection from white men is revealed as useless in the ruined plantation. Instead of protection from white men, Temple receives nothing but threat, not only from Popeye, Goodwin, and the other bootleggers but also from Gowan. Temple tries to invoke the social and class barriers that she has been taught will protect her, insisting "my father's a judge. Judge Drake of Jackson" and that "the gu-governor comes to our house to e-eat" (44, 46). But these injunctions are meaningless to the men who inhabit the Old Frenchman place and to Gowan, who rejects his social position as the protector of the white woman's purity.

Sanctuary is populated by male characters who fail to perform their gender correctly under the terms of Southern memory and myth. First, Gowan Stevens fails to act as a Southern gentleman and instead, his masculinity takes the form of alcoholism and abandonment. After passing out from drink he rambles "[g]ot proteck...girl. 'Ginia gem...gemman got proteck..." signalling that he knows his duty but cannot carry it out (60). The Frenchman place is inhabited by a variety of men who exist outside of the boundaries of the traditional Southern plantation home: a blind and deaf old man, an aggressive criminal, and a dim-witted bootlegger who is described by Popeye as a "feeb" (11). While all of these men intimidate and corral Temple in some way, it is Popeye who finally rapes her in the corncrib.

The rape of the white woman is the greatest fear of the white South during and after slavery. "Jim Crow laws, lynchings, and a rigid class system were maintained in the South partly out of a fear that the purity of white women would somehow be compromised" (Roberts, *Southern Womanhood* 103). The fear of rape was specifically the fear that black men would rape white women. The "Southern rape complex" assumes "a black male rapist and white female victim, the victim is transformed into a symbol of threatened white Southern culture while the black male symbolises the threat" (Barker 142). In *Sanctuary*, the rapist Popeye is "a man of under size," a criminal and a bootlegger, but importantly, he *is* a white man (5). His face is "a queer, bloodless colour" and Tommy describes him as "the skeeriest durn white man I ever seen" (5, 19).

Duvall notes that superficially, *Sanctuary* appears as an "anomaly" in the Faulkner canon as a "Yoknapatawpha novel largely without race" (*Race* 38). But

while Popeye is a white man, he is repeatedly described in terms that would code him as black. Horace Benbow declares that he “smells black” at their first meeting, his gaze is “black,” he is “quiet, thin, black,” and he dresses in “narrow black suits” (8, 78, 247). The rape of Temple is therefore carried out by a man who while physically white, behaves and is understood as black. Although Caucasian, Popeye “activates a Southern hysteria over black male criminality and sexuality” (Duvall, *Race* 38). Popeye slips between racial categories throughout *Sanctuary* and highlights once again the performative nature of race in Faulkner’s South.

Popeye is the black rapist who is actually white but he is also the black rapist who is impotent. Popeye slips not only between racial categories, but also between sexual and gender categories. The terrifying black rapist who ravishes the white woman is a small man who had been “an undersized, weak child” (242). Who, when he is first born, is thought to be blind: “Then they found that he was not blind, although he did not learn to walk and talk until he was about four years old” (244). Later, a doctor confirms to Popeye’s mother his sexual impotency, telling her “he will never be a man, properly speaking. With care, he will live some time longer. But he will never be any older than he is now” (246). Popeye’s small stature, his physical weakness, and his impotency goes against the stereotype of the brute black male rapist. Yet his violence against Temple is very real.

Popeye’s sexual appetite complicates Southern interpretations of sex and gender. Popeye not only rapes Temple with a corncob, but then sequesters her in a brothel and watches while she has sex with another man, Red. Duvall argues that “what is queer about Popeye is his combination of violence and nonheteronormative voyeuristic libidinality” (*Race* 39). It is hard to determine what drives Popeye’s sexuality and other characters find it difficult to interpret him – to Horace he is both “savage” and “childlike” (10). Later, Popeye watches Temple and Red have sex: “crouching beside the bed, his face wrung above his absent chin, his bluish lips protruding as though he were blowing upon hot soup, making a high whinnying sound like a horse” (127). Popeye is rendered animalistic here and Duvall asks, “wherein lies Popeye’s identification while he watches – as the penetrator or as the penetrated?” (*Race* 42).

Sanctuary presents Popeye as not only racially ambiguous but also sexually fluid. He is a white man who acts black and an impotent man who rapes white women. Popeye is another male character who, like Quentin Compson, fails to “do his gender right” (Butler, *Gender Trouble* 23). Popeye highlights the necessarily performative nature of both race and gender in the South. His residence in the dilapidated plantation home and his rape of the white Southern belle reveal the inauthenticity of the Southern myth and the gender roles that are a key part of upholding this structure.

While Popeye is the most shocking incarnation of perverse masculinity in *Sanctuary*, Horace Benbow also fails to conform to his prescribed gender and sexual role. Like Gowan Stevens, Horace is positioned as a Southern gentleman in the social milieu. He is a lawyer, well-read, and well presented, whom Popeye calls a “Professor” because “he’s got a book with him” (9). Horace is the dominant narrative voice heard throughout the novel and he presents himself as a good Southern white man, who does not have the vices of Gowan Stevens. However, his sexuality complicates his character. While Benbow’s idealisation of his sister, Narcissa, who he describes as “pure” and “serene”, is not obsessive and sexual in quite the same way as Quentin Compson’s relationship to his sister, it is still complicated by ideals of purity and desire (82, 85). Narcissa is a woman similar to Mrs Compson, committed to her role as Southern lady to the point that it consumes her, and her commitment to her social role leads her brother to idealise her. Narcissa dresses in white and lives a “life of serene vegetation like perpetual corn or wheat in a sheltered garden instead of a field” (85). Narcissa’s womanhood is unmoving and contained in a way that is distinctly at odds with other women in the novel.

The confrontation between the different kinds of womanhood in the world of *Sanctuary* come to a head when Horace invites Lee Goodwin’s common-law wife Ruby stay in his and Narcissa’s family home. Narcissa is outraged. “The house where my father and mother and your father and mother, the house where I – I won’t have it. I won’t have it...to bring a street-walker, a murderess, into the house where I was born” (*Sanctuary* 94). Narcissa fears contamination of both her own social place and that of her family. Like Caroline Compson in “That Evening Sun” who refused to allow Nancy to stay in her family home, Narcissa is concerned by the implications such action would have on her own reputation, both social and sexual, rather than

providing support for Ruby. And while Ruby is a white woman, her sexual misdeeds and her social position place her outside of the boundaries of Southern whiteness. As Jason, in *The Sound and the Fury*, insists about his niece's sexual (mis)behaviour: "[w]hen people act like niggers, no matter who they are the only thing to do is treat them like a nigger" (114).

Horace's relationship to his stepdaughter Little Belle is more clearly characterised by desire. He keeps a photograph of her at his bedside and studies it often.

He stood before it, looking at the sweet, inscrutable face which looked in turn at something just beyond his shoulder, out of the dead cardboard. He was thinking of the grape arbour in Kinston, of summer twilight and the murmur of voices darkening into silence as he approached...the pale whisper of her white dress, of the delicate and urgent mammalian whisper of that curious small flesh which he had not begot and in which appeared to be vatted delicately some seething sympathy with the blossoming grape. (133)

Horace highlights Little Belle's innocence and her indecipherability. She is, like his sister, dressed in white and her skin is pale, but Horace's desire for her is figured as animalistic. Later, Horace begins to associate Little Belle with the smell of honeysuckle just as Quentin Compson is haunted by the pungent smell of honeysuckle in *The Sound and the Fury* (177). For both men, honeysuckle represents their incestuous desire and their guilt. For Horace the smell of honeysuckle is "thick" and "writhed like cold smoke" (177), while for Quentin, the smell of honeysuckle "all mixed up" is "unbearable," "that damn honeysuckle" (82, 94).

For both men honeysuckle represents desire, fear, and guilt in relation to women's bodies. For Quentin, honeysuckle signifies his sister's failure to contain her body within the categories of the Southern myth. For Horace, honeysuckle stands for his desire for his stepdaughter as well as his guilt. As he becomes aroused looking at the photograph of Little Belle the "scent filled the room and the small face seemed to swoon in a voluptuous languor" (177). Little Belle becomes womanly and desirable in his mind, her voluptuousness evidence to Horace of her sexual availability. But Horace's desire transforms into fear and guilt and he vomits. This longing then transforms into a desire for Temple Drake. As he vomits he hears the "shucks...set

up a terrific uproar beneath her thighs,” fantasising about the moment of her rape by Popeye, he imagines her “bound naked on her back” (178).

Horace outwardly performs the role of educated, respectable Southern gentleman, but confrontation with women’s bodies unsteadies his position. So while he idealises his sister’s performance of respectable white womanhood he desires his stepdaughter and Temple, revealing the gap between Southern white men’s idealisation of white women and their desire for them. In other words, while Popeye is the “black” man who is a threat to white womanhood, he also plays out the fantasies of white men like Horace who also wish to possess the bodies of white women. After Lee Goodwin is wrongly convicted for the rape of Temple and the murder of Tommy, he is lynched by a crowd of white men who also rape him. The rape of white women in the Southern context is understood as a black man’s crime and lynching the appropriate punishment. And although Goodwin is white, his actions racialize him as black (“when people act like niggers, the only thing to do is treat them like a nigger”) so he is lynched by the crowd of white men.

This crowd highlights white men’s desire to control and contain white women, revealed by Horace’s desire throughout *Sanctuary*. When discussing Temple one man in the crowd says, “I saw her. She was some baby. Jeez. I wouldn’t have used no cob” (234). So while the white community is outwardly horrified by the rape of the belle, it is not the action of rape that necessarily upsets them – they understand how and why a man would rape Temple (she is, after all, a “looker”) – but that this action occurs at the hands of an outsider and in an “unnatural” way. The crowd of white men then turn their desire for sexual violence onto Horace, identifying him as the “man that defended him”:

‘Put him in, too. There enough left to burn a lawyer.’

‘Do to the lawyer what he did to him. What he did to her. Only we never used a cob. We made him wish we had used a cob.’ (236)

Duvall argues that in this moment “the homosexual act is performed in the name of preserving nonmiscegenated heterosexuality and the superiority of the white over the black penis” (*Race* 46). That is, the crowd of white men seek to reinscribe their own whiteness and heteronormativity through an act of sexual violence against another man.

Sanctuary plays out Southern masculinity in crisis, revealing the performative nature of both race and gender in the South. Again, Faulkner shows how masculinity slips when white women fail to perform their prescribed social and sexual role – when the belle fails to do her womanhood right. Temple Drake’s performance of white womanhood at the beginning of the novel is violently dismantled by her rape. She is removed from her pedestal in the most violent of ways. Temple’s experience of her rape and her behaviour during her time in the Memphis brothel leads many critics to read the act of her rape as revealing her true character as a woman debased, sexually uncontrollable, or even evil (Ladd, Eddy, Tate). Horace Benbow’s point of view drives these kinds of interpretations. He, upon hearing Temple tell her story, “realised that she was recounting the experience with actual pride, a sort of naive and impersonal vanity” (172).

Horace and many critics misread and misunderstand Temple’s retelling of her rape. Instead of revealing her uncontrollable sexual perversion and her pride, Temple’s retelling of her story is her attempt to regain control over her body. Her telling also reveals her understanding of gender and sexuality as performative. Early on in the novel Ruby highlights Temple’s performance of gender and sexuality, accusing her of “playing at it” and telling her “I know your sort. I’ve seen them. All running, but not too fast” (50). As Temple retells her rape story she attempts to control her body through performance once again. She first demands a drink from Miss Reba, then a cigarette and finally to be left alone (170-171). Horace attempts to get her to tell the story of her rape multiple times but she “would elude him and return to herself sitting on the bed, listening to the men on the porch, or lying in the dark while they entered the room and came into the bed and stood there above her” (171). Temple clearly does not wish to tell her story, her “pride” seemingly gone at these moments, but she is pushed by Horace and finally submits.

At the moment of her rape Temple imagines herself as a variety of different characters. First, she tries to “make like I was a boy. I was thinking about if I just was a boy” (172). She then tries to “fasten herself up in some way” with an “iron belt” or similar (173), before imagining herself as a matronly teacher, “forty-five years old...iron-grey hair and spectacles and I was all big up here like women get. I had on a grey tailored suit” (175). Before realising that being a man is her best defence: “That won’t do. I ought to be a man. So I was an old man, with a long white beard”

(175). Temple tries to harness the performative nature of gender to protect herself from sexual violence. She attempts to reject femininity to keep her body safe. Moreover, in her fantasy of bodily performance she also imagines a shift in race and situates Popeye as “a little black thing like a nigger boy” and herself as the teacher who could control him (175). During and after her rape Temple’s performance of her sexuality and her gender is outside of the boundaries of the Southern belle. When she arrives at Miss Reba’s brothel the older woman declares: “You got a boy’s name, ain’t you?” (117). After her rape, Temple’s gender becomes fluid and she slips further from the pedestal of the belle.

The conclusion of the novel returns Temple’s body to its socially designated place within the white patriarchal family. After she has wrongly testified against Lee Goodwin, signalling him as her rapist and the murderer, the courtroom returns her to her fathers and brothers:

Four younger men were standing stiffly erect near the exit. They stood like soldiers, staring straight ahead until the old man and the girl reached them. Then they moved and surrounded the other two, and in a close body, the girl hidden among them, they moved toward the door. Here they stopped again; the girl could be seen shrunk against the wall just inside the door, her body arched again. She appeared to be clinging there, then the five bodies hid her again and again in a close body the group passed through the door and disappeared. (231)

Surrounded by the five men of her immediate family, Temple “disappears.” The language of this passage is intimate and there is a merging of the daughter’s body with the white family. She is made smaller, shrunken, and finally hidden. Her body, and therefore her bodily power, is subsumed by the larger body of the patriarchal family. “Temple’s return to her family merely seems like a transfer of power from Popeye to father, both of whom she calls ‘Daddy’” (Garnier 172). The body of the belle is returned to the control of the patriarch, and Southern social and sexual power structures are upheld. The deliberate performance of the belle’s return to the father in this scene reveals that the maintenance of social and sexual dynamics in the South is essential to the Southern patriarchy. The all-male world of the courtroom requires the over-done performance in which the broken belle is returned to her masculine relatives reaffirming the power of the white male in the South.

When asked in 1957 why he returned to the character of Temple Drake for the novel *Requiem for a Nun*, Faulkner responded:

I began to think, what would be the future of that girl? And then I – I thought of, what could a marriage come to which was founded on the vanity of a weak man. What would be the outcome of that? And suddenly that seemed to me dramatic and – and worthwhile. (Tape T-116)

Faulkner highlights the inadequacy of Gowan's performance of Southern masculinity in *Sanctuary*. In *Requiem*, both Gowan and Temple seek to make up for their failure to perform their social and gendered role correctly in the events of *Sanctuary*. Rejecting their past indiscretions, Gowan and Temple are now married and live in a "smart, modern" house in "the right street among other young couples who belong to the right church and country club" (53). Their marriage is an attempt to regain the social position lost to them by the events of *Sanctuary* and at the beginning of the novel they are performing the role of respectable white Southern couple.

However, there are cracks in this performance. The modern house "has the air of another time...it has the air of being in an old house" and Temple is smartly dressed but her air is "brittle and tense, yet controlled" (53). Gowan too is outwardly respectable, he is "almost a type...only children of financially secure parents living in city apartment hotels, alumni of the best colleges" but his "face is a little different, a little more than that. Something has happened to it – tragedy – something, against which it had no warning" (53). *Requiem's* narrative structure requires an ongoing confrontation with the Southern past. The novel is divided into distinct parts, long chapters of text that lay out the history of Jefferson, and play sections which deal with Temple Drake and the murder of her child at the hands of the mammy, Nancy Mannigoe. The division of the text in this way insists that the play sections are read in conjunction with Southern history. The first introduction of Temple and Gowan and their marital home also insists on the pervasiveness of history and memory as well as highlighting the fresh trauma that has come into their lives.

Gowan and Temple's performance of marriage and parenthood is haunted by the trauma of *Sanctuary*. Clewell argues that "Gowan hopes to reclaim the status of Southern gentleman by marrying the woman he abandoned at the bootlegger's house" and that Temple "seeks redemption by bearing children whose innocence she has pledged to protect" (79). Temple's redemption is sought not only through

motherhood but also through marriage. She insists throughout the novel that she is “Mrs Gowan Stevens” and no longer “Temple Drake,” seeking to gain distance from her past identity (79). However, critics of the novel initially read the text as concerned with how Temple had not changed, and viewed Gavin Stevens’s desire for the “truth” about Temple’s character as the ethical centre of the novel. Kathryn Seidel reads *Requiem* as Faulkner’s attempt to answer the question: “Is it possible to reclaim a woman so debased as Temple?” (162).

This type of reading continues the misunderstanding of Temple’s motivations and her trauma begun by Horace Benbow in *Sanctuary* and continued by Gavin Stevens in *Requiem*. These men, confused by Temple’s attempts to regain her identity and her body, instead view her as sexually uncontrollable, failing to perform her gender correctly, and therefore unreformable. Both men are troubled by Temple’s failure to respond to her rape in ways that would make sense to them. They are therefore the same kind of Southern man, reformist in that they dismiss much of the Old South, but still holding on to the precepts of white womanhood it rested on, precepts threatened by Temple Drake. Therefore in both *Sanctuary* and *Requiem* Temple’s sexuality and consequently, her morality, is called into question by the same type of man – a man who wants to be progressive, but only up to a point, not completely, not radically, and certainly not in regard to a white woman’s sexuality.

Requiem is one of Faulkner’s least-studied novels and the critical conversation surrounding it is somewhat limited. Most early criticism of the novel read Temple as unreformed (and unreformable), however, more recent scholarship has complicated her characterisation. As Ladd puts it, “in recent readings of the novel Temple has been transformed from a woman who ‘embraces corruption’ to a victim of repression, from a woman whose moral agency is in question (is she immoral or amoral?) to a victim of her cultural context” (490). Leading this critical re-evaluation in relation to Temple is Noel Polk’s *Faulkner’s Requiem for a Nun: A Critical Study*. Instead of seeing Temple as the failed belle in need of the moral guidance of her uncle/lawyer, Polk argues that she is

the bereaved mother of a child who has been brutally murdered by a person she had trusted and loved; she has had to be the sole emotional support of a

very weak husband; she has had to live with a terrifyingly shameful past; and she is being harassed by the County Attorney. (*Critical Study 74*)

Polk's re-reading of Temple's character goes on to suggest that the eight years that have passed since the events of *Sanctuary* have been for Temple herself "specifically and precisely a courageous attempt to accept the responsibility for her actions and to live with the consequences" (*Critical Study 9*). It is important then to consider why Stevens pressures Temple into a confession of her social and sexual "sins" and the significance of this confession being witnessed by three men: Stevens himself, the Governor of Mississippi, and Temple's husband, Gowan Stevens.

Gavin Stevens is the lawyer defending the killer of Temple's child, Nancy Mannigoe, and he is also Temple's uncle. Throughout the dramatic sections of *Requiem* he is concerned with getting Temple Drake to confess, to tell the "truth" about who she is. However, Gavin's concept of truth is somewhat sketchy. When Temple asks him what he wants he responds in a tone "implacable and calm" as the stage notes indicate: "Temple Drake. The truth" (81). Temple is incredulous at the simplicity of this notion: "Truth? We're trying to save a condemned murderess whose lawyer has already admitted that he has failed. What has truth got to do with that?" (81). The "truth" that Gavin so desperately tries to reveal is the truth regarding Temple's moral character and what he sees as her implication in the murder of her child. While Gavin's stated motives for his actions in the novel are all about helping Temple, what he requires is that Temple confess that her reformation is false.

Temple's confession is forced by her uncle, and her telling of it is hesitant and often confused. Gavin Stevens speaks over her, interrupts her, and insists on telling parts of it himself. Polk and others have highlighted the key problem in Gavin's rhetoric regarding Temple's confession: the fact that her confession will not have any effect on Nancy's case.³⁰ Why then is he so compelled to force a confession? Polk argues that Stevens's concern with Temple's past is "anything but harmless; he uses it, a past not his own, as a cross on which to crucify her, and fairly well succeeds" (*Critical Study 6*). Stevens requires Temple's confession because he is disturbed by her past exploits and by the fear that Temple has not adequately reformed.

³⁰ Ladd says it has "no impact whatsoever on Nancy's death sentence" (491),

We can therefore read Stevens's desire to force Temple into confession as stemming from the same motivations of Horace Benbow in *Sanctuary*, that is, Temple challenges his gendered and familial position. Polk gives two examples of this. First he suggests that part of what motivates Stevens is "his horror at having in his family the eight year old scandal, as well as its more recent variation, and his desire to purge his family of it or at the very least disassociate himself from it in a very public way" (*Critical Study* 66). Secondly, Polk argues that much of Stevens's "strident tone in *Requiem*... derives from his need to assure himself of his own moral character" (*Critical Study* 123). What is in question for Stevens is not Temple's social and gendered identity but his own. Or more delicately, the two are interrelated, reliant upon one another. I would extend Polk's argument to consider the racial implications of Temple's behaviour. Like the other failed belles in Faulkner's novels, Temple's sexual activity (forced or not) marks her as black in the Southern context. Gavin's insistence that Temple confesses her guilt reads like Quentin Compson's desperate plea to his sister in *The Sound and the Fury*: "[w]hy must you do like nigger women do[?]" (77).

During her confession Temple draws a connection between her own trauma and race, specifically, the suffering of a black man. Retelling the story of Rider that first appeared in the short story "Pantaloons in Black" in *Go Down, Moses*, Temple recalls how Rider is driven to murder as he mourns the death of his wife. Temple tells the story in full, and I include the long quote from the text here:

If I could just cry. There was another one, a man this time, before my time in Jefferson but Uncle Gavin will remember this too. His wife had just died – they had been married only two weeks – and he buried her and so at first he tried just walking the country roads at night for exhaustion and sleep, only that failed and then he tried getting drunk so he could sleep and that failed, and then he tried fighting and then he cut a white man's throat with a razor in a dice game and so at last he could sleep for a little while; which was where the sheriff found him, asleep on the wooden floor of the gallery of the house he had rented for his wife, his marriage, his old age. Only that waked him up, and so in the jail that afternoon, all of a sudden it took the jailer and a deputy and five other Negro prisoners just to throw him down and hold him while they locked the chains on him – lying there on the floor with more than a half dozen

men panting to hold him down, and what do you think he said? 'Look like I just can't quit thinking. Look like I just can't quit.' (174)

By recounting this story, Temple equates her own suffering with that of Rider. She connects her own failure to appropriately act out her loss and pain with Rider's similarly unreadable suffering.

"Pantaloon in Black" is explicitly a story of mourning and loss. Recall that Faulkner dedicated *Go Down, Moses*, the book in which the story appears, to Caroline Barr shortly after her death, and Sensibar and others have read the story as part of Faulkner's own mourning for Barr. As Rider mourns for his wife Mannie, so Faulkner seeks to express the loss of his mammy. Temple's retelling of the story in *Requiem* is also one of the moments in which she draws a parallel between her experiences and those of a black person. Temple retells Rider's story to bolster her own confession, to help work through her own suffering, and it is for the same reason that she later explains her hiring of Nancy as her mammy. Nancy is "the only animal in Jefferson who spoke Temple Drake's language" (140). By drawing this parallel between her own body, the lynched body of Rider in "Pantaloon in Black," and the sexually exploited body of Nancy, Temple reveals her understanding of the South's patriarchal structures that insist that her body is soiled and "blackened" by her failure to uphold her position as a white woman, an idea that Gavin Stevens adheres to throughout *Requiem*. Her confession plays out this understanding, and supports white Southern men's opinion that she has failed to fulfil her social and racial position. These men's insistence on her guilt highlights their inability to reconcile her sexual transgressions with her expected public and social position as a white woman.

The result of Temple's confession of "everything," her confession of "the truth" as Gavin sees it, is that Nancy is executed and Temple is returned, as in *Sanctuary*, to her family. Ladd suggests the following in regard to the conclusion of Temple in *Requiem*.

Under Stevens's guidance she is 'reprivatized'... persuaded to return to her home, her husband, and her son in the interests of ensuring cultural stability and reaffirming the principle of innocence that Gavin believes in so strongly, the principle that children have the right to remain 'unviolated' and 'unanguished.' (488)

Temple is reinstated into the male world from which she tried to escape and the perpetuity of the white family has been assured. No longer a threat, Temple has revealed herself to the three men and returned to her position of wife and mother. The Southern community has returned her to her rightful place within the family – still with one child to care for.

In *Requiem* the relationship between the white woman and her black employee is given a tragic turn by Faulkner. In this rendition of the mammy and the belle, the belle has publicly fallen from her pedestal and the mammy is a murderer. At the beginning of *Requiem* the belle as whore and mammy as saint as seen in *The Sound and the Fury* is seemingly transformed into the belle as whore and the mammy as monster. The mammy, Nancy, is the murderer of a white infant, as well as an ex-prostitute, ex-drug addict, and the mother of a child miscarried because of an act of violence by a white man. However, at the conclusion of the novel the belle's sexuality has been contained yet again and she is returned to her husband and remaining male child, while the mammy who murdered the other child is sanctified by the rhetoric of Gavin Stevens who presents her violence as necessary for the cohesion and futurity of the white family.

The stakes of the novel are grounded in the guilt or innocence of both Temple Drake and Nancy Mannigoe and this guilt or innocence is marked by the terms of sexuality and race and is less about legality than morality. As in *The Sound and the Fury*, the belle is sexually compromised and although Faulkner's portrayal of the mammy here is significantly darker than that of *The Sound and the Fury's* Dilsey, she is again ultimately sanctified because of her sacrifice to the white family. The South of *Requiem* represented by Gavin Stevens, turns Nancy Mannigoe's murder of a white baby into a heroic action undertaken to save the belle and in turn, to ensure the perpetuity of the white family.

Gavin positions the relationship between Temple and Nancy as the result of her failure to "redeem" herself from her perverse performance of Southern womanhood in *Sanctuary*. In Gavin's mind, Temple is in no way "reformed" but is instead still the "whore" who was kidnapped, raped and "loved it" (69). For Gavin, what is revealed in Temple's confession is an affiliation between the mammy and the

belle based not on a mutual desire to maintain white values, but on mutual sexual transgression. Temple and Nancy are, in Temple's words, "sisters in sin" (141).

The mammy, Nancy, is the cipher Gavin uses to manipulate Temple into confession. After convincing Temple to go with him in the middle of the night to see the Governor of Mississippi and tell what Gavin deems the "truth" about herself, she reveals to these men her complicity in the sexual transgressions against her as related in *Sanctuary* (81). She tells them that she probably could have gotten away from Popeye once he had kidnapped her:

I had two legs and I could see, and I could have simply screamed up the main street of any of the little towns we passed, just as I could have walked away from the car after Gow – we ran it into the tree, and stopped a wagon or a car which would have carried me to the nearest town or railroad station or even back to school or, for that matter, right on back home into my father's or brothers' hands. But not me, not Temple. I chose the murderer. (125)

She goes on to describe her confinement in the whorehouse as similarly easy to escape, telling the men that she "could have climbed down the rainspout at any time, the only difference being that I didn't" (128). Temple implicates herself in the crimes enacted upon her body in *Sanctuary* and concludes that she did so because "Temple Drake liked evil" (122).

Readers and critics including Tate, Eddy, and Ladd, have read Temple's confession here as confirmation of her uncontrolled and uncontrollable sexuality, a continuation of her rampant desire from *Sanctuary*. However, reading Temple's confession that she "liked evil" uncritically fails to take into account Temple's understanding of social and gender performance. As the "bereaved mother" of a murdered child, Temple undoubtedly already feels not only sadness, but also guilt about the death of her child. The confession sought by Gavin would only amplify these feelings. So perhaps she confesses to her "evil" nature because of the guilt that she could not protect her child from what seems like an act of senseless violence. But it is also possible to read Temple's confession as yet another performance. Temple gives Gavin and the men the performance that they seek – that of the corrupted, fallen Southern belle, whose final disgrace is the death of her child.

In her confession, Temple links her own past to her relationship to Nancy. The Governor asks her why she employed Nancy and Temple replies:

You are asking why I – we hired a whore and a tramp and a dope-fiend to nurse our children... to give her another chance – a human being too, even a nigger dope-fiend whore.. All right. It was to have someone to talk to. (109)

Temple goes on, exasperated:

And now you see? I'll have to tell the rest of it in order to tell you why I had to have a dope-fiend whore to talk to, why Temple Drake, the white woman, the all-Mississippi debutante, descendant of long lines of statesmen and soldiers high and proud in the high proud annals of our sovereign state, couldn't find anybody except a nigger dope-fiend whore that could speak her language. (109)

By hiring Nancy, Temple attempts to contain the split in her identity caused by her traumatic past. Temple recognises the similar trauma suffered by Nancy and seeks her company in an attempt to understand her own complex relationship to her womanhood. Temple and Nancy's relationship in *Requiem* is the kind of sisterhood across class and race lines that is rejected by Caroline Compson and Narcissa Benbow when they refuse to let another woman stay in their family home. Instead of rejecting the black woman from her space, Temple invites her in and forges a relationship with her not in spite of her sexual past, but because of it.

When we first see Nancy in the novel, she is seated in the courtroom being tried for the murder of Temple's baby. Nancy is described as "a Negress, quite black, about thirty –that is, she could be almost anything between twenty and forty" (51). Faulkner gestures here toward the unreadability of blackness and the unknowability of Nancy is something that Faulkner highlights again later in the novel. The stage directions indicate that Nancy is "or was until recently, five months ago to be exact – a domestic servant, nurse to two white children, the second of whom, an infant, she smothered in its cradle" (51). The introduction to Nancy continues by elucidating some other aspects of her history:

But she has probably done many things else – chopped cotton, cooked for working gangs – any sort of manual labour within her capacities, or rather, limitations in time and availability, since her principal reputation in the little Mississippi town where she was born is that of a tramp – a drunkard, a casual

prostitute, being beaten by some man or cutting or being cut by his wife or his other sweetheart. She has probably been married, at least once. Her name – or so she calls it and would probably spell it if she could spell – is Nancy Mannigoe. (51)

There is no specific indication that this Nancy is the same one who cared for the Compson children in “That Evening Sun” but there are certainly clues that suggest this is a reappearance.

The text is vague about Nancy’s past, she has “probably” done many other things and the narration is not definitive in the same way that it is for the white characters in the text, suggesting something innately unknowable about the experience of a black woman. While the text sections of *Requiem* provide an extensive history of the white community, there is little mention of the black community. Faulkner’s failure to provide a background for Nancy here, highlights this erasure of black history in the South. What we do know of Nancy is that she has been both a prostitute and “married, at least once,” just as Nancy in “That Evening Sun” was both a casual prostitute and wife to Jesus. The end of “That Evening Sun” had left Nancy’s survival ambiguous and *Requiem*’s use of a similar Nancy character does little to clarify her survival in the short story. Recall that Faulkner saw taking liberties with his characters and “moving them about in time” as part of his prerogative as author. Despite this lack of certainty about Nancy’s survival, there is undoubtedly a connection between “That Evening Sun” and *Requiem*’s Nancy characters and it is necessary to read them as part of Faulkner’s own trajectory of thinking about black women in the South as agents.

From her first appearance in the novel Nancy is presented as a prostitute and throughout the text she is referred to as whore by almost all of the white characters who speak to or of her. The use of “whore” as the descriptor for a black woman would usually automatically disqualify her from the role of mammy. Specifically, as the textual mammy has taught us, mammy must be sexless. Already Nancy is something different. She is more Jezebel than mammy and Temple hires Nancy not in spite of, but because of her sexual misdeeds, and because she “was the only animal in Jefferson who spoke Temple Drake’s language” (140). By figuring both women as “animals” Temple highlights the physicality and sexuality of each woman’s past. This language also reveals that both Temple and Nancy have been subject to

degradation and dehumanisation by men. In her language Temple suggests that both she and Nancy have experienced the transformation of “personality into property” that Spillers recognises in the structures of slavery (78).

Requiem thus presents us with a belle and a mammy who are both in some way sexually fallen. Each of these women has a complicated sexual history which unsettles the white South. Temple’s purity is compromised by her notorious past and she hires a mammy who will not contain these desires, but who mirrors them. This mammy becomes for the belle-whore a confidante, a friend. Temple describes herself and Nancy as

two sisters in sin swapping trade or anyway vocational secrets over Coca-Colas in the quiet kitchen. Someone to talk to, as we all seem to need, want, have to have, not to converse with you nor even agree with you, but just keep quiet and listen. (141)

The mammy and belle relationship has been transformed in *Requiem* into one not concerned with maintaining the standards of white propriety, but about shared sexual transgression. However, this is not to say that Nancy and Temple’s relationship is completely free from the binds of race, class, and gender. Temple describes Nancy as

nurse: guide: mentor, catalyst, glue, whatever you want to call it, holding the whole lot of them together – not just a magnetic centre for the heir apparent and the other little princes or princesses in their orderly succession, to circle around, but for the two bigger hunks too of mass or matter or dirt or whatever it is shaped in the image of God, in a semblance at least of order and respectability and peace. (140)

Recognisable in this description of Nancy is the traditional black mammy who is the centre of the white family and “holding them all together.” By employing a black woman as a domestic in their home, the Stevens family position themselves as elite Southern whites as mammies are only for rich and proper white families. Nancy therefore brings to the Stevens family at least an outward semblance of respectability and peace. However, this description is without the nostalgia of other reminiscences of mammy. Temple is almost savage in her description of the white family, figuring them as hunks of mass or dirt rather than individuals. Temple

recognises the falseness and inevitable failure of the white family, but highlights Nancy's position in holding them all together in spite of this.

Despite the fact that they are "sisters" in sin and both fallen women in the structure of the South, Temple and Nancy's relationship cannot fully transgress the racial boundaries of the Southern world. Kelly Lynch Reames notes the transgressive aspects of the relationship between the two women, arguing that "Temple and Nancy's social identity as 'whores' gives them an equality that would not otherwise exist in the relationship of a white woman and a black woman who works for her" (64). But she goes on to argue that despite Temple's identification with Nancy "their relationship remains largely determined by the Southern social structure within which they live, a structure in which the black woman's role as domestic and nanny is to function as a mirror and support for the white woman" (*Mockeries* 58). So Temple and Nancy are not "sisters" in the sense that they are equals. Nancy is still the black woman working within a white home. She has no chance for reformation, while Temple has been able to rebuild her life (at least superficially) and regain the respect and reputation that is never available to Nancy.

Nancy is undoubtedly a different version of mammy to the traditional image of the fat, happy, devoted, sexless mammy. However, as much as the image of the ex-prostitute mammy is destabilising, Nancy does not represent a complete break from mammy mythology. A key aspect of the mammy's position within the white household is her support for white motherhood. The mammy is the figure who allows the white belle to be a mother while maintaining her position as lady. Despite Nancy's social and sexual transgressions – despite her status as "whore" – she is still deeply concerned with supporting Temple's maternity. Gavin Stevens concludes that Nancy goes so far as to murder the white child to reinforce the maternity of her belle. This conclusion is predicated on a troubling set of social, racial, and sexual structures, yet Nancy's dedication to the maternity of her employer is clear.

In *Requiem* both Temple's and Nancy's maternity is put under pressure. For Temple, her "reformation" takes place because of her transition into motherhood, and her ultimate failure to fully embrace her new maternal role is put on trial by Gavin Stevens. Nancy exists as a surrogate mother to Temple's children and Temple herself in *Requiem*, but her position as good mammy is complicated by both her past

and the fact that her maternal devotion ends in the murder of a child in her care. In a third move, Nancy's maternity is further complicated by the fact that she is not only surrogate mother to whites but also the mother of a child miscarried, possibly after an act of violence by a white man. Nancy's desire to maintain Temple's maternal position can be read as stemming from something personal, perhaps her sexual transgressions, but perhaps also the loss of her own child.

Temple's confession brings forth the revelation that on the night of her baby's murder, she was set to run away with Pete, the brother of Red, with whom she had a sexual relationship in *Sanctuary*, leaving her older son behind and taking her infant daughter with her. It is at this moment of maternal abandonment that for many critics (as for Gavin Stevens) Temple's "reformation" is revealed as superficial.³¹ That a white mother – a belle reformed into the "good mother" of Southern mythology – would leave her children in favour of a lover is intensely confronting for Stevens, Faulkner's Yoknapatawpha, and critics of the novel including Fowler and Parsons. It is when Pete – Red's brother – turns up to blackmail Temple with the letters she wrote to Red that Temple reveals: "I found out that I not only hadn't forgotten about the letters, I hadn't even reformed" (*Requiem* 135).³² Stevens takes over the narration from Temple when she comes to this part of the story, telling her that she is "drowning in an orgasm of abjectness and moderation when all you need is truth" (129). Stevens's accusation diminishes and dismisses Temple's voice. Stevens uses sexual language to accuse Temple of being aroused by debasement, the same desire that he believes led to her being captive in a whorehouse and "loving it" and the same desire that keeps her married to Gowan. Gavin seeks to implicate Temple with an attraction to abjection but instead, reveals his own interest in the sexual nature of her experience.

Stevens then takes up the story with his own flourish of rhetorical drama, telling the Governor about the new man, Pete, who was Red's brother, asking him when the Governor doesn't follow Stevens's train of thought "don't you know anything about women?" (149). He elaborates to the Governor:

³¹ See Fowler, Doreen. "Time and Punishment in Faulkner's *Requiem for a Nun*"; Brooks, Cleanth. "Faulkner's *Sanctuary*: The Discovery of Evil."

³² This is the second time a woman has been blackmailed over suggestive letters in Yoknapatawpha. In the 1933 short story "There was a Queen," Narcissa Benbow receives a series of "anonymous and obscene" letters which she keeps and are later used to blackmail her into sleeping with a federal agent.

I imagine that he (the new one, the blackmailer) even looked like his brother – a younger Red, the Red of a few years even before she knew him, and – if you will permit it – less stained, so that in a way it may have seemed to her that here at last even she might slough away the six years' soilure of struggle and repentance and terror to no avail. (151)

Stevens seeks to further evidence Temple's desire and her attraction to abjection, but it is Stevens himself who idealises Pete as a younger, more attractive version of Red.

The idea that Temple would leave her children for a man troubles Stevens (even if the man is "less stained" and more attractive than the last), but it is Nancy who is perhaps most concerned by Temple's willingness to abandon her children. Nancy, the ex-drug addict and ex-prostitute, judges Temple as a mother, deeming her unfit and, as Stevens seems to conclude, murdering the child in her charge in order to save Temple from herself, and her children from their "bad" mother. Scene II reveals the action on the evening of the murder of Temple's (always unnamed) baby. The stage directions indicate that the setting is "Temple's private sitting- or dressing-room. 9.30P.M. September thirteenth *ante*" (154). The scene opens with Temple frantically searching for Nancy who has hidden the money and diamonds Temple plans to run away with. Nancy appears in the room with a face "sad, brooding and inscrutable" (160). Again, Nancy cannot be read, her face gives nothing away. Nancy goes on to reprimand Temple for leaving. Like Stevens, she judges Temple on the basis of an uncontrollable sexuality that both seem to see as hiding inside Temple, with Nancy telling her, "it was already there in whoever could write the kind of letters that even eight years afterward could still make grief and ruin" (162).

Nancy argues that Temple didn't need money or diamonds to get rid of Pete, arguing that all a woman needs is "womanishness to get anything she wants from men. You could have done that right here in the house, without even tricking your husband into going off fishing" (163). Nancy's anger and judgement regarding Temple's sexuality seems at odds with her past as a "casual prostitute." However, even though it is ultimately motherhood that Nancy wants to protect, that she also values and wants to protect marriage is not that surprising if we recall her appearance in "That Evening Sun" in which she herself is married. Despite her fear

of her husband Jesus in “That Evening Sun,” Nancy is also protective of him and furious when it is suggested that Jesus has run off with another woman.

In Nancy’s mind there is a clear distinction between marriage and sex. In “That Evening Sun” Nancy is both a prostitute to white men and wife to a black man. This duality reflects Nancy’s position in the Jim Crow South as a black woman. We might understand Nancy’s marriage as a personal decision, but her prostitution as the result of social and economic factors. Temple responds in anger to Nancy’s suggestion that she could have “done that thing” right in the house and not left her marriage, arguing that such thinking is “a perfect example of whore morality” (163). But both Temple and Nancy make a division between marriage and sex, with Nancy insisting that Temple could have had sex with Pete in the house and then returned to her life as wife and mother, while Temple refuses to have sex with Pete in her marital home, needing to leave that space to begin her relationship with him.

Nancy judges Temple on the grounds of her maternal failure. She tells Temple, “I ain’t talking about your husband. I ain’t even talking about you. I’m talking about two little children” (163). Nancy wants to stop Temple from leaving because of the children and of the damage that the mother leaving would have for the little boy particularly. Nancy goes on to accuse Temple of giving up: “You gave up. You gave up the child too. Willing to risk never seeing him again maybe” (163). When Temple fails to respond to this accusation Nancy continues “That’s right. You don’t need to make no excuse to me. Just tell me what you must have already strengthened your mind up to telling all the rest of the folks that are going to ask you that. You are willing to risk it. Is that right?” To this Temple does not respond and Nancy continues: “All right. We’ll say you have answered it. So that settles Bucky. Now answer me this one. Who are you going to leave the other one with?” (163).

Temple responds to this by noting that because the baby is only six months old, it cannot be left behind. To which Nancy responds:

That’s right. Of course you can’t leave her. Not with no body. You can’t no more leave a six-months-old baby with nobody while you run away from your husband with another man, than you can take a six-months-old baby with you on that trip. That’s what I’m talking about. So maybe you’ll just leave it in there in that cradle; it’ll cry for a while, but it’s too little to cry very loud so maybe

won't nobody hear it and come meddling, especially with the house shut up and locked until Mr Gowan gets back next week, and probably by that time it will have hushed. (164)

Nancy's claim that Temple will leave the baby to die and run away with Pete angers Temple who threatens to slap her because of the accusation. Temple does intend to take the child with her and not leave it to die as Nancy suggests. However, Nancy equates both taking the child and leaving it with the baby's literal death.

Toward the end of this scene Nancy repeatedly says "I've tried. I've tried everything I know. You can see that" (164, 165). But what is not clear is whether or not Nancy intends for the "you" to be Temple or some sort of higher power. When she first claims that she has "tried everything" Temple responds, "[w]hich nobody will dispute. You threatened me with my children, and even with my husband... You even stole my elopement money. Oh yes, nobody will dispute that you tried" (165). Clearly Temple interprets Nancy's words as intended for her, replying that "nobody will dispute that you tried." But perhaps Nancy is speaking to God, the implications of which Temple misses. If Nancy is asking God to confirm that she has done everything that she could, she is also asking for confirmation that the next step, the ultimate step, is her only option. What finally seems to convince Nancy that she has "tried everything" is when Temple admits that she will flee the house "children or no children" (168). She forces Temple to admit that this is the case, asking her to say the words "children or no children." Temple reluctantly and with some anger complies with this request and it is at this moment that Nancy seems to cement her decision that nothing but a drastic and tragic action can "save" Temple and her family. After the revelation of "children or no children" Nancy says one final time, "I tried everything I knowed. You can see that" (168) and leaves the room and kills the baby.

There is a disparity between Nancy's rhetoric and her actions. Nancy criticises Temple for leaving one child with his father and running away with the other because she is concerned about the "two little children." But when she fails to convince Temple to stay she murders the youngest child. Nancy's rhetoric suggests that she kills the child because she cannot think of any other way to keep Temple from leaving. And Gavin Stevens accepts this view, suggesting that Nancy sacrificed the

baby, and herself, to “save” Temple and to save the remaining child from a broken home, or to save the daughter from becoming like her mother.

The early critical conversation around *Requiem*, although limited, accepted Stevens’s thesis that Nancy’s murder was a selfless double sacrifice made to save Temple. These readings fail to recognise the dysfunction of a conclusion in which infanticide brings about salvation. As Polk argues, the “crime is heinous, the punishment appropriate. Any evaluation of Nancy in this novel, any discussion of mitigating circumstances or motive, must begin with a recognition of this fact” (*Critical Study* 63). Stevens reconciles Nancy’s abhorrent act by situating it as the ultimate act of devotion on behalf of the mammy for her white employer, while Jeffrey Stayton, following Stevens’s rhetoric, argues that the mammy has the “*moral right to take the life of a baby – so long as she upholds the honour or integrity of her white family*” (268). This is a uniquely Southern outcome, born out of a society wounded by racial trauma and that values the patriarchal white family above all else. By sacrificing the female child and leaving the white male heir in the form of Bucky, the male child, Nancy has successfully ensured the future of the white family and is therefore idealised by Stevens and the larger South.

Faulkner’s representation of the mammy as murderess in *Requiem* is a transgressive move that drives mammy mythology to its (il)logical conclusion. The idea of a mammy who murders a white child is something that literature has considered very rarely. Wallace-Sanders cites only one example of a murderess mammy, in Adeline Ries’s 1917 short story “Mammy: A Story” and calls this depiction “unique” (112). She argues that “in the array of mammies from the nineteenth to the twentieth centuries [Ries’s] unique depiction of a killer or brute mammy seems to have appeared and disappeared in silence” (112). Wallace-Sanders does not mention Faulkner’s rendition of the killer mammy in *Requiem* despite the fact that at other points her argument considers other Faulknerian mammies. The critical silence surrounding Nancy’s murder of her mistress’s child reiterates the slipperiness of Faulkner’s portrayal of the murdering mammy. Nancy is the black mother made potent through an act of violence. But Nancy’s maternity is never fully realised, her child is lost before it is born, and her potency in Faulkner’s hands does not extend to a biological family or community and only succeeds in bolstering the white family.

In Ries's story the (always unnamed) mammy murders the infant child of the white woman she had raised after her own biological daughter is sold away and dies. The story ends with the mammy tossing the white baby into the ocean:

hours later, two slaves in frantic search for the missing child found Mammy on the beach tossing handfuls of sand into the air and uttering loud, incoherent cries. And as they came close, she pointed towards the sea and with the laugh of a mad-woman shouted: 'They took her from me an' she died!' (523)

Wallace-Sanders suggests that in Ries's story "the symbol of racial harmony [the mammy] is distorted until the fantasy and myth dissolves into a tragic nightmare" (110). Moreover, "Ries exploits our expectation that the mammy's grief, and ostensibly any slave mother's grief, is impotent. She then provides a lesson in subversion by reminding her readers that sometimes there are no black children to whom the mammy can return" (111). But Stevens's narration does not allow much space for readers to pity Nancy. Her sacrifice is represented by him as a choice and her death as an expected outcome.

Nancy's murder of the white child can be read alongside that of Ries's mammy and of Sethe in Toni Morrison's *Beloved*. These women's murders are part of a genealogy of black maternity outraged by slavery and its aftermath. Nancy appears to have no biological children of her own in *Requiem*, but what is rarely mentioned by critics of the novel is that she was pregnant in "That Evening Sun": "her belly swelling out a little...like a little balloon" (81). The end of "That Evening Sun" leaves no explanation as to what has happened to her pregnancy, but she has been victim to an act of violence at the hands of a white man and *Requiem* seems to suggest that the pregnancy was lost because of this.

We need to return again to this key scene that appears in both "That Evening Sun" and *Requiem*, where Nancy confronts Mr Stovall for payment for her services as a prostitute. Nancy asks him, "where's my two dollars white man?" – before he "struck her, knocked her across the pavement into the gutter and then ran after her, stomping and kicking at her face" until she was "spitting blood and teeth and still saying 'it was two dollars more than two weeks ago and you done been back twice since'" (*Requiem* 110). While the novel does not make it clear that Nancy is pregnant here and loses her child as a result of this attack, later in the novel her miscarried child is brought up by Temple who asks her about the child she was carrying "six

months gone” where she “went to a picnic or dance or frolic or fight or whatever it was, and the man kicked you in the stomach and you lost it?” (245). Faulkner’s repetition of this scene in both “That Evening Sun” and *Requiem* suggests that it is essential to Nancy’s character and a powerful reflection of the gendered and racial codes that disenfranchise Nancy as a black woman in the South. However, as I argued in chapter two of this thesis, it also reveals Nancy’s agency. She confronts a white man publicly, seeking payment for his access to her body and laughs as he beats her. This scene, as well as Nancy’s characterisation in “That Evening Sun” and *Requiem* show her as a woman who is unable to be defined by the strict and limited roles available to black women in the South. She exists in complex duality as both wife and whore, and mammy and murderess.

Nancy’s miscarriage does not change the fact that the act of infanticide itself is abhorrent, but it does complicate the way that Nancy’s maternity can be read. Returning to Ries’s “Mammy: A Story,” Wallace-Sanders argues that “mammy’s biological motherhood is repeatedly denied, leaving her powerless to protect her child” (112). Similarly, criticism of *Beloved* has cited Sethe’s maternal powerlessness and her infanticide as an attempt to enact maternal potency. Marianne Hirsh suggests that “when Sethe tries to explain to Beloved why she cut her throat, she is explaining an anger handed down through generations of mothers who could have no control over their children’s lives, no voice in their upbringing” (196). It is therefore the notion of powerlessness or impotence regarding their maternity that is central to considerations of black maternal infanticide. Fowler analogises Nancy’s act to Sethe’s and argues that “in *Requiem* as in *Beloved* the mother-child bond is under attack” (“Reading” 142). But this reading fails to take into account the troubling fact that the mother-child bond in *Requiem* is under attack because of the white mother’s sexual transgressions. While in *Beloved* Sethe is trying to save her daughter from the horrors of slavery which she has herself experienced first-hand, Nancy’s murder is ultimately about reinstating the fallen white woman back onto her pedestal and protecting the white daughter from the same fate as her mother.

At the University of Virginia, a student asked Faulkner whether the “nun” from the title of *Requiem* referred to Temple or Nancy. Faulkner’s response was succinct: “the nun was Nancy.” Requiring further explanation, the session mediator asked

whether this was because she was “separated from the world as a nun is.”

Faulkner’s responded:

Well, it was in the—the—that tragic life of a prostitute which she had had to follow simply because she was compelled by her environment, her circumstance, to be it. Not for profit nor any pleasure. She was just doomed and damned by circumstances to that life. And despite that, she was capable within her—her poor dim lights and reasons of an act, which whether it was right or wrong, was a—was a complete, almost religious abnegation of the world for—for the sake of—of an—of an innocent child. That was—it was paradoxical, the use of the word ‘nun’ for her, but I—but to me that—that added something to her tragedy. (Tape T-136)

So Nancy is the nun of *Requiem* but Faulkner himself seems unable or unwilling to fully explain why she fits this role.

Faulkner notes that her position as “nun” is paradoxical, because she is a nun who, in the vocabulary the novel, is also a whore. More specifically, Nancy is both the idealised black mother – mammy – and transgressive black woman – Jezebel. The contradiction between, on the one hand, maternal sacrifice and care and, on the other, uncontrollable sexuality, is reminiscent of the dual pictures of Caroline Barr that emerged in chapter one of this thesis. Nancy is both mammy and whore in *Requiem*, but her emergence as nun by the conclusion of the novel negates her transgressiveness as the whore mammy and instead promotes Nancy to a position alongside the monumental Dilsey and the memorialised Caroline Barr, as an idealised black sacrifice.

Nancy’s position as an ex-prostitute, ex-drug addict mammy who murders a child in her care, outwardly compromises her ability to become idealised under the same terms as other fictional versions of mammy. However, by the end of *Requiem* the murdering Jezebel mammy has been recast by Gavin Stevens as a definitive figure of transcendent black maternity. As Paradiso argues Nancy has no “place” within the Southern society of Yoknapatawpha as a “reformed prostitute who murders in the name of the lord.” But “the people in the form of Gavin Stevens... find a way to make her fit: by turning her into a saint” (29).

Nancy's religious devotion is reminiscent of the spirituality of both Caroline Barr and Dilsey. Her religious commitment is based less on an adherence to a particular church doctrine and more on an innate spirituality. Nancy "doesn't know" what to tell Temple when she asks about the afterlife, all she knows is that she "believes," telling Temple repeatedly to "just believe" (239, 240). Nancy's spiritual reverence is, however, rooted in her lived experience. Nancy tells Temple that she can "get low for Jesus" because "Jesus is a man too" (240). Temple is shocked by the admission that she would come to serve Jesus in a sexual way, accusing her of blasphemy, but Nancy is adamant in her resolve that Jesus is a man who, like other white men, she can get low for. Nancy "uses the language of sexual submission and domination" in her expression of her faith (Towner 71). Nancy's spirituality reveals her understanding of her social place wherein her body is used by white men. Nancy's spirituality is hard to pin down and difficult to digest, but that doesn't stop Gavin Stevens from using it as the basis for his exaltation of the murdering mammy.

Gavin needs to rationalise Nancy's actions in a way that will not destabilise the sanctity of the white family. Readers are not led to consider Nancy's murder as stemming from hate, anger, or madness; instead, by the end of the novel, her murder is coded in terms of black sacrifice. Nancy's murder is cast as a deliberate double sacrifice of the white child and herself so that she may save the white woman and her family. Nancy herself is resigned to her own death, speaking of it as "pay for the suffering" (242). She "just believes" in God and his path and her death is presented as simply part of the transaction required to purchase redemption for herself and the white family she is ultimately shown to serve.

Stevens tells Temple that Nancy "will die tomorrow to postulate that little children, as long as they are little children, shall be intact, unanguished, untorn, unterrified" (185). Gavin's reading of the murder of Temple's child iterates that for him, being the child of a sexually impure mother is worse than death. Nancy has protected Temple's remaining child from anguish and terror by murdering his infant sister, Stevens argues. But also, Nancy murders the white girl to protect her from her mother's actions and history, linking her actions to that of Sethe in *Beloved*. What is perverse about Requiem's infant sacrifice is that the black woman kills the white child to preserve her position as a future Southern belle. This makes no sense, but in Faulkner's South such an argument holds. Stevens does not consider for even a

moment that the death of his sister would cause anguish or terror for the remaining child. Instead, having his mother returned to her pedestal as Southern lady and mother is more important than the life of the murdered infant, or indeed, the life of the mammy.

Like Dilsey, Nancy is celebrated by the white society because of her endurance and sacrifice to whiteness. Moreover, both of these black women's sanctification results from some kind of maternal devotion. That is, because each of them is a mammy, a celebrated rendition of black maternity in the South, at their conclusions, both Dilsey and Nancy have gone some ways towards reaching the "totality" of Kristeva's Virgin Mary, combining the duality of maternal love and the virginal body, a totality "as perfect as it was inaccessible" (Kristeva 141). Dilsey and Nancy are attempts to reconcile the dual aspects of femininity of Kristeva's Virgin and are sanctified as a result. While Nancy's path to redemption is more violent and incendiary than Dilsey's, the result is the same; a black woman sacrifices herself to the white family and becomes a monument, a myth, a saint, or a nun for doing so.

Chapter Four

“Tell About the South”: Women and Southern Memory in *Absalom, Absalom!*

Where *Requiem for a Nun* ends with the perseverance and preservation of the white family, however damaged and destabilised, Faulkner’s 1936 novel *Absalom, Absalom!* closes with Quentin Compson’s frantic insistence to his Canadian roommate Shreve that he doesn’t hate the South:

‘I don’t hate it,’ Quentin said, quickly, at once, immediately; ‘I don’t hate it,’ he said. *I don’t hate it* he thought, panting in the cold air, the iron New England dark: *I don’t. I don’t! I don’t hate it! I don’t hate it!* (378)

This conclusion follows a prolonged process of story-telling, mythmaking, and memorialisation across time and families in the South. Quentin and Shreve are active participants in these processes which begin with Quentin’s encounter with the elderly Miss Rosa, who wishes to share with him the story of her sister’s husband, Thomas Sutpen, and his rise and fall in the South.

The multiple tellings and retellings of the Sutpen family saga reveal the many failings of Southern patriarchy and the violent potential of familial and social relationships in the South. While the presence of mammy and belle figures in *Absalom* is not as distinct as in the other texts that I have considered, *Absalom*’s engagement with race and sexuality and its representation of Southern gender roles situates it as essential to any consideration of women as conduits of memory and Southern myth. *Absalom* does something different from *The Sound and the Fury* and *Requiem* with its female characters, specifically with its mammy and belle figures, but the representation of Judith, Rosa, and Clytie in this novel also throws into relief the renditions of mammy and belle figures that this thesis has already considered. While this chapter’s focus is, in a sense, tangential to the figures of the mammy and the Southern belle, reading *Absalom* through gender provides a new lens through which to examine the crisis of Southern gender and racial codes.

Absalom has been widely read as Faulkner’s most successful exploration of Southern history and memory but it also reveals much about gender roles, sexuality, and the problem of race in Yoknapatawpha. *Absalom* is ostensibly a story about fathers and sons, and this chapter considers the novel’s engagement with Southern memory and memorialisation, Lost Cause mythology, and Southern patriarchy. It

provides a reading of the key link between sexuality and miscegenation in the South through the homoeroticism of two sets of men, Henry Sutpen and Charles Bon, and Quentin Compson and Shreve, and considers these relationships as versions of the black-white brotherhood central to chapter one of this thesis. But *Absalom* also provides revelatory moments in which the connection between women in the South is exposed and explored and this chapter considers the key role of women in the storytelling process of the novel and the story of Thomas Sutpen.

My argument finds its focus in two key scenes from *Absalom* which reveal the power and the violent potential of Southern relationships. In the first scene, a young Thomas Sutpen is turned away from the front door of a plantation house by a black man. To the boy this moment is a revelation of the race and power structures of the South and it is the trauma of this primal scene that drives his lifelong quest for patriarchal power and symbolic and actual potency. The second scene is a moment of connection between two women, one white and one black. After the murder of Charles Bon at the hands of his brother Henry, Miss Rosa races to the house to comfort her niece, Judith. She is stopped at the base of the stairs by Clytie, the black woman who is also her niece's sister. The moment of physical contact, in which Clytie touches Rosa's arm to bar her from climbing the stairs, is a shattering moment for Rosa which, like Sutpen's rejection from the big house, illuminates the racial and sexual divisions at the heart of Southern society and within Southern families. As Sharon Patricia Holland argues, the moment reveals "the power of the touch as both boundary and trespass" (101).

At the heart of *Absalom* is the process of storytelling. In the broadest sense, the novel is involved in the telling and retelling of the story of one man, Thomas Sutpen, and his rise and fall in the South. The story is told by multiple narrators and in multiple ways. The first narrator is Rosa Coldfield who in her aging state wishes to tell to the young Quentin Compson the story of her "demon" brother in law and one-time fiancé (9). Rosa's telling of the story appears to Quentin as something of a compulsion: "*It was because she wants it told*" (11). But Rosa is only the first to tell this story. Quentin's father, Mr Compson, also tries his hand at the narrative of Thomas Sutpen, relaying the version of events that had, in turn, been told to him by his father, General Compson, who heard them from Sutpen himself. Eventually, the story of Sutpen's life and family overwhelms Quentin and his roommate Shreve who

become obsessed with reconstructing the story and filling its many narrative gaps and silences.

The exact details of the story of Sutpen are hard to pin down, even to Sutpen himself, who confesses to his own narrative gaps which cannot be filled. This includes his age, which Sutpen himself does not know. Mr Compson recalls that “he told [General Compson] that he did not know within a year on either side just how old he was” and his tombstone, that he insists his men carry through the war, does not have a year of birth engraved on it (227). Other narrative gaps in Sutpen’s own version of his story appear as more deliberate omissions, with no explanation given by Sutpen for his arrival in the West Indies – “he got himself to the West Indies by saying that he decided to go to the West Indies and so he went there” (246) – and the story he tells General Compson is punctuated by things he “didn’t remember” (224, 227).

In each telling of the Sutpen story there are these kinds of omissions and misinterpretations. Mr Compson’s story, for example, cites Charles Bon’s octoroon wife and child as the reason for Sutpen’s revelation to Henry and Henry’s subsequent renouncing of his birthright. Later, however, Quentin and Shreve decide that the revelation is due to Bon’s position as Sutpen’s biological, mixed race son. In Rosa’s story, Sutpen is presented as a demon, a fictionalised, ghostly presence and the reason why “*God let [the South] lose the War. that only through the blood of our men and the tears of our women could He stay this demon and efface his name and lineage from the earth*” (11). Quentin and Shreve’s version of events, which closes the novel and is generally understood as the most definitive, is still clouded by narrative bias. In *Doubling and Incest/Repetition and Revenge*, John T. Irwin explores Quentin’s motivations for engaging so enigmatically with the Sutpen story, calling his story telling a “mutual process” in which “what Quentin knows of the motivations of his own family life illuminates the story of the Sutpens and, in turn, the events in the Sutpen’s story help Quentin to understand his own experiences” (26).

The many tellings and retellings of the Sutpen family reveal the narrative struggle over history and memory in the postbellum South that has been a key theme of this thesis. The slipperiness and necessary inauthenticity of the stories that individuals in *Absalom* tell about their collective past evidences the pervasiveness of

Lost Cause mythology in the historical South after the War but also its incompleteness, suppressions, and silences. The conflict among the multiple narratives in the novel reflects the Southern struggle over who owns the past and whose memories are codified as “truth.” We might here recall Joan Marie Johnson’s comment regarding the erection of mammy monuments, that both black and white people in the South “understood that the images they promoted, the texts they wrote, and the monuments they erected legitimized collective memories” (63).

Absalom’s engagement with Southern history is not only symbolically revealed through the process of memorialisation and storytelling, Sutpen’s rise and fall is also linked to the South generally. Sutpen is driven throughout the novel by his “design.” He tells General Compson: “I had a design. To accomplish it I should require money, a house, a plantation, slaves, a family – incidentally of course, a wife” (263). The catalyst for this design is the primal scene from his childhood, in which he is rejected from the front door of the plantation house. Before this moment Sutpen, we are told repeatedly, is innocent: “Sutpen’s problem was innocence” (220). For Sundquist, Sutpen’s innocence reflects the larger South: “Sutpen’s crisis of innocence, as well as the flaw that engenders it, is the nation’s” (102). That is, the South’s wilful ignorance of the violence and dysfunction of its racial and gendered structures.

Rosa’s version of Sutpen’s story supports the idea that Sutpen’s experience stands in for the South generally. To Rosa, he is the reason the South loses the War. And indeed we can see reflected in it many aspects of Southern history, particularly, the rise to power and potency thrown into crisis by the reality of race and the legacy of slavery. For some critics “Sutpen’s career parallels the rise and fall of the entire region as a powerful economic and political entity” (Ragan 159). While this may be overstating the link, what is clear is that Sutpen’s story plays out the trauma of race and slavery as a form of “repetitive wounding” (Gwin, “Racial Wounding” 23).

The Sutpen family narrative and its multiple tellings reveal not only this repetition of racial wounding, but also highlight the inevitable precariousness of time and narrative trauma. The text jumps around in time, the facts of the story are unclear and hard to follow, and past and present mingle in *Absalom* to obscure events. This narrative confusion mirrors the unsteadiness and unknowability of race

that haunts the Sutpen family and the larger Southern community. As Charles Bon reveals, race's very imperceptibility makes it dangerous. Ulfried Reichardt highlights this connection between narrative form and racial ambiguity, arguing that "the novel confounds past and present and unsettles the notion of a clear distinction between them. The same is true for racial boundaries" (616). James A. Snead links the jumbling of narrative time to mythology and storytelling by arguing that the novel is "not primarily about particular historical events, but rather about how actual historical events are transformed, often retroactively, into deceptive, fictive, mythic and ideological constructs" (104). *Absalom* therefore reveals the mythologising of the past that occurs in the historical South. It also highlights the necessarily fluid nature of history that is central to many of Faulkner's other texts, the most obvious incarnation of which is Gavin Stevens's famous declaration in *Requiem for a Nun*: "The past is never dead. It is not even past" (85). *Absalom* plays out this insistence on the inescapability of the past, which, for Southerners, is particularly paralysing. For Quentin Compson, the inability to escape the burden of the past, represented not only in his own family history but also in the story of the Sutpen family, leads to his suicide in *The Sound and the Fury*.

The novel circles around a series of men and focuses on the struggles between various fathers and sons. Sutpen's very design places women on the margins of the story, ironically as secondary to the progression of the patriarchy. To him, success requires a house, slaves, a family, and only "incidentally" a wife (263). Sutpen's view of women as necessary but tangential to his design is repeated throughout the novel and finds its clearest example in his suggestion to Rosa that she become pregnant with a son before they marry – "the bald outrageous words" – that horrify Rosa and lead her to flee the Sutpen home (168). And while it is Rosa's story and her voice that open the novel, her narrative eventually disappears and the masculine narratives of Mr Compson, Quentin, and Shreve take over. Like Caddy Compson in *The Sound and the Fury*, the women in the novel are silent and spoken for by men. While Rosa's voice is at least partially heard, Judith, Clytie, and Ellen are all distinctly silent and only spoken for by the male narrators in the text. Deborah Clarke suggests that because of this, the women in the novel are "either wilfully misread or inadequately explained" ("Familiar" 65). But as Clarke herself and other feminist critics have noted, there is still power to be found in these silences.

Susan V. Donaldson suggests that while the women in the novel “appear to serve only as means of perpetuating [a] dynasty – as mothers, wives, and sisters,” there is power to be found in “consciously resisting” the masculine stories being told and instead directing our attention to the margins and shadows where the women’s voices can be found (167). Undertaking this conscious resistance proves fruitful to any reading of the novel and the key scene of confrontation between Rosa and Clytie in particular demands close, considered attention outside of the boundaries of the masculine narrative voices. *Absalom*’s focus on fathers and sons obscures what feminist critics such as Dunleavy, Clarke, and Bollinger have highlighted: the distinct absence of mothers within the text. Clarke brings attention to this stark absence by suggesting that the literal mothers in the text: Ellen, Eulalia, the octoroon, and Milly Jones, are overshadowed by Rosa, her aunt, Judith, and Clytie, with “literal mothers...curiously absent, replaced by aunts” (*Robbing* 126).

This absence reflects Sutpen’s own dismissal of women’s power outside the boundaries of the generative or procreative. However, the lives of the women in the text, particularly of Rosa, Judith, and Clytie, represent a connection outside of the patriarchy of Sutpen’s South. *Absalom*’s focus on women who are not mothers provides space for a consideration of the other roles that women may inhabit outside the boundaries of mother or whore. The representation of relationships between women in *Absalom* does not play out in the same way as the mammy and belle relationships of Caddy and Dilsey in *The Sound and the Fury* or Temple and Nancy in *Requiem*. Judith and Clytie are sisters and exist in a communion of equality where neither holds a distinct maternal position. But that does not mean that these women do not mother in the novel, nor that they escape the constraints of mammy and belle myths. Judith, Clytie, and Rosa are all constrained by Southern codes that limit and control the expression of their femininity. *Absalom*’s focus on Sutpen’s patriarchal design insists on a thorough dissection of Southern gender roles and racial boundaries that is revelatory in regard to women’s position in the South.

Thomas Sutpen’s design is ultimately concerned with the attainment of Southern social status, particularly through the acquisition of the material vestments of this status: a house, plantation, and slaves. The result of his design is largely successful. After coming to Jefferson with nothing, in only a matter of years he becomes, the “biggest single landowner and cotton-planter in the county” (72).

However, Sutpen's economic and social achievement does not grant him full access to the Southern elite and Rosa's narration insists on this distinction:

He wasn't a gentleman. He wasn't even a gentleman. He came here with a horse and two pistols and a name which nobody ever heard before, knew for certain was his own any more than the horse was his own or even the pistols, seeking some place to hide himself, and Yoknapatawpha County supplied him with it. (14)

Sutpen's social and financial success does not guarantee his attainment of the status of Southern gentleman. Sutpen's marriage to Ellen is also, for Rosa, part of his attempt to achieve the position of Southern gentleman and he accomplishes this almost through blackmail. But Rosa insists that "[m]arrying Ellen or marrying ten thousand Ellens could not have made him one" (16).

Rosa here voices the concerns of the traditional South in which social value is gained through rigid honour systems and familial ties. Central to Southern conceptions of masculinity are personal and familial honour, sexual virility, racial purity, and economic power. Rosa insists that Sutpen's marriage to Ellen is about gaining respectability through a connection to a Southern family:

[A]ll he would need would be Ellen's and our father's names on a wedding license (or on any other patent of respectability) that people could look at and read just as he would have wanted our father's (or any other reputable man's) signature on a note of hand because our father knew who his father was in Tennessee and who his grandfather had been in Virginia and our neighbours and the people we lived among knew that we knew that we knew they knew we knew and we knew that they would have believed us about whom and where he came from even if we had lied (16)

Sutpen achieves status in the South by aligning himself with the Coldfields, who, in spite of not being especially wealthy, are an old Southern family whose ability to trace their familial origins gives them status within the patriarchal South.

The masculinity that Sutpen hopes to achieve for himself is bound to both economic power and racial purity. His position as a man with no legacy and no traceable family history leaves him open to the inevitable Southern fear of racial impurity. If he comes from nowhere and no one knows who his father and grandfather is, he could be anyone. Rosa alludes to the racial implications inherent

in Sutpen's arrival when she suggests that "the very fact that he had to choose respectability to hide behind was proof enough (if anyone needed further proof) that what he fled from must have been some opposite of respectability too dark to talk about" (17) . What cannot be spoken but is constantly feared in the South is the taint of black blood and the possibility of racial impurity within white families.

However, Rosa tells Quentin that Sutpen's financial success allows his acceptance within the community. He becomes the "biggest single landowner and cotton-planter in the county" and achieves this status through

the same single minded unflagging effort and utter disregard to how his actions which the town could see might look and how the ones which the town could not see must appear...But he was accepted; he obviously had too much money now to be rejected or even seriously annoyed anymore. He accomplished this...within ten years of the wedding and now he acted his role too – a role of arrogant ease and leisure which, as the leisure and ease put flesh on him, became a little pompous. (72)

Sutpen's economic success transcends his unknown origins and his socially unacceptable behaviour and allows him to attain acceptance in the Southern elite. But although he is able to act out the role of Southern gentleman once he has gained the material vestiges of the role, he is never able to fully embody this position because of the taint of black blood that haunts him.

Sutpen's desire to attain a position of high status within Southern society stems from a key moment in his childhood. The moment, in which a black servant forces the young Sutpen to go around the back of a plantation home, is a primal scene in which the child comes into realisation of adult knowledge. For Sutpen, this moment is primal because it shatters his core belief about his own racial position. It breaks apart the assumed value of his own whiteness – that he deserves privilege simply for being white, dismantling the mythology of whiteness. According to the narration, Sutpen "didn't even know he was innocent that day when his father sent him to the big house with a message" (229). He is "thirteen or fourteen" when this scene occurs and he has already "irrevocably lost count of his age" (228). The gaps in Sutpen's narrative continue, with General Compson insisting he "didn't remember (or did not say) what the message was" that he took to the big house on that fateful day (229). Moreover, he "never even remembered what the nigger said, how it was

the nigger told him, even before he had time to say what he came for, never to come to that front door again but to go around to the back” (232).

In spite of his inability to recall the exact words of his exchange, the moment causes a catastrophic break for the young Sutpen:

[He] seemed to kind of dissolve and part of him turn and rush back through the two years they had lived there like when you pass through a room fast and look at all the objects in it and you turn and go back through the room again and look at all the objects from the other side and you find out you had never seen them before, rushing back through those two years and seeing a dozen things that had happened and he hadn't even seen them before. (230)

The things that Sutpen had not seen, or not seen clearly, are all bound to the necessary inequality between races in the South. The “certain flat level silent way his older sisters and the other white women of their kind had of looking at niggers, not with fear or dread but with a kind of speculative antagonism not because of any known fact or reason but inherited, by both white and black” (230). He also recalls other moments in which white men and women spoke about or around black people and actions between black and white Southerners that gain new meaning with his new knowledge. He also recalls a night when his father came home late, smelling of whiskey and declaring: “We whupped one of Pettibone's niggers tonight” (231). When asked who the man was, his father said he did not know and had never seen the man before. When Sutpen asks what the man had done his father only says: “Hell fire, that goddam son of a bitch Pettibone's nigger” (231).

These moments from his life are drawn into distinct clarity for the young Sutpen following his rejection at the front door of the plantation home. What is revealed to him is the reality of Southern life and the inequality at the heart of every relationship and interaction. The trauma he experiences is the revelation of his value in the Southern economy as a poor white, but also that this value system is ingrained in all aspects of his life, family, and community. As Thadious M. Davis argues, in “closing the door, the ‘monkey nigger’ opened the boy Sutpen to a painful awareness of the inner dynamics of Southern life” (184). This moment reveals to Sutpen that his position as a poor white complicates and threatens his racial position. Like Carothers and Zach Edmonds in *Go Down, Moses*, and the Faulkner persona in “Mississippi,” this is Sutpen's primal scene of racial recognition and the knowledge induces both

an emotional and physical reaction from him. He “all of a sudden found himself running and already some distance from the house, and not toward home” (232). The revelation causes him to break with his body. He loses control of it immediately after the event: “he did not tell himself where to go...his body, his feet, just went there” (233).

The pages that follow in the text show Sutpen’s frenzied attempt to make sense of his feelings. He insists that he wasn’t mad, he only “had to think” (232). He tries to rationalise his panic, his anger, and his pain. “Of course he had not expected to be invited in to eat a meal...but he did expect to be listened to because he had come, been sent...” (233). It is the rejection of his authority, the dismissal of his value by a black man that shatters Sutpen’s childhood innocence. The revelation of this reality splits his identity in two: “there was only himself, the two of them inside that one body, arguing quiet and calm” (234). It is in these moments that he comes to conceive of his design, which, at its centre, would allow him to regain his authority within the unequal South. The moment causes such a break for Sutpen that he decides that “he would have to do something about it in order to live with himself for the rest of his life” (234). He dismisses simply shooting the black man because “*that wouldn’t do no good,*” before what he must do comes into sharp focus, “a bright glare” that reveals to him his design (235).

Sutpen’s decision stems from his newly gained understanding of Southern social and racial codes in which power is gained through gender, race, and property. He realises that “you got to have land and niggers and a fine house to combat them with” (238). So he leaves that night to begin his relentless search for property and power. Sutpen spends his life working for “the indisputable, visible and material, right to assert his superiority over the ‘monkey nigger’ and his kind” (Davis 184). Rosa describes Sutpen as “completely the slave of his secret and furious impatience, his conviction” (34), which stems from this childhood moment of trauma. Yet again, a white boy is violently and painfully brought into adult knowledge in Faulkner’s Yoknapatawpha.

A similar disassociation and splitting of the self occurs in Charles Bon’s child, Sutpen’s grandson, Charles Etienne St. Valery Bon, who is brought to the Sutpen house to live with Judith and Clytie after he is orphaned by the death of his mother.

Judith and Clytie seek to contain his racial identity by hiding him from the outside world. Clytie chases a black boy away after she finds Charles Etienne playing with him, while Judith allows him to sleep in her room in a bed meant for a “white child” (200). Yet in spite of their efforts to shield Charles Etienne from his mixed race identity, he becomes painfully aware of its presence. At age fourteen, Judith or Clytie (the narration is not clear) finds beneath his mattress a “shard of broken mirror: and who to know what hours of amazed and tearless grief [Charles Etienne] might have spent before it, examining himself in the delicate and outgrown tatters” (199). As he ages, his crisis manifests itself through acts of aggression, with Charles Etienne seeking out fights with black men with “no cause, no reason for it” (202). His grandfather, Thomas Sutpen, also seeks to settle his anger through physical contact with black men. He stages brutal fights between himself and his slaves – “fighting, naked, fighting not as white men fight, with rules and weapons, but as negroes fight to hurt one another quick and bad” (29) – in order to “defeat the darkness” that exists inside him (Duvall, *Marginal* 106).

Charles Etienne eventually flees the Sutpen home and the town, before returning with “a coal black and ape-like woman and an authentic wedding licence” (205). Charles Etienne’s wife exists in an “aghast and automaton-like state” and cannot write and does not speak (205). Davis argues that Charles Etienne’s wife is an “external projection of his black self” (204), and the narration supports this reading, with Charles Etienne apparently “hunting out situations in order to flaunt and fling the ape-like body of his charcoal companion in the faces of all and any who would retaliate” (206). So while Sutpen’s entrance into racial knowledge leads him to relentlessly pursue the power afforded by whiteness and property, Charles Etienne rejects the white community and seeks out opportunities to test the boundaries of his own mixed-race ancestry.

Charles Etienne’s struggle with his racial identity is therefore similar to that of Joe Christmas in *Light in August* as both men seek to act out their frustrations through physical acts of violence. Charles Etienne’s violent action repeats a key moment which this thesis has touched on before, black laughter in the face of white violence. Like Nancy as she is being kicked in the street in *Requiem*, Charles Etienne laughs as he is attacked. He is

the man with body and limbs almost as light and delicate as a girl's giving the first blow, usually unarmed and heedless of the numbers opposed to him, with that same fury and implacability and physical imperviousness to pain and punishment, neither cursing nor panting, but laughing. (206)

I have argued that Nancy's laughter can be read as an act of resistance and agency, and something similar applies to Charles Etienne. The language of this scene is strikingly similar to that used to describe Nancy; she is also implacable throughout *Requiem* and seems to not feel pain as she is attacked. Charles Etienne actively seeks out physical violence, in full knowledge that these encounters will cause injury and so, like Nancy, he laughs at his success. So while Sutpen fights to gain control and power over others, particularly, black men who stand in for the "monkey nigger" from his childhood, for Charles Etienne, fighting results in desired pain and punishment and allows him to continue his alienation from the Southern community, both black and white.

Thomas Sutpen's design requires male heirs and his "secret and furious impatience" is, according to Rosa a "fever, mental or physical – of a need for haste...which was to drive him...roughly until about nine months before his son was born" (34). The birth of his son, Henry, is followed by the birth of a daughter, Judith, two years later. But these heirs do not stem Sutpen's impatience for long. As they grow, Henry and Judith both fail to live up to the ideals of their father's design. Judith is detached and impervious to actuality "almost like physical deafness" (70), a "hoyden who could – and did – outrun and outclimb, and ride and fight both with and beside her brother" (67). Henry and Judith's inversion of gender roles (reminiscent of Caddy and Quentin in *The Sound and the Fury*) is most clearly articulated by their experience of watching their father fighting with his slaves.

In this important scene, Sutpen brings Henry to one of his ritualised fights and forces him to watch as the older man fights a black man: "a white one and a black one, both naked to the waist and gouging at one another's eyes as if they should not have been the same colour, but should have been covered with fur too" (29). Sutpen is made animal in this scene, and problematically his very entering into the ring with black men aids in this transformation from man to beast. Duvall reads this moment as Sutpen's attempt to "correct" the gender inversion of his children, arguing that Sutpen "turns his own ritualised enactment of suppression of the Other into a bizarre

ritual of filiation that attempts to undo the gender reversal of th[e] two children” (“Authentic Ghost” 90). Both Henry and Judith have witnessed the scene, but it is only Henry whom Sutpen wishes to be present for the lesson. Henry’s response to seeing his father’s brutality is physical, he is “screaming and vomiting...crying” (29-30). But Judith, unbeknownst to her father, is also watching from the loft above and she is not alone, there are “two Sutpen faces this time – once on Judith and once on the negro girl beside her – looking down through the square entrance to the loft” (30). Judith and Clytie, the two young girls, appear unmoved by the violence they have witnessed. Sutpen’s lesson, instead of bolstering the masculinity of the son deemed feminine, instead only serves to accent the reversal of the children’s gender roles (Duvall, “Authentic Ghost” 90).

Judith and Henry’s inversion of gender roles is complicated in adulthood by the intersection of their own incestuous desire and the arrival of their brother/lover Charles Bon. Bon meets and befriends Henry at “a small new college in the Mississippi hinterland...three hundred miles from that worldly and even foreign city which was his home” (74). The foreign city of Bon’s origin is New Orleans and his attendance at the Mississippi College is unexplained. Bon is

not only some few years older than Henry but actually a little old to be still in college....a young man of worldly elegance and assurance beyond his years, handsome, apparently wealthy and with for background the shadowy figure of a legal guardian rather than any parents. (74)

Bon’s mysterious presence continues throughout the novel. We learn little more about his character and his origins outside of the speculative reconstruction undertaken by Quentin and Shreve. He is described as “having appeared almost phoenix-like, fullsprung from no childhood, born of no woman and impervious to time” (74). Rosa never lays eyes on Bon, in spite of the essential role he plays in the downfall of her family. She suggests that, as much as he arrives from nowhere and has no origin, he similarly “vanished, leaving no bones or dust anywhere” after his death (74). This slipperiness of character follows Bon throughout the novel; we do not hear his voice at any point except in the reconstruction of Quentin and Shreve. The unknowability of Bon, experienced by Rosa and others in the novel, reflects his troubling and largely hidden racial identity.

Yet in spite of his phantom-like presence throughout the novel, Bon's impact on the Sutpen family is tangible and it is on his body that the combination of taboos which make up the central crisis of the novel – miscegenation, homoeroticism, and incest – are played out. Bon exists in the novel not only as a love object for Henry and for Judith, but also as their black brother. Both Judith and Henry find incestuous desire in the body of their brother, Bon. But even before his arrival the relationship between the white siblings is complicated by both conflict and a strange desire. Rosa's narration recalls that "between Henry and Judith there had been a relationship closer than the traditional loyalty of brother and sister even; a curious relationship: something of that fierce impersonal rivalry....who would risk death for one another" (79). The closeness between the siblings continues even after Bon's arrival, Henry's infatuation with him, and Judith and Bon's engagement.

It is Henry who first falls for the elusive Charles Bon at college and who then begins to "ape his clothing and speech" and telling Bon that if he had a brother he would want him to be "just like you" (102, 11). Henry seeks to achieve literal brotherhood with Bon through marriage to Judith. Henry brings Bon home to meet the family, especially Judith, and their engagement takes place shortly after. Henry tells Bon that "*what my sister and I have and are belongs to you*" (332), but Judith's voice is not heard in the novel so it is difficult to ascertain her feelings toward Bon with any real clarity. Bon and Judith's betrothal is achieved not through a connection between Judith and Bon himself, but between Judith and Henry:

[I]t was Henry that seduced Judith: not Bon, as witness the entire queerly placid course of Bon's and Judith's courtship – an engagement, if engagement it ever was, lasting for a whole year yet comprising two holiday visits as her brother's guest which Bon seems to have spent either in riding and hunting with Henry or as acting as an elegant and indolent esoteric hothouse bloom, possessing merely the name of a city for origin history and past. (97)

Bon is again without history, an exotic outsider who cements the bond between the siblings. That Judith and Bon have no direct connection highlights the incestuous relationship between Judith and Henry.

Henry chooses Bon as his sister's lover in an effort to control her sexuality, in a similar way to Quentin Compson's desire to control Caddy's sexuality in *The*

Sound and the Fury. *Absalom* suggests that in the case of Henry and Judith, this is the “pure and perfect incest... the brother realising that the sister’s virginity must be destroyed in order to have existed at all, taking that virginity in the person of the brother-in-law, the man whom he would be if he could become, metamorphose into, the lover, the husband” (96). But it is not only for the protection of his sister’s sexuality that Henry chooses Bon. The passage reveals that Henry’s desire is also focused on Bon himself. He wishes not only to metamorphose into the lover, the husband, and therefore act out his desire for his sister’s body as Bon, but also to “metamorphose into the sister, the mistress, the bride” (96). Henry seeks marriage between Judith and Bon because such a pairing plays out his own desire for each of them. Henry can imagine himself as either Bon or Judith and their marriage therefore has “the potential to vicariously satisfy his desire for both of them” (Dunleavy 463).

However, it is his desire for Bon that drives Henry throughout the novel while Judith acts as an intermediary between the two men. Critics agree that the triad is actually a pairing. As Bollinger argues, “Judith becomes not a subject but rather an object” in the relation between Charles Bon and Henry (“Triumvirate” 215).³³ Judith’s role in bringing together the two men is made explicit in the text, where she is described as

the black shape, the empty vessel in which each of them strove to preserve, not the illusion of himself nor his illusion of the other but what each conceived the other to believe him to be – the man and the youth, seducer and seduced, who had known one another, seduced and been seduced. (119)

Absalom insists on Judith as the “blank page” (Gubar 243), a blankness onto which men can inscribe their creativity and connection to one another. Judith’s white female body cements the connection between Henry and Bon. And while it is unclear to what extent Henry’s desire for Bon is reciprocated (we never hear Bon’s voice and his actions in the text reveal little on this front), Judith does allow these men to imagine their desire for each other through the body of their sister. Judith’s role is therefore another explicit instance of Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick’s triangulation of desire “between men” where women exist as property for the purpose of “cementing the

³³ Irwin argues that Bon’s marriage to Judith would have represented a “vicarious consummation of the love between Bon and Henry” (32). For Dunleavy, Judith “forms the bridge between her two brothers, providing them with a way to realise their desire for each other” (463).

bonds of men with men" (25). This thesis has previously argued that elsewhere in Faulkner the mammy functions in a similar way for black and white boys, with the added complication of race. In the case of Judith, Henry, and Bon, Judith's role plays out this triangulation traditionally and explicitly; she is a white woman who functions to connect two men.

But this is Faulkner's South, where race, while often invisible, is always present and this instance is no different. Bon is not just the object of Henry's desire, he is also Henry and Judith's brother, and further to that, a black man. Henry's discovery that Bon is his brother does not lead him to distance himself from Bon. Instead, he bolsters his connection to Bon, renouncing his birthright and leaving home with his brother. In Quentin and Shreve's reconstruction of events, what does cause the break between the two men and ultimately leads to Henry's murder of Bon is the revelation of his black blood. Sutpen's revelation that "*his mother's father told me that her mother had been a Spanish women...it was not until after he was born that I found out that his mother was part negro*" (354) leads Henry to shoot his beloved brother at the gates of the Sutpen plantation.

In Quentin and Shreve's reconstruction, before he is shot Bon declares to Henry: "*So it's the miscegenation, not the incest, which you can't bear*" (356). There is no question mark in this sentence; it is rather a statement which requires no answer. Holland argues that miscegenation is the "space of comingling" which "drags more than just race into its orbit. It also takes categories like brother/sister, human/animal, and produces an end product that is now the "us" that we used to call "them" (108). For Henry, it is the collapsing of the boundaries between races that causes his crisis. When Bon declares that he will finally marry Judith, knowing that he is her half-brother, and with Henry knowing the same, Henry's response is "*Thank God. Thank God*" (347). But the revelation of the brother's black blood demands murderous action. For Henry, the comingling of blood through incest is made dangerous by the introduction of blackness into the equation.

Yet while the conclusion of the novel makes this distinction clear, it is important to remember that the final version of the Sutpen story given in the novel is a reconstruction of events, an act of storytelling by Quentin Compson and his roommate Shreve, who themselves have a vested interest in highlighting some

aspects of the story and reducing others. Critics such as John T. Irwin, Betina Entzminger, Eric Sundquist, and others have highlighted the homoerotic nature of Shreve and Quentin's relationship as it mirrors the closeness of Henry and Bon. These critics suggest that the conclusion that it is the miscegenation and not the incest that Henry cannot stand exposes Quentin's desire to deny both Henry and Bon's and his and Shreve's homoerotic desire. Erin Pearson questions Bon's blackness itself and argues that "whether or not Bon actually has black ancestry, his purported blackness derails any focus on the homoerotic bond between Bon and Henry – a bond which Quentin cannot successfully face" (352). Entzminger agrees and highlights Southern patriarchy's equating of heterosexuality and whiteness as the reason they "divert their attention away from their homosexual desires onto a more open topic for their time and region: the taint of black blood" ("Passing" 90).

There is much about the Sutpen story that mirrors Quentin's own experience. Desire for the sister, the importance of protecting women's virginity, and the need to maintain racial boundaries are all issues that confront Quentin and his family in *The Sound and the Fury* and which influence his retelling of the Sutpen story in *Absalom*. Both texts therefore insist on the repetition of Southern history and the South's ongoing battle to contain the boundaries of race, sexuality, and gender.

While *Absalom*'s narrative is driven by communication and relationships between men – fathers and sons, brothers, lovers – it is when two women come together in the text that the most powerful and dangerous moment of connection occurs. Early critics of *Absalom* all but ignored the presence of the key women in the Sutpen story, instead choosing to focus on Sutpen and his sons and Quentin and his father. But more recent feminist critics such as Roberts, Donaldson, and Clarke have importantly refocused attention on women's role in the Sutpen family drama. Judith, Clytie, and Rosa exist in the text as outside of the main narrative because Quentin and Shreve's final retelling gives only scant attention to their experiences. And while Rosa's narration opens the text and hers is the first version of the story we hear, by the end of the novel Quentin's voice has drowned her out, as he speaks over and for her.

Taking Donaldson's advice to direct our attention to the women in the "margins and shadows" (167) of the text, we can find Ellen, Judith, Clytie, Rosa, and even

Sutpen's first wife, who, within this space, "form their own narrative of sorts, a muted story underlying Sutpen's dominant history" (Donaldson 169). In undertaking this kind of focused reading it becomes clear that the connections between women in the novel do not necessarily conform to the general structure of the mammy and the Southern belle represented in Southern plantation fiction. When we ask: "where is the mammy and the Southern belle in *Absalom*?" we might come up rather short.

Instead of a black woman who exists as a guide to a younger white woman, as occurs in *The Sound and the Fury* and *Requiem*, we see black and white sisters coming together. Judith and Clytie, along with Rosa, become that "triumvirate mother-woman," an amalgamation of the three individuals into a single being (162). Judith and Clytie, who superficially seem to fit into the role of mammy and belle, are instead sisters and live together in what appears to be – if not equality (as this is impossible in the Southern context) – at least mutual respect and dependence. The two women sleep together, make and keep a "kitchen garden of sorts" and live together in apparent harmony (125, 197). The text insists on a doubling between Judith and Clytie. They appear together regularly in the novel as a pair, perhaps most strikingly as they watch their father fight a slave when they are children, with their "two Sutpen faces" looking down on the scene, unmoved (30). The similarity in descriptions of Clytie and Judith and their closeness throughout the novel lead Davis to argue that the two women are a "single personality with two bodies" (200). But importantly, descriptions of each of them are similar largely because of the unreadability of each woman to the largely male narrators of the text.

Judith is "calm, cold and tranquil" and largely passive and silent, and Clytie is similarly "perverse inscrutable and paradox" (151, 156). Neither woman's voice is heard throughout the novel and so we don't get an insight into their relationship and the terms on which their cross-racial partnership plays out. Even Rosa struggles to understand Judith and Clytie even as she lives with them for a year awaiting Thomas Sutpen's return to the plantation. She declares at this time that "we were three strangers. I do not know what Clytie thought....I did not even know what Judith thought and felt" (157). Yet in spite of her existence as an outsider to the closeness of Judith and Clytie, Rosa is positioned within the "triumvirate" that includes all three Sutpen/Coldfield women. The time that the three women spend together living at the Sutpen plantation without men, awaiting Thomas Sutpen's return, is a moment of

power in the text. In a novel concerned with men who tell stories to each other about themselves and other men, these three women come together to tell their own stories at this time. Bollinger argues for the power of these stories, suggesting that they “construct an alternative narrative to the dominant one of the novel” and in doing so they seem to have power over their own narrative futures – and in this, their “narration threatens to revise the novel as a whole, substituting their story for Faulkner’s own” (“Triumvirate” 198). The stories that the women tell to each other that make up this alternative narration are unheard in the text. The description of the three women’s experience during this time is less than ten pages and is largely without detail and almost no direct voice is heard from the women themselves. But as Bollinger effectively highlights, there is a distinct power to be found in this community of women.

This community begins with Judith and Clytie’s closeness and their relationship as sisters rather than women of two different races. Minrose Gwin suggests that the sisters become “in their closeness twin emblems of human unity and cross racial female bonding” (*Black and White* 115). Davis agrees and argues that “because Clytie and Judith relate to each other as ‘womanfolk’ first, then as ‘daughter’ and ‘sister,’ they partly escape the racial burden placed on their brothers” (201). *Absalom* therefore lays out a gendered connection in which women are able to transcend the danger and violence of miscegenation, while men are not. For while Judith can accept her black sister, Henry’s love for Bon is broken by the revelation of his race. This gendered distinction in cross-racial relationships seems to reflect the popularly held view of women as gentle and kind, particularly toward slaves, in contrast to the master’s paternal power and punishment, a view that has been dismantled in historical terms by Thavolia Glymph in *Out of the House of Bondage: The Transformation of the Plantation Household*. In *Absalom* the representation of Judith and Clytie is more complex, for they exist not as master and slave but as sisters and are therefore able to come together within the family in a way that men are unable to.

But that is not to say that *Absalom* does not present moments of cross-racial violence between women. One of the most enigmatic scenes in all Faulkner’s literature occurs in *Absalom* and is a moment of violent touch between two women, one white and one black. After Charles Bon is shot by his brother Henry, Rosa

Coldfield comes to the Sutpen plantation to see Judith but is stopped at the base of the stairs by Clytie. Rosa's narration reveals that she was "*running out of the bright afternoon, into the thunderous silence of that brooding house where I could see nothing at first*" (136). When she finally does regain her vision inside the house, it is Clytie's face that she first sees: "*the face, the Sutpen face not approaching, not swimming up out of the gloom, but already there*" (136). Rosa here reiterates Clytie's physical similarity to Thomas Sutpen and throughout the novel various narrators insist that Clytie has a "coffee-coloured" Sutpen face (140).

Rosa's description of Clytie in this scene again confirms her inability to read the black woman. At the base of the stairs Clytie's face is "without sex or age" having "never possessed either" (136). Rosa's narration links Clytie's appearance here with both the enduring eternity of the mammy figure and with her childhood face looking down on the scene of violence as Sutpen stages a bloody fight with one of his slaves. Rosa recalls that this is the "*same sphinx face which...had looked down from the loft that night beside Judith's...looking at me with no change, no alteration in it at all*" (136). Rosa is already shaken by Clytie's presence at the base of the stairs and assigns to her a kind of higher knowledge, suggesting that it is as though she had "*known to the second when I was to enter and had waited there*" (136). But Rosa presses on, distressed and searching for Judith, calling her name up the stairs, but always aware of Clytie's presence: "*she was not looking at me but through me...a brooding awareness and acceptance of the inexplicable unseen*" (137).

Rosa interprets Clytie's actions, her very being, as something other than human, something more than human, while at the same time, animalistic. Clytie is described as "brooding" just as Nancy and Dilsey are similarly rendered in other Faulkner texts. This unknowability of the black woman's experience threads through many of Faulkner's novels. Rosa imbues Clytie with an other-worldly knowledge that is reminiscent of other literary representations of African American's possession of folk magic.³⁴ Rosa links this knowledge explicitly with race. It is a knowledge "*inherited from an older and purer race than mine*" (137). But in spite of her assumed

³⁴ Both Dilsey Gibson and Nancy Mannigoe are similarly imbued with a kind of transcendent spirituality that is represented as outside of white knowledge. Matthew Hughey's "Cinethetic Racism: White Redemption and Black Stereotypes in 'Magical Negro' Films" provides an examination of this kind of black folk wisdom in popular fiction and culture.

physic knowledge, Rosa ignores Clytie's order – "*Don't you go up there*" – with Rosa explaining that "*still I did not stop*" (138).

What does stop Rosa's panicked flight is a touch. Seemingly innocuous, Clytie places her hand on Rosa's arm and what follows is a catastrophic break for the white woman:

Then she touched me, and then I did stop dead. Possibly even my body did not stop, since I seemed to be aware of it thrusting blindly still against the solid yet imponderable weight (she not owner: instrument; I still say that) of that will to bar me from the stairs; possibly the sound of the other voice, the single word spoken from the stairhead above us, had already broken and parted us before it (my body) had even paused. I do not know I know only that my entire being seemed to run at blind full tilt into something monstrous and immobile, with a shocking impact too soon and too quick to be mere amazement and outrage at that black arresting and untimorous hand on my white woman's flesh. Because there is something in the touch of flesh with flesh which abrogates, cuts sharp and straight across the devious intricate channels of decorous ordering, which enemies as well as lovers know because it makes them both (139)

Rosa experiences a physical and psychic break at the moment at which Clytie places her hand on her white body. This moment of touch is revelatory for Rosa in the same way as Sutpen's moment of being turned away from the plantation house by a black man. In both cases the white individual is rendered motionless and the black individual is made monstrous. For Rosa, Clytie is something "monstrous and immobile" while for Sutpen the black man's face becomes a slick and smooth "toy balloon with a face painted on it" (230). In both cases the immediate motionlessness gives way to physical movement, Sutpen "found himself running" (232), while Rosa's movement is verbal, she finally speaks to Clytie: "*Take your hand off me, nigger!*" (139).

What leads up to her naming of Clytie as "nigger" is Rosa's own "outrage" and "terror" (139). So traumatic, so dangerous is the touch of black skin on white in the Southern context, that it strikes fear into the heart of the white woman who is being touched. Holland argues that this moment reveals "the power of the touch as both boundary and trespass" (101). Clytie's touch reveals to Rosa the reality of the

racialised and gendered structures of the South. Clytie comes to represent the fragile boundaries at play in the slave South, whereby black and white men and women are both publicly segregated but privately intimate. Holland makes clear the erotic nature of touch, arguing that if touch can be interpreted as “the action that bars one from entry *and* also connects one to the sexual life of another, then we might go so far as to say that *racism has its own erotic life*” (107).

The erotically charged nature of this moment of connection between the two women is highlighted in the text itself, with Rosa calling the connection of their two arms “a fierce rigid umbilical cord, twin sistered to the fell darkness which had produced her” (140). Clytie’s touch is imagined through sensual and procreative language and brings the two women together. Gwin suggests that in this moment Clytie reaches out to Rosa and “acknowledges her as womankind and humankind, and seeks mutual recognition” (*Black and White* 111). But Rosa is unable to accept this offer. Instead, she experiences the touch as violence. Clytie’s touch forces Rosa to recognise her very existence and in turn the reality of miscegenation in the South, but more poignantly, within her own family. The revelation leads Rosa to cry out: “*And you too? And you too, sister, sister?*” (140). In naming her as sister, Rosa finally comes to understand the reality of her familial connection to Clytie, which implicates not only her own identity and womanhood but that of her sister Ellen as well. This traumatic revelation of knowledge is painful for Rosa, as similar moments of revelation have been revealed as painful for Thomas Sutpen and others in Faulkner’s fiction. Rosa’s revelation of sisterhood with Clytie across racial lines is so traumatic that it requires immediate reclassification. Just as Thomas Sutpen seeks to undo his rejection by becoming the white planter; Rosa renames her sister as “nigger” to regain her own subject position within a South structured by rigid racial classifications.

This moment of touch between a white and black woman reveals the precariousness of Southern relationships in which separation and intimacy exist side by side within communities and families. The slippage that necessarily occurs in such interactions is codified by Rosa’s terror when touched by her black “sister.” This moment therefore importantly reveals the concerns at the heart of the relationships between white and black women that this thesis has explored. Belles and their mammies are involved in the dangerous intimacy that Rosa and Clytie’s touch

exemplifies; and what Holland describes as the erotic life of racism – that is, race’s “incredible power in its ordering of *family, generation, and desire*” (10) is at play within each relationship between white children and their black surrogate mother.

Clytie becomes a distinctly powerful individual at the moment that she touches Rosa, able to cause a destructive break for the white woman both physically and psychologically. And while we do not hear from Clytie throughout the novel – she is given no space for narration and we barely hear her speak even as others narrate the Sutpen story – it is ultimately she who brings about the conclusion of the tellings and retellings of the Sutpen drama. Clytie exists within the novel in a vacuum, outside of a larger black family or black community. We know that her mother was one of Sutpen’s slaves, but no further information is given about her. Clytie does not play with other black or mixed race children and instead she grows up with Judith and Henry, her white siblings, in the white house. As an adult she continues to live side by side with Judith and has no connections to the outside community, black or white.

Clytie’s separation from the black community reflects the mammy character’s social isolation in other instances discussed in this thesis. Clytie’s lack of black family and community is reiterated by the text’s insistence on her as a Sutpen first and foremost, most tellingly through her physical similarity to the white family made obvious by her “coffee-colored Sutpen face” (140). Clarke and others have read Clytie as a development of Dilsey’s character from *The Sound and the Fury*. For Davis, “Clytie is not simply a member of the Sutpen household. She is a member of the family” and therefore she can be aligned with the Sutpen plantation itself (199). Clarke argues something similar when she suggests that Clytie “appears as the embodiment of the house... [and] by extension, Sutpen himself” (“Familiar” 67). Both Clarke and Davis draw a distinction between Dilsey and Clytie and argue that Clytie is a more powerful representation of black womanhood. For Clarke, “Clytie is what Dilsey is not: a powerful black mother” (*Robbing* 150). She is not a “self-denying mammy” but is instead a “woman who defines herself not racially but familiarly and who celebrates that identity in protecting the family” (*Robbing* 150). But, of course, this kind of protection and self-sacrifice on behalf of the white family is the key task of mammy. So while Clarke seeks to distance Clytie from the mammy image by highlighting her devotion, doing so only bolsters her connection to the stereotype.

Clytie's final act of protection for the Sutpen family is her destruction of the plantation, herself, and the dying Henry Sutpen. After Rosa and Quentin discover that Clytie has been hiding Henry in the Sutpen home, Clytie waits for them to send the authorities to charge Henry for Bon's murder, or to help him as he dies, and when they do, Clytie sets the plantation on fire:

Clytie appeared in that window from which she must have been watching the gates constantly day and night for three months – the tragic gnome's face beneath the clean head rag, against a red background of fire, seen for a moment between two swirls of smoke, looking down at them, perhaps not even now with triumph and no more of despair than it had ever worn, possibly even serene above the melting clapboards. (376)

Clytie is steadfast and enduring in this moment, having been waiting and watching for an unknown amount of time. Adorned in the head rag of mammy mythology she is unknowable and then finally serene as she brings about the destruction of the Sutpen family and herself. It is Clytie's action that finally brings about the end of the various retellings of the Sutpen family drama. It is the black woman who ensures the silencing of the Sutpen story and brings it to a close through violent action. Davis links her action to the family to which she belongs, arguing that her final deed "is a desperate attempt to preserve the house and the family from violation by outsiders" (201). In doing so she preserves her loyalty to the white family to the end, just as Nancy's violent action in *Requiem* ensures the continuity of the white family.

As in *The Sound and the Fury* it is a black woman on whom the narrative closes. But while Dilsey exists in stasis, enduring only to continue the white family, Clytie's sacrifice is an act of agency. While each woman supports the white family, it is only Clytie whose action brings about closure and finality in a way that Dilsey's idealised endurance is never able to. Clytie is therefore not a mammy who sacrifices everything to promote a white family that is not her own, but a black woman whose agency brings about the destruction of the white plantation and the silencing of white patriarchal storytelling.

The conclusion of the novel returns us to Quentin's desperate insistence that he does not hate the South: "*I don't. I don't! I don't hate it! I don't hate it!*" (378). Quentin's complicated and passionate feelings toward the South are representative of the position of many white Southerners who are bound to the troubling historical

realities of their homeland. This complex relationship between white Southerners and the South itself is key to Faulkner's representation of Quentin in both *Absalom* and in *The Sound and the Fury*. Irwin effectively traces Quentin's development and the connection between *Absalom* and *The Sound and the Fury* and concludes that the deepest level of meaning in *Absalom* is to be found in the symbolic identification of incest and miscegenation. That is, the Southern desire to maintain racial and sexual boundaries through incest, by keeping relationships within the family and therefore, safe from contamination. Quentin's turmoil and pain over his relationship to the South at the conclusion of the novel is the result of his exploration of personal history and storytelling. But this moment is also important because Faulkner repeats it in the semi-autobiographical essay "Mississippi."

In the essay, it is the Faulkner persona who articulates the troubled relationship between the Southerner and his South: "Loving all of it even while he had to hate some of it because he knows now that you don't love because: you love despite; not for the virtues, but despite the faults" (42). "Mississippi's" William Faulkner and *Absalom's* Quentin Compson both conclude their story-telling by grappling with the love-hate relationship between themselves and the South. While critics have often cited the similarities between Quentin Compson and Faulkner, comparative readings of this kind are largely unfruitful because they fail to account for the differences and subtleties between authorial and character voice. However, the connection between *Absalom* and "Mississippi" importantly reveals the power of Southern history and memory to the white Southern man, an issue with which Faulkner grappled throughout his fiction.

The connections and parallels between *Absalom* and "Mississippi" have rarely been considered by Faulkner critics, but there are multiple moments in which the two works intersect, including Quentin and Faulkner's relationship to their Southern heritage as well as the language used to describe black women in each text. Again, as in *The Sound and the Fury* and in *Go Down, Moses*, Faulkner describes the black woman (in *Absalom* it is Clytie) much as he describes Caroline Barr:

a little dried-up woman not much bigger than a monkey and who might have been any age up to ten thousand years, in faded voluminous skirts and an immaculate headrag, her bare coffee-coloured feet wrapped around the chair

rung like monkey's do, smoking a clay pipe and watching you with eyes like two shoe buttons buried in the myriad wrinkles of her coffee-coloured face.
(*Absalom* 214)

In "Mississippi" Barr is also described as physically very small, she too wears an "immaculate headrag," smokes a pipe, and her age is indeterminate – to the young Faulkner she seems "already older than God" (16). Throughout *Absalom*, Clytie is described using these same words. As she ages her "body just grew smaller and smaller," and later Quentin describes her as "not much more than five feet tall" (215, 351). Clytie's diminutive physical presence is at odds with her power within the text, and in both regards this reflects the fictionalised Caroline Barr who appears in "Mississippi," but also the real Caroline Barr. Senisbar's biography of Faulkner and the women in his life reveals the real Caroline Barr as "small and small-boned, and her skin was a deep blue-black; she was opinionated and passionate; she had a wry wit and told compelling stories but could not read or write; she was strong both physically and mentally and remained mentally acute until her death at 107" (35).

It is Clytie who brings about the end of the Sutpen family drama and the story-telling surrounding it in *Absalom*. In doing so she exercises a certain kind of power and influence over the other characters in the text. She has the power to destroy the legacy of the white South, but in doing so must also destroy herself. If we read Clytie as in some way influenced by Faulkner's relationship to Caroline Barr – and the connection revealed by "Mississippi" insists upon it – then we can read Clytie's power over the white family at the conclusion of *Absalom* as illuminating the power Faulkner identified in Caroline Barr but failed to articulate in "Mississippi" and elsewhere. Faulkner imagines the potential sisterhood between black and white women and the destructive power of the mammy figure in *Absalom* and he once again struggles against the myth of the mammy and is again ensnared in its complex web. In the case of *Absalom*, mammy has power over the white Southern family, but this power requires a complete sacrifice on behalf of the black woman who wields it. *Absalom* and "Mississippi" therefore both engage with Southern memory through representations of a black woman within a white family, with both revealing the complex and troubling racial inheritance of the South for white male protagonists.

Conclusion

"Tomorrow and Tomorrow and Tomorrow": Faulkner and Contemporary Southern Memorialisation

This thesis has read Faulkner's fictional women as they play out the uniquely Southern memorialisation undertaken after the Civil War. The figures of the mammy and the Southern belle are a key part of this memory-making which sought to reimagine the horrors of slavery and the inequality at the heart of Southern history and to present the pre- and postbellum South as a paternalistic and ideal community. The mammy and the belle were two figures who were developed as part of this Lost Cause mythology and were created and maintained because they bolstered the white patriarchy of the South.

As a white Southerner, Faulkner could not help but be influenced by the mythology so pervasive in Southern life. As this thesis has argued, his fictional texts reveal his investment in the concerns and characters of the mythology, but also his attempt to critique and even dismantle aspects of Southern memorialisation. Faulkner's most expansive fictional texts, the novels *The Sound and the Fury* and *Absalom, Absalom!*, reveal his concern with reading through the problems and demands of Southern history and memory. In each of these texts, trauma passes through generations and young men are concerned with the passing of time and the disintegration of the white family. But memory and history are also complex for women in Faulkner's writings and it is through these female figures that the author often grapples with the changing face of the South. His representation of Caroline Barr in the essay "Mississippi" and in his public memories of her, and of Dilsey Gibson in "That Evening Sun" and *The Sound and the Fury* reveal his investment in the idealised mammy figure who is wholly devoted to the white family, while Nancy Mannigoe and Clytie Sutpen challenge the boundaries of a black woman's agency and her loyalty to the white family.

The Southern belle figure also reflects Faulkner's interpretation of a changing South. Caddy Compson and Temple Drake are young white women who fail to live up to the expectations of a culture that would frame them as pure Southern belles. Instead, these women are sexually transgressive, throwing the men around them whose identities rest upon their adherence to the social order, into chaos. As sexual

action is coded as black in the Southern context, sexual ambiguity leads to racial ambiguity for women like Caddy and Temple. These “belles gone bad” play out the concerns of a Southern society rapidly modernising.³⁵

Faulkner’s representation of women, particularly those who can be read as versions of the mammy and the Southern belle, oscillates between the stereotypical and the subversive. As with his use of the Southern myth, Faulkner’s women in turns support the mythology around an idealised Southern past and critique it. Faulkner’s fiction in this way reflects his position as a Southern intellectual. Faulkner was regarded as something of a progressive thinker in his time, and in particular his portrayals of black and mixed race characters in his fiction were progressive in their exploration of the thoughts, motivations, and desires of these individuals.³⁶ Faulkner self-identifies as a Southern progressive in the semi-autobiographical essay “Mississippi” in which declares his hatred of the intolerance and injustice, the “lynching of Negroes...because their skins were black...the inequality” (37). However, as chapter one’s exploration of “Mississippi” argued, this progressive stance is at odds with the representation of Caroline Barr and her family throughout the essay.

While Faulkner promotes a liberal attitude toward race in “Mississippi” and elsewhere, at other moments his public declarations are in conflict with his picture as a progressive abolitionist, particularly, in February 1956, when Faulkner gave an interview to William Howe in which he espoused a variety of controversial views regarding segregation. In response to this interview James Baldwin wrote “Faulkner and Desegregation” in which he roundly criticised Faulkner’s position regarding race relations. In the interview Faulkner encouraged civil right activists to “go slow” in taking steps toward racial equality (*Lion* 258). Baldwin criticises Faulkner’s suggestion that “white Southerners, left to their own devices, will realise that their

³⁵ Kathryn Seidel argues that “self-conscious and critical modern Southern writers use the ‘darker’ side of the belle – the repressed narcissism, etc. – to indict the Old South or to describe the New” (xiv). And therefore, Faulkner’s belles “represent the most self-conscious and comprehensive culmination of the long tradition of associating the belle and all her faults with the South” (97). Betina Enztminger argues that such representations of white women form part of a social critique of gender roles, where the bad belle is a “type of femme fatale – sexually knowing, physically powerful because of her allure, and morally dangerous” (2) and often appears in work by white women of Faulkner’s period to “comment on the abuses and hypocrisies enacted against white and black women by the Southern patriarchy” (19).

³⁶ In particular, Manny in “Pantaloon in Black” and Joe Christmas in *Light in August* are more thorough and detailed representations of black and mixed-race characters than previously considered in much of the other fiction by white authors of Faulkner’s period.

own social structure looks silly to the rest of the world and correct it of their own accord" ("Desegregation" 148). But, Baldwin argues, they have instead "clung to it, at incalculable cost to themselves, as the only conceivable and as an absolutely sacrosanct way of life" ("Desegregation" 148).

Faulkner insists that Southerners simply require more time, that civil rights activists and Northerners need to "take the pressure off" the white South and let them come around to equality in their own time and on their own terms (*Lion* 249). This "wait and see" attitude, the call to "go slow" is not enough for Baldwin, who asks "just what Negroes are supposed to do while the South works out what, in Faulkner's rhetoric, becomes something very closely resembling a high and noble tragedy" ("Desegregation" 148). Baldwin argues that the essential feature of Faulkner's rhetoric regarding race is that his concerns are about white people, rather than black. Specifically, Baldwin suggests that the defeat of the South by the North left the South with only one means "of asserting its identity and that means was the negro" ("Desegregation" 151). As such, white Southerners are reliant on African Americans to define themselves.

Ann Anlin Cheng, in *The Melancholy of Race*, suggests that "segregation and colonialism are internally fraught institutions not because they have eliminated the Other but because they need the very thing they hate or fear" (12). The white South does not wish to eliminate black people, for without them how would they know themselves? Instead, they must recast the racial situation. Faulkner's view that the white South is in some way inevitably damned and black people already saved leads him to idealise blackness to the point of unreality, sanctifying black suffering. The black women this thesis has considered – Dilsey Gibson, Nancy Mannigoe, Molly Beauchamp, Clytie Sutpen, and Faulkner's fictionalised version of Caroline Barr – all, to differing extents and in multiple ways, play out this sacrificial idealisation in the service of white families. This racial set up, in which whites are doomed and black people are saved, is deeply problematic because it fails to allow for a scenario in which black people can be anything other than martyrs.

Faulkner places himself on the side of equality in the interview with Howe but advocates a moderate way forward. However, Faulkner is thinking of white people rather than black when he advocates a slow and gradual process of desegregation:

we know that racial discrimination is morally bad, that it stinks, that it shouldn't exist, but it does. Should we obliterate the persecutor by acting in a way that we know will send him to his guns, or should we compromise and let it work out in time and save whatever good remains in those white people? (*Lion* 261)

A program of compromise and gradual gains whose end result would be to save whatever good remains in whites is understandably inadequate to commentators like Baldwin who have suffered the continuing ravages of racial inequality. It is hard to imagine how going slow might comfort black people for whom Southern history has been, in Baldwin's words, "an intolerable yoke, a stinking prison, a shrieking grave" ("No Name" 380). Baldwin interprets Faulkner's desire to save "whatever good remains in these white people" as an indication that he believes that Negroes are therefore "already saved" ("Desegregation" 152). The Negroes, Baldwin continues "who, having refused to be destroyed by terror, are far stronger than the terrified white populace" ("Desegregation" 152). Baldwin highlights that Faulkner seems to think because of their suffering, black people are able to claim the high moral ground and he seems to be suggesting that such a position is an adequate substitute for a life lived without fear and prejudice. It is white moral identity that is at risk in Faulkner's reading of the South.

Faulkner's own grappling with issues of race and gender in his life and his fiction reveal the necessarily fraught nature of these matters in the Southern context. The disparity between Faulkner's self-presentation as a progressive and his comments regarding race are fed by the complicated Southern past, but they are also reflective of Faulkner's understanding of identity as performative. In *William Faulkner: Self-Presentation and Performance*, James G. Watson highlights Faulkner's merging of his biography and his fiction that was considered in chapter one of this thesis. Watson suggests that Faulkner borrowed from his own life experience and in doing so "created a world of controlled chaos, made in his own protean image and reflective of his own multiple sense of self" (2). Faulkner presented these multiple selves through acts of performance, what Watson calls the "guises and disguises of the moment – gentleman dandy, soldier, and farmer" (5). Faulkner's manifestation of various identities in his own life highlights his understanding of identity as necessarily performative. However, he is never able to

fully transcend the boundaries of the Southern past, as revealed in his troubling comments on race.

As a white Southerner Faulkner is caught up the struggle between memorialisation and modernisation that troubles the South. Stemming from the promotion of Lost Cause mythology after the Civil War, issues of identity, memory, and history, and relationships between community members and within families are complicated and often made dangerous by the intersection of race and gender. Faulkner's fiction and his public statements play out white Southerners' necessary investment in the mythology of the past. But it is not just Faulkner and his generation who are haunted by the Southern past and memory making.

The idealisation and memorialisation of the Southern past has continued to hold cultural value in America and beyond. The continued celebration of the novel and film versions of *Gone with the Wind* was a key part of this process. But this idealisation of the Southern past has recently experienced something of a resurgence thanks to Kathryn Stockett's 2009 novel *The Help* and its 2011 film adaptation. Both versions of the story have been enormously successful. The novel spent more than 100 weeks on the New York Times best seller list and the film adaptation made over \$200 million at the box office. Two black maids and one white woman are at the centre of the story and the plot follows as the white woman, Skeeter, collects stories from the maids about their experiences working in white homes and for white women for a book she eventually publishes.

While the text and film have garnered criticism, most tellingly from black critics such as Harris and Barlow, the story has been celebrated by white women. On online forums that discuss the book and film, for example Oprah's reading guide to *The Help* and Good Read's online guide to the text, readers consistently rallied behind the book, tellingly using the word "love" to describe their reactions to the text. White women "loved" the book, they "loved" the characters, and they "loved" everything about the text.³⁷ The majority of white readers are unconcerned by the historical inaccuracies of the text and instead find the tale uplifting and inspirational. In the same way that Lost Cause mythology aimed to soften the trauma of the

³⁷ While Oprah's selection of the novel as part of her book club suggests that some in the black community participated in the celebration of the novel, her viewership is largely white and this is reflected in the comments on her website about the novel and in the larger celebration of *The Help*.

Southern past, *The Help* ultimately suggests that the problems of the South's racial past have been solved. *The Help*'s black domestics allow the perpetuation of a fantasy about the American South in which white and black women can work together to create racial harmony. And when at the end of the text, the white woman is a successful published author and moves to New York to further her career, she leaves behind the black women whose stories she has appropriated to gain her success. In their lives, very little changes. They endure in an immobile way that is reminiscent of Mammy at the end of *Gone with the Wind* and Dilsey at the conclusion of *The Sound and the Fury*. In *The Help*, the black women not only provide their life stories so that the white woman can be successful, they actively encourage her to leave them behind. At the conclusion to the novel, Minny, one of the maids, tells Skeeter "don't walk your white butt to New York, run it" (424).

So while white audiences largely celebrated *The Help*, contemporary African American readers and critics raised concerns about the content and tone of this version of Southern racial and gendered relations. The critical conversation about the text across racial lines played out in a similar way to responses to Toya Graham's disciplining of her son during the Baltimore riots that this thesis considered in chapter two. The Association of Black Women Historians released a statement after the movie was released which was highly critical of the story and particularly, what they called the "disappointing resurrection of mammy." The association suggested that "the popularity of this most recent iteration [of mammy] is troubling because it reveals a contemporary nostalgia for the days when a black woman could only hope to clean the White House rather than reside in it." African American talk show host and political commentator Tavis Smiley expressed similar concerns regarding the film when its stars, Viola Davis and Octavia Spencer, were guests on his show. He began his interview with the two actresses by explaining how he felt about their Academy Award nominations for this film:

Let me be honest...I celebrate the two of you, I'm delighted that you were nominated. I'm pulling for both of y'all to win the Academy Award and I wouldn't want it any other way. And yet I will admit to you, and I have friends who feel the same way, that there is ambivalence here.... There's something that sticks in my craw about celebrating Hattie McDaniel so many years ago

for playing a maid, and here we are, all these years later... and I want you to win – but I'm ambivalent about what you're winning for.

What does it say about a story ostensibly *about* black women that it has no real resonance with the black community apart from outrage, anger, or ambivalence? At issue here is the repeated structure in which black characters act in the service of whiteness. Black criticism of Stockett's novel and the film recall Baldwin's critique of Faulkner – that the concerns of these texts is white people, not black. In *The Help*, Skeeter recalls a moment with her family's maid, Constantine in which the maid comforted the white girl about being called ugly and told her "You gone have to ask yourself, *Am I gone believe what them fools say about me today?*" (63). Skeeter recalls that Constantine

kept her thumb pressed hard in my hand. I nodded that I understood. I was just smart enough to realise she meant white people. And even though I still felt miserable, and knew that I was, most likely, ugly, it was the first time she ever talked to me like I was something besides my mother's white child. All my life I'd been told what to believe about politics, coloreds, being a girl. But with Constantine's thumb pressed into my hand I realised I actually had a choice in what I could believe. (63)

Constantine teaches the little white girl about who she is. She helps her arrive at knowledge of her identity, just as, years later, grown up Skeeter is given another gift of knowledge from Abileen, Minny, and the other maids whose stories she gathers and publishes. This is the story about a young white woman who finds herself with the help of the help. Mammy has performed a service for the white woman yet again and she can leave for New York as a better, brighter, person. As the Association of Black Women Historians statement concludes:

In the end, *The Help* is not a story about the millions of hardworking and dignified black women who laboured in white homes to support their families and communities. Rather, it is the coming-of-age story of a white protagonist, who uses myths about the lives of black women to make sense of her own.

The Help and the reactions elicited by it play out the ongoing American struggle to make sense of the past, a past complicated, particularly in the South, by a dangerous history of racial and gendered violence and oppression. For Faulkner, the relationship between the white Southerner and the past is one of extremes:

“loving all of it even while he had to hate some of it” (“Mississippi” 42). Faulkner’s fiction is simultaneously engaging with the Southern mythology of the past and seeking to dismantle it, and his use of female characterisations which are recognisable as versions of the Southern belle and the mammy highlight this complex connection between memory and history.

To suggest that Faulkner’s fiction is misogynistic and racist closes down the spaces in which we might use his fictional world to think about race, sexuality, and gender. Misogyny and racism are part of his fiction, but they are not the whole story. Faulkner’s novels and essays reveal a white Southerner struggling to understand his past and the collective and social memory formed around that past, as well as his own place in the world. Faulkner’s fiction is attempting to show how Southern memory works and it therefore inhabits the myth and shows its peculiarities and its complexities. While his is overtly the story of a white man coming to terms with his place in the social milieu, his fiction allows us glimpses into a deeper, more engaging, more complex South. A South in which a black domestic refuses payment for services to remind the white family of its debt, or one in which white women’s gender is ambiguous and their sexuality fluid or, one in which a moment of touch, a black woman’s hand on a white woman’s flesh, breaks down the boundaries of race and gender and, for just a moment, stops time.

Appendix

Funeral Sermon for Mammy Caroline Barr

Memphis *Commercial Appeal*, February 5, 1940

As oldest of my father's family, I might be called here master. That situation never existed between "Mammy" and me. She reared all of us from childhood. She stood as a fount not only of authority and information, but of affection, respect and security. She was one of my first associates. I have known her all my life and have been privileged to see her out of hers.

She was a character of devotion and fidelity. Mammy made no demands of any one. She had the handicap to be born without money and with black skin and at a bad time in this country. She asked no odds and accepted the handicaps of her lot, making the best of her few advantages. She surrendered her destiny to a family. That family accepted and made some appreciation of it. She was paid for the devotion she gave but still that is only money. As surely as there is a heaven, Mammy will be in it.

Original Version. Page 275-276 *William Faulkner: Essays, Speeches, & Public Letters*.

Funeral Sermon for Mammy Caroline Barr

Delivered at Oxford, Mississippi, February 4, 1940.

Caroline has known me all my life. It was my privilege to see her out of hers. After my father's death, to Mammy I came to represent the head of that family to which she had given a half century of fidelity and devotion. But the relationship between us never became that of master and servant. She still remained one of my earliest recollections, not only as a person, but as a fount of authority over my conduct and of security for my physical welfare, and of active and constant affection and love. She was an active and constant precept for decent behaviour. From her I learned to tell the truth, to refrain from waste, to be considerate of the weak and respectful to age. I saw fidelity to a family which was not hers, devotion and love for people she had not borne.

She was born in bondage and with a dark skin and most of her early maturity was passed in a dark and tragic time for the land of her birth. She went through vicissitudes which she had not caused; she assumed cares and griefs which were not even her cares and griefs. She was paid wages for this, but pay is still just money. And she never received very much of that, so that she never laid up anything of this world's goods. Yet she accepted that too without cavil or calculation or complaint, so that by that very failure she earned the gratitude and affection of the family she had conferred the fidelity and devotion upon, and gain the grief and regret of the aliens who loved and lost her.

She was born and lived and served, and died and now she is mourned; if there is a heaven, she has gone there.

Revised Version. Page 117-118 *William Faulkner: Essays, Speeches, & Public Letters*.

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