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YOKNAPATAWPHA RAILROAD: TRAINS AND MOBILITY IN THE NOVELS OF  
WILLIAM FAULKNER

by

James Christopher O'Brien

A Dissertation

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Major: English

The University of Memphis

August 2020

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## Acknowledgements

First, Bee.

It is impossible for me to list all the family, friends, colleagues, classmates, professors and people who helped make this dream a reality. I couldn't have done this alone, and they all deserve to be thanked for helping me through this process, but I will try to be brief. First and foremost, I couldn't have managed this degree without my wonderful wife Kelli. I love you forever and more. From proofreading to being a sounding board for ideas to helping me manage this whole damned process and keeping me healthy physically, mentally, and emotionally all the while, there's no way this would have ever happened without you.

In terms of the real bits and pieces of drafting and defending a dissertation, I must also provide plentiful thanks to my committee who helped me bring this document into the world. These exemplary individuals include my director, Dr. Theron Britt, as well as Dr. Jeffrey Scraba, Dr. Donal Harris, and Dr. Teresa Dalle. Thank you for all the ways, large and small, you've helped me over the years. I've had so many amazing educators who helped make me the student, professor and person I am today, and that list also includes my undergraduate advisors Dr. Vincent O'Neill and Dr. Rick Kyte.

Beyond the people who were directly involved in this process, I must also offer profuse thanks to all the friends and family who listened to me whine and complain while still encouraging me, praying for me, and believing in me. My parents, Michael and Theresa, left my world far too soon, but they raised me to have the audacity and the strength to pull this off. I know they're proud of everything I've accomplished. In addition, I must also thank my late aunt Kathy and my uncle Lance for providing a

number of educational opportunities that my parents couldn't afford. I would also like to thank my aunt Maureen and my godmother Emily, both lifetime educators, who gave me advice and encouragement when I started out in this profession. In addition, my mother-in-law Kathy, my siblings, and the indispensable network of cousins, aunts, and uncles (by blood, marriage, or just love and longevity—including and especially Uncle Roger and the Bushwackers), and my sweet, sweet grandmothers Eva Moise, Gobby, and Catherine also deserve my thanks.

And finally, though she didn't really *do* anything—aside from love me unconditionally, which is everything—and though she'd never know if I left her out even though she's sitting in my lap as I type, I *would* know, so I must also acknowledge, Sasquatch, the best, most loving pup God could ever make.

## Abstract

Though considered one of the foremost of 20<sup>th</sup>-Century American modernists, many critics accuse William Faulkner of being obsessed with some idyllic southern past. In contrast, my study, utilizing the burgeoning field of mobility studies, focuses on the trains featured within his novels to counter this accusation. As I discuss, Faulkner does indeed question notions of modern progress wrought from industrialization as well as technological advancements, though he never offers blanket condemnations of them. In contrast, his depictions of railroad mobility reveal an attitude of active participation in modernity rather than cantankerous retreat.

In my opening chapter, I begin by explaining why an examination of Faulkner's portrayals of trains and tracks can be particularly enlightening. In addition, I discuss the burgeoning field of mobility studies and how it will be utilized in my examination of the railroad within Faulkner's novels. In Ch. 1, I discuss Faulkner's depictions of avant garde sexuality and gender roles that are enabled by railroad mobility. Within this chapter, I discuss his two most sexually-controversial novels, *Sanctuary* and *The Wild Palms*, though I begin with a brief discussion of trains in *Light in August*. In Ch. 2, I discuss the ways he uses the railroad to question narratives of progress. Here, I discuss his debut novel, *Soldiers' Pay*, before delving into *Go Down, Moses* and its pessimistic ruminations on progress; however, I argue that *The Reivers*, his final novel, serves as a sequel to that novel, providing a valedictory reappraisal of its pessimism. Finally, Ch. 3, discusses Faulkner's general lack of depictions of black mobility enabled by the railroad—despite historical realities. As I parse through his portrayals of African American interaction with trains, this reveals a resistance on Faulkner's part to depict

black mobility. Here, I look at *Flags in the Dust* and its prequel *The Unvanquished* as well as Quentin Compson's chapter of *The Sound and the Fury*. In my conclusion, I discuss the lasting impact of trains on American culture and the next steps to be taken in light of my study, suggesting other writers whose works carry on Faulkner's depictions of railroad mobility.

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## **Introduction: Faulkner, the Railroad, and the Mobile Modern Condition**

Before he'd won a Nobel Prize, before he became the darling of the post-World War II American literary scene and was sent abroad as a cultural ambassador, even before he'd returned home from the Great War and earned the spurious nickname "Count No 'Count," or (re)inserted the "u" in his surname, young Billy Falkner loved to draw. According to Joseph Blottner's massive *Faulkner: A Biography*, the young Falkner worked conscientiously in grade school at the three Rs, but he liked drawing the most. Blottner adds, "In the back of his first-grade reader he drew a locomotive and tender in great detail and sketched abbreviated engines at the front. One Sunday when Damuddy [his grandmother] took him to the Baptist Church he drew a whole train in one of the hymnals before she noticed what he was doing" (21). Within the early chapters of his biography, Blottner sprinkles numerous other anecdotes that illustrate the young Faulkner's enthusiasm about trains that rivals that of Vardaman Bundren in *As I Lay Dying* (1930), who has his heart set upon the shiny red toy train in that Jefferson store window.

There exists a wealth of biographical information that links Faulkner and his family to the railroads. In a 1976 article, Dean Faulkner Wells, William Faulkner's niece/foster daughter, likewise discusses the family's love of trains: She shares that her grandfather Murry Falkner's "enchantment with trains was inherited by his sons, William, Murry (called Jack), John, and Dean" (864). She adds, "As little boys, the four Falkner brothers spent many happy hours in and around the Oxford, Mississippi, depot, anticipating the arrival and departure of the four passenger trains and four freights which passed through town daily" (ibid). The first trip young William ever took was by train

when he was three months old (Blottner 4). Furthermore, for the first five years of his life, a major component of the family business was a railroad company started by his great grandfather, William Clark Falkner, “the Old Colonel, who rode with Forrest during the Civil War, built railroads with convict labor during Reconstruction, and published best-selling romances that featured breathless train chases in the New South” (Millichap 17). As a young man, James Watson notes, Faulkner’s letters to his father would often describe all the trains he saw in his travels. Faulkner’s biographers have readily noted that the railroad carried much personal significance for Faulkner, so it is not surprising that his novels would so repeatedly feature tracks and trains. What is surprising is that scholarship about Faulkner’s uses of trains is fairly non-existent.

Given the vast amounts of extant Faulkner criticism, it is perhaps fair to pause here and ask: isn’t there enough Faulkner criticism already? As most scholars may legitimately find a simple “no” quite unsatisfactory, I will defer to Richard Godden, who posed the same question more poetically over twenty years ago in his *Fictions of Labor* (1997): “Why still more on someone of whom so much has been written?” (1). Though our answers differ on this question, I will take my lead from Godden, who said, “My defense for adding to the exegetic pile is that, although I get to where I go thanks to the work of others, I find my own and my subject’s constellation of difficulty in the place of labor – a place to which Faulknerians have not often been” (3). Godden faced a dearth of criticism that spoke to his particular concerns about labor, particularly the bodies who performed that labor and the bodies who benefited from it. My own concerns revolve around mobility, especially the ways modern society is undergirded by movement, be it

movement of people or things or ideas, both in the real world and within the American cultural imagination of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Moreover, another important question is, can we expect a white southern male to adequately speak for the American imagination? No, of course not. There is a danger in relying on the voice of the majority to speak for all, especially in having him narrate the experience of minorities (women, non-whites, non-hetero, etc.). Yet, his works give rise to a multitude of questions and concerns that are just as valid today as they were in the first half of the twentieth century. As Susan Donaldson has noted,

A man born into the late nineteenth century, Faulkner uneasily bridged the old and the new throughout his life, and arguably no other American writers of the twentieth century has had the capacity that he had to bring the past back to life again—with all its accompanying possibilities of entrapment in old narratives and old identities. (12)

Furthermore, throughout his career, he did not shy away from “untidy, truthful themes and characters” (“Why Faulkner, Still”). Moreover, while he loved his region and his nation, James Carothers asserts that Faulkner “won’t look away from [their] worst behavior; he provides an unvarnished study of his characters who are flawed, glorious, and mixed” (qtd. in “Why Faulkner, Still?”). Sometimes, Faulkner asks us to be uncomfortable.

Historically speaking, Faulkner’s America was one in which white male power structures sought to control social and physical mobility of minorities, but also one in which such power structures were resisted. He was especially concerned with the rise of so-called “Snopesism” (which I will discuss at length in due time) and the power of

unscrupulous demagogues to sway public opinion and maintain power solely in the name of personal enrichment. It is difficult to read Faulkner's descriptions of Clarence Snopes and his "petty chicanery" (187) in *Sanctuary* (1931) or Flem Snopes in *The Town* (1957) without them bringing to mind the petty chicanery of American politics and politicians in the present day. Moreover, though Faulkner doesn't and can't speak for all of America, he is undeniably one of the most important literary figures of the twentieth century; as Thomas Inge demonstrates in *Dixie Limited: Writers on William Faulkner and His Influence*, he had a profound influence both on authors of his time and since, spanning across gender and racial lines.

As Faulkner's career advanced and he grew from young artist/vandal of hymnals and trainspotter into the writer we still write about a half-century after his death, his transportational subject matter eventually shifted from trains to automobiles and airplanes. And yet, the railroad, that fascination and family business of his boyhood, persisted throughout his career. For instance, the opening scenes of his first novel, *Soldier's Pay* (1926), are set on trains. Of course, such fascination with railroads could perhaps be interpreted by literary critics as further evidence of the writer's "obsession with the Southern past" (Matthews 19). Perhaps the most nostalgic of Faulkner's novels is his final work; *The Reivers* (1962) is actually set in the "present day" as grandfather Lucius shares a tale with his grandchildren about a boyhood adventure at the turn of the century. The novel "lives" in the past as only the first two words—"Grandfather said" (Faulkner, *Reivers* 3)—are set in the present. Notably, in contrast to the present day of the novel, grandfather Lucius's story is set during a period of the American experience in which the majestic steam locomotive was still the captain of industrial progress and the

prince of passenger locomotion. In terms of actual plot, *Reivers* is much more concerned with Jefferson's first automobile than the railroad, yet the railroad remains ever-present. Focusing on the backward-looking Grandfather of *Reivers*, such claims that Faulkner was caught up in the past might seem reasonable.

However, in his recent critical biography, John T. Matthews challenges this often-repeated assertion that Faulkner was constrained by an obsession with the Southern past. Matthews presents Faulkner as an artist very much in tune with his modern moment(s), asserting that while Faulkner's work does respond to the past, he also "responded strongly to the opportunities for novelty presented by the modern age" (20). Throughout the book, Matthews examines each of Faulkner's novels and multiple short stories to pursue this understanding of Faulkner as "a foremost international modernist" (1) rather than merely some disgruntled chronicler of bygone golden days. Matthews does a fairly remarkable job of substantiating his claims that Faulkner does indeed respond to the past, but also, he "responded strongly to the opportunities for novelty presented by the modern age" (20). Yet, Matthews, like other prominent critics, fails to examine railroad mobility, which is essential to the modern age, as I will discuss momentarily.

Furthermore, Matthews is not alone in this oversight, considering that very few critics have considered the railroad. Two particular novels about which critics will mention the railroad are *The Unvanquished* (1938) and *Go Down, Moses* (1942), but even there, trains are mentioned merely as plot elements and rarely discussed in and of themselves. One notable exception is Joseph Millichap's *Dixie Limited: Railroads, Culture, and the The Southern Renaissance*<sup>1</sup>, which takes up a handful Faulkner novels

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<sup>1</sup> Not to be confused with the already mentioned *Dixie Limited: Writers on William Faulkner and His Influence* by Thomas Inge.

(*Flags in the Dust* (1929), *The Unvanquished*, and *Go Down, Moses*). However, the bulk of his critique of *Flags* and *Unvanquished*, while quite informative and very readable, is devoted to autobiographical elements found in the novels, focusing heavily on Faulkner's great grandfather's efforts to bring the railroad to northern Mississippi. In his later chapter on *Go Down, Moses*, Millichap periodically attempts to return to autobiography in his discussion of the novel; however, he does provide some solid commentary on the railroad despite disjointed leaping from topic to topic. In the final section of the chapter, he also provides a few valuable references to other Faulkner novels that utilize trains, leaving them to other critics to explore.

A more methodologically rigorous exception to the lack of scholarly attention devoted to Faulkner's persistent use of trains can be found in Mark T. Decker's "'Moving Again Among the Shades of Tall, Unaxed Trees': Regional Utopias, Railroads, and Metropolitan Miscegenation in Faulkner's *Go Down, Moses*." Decker's article uses historicist techniques to discuss Ike McCaslin's reactions to the gradual dissolution of woods he's hunted in all his life as well as to the "miscegenation" of the culture of his native Mississippi at the hands of capitalist expansion. In Decker's critique, for Ike, as the railroad denudes the landscape and decimates local culture, it is not merely symbolic of but also the agent of capital, modernization, and progress. Decker's article is well researched, but an analysis of his bibliography reveals that he is virtually alone in discussing the railroad in Faulkner.

Literary critics have diagrammed, deconstructed, and dissected seemingly every and all aspects of William Faulkner's fiction, repeatedly falling back to his narrative of place—Jefferson, Mississippi in Yoknapatawpha County, his so called "little postage

stamp of native soil” of Southern and American reality and fiction (Padgett). This critical focus on place—the ultimate southern place filled by the ultimate southerners telling a story that is uniquely southern but also abundantly American—is understandable when we consider the importance of Yoknapatawpha to such masterpieces as *The Sound and the Fury* (1929) or *Light in August* (1932). While critics have excavated so many pieces of the experiences of *a place* in Faulkner’s fiction, far fewer have taken a look at movement across, around, through, etc. that place. In other words, on a more fundamental level, how do Faulkner’s characters interact with place, and how do these interactions reflect back on those spaces? My study, then, will pick up where those other critics have left off.

Within the pages of William Faulkner’s fiction, we repeatedly find trains and tracks, boxcars and dining cars, steam engines and steam whistles. As noted above, *Soldier’s Pay* begins on a train. Amongst other soldiers, we meet Donald Mahon, the silent central figure of the novel, traveling home to Georgia to die of a wound received in World War I. From there, Faulkner went on to write novels about fast cars, air planes, and, most notably, a fraught and declining Southern aristocracy losing ground to ignoble yokels and the dubious progress of modernity, or as Tim Ryan phrases it, “the decline of the old plantation order and the rise of vigorously modern South.... in an age of burgeoning mechanization, insect plagues, mass migration, disastrous flooding, and the evolution of a service economy” (7, 10). And yet, the train he started with remained, a multifunctioning signifier puffing away in the background. There is no denying that the railroad is present in his novels at least partially because of historical (and biographical)

realities, and it may be for this reason that, by and large, literary criticism has ignored Faulkner's trains. It's easy to ignore something that you already expect to be there.

In order to fully understand Faulkner's depictions of modernity in America and particularly in the South, we must interrogate his use of trains rather than simply taking them as a given, an essential feature of modern mobility (a topic I will be discussing at length below). Decker takes up only the trains in Ike McCaslin's chapters of *Go Down, Moses* (obviously appropriate for a journal-length article); however, here in this study, I aim to examine the significantly larger body of Faulkner's texts, examining his various uses of trains within his novels. As a machine that industrialized America, the train is inextricably linked to flows of capital, supply chains, and constructions of modern identity; thus, we must further examine the railroad as a vital component of Faulkner's portrayal of modernity. Spanning across the arc of Faulkner's novels from *Soldiers Pay* to *The Reivers*, I will delve into his use of the railroad to enrich the field of Faulkner scholarship. More than simply adding an evaluation of Faulkner's uses of trains and railroads to the massive body of extant criticism, however, I also intend to bring the field of mobility studies to bear on Faulkner studies.

### **Mobility Studies, Modernity, and the Railroad**

Before moving into my arguments about Faulkner's novels, a most reasonable step to take here is to explain what I mean by mobility studies, a field also labeled simply as mobilities (though I find such an abbreviation potentially confusing, so I will use it sparingly). Providing this explanation necessarily entails a discussion of my own mobilities-related conception of modernity, and while it is not specifically the position of any particular mobilities scholar, let alone a given within the field, my conception of



mobility-fueled modernity is necessarily predicated upon and intrinsically linked to the railroad, as is the advancement of modernization up through the mid-twentieth century.

The first step in discussing mobility studies involves providing a clarification of the term mobility. According to the broad definition offered by Drexel University's mCenter, or Center for Mobilities Research and Policy, mobility "applies to both the large-scale movements of people, objects, capital and information across the world, and the more local processes of daily transportation, movement through urban space, and mobile communications" ("Research in Mobilities"). Tim Cresswell discusses mobility as "socially produced motion" (3). Expanding further, Cresswell distinguishes between movement and mobility. Movement, he says, is abstracted from meaning—something was at point A, it is now at point B, and the how and why are not necessarily relevant. Mobility, on the other hand, "is the dynamic equivalent of *place*" (3, italics original). Place, for Cresswell (a geographer), signifies "meaningful segments of space—locations imbued with meaning and power. A place is a center of meaning—we become attached to it, we fight over it and exclude people from it—we experience it" (3). Thus, mobility might be described as experienced movement. He later declares, "Movement is rarely just movement; it carries with it the burden of meaning" (6). Mobility has implications. Mobility Studies (Cresswell also uses the term social kinetics) seeks to analyze those implications, for the "movements of people (and things) all over the world and at all scales are, after all, full of meaning" (2).

It is important to note that, as used in this study, mobility almost always refers to physical movement (albeit within works of fiction) rather than other common usages, such as social or economic transitions. Here, I am borrowing from Stephen Greenblatt,

whose first rule of mobilities in “A Mobility Studies Manifesto” is “*mobility must be taken in a highly literal sense*” (250, italics original). Though likewise a literary scholar by training, Greenblatt diverges from my pattern of inquiry in that he is more concerned with real people moving and thus causing cultural shifts; as is clear from reading his introduction to *Cultural Mobilities*, he is much more interested with what happens when a Faulkner novel travels across space and time than with the travels of a character within said novel (for instance, he might ask, where do we find Faulkner’s texts embedded within the ficciones of Jorge Luis Borges or Gabriel Garcia Marquez?).

According to Greenblatt, only after we grasp physical movements and their implications should we seek to look at movement as a metaphor or symbol or how such movements might connote abilities to move socially or economically; it’s not that these non-physical movements are unimportant, just that they are secondary concerns. As I complete this study, the bulk of the characters I am discussing are indeed physically moving (or not moving as the case may be) and it is these movements, specifically by train, (whether from New Orleans to Chicago, Jefferson to Cambridge, rural to urban Yoknapatawpha County, or even nowhere at all) that will be the subjects of my inquiries.

Some essential aspects of a situation (a culture or a text) to be analyzed when working within a mobility studies framework include “physical, infrastructural, and institutional conditions of movement—the available routes; the maps; the vehicles; the relative speed; the controls and costs; the limits on what can be transported; the authorizations required; the inns, relay stations and transfer points; the travel facilitators,” though none of my chapters will necessarily interrogate each of these features (Greenblatt 250). The aim of such a framework is to place “movement (its restrictions, its

amplification and, above all, its diffusion) at the center” of analysis (ibid). Reflecting on a few of the lines of inquiry proffered by Greenblatt, we will find that such questions as the following lend themselves readily to a study of railroad mobility in Faulkner:

What are the mechanisms at work when movement encounters structures of stability and control? How do local actors accommodate, resist or adjust to challenges posed by outside movement? What are the cultural mechanisms of interaction between states and mobile individuals? What happens to cultural products that travel through time or space to emerge and be enshrined in new contexts and configurations? How do they set in motion—imaginatively as well as geographically—people who encounter them and, in turn, are set loose themselves? (19-20)

This inexhaustive array of questions posed by mobility studies prefigures some of the questions I address through my examination of the railroad in Faulkner’s texts.

Reworking each of Greenblatt’s inquiries, we get the following example inquiries: What social mechanisms intrude upon Charlotte and Harry as they travel the country attempting to cultivate their unconventional romance in *The Wild Palms* (1939)? In what ways does Deacon utilize the train depot to renew his yearly (successful) campaign of resistance against southern white ideology at Harvard in *The Sound and the Fury*? What are the cultural mechanisms that re-indoctrinate Caspey Strother to subservience to white supremacy upon his return to Jefferson after the war in *Flags in the Dust*? What happens to the De Spain hunting camp throughout Ike McCaslin’s lifetime in *Go Down, Moses*? How do generations of characters repeatedly re-appropriate Col. John Sartoris’s name, railroad, and legacy throughout Faulkner’s texts? Importantly, I should point out that it is

not my aim here to rework and then answer Greenblatt's questions; these questions (which I do actually answer in the following chapters, if obliquely at times) are here as sample lines of inquiry when analyzing a text from a mobilities mindset.

Greenblatt further states that "*mobility studies should account in new ways for the tension between individual agency and structural constraint*. This tension cannot be resolved in any abstract theoretical way, for in given historical circumstances structures of power seek to mobilize some individuals and immobilize others" (251, italics original). These ideas overlap well with Drexel's mCenter, whose mission states that mobility studies "entails interdisciplinary study of the infrastructures, flows and policies that create the contexts for contemporary mobility (and immobility)" ("Research in Mobilities"). Further, they add that it, "includes attention to mobility rights, mobility justice and the new social inequalities being produced by the uneven distribution of 'mobility capital'" (ibid). In their introduction to *Trains, Literature, and Culture: Reading/Writing the Rails*, Stephen D. Spalding and Benjamin Fraser cite the mCenter as they describe mobility studies as a blending of "cultural, historical, and theoretical concerns" that argues for a scholarly "approach that prioritizes shifting relations over static objects, calling for research that 'encompasses both large scale movements of people, objects, capital and information across the world, as well as the more local processes of daily transportation, movement through public space and the travel of material things within everyday life'" (ix).

Spalding and Fraser state that the mobilities field "has its roots in an intellectual tradition that sees modernity itself in terms of movement," and they go on to include multiple figures who highlight "the mobile nature of modern life," such as Karl Marx,

Charles Baudelaire, Walter Benjamin, Georg Simmel, Michel de Certeau, and David Harvey, among others (ix-x). Here would seem a felicitous moment to quote Faulkner in order to place him in conversation with such luminaries; he said, “Life is motion and motion is concerned with what makes man move—which are ambition, power, pleasure... the aim of every artist is to arrest motion, which is life, by artificial means and hold it fixed so that 100 years later when a stranger looks at it, it moves again because it is life” (qtd. in Hahn).

Specifically discussing the railroad, Spalding and Fraser describe trains as “an expression of the cultural project of modernity” and explain how “train travel has provided a mobile experience of modern realities that were themselves subject to constant change and even rupture. Through literary and visual representations, artists have imagined the train as a contradictory symbol of both modern anxiety and potential freedom” (x). At the risk of sounding glib, I will note that the title of this dissertation could very easily be “modern anxiety and potential freedom” since a large-scale discussion of the railroad in Faulkner’s novels repeatedly returns to these two concepts.

In accordance with the noted academics cited by Spalding and Fraser, my conception of modernity is likewise rooted in the history of mobility. It is certainly true that humanity has always been mobile—Greenblatt briefly derides as fantasy the notion “that once upon a time there were settled, coherent, and perfectly integrated national or ethnic communities” (2). These have never existed. Nevertheless, the rapid mobility of the railroad redefined the relationship between “here” and “there” in its compression of “in-between.” As Cresswell asserts, the “modern individual is, above all else, a mobile human being” (15) and our modern culture “no longer sits in places, but is hybrid,

dynamic—more about routes than roots” (1). Under the pre-modern paradigm of mobility, movement was dependent upon natural forces, such as wind power or horse power, but the rise of steam/locomotive technologies (i.e. the railroad) in the eighteenth and especially the nineteenth centuries meant that “[f]or the first time, the wheel was no longer set in motion by a power extraneous to itself — the draft animal — but was, to all appearances, propelling itself along” (Schivelbusch 19). Once the railroad came into being, it proved itself to be “unrelenting in its advancing dominion over the landscape...and in little over a generation it had introduced a new system of behavior: not only of travel and communication *but of thought, of feeling, of expectation*” (ibid, italics added). Thus, the railroad acts as an agent of societal change, altering our perceptions of time, space, and reality. Wolfgang Schivelbusch asserts that “the industrialization of the means of transport” altered the consciousness of passengers, leading them to develop “a new set of perceptions” (14) of the world. Again, humans have always been mobile, yet the invention and advancement of the railroad, not as a machine in and of itself, but as an arbiter of advanced mobility, ushered in a new era in human history.

There was no part of American modernity that was not intrinsically connected to the railroad. For the U.S. in particular, Barbara Young Welke adds that railroads created “a culture defined by movement and mobility, to and from, upward and downward” (296) in which the railroad had a daily impact on American life. Further, Walter Kalaidjian, discussing the completion of America’s transcontinental railroad, describes the its impact as “[d]ynamic, transformative, and ‘unpent,’” adding that “modernism’s new social, cultural, and technological economies of scale would rapidly remap space, time, and

distance in ways that were heretofore unimaginable” (120). This isn’t to say there was no resistance to cultural mobility, for

it is impossible to understand mobility without also understanding the glacial weight of what appears bounded and static. Mobility often is perceived as a threat—a force by which traditions, rituals, expressions, beliefs are decentered, thinned out, decontextualized, lost. In response to this perceived threat, many groups and individuals have attempted to wall themselves off from the world or, alternatively, they have resorted to violence. (Greenblatt 252)

In the American south that produced Faulkner, for instance, we note repeated attempts, often violent, to control movement, particularly but not exclusively, of non-whites. While this is obviously true of a slave-holding society, mobility after the Civil War was likewise policed and curtailed.

The railroad made both extreme mobility and the industrial revolution realities in America. With the advent of the new modernity of mechanized mobility, commodity capitalism expanded. By compressing space and time, the railroad accelerated production and consumption, thus sponsoring a surge in commodification as well as a massive wave of industrialization that affected nearly every aspect of lived experience. Following the Civil War and moving into the twentieth century, railroad-fueled industrialization went on to reshape the landscape, the cityscape, and the mindscape of America, especially in the South.

In the modernizing South at the turn of the twentieth century, the steam locomotive was the arbiter of mechanized transport. Faulkner’s fascination with trains is

in accord with the modernizing South into which he was born. After Reconstruction, the Southern states east of the Mississippi River bore witness to a railroad boom as the number of track miles expanded from about 11,000 in 1870 to 13,000 in 1880 to 28,000 in 1890 (Woodward 120). “Railroad building inflamed the imagination and hopes of whole states and regions” (ibid), fueling an industrial revolution in the decades between Reconstruction and Faulkner’s birth. And while he was speaking directly neither of trains nor of the South, Leo Marx’s comments about industrialization are particularly apt here: “The sensory attributes of the engine—iron, fire, steam, smoke, noise, speed—evoke the essence of industrial power and wealth” (374). Moreover, beyond the railroad’s importance to the Southern economy and culture, Edward Ayers notes that it “was surrounded by an aura of glamour” (10).

The expansion of the South’s industrial power and wealth accelerated even further after World War I, and this modernizing growth likewise entailed greater mechanization (Daniel xii), changing the nature of Southern agriculture and, by extension, nearly every aspect of Southern culture. As a direct result of this cultural shift, David Davis asserts, “The machines that changed Southern infrastructure after World War I initiated a series of changes in the region’s political and economic structure that led to the emergence of modernist literary production by Southern writers (431), and Joseph Millichap adds, “[t]he engagement of the train as a trope by both authors and critics of the Southern Renaissance seems culturally determined by the dominance of the railroad as an emblem of modernity in the South. [...] As a technology that changed culture, and by extension literature, the railroad became the very type of modernity” (6).



To study mobility is not merely to examine movement of people and products; it also contains a study of perceptions of movement, of space, and of time. As noted before, the railroad's rapid mobility redefined mental relationships between "here" and "there" through the compression of "in-between." Karl Marx famously used the phrase "annihilate space with time," by which he meant minimizing the time needed to move from here to there. The railroad, as an agent of modernization, of industrial progress, and of capitalism in general, aimed to do just that. Cresswell explains this time-space compression as "the effective shrinking of the globe by ever-increasing mobility at speed enabled by innovations in transportation and communication technology" (4). This time-space compression, while it indeed provides every-day benefits to the modern populace, is arbitrated "for the most part, by the demands of trade and capital" (5). In short, the modern experience of distance has become abstracted; that is, it is subservient to time. The experience of modernity is marked by a new apprehension of time and of space such that the distance between places became more meaningfully measured in units of time (a destination is x hours away, a package is shipped overnight or in some number of days, etc.). Moreover, the modern experience of time has been regulated by the needs of capital, a shift explicitly linked to the ascendancy of railroad corporations, for it was they who established time zones long before governments gave time zones official sanction (1883 for the railroad, 1918 for the U.S. government). Through the influence of the railroad on everyday life, "time was increasingly rationalized, mechanized, and timetabled as people accustomed themselves to tickets, labels, luggage, clocks, timetables, and uniforms" (Cresswell 6).

Following the lead of Cresswell, I will approach the concept of modernity through the lens of “social kinetics,” which is “the history of socially structured movement; it points toward the political and theoretical necessity of seeing mobility as operating within fields of power and meaning, and the crucially larger contexts of changing senses of movement” (10). The advent of modernity, especially in terms of American culture(s), is marked by “a moment when mobility became increasingly regulated and regular—marked by timetables and mechanization” (18). While it is not Cresswell’s aim to pinpoint any exact moment, his use of “timetables and mechanization” readily brings to mind the railroad, an invention that he says “quickly became a symbol of national identity in the United States” (16). As Shivelbusch declares, “Nothing else in the nineteenth century seemed as vivid and dramatic a sign of modernity as the railroad” (xiii), and Alan Trachtenberg adds that the chief agent of cultural change at the turn of the twentieth century was “the most conspicuous machine of the age: the steam-driven locomotive with its train of cars” (57). As we will see with Faulkner’s fiction, for Cresswell, mobility is a many-headed beast, defining itself as progress, freedom, and opportunity but also as shiftlessness, deviance, and resistance (1-2).

The advent of railroad mobility precipitated an economic boom that further expanded the “lived” space of modernity. Before mechanized movement, the majority of the world’s population was born, lived, and died within a tight geographical area. Not only did the railroad take people into the world, but also, the railroad brought the world to our front doors. The railroad network connected distant markets together allowing commodities (a concept we’ll look at momentarily) to be exchanged in national and international markets. Fresh Gulf shrimp could be had in Chicago and freshly-slaughtered

Chicago beef could be had on the Gulf. Moreover, ready availability of “exotic” goods left consumers with a desire for more. Discussing the modernizing American economy, Welke describes how entrepreneurs and salesmen mingled in depots all across America and notes, "These were the men who made the contracts, which in turn led to the production and shipment of goods and the geometric explosion in freight traffic that underpinned America's industrial growth" (45). This explosion of freight traffic, while only one component of modernity, is further indicative of the mobility that had become endemic throughout modern American society.

At the heart of our mechanized modernity was an economic revolution, so in addition to mobility, we must also acknowledge the role of commodities (and, of course, the mobility of commodities) in our perceptions of the modern. In this modernism predicated on mobility, commodification is a crucial concept. Here, we can draw on Karl Marx’s idea of commodity as “a thing which through its qualities satisfies human needs of whatever kind” as well as an object that possesses use-value and a non-intrinsic exchange value (27). Furthermore, given the modern world of commodity exchange, Marx’s “a thing” can be understood as any thing as well as any person, any place, and even any idea.

Anything that can be marketed will be if a buyer can be found—Faulkner himself not only created commodities, but he became one as well—an image-idea created and contested and disseminated to America and the world. Faulkner was heavily involved in the culture industry—in addition to his fiction, Faulkner wrote scripts for Hollywood films (complaining about his terrible treatment all the while) as well as non-fiction pieces for newspapers and magazines, ranging from the *Daily Mississippian* (the Ole Miss

student newspaper) to *Sports Illustrated* (for whom he wrote articles ostensibly about hockey and horse racing). As we might expect from a public figure, aside from intense involvement in a variety of media, Faulkner's public image was a highly mediated product, both by himself and by publishers, even down to his name: As a very young man, he started spelling his name "Faulkner" instead of "Falkner," allegedly because it looked more British. During the significant lull in his career that he experienced in the middle part of his life, publicity minded producers resurrected his public image. His works (except the potboiler *Sanctuary*) went out of print until Malcolm Cowley published *The Portable Faulkner* (1946), MGM placed a significant marketing push behind a film version of *Intruder in the Dust* (1948), and Faulkner was awarded the Nobel Prize (1950). If Lawrence Schwartz is to be believed, the awarding of the Nobel was largely due to anti-communist Cold War politics (a claim made more plausible by the Nobel Prize in Literature also being awarded to Winston Churchill a few years later). As a U.S. cultural ambassador in the 1950s, Faulkner traveled the world tasked with spreading a positive version of American culture. More than showing a biographical connection, I have included these anecdotes to help demonstrate Faulkner's intense involvement in a media-driven modern arena of commodity exchange and valorization.

While this mobile modernity was felt differently in different regions of the country (and the world for that matter), there was no part of the American economy or the American public that did not come into regular contact with railroads. Trachtenberg discusses the daily interactions with the railroad and other technologies of modernity, noting that increased mechanization, especially the steam locomotive, brought about "daily transformations of old patterns of work, of travel, of communication" (42).

Further, he points out that the railroad increased the speed with which products could be brought to far-flung markets (59), opening up a wealth of new experiences to everyday citizens. However, this wealth of new experiences would ultimately reduce “the distinctiveness of places—their auras” (Cresswell 5). Transportation changed local products into ubiquitous commodities, causing goods “to lose their spatial presence” and instead become products in an increasingly expanding marketplace (Cresswell 5-6). However, as Welke notes, “The separation of home and work, the production of food, clothing, and other basic necessities of life outside of the home, and the commercialization of leisure all fed a need to travel that was fundamentally modern” (20). The industrialized modernity of mobility solidified travel as an indispensable fixture in the modern experience of daily life. As the twentieth century advanced, railroad mobility would give way—during Faulkner’s lifetime even—to automobiles and airplanes, which would further escalate the pace of modern American life. These new modes of transportation would likewise present themselves in Faulkner’s works, though such a discussion extends beyond the scope of my study. Ultimately, as the twentieth century wore on, the railroad would prove not modern enough for a hungry nation.

Due to ever increasing demand for mobility coupled with the natural cycles of technological innovation, the railroad was doomed from the start: At least in hindsight, the rise of the automobile—a personal conveyance divorced from the restrictions of rails—was inevitable. As the automobile advanced, the railroad declined. Louis D. Rubin describes the already-obsolescence of the railroad as Faulkner is creating the world of Yoknapatawpha:

Even when I sat in the bleachers at the baseball games in the 1930s and watched the little train arrive at the Seaboard station, it was already outmoded, for the trains had been an earlier phase of the change. By the 1930s automobiles, buses, and trucks were the principal means of conveyance between the city and the islands. The dirt roads were being widened and paved. There were highway bridges connecting most of the sea-islands with the mainland. Few places in the Low-country were really remote any more.

We can combine Rubin's description with Millichap's assertion that "[i]n the course of time, the express train, important as it was once, gave way to new modes of transport better suited to the changing region; the great steam locomotives remain in Dixie today, if at all, as monuments to a changing past" (7). This already-obsolence reminds us to question what the railroad is doing for Faulkner, suggesting that we need to look more closely at his persistence in using it throughout his career. Faulkner especially, despite his reputation for being obsessed with the Southern past, was known for his innovative literary style. Yes, he utilized automobiles in his creative output, but the railroad never disappeared. For example, despite its focus on a stolen car, trains figure prominently in *The Reivers*, Faulkner's final novel.

### **Literary Modernism**

In discussing Faulkner and concepts of modernity, I would be remiss if I did not briefly address literary notions of modernism since he is a prominent modernist writer. Hoping to avoid Houston Baker's judgement that most accounts of modernism end in "frustratingly vague specifications" (*Modernism* 1) as I consider what modernity is in

relation to the railroad and Faulkner, my understanding of the concept will be informed by a number of viewpoints drawn from literary criticism as well as mobility studies. Furthermore, while the methods of literary criticism are essential to my project, my overall concern here is the American experience of cultural *modernity* rather than any conceptions of literary *modernism*. Modernism as a literary movement concerns itself with structural elements of defamiliarization of language and experimentation with narrative voice (including stream of consciousness and unreliable narrators). Moreover, literary critics tend to insist on somewhat arbitrary timelines (e.g. 1915 to 1945, 1890 to 1939, “on or about December 1910,”<sup>2</sup> etc.). These timelines indeed describe much of Faulkner’s work. However, such a structuralist critique focuses too much on form, which fails to address the culture(s) which engendered that form. Moreover, the constricting timeframes that define literary modernism do not and cannot factor in the ongoing cultural influence of the forces of modernization from the early 1800s through the present day, nor the different lived experience of various groups. Thus, this study will confront that lived cultural experience of modernity, both of the writer himself and his audience.

According to Baker, the experience of modernity was one of “radical uncertainty,” in which the position that “precisely anyone or anything was located could no longer be charted on old maps of ‘civilization,’ nor could even the most microscopic observation tell the exact time and space of day” (*Modernism* 3). Phrased less prosaically, science and technology had refigured our understanding of the laws of nature yet failed to provide all the answers they promised. Though Baker is focused on science and technology of the twentieth century, ignoring the nineteenth century advancements,

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<sup>2</sup> This is as per Virginia Woolf (Baker *Modernism* 3).

especially in terms of mobility, that prefigured these twentieth century breakthroughs, modernity premised on mobility necessarily stretches further back. Further, Baker opts for a traditional literary critical placement of modernism on the heels of “[a] war of barbaric immensity [World War I] combined with imperialism, capitalism, and totalitarianism to produce a reaction to human possibilities quite different from Walt Whitman’s joyous welcoming of the modern” (*Modernism* 4). While he does capture a certain spirit of modernity with his descriptions, the ultimate problem with such literary critical accounts of modernism is that they seek to identify a moment, and if modernity is defined by mobility, then it stands to reason that it is a process rather than a moment, which is a guiding principle of mobility studies. Nevertheless, as a work of literary critique, this study will occasionally bend toward the direction of literary modernism.

### **The Road Ahead**

Faulkner’s consistent uses of trains throughout his career, up to this point, has not received adequate examination. Presumably, part of the blame rests in the complexity of so many of the texts. His works are often multilayered and sometimes nearly inscrutable. For instance Vardaman’s assertion in *As I Lay Dying*, “My mother is a fish” (84) is one of the most famous sentences in all of Faulkner’s texts (partially because this is his most often taught novel). The one sentence gets its own chapter. Critics will tell us that it’s crucial to our understanding of Vardaman and his process of coping with his mother’s death. Everyone who reads the novel remembers that line. However, receiving significantly less attention is his obsession with the toy train in the Jefferson store window: “The train is behind the glass, red on the track” (65-66). This is understandable; it’s normal for a child to want a toy train; in the decades before the rise of video games



and smart phones, a train set was at the top of many a young child's Christmas list; Dewey Dell even assures him repeatedly that the train will still be there come Christmas (216, 250). Conversely, it's obviously not so normal for a child to think his mother is a fish, hence all the analysis.

Nevertheless, even that toy train's persistence throughout the book—not to mention the full-on real railroad whose intrusion into simple Southern life Anse Bundren rails against—calls for more consideration on our part. If we further investigate this seemingly predictable occurrence, Vardaman's obsession will further lead us to a fuller understanding of him and of the novel. As they make their excruciatingly long journey from their farm in rural Yoknapatawpha toward Jefferson, a journey that drags out due to their reliance on a mule-drawn wagon because they lack access to more progressive modes of transport, Vardaman lobbies his family to buy him the beautiful shiny red model train from the storefront window: "When it runs the track shines on and off" (66), he muses. The lack of punctuation trips up our eyes in midsentence, destroying our steady progression and rerouting our eyes back to the beginning of the sentence: "When it runs the track, shines..." No. "When it runs, the *track shines*..." The track shines when the train runs. Why is this important?

Vardaman's thought processes are indicative of modern power relationships. *When* the train is in motion, the track shines on and off. And when it doesn't, there's no shining. No lights. Where there's a train, there's light, and the inverse is true. The person with the power to move the train has the power to make the lights, metaphorically speaking. Though still quite young, Vardaman is being indoctrinated into capitalist power dynamics thanks to the shiny model train traveling around the main-street window

display. Dewey Dell, already hardened to the realities of capital, offers a more affordable though temporary pleasure: ““Wouldn’t you rather have some bananas instead?”” (66). However, Vardaman already knows that only when the bananas are on the palate do the taste buds shine on and off. This is a temporary pleasure like merely watching the train in the window. His mother’s death has taught Vardaman that he doesn’t want to have just the ephemeral now; rather, he wants control over now and later. He wants the train itself, musing “Bananas are gone, eaten. Gone” (ibid). He had a mother; his mother is now a fish. “Gone.” The train is desirable because it represents lasting power in young Vardaman’s world, a world rocked by inconstancy. Explained differently, the reality of Vardaman’s life as a “country boy” instead of a “town boy” (ibid) is that he comes from a family of workers who trade their labor for meager wages that allow for subsistence and ephemeral pleasures. In a world where commodities are fetishized (we witness such devotion to the religion of commodities as two of Vardaman’s siblings are named Cash and Jewel), Vardaman wants to be the capitalist who owns the movement and brings the shine even though he is beginning to understand that this is impossible. He asks, ““Why ain’t I a town boy, pa?”” (ibid) and laments that God—the same God who, according to Vardaman’s understanding, made the train and who made flour and sugar and coffee cost so much—didn’t just make them all town boys. Through his exposure to but denial of ownership of the train, he is beginning to internalize an ideology that socioeconomic inequalities are natural facts and accidents of birth.

Vardaman himself is a troubling case because, as the novel’s events play out, we know that he’s left to be reared by Anse Bundren, a more farcical but only slightly less despicable version of Ab Snopes from “Barn Burning” (1939). Vardaman, a country boy

by his own accounting, is really every child born and raised in a commodity-capitalist framework. But more than this, he is uniquely a product of 20<sup>th</sup>-century America. In 1900, thirty years before the publication of *As I Lay Dying*, Joshua Lionel Cowen founded Lionel Trains and the model train industry along with it. He began by manufacturing toy trains for such store windows as the one in Faulkner's fictional Jefferson, Mississippi, and soon the industry took off. Despite multiple bankruptcies and changing ownership four times, the company is still the most recognized brand name in the multi-billion dollar industry. Throughout the course of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, ideas of mobility in modern America would come to be defined by automobiles and airplanes; as Enda Duffy discusses in *The Speed Handbook*, the century's modernity came to be defined by an obsession with speed, in terms of both individuated experience and spectatorial excitement. And yet, the railroad, the chief conveyance of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, would remain strongly entrenched in the American imagination, by which I mean the nation's wealth of artistic media productions disseminated throughout American culture, including novels, poetry, films, television programs, dramatic productions, songs, and even—or especially—children's toys. Interrogating and interpreting the railroad's lasting impact on the American imagination of the twentieth century and beyond is, quite obviously, a monumental undertaking. Here, I will isolate one slice of that pie, the novels of William Faulkner, and examine the persistence of the railroad's impact throughout his works, most of which coincide with a period of American history when the actual railroad—as a long-haul passenger experience, at least—was fading into obscurity.

Using the methodology of literary critique and the burgeoning field of mobility studies, this dissertation will interrogate Faulkner's utilization of the railroad to depict *not*

a rejection of modernity and modernization as some critics have claimed, but rather an array of responses to modernity. Spalding and Fraser describe the train as used in literature, as “a complex narrative form engaged by artists...as a way of assessing the competing discursive investments of cultural modernity” (xi). As discussed above, we witness Faulkner doing just this in *As I Lay Dying*. Through Vardaman and his obsession with the train, Faulkner provides Depression-era insights into the ways that cultural modernity with its innate ties to capital work to shape minds. In the next three chapters, I will examine Faulkner’s trains as that “complex narrative form.” Drawing further on Spalding and Fraser, they declare that, “By turns trope, metaphor, and emblem of technological progress and its costs, the textual... representations of the train serve at times to index racial and gender inequalities... and at still others to evince the trauma of industrialization” (x-xi). Though my order diverges from their phrasing, my chapters will likewise discuss gender/sexuality, industrialization, and race.

At the heart of my inquiry into his varied utilizations of the railroad is the question “what does the railroad *do* for Faulkner?”—how does it serve his literary needs? As I have demonstrated, this question will be answered not merely from a literary perspective but also, and more importantly, from a cultural perspective. Though some of his characters adamantly resist mobility (e.g. Benjy Compson in *The Sound and the Fury* or the Tall Convict of *The Wild Palms [If I Forget Thee Jerusalem]*) and some may waste away in immobility (e.g. Donald Mahon in *Soldier’s Pay*), the majority of Faulkner’s works are, nevertheless, abundantly concerned with mobility, and particularly mobility that is connected to the railroad. I will argue that Faulkner communicates the lived experience of twentieth-century America by utilizing the railroad to demonstrate a

modernity built on mobility; furthermore, we must understand that the author himself is both a product of and a contributor to this modernism. Throughout his works, we find the railroad used as an agent of commodification (the replacement of social value with market value). For instance, the railroad helps to regulate the cognitive experience of space in terms of many characters' lasting relationships with place. Conversely, we find Faulkner using the railroad as a form of resistance to these forces; for instance, we find several characters who utilize the railroad's mobility to rebel against the value placed upon them by society.

### **Upcoming Chapters**

In Chapter 1, "Railroad Lovers, Elicit and Otherwise: Sex and Trains in Faulkner," I examine the ways he uses the railroad to examine sexuality and gender roles and to explore *avant garde* attitudes toward these concepts. Though surely tame or commonplace by today's standards, Faulkner never shied away from expressing such attitudes toward sexuality and portrayals of sexuality within his works. For instance, *Flags in the Dust* presents Horace Benbow, who has an affair with Belle Mitchell, a married woman, and *then* has a brief fling with her sister Joan, who has come to town to vet Horace as a suitable match for Belle. When Joan has learned all she needs, she doesn't bother with goodbye; rather, she leaves on the morning train, and Horace's affairs are tame compared to Temple Drake's sexual adventures and misadventures in *Sanctuary*. Despite modern America's persistent Victorian sensibilities, Faulkner didn't flinch at portraying women as sexual beings or from exploring alternative gender roles. Moreover, Faulkner repeatedly uses the railroad to explore the evolving nature of sexuality and ideas of gender in modern America.

In this chapter, I will examine characters who have been converted to sexual commodities (because of or in spite of the railroad) as well as characters who use the railroad to defy sexual commodification. While I will begin with a brief examination of the closing chapters of *Light in August*, the primary texts I will analyze here are *Sanctuary* and *Wild Palms [If I Forget Thee Jerusalem]*. In my examination of *Sanctuary*, I generally skip over Temple Drake, the overly-critiqued figure at the center of the novel, to focus especially on Horace Benbow, whose marital woes are uniquely tied to the railroad. In addition, Horace will use the railroad to track down the debutante Temple, a proponent of fast cars, bootlegged gin, and transgressive sexuality, in an ill-fated attempt to secure her testimony to exonerate his client who has been wrongfully accused of murder. Described and decried as smut for its racy (for 1931 at least) depictions of sexuality, the book's reputation would later be used by publishers to sell other Faulkner novels, including *Wild Palms*, by adding the phrase "From the author of 'SANCTUARY'" alongside overly-sexualized cover art. The "Wild Palms" sections of *Wild Palms* (as opposed to the "Old Man" segments, which feature a man sent to prison for robbing a train) tell the story of Charlotte Rittenmeyer, a married woman, and her lover Harry Wilbourne, who use trains both to escape her marriage and to resist middle class America's sexual mores. In addition, we find Charlotte railing against male domination despite her husband's and Harry's commodification of her, a commodification most saliently represented in the exchange between "Rat" (Charlotte's husband) and Harry in which Rat formally transfers custody of his wife to Harry while she waits in another train car.

In Chapter 2, “Blood on the Tracks: The Railroad and Narratives of Progress in Faulkner,” I will demonstrate how Faulkner uses the train to question America’s ideas of progress, writing partially in defense of a culture he sees being sublimated to the demands of capital. Contrary to some critics who depict Faulkner as obsessed with the (Southern) past and resistant to progress, I will illuminate tensions between nostalgia for days of yore and faith in modernization, despite its potential pitfalls, that Faulkner presents in his novels. In this aspect, Faulkner’s works exemplify what Lawrence Levine describes as “the central paradox of American history” (191). By this, he means “a belief in progress coupled with a dream of change, an urge toward the inevitable future combined with a longing for the irretrievable past; a deeply ingrained belief in America’s unfolding destiny and a haunting conviction that the nation was in a state of decline” (ibid). Faulkner, I will argue, utilizes the railroad to work through these tensions between past and future. I will illustrate the ways that he uses trains to question narratives of progress as well as the pitfalls of uncritical acceptance of these narratives.

Multiple Faulknerian texts present the railroad as a metonym of linear narratives of progress (industrial, moral, social, etc.) and sometimes these texts find those narratives are insufficient. This echoes Phillip Weinstein’s assertion that “in his art he explored, the unwanted ‘other’ of progress” (8). I will begin this chapter with an analysis of the opening scenes of *Soldiers’ Pay*, discussing Donald Mahon as a prototypical post-war “hero,” and discussing how the railroad, while not always specifically mentioned in the text, is present throughout and central to the novel. Here, Faulkner uses Mahon and his plight, similarly to many modernist contemporaries, to interrogate conflicting social realities, new and extant, in the wake of The Great War. Next, I will briefly discuss

portrayals of the train in *Go Down, Moses*, embellishing on the work already done by Decker's study of trains in Ike McCaslin's portions of the narrative. Next, I will contrast *Go Down, Moses* with *The Reivers*, investigating the notions of progress that Faulkner explores in his final novel. Though more about automobiles than locomotives, the plot of *Reivers* is utterly dependent upon trains as the narrator, Lucius Priest, repeatedly questions the progress wrought by the railroad, noting the toll that progress has taken upon lives and landscapes as he ventures through Northern Mississippi and Western Tennessee.

In Chapter 3, "The Racial Railroad: Whiteness, Blackness, and Otherness and the Railroad in Faulkner," I will discuss Faulkner's portrayals of race in relation to the railroad as well as examine how his use of the railroad helps highlight racial disparities in modern American culture—that is, I will look at both the extant racial portrayals and question those that are missing. Faulkner, as we'd expect from a rurally-backgrounded Southerner, expressed complicated views on race, especially in terms of black-white relations. While readers will note a significantly more liberal Faulkner regarding his portrayals of African-American characters in *The Reivers* (1962) than was present in *Flag in the Dust/Sartoris* (1929), his first Yoknapatapha novel, in his nonfiction works [e.g. "Mississippi, 1954" (1954)], he is a staunch advocate for gradualism as his first choice, white supremacy as his second choice, and immediate equality as a distant third. To be sure, his racial views had more in common with MLK than Bull Connor, but there's quite a yawning chasm between those two camps.

As my final chapter will demonstrate, with a few important exceptions, despite comparably liberal stances on race relations relative to his Southern counterparts,



Faulkner generally portrays railroad mobility as the province of whites, almost completely ignoring African Americans' roles in the production or use of America's rail lines. I will begin the chapter by taking a look at Faulkner's complicated record on racial issues before moving into discussions of *Flags in the Dust*, *The Unvanquished*, and *The Sound and the Fury*. I will include a discussion of Baker's criticism that theories of modernism tend toward the Anglo-centric; as they forecast gloom in the wake of civilization's fall (which is really the "fall" of the Anglo-Saxon elite), this falling civilization is characterized as white and male and tends to ignore the fates of non-whites (*Modernism* 4).

Both *Flags in the Dust* (completed in 1927, published in abbreviated form as *Sartoris* in 1929, published whole in 1973) and *The Unvanquished*, an episodic prequel to *Flags*, chronicle the history of the Sartoris family from the Civil War up through the 1920s. From the moment John Sartoris brought the railroad to Northern Mississippi following the Civil War, railroad mobility is repeatedly treated as a white privilege. Looking at *Flags*, I will examine the homecoming of three World War I veterans to illustrate the differences in white vs. black mobility. My discussion of *Unvanquished* will center on two particular chapters and the close friendship enjoyed by Bayard Sartoris and Ringo Strother up until the moment that Ringo utterly disappears from Yoknapatawpha.

Sandwiched between these two discussions (to preserve chronological order), I will discuss Quentin Compson's chapter of *The Sound and the Fury*. My analysis focuses on his rail-related interactions with two particular African American characters, Deacon, who Quentin meets upon his arrival at Harvard, and a rural black man riding a mule who Quentin encounters during a train stop. Quentin's reactions to these two characters

illustrate his position on black mobility. I will end this chapter by reflecting briefly on the case of Wallace Saunders, an African American railroad employee, who is believed to have written the original “The Ballad of Casey Jones.” Saunders, however, never received any financial benefit from his efforts, mirroring the “invisible” people of color who did much of the actual labor of building and running the nation’s railroads while enjoying a marginalized share of the benefits.

Finally, “The End of the Line? Final Thoughts on Mobility, the Railroad, and American Culture and Literature” serves as the conclusion of my dissertation. Here, I will briefly discuss America’s history of restricting mobility as well as the decline of the railroad’s popularity with the advent of the Interstate highway system. I will also discuss the lasting impact of the railroad beyond just tracks and trains. Just because a story or a song doesn’t feature a train, this doesn’t mean it isn’t strongly influenced by the railroad. Railroad culture is more than just the railroad. The existence of suburbs, watches, time zones, and fast-food chains, for instance, began with the railroad, though these entities exist independently today. Here, I will envision the next steps for my line of inquiry. Faulkner is a natural starting point because the railroad is integral to his oeuvre, but by no means does he have a monopoly on mobility stories. For example, texts such as Vladimir Nabokov’s *Lolita* (1955), Jack Kerouac’s *On the Road* (1957), Toni Morrison’s *Jazz* (1992), and Colson Whitehead’s *John Henry Days* (2001) serve as representation of railroad culture and heirs to railroad mobility. Thus, the last question to be answered after applying mobility studies to Faulkner’s canon is, where to next?

## Ch. 1: Railroad Lovers, Elicit and Otherwise: Sex and Trains in Faulkner

Throughout his novels, we can find numerous examples of Faulkner using trains to develop characters who are sexually liberated as well as characters who do not conform to traditional gender norms. In this chapter, I will examine the ways in which Faulkner uses railroad-infused mobility to explore gender and sexuality as well as *avant garde* attitudes toward sex. I will examine characters who have been converted to sexual commodities (because of or in spite of the railroad) as well as characters who use the railroad and mobility to defy sexual commodification. The primary texts I analyze here are *Sanctuary* (1931) and *The Wild Palms [If I Forget Thee Jerusalem]* (1939), but I will start with a brief glimpse at *Light in August* (1932) to get the ball rolling.

My examination of *Sanctuary* focuses on Horace Benbow, whose marital woes are uniquely tied to the railroad. In addition, Horace will use the railroad to track down the debutante Temple Drake in an ill-fated attempt to secure her testimony to exonerate his client who has been falsely accused of murder.. Temple is a proponent of fast cars, bootlegged gin, and transgressive sexuality, but she begins her odyssey into these pleasures, as we learn in *Requiem for a Nun*, by getting off of a train. Described and decried as smut for its racy depictions of sexuality (for 1931 at least), the book's reputation would later be used by publishers to sell other Faulkner novels, especially *Wild Palms*, by adding the phrase "From the author of 'SANCTUARY'" alongside overly sexualized cover art. In addition to Horace, I will look briefly at a handful of female characters whose sexuality is explicitly linked to the railroad, including Horace's step-daughter Little Belle.

The “Wild Palms” chapters of *Wild Palms*<sup>1</sup> tell the story of Charlotte Rittenmeyer, a married woman, and her lover Harry Wilbourne, who use trains to run from both her marriage and middle-class America’s sexual mores. Here, we find Charlotte railing against male domination despite her husband’s and Harry’s commodification of her, a commodification that is most saliently represented in the exchange between Francis (Charlotte’s husband) and Harry before departing New Orleans: While Charlotte waits in another train car, Francis formally gives over custody of his wife to Harry. Both novels, driven by risqué sexuality, rely upon trains to advance their narratives and develop their characters.

**Men With No Address: Trains in *Light in August***

*Light in August* tells the story of Joe Christmas, a man who is lynched for the double crimes of murder and being, allegedly, black. Like many of William Faulkner’s greatest works, race is an integral factor. No less so, however, is sex. The very first character we meet is Lena Grove, an unwed pregnant teen (the novel also ends with her). Furthermore, the person Joe Christmas is lynched over is the white woman he has been sleeping with. While numerous critics have excavated the details of Joe Christmas’ race, class, and sexuality (and supposed Christ symbolism), one facet of the novel that has been overlooked is the connection between trains and illicit sex. For instance, Joe’s introduction to sex is intimately tied to the railroad.

As a young man, Joe comes into town with McEachern, his adoptive father, who has business to attend to at his lawyer’s office. One of the first things we learn about this town is that it was a railroad division point (*LA* 173). Essentially, a division point is

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<sup>1</sup> This is in contrast to the “Old Man” segments, which feature the tall convict, a man happy to remain motionless in prison after being sent up for robbing a train.

where one segment of railroad territory ends and the next begins. The upshot for the town is that it becomes a place for trains to be refueled and change crew members. Because of this special status, the local streets were always graced with travelers. Faulkner describes the town's ambiance: "The whole air of the place was masculine, transient; a population even whose husbands were at home only at intervals and on holiday—a population of men who led esoteric lives whose actual scenes were removed and whose intermittent presence was pandered to like that of patrons in a theatre" (173-4). One of the multitude of places pandering to these itinerant men is the restaurant which Joe visits because the dinner is cheap and so is his father. McEachern knows exactly what kind of place he is taking Joe, but miserliness wins out over his usual self-righteous religious authoritarianism. Aside from Joe and his father, there is only a handful of men in the restaurant, and they had the look of "people who had just got off a train and who would be gone tomorrow and who did not have any address" (174). Soon, Joe becomes enamored of Bobbie, their waitress, and she will become his first sexual partner. Shortly after Faulkner introduces her, we learn that she wasn't hired for any table-waiting skills; rather Max and Mame, the owners of the "restaurant," brought her down from Memphis so they could pimp her to the address-less men. Bobbie's actual occupation is fairly obvious to everyone—except Joe, that is. Soon, however, he does learn the truth and responds by beating her (as he seems to do to every woman that he is amorous with). Though he is a local farm boy, before long, Joe becomes one of those train-inflected men sitting at the bar, drinking, smoking cigarettes, and waiting his turn with Bobbie.

This is not even the first time in the novel in which Faulkner connects illicit—or at least non-traditional—sexuality to the railroad. Early on, readers encounter the wife of

Reverend Hightower; she frequently utilized the railroad's mobility to leave town and travel to Memphis for sex with random men in hotel rooms. Her carousing with strangers eventually leads to dire consequences: Faulkner tells us that "nobody saw her when she got on the train that Friday, or maybe it was Saturday, the day itself. It was Sunday morning's paper which they saw, telling how she had jumped or fallen from a hotel window in Memphis Saturday night, and was dead" (67). As it turns out, she had been there with a man; they had "registered as husband and wife, under a fictitious name" (ibid). He was drunk when the police arrested him for her murder. In this particular instance, it seems that Faulkner bends to the popular Victorian trend of the liberated woman being punished for her sexuality; however, the narrator implies that her death is actually due to Reverend Hightower's failings as a husband. She is clearly dealing with mental health issues that her husband ignores, hoping they'll go away. It is left to the reader to determine whether he is more inadequate in the role attentive husband or as a godly minister. His congregation had been able to overlook his marital failings (even if they thought that failing was marrying a harlot) if every single one of his sermons wasn't about his grandfather getting shot off of his horse during a cavalry charge in the Civil War. When his wife's railroad-enabled promiscuity ultimately leads to her death—especially a death so well covered by the Memphis newspapermen invading their church—the congregation abandons him.

Near the end of *Light in August*, we find another example of characters, male and female, who display decidedly liberal attitudes toward sexuality who are linked to the railroad. Sometimes, as we see with Joe Christmas, this is merely a causal link with the railroad creating an environment where such habits can flourish, while at other times, as

with Bobbie and Mrs. Hightower, these characters' sexuality is dependent on the railroad. Our final example is Joe Brown (aka Lucus Burch), whose sexual liberation is assisted by the railroad. In the novel's closing chapters, he will use a freight train to aid and abet his freedom, both legal and domestic. Brown hops the northbound train out of Yoknapatawpha to escape Lena Grove, the young woman who has just given birth to his child. When she became pregnant, he left her in Alabama, telling her he was going off to find work and that he'd send for her. This was a lie. He is completely surprised when he finds himself face-to-face with her and his child in the cabin he had shared with Joe Christmas. Slipping out a back window (there's a deputy waiting for him at the front door), he instinctively runs two miles to the nearest railroad tracks. After a brief struggle with Byron Bunch, who is trying to bring him back to Lena, he fights his way free and deftly hops onto an accelerating train. Byron watches him "grasp the iron ladder at the end of a car and leap upward and vanish from sight as though sucked into a vacuum" (441). Byron's semi-conscious response is "'Great God in the mountain... he sho knows how to jump a train. He's sho done that before'" (ibid). In making his escape, he is leaving behind the domestic lifestyle that Byron, the sheriff, and Lena are trying to force upon him but that he has no desire to experience. In fact, so feral is his aversion to domesticity, he will abandon both his bootlegging operation and the \$1000 reward he feels that he is owed by the sheriff for helping capture Joanna Burden's murderer. Hopping onto the passing boxcar serves Brown in the same fashion that, as Byron's groggy response indicates, it has served him before: keeping him one jump ahead of both the law and the women from his past. Bobbie Allen, Joe Christmas, Mrs. Hightower, and Joe Brown are not outliers in the annals of Yoknapatawpha. These cases from *Light in*

*August* are just a few examples of the railroad's mobility being used to facilitate liberated sexuality.

### **Horace and the Belles: Sex and Trains in *Sanctuary***

In general, examinations of *Sanctuary* focus most heavily upon Temple Drake, described by John Matthews as a “modern girl” and “daughter of a prestigious family” who “tunes out the wagging tongues of the old fogies and hops a train to where the action is” (41). As the novel progresses, Temple learns that there is “no sanctuary from commodifying, dehumanizing, misogynistic violence of a money-and sex-driven society” (41-2). Furthermore, Matthews asserts that *Sanctuary* does not present a fable about some evil incursion of “alien modern ways” brought in by Popeye so much as it “lifts the scales of self-deception that exalted the South as an exception to the story of national exploitation” (49). While there is indeed much and more to be said about Temple, I would like to turn our attention to Horace Benbow, a man easily characterized as one of the aforementioned “old fogies” even though he is presumably just in his thirties. Matthews asserts that Horace is a “middle-class lawyer and family man... hysterical over the wickedness and vulgarity of the new age” who “goes into shock when he realizes how much things have changed from the apparently innocent world he knew growing up in a small southern town” (46) and who “feels himself rushing toward an unfathomable future” (47). While this description is not precisely incorrect, a closer look at Faulkner's use of trains in his presentation of Horace reveals another view of him, that is, as a man who is metaphorically impotent (in contrast to the villain Popeye's literal impotence) and sexually frustrated in his relationships with his wife, Belle, and stepdaughter, Little Belle.



We first meet Horace Benbow in *Flags in the Dust*, a precursor to *Sanctuary* that is primarily concerned with the descendants of the infamous Colonel John Sartoris. In *Flags*, Horace becomes sexually involved with Belle Mitchell, a married woman lamentingly referred to as “dirty” by Horace’s sister Narcissa (*Flags* 206). By the conclusion of the novel, Belle divorces her husband and marries Horace, but not until after her sister has come to Jefferson to have a brief but torrid affair with him before she leaves town “on de evenin’ train” (*Flags* 325). After their marriage, the couple moves south to Kinston, MS, now an important boom town with its own “ugly yellow station,” while ten years ago it was just a hamlet twelve miles from the nearest railroad (*Flags* 373). In *Sanctuary*, Horace resurfaces, running out on Belle and fleeing back to Jefferson. Throughout his second and final appearance in the annals of Yoknapatawpha (he is essentially replaced in subsequent novels by Gavin Stevens), Faulkner uses the railroad to explore Horace’s fraught sexual identity.

To fully unpack Horace’s sexual identity, it will be helpful to first take a look at Michel Foucault’s concept of heterotopia. As per Foucault, heterotopias “have the curious property of being in relation with all the other sites, but in such a way as to suspect, neutralize, or invert the set of relations that they happen to designate, mirror, or reflect” (24). The heterotopia is an “other” space, a space whose difference can be thought of as a shared mental construct, yet it is a real space all the same. In its special, othered existence, it speaks to and interacts with the real world. Faulkner’s novels—or any novel, really—are replete with heterotopia, including brothels, bootleg operations, plantations, and trains. In “Of Other Spaces,” Foucault includes a few brief mentions of the railroad, describing it as “an extraordinary bundle of relations because it is something

through which one goes, it is also something by means of which one can go from one point to another, and then it is also something that goes by” (23-4); he also discusses its usefulness in the honeymoon trip, allowing the bride to be deflowered in no particular place at all since the train is in motion (in *Wild Palms*, we find an alternative version of this honeymoon trip). However, it might be most helpful for this essay to reflect upon Foucault’s discussion of the boat/ship as heterotopia, which he says is “...a floating piece of space, a place without a place, that exists by itself, that is closed in on itself and at the same time is given over to the infinity of the sea...” (27). He declares the ship “the heterotopia par excellence” and simultaneously as “the great instrument of economic development” and “the greatest reserve of the imagination” (27). Though he does not discuss the train in such terms, it is likewise a “place without a place” which is “closed in on itself” yet given over to the vastness of the continent’s proliferation of rails, wherein it serves as a great instrument of economic development (and modernization) and a reserve of the imagination.

In *Sanctuary*, the train functions as a rooted yet utterly rootless heterotopic space. Its tracks (routes) are permanently affixed (rooted) to the ground, but the railcars themselves are utterly transient. One may work in, sleep in, eat in, but never truly stay in a train because it is in the train’s essence not to remain still. For Horace Benbow in *Sanctuary*, the train functions as a heterotopia of sexual identity. Multiple times, the train helps Faulkner reveal this identity. Before the novel even begins, Horace has walked out (literally) on his wife and stepdaughter, deciding he will walk back to Jefferson. As if trying to reverse the previous trajectory of his life, he chooses to walk back along the same railroad tracks that brought him both into and out of Jefferson in *Flags*. Walking

along the tracks allows Horace to try on a new identity, that of hobo. He is a man of means yet plays at this othered identity. He is hoping that the freedom of the open rails will be transformative, turning him into an independent agent rather than henpecked husband. If he can harness railroad mobility—for instance, the way Joan uses it, a woman Horace repeatedly saw as a predator in repose—he can remake himself as a stronger person, one who can control sexuality rather than being controlled by it.

As Horace approaches the town, he encounters the gangster Popeye, who, after the two stare at each other for literally two hours—brings him back to Lee Goodwin’s moonshine operation where they discuss his decision to abandon his wife. In this masculinized heterotopia, Horace can describe himself, and therefore start to believe in himself, as a man who has cast aside his old identity of subservient husband, slave to sexuality. When Ruby (Lee’s wife) asks why he walked out, he says, ““Because she ate shrimp”” (17), adding that every Friday, he would have to go down to the train station and procure her shipment of shrimp, of which he could not stand the smell. As he delves deeper into this abhorrent task, he says, “All the way home it drips and drips, until after a while I follow myself to the station and stand aside and watch Horace Benbow take that box off the train and start home with it” (ibid). Visiting the other space of the train station transfigures Horace’s ability to perceive himself, as if watching himself in a film (another heterotopia), showing him that his identity has been reshaped by some malevolent combination of Belle, her shrimp, and the train from which he retrieves it for her (at least, that is the way he would see it; seemingly he is still blind to his own collusion in his sexual subjugation). At the train station, which functions for Horace as a heterotopia allowing him to get a clearer picture of his identity. He may have been perceiving himself

as a husband (as well as lawyer and Southern gentleman), and he is that, but his weekly experience at the train station has allowed him to perceive himself as errand boy for another man's wife, with each drip from the smelly parcel signifying another drop of his agency being nullified, thus leading him to think "Here lies Horace Benbow in a fading series of small stinking spots on the Mississippi sidewalk" (ibid). Of course, Belle is, or at least was, literally another man's wife—Harry Mitchell's—but Horace can no longer even perceive himself as being her husband. Not only is this secondary existence abominable to him, but every week, he is re-emasculated by Belle as she orders him—*and* he acquiesces—to perform a task that could easily be performed by a hired hand.

Though providing fewer details, he offers the same reasoning when confronted by his sister and his aunt: He tells Narcissa (his sister) and Aunt Jenny, "It was Friday, and all of a sudden I knew that I could not go to the station and get that box of shrimp" (108). The two women are less than sympathetic and not overly credulous: Narcissa questions why it took him ten years to finally leave while Miss Jenny asks why it took him so many years to figure out that Belle is a poor wife.

Their lack of credulity is understandable, and there is, in fact, a secondary reason for his departure that emerges in a conversation overheard though not understood by Ruby. As it turns out, his exodus has at least as much to do with his stepdaughter as it does with his wife—but no less to do with sexuality or with trains. Horace knows that Little Belle neither respects him nor takes him seriously, whether as an authority figure or as a man. This is exemplified by her behavior during the time(s) he catches her fooling around with her boyfriends. She never feels the need to explain away the boyfriend to her stepfather with phrases such as "Horace, this is Louis or Paul or Whoever;" instead, she

feels the need to explain away her stepfather to her boyfriends, saying, “‘It’s just Horace’” (13). This situation comes to a head when Horace catches her with a particular lover she met on a train, as he explains to Popeye and the gang at Old Frenchman’s Place:

“...I said ‘Honey, if you found him on the train, he probably belongs to the railroad company. You cant take him from the railroad company; that’s against the law, like the insulators on the poles.’

“‘He’s as good as you are. He goes to Tulane.’

“‘But on a train, honey,’ I said.

“‘I’ve found them in worse places than on the train.’

“‘I know,’ I said. ‘So have I. But you dont bring them home, you know.

You just step over them and go on. You dont soil your slippers, you know.’ (14)

Here, we see Horace is lashing out at his stepdaughter since he cannot control (or possess) her sexuality. She has “soiled her slippers,” so to speak, by cavorting with a man he sees as filthy, or at least lesser than himself: The lover is connected with the train that brings the foul-smelling shrimp he must fetch for Belle; additionally, the train confers upon him a transience that contrasts with the rooted history of Yoknapatawpha’s aristocratic families like the Benbows and Sartoris. Furthermore, by referencing the “insulators on the poles,” Horace demonstrates that Little Belle is actually less concerned with what school he comes from (Tulane) than what he can do for her (casual sex). In part, Horace is concerned about propriety, worried that she is soiling herself and her reputation, and by extension, she is soiling his own reputation as well as his own self-conception. But likewise, she is symbolic of her mother. He can control Little Belle no more than he can control Belle. Finally fed up with Horace’s interference, she demands

that he try to get her in trouble (mirroring Temple Drake's self-destructive demands elsewhere in the novel that Popeye touch her):

“ ‘Tell Mother, then! Tell her. That's what you're going to do. Tell her!’

“ ‘But on the train, honey,’ I said. ‘If he'd walked into your room in a hotel, I'd just kill him. But on the train, I'm disgusted. Let's send him along and start all over again.’

“ ‘You're a fine one to talk about finding things on the train! You're a fine one! Shrimp! Shrimp!’ ” (14).

Horace insults the boy from the train, and indomitable Little Belle thrusts his status in the family back at him. For all intents and purposes, Little Belle has placed Horace squarely on the train right along with her reprehensible (to Horace) lover and her mother's smelly shrimp. The train, the dirty, rootless, transient train, solidifies an abhorrent identity from which he must flee, yet it's very rootlessness and transience offers him hope of an escape to remake himself. If he can get back home to the Benbow estate in Jefferson, he can reclaim his aristocratic identity (i.e. white male privilege). Understandably, then, when we first encounter Horace in the novel, he is walking back to Jefferson.

However, this altercation, early on in the novel, is not the last time we see illicit sex tied to the train. After visiting Temple Drake in the othered space of Miss Reba's bawdyhouse, Horace's libidinal desires are momentarily set loose. He boards the train in Memphis and comes home, only to engage in a rape fantasy/nightmare that conflates Little Belle and Temple. Here, the railroad, which by this point in the novel is thoroughly linked to modernization (and therefore corruption for Horace), is solidified as a symbol of corrupted sexuality. As Joseph Urgo asserts, “Temple's ordeal helps him discover what it

was he wanted from Little Belle” all along (441). Spoiler: He’s not concerned with being a good father to her. As Horace gazes upon her picture, “the face began to breath in his palms, in a shallow bath of highlight, beneath the slow, smoke-like tongues of invisible honeysuckle” (*Sanctuary* 223). Along with the scent of honeysuckle, “a signal for sexual energies throughout Faulkner's work” (*Urgo* 442), the room is filled with “invitation and voluptuous promise and secret affirmation like a scent itself” (*Sanctuary* 223). It is not until he runs to the bathroom, reportedly from nausea (though *Urgo* suggests otherwise) that a link between the two young coeds emerges which is based in the repeated aural imagery of corn shucks from Temple’s rape earlier in the novel: “the shucks set up a terrific uproar beneath her [Little Belle’s] thighs.... She was bound naked on her back on a flat car moving at speed through a black tunnel... a roar of iron wheels in her ears” (*ibid*). Bent over the commode, Horace’s masturbatory fantasy moves both himself and Little Belle “...toward a crescendo like a held breath” (*ibid*). Even if we disbelieve *Urgo*’s assertion that “Horace has found Temple's story as erotic as it is criminal” and that he has “discovered a potentiality within himself which places him in collusion with a rapist” (442), it is quite clear that this scene links the railroad and its mobility with Horace’s corrupted sexual identity. He has allowed himself to be emotionally dominated by Belle, so his sexual fantasies now focus on overpowering Belle’s young daughter (aptly called Little Belle) so that he can regain some sense of masculine authority to which he feels entitled.

When Horace actually boards trains in the novel—rather than just fantasizing about them or walking along their tracks—we witness a grand attempt to remake his identity as he searches for his aforementioned masculine authority. On the train, he is no

longer Horace the boring lawyer; instead, he can remake himself. In this case, he becomes a detective in search of Temple Drake, who he mistakenly believes will help him exonerate Lee Goodwin of murder charges. If he can save his client, and thus exert some amount of power, he will be one step closer to repairing his masculine and sexual identities. While acquiring his ticket, “The clerk looked at him. He leaned, lowering his voice: ‘Are you another detective?’ / ‘Yes,’ Horace said” (171), but he only is able to maintain this new fantasy until he encounters other passengers on the train. Just as Horace objected to the rootlessness of the lover Little Belle found on the train, the other young people he encounters on his ride reinforce rootless vagabondage in opposition to his imagined righteous questing. Soon, he finds himself aboard a train with yammering college students, Temple’s classmates from Ole Miss.

Entering the train, they “pushed gaily forward, talking and laughing, shouldering aside older people with gay rudeness, clashing and slamming seats back and settling themselves, turning their faces up out of laughter, their cold faces still toothed with it” (168-9). Despite the apparently jovial demeanor, they are monstrously cold and toothy. Two other boys occupy the seat behind Horace and do not so much trick the conductor as intimidate him into giving them free rides. Their conversation is filled with lewd innuendo and nearly nonsensical onomatopoeia, such as “Eeeeeyow” as they “whistled, clapping their heels on the floor to furious crescendo, saying duh-duh-duh” (170). Their noises, after a fashion, resemble the train’s noises, and this behavior, when connected to their lewd (whatever that word means to Horace) speech, reinforces the train’s connection to sexuality for Horace. His virile detective dreams descend into nightmare as he is trapped in the moving train. While not exactly depicted in any direct sexual way, the



behavior of the young men on the train and Horace's reprehension to it reinforce his impotence and inadequacy. Concluding his fruitless search for Temple at the university, he observes more students as he approaches the train depot, noting their "gathering along the platform with thin, bright, raucous laughter, their blond legs monotonous, their bodies moving continually inside their scant garments with that awkward and voluptuous purposelessness of the young" (172). The students clearly make him uncomfortable, but it is difficult to determine whether this is because their voluptuousness is a turn-on to Horace, a man who lacks courage but has the rest of his machinery intact (17), or if they serve to remind him of his inadequacies.

While Faulkner subtly develops Horace's sexuality over the course of the novel, his development of Clarence Snopes, one of Horace's fellow passengers, is more direct. While today's Faulknerians are well familiarized with the infamous Snopes clan, *Sanctuary's* contemporary readers met one of the earliest Snopeses. A corrupted politician, Clarence contrasts Horace's fractured sexuality with a corrupted sexuality. Before providing any sexual overtones, Clarence is simply presented as filthy as "the man in the soiled hat" (173), and the soiled hat is mentioned at least three more times before the end of the chapter. In addition, Clarence's coat is "a shoddy blue garment with a greasy velvet collar" (174); furthermore, his suit is "pressed but not cleaned" (174). Physical filth soon gives way to illicit sexuality on the part of the state senator who takes pride in his talent to find vice. He describes his life at the capital (Jackson, MS) by painting "a picture of stupid chicanery and petty corruption for stupid and petty ends, conducted principally in hotel rooms into which bellboys whisked with bulging jackets upon discreet flicks of skirts in swift closet doors" (175). Throughout *Sanctuary*,

Faulkner demonstrates that this is the world in which Clarence is at home, whether at the capitol or the brothel or any one of the trains in between. He assures Horace, ““Anytime you’re in town... I always like to show the boys around. Ask anybody in town; they’ll tell you if it’s there, Cla’ence Snopes’ll know where it is”” (175-6). This assertion seems to hold true for Memphis as well, since he is the one who reveals to Horace that Temple is being housed in Miss Reba’s brothel, the same brothel in which he will later be chastised for using as a waiting room without getting “on the train now and then” (209).

Earlier in *Sanctuary* when he discusses his decision to walk out on Belle with Ruby, he laments his fatal flaw: ““I lack courage: that was left out of me. The machinery is all here, but it wont run”” (17). When we reflect over his character, this statement should give us pause. In *Flags*, we learn that Horace is a war veteran. Moreover, we see him undertake various journeys in his quest to prove his client’s innocence. So, in what way exactly is it that he lacks courage? The answer is that he cannot take charge of his sexual identity. He has found himself married to Belle, yet this is only because she pursued him. He abhors his weekly shrimp-fetching duty, yet he cannot tell Belle “no.” He clearly has sexual desires for younger women, yet even when he has walked out on his wife, he cannot ever try to act on them. His lack of courage has nothing to do with physical harm; he is utterly terrified of asserting himself and he is likewise terrified of acknowledging that what he wants is sex with his stepdaughter. After his rape fantasy conflating Temple and Little Belle, he decides to take action against his illicit desires—he drafts a letter asking Belle for a divorce; nevertheless, this his momentary burst of courage won’t last.

In the end, Horace “fails in his defence [sic] of Goodwin [and] loses a certain male authoritative position as both defender of justice and hero of the public good” (Polchin 153). Unfortunately for him, this position as lawyer was the last vestige of dignity or potency he had. Just as he had allowed Belle (and Little Belle) to strip him of his masculine self-image, losing this court case—especially with the knowledge that his client really was innocent—has occupationally emasculated him. He can no longer be a lawyer. Moreover, as ill luck should have it, Lee Goodwin is lynched while Horace dozes while waiting for the train that will take him back to Kinston (*Sanctuary* 295).

Throughout the novel, the train-related incidents illustrate Horace as someone who is both socially and sexually powerless. As Matthews asserts, just as Horace’s fantasy featured Little Belle and Temple tied down, the “sensation of hurtling into a black future is Horace’s response to the array of terrifying things that together have bound him on the train to modernity” (48). In defeat, he boards the train bound for Kinston and Belle in acceptance of the identity of failure (as a lawyer, as a detective, as an attempted divorcee). He returns to Belle as an “utterly demoralized man” (Jay Watson 73), defeated and stammering (74). “Horace is gone for good. He will never return to Yoknapatawpha from Kinston, never again appear in a Faulkner novel. Faulkner’s first major lawyer does not so much boldly exit from Yoknapatawpha as fade away into the silent margins...waiting for an acknowledgement that will never come” (75). His inability to operate effectively within the real world ensures his silent oblivion. Upon completing *Sanctuary*, the reader is left with images of corruption and defeat. Clarence Snopes had offered to take him to a place where “a man can do just whatever his is big enough to do,” but Horace isn’t “big enough” to do much at all by the end of the novel (*Sanctuary*

261). He slinks back home to Belle to retrieve her foul shrimp at the train depot every Friday.

Through Horace especially, and, to a degree, Belle, Little Belle, Clarence, and Temple, Faulkner presents numerous images of corrupted sexuality explicitly coupled to modernization and unified in their relationships to trains. For instance, Horace's lack of sexual power is used to link him to the impotent Popeye. Moreover, Faulkner uses train imagery to link Temple and Little Belle in deviant sexuality (insofar as desiring sex outside of marriage is deviant), uniting the young women through Horace's decidedly deviant rape fantasy, which further unifies him with the criminal Popeye as well as the thoroughly-debased brothel connoisseur Clarence Snopes.

### **Gender Trouble and Trains in *The Wild Palms***

Faulkner's *If I Forget Thee, Jerusalem*—shortened by Random House against the author's wishes to *The Wild Palms*—offers two obliquely interconnected novellas revolving around escape and containment. One of the storylines, “The Wild Palms,” traces the ill-fated love affair between Charlotte, a wife and mother, who runs away with Harry, an impoverished med student. Interspersed within the chapters detailing their flight from social conventions, Faulkner provides “The Old Man,” which is about the misadventures of the unnamed “tall convict” who has been conscripted to rescue a pregnant woman during the historic Mississippi River flood of 1927. In the end, he is finally able to return to the safety and stability of his Parchman cell. Switching back and forth from one narrative to the other, the two stories play upon and subvert each other as well as readerly expectations about sexuality and gender roles. If we examine the use of trains in the novel, we gain a broader understanding of the intersection of mobility,

sexuality, and gender roles in a novel that “explores the expansive powers of female desire” (Gwin 127).

In the *Wild Palms* (here, I follow Random House’s lead for brevity’s sake), Faulkner uses locomotives to drive a critique of social conceptions of gender and sexuality. His critique is likewise preoccupied with the concept of exchange value. For instance, the novel’s young lovers converse repeatedly about the prices they have, can, will, should, should have, and must pay for their love. Though less present in some chapters of the novel than others, the railroad is integral in crafting these stories, especially that of the young lovers who travel around the country mistakenly conflating mobility with freedom (Godden 207). Even the tall convict’s tale relies upon trains since they are central to his incarceration—aside from “taller convict,” the only other name ever ascribed to him is “train-robber convict.” And though my examination focuses much more heavily upon “The Wild Palms” chapters, “The Old Man” sections cannot be entirely ignored as I unpack Faulkner’s uses of trains in exploring sexuality and gender. For instance, the tall convict attempted a train robbery for love, rather than money, which is to say he wanted to be able to buy presents for his girlfriend.

My title for this section of the chapter is, of course, derived from Judith Butler’s influential *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. There, Butler discusses gender’s performativity; that is, she describes gender as something that is not an inherent, “natural” phenomenon but one that is socially constructed, altered, and maintained through repeated performance. She observes, “Gender ought not to be construed as a stable identity or locus of agency from which various acts follow; rather, gender is an identity tenuously constituted in time, instituted in an exterior space through

a stylized repetition of acts” (140). Throughout *Wild Palms* (as with so many other Faulknerian texts) our primary characters try out various gendered and sexual roles. For instance, we witness Charlotte “veer precipitously between feminine and masculine, transgressing gender boundaries” (Roberts 205). As Diane Roberts notes, “Mothers tell their stories through their children; words are officially the province of men (or “the manlike”)” (198). Charlotte, however, is a “verbally articulate” exception to this rule, she thus destabilizes the gender binaries (205). She abandons her family so that she can make love and make art, and she even refers to herself as Charly. Along the way, both she and Harry “commit crimes against nature, that is, against gender categories. The novel immediately suggests a series of gender reversals” (208). In Harry’s case, non-standard gender performance culminates in his somewhat voluntary imprisonment (similar to that of the Tall Convict) so that he might “turn his body into a mausoleum containing the memory of Charlotte” (Godden 179). Like a devoted mother, he will protect and raise this image of Charlotte that he has given birth to.

Though not explicitly concerned with Faulkner’s explorations of sexuality and gender and not at all with trains, in *Vision’s Immanence: Faulkner, Film, and the Popular Imagination* (2004), Peter Lurie argues that Faulkner plays on the filmic conventions in order to continuously subvert readerly expectations, dangling a melodramatic plot in front of them only to snatch it away much in the way the culture industry dangles satisfaction in front of readers only to snatch it away. As Lurie explains, the novel critiques popular media, particularly film, by playing upon an “unsatisfied longing inherent in commercial forms” (159). The culture industry “produces in its audience an appetite that is constantly stimulated but constantly frustrated” (ibid). That is, the masses must be kept wanting so

that they keep working and spending. John T. Matthews asserts that the novel is the product of “Faulkner’s own discomfort at his complicity with the engines of industrial culture” after a decade of working in Hollywood (74). Matthews’ reading is heavily focused on the ways in which Faulkner’s fiction “conducts an ongoing dialogue with the forces of modernization,” and in this novel in particular, the ways that he “draws on a sense of the seismic shifts in social and sexual mores, cultural forms, mass behavior, and economic relations” to which his life in Hollywood exposed him (60). Lurie asserts that the “Wild Palms” chapters, using a narrative voice that is almost always reporting on Harry Wilbourne’s perceptions, demonstrate for “readers what Faulkner wanted them to see about their own experience: the deadening, narcissistic prison of popular culture that refers consumers only to projections of their own desire” (160). Assessing the filmic elements of Faulkner’s construction of the novel, he argues that it plays on America’s love affair with cinematic love affairs. Drawing their Hollywood-style romance to its logical conclusions, Faulkner illustrates the hollowness of our cinematic fantasies by utilizing conventions of melodrama; in this case “the story of a ‘fallen’ woman who leaves a bourgeois marriage and her children to pursue passion, only to die a painful and graphically depicted death” due to her “misguided love” (146). In respect to the violent re-inscription of society’s gender norms, Diane Roberts declares that Charlotte’s decision to abandon her family life and run away with Harry “seems at first an iconoclastic bid for freedom and individuality, a triumph of the creative self, a vindication of desire,” yet by the end of the novel her story has been coopted: “the intolerable incongruity of a woman who tries to break free of motherhood, domesticity, sexual submission, even the womb itself, must be punished. Charlotte suffers a painful, messy, sordid, and significantly

‘female’ death in a failed abortion” (Roberts 207). Departing only slightly from Lurie and Roberts, I will discuss how Faulkner’s steamy tale of love on the run—complete with a strong female figure intent on defying restrictive sexual and gender expectations/performances as well as a pathetically weak male counterpart—critiques popular notions of sexual behavior by presenting a familiar plot but related in such a way to shift focus away from the doomed woman’s sinfulness onto the weakness and moral hypocrisy of the people surrounding her, including her lover. Charlotte’s rebellion ultimately ends in her death not because of her sinfulness as still-extant Victorian sexual morality would ordain it but, rather, because she is trapped in a society eager to display such notions of morality. As I discuss in the next segment of my critique, we note a disconnect between actual mores and morality and public mores/morality. That is, as he demonstrates with the middle-aged doctor and his wife at the beginning and ending of the novel, Faulkner is not bringing to light some set of unknown behaviors. Instead, he is pointing out the hypocrisy of a society that has repeatedly turned a blind eye toward those very behaviors in the name of economic gain and moral peace of mind.

Initiating his critique of mainstream notions of gender and sexuality, Faulkner first demonstrates what these notions are: In the opening chapter, he delineates the boundaries of socially-acceptable sexuality by attaching the narrative voice to a thoroughly unexceptional middle-class agent rather than either of the central characters. This agent is a white, forty-eight, married (though childless), property-owning, middle-income physician who graduated “nearer the foot of the class than the head though not at either” and inherited his father’s practice “losing nothing from it and adding nothing to it” (*IITFJ* 4). Further, the doctor stubbornly insists upon wearing a night shirt, “not



pajamas, for the same reason he smoked a pipe that he had never learned and knew that he would never learn to like” because his father taught him that “cigarettes and pajamas were for dudes and women” (ibid). It is clear that society’s attitudes may be changing, especially among younger generations, yet he and his set will adhere to respectability. Thus, the doctor is Faulkner’s stand-in for patriarchal, middle-aged, middle-class, white-dominated, generically-Christian America and its proclivities, or as Peter Lurie asserts, the doctor and his wife are precisely the kind of people Charlotte and Harry are trying *not* to be: “the conservative, ‘respectable’ couple who live in the passionless, sterile confines of marriage. As such, the older couple appears in the frame portions of ‘Wild Palms’ as an index of the sort of people who live narrowly and for whom the stimulations of genuine experience, whether it be in art, love, or food, are distasteful” (130). As the novel continues, we will witness their attempt at flight from this lifestyle.

Moreover, throughout these opening pages, the doctor’s musings on respectability likewise reveal the texture of contemporary sexual morality. Specifically, this sexual morality is informed by the Doctor’s Baptist faith, but the narrator notes that his faith is lived out “not with sincerity or pity but through duty” (*IIFTJ* 9). After Cofer, the leasing agent, rents one of the doctor’s beach cottages to Harry and Charlotte, he warns the doctor, ““She’s got on pants... not these ladies’ slacks but pants, man’s pants. I mean, they are too little for her in just exactly the right places any man would want to see them too little but no woman would unless she had them on herself. I reckon Miss Martha [the doctor’s wife] aint going to like that much”” (*IIFTJ* 6). Cofer adds, ““I reckon Miss Martha is going to have something that will set heavier on her stomach than them pants even. I dont think they are married”” (*IIFTJ* 7). This exchange is rather telling, both about

gender expectations and sexual morality. Cofer's warning, while directed at the doctor, actually concerns his wife's sensibilities. The warnings can be understood as "don't let your wife catch you enjoying this young lady's ass" and "don't let her find out the couple is renting-in-sin, or else she will kick them out." These warnings are accompanied by a healthy dose of wink-wink, nudge-nudge in his tone. It is clear from this conversation that, according to middle-class morality, Harry and Charlotte are living immodestly. Moreover, we see that modesty's burdens are largely placed upon middle-class women in addition to the burden of policing said modesty. There is no criticism for Harry for associating with a man-pants-wearing hussy who allegedly wants to be seen wearing these man-pants so that she might entice the male gaze. From the doctor's impatience at the conversation, it is clear that he is not particularly interested in the enjoyment that Cofer takes from gazing upon Charlotte, yet there is likewise no rebuke.

We also learn from this conversation, as well as other musings of the doctor, that as long as immorality is not spoken, then it can be ignored—it is only taboo if it is spoken aloud, even if everyone knows what's going on. Cofer claims to be able to "smell a husband" (*IIFTJ* 7), and thus he knows that Harry is not one, but so long as everyone keeps his mouth shut, no one has to lose out (whether on money, shelter, or enjoying Charlotte's shapely figure) in the exchange. The doctor's standard policy is to only rent the cottage overnight to strangers who were "formally professing to be man and wife... even though he knew better and knew that his wife knew better" (*IIFTJ* 16). If the situation is brought into the light, the doctor would be honor-bound to turn away paying customers. As the doctor and Martha discuss their tenants, they are very careful not to voice such moralistic concerns and therefore bring them into existence: "She did not say

‘They are not married’ though it was in both their minds. They both knew that, once it was said aloud between them, he would turn the renters out” (*IIFTJ* 8). While they are genuinely concerned for Charlotte and Harry’s wellbeing (it would be un-middle-class American of them not to be), a large part of their motivation is that if they evicted the young couple from the bungalow, “he would feel conscience-bound to return the rent-money” (*ibid*). Because he feels he is showing benevolent mercy to the couple, the doctor feels betrayed when Harry does make it clear that he and Charlotte aren’t married, inwardly railing, “*So Cofer was right he thought. You are not married. Only why did you have to tell me so?*” (*IIFTJ* 15, italics original). The doctor and his wife, as our exemplars of American middle-class morality and modesty, prefer to quietly go along under that pretense that everything is on the up-and-up so long as everyone else does so, and as we find as the plot progresses, this is the behavior that Charlotte and Harry spend the novel running from. At this stage in their relationship (we will soon learn that this is the end of Harry and Charlotte’s story, not the beginning), they have had to seek shelter in acceptable morality due to their circumstances, claiming to be married, yet as the novel progresses, their quest to avoid adhering to such a lifestyle propels them around the country, using the train to arrive at new stopping points that they hope will produce and preserve the love affair they crave.

Faulkner’s choice to make the narrator’s initial focus a doctor allows us to see that character as a sort of alternate-reality version of Harry Wilbourne. If Harry had finished his residency and become an M.D., his future may well have been quite identical to the unnamed doctor in this opening chapter. Of all the “Wild Palms” chapters, only this first one features a narrative voice that accompanies the middle-aged doctor’s

perspective and inner monologue; the rest focus on Harry's interiority. However, this is not the last we see of the older physician. We return to the opening scene near the novel's conclusion. The doctor's horror at Harry's crime (not only performing an abortion but also performing a surgery without having a piece of paper declaring his eligibility to perform such a task) mirrors Harry's staunch refusal to perform an abortion in the first place, though Charlotte eventually prevails upon him to do so (twice). Further, when Faulkner revisits the good doctor and his wife, readers will again note that sexual morality itself is not nearly so important as its appearance. In fact, later, when the doctor holds a gun on Harry as they await the police, Miss Martha, Cofer's supposed bastion of morality, suggests to her husband that he give the young couple whatever aid he can so that Charlotte can die someplace that's not their property. She doesn't express her concerns precisely thus, but how can they show their face in church amidst the scandal of everyone knowing they rented a cottage to an unmarried couple, and if Charlotte dies there, everyone will know, and everyone will talk.

After establishing acceptable standards of morality, Faulkner backtracks to the first meeting of the two lovers. When Harry meets Charly, she is first and foremost a commodity whose exchange value was to be examined and calculated exactly as he had just been examining one of the host's paintings: "for a moment he thought she was fat until he saw it was not fat at all but merely that broad, simple, profoundly delicate and feminine articulation of *Arabian mares*—a woman under twenty-five, in a print cotton dress, a face which laid no claim even to prettiness and wore no makeup save the painted broad mouth" (*IIFTJ* 33, italics added). Her objectification and comparison to a horse illustrate her as a good to be consumed with her value tied to age and beauty; at first

blush, then, she's not worth all that much. Her first question to him is "You haven't decided yet, have you?" (ibid). She is discussing the painting, but the question covers both it and herself. To this point, there is little abnormal about their courtship. She is only another woman at a party who he will decide to pursue or not, but before long, Faulkner's tale strays well outside the bounds of gender norms. Rather than being the pursuer, Harry will be pursued, for he is likewise a commodity to be consumed. As Godden elaborates, by setting aside money for his medical training when Harry was an infant, his father's will "ensures that from the tenderest age, its beneficiary has been stamped and certified as an investment", and that he has "spent his life transforming himself into a cash flow problem" (187). He soon learns that she is a married mother of two, which signals the end of the pursuit for Harry, who is just trying to be "good" and take care of his responsibilities. Nevertheless, Charlotte instead decides to pursue him, demanding that he come to dinner at her house, even offering to pick him up from work (*IIFTJ* 36). This alone promises to readers, eager for a risqué tale "From the Writer of Sanctuary" as the book's cover proclaims, that the story (as if we didn't already know from the previous chapter) will be one of salacious melodrama. Charlotte refuses to be constrained by the public's mores; she will wear the pants (literally) in the relationship, taking on the traditionally male roles of pursuer and even driver, and as the story progresses, in later chapters she becomes breadwinner in the relationship.

Faulkner spends little time cutting to the chase, chronicling their budding relationship in a few pages, and in so doing, we soon witness the essentiality of the railroad to their relationship when they board the train in search of a new love life in Chicago. Before that elopement, however, they attempt an ill-fated tryst at a low-budget

hotel down by the train station, but Charlotte calls it off because, she says, “the value of love is the sum of what you have to pay for it and anytime you get it cheap you have cheated yourself” (*IIFTJ* 41). This is the first, though certainly not the last, time we encounter Charlotte and Harry discussing love as a commodified experience. Even though Charlotte especially seeks a love affair that breaks from the conventions of modern capital (not that she would phrase it that way), she is trapped in an exchange framework unable to see another way. Citing Wolfgang Haug, Godden declares, ‘The social worlds they seek to leave are pervaded by... ‘the viewpoint of exchange,’ in which persons and things are considered mainly as means to money” (205). Their first cheap attempt at lovemaking at a hotel next to the train station won’t do; however, they will soon be on the train itself and then their love can be consummated—but not until after Charlotte is handed over with all due decorum.

They abscond by train for Chicago—but not without Rat’s blessing. Rat, or Francis Rittenmeyer, is Charlotte’s husband. Their elopement (or anti-elopement since Charlotte and Harry try to insist on breaking from traditions and customs in their relationship) is Charlotte’s plan. Because she possesses a strong will, which sets her apart from her contemporary heroines of Hollywood melodrama who exist largely to be saved and owned by men, she will not try to slip away in the night, for that would cheapen their love. Instead, she tells Rat from the beginning—before the relationship is even a relationship—what she’s doing. And, he carries her luggage to the train. He doesn’t mind losing her, but he will not give her a divorce, ostensibly on religious grounds. Yet, we witness precious few instances of Rat living any sort of sincerely held faith, thus we can assume that his refusal is simply based on his social milieu.

Strength and independence aside, Charlotte is still biologically a woman living in middle-class America, so she is excluded from the next stage of her love story. With a formality “almost identical with the conventional mumbo-jumbo of father and bride at a wedding in church” Rat confers ownership of his wife to Harry (*IIFTJ* 46). Rat and Harry leave Charlotte in her seat and exit to the smoking car so that he can formally hand off possession of her as if she were any other railroad parcel. Rat gives him a warning to do right by her, and in place of a dowry, hands Harry a check “payable to the Pullman Company of America and endorsed in the corner in red ink: *For one railroad ticket to New Orleans, Louisiana*” should she change her mind and come back to him (*IIFTJ* 48). Rat departs at the next station, and Charlotte considers leaving with him. Instead, to steel her nerve, she orders Harry to rent out a private drawing room: She must invest in their affair—have some skin in the game, so to speak—because she’s sure if Rat gets back on the train and asks her to come back, she will, so as the train hurtles northward to Chicago, the two lovers consummate their union so that they can be “wholly lost” together (*IIFTJ* 50).

As this flight to Chicago plays out, we see the male characters’ obsession with formality and respectability—Faulkner never grants entrance to Charlotte’s thoughts; they are always filtered to the reader through Harry or a narrative voice closely allied to him. Rat is nearly shaking during the commodity hand-off, and Harry cannot tell whether it is with rage, despair, or both. Still, they must keep up appearances in public, even the smoking car. On their way to the drawing room, Harry is certain that he and Charlotte “must have disseminated an aura of unsanctity and disaster like a smell” as they pass the other passengers (*IIFTJ* 51), the same self-awareness he exhibited in the low-rent hotel

earlier in the chapter. Whether or not anyone else on the train does actually notice him, Harry must maintain outward appearances. A few chapters later, Harry again returns to a preoccupation with respectability, this time putting it on Charlotte. Hesitant to let go of traditional gender and sexual norms, he presumes that she, like all women (he reckons) aims to “*take the illicit love and make it respectable, take Lothario himself and trim the very incorrigible bachelor’s ringlets which snared them into the seemly decorum of Monday’s hash and suburban trains*” (*IIFTJ* 70, italics original). For Harry, the train exists initially as a marker of respectability, despite the fact that they have just used it so they can leave their respectable lives behind. The value of the train as an arbiter of morality will resurface later when Harry describes their decision to leave Chicago; only then, it will be their friend McCord who reestablishes the link between trains and respectability.

As pursuer, Charlotte initiates their non-standard relationship, but Harry takes a while to break free of Victorian ideals (and, in truth, never fully does so). As they move into their first apartment, he is able to contemplate her position—that she wants to be free of social norms that dictate that her place as a woman is to be a wife and mother—though he quickly lapses, returning to a view of her as a sort of wife without the marriage. A few weeks later, she returns with money from selling figurines she’d made to a department store; she tries to hand him the money and her “unwinking yellow stare” makes him come to terms with his dishonesty in interacting with her—that is, pretending to be okay with the unconventional nature of their relationship; he felt caught like a bug in an acid “in which all the dross and small lying and sentimentality dissolved away” (*IIFTJ* 75). She questions rhetorically, ““You don’t like the idea of your woman helping to support



you, is that it?” (ibid). While the concept of a working middle-class woman wouldn't be unheard of for Faulkner's contemporary readers, it was understood that men were to be the providers of the family, so it takes a while before Harry can adjust. However, this becomes the price that he will pay (the exchange value) for his sexual relationship with Charlotte. For them, the normal life of husband and wife cannot suffice. Just after they move into their first apartment, he realizes: “*She chose a place not to hold us but to hold love; she did not just run from one man to another; she did not merely mean to swap one piece of clay she made a bust with for another*” (IIFTJ 72, non-italics added). Rat was a bust, not in the artistic sense but in the colloquial. He was not going to give her what she wanted. He was a man she married and had children with because marrying and having children were what a woman did with her life. She learned later, however, that that could not satisfy her. The first attempt at love (wife and motherhood) was a bust, so she'd try again, her children being the price she would be willing to pay for her second chance. In her elopement to Chicago with Harry, she is not simply trying to “swap” one man for another; she seeks an upgrade in the emotional value derived from her lover.

As noted earlier, Harry initially forges a link between trains and respectability, and this link is reestablished by their friend McCord, who scoffs at their plan to leave Chicago to live “in a mine shaft in Utah, without a railroad or a telephone or even a decent can” (IIFTJ 111). A native of Chicago, the “Player with Railroads and the Nation's Freight Handler” according to Carl Sandburg, it is natural that McCord would feel this way. His comment is made to Harry in the bar at the train station in yet another conversation between two men concerning Charlotte's future that is carried out in her absence. In their conversation, we can understand the station functioning in the real and

symbolic realms. In realistic terms, the train leaves the station as the physical movement from Chicago to Utah (or New Orleans to Chicago, as in the other instance). Moreover, the train and station highlight the life choices the couple has made to continuously leave their old routines behind when they get in the way of the love they seek. When the train takes them westward, the couple is knowingly exchanging a more comfortable lifestyle for a Utah mine shaft. They use railroad mobility to keep their love affair one jump ahead of reality, for their love is constantly in danger of being snuffed out: As Charlotte declares, “it’s got to be all honeymoon, always. Forever and ever, until one of us dies. It cant be anything else. Either heaven, or hell: no comfortable safe peaceful purgatory between for you and me to wait in until good behavior or forbearance or shame or repentance overtakes us” (*IIFTJ* 71). Harry tells McCord that they had fallen out of honeymoon and into a rut. As Matthews notes, their “love nest [has degenerated] into a mere replication of the ’bourgeois standard’ of marriage” (72). Rather than clandestine lovers, they had come to see each other merely as husband and wife—Monday’s hash and suburban trains again—but this time it had been Harry who made the realization (when Charlotte comes home with a full-time job), so he takes action.

As he tells McCord, he had twice caught himself thinking “I want my wife to have the best’ exactly like any husband with his Saturday pay envelope and his suburban bungalow full of electric wife-saving gadgets and his table cloth of lawn to sprinkle on Sunday morning that will become his actual own provided he is not fired or run down by a car in the next ten years” (*IIFTJ* 112). He knows that Charlotte does not want a husband, for she has even chastised him earlier, “If it was just a successful husband and food and a bed I wanted, why the hell do you think I am here instead of back there where

I had them?” (IIFTJ 99). In forging ahead with the Utah plan, the narrator presents Harry as taking action to save their love affair, though, of course, the reader can readily draw the conclusion that he is deceiving himself since he has urged Charlotte quit a full-time job so that he, himself, can be their provider and reestablish gender norms. Even if that is the case, Charlotte acquiesces, choosing to see the situation as Harry sees it. For their love to survive, for them to reap the benefits of their sacrifices, so they can *be* together, “not just to eat and evacuate and sleep warm so we can get up and eat and evacuate in order to sleep warm again” (IIFTJ 101) as Charlotte explains it, they must leave the comfort of Chicago. As Matthews notes, their “voyage of liberation” has failed “to locate a sanctuary where passion may be purified of modern decadence” so they must “turn their backs on money culture just as they defy sexual mores” (72) and hop a train out of Chicago just as they left New Orleans before.

When the lovers arrive at the mine, we learn that McCord was somewhat mistaken about the lack of railroads, for the mine is served by “a dummy engine with neither head nor rear and three cars and a cubicle of a caboose containing mostly stove” (IIFTJ 151). However, if the train is any indication, McCord’s lack of respect for the place is warranted. The underpowered “dummy engine”—a steam engine covered over with a wooden frame to resemble a streetcar—is just barely sufficient for the mine’s needs. Likewise, the accommodations are also quite spartan: Upon arrival, the lovers find themselves rooming with “Buck” Buckner, the manager, and his wife Bill/Billie<sup>2</sup> in a one room sheet-metal cabin. For Buck and Billie, that pathetic dummy engine has brought a

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<sup>2</sup> Charlotte perhaps provides insight into Faulkner’s opinion of himself as a writer of both Hollywood schmaltz and smutty melodrama: Like Mrs. Buckner, Faulkner’s friends and family called him Bill/Billy; Charlotte declares “it’s a perfect whore’s name” (IIFTJ 150).

solution to a problem. It has become apparent before Harry and Charlotte arrive that Callaghan, the owner of the mine, has no intention of sending any more payroll; he just needs the mine running so he can keep selling the stock (apparently, the last expense he pays for the mine is actually Harry and Charlotte's railroad fare to Utah). Thus, the Buckners need to find work elsewhere. However, a complication has arisen in their plan; Billie is pregnant. The train bringing them a less-than-professional physician perfectly suits their needs. They ask Harry to perform an abortion, but he refuses until finally Charlotte prevails upon him to do it so that they can finally have the cabin to themselves (i.e. get back to love-making). The procedure is a success, and in a few days, the last they see of Buck and Billie is the little dummy engine retreating back down the line. We learn later that it is this very afternoon when Charlotte becomes pregnant, and as we know from the first chapter, Harry will not be as successful with Charlotte's abortion as he was with Billie's. Charlotte will not allow Victorian family norms to overtake their relationship, so she demands that Harry give her an abortion. Charlotte, we already know, will die as a result of Harry's botched operation, and though the narrator never tells us of their path's crossing, Harry finds himself, like the tall convict, a resident of Parchman Farm, and like the tall convict, happy to be immobile.

Before her passing, however, the couple will first take a second train ride out of New Orleans. Charlotte has come home to give Rat the cashier's check and to say goodbye (they have already discerned that Harry has botched the operation). We don't get to witness this exchange; Faulkner only provides us with the hypothetical melodramatic conversation—a scene of “high drama and moral conflict [that] conforms to standards of melodramatic content, affirming the Victorian sanctity of the family and

punishing the reprobate mother” that plays out against Harry’s eyelids as he daydreams in the park (Lurie 150). As Lurie asserts, the language used by Charlotte in Harry’s fantasy movie is unlike her normal language, and when he tries to push this narrative upon her during the cab ride to the train station, she cuts him off. In melodramatic fashion, he solemnly promises to hold her until the end. She scoffs at this, demanding, ““Don’t be a fool now. There’s no time now. You’ll know in time. Get to hell out, do you hear?”” (IIFTJ 191). Nevertheless, he opts for the punishment he feels he deserves for all of his transgressive behavior—even when Rat himself shows up and tries to help him to escape to Mexico and, after the trial, offers him cyanide. Harry famously decides “*Between grief and nothing I will take grief*” (IIFTJ 273, italics original) as he contemplates his lonely future because in the over-simplified world of melodrama, those are his only two options.

Considering the novel’s end, it might be easy to see the train, which has been integral to Charlotte and Harry’s affair, in a negative light since it leads Charlotte down the path toward death and Harry to imprisonment, but despite this, they are not the victims of the railroad; rather they use it toward their own ends of personal fulfillment. They are more victims of an unscrupulous robber-baron, bad decision making, and Harry’s ineptitude than the train and its mobility. Furthermore, we might be tempted to believe that Charlotte’s story couldn’t have ended any other way because Victorian morality demands that she pay the ultimate price, yet the novel clearly attributes her death to Harry’s bungling, not some prescribed punishment for bad behavior. This is especially true when we consider Buck and Billie get to live happily ever after when the train delivers them from the mine, despite their own non-standard gender roles and illegal decision to abort their child.

To contrast the doomed lovers of “The Wild Palms,” Faulkner presents the “The Old Man” chapters, featuring the tall convict who has found himself in Mississippi’s notorious Parchman Prison for believing that dime novels could lay out a perfect plan for robbing a train (21). As it turns out, these mass media fictions proved quite unrealistic, leading him to feel betrayed, for he was “captured as soon as he entered the express car” (ibid). When the Mississippi River (“the Old Man”) floods in 1927, he and his fellow inmates are coscripted to assist in the relief efforts. His task, straight from a melodrama, is to rescue the damsel in distress—a pregnant woman who has been caught up in the flood and trapped in a tree. Readerly expectation might be that the two will fall in love and escape together, and in the earlier chapters, it remains to be seen whether this will end in romance or tragedy. Faulkner upsets these expectations, however. The woman has no interest in romance and can rescue herself, thank you very much. Meanwhile, the tall convict’s aspirations prove much less melodramatic—he just wants to return to prison where he can return to being quite comfortable in his immobility. The unnamed pregnant woman is presented as a foil for Charlotte while the tall convict is a foil for Harry. The pregnant woman doesn’t want to be rescued by a knight errant, though she finds herself in a position in which she has no choice. Simultaneously, Charlotte is not interested in a rescuer, she wants an equal partner; she finds herself relying on Harry to be this partner, and each time he seems to let her down, culminating in a botched abortion and a sentimental refusal to save himself despite her insistence that he do so. Even though he is enamored with taboo gender and sexuality roles, Harry repeatedly demonstrates that what he really wants is stasis. Charlotte’s story ends in melodramatic tragedy because she tried to be an independent actor in a society that enforces conformity to public gender and sex

mores while the pregnant woman is more successful, though we never learn quite how her story ends.

Each portion of the novel presents a conflicted image of the railroad as both bringer of mobility and agent of exchange value. The tall convict's primary interactions with trains involve attempted robbery so that he can buy presents for his girlfriend and later being packed onto a train with other convicts so that they can be shipped to the broken levee. He and his fellow inmates legitimately fear that they will drown in the process, for they know that they are deemed expendable. Charlotte and Harry repeatedly rely upon trains to take them away from the social norms, but each time they have to pay a price, one they are always willing to pay. Charlotte especially is liberated by the train, which carries her away from marriage and motherhood in New Orleans and allows her to become a lover, an artist, and a provider. She escapes society's expectations of her as a woman with a working womb; the railroad allows her to transcend gender and become both a woman and a person. For Harry, the benefits may be less dramatic, but in the middle-age doctor from the opening chapter, we see a vision of the life Harry could have had, one of hypocrisy driven by outward appearance rather than genuine feelings. Like Charlotte, he is never ever able to break free of an exchange value society, yet he is oddly content with his ending as evidenced by his declaration about grief.

## Chapter 2: Blood on the Tracks: The Railroad and Narratives of Progress in Faulkner

Walking the rails of the Yoknapatawpha railroad, readers will constantly encounter blood on the tracks. That is, Faulkner repeatedly associated the railroad with death—not solely, to be sure, but repeatedly. Within the chronicles of Yoknapatawpha, we find numerous examples of death and devastation that are intrinsically coupled to trains. While usually, the railroad is merely present, sparking implied connections to whichever calamity it might oversee, occasionally, it takes on a causal role. For instance, in chapter sixteen of *The Town*, we read about Old Hait who collaborated with I.O. Snopes in a scheme of driving mules onto the train tracks and suing the railroad when the mules are obliterated by passing locomotives. Unfortunately, Old Hait accidentally finds himself obliterated right along with them. That chapter is a reworking of the short story “Mule in the Yard,” which is itself a reworking of an anecdote from *Flags in the Dust* about a horse trader who “was constantly engaged in litigation with the railroad company over the violent demise of his stock by its agency” (*Flags* 127)<sup>1</sup>. In each iteration, however, we find the railroad a force of violent destruction. Furthermore, as we search the annals of Yoknapatawpha, we can uncover numerous destructive undertones caused by, or at least connected with, the railroad’s presence. Some of these, such as the demise of Old Hait, are more obvious than others.

*Flags*, the first of Faulkner’s Yoknapatawpha novels, provides both inconspicuous and outright ruminations on the dangers of progress, specifically from the railroad. In the middle of the novel, readers meet young John Henry, whose name, of

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<sup>1</sup> Toni Morrison would rework this scenario in *Sula*; Sula’s grandmother sacrifices her leg to a passing train then sues the railroad, setting in motion the subsequent events of the narrative.



course, alludes to the legendary “steel-driver” John Henry, who achieved a pyrrhic victory over the forces of modernization when he was able to outwork a rudimentary steam drill only to die as a result of his exertions. John Henry is a figure intrinsically linked to America’s narrative of progress as well as the railroad. He would have been one of the multitudes of workers clearing the way for tracks to be laid so that the trains would be able to crisscross the nation. *Flags* briefly features a young African American by that name who rescues young Bayard from drowning as a result of one of his numerous automotive misadventures. John Henry’s father cautions against interfering with Bayard’s situation lest they get blamed for it and suffer the consequences (*Flags* 214-6). The scene featuring John Henry (who quickly disappears from the novel without incident) along with the scene featuring the demise of Bayard’s grandfather (also named Bayard) tie together catastrophe with both automobiles and trains. Later in *Flags*, a colossal statue of Colonel Sartoris watches over his son and grandson as the latter inadvertently causes his grandfather’s death. While young Bayard’s car spins out of control, “directly over them John Sartoris’ effigy lifted its florid stone gesture, and from among motionless cedars gazed out upon the valley where for two miles the railroad he had built ran beneath his carven eyes” (*Flags* 326). When the spinning car comes to a halt, we learn that old Bayard’s heart has given out. Meanwhile, the statue of the old colonel looks down impotently on the scene, a situation in which, if we follow the causal chain back far enough, we can find the old colonel complicit. The enormous statue in Faulkner’s novel is actually modeled after the mammoth grave marker of Faulkner’s own great grandfather, William Clark Falkner, who likewise brought the railroad to northern Mississippi, and who likewise died by the pistol of a former railroad business partner. In

both *Flags* and *The Unvanquished*, John Sartoris is murdered by Redlaw/Redmond (same person—Faulkner changed the name for the later novel), his partner in building north Mississippi's first railroad. While it brought progress to Jefferson, this progress was not without its costs—as we will see Lucius Priest meditating upon in *The Reivers*, Faulkner's final novel.

In addition to explicitly death-related scenes, we find a number of other troubling train associations. In *The Sound and the Fury*, Quentin spends his final day riding around in trains and trolleys (and obsessing over the color of fellow passengers) before committing suicide. As discussed in the previous chapter, *Sanctuary*'s Horace Benbow entertains rape fantasies wherein his teenage step-daughter is lashed down to a railcar. After his masturbatory fantasy, he decides to divorce his domineering wife, but instead, he takes the train back to her. His client is lynched while he awaits said train. Though only briefly portrayed on page 36 of *Sanctuary*, we find an act that is central to Temple Drake's thoughts throughout the sequel *Requiem for a Nun*: At least three times throughout *Requiem* (180, 235, 240), Temple holds up her decision to get off of the train to be the central event that has led to the deaths of her daughter and of her friend Nancy as well as it being the proof of her evil and her guilt. Temple asserts, "Because Temple Drake liked evil. She only went to the ball game because she would have to get on a train to do it, so that she could slip off the train the first time it stopped, and get into the car to drive a hundred miles with a man—" (*Requiem* 117). Furthermore, Temple declares herself guilty because she chose to stay with the murderer Popeye rather than to run to the nearest train station (121). In *As I Lay Dying*, the last glimpse we get of Darl Bundren has him riding the train to Jackson, MS where he will be committed to the state's mental

hospital. In *The Mansion* (1959), sequel to the aforementioned *The Town*, Faulkner repeatedly returns us to Mink Snopes, making his way home by train from the penitentiary, chapters that culminate in Mink murdering his brother Flem, the central figure of the Snopes trilogy. This catalog of rail-related catastrophe is by no means exhaustive.

It's not that Faulkner never portrays the railroad in a positive light; he does this just as frequently throughout his novels. However, these examples cited above highlight the ambiguous nature of the railroad in both the world of Yoknapatawpha and Faulkner's lived experience of modernity. As Alan Trachtenberg noted, the train "proved to be a complex symbol," bringing destruction along with creation, poverty along with progress, thus "arousing hope and gloom in the same minds" (38). Throughout Faulkner's novels, we find him resisting narratives of progress and otherwise exploring the ambiguity of so-called progress.

Faulkner was born into a nineteenth century that boasted intellectuals ranging from Hegel to Mill to Spencer espousing a philosophy of human progress. Karl Marx, for instance, borrowed Hegel's dialectical process to propose a proletariat revolution that would overthrow capitalism and lead to a more just and equal human society (obviously, this is grossly oversimplifying Marxism). Faulkner came of age in Roosevelt and Taft's progressivist America that anticipated ever greater heights for American society (in military, industrial, and economic might). As a machine that helped to industrialize America, the train is indeed inextricably linked to the processes of modernization and modern conceptions of progress and prosperity, both for people and places. For example, in summing up Jackson, MS at the end of the second prologue in *Requiem for a Nun*, the

third attribute of the city, after only altitude and population, is the list of railroads serving it (*RN* 97), and the reader will understand this as a marker of the value of the city—the more important it is, the more plentiful its rail lines. Thus, railroads themselves often served as signifiers of progress. After Reconstruction, the Southern states east of the Mississippi River bore witness to a railroad boom as the number of track miles expanded from about 11,000 in 1870 to 13,000 in 1880 to 28,000 in 1890 (Woodward 120). “Railroad building inflamed the imagination and hopes of whole states and regions” (ibid), fueling an industrial revolution in the decades between Reconstruction and Faulkner’s birth. And while he was not speaking particularly about the South, Leo Marx’s comments about industrialization are particularly apt here: “The sensory attributes of the engine—iron, fire, steam, smoke, noise, speed—evoke the essence of industrial power and wealth” (374). In this statement, Marx is not discussing railroad/locomotive engines—yet neither is he *not* discussing them: They were a central component of the industrialization that was intruding upon Thoreau’s and Hawthorne’s (among other nineteenth century authors) idyllic pastoral America. While Marx’s *The Machine in the Garden*—published two years after Faulkner’s death—won’t be making more of an appearance in this chapter, I will be carrying out a similar operation as I demonstrate the tension evident within Faulkner’s novels related to American ideals of progress. In addition, Faulkner is occasionally guilty—like Thoreau in Marx’s text—of portraying the railroad as an agent of what we might call “bad modernism;” that is, modernization as a force of destruction and ruination rather than progress (thus leading some critics to suggest that he was obsessed with some nonexistent idyllic past).

In discussing how to frame the history of twentieth-century economics, E. Roy Weintraub notes the tendency toward “Whig-History,” or viewing history, science, and economics through the meta-narrative that “the march of progress leads us ever forward into a territory of greater truth and knowledge” (145). In both science and economics, he notes a tendency to tell “the story of economics in the twentieth century as a fable with a moral called ‘science produces progress’” (146). Weintraub admits that “[w]hile the idea of progress makes sense to economists, it is problematic to historians” (140); however, he adds that governments and non-governmental organizations have, “over the course of the century, increasingly spoken the language of economics” (ibid) and attributes similar conceptions to journalists (149).

Just as Weintraub warns his readers away from such interpretations, Faulkner, having witnessed two world wars and experienced the Great Depression, displays skepticism toward a metanarrative of human progress. Even beyond world-historical events, Philip Weinstein asserts, “neither Faulkner’s life nor his art featured progress. In his life he experienced, and in his art he explored, the unwanted ‘other’ of progress” (8). Further, Faulkner’s novels “complicate the tidier narrative of American exceptionalism, revealing the underweave of the American success story” (ibid). As I will discuss in this chapter, Faulkner’s career as a novelist commences with a chronicle of the ills of modernity in *Soldier’s Pay*, a novel which itself begins and ends with trains. A natural bookend to a discussion of Faulkner’s first novel is his final novel, *The Reivers*. However, a brief glimpse at *Go Down, Moses*, which features a bitter lament for the destruction of both a natural habitat and a way of life, will be helpful in setting up my arguments about *Reivers*. In *Moses*, readers find a narrow-gauge logging railroad serving

as the agent of the demise of the Big Woods and hunting camp. *Reivers* likewise notes the railroad as it comments upon the ravages of progress, but in this final chronicle of Yoknapatawpha, we find a revision of *Moses*' bitter response to modern progress.

### ***Soldiers' Pay and the Disruption of Progress***

An appropriate starting point for an examination of Faulkner's use of the railroad to question narratives of progress is his first novel, *Soldiers' Pay* (1926). In his debut novel, Faulkner begins to explore a number of themes that would come to define his fiction, including mobility, sexuality, gender, race, and ideas of progress (all subjects of my own study). The figure at the center of *Soldiers' Pay* is Lt. Donald Mahon (pronounced "man," a somewhat heavy-handed bid at allegory), one of the handful of soldiers to which the title specifically refers. Rather than the heroic flying ace familiar to American culture at the time, Faulkner presents readers with Mahon, who is "hideous, dying, and decidedly unromantic" (Dougherty 68). With Mahon, Faulkner presents an aviator who is physically present in his dashing uniform, but he is in all other ways absent; further, Faulkner "brings the damaged man home and makes us see the broken mind and body and watch his painful death" (Dougherty 81). Initially, he had been reported as killed in action during World War I, "a flashpoint for the way that the promise of modernity turned so deadly perverse" (Matthews 24). In sending the allegorical Mahon home to die in plain sight—a visual reminder that 20<sup>th</sup> Century America's promises of progress had fallen short—Faulkner demonstrates how fragile the ideals of patriotism and community are, even in the bulwark of small-town America.

Faulkner's choice of title for the novel is evocative of both the price paid by the war's combatants—in the realm of post-war fiction, life, potency, and mental health—

and the rewards awaiting the soldiers upon their return.<sup>2</sup> For instance, Mahon has paid the ultimate of ultimate prices—not only death, but death in a slow, undignified fashion. Rather than a fiery romantic death in aerial combat, he is mortally wounded and shipped back home to be a burden upon friends and family. Upon his arrival, his fiancée, disgusted by his wounds and horrified by her impending future, nevertheless assumes that her body is his just reward for heroic service. When she is ultimately relieved of that burden by another woman, she is still weighed down by the guilt of giving up on Mahon.

While Mahon is the novel's central figure, the central image is the "dreadful scar across his brow" (*SP* 19). Never described beyond the term "dreadful," Mahon's scar "symbolizes the traumatic effects of mass violence, disillusionment, and denial that marked a generation" (Matthews 24). The wound arouses a variety of negative responses. The first character to see it is Julian Lowe, a naïve flying cadet who is depressed that they have stopped the war on him (expressing sentiments similar to Faulkner's own when the war ended before he had finished flight school): "My God, he thought, turning sick" as he sees the scar (*SP* 19). Joe Gilligan, another soldier and as close as the novel has to a protagonist, rhetorically asks "My God, it makes you sick at the stomach, don't it? I wonder if he knows how he looks?" (*SP* 22). The most generous reaction is that of Margaret Powers, a war widow: "Oh, his poor terrible face" (*SP* 24). Margaret is contrasted by Cecily Saunders, Mahon's fiancée, who screams when she sees his face and crumples "like a stricken poplar" (*SP* 66). Mahon—man—has been scarred unto death by the Great War, and the world will never be the same again. Even worse, perhaps it will be the same as the war has acted not to change the world, just to reveal its true nature. It's

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<sup>2</sup> Numerous critics have discussed the significance of Faulkner's choice of title over the years, at least as far back as 1930 (Millgate 1-2) to as recently as Kimberly Dougherty's 2019 article in *The Faulkner Journal*.

difficult to look upon Mahon's scar without getting sick, so most of the characters are happier when Mahon is finally dead and buried so that life can get back to normal. For the soldiers, however, the "pay" they receive, the consequence of fighting in the war, is an inability to return to normal.

As Michael Millgate, John Matthews, and others have pointed out, in many ways *Soldiers' Pay* is rather typical post-war fiction, falling in line with precursors such as Dos Passos' *Three Soldiers* (1921) or Hemingway's *In Our Time* (1925) and *The Sun Also Rises* (1926). As Millgate discusses, "The ironic title of *Soldiers' Pay* associates it immediately with that bitter disillusionment which by 1926 had already become established as the dominant mood of American post-war fiction" (Millgate 1). Faulkner's contempt for the war is apparent throughout the novel, and this "hostility, of course, was entirely fashionable for a novelist starting out in the Twenties," representing an effort on the author's part "to enroll among the wastelanders" (2). Like other young moderns, Faulkner was following in the footsteps of Eliot, whose *Waste Land* (1922) "delineated a culture in fragmentary ruins, its myths shattered by modern ignorance, materialism, [and] abandoned faith" (Matthews 24). Further, Millgate suggests, it is possible to read the entire novel as "a kind of extended dramatic gloss on [*The Waste Land*'s] 'The Burial of the Dead'" (4). *Soldier's Pay* delivers Faulkner's vision of a wasteland—"a world emptied of significance and meaning—which by 1926, was already becoming familiar to readers of war fiction" (12).

As Matthews notes, Faulkner's work "described the seismic upheavals that formed our modern life," adding that his novels take up all the crucial element of the event of modernization (1,2), and there are few upheavals as seismic as World War I.



Within the novel, we find Faulkner expressing elation at the newness and liberation of post-war America (for instance, the author can write openly about sex and sexuality) as well as “bad modernism.” As Matthews enumerates, nearly every aspect of life, particularly in the South, was reinvented after World War I, including,

the arrival of automobiles and the building of new roads; the electrification of towns and farms; plentiful consumer goods and the growth of national merchandising through catalogues; the attempt to secure greater personal liberties by black Americans who had fought in Europe and realized that Jim Crow segregation was not universal; the extension of the ballot to women in 1920; a liberalization of sexual mores; the popularity of movies and a culture of celebrity; the power of national magazines and advertising; the modernization of education and public health; the development of local industries, the increase of wage labor, the decline of small farm ownership, and the inevitable rearrangements of wealth, social prestige, and power in communities of the Deep South. (20-21)

Indeed, it was a thrilling national moment for Faulkner to capture, and “Faulkner’s art responds to the sensation of exhilaration as much as to a sense of horror at these transformations” (20). Thus, while some of the novel’s characters partake of the exhilarations of love and sex and liquor, the world of the novel revolves around Donald Mahon, once a mythic hero and flying ace, as he completes his excruciatingly slow transformation from disgustingly disfigured veteran into a corpse.

While trains are mentioned throughout the novel (it was written and set in the 1920s when the railroad was still the primary agent of passenger travel), I will focus on two particular sections that most clearly convey Faulkner's excitement and unease with ideas of progress. These two sections include the novel's opening, which is set on a train and its penultimate scene, wherein Margaret Powers—now Mrs. Mahon and a double-widow—departs Charlestown.

The purpose of the opening scene is twofold: First, it establishes the general character of the returning servicemen, especially in terms of their interactions with civilians. Secondly, Faulkner uses the train's octopodian nature to suggest the diffusion of these servicemen<sup>3</sup> across the American landscape. Of course, in practice, these two purposes are intertwined. Introducing these soldiers on the train shows their clashing reentry into America's social and economic lifestyle, with their presence serving as a disturbance to everyone around them—a disturbance spreading across the nation as veterans find themselves trying to reacclimate themselves to civilian life and civilian life trying its best to reindoctrinate returning soldiers to peacetime.

Faulkner begins with Lowe stewing over his inability to fight and die—or at least receive a scar like the disturbing wound adorning Mahon's face. While his loss is cartoonish compared to Mahon's, he does nevertheless feel that he has experienced a disruption of his dreams because of the war's end. He soon encounters "Yaphank" (Joe Gilligan) and a nameless drunken soldier who literally force rotgut liquor down Lowe's throat, telling him, "Us soldiers got to stick together in a foreign country like this" (*SP* 9), adding "think of having to go to work again when you get home. Ain't war hell?"

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<sup>3</sup> Faulkner chooses to omit the very idea of servicewomen—though noncombatants, they were nevertheless present on the front as nurses and in other auxiliary capacities.

(Ibid). To be clear, the train is en route across New York state, so to express concern over being in a foreign country demonstrates—aside from drunkenness—the lack of congruity for combat vets attempting to re-enter civilian life, such as returning to work. As Lowe and Gilligan are becoming loudly acquainted, it is obvious that they are causing a disturbance, yet the conductor can do little but regard them in “helpless disgust” (*SP* 10) and plead with them: “‘Listen, you must stop this. You will ruin my train,’ adding to Lowe, the soberest of the group, ‘do something with them. I can’t bring a train into Chicago with the whole drunk army on it’” (Ibid). He is in a bind: He can’t have passengers causing an uproar, yet he must defer to patriotism and the uniform. Later, another passenger declares, “‘I’m certainly glad my boy wasn’t old enough to be a soldier,’” and it is clear that she means that she’s glad he didn’t go off and become a drunken hooligan (*SP* 15). As soon as the conductor expresses his concern, Gilligan announces, “‘this is the reward we get for giving our flesh and blood to our country’s need [...] suppose we hadn’t sprang to the nation’s call, do you know what you’d have? A train full of Germans’” (*SP* 10). The conductor, unable to quiet or soothe their bruised drunken egos, ultimately declares, “‘If we ever have another peace I don’t know what the railroads will do. I thought war was bad, but my God’” (*SP* 11). The last straw before he finally exits to alert the police is when he has to rally other passengers and the porter to help prevent the unnamed soldier from being shoved out of the train window by Gilligan and Lowe.

For the most part, the conductor is the sympathetic character here, but the scene raises valid questions about how to reintroduce these soldiers who have seen and experienced the worst of humanity in their service to the country yet who are still

creating havoc for the people around them. In terms of narratives of progress, we see Faulkner taking a closer look at national victory narratives. In times of war, the nation's propaganda machine declares that victory is certain if everyone does their part by joining up, pitching in, and buying war bonds. Faulkner takes up the question "then what?" The opening scene raises concerns about a return to normalcy that the novel ultimately answers in the negative: Mahon dies, his father, a minister, questions his faith, Margaret Powers/Mahon buries a second husband, and Joe Gilligan never attains the settled life he desires, getting drunk in lieu of getting on the next train to pursue the woman he loves.

When their train reaches Buffalo at the end of the first chapter, Gilligan and Lowe abandon the unnamed drunken soldier to his fate as they beat a hasty retreat to avoid the police. When their civilian watchmen ask if they're going to take their unconscious companion with them, Gilligan declares, "'Hell, no. I never seen him before. Let the porter sweep him out or keep him, whichever he likes'" (SP 16). Never mind that a few pages earlier, he declared that soldiers must stick together. Soon after, Gilligan sacrifices two civilians (now drunk thanks to Gilligan) to the police who are responding to the conductor's call. He uses the authority of the uniform to convince the police that the two civilians are in fact the drunks they're searching for. This is mere moments after one has pledged his loyalty to and appreciation for returning soldiers (SP 16-7). Faulkner here further deromanticizes the returning soldiers, demonstrating that wearing the uniform shouldn't innately connote goodness and trustworthiness, a theme that will resurface in numerous works, such as "Barn Burning" and *The Unvanquished*. Contrary to romantic ideals and patriotic propaganda, not all soldiers served for love of country; here Faulkner is echoing sentiments expressed by modernist poets including Owen, Eliot, and Pound.

As the soldiers race away from the train station (the scene of their crimes) and the first section of Chapter I comes to a close, the narrator takes a moment to meditate upon the approaching spring, apparently alluding to *The Waste Land*'s opening stanzas. Faulkner writes, "Caught both in the magic of change they stood feeling the spring in the cold air, as if they had but recently come into a new world, feeling their littleness and believing too that lying in wait for them was something new and strange. They were ashamed of this and silence was unbearable" (SP 17). Readers of modernist poetry (Faulkner's friends and the people he was trying to impress with his novel) would be reminded of *The Waste Land*'s opening lines discussing the cruelty of April (the month in which *Soldier's Pay* is set) whose fresh flowers deliver false promises of new growth in a dead land (Eliot 1-2). Eliot suggests that April is cruel because its "breeding," "mixing," and "stirring" promise new life and rebirth—new progress—but this promise will only be met with disappointment (2-4).<sup>4</sup> Even Lowe, young and immature as he is, feels ashamed for momentarily falling for spring's promises.

They are soon to meet the grievously wounded Donald Mahon on their next train, the character who most disturbs narratives of progress. His unexpected return home will bring momentary joy to his family, like that experienced by Gilligan and Lowe at the thought of spring, but soon that joy will be replaced by disgust and a sense of loss. When Mahon was believed dead in aerial combat overseas, he was a hero, but when the hero returns home to die, he becomes a burden and a monstrosity. Again, we see Faulkner mirroring other postwar writers in their morose disbelief in progress after such a devastating demonstration of the way that science and technology, long assumed to be

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<sup>4</sup> Obviously, there is a great deal more to Eliot's poem, but there is not space here to sufficiently tackle even the opening stanza.

propelling humanity to ever greater heights, were used to increase the brutality and efficiency of death.

In the first segment of chapter one, Faulkner presents some of the problems associated with the return of living soldiers. In the second segment, he presents the true “problem” of the novel, the return of the dying soldier. Faulkner begins this chapter by quoting a drill song: “Who sprang to his land’s defense / and has been sorry ever since? / Cadet!” (*SP* 18). While it introduces the second section, it likewise serves as a coda for the first. Upon reflection, we can see that the cadet’s sorrow cuts two ways: Yes, the hypothetical cadet might be regretting his decision to serve in the military now that he is enlisted (or, now that the war is over and he is back and having to reenter society). On the other hand, we see from the reactions of the civilians on the previous train, they are likewise rueful because now they must deal with these returning soldiers. Again, adding the train to this equation likewise demonstrates the diffusion of this phenomenon across the land. Taking a train is an everyday occurrence for these people, so presenting the novel’s opening movement (so to speak) on the train, he is able to imply a greater sense of the universality and everydayness of this return experience. No, not every returning soldier is a commotion-causing drunkard, but the social questions, such as “how do we re-enroll these men into society?” and “how do we show them adequate respect for their sacrifices?” must be addressed. After the cadet song, these themes are even repeated in the first conversation between Gilligan and Lowe.

After Gilligan and Lowe have come to realize that April is indeed the cruelest month, Faulkner deposits them onto another train. As they once again partake of railroad mobility, Gilligan warns Lowe that they “are getting among strangers now,” adding

““We don’t want to offend no savage customs”” (Ibid). This conversation occurs moments after they discuss the places their particular train might be going (they don’t actually know), including San Francisco, St. Paul or ““Omyhaw”” (Ibid). This lack of a clear destination helps to universalize their experience, for there are indeed soldiers on trains heading to all of these cities. Gilligan ultimately declares ““What I say is let’s have a look at this glorious nation *which we have fought for*”” (Ibid, italics added). Technically speaking, of course, Julian never fought for any country, and there is no mention throughout the novel of any combat Gilligan actually engaged in; nevertheless, the sentiment is the same. Immediately after those exchanges, we witness the porter refuse to bring them glasses to drink with, to which Gilligan responds, ““Well! What do you know about that? Ain’t that one hell of a way to treat soldiers? I tell you, general [speaking to Lowe], this is the worst run war I ever seen”” (SP 19). After returning to the “Cadet” song to further reinforce the difficulties that both the real and the novel’s fictional soldiers are encountering in their return stateside, Faulkner finally introduces Mahon and his scar. When the semiconscious Mahon proves able get them the drinking privileges they desire, Gilligan suggests, ““we better keep the lootenant [Mahon] with us, huh? Might come in useful”” (SP 20). This will soon lead to a commitment to getting Mahon back home to Charlestown, Georgia, a place just “like numberless other towns throughout the south” (SP 78), but this generous service is not borne of any fellow-feeling for another soldier or any sense of duty to the wounded—the types of considerations that Gilligan has been steadily complaining about his fellow Americans lacking. Rather, he hopes to spend more time with Margaret, who has likewise committed to taking Mahon home. As for her, the war widow is motivated by guilt: She barely knew Mr. Powers

when he left for war; she only married him because he insisted. Her guilty conscious stems from the fact that she was attempting to divorce him when he died in combat. She was freed of a spouse she didn't want, but at the cost of his life.

Faulkner never lets his readers fully sympathize with his soldiers (apart from Mahon). In the previous chapter, the soldiers are presented as a public nuisance. Here, Gilligan is presented as an opportunist, leading us to question his motives for joining the war in the first place (prefiguring, perhaps, Abner Snopes of "Barn Burning" and *Unvanquished*). Throughout the novel, Faulkner repeatedly skewers traditional American tropes of men and women in war time—the patriotic soldiers, the thankful civilian, the war widow, and the dutifully waiting fiancée (Mahon's fiancée, believing him dead, is happy to be free of the burden of marrying him or anyone else). As the various trains take Gilligan, Margaret, and Mahon to Charlestown with its town square, white columns, and Confederate monuments, Faulkner advances his critique from types of people (soldier, widow, etc.) toward a critique of mythic America. And with Mahon's arrival at the Charlestown station, "the ideal of tight-knit Southern community" will soon vaporize "before the severity of Mahon's disfiguration," having "devolved into a bad dream of superficial self-gratification" (Matthews 24). In Hemingway's "Big Two-Hearted River," the most canonical of the stories from *In Our Time*, Nick Adams arrives by train to find his destination, the town of Seney, MI, burned to the ground. We can interpret the town's demise as symbolic of the disappearance of a past way of life that Nick knew before the war. Donald Mahon's Charlestown presents a much more insidious experience for its returning soldiers. Not only is the town still there, but it's been doing fine without them—it might be better if they just didn't come home. In the initial train scenes from the



first few chapters, Faulkner uses a handful of veterans as stand-ins for the legions of returning soldiers heading to homes across the country so that he can express displeasure with America's self-congratulatory myths. As the novel progresses, we see Mahon's community become more honest and open with itself, if only temporarily. Nevertheless, when Mahon's body is in the ground, life can finally return to normal as Mahon's new widow, the erstwhile Mrs. Powers, boards a train out of Charlestown and the novel.

In the final rail-inflected scene of the novel—which features a call-back to Frank Norris's *The Octopus* (1901)—we once again witness the intersection of railroad mobility and the ambiguous nature of progress. To get the full story on progress here, readers must apprehend the scene beyond what Faulkner feeds us. Faulkner presents the scene largely from Joe Gilligan's perspective, and from that perspective, the railroad is the beastly entity detailed by Norris.

But before delving into that final railroad scene of *Soldiers' Pay*, let's briefly return to Faulkner's aforementioned use of the railroad as destroyer of livestock in *The Town* et al. These scenes are reminiscent of the livestock-murdering locomotive in the opening chapter of *The Octopus*. There, the train is first described as a beast in repose: "a huge freight engine...sat back upon its monstrous driving wheels, motionless, solid, drawing long breaths that were punctuated by the subdued sound of its steam-pump clicking at exact intervals" (Norris 18-19). By the end of that chapter, Norris describes how this brutish locomotive has erupted violently onto the countryside, laying waste to a herd of wayward sheep (foreshadowing the demise of the novel's ranchers at the hands of the railroad):

It was a slaughter, a massacre of innocents. The iron monster had charged full into the midst, merciless, inexorable. To the right and left, all the width of the right of way, the little bodies had been flung; backs were snapped against the fence posts; brains knocked out. Caught on the barbs of the wire, wedged in, the bodies hung suspended. Under foot it was terrible. (61-62)

After the train has passed, the vivid imagination of Presley, the novel's protagonist, can't help but revisit the horrific scene: "the galloping monster, the terror of steel and steam, [...]the symbol of a vast power, huge, terrible, flinging the echo of its thunder over all the reaches of the valley, leaving blood and destruction in its path" (Norris 62-63). While he doesn't try to reach Norris's vivid level of locomotive cruelty, Faulkner does echo *The Octopus* in his debut novel. He describes,

The locomotive appeared at the curve, plumed with steam like a sinister squat knight and grew larger without seeming to progress. But it was moving and it roared past the station in its own good time, bearing the puny controller of its destiny like a goggled greasy excrescence in its cab.

The train jarred to a stop and an eruption of white-jacketed porters (*SP* 212).

This scene occurs as the twice-widowed Margaret is about to break Gilligan's heart, boarding the train out of town and out of his life. As her train approaches, Faulkner provides an insight into Gilligan's trepidation. The train, then, becomes a sinister knight who has the boldness ("brass") Gilligan feels he's lacking (*SP* 211). The engineer is dehumanized, becoming a greasy pimple on the knight's face. The porters erupt out of a

gas shell like that which soldiers would have encountered in the trenches in Europe during the war, their efforts to take Margaret's luggage reminiscent of a gas attack taking Gilligan's comrades in arms.

Gilligan's fears resemble Presley's, though Faulkner spares the graphic details. Likewise, in *The Town* and the other works using the livestock-massacre trope, he injects humor instead of Norris's pessimism. Faulkner mentions that the remains of Old Hait had to be sorted out from those of the slaughtered mules, but that is the extent of his description (*Town* 233). As his writing career advanced, this particular scene from *Soldiers' Pay* proved somewhat of an outlier. He rarely asks readers to view locomotives as possessing an imminent threat of bodily harm. When danger is clearly present, it is usually the fear that "progress" will destroy nature (as we will see with *Go Down, Moses* and *Reivers*) in contrast to Norris's fear that corporate greed would destroy the working man.

For Gilligan, the train has become a monstrous nemesis, taking his lover away with its power and even a touch of duplicity. After this sinister knight arrives at the station so that it can abscond with Margaret, she invites Gilligan to participate with her in the freedom afforded by the railroad. For now, she is bound for Atlanta, a city built by railroad mobility, but then to points unknown. Gilligan refuses. After his experiences abroad in the war and now in Charlestown, he wants to settle down, to stop moving. As other passengers filter on and off the train around them, Margaret asks Gilligan to come with her, and his hopeful response is "'To a minister?'" (*SP* 212). As he helps her to her seat, she insists that they can just be together, but he declares, "'No, no. I can't do it that way. You know I can't'" (*SP* 213). Though a wandering ne'er-do-well at the novel's

commencement, Gilligan's experiences in Charlestown have driven him toward traditionalism—the prewar American ideal of a family and a stable home, the ideal sold to millions of American consumers through mail-order catalogs and advertisements.

After living in Charlestown for the last month and watching the saga of small-town life play out—despite its ups and downs—that's the life that Gilligan desires. Whether he could articulate it or not, he is very much like young Cadet Lowe; he envies the corpse of Donald Mahon: He had it all—a beautiful wife, a loving family, a hero's death, and a town to mourn him. But now, it seems the world is moving on too quickly. As he ushers Margaret onto the train, they pass by Cecily and her new husband already back from their honeymoon. Margaret attempts to point to them—a couple who married for sex but who are miserable now—as a cautionary tale, but Gilligan won't acknowledge this as his own future with Margaret. She tries again to “seduce” Gilligan into coming with her unmarried; instead they kiss goodbye (Ibid).

As soon as he exits the train, he has a moment of clarity, wondering, “But why not? he thought with cinders under his feet, why not take her this way? I could persuade her in time” (Ibid). He leaps back onto the train but cannot find her. He convinces himself that she has changed her mind as well, and so he exits the now-moving train. When he looks at the departing train's rear platform, he finally spots her, waving a last goodbye. In vain, he runs “after the arrogant steel thing,” but he is no match for the sinister knight's speed and power (Ibid). Weeping with anger and despair, he watches as she becomes “smaller and smaller with the diminishing train that left behind a derisive whistle blast and a trailing fading vapor like an insult, moving along twin threads of steel out of his

sight and his life” (*SP* 214). As Margaret departs, we once again witness Norris’s train—the personified evil force that relishes the pain it causes.

In a few more pages, the novel will be over, and it might be perfectly reasonable to imagine Gilligan pursuing Margaret to Atlanta, but the line “out of his sight and his life” is fairly definitive. He does not go buy a train ticket; instead, he gets drunk while half-baking a soon-abandoned plan to pursue her. The train has taken his lover away from him. She’s moved on to a new life, but Gilligan is unable to do the same. At the station, she had asked Gilligan what difference it really makes if they’re married or not, and he responded, ““Why, none, if it was just your body I wanted. But I want—— I want—— ”” (*SP* 212). When asked what he does want, he cannot provide an answer. Earlier in the scene, there were literal cinders under his feet—the natural result of the steam train’s power source. Reflecting on the failed love affair, we note metaphorical ashes under Gilligan’s feet. He blames the train for taking his lady away, but there doesn’t seem to be a scenario in which Margaret will bend to his unvoiced wish to have a more permanent possession of her (settling down and raising a family). Margaret offered him a new possibility, but he has retreated to tradition. The narrator doesn’t specifically call out Gilligan for the end of their possibilities; of course there is no line that says, “Gilligan was afraid of progression in sex and gender roles.” And yet, the ashes are under his feet; Margaret lovingly waves goodbye as she progresses to a larger city and a different future (which may or may not be brighter than what she’s already known).

If we take up the scene from Margaret’s perspective, we find a different narrative and differing ideas of progress and mobility. She has no reason to stay in Charlestown, where she has just buried her second dead husband. She warns Gilligan, ““Bless your

heart, darling. If I married you you'd be dead in a year, Joe. All the men that marry me die, you know'" (SP 212). Certainly, there's some hedging on her part, some bending of the truth to make it easier on him. All men die, thus any man that marries her will die. However, what she isn't saying is that marriage is death to her. She married her first husband because he was going to war; she was planning on divorcing him when he was killed in action. She married the nearly-dead Donald Mahon as an easy favor to his family and the town's ideals. He had already since lost consciousness of the outside world before their wedding. For her, marriage is a tie that binds the dying and the dead. She doesn't want that for herself or for Gilligan. The cataclysmic war has destroyed the old ways of life and old ideas of progress, yet it has also freed her. She has likewise allowed herself to be free, unlike Cecily who bowed to small-town mores and married the first man she had sex with, bringing joy to neither of them.

Instead, what she wants is a life of possibility. In Margaret, we see an early prototype of Charlotte Rittenmeyer of *The Wild Palms*. She doesn't want marriage, but she does want to be with Gilligan "just as [they] are" so that "when we get fed up all we need do is wish each other luck and go our ways" (Ibid). He continually demands the long-term commitment to a traditional life (that would entail for her a life as a housewife with few other possibilities). She apologizes that she can't be who/what he wants her to be, adding "'I'd like to make you happy for a short time, if I could. But I guess that's not in the cards, is it?'" (SP 213). She has tried marriage, and she didn't enjoy it, so she feels no reason to try again.

In this final train scene, Faulkner allows the reader to choose a side in this failed love. Gilligan is, admittedly, easy to criticize for his inaction especially after Margaret

leaves and he opts for drunkenness and brawling instead of racing after her. Nonetheless, he represents the force of tradition; he would like to settle down and rebuild life in the old ways. In fact, it wouldn't take much of a stretch to place him with the Vanderbilt Fugitives taking a stand for agrarian life and the plantation ideal. As the novel opens, Gilligan is enjoying a drunken jaunt across the country as he makes his way home from the war, but when those wild oats are sewn, he aims to settle down with the woman he loves. For him, the progress afforded by mobility is a threat to his happiness. Yes, he could chase after Margaret, but to what end? She's never going to want what he wants. On the other hand, it is easy for present day readers to side with Margaret as her words tend to reflect modern-day rules of engagement. For his contemporary readers, she, like Temple Drake, Caddy Compson, Linda Snopes, or Charlotte Rittenmeyer, represented a new progression in women's liberation, both sexual and social. And, like these other Faulknerian heroines, Margaret uses mobility, specifically mobility borne of the railroad, to enact her liberation. *Soldiers' Pay* does not necessarily insist that one side is stronger, better, or more correct than the other; instead, Faulkner is depicting a modern situation in the aftermath of a life-changing, utterly cataclysmic war that arose from the promises of technological progress. The novel, like so many modernist works, depicts America in crisis. It suggests that Joe Gilligan's ideal of American life is waning, perhaps to be replaced by Margaret's life of liberation and heightened mobility. Faulkner is not willing to suggest that this replacement is positive or negative.

## **A Dingy Harmless Snake in the Big Woods: *Go Down, Moses* and the Destructive Nature of Progress**

In contrast to the vast bulk of criticism that generally ignores Faulkner's use of the railroad in his texts, *Go Down, Moses* has drawn an array of rail-related responses. This is perhaps because, as Joseph R. Millichap asserts, "no [other] text in the Faulkner canon is more profoundly focused on the railroads in its landscape" (48). While she only discusses the novel briefly, one of the more well-known critics to discuss the railroad in the novel is Patricia Yaeger in *Dirt and Desire* (2000). Here she contrasts the novel with Hurston's *Jonah's Gourd Vine* (1934). Yaeger argues that the train "becomes an emblem of the disappearing 'wholeness' of a mythic southern experience—a space-devouring monster<sup>5</sup>, a force ruining the southern wilderness" (35). She asserts that the wilderness that is being lost is metonymic for the white supremacist cultural landscape—that is, what's lost physically is the woods; what's lost culturally is white domination. She adds, "The train that roars through *Go Down, Moses* comes to mean loss and transition" (ibid). While she does not directly say that Faulkner lamented this loss of white power, this is implied (and, of course, not necessarily untrue).

Another monograph which takes up Faulkner's uses of trains in this episodic novel is Millichap's *Dixie Limited*. In his chapter "William Faulkner's Cultural Geography: Railroads in *Go Down, Moses*," he argues that the variety of trains in the novel "demonstrate a maturing writer coming to terms with his own ambivalence, not just toward technology, landscape, and geography, but toward larger issues of gender, race, and class in Southern culture" (48-9). He adds, "Railroads shape Yoknapatawpha's

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<sup>5</sup> Again, we find echoes of Frank Norris's "galloping monster" (Norris 62).



landscape as much as any single historical factor, and these technological constructions have also determined much of the region's cultural geography" (49). Paraphrasing then, more so than the scars of war, slavery, or Jim Crow, the railroads shaped the Yoknapatawpha that exists in 1942 when the novel was published. A visual indicator of this is the map of the county which is "stitched down the middle" by the Sartoris railroad (ibid). In terms of the scars of progress, Millichap discusses the "dark record of environmental degradation and human exploitation [that] is revealed by the network of real and recreated railroads Faulkner weaves into the complicated narrative patterns of *Go Down, Moses*" (ibid). Culturally speaking, we will note that these rail lines are likewise integral in moving populations—specifically African Americans—northward, as witnessed with the great migration. Thus, while Isaac "Ike" McCaslin—arguably the central figure of the novel—laments the destruction and cultural decline (or the decline of white hegemony as per Yaeger) engendered by the railroads, we witness many of the novel's African-American characters utilizing the railroad to seek new lives in the north. Before launching into a brief discussion of some of Faulkner's other works, Millichap's ultimate appraisal of the numerous trains populating the novel is that they "form one of the most important symbols of a complex cultural power dynamic involving geography and history as well as class, gender, and race in *Go Down, Moses*—and in many other works comprising Faulkner's canon" (58).

Another recent discussion of trains within *Go Down, Moses* is set forth by Mark T. Decker, who argues that "Ike gives voice to the fears of a Southern society trapped within its own dread of cultural change that can be easily coded as contamination" (471). His article is built around illuminating the layers of meaning found in Ike McCaslin's

“racist screed” (474) from the “Delta Autumn” chapter, in which he laments and conflates destroyed wildlands and racial/cultural miscegenation. Decker delves into the rail-related history of the region, describing how railroad companies “helped accelerate the depletion of the forests” for raw materials and also created “‘scientific’ agricultural communities where there had only been plantations and bear hunters” (479). He argues that, for Ike, the train has just as much symbolic significance as literal, describing it as “a link into a network of commerce that will bring the metropolis into the rural South and the rural South into the metropolis, blending them together into an indistinct whole, just as, in Ike’s metaphor, interracial sex and its commerce between distinct others turns stable categories like black and white into one indistinct whole” (482). Throughout the novel, Ike repeatedly sees the woods (the South) in a “fallen state” (483).

While trains are present to some degree throughout most the novel, two chapters that are overwhelmingly apprehensive about modern progress are “The Bear” and “Delta Autumn,” both of which chronicle Ike’s reactions to the destruction of the wilderness. From the outset of the novel (the chapter “Was”), we learn of Ike’s love for the outdoors as well as his feeling that “the earth was no man’s [property] but all men’s” (*GDM* 3). In “The Bear,” we see Ike as a young man and witness some of his earliest encounters with the railroads that have just begun to invade the post-Reconstruction North Mississippi wilderness. “Delta Autumn,” which follows immediately after “The Bear” but is set several decades later, illustrates the tremendous impact that railroads and capitalistic progress have had on the state’s wilderness. Insofar as we want to consider Ike speaking for Faulkner (as Yaeger and Millichap interpret), we find Faulkner at his most pessimistic about progress within these chapters.

The titular animal of “The Bear” is Old Ben, a massive bear hunted by a very young Ike along with a host of Faulkner’s recurring characters, including Major de Spain [owner of “the big woods” they’re hunting in (*GDM* 191)], General Compson, and Boon Hogganbeck. Ironically, the first mention of a train in this chapter is in Faulkner’s characterization of Old Ben, who rules the big woods with “the ruthless and irresistible deliberation of a locomotive” (*GDM* 193). Ben is, essentially, an avatar of nature, nearly impossible to dominate; it will be locomotives, however, that will, by “Delta Autumn,” be the new rulers of the land. While railroads are obviously man-made, there is a sense early in the chapter that man is incapable of overcoming the wilderness, though it is described as “doomed” with “edges constantly and punily gnawed at by men with plows and axes who feared it because it was wilderness” (*ibid*). Mankind will need a bigger tool to get the job done. When we first encounter a literal train in this chapter, it is puny and mostly powerless, weak like the nameless men with their plows and axes. Before the novel’s conclusion, however, Faulkner will present larger, more powerful locomotives. Trains, as a concept, are used in “The Bear” and “Delta Autumn” as symbols of power. While Ben is compared to a locomotive to represent the power of nature, the literal trains in these chapters represent the industrial power of mankind, and Faulkner presents this power destroying the sacred in the name of profit and progress. Writing as a second great war has begun in Europe, Faulkner’s text asks, what is the point of this industrial, technological, and economic progress? What is it actually accomplishing for mankind?

Sixteen-year-old Ike’s first encounter with a train in the big woods occurs as he and Boon have been sent to Memphis to get more whiskey for the hunting party. To get to the main line, they catch a lift on the small outbound log train carrying felled trees to a

lumber camp called Hoke's—"a sawmill and commissary and two stores and a loading-chute on sidetrack from the main line" (*GDM* 231). At this early stage, the log train is quite innocuous. Hoke's is clearly no threat. Major de Spain has sold off a small chunk of his gigantic (nearly 100-square mile) parcel of land. Ike doesn't know that he should be concerned, and the reader likely won't think much of it either in this early encounter which is much more concerned with highlighting Boon's comic unreliability<sup>6</sup> and Ike's insatiable desire to be back in the Big Woods.

However, five years later, Ike, now 21, finds the small operation has grown. He rides to Hoke's to meet up with the rest of the hunting party and "looked about in shocked and aggrieved amazement even though he had forewarning and had believed himself prepared" for what the lumber camp had bloomed into in such a short time (*GDM* 318). Looking around, he sees that what had been a small outpost of buildings gathering a small but steady crop of lumber had now blossomed out of control. He sees

a new planing-mill already half completed which would cover two or three acres and what looked like miles and miles of stacked steel rails red with the light bright rust of newness and of piled crossties sharp with creosote, and wire corrals and feeding troughs for two hundred mules at least and the tents for the men who drove them. (ibid)

Not wanting to look upon the sprawling growth that he knows will be the doom of the wilderness, he averts his gaze. He soon finds himself on the log train ignoring the camp, focused solely on "the wall of wilderness ahead within which he would be able to hide

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<sup>6</sup> And perhaps, we may have an early visit to Miss Reba's brothel—Boon borrows a dollar from young Ike and disappears for an hour. It is not out of the question that this scene served as the raw material upon which Faulkner built *The Reivers*.

himself from it” (ibid). The “it” in the previous line is simultaneously the now-sprawling lumber camp as well as the inevitability of the demise of the Big Woods. As the small train disappears into the trees, Ike reflects, “It had been harmless once” (*GDM* 319). Faulkner provides a counterpoint to Old Ben as Ike remembers that on the first time that particular train had run less than a decade ago, it had startled a bear cub, which then fled into an ash tree and hid its head between its arms (ibid). Old Ben, the avatar of the big woods is gone; now it is the train—still just a tiny “shrieking” thing—that will hold dominion over the land (*GDM* 318). The narrator compares it to “a small dingy harmless snake vanishing into weeds” (ibid), yet with the number of biblical references and discussions throughout the novel (and even the novel’s title), it is not unreasonable to liken the train to the serpent in Genesis that tempts Eve (a role played by Major de Spain in this iteration). If it is hazy in “The Bear,” it is certain by “Delta Autumn” that Ike is being cast from Eden. While this particular train is seemingly harmless, in the next chapter, readers will find vast locomotives hooting across the land. Ike understands that he is witnessing the beginning of the end of the Mississippi wilderness.

In “Delta Autumn,” Faulkner returns to Ike as a testy old man making one final hunting trip into the wilderness and reflecting, not positively, upon the changes wrought upon the Delta in the service of progress over the last eighty years. Ike notes that in his youth, a short wagon ride beyond the town’s limits brought men to the woods, yet now “a man drove two hundred miles from Jefferson before he found Wilderness to hunt in” as “neon flashed past them from the little countless towns and countless shining this-year’s automobiles” (*GDM* 340). He further ruminates that now

there came no scream of panther but instead the long hooting of locomotives: trains of incredible length and drawn by a single engine, since there was no gradient anywhere and no elevation save those raised by forgotten aboriginal hands and refuges from the yearly water and used by their Indian successors to sepulchre their fathers' bones, and all that remained of that old time were the Indian names on little towns (*GDM* 341).

The railroad here is likened to a predator prowling across its demesne with impunity as Old Ben had done before, its hooting reverberating for miles and miles across the land. By adding references to at least two iterations of native settlers—now extinct except for as place names—Faulkner hints at an impending dystopian future where even Ike's generation as well as that of the young men that he's hunting with will have been wiped away just like the hunting grounds and their previous inhabitants, leaving only names behind. Later, when they have settled down for dinner upon reaching the camp, another nameless hunter laments the depletion of the land, interjecting ““Times are different now [...] There was game here then”” (*GDM* 345). As the meal concludes, Ike says, discussing God's intentions when creating man and beast, ““The woods and fields he ravages and the game he devastates will be the consequence and signature of his crime and guilt, and his punishment”” (*GDM* 349). For Ike, the depleted land is not only the outward signifier of mankind's crimes in the name of progress but also the punishment for those crimes—when humanity has finished ravaging the planet, their punishment will be being stuck on that very ravaged planet. One can intuit that, for Ike, who feels himself “insulated by his years and time from the corruption of steel and oiled moving parts”

(*GDM* 342), the death of the wilderness will not necessarily be the end of humanity, but it will be the end of their opportunities to be humans—actually living rather just existing.

Coming back around to my discussion of Faulkner's ambivalent responses to notions of progress, we find that Ike and *Go Down, Moses* are squarely in the camp of the aforementioned "bad modernism." The railroad has destroyed the depleted nature in the name of industrial and commercial progress. The railroad has destroyed old Southern ways of life—both the good and the not so good—in the name of social progress and its meager rewards. The railroads have come to rural Mississippi and filled it with outsiders and foreign goods, newfangled ideas and new economic schemes all in the name of progress, or, to borrow a term from Decker, the north's "decadent modernity" (481). As we find in these two chapters from the novel, Faulkner uses the railroad to both deliver and symbolize that decadent modernity. Faulkner decries the South's environmental destruction at the hands of capital. There are other arguments, especially in terms of the novel's racial dynamics as noted by Yaeger (and others) that can be applied to Faulkner's use of railroad mobility in the novel (and in my next chapter I will indeed return this very point). But for now, I will move forward with the idea that 1942 Faulkner was indeed very upset at what progress, railroads, and industrialization had done to his home state. However, by the end of his career, Faulkner had some second thoughts, perhaps not about the bitter depiction of progress but at least in how one should mentally approach it. This will be evident when we examine Faulkner's depictions of the railroad and notions of progress in his final novel: *The Reivers*.

### **“Live with it”: *The Reivers* and the Acknowledgement of Inevitability**

As John Duvall points out, “Certain ways of speaking, certain ways of seeing Faulkner’s texts begin to feel natural and, as a result, there is consensus on certain points” (5). Beginning at the end with the folksy words “Grandfather said,” Faulkner’s *The Reivers* is a light-hearted valedictory novel dedicated to his grandchildren, so unlike his signature texts, its “pathos rarely turns toward tragedy or obsession” (Weinstein 227). As a result, we have a novel framed by many critics as “Faulkner Lite” (my words, not theirs). Noting other critics’ comparisons to Shakespeare’s *Tempest* or a Twain boy book, Philip Weinstein, despite his favorable opinion of the novel, declares that it “possess little of *The Tempest*’s inexhaustible resonance” and that it’s “closer to the shenanigans of Tom Sawyer than the more brooding inwardness of *Huckleberry Finn*” (ibid). In his Nobel acceptance speech, Faulkner declared that his “signature concern” was ““The human heart in conflict with itself,”” and Weinstein notes that there is, here, a lack of such conflict compared to the more canonical Faulknerian texts (ibid). Since Duval notes a “failure of individual critics to confront the ideological assumptions of the discourse they move within” (5), I want to use part of this chapter to give a more serious consideration to Faulkner’s final novel. In fact, what I am going to be suggesting is that, in *Reivers*, Faulkner has, in fact, provided a sequel to *Go Down, Moses*. As such, I will argue that *Reivers* displays no less discomfort with narratives of progress—in fact, this discomfort is viscerally on display throughout the text. The novel is quite atypical of his texts in that we find in the novel’s closing pages a moral to the story, a life lesson for his grandchildren and other subsequent readers which touches upon the issues presented in the Faulkner canon: “Live with it” (*Reivers* 302). In building up to this moral, I will



argue, Faulkner is critiquing—not repudiating by any means, but critiquing—*Go Down, Moses*.

Readers quickly discover that the novel is a recounting by grandfather Lucius Priest of a coming-of-age adventure from when he was a boy in turn-of-the-century Mississippi. He is telling the story with occasional ruminations on the current era (the 1960s) seemingly to share wisdom with his grandchildren. At the end of the novel—a comedy in the classic sense in that it ends happily with a marriage—we get the aforementioned moral. Back home after a string of misadventures involving lying, cheating, a stolen automobile, a stolen horse, a stolen box car, a series of illegal/fixed horse races, and even a knife fight in a brothel, Lucius awaits punishment for his litany of transgressions. He desperately desires punishment to expiate his sins, but like the scar on his hand from the knife fight (over the honor of a prostitute), there is no way to erase what happened. He begs, “How can I forget it? Tell me how to” (Ibid). Instead, his grandfather, Boss Priest, tells Lucius, who is in turn telling his own grandchildren, “Live with it,” insisting that “Nothing is ever forgotten. Nothing is ever lost. It’s too valuable,” (Ibid) reflecting Gavin Stephens’ quotable proclamation from *Requiem*, that the past is never dead, nor even past. It is from the perspective of “live with it” that I approach Faulkner’s integration of the railroad into *The Reivers*.

The novel is by turns nostalgic, by turns realistic, as “grandfather” Faulkner tries to share some final insights with his readers. Now in his sixties, Faulkner knew he was facing the end of his career and his life (he died the same year *Reivers* was published). The result is a novel that may lack the complexity of *Sound and the Fury* or *Absalom, Absalom!* or the monumental gravity that we might feel typifies a Faulkner novel.

Furthermore, *The Reivers* doesn't repeat previous novels' turgid appraisals of the inevitable demise of a way of life. Instead, there's a pragmatism. Live with it. Young Bayard Sartoris or Quentin Compson, both roughly of age with Lucius, could never absorb such a lesson, but based on the evidence that Lucius lives to know his grandchildren, he has put that lesson to use, so again, it is with that mantra that I approach the novel's use of the railroad to question the progress wrought by the industrial revolution, the atomic age, and America's ascendancy as a global power.

John T. Matthews notes that *Reivers* elaborates on "informal local economies against the backdrop of modern life that, in Faulkner's judgement, had become overly administered, homogenous, and mass-produced" (279). The most significant component of that administered, homogenous, mass-produced economy was the railroad, which, from its earliest incarnations, played a role in reshaping physical space of America and the American South. Wolfgang Schivelbusch explains how the railroad was "built thus across the terrain by means of cuttings, embankments, tunnels, and viaducts" (23), and while American rail lines tended to curve around natural obstacles rather than demolish them (95-6), a flat landscape was essential for laying tracks, so the land had to be extensively graded and shaped. As such, vast swaths of the landscape were demolished—often through blasting<sup>7</sup>—to make way for the tracks. Thus, the railroad's transformative effect on American space cannot be ignored.

The transformation of Southern space is further apparent from Edward Ayers's discussion of the growth of railroads in the South after the Civil War. In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the modern South was literally being shaped by railroads as

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<sup>7</sup> As discussed previously, this practice gives us the legendary John Henry.

they “connected the landscape, cutting into clay banks, running across long sandy and swampy stretches, winding their way through wet mountain forests” (3). Schivelbusch similarly asserts that the railroad “appeared as one great machine covering the land” (29), reminiscent of Norris’s characterization of the railroads as *The Octopus*, a many-legged beast taking dominion over the entire country. In the modernizing South where Faulkner came of age, the railroad became an agent of increasing commerce, speeding up the movement of commodities to markets, and even transforming the local wilderness into profit. While agriculture was still an essential component of the Southern economy, commercial interests were becoming more influential in shaping urban areas. Ayers notes that, “the railroad dominated the center of most cities” (75), and in “places lucky enough to have a railroad, the station often became the most prominent feature of the landscape” (11). Both as a boy and as a young man, Faulkner himself spent a great deal of his time down at the depot watching the trains arrive and depart. Just as we note the railroad’s alteration of the Southern landscape in Ayers’ text, readers find the railroad busily at work in *Reivers* altering and reorganizing the physical space of Jefferson and Yoknapatawpha in the name of progress, particularly in terms of accelerating the flow of capital and commodities.

Examining Faulkner’s map of Yoknapatawpha (at the back of *Absalom, Absalom!*), the county is bisected by John Sartoris’s railroad. By bringing the railroad to North Mississippi, Sartoris demonstrates his wealth, his forethought, and his capitalist savvy. This demonstration is augmented by the fact that the railroad runs very nearly through the middle of Jefferson. With his railroad, the Old Colonel could control the flow of capital (e.g. cotton) through the county, and the placement of that railroad in Jefferson,

while partially rooted in practical concerns, provides a daily reminder of his power and influence. We find, however, that this Sartoris power was not all-encompassing: As in the real world, the presence of the railroad likewise provides business opportunities for other Jeffersonians, such as the wealthy Priest family. Lucius's father and grandfather utilize the Sartoris railroad<sup>8</sup> every day, moving freight and providing transport to the passengers and merchants getting off the trains. Lucius himself earns a meager weekly wage by collecting freight bills from companies on the square (*Reivers* 1). The Sartoris railroad, then, demonstrates both a reorganization of Jeffersonian space and a reorganization of Jeffersonian capital.

Barbara Young Welke notes the power of the railroad to redefine the social and economic status of communities themselves as new rail lines led to "new towns, [and] sleepy havens exploded into thriving metropolises" (295). Moreover, in the latter half of the nineteenth century, one in six Southerners lived in urban areas, largely including "towns literally put on the map by the railroad" (309). While "thriving metropolis" is an overstatement for most locales in *Reivers* (apart from Memphis), we see this urban boom represented in the novel, particularly in terms of Parsham, TN (modeled after Grand Junction, TN), the location of the races between the ill-begotten horse Lightning and Colonel Linscomb's Acheron. Parsham is a small town, but the railroad serves to make it a mini-locus of power: It is a "hamlet, two or three stores where the two railroads crossed, [featuring a] depot and loading chute and freight shed and a platform for cotton bales" (*Reivers* 166). While Parsham is by no means large, it serves as a concentration

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<sup>8</sup> By 1918 (when young Bayard returns home), the Sartoris railroad has become part of a syndicate and is no longer owned by the family; however, in *Reivers* (1905), there is no indication that this changeover has occurred. As for the Falkner Railroad, J.W.T. Falkner sold it, much to the chagrin of Murry Falkner, in 1902 (Blotner 10).

zone for capital as it functions as a transportation hub for the local farmers' cotton. Thought of differently, the railroad here provides a contact zone between the country and the city where crops and livestock can be transformed into commodities to be redistributed across the nation. Thus, one of the functions of the railroad in *Reivers* is to place Parsham on the economic map.

Within the novel, Faulkner sends Lucius, Ned, and Boon on a high-spirited odyssey through northern Mississippi and western Tennessee. Before slinking into Parsham in their stolen train car, the trio encounters other examples of spaces that have been reorganized by the railroad in the name of maximizing mobility and, thus, economic productivity. In addition to relatively small communities like Parsham, readers witness the railroad's impact on the rural countryside and even within the metropolis. Though *Reivers*, with its moral of "live with it," does not repeat the bitter sense of loss found in *Go Down, Moses* as economic progress devoured Ike's hunting grounds, Faulkner does remind readers of the railroad's impact on North Mississippi: By 1905, "a northern lumber company had built a narrow-gauge railroad for hauling logs, which connected with the main line, passing within a mile of Major de Spain's new camp" (*Reivers* 20). Lucius adds, "By 1925 we could already see the doom" of the wilderness, and he speculates that "by 1980 the automobile will be as obsolete to reach wilderness with as the automobile will have made the wilderness it seeks" (*Reivers* 20-1). While that idea echoes Ike's sentiments from "Delta Autumn," Lucius adds, "But perhaps they—you—will find wilderness on the back side of Mars or the moon, with maybe even bear and deer to run it" (*Reivers* 21). While there is not a tremendous note of optimism in the suggestion, he has lived long enough to see other complete transformations in everyday

life that this is not entirely out of the question. Again, no, it's not overly optimistic, yet it avoids Ike's fatalism (and Quentin's, Bayard's, etc.). In *Go Down, Moses*, this very log train, described by Ike McCaslin as a snake, proves the beginning of the end of the wilderness. When grandfather Lucius looks back on this same scenario in the 1960s, he simply reports it as inevitable—sad, yes, but inevitable. In *Reivers*, then, the railroad is presented as neither angel nor as devil. Rather, it is a transformative force bringing weal and woe, affirming Trachtenberg's statement (quoted earlier) that such machines and their accompanying narrative of progress brought creation along with destruction, fresh opportunities for wealth along with the end of older industries, and “hope” along with “gloom” (38).

We find an example of one of these new opportunities for wealth coupled with an end to older industries as Lucius and company make their way through North Mississippi. They stop for the night at (Miss) Ballenbaugh's, a somewhat shady roadside motel. Lucius provides a brief history of the establishment, which was originally a river ferry station at the terminus of a straight road to Memphis where cotton traders would need to stop and rest for the night in the slower era of mule-drawn mobility. In the 1870s, Colonel John Sartoris (“the actual colonel,” as Lucius says to differentiate him from Boss's business rival) built his railroad and “destroyed” Ballenbaugh's (*Reivers* 74). The Colonel's railroad “came and removed the cotton bales from the wagons and therefore the ferry from Ballenbaugh's” (ibid). While Lucius uses the grandiose verb “destroy,” we note a pattern of reorganization: Ballenbaugh's still has value in the flow of capital. The ferry is gone, but the establishment still stands, itself in the process of yet another transformation to accommodate the increasing automobile traffic. Rather than lament,

Miss Ballenbaugh will “live with it;” that is, she will learn to adapt, just as Grandfather Lucius hopes for his progeny.

Throughout their excursion, the closest Lucius comes to expressing chagrin for the transformative effects of progress and the railroad occurs when the reivers are attempting to coax Lightning onto a re-appropriated (i.e. stolen) boxcar. Not only are the countryside and small communities reorganized by the modernizing railroad, the space of the metropolis (in this case, Memphis) is likewise affected. As Ned works to coax the horse into Sam Caldwell's boxcar, he asks Lucius to retrieve a switch from the bushes. In the midst of this task, Lucius, as narrator, remarks, “all this was probably somebody’s lawn or garden before progress, industry, commerce, railroads came” (*Reivers* 147). This transformation from garden (an artificial space of natural growth) to depot (an artificial space of industrial growth) reflects the power of the railroad to change “the physiognomy of the old cities with bold strokes” (Schivelbusch 179). Lucius does not dwell on this transformation, does not steadfastly avert his gaze as twenty-one-year-old Ike did when he found that the logging camp was becoming a boom town; instead, he makes his observation and returns to the task at hand. Regardless, this scene does conclusively entwine the railroad with commercial and industrial expansion in the mind of the narrator. Progress, as noted by Lucius, may have indeed destroyed something beloved, but the answer isn’t willful blindness.

This scene likewise illuminates two analogous lines of capital transformation: In the turn-of-the century economy, the railroad brings commodities from the outer reaches (such as Yoknapatawpha) into the metropolis for commercial processing. All the while, the railroad is reorganizing physical space in the name of progress. Similarly, within the

novel, Lucius, Ned, and Boon are engaged in their own capital transformation project. By the close of the novel, they have transformed a stolen automobile into a decent amount of gambling spoils, including cash, a horse, and a pardon from Boss Priest (and Boss gets his car back). This is a transformation, notably, that would be impossible without the help of the railroad and Sam's borrowed boxcar. Any actual transformation on the part of Ned or Boon is debatable, but Lucius is indelibly marked by his adventure. Literally, in the case of the scar he receives in his whore-house scuffle with Otis, and mentally, in terms of Boss's directive that he must carry the weight of his actions, Lucius has been transformed. This transformation mirrors that undergone by America and the American South, both of which display physical and mental (cultural) transformations as a result of their encounters with trains, mobility, modernization, and progress. As a one-off novel for readers new to Yoknapatawpha, the novel's effect is minimal, but as a sequel to *Go Down, Moses* and for readers who know how the county's other scions have fared when faced with the need to adapt to new realities (or for critics who accuse Faulkner of living in an imaginary Southern past), Boss Priest's directive is as revolutionary as the machines that transformed the South.

Throughout *Reivers*, we witness the way the railroad has restructured not just space itself but likewise our experience of space and place. For instance, when Mr. Binford storms out of Miss Reba's brothel, we learn that this is not the first time he has abandoned her. Minnie recounts just such an occasion one year previous, saying that when they finally found him, "he was working in a gang laying a sewer line way down past the Frisco depot..." (*Reivers* 115). This scene demonstrates an important reconfiguration of the modern experience of space: The railroad, which had become an



ever-present force in the daily lives of Americans at the turn of the century, had remapped mental geography. The depot, rather than a street or an avenue, had become a "go-to" reference point with which to orient oneself within this modern geography. Similarly, Trachtenberg notes that the railroad incorporated space and place into the economy so that places became "identified as scheduled moments of departure and arrival" (59). In the South, the railroad's reach had become significantly ubiquitous by the end of the nineteenth century as the South saw a dramatic increase in its number of track miles, allowing it to touch "the lives of many Southerners, white and black [by connecting] them to other counties, towns, and cities" (Welke 263), a "touch" that would only expand as the twentieth century wore on. Naturally, the depot serves as a geographical focal point in this scene because, on a daily basis, the train was touching everyone's lives.

Within *Reivers*, one of the most dramatic results of this modern experience of geography brought about by railroad progress is the deterioration of local "roots" in favor of mobility and "routes." As in-between space dissolves, so too does the space here and the space there. In addition, increased industrialization and mechanization—economic restructuring—was spurred both directly and indirectly by the railroad. One result of these changes in American culture was redistributions of population. These population shifts disconnected individuals from their communities and even from their families, and this disconnection was often carried out with the aid of a one-way railroad ticket. While Lucius seemingly maintains his connections over the course of his life, within the novel, a variety of characters exhibit a disconnection from family and community that is directly facilitated by the railroad. The most notable of this is Corrie/Everbe.

For Corrie, “roots” consist of brothels and sexual exploitation in both Arkansas and Memphis. Thus, her aim is to find a place where she can set down new roots. She finds herself facing a choice between Boon Hogganbeck and Sam Caldwell, deciding that one of them will remove her from the Memphis brothel and help her establish a new life (preferably far away from her nephew Otis). She declares to Boon, “‘I aint going to stay in Memphis. I talked to Sam at the depot this morning and he says that’s a good idea too. He can find me a job in Chattanooga *or somewhere*’” (*Reivers* 218, italics added). The phrase “or somewhere” suggests further stops on down the line if and when things do not work out in Chattanooga. In the end, she chooses stability and roots, opting to marry Boon rather than throwing her lot in with Sam, a railroad man as transient as the railroad itself. While Corrie demonstrates a modern “unrootedness”<sup>9</sup> that is borne of railroad mobility’s influence on society, it is Sam who most clearly illustrates it. Faulkner presents him as a veritable avatar of mobility. Sam, a flagman on the Memphis Special (*Reivers* 130), functions almost as an extension of the railroad itself. Like the railroad, he is an inherently unrooted entity. We find that he is a child of privilege, the nephew of a “division superintendent” for the railroad (*Ibid*). His position with the railroad gives him nearly unlimited mobility while it simultaneously prevents him from putting down roots. In *The Promise of the New South*, Ayers provides a description of the railroad at the turn of the century that could just as aptly describe Sam: “The locomotive passed through nearly a thousand Southern counties but *it belonged to none of them*” (12, italics added), adding, “the railroads were even more ‘modern’ than cities themselves, detached from their settings, transitory, volatile” (145). Unlike other characters in the novel, we never

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<sup>9</sup> “Unrootedness” is more appropriate here than “rootlessness” as the former implies a new relationship with mobility while the latter implies only a lack.

learn where Sam is from nor where he lays his head at night. His mobility is ubiquitous like the railroad itself. Despite the nepotistic origins of his job, Sam does prove himself to be a model of efficiency. With just an hour's notice, he is able to produce seemingly everything that Ned, Lucius, and Boon need to “ruthlessly use a combination of uxoriousness and nepotism to disrupt a whole boxcar from the railroad system to get [their stolen horse] to Parsham” (*Reivers* 229) for the race. Ned sums up Sam’s effectiveness in navigating the railroad industry by declaring, ““When Mr Sam Caldwell runs a railroad, it’s run, mon”” (*Reivers* 162). Sam is a man of both the old era and of the new modern era. Like Lucius, he has attained his socioeconomic position through birth into a wealthy family rather than through any meritorious performance—Miss Reba describes him as being born with ““the silver spoon already in his mouth”” (*Reivers* 130). However, he can stay in touch with modernity. More dynamically than any other character in the novel, he has nearly literally traded in his roots for routes.

While Boss Priest probably would not wish for his grandson to take on Sam’s unrootedness, Sam does provide a sort of model for the man he’d like Lucius to become. Sam is a problem solver who adapts to situations, thus a reflection of the modernizing and industrializing South that produced him. After Boss tells Lucius that there’s nothing he can do to expiate his guilt—that he must live with it and grow from it—Lucius declares, ““Dont you see I cant?”” (*Reivers* 302). Boss replies that he (Lucius) can and will, adding, ““A gentleman can live through anything. He faces anything. A gentleman accepts the responsibility of his actions and bears the burdens of their consequences”” (*Ibid*). When Lucius finishes crying over the weight of his guilt, Boss adds, ““Now go wash your face. A gentleman cries too, but he always washes his face”” (*Reivers* 303).

Faulkner's moral here is one particularly relevant for the South facing the benefits and costs of progress—economic, geographic, and social. Boss tells Lucius that he must face obstacles, take responsibility, and deal with the consequences. These very tasks are what Ike finds so difficult in “The Bear” and “Delta Autumn.” While Lucius grows old and counsels his own grandchildren to survive and adapt like Miss Ballenbaugh, Sam Caldwell, or Boss Priest did when faced with the pitfalls of progress, Ike grows old running from his family's responsibilities into the ever-shrinking wilderness and ruing the mess that railroads have made of both the delta wilderness and the country:

*This land which man has deswamped and denuded and derivered in two generations so that white men can own plantations and commute every night to Memphis and black men own plantations and ride in jim crow cars to Chicago to live in millionaire' mansions on Lakeshore Drive, where white men rent farms and live like niggers and niggers crop on shares and live like animals (GDM 364, italics original)*

He goes on to declare, “the ruined woods I used to know dont cry for retribution [...] The people who destroyed it will accomplish its revenge” (ibid). Unlike Boss's directive that Lucius take responsibility and take action, Ike remains inert, impotent, and isolated. Though it is a stretch to suggest that Faulkner would tell Ike that he's a coward or a fool for running away from his responsibilities because he cannot bear the weight of the guilt from the damage wrought by his brutal ancestor Carothers McCaslin, when read as a response to *Go Down, Moses*, this is solidly the implication of the ending of *Reivers*. Like previous works, *Reivers* wrestles with the idea of progress, and we do witness

incarnations of the destruction that it brings, but in this final novel, Faulkner's moral is to survive and adapt—to live with it.

A reconfigured modern experience of mental space is borne out in a variety of contexts within *Reivers*. The railroad is constantly moving, always coming and going. The very essence of modernity is mobility, and the railroad acts as constant reminder and facilitator of this mobility. Though it may be an overstatement to view the railroad as the absolute cause (i.e. the "why") of the shifts in Southern/American society as well as shifting relationships to place, it is quite obviously the instrument of these shifts (i.e. the "how")—particularly after the Civil War and before World War II. The railroad regulated the cognitive experience of space in terms of one's lasting relationship to a place. Thus, in *Reivers*, we find repeated instances of the railroad allowing characters to discard or transcend communal roots as the mental understanding of the spaces of here, there, and in-between were all redefined.

With Lucius, Faulkner provides a protagonist who attains fluency with modern technologies of mobility but who is still able to maintain his self identity. Faulkner's earlier work presents young Bayard Sartoris and Quentin Compson, unrooted and tragically isolated like their literary contemporaries Jay Gatsby or Frederick Henry. Further, we have Caddy Compson, who is able to adapt but cannot maintain any connection to family or community (abandoning her daughter, even, in her efforts to be free). Later, we have Ike McCaslin who repudiates his roots in an attempt to distance himself from the sins of previous generations. While he does marry and stay in Jefferson; nevertheless, he remains isolated from the people around him. However, Lucius presents a different sort of protagonist, arguably a response to the previous Faulknerians. Lucius is

able to see beyond his upper class existence. As Matthews points out, “he begins to watch penniless people making their way in a world he knows nothing about [and what] staggers Lucius is how degrading the struggle for money is among the poor” (282). For instance, Corrie sacrifices the new leaf she has turned over (she has vowed to leave prostitution) and has sex with Butch in exchange for him allowing the horse race to proceed as planned. For reward, she is brutally beaten by Boon, the man who professes to love her. Matthews argues, not without justification, that

The novel mostly makes light of such painful realities [such as Ned’s socioeconomic position in the Jim Crow South or the utter necessity for Corrie to attach herself to a man else continue a life of prostitution], or ignores them altogether in the spirit of the happy outcome, yet at certain points we can see that what’s at the core of Lucius Priest’s memory is [...] an unwanted and extremely troubling initiation into the desperate measures forced on the disadvantaged” (280).

Again, Ike’s coping method is willful blindness and suppression of emotions—such that he longs to connect with the black woman who is his kinswoman but cannot do anything but push her away (in “Delta Autumn”). *Reivers* provides a revision of “Delta Autumn” while keeping Ike present in the background; otherwise readers would not be able to notice this revision. No, Lucius did not learn the horrifying truths that Ike learned, namely that his ancestor treated all people like property who existed for his pleasure, including his own offspring. Fortunately for him, the lessons Lucius learns are more along the lines of progressive racial interactions (dated and paternalistic by today’s standards but radical for 1962 Mississippi) or the interrelation of poverty and

prostitution—notably, he never questions the morality of any of the women at Miss Reba’s brothel. Nevertheless, Lucius has benefited from his grandfather’s lesson, and thus he is attempting to pass it along to his own grandchildren.

### Chapter 3: Black Erasure and the Railroad in Faulkner

William Faulkner's *Go Down, Moses* features some of his most dynamic and well developed African American characters as well as some of his most honest commentary on race in the South. One of these characters, Samuel Worsham Beauchamp, known as Butch back home in Jefferson, is the focal point of the final chapter of the book from whence the novel gets its name. Within this short chapter, Butch is put to death in Chicago for (allegedly) shooting a police officer in the back, not even remotely his first run in with the law during his career. Talking to a census taker, he declares that his occupation is "getting rich too fast" (369) while Gavin Stevens, the lawyer tasked by Butch's grandmother with finding him, says, "He was in a business called numbers, that people like him make money in" (375). When Butch's body arrives in Jefferson, a crowd has assembled: "it was not until the train came in that Stevens and the editor began to notice the number of people, Negroes and whites both" (381). As the crowds watch, "the Negro undertaker's men lifted the gray-and-silver casket from the train and carried it to the hearse" (382). The members of the crowd have gathered to watch the arrival of Number Four southbound train for disparate reasons, some because they secretly helped pay for the body's return to Jefferson to help out Mollie Beauchamp, Butch's grandmother, others, particularly the black characters, to pay respects to a lost child who has returned home. Nevertheless, the crowd of spectators is appropriate in that Butch has accomplished something rare in the annals of Yoknapatawpha: He has ridden the train home to Jefferson.

It stands to reason that many thousands of people have passed through the doors of the Jefferson station, coming and going. We even have multiple examples in the



novels. In *Sanctuary*, we read about Horace's travels on the train. In *The Sound and the Fury*, Jason threatens Caddy that she better be out of Jefferson "after number 17 runs" or else she'll never see her daughter again (206). What makes Butch's trip remarkable, however, is that he is the only black character in all of Faulkner's novels whose train ride is narrated. In *Flags in the Dust*, as we'll see below, Caspey Strother has come home by train, but we only learn of this second hand. Presumably, at the end of *The Reivers*, Ned comes home on the train with Lucius, Boon and Boss Priest, but the trip is not narrated. In multiple novels, there is reference to Jim Crow cars, whose express purpose is to carry black passengers (and whites who feel like smoking). In his chapter of *The Sound and the Fury*, Quentin does encounter (and even obsess over) other black passengers on trains, but these are in Massachusetts, not Mississippi. When Butch's body arrives in Jefferson, albeit posthumously, Faulkner narrates the arrival. This may seem like an unimportant detail to get hung up on; earlier in the novel even, it is implied that African Americans are using the trains. Nevertheless, Butch's narrated arrival back in Jefferson is unique considering the consistent pattern in Faulkner's novels of featuring white characters who are enabled by railroad (and other) mobility alongside non-whites who are generally not afforded the same freedoms despite historical realities of the Great Migration of African Americans into the cities and out of the South that Faulkner would have experienced.

Three particular novels, each from the early decades of Faulkner's career, that bear this out are *Flags in the Dust* (1928), *The Sound and the Fury* (1929), and *The Unvanquished* (1938). *Flags*, the first Yoknapatawpha novel, and *Unvanquished*, set mostly during the Civil War, recount the travails of two different generations of Bayard Sartoris. In my analysis of *Flags*, I will differentiate between the locomotive

experiences of the three World War One veterans, Bayard Sartoris (a white man), Horace Benbow (also white), and Caspey Strother (a black man). Specifically, their separate experiences of return to Yoknapatawpha County highlight racial differences in railroad mobility. After discussing *Flags*, I will move to Quentin Compson's chapter, "June Second, 1910," from *The Sound and the Fury*; my analysis takes as given that Quentin, a (relatively) wealthy white man has free reign to move about at will. My focus on mobility and the railroad in this section will look specifically at two African American characters and their relation to the railroad. Finally, I will end this chapter by returning to the Sartoris clan to briefly examine a few segments of *The Unvanquished* to meditate upon the disappearance of Ringo Strother, boon companion of the older Bayard from childhood onwards. But some might ask, what about the real-life Faulkner? What did he have to say about non-whites and/or their mobility? Before delving into the representations of African American railroad mobility, then, it will be beneficial to take a moment to discuss a few of the highs and lows of Faulkner's stance(s) on race and race relations throughout his career as both a novelist and as a public figure.

Faulkner's infamously fluid stances on the civil rights issues throughout his career have been documented by numerous critics, some more generous than others. Generally speaking the worst damage done Faulkner's reputation on racial issues was done by himself. For instance, when asked his opinion about black writers, Faulkner spoke about Richard Wright and Ralph Ellison, declaring that each had "a great deal of talent" (qtd in Taylor 129). He added "Wright had written 'one good book and then went astray, he got too concerned in the difference between the Negro man and the white man and he stopped being a writer and became a Negro'" (ibid). Furthermore, "Faulkner thought

Ellison ‘has talent and so far has managed to stay away from being first a Negro, he is still first a writer’” (qtd in Taylor 129). Perhaps it is a conclusion too easily leapt to, but such a statement denotes an identification of writing with whiteness whereas a concern for the status of African Americans is an issue not for writers but for blacks. There is no accompanying indication from Faulkner which characterizes Thomas Dixon or Thomas Nelson Page as a potentially great writer who got too concerned with being a white man.

One of his most well-known sentiments about racial tensions in America occurred in an interview in 1956. An admittedly intoxicated Faulkner declared, “As long as there’s a middle road, all right, I’ll be on it. But if it came to fighting, I’ll fight for Mississippi against the United States even if it meant going out into the streets and shooting Negroes” (qtd. in Hale 155). Conversely, reacting to the death of 14-year-old Emmett Till, lynched for whistling at white woman the previous year, his response was quite different, saying “If we as Americans have reached that point in our desperate culture when we must murder children, no matter for what reason or what color, we don’t deserve to survive, and probably won’t” (qtd. in Weinstein 132). In another statement, “On Fear,” published during the trial of Till’s murderers in *Harpers*, Faulkner addressed the culture of fear amongst his fellow whites in the South. Specifically, he declared that white Southerners fear “that the Negro, who has done so much with no chance, might do so much more with an equal one that he might take the white man’s economy away from him, the Negro now the banker or the merchant or the planter and the white man the sharecropper or the tenant” (Faulkner “Southern Harm”). Thus, behind Southerners’ rejection of pleas for equal rights was a fear of black economic progress rather than fear of African American social progress.

One prominent critic who lands firmly on the side of generosity towards Faulkner's racial attitudes is Noel Polk, who asserted that, while Faulkner "supported unequivocally equality of opportunity for all races as the morally right thing to do, he made his arguments along the very pragmatic lines that for the South not to solve its own problems would be to invite the federal government to intervene in its affairs," though, Polk continues, Faulkner may have "overestimated the capacity of Southern whites to act in their own best interests" (139-140). At the end of *The Reivers*, his final novel, Boss Priest instructs young Lucius that a gentleman must live with the consequences of his actions. In that same vein, Polk argues that Faulkner

did not waste his or anybody else's time trying to change the hearts of Southern whites, but only their behavior; he did not hope to bring about brotherly love and understanding overnight or any time in the future. What he did was argue very pragmatically that change was inevitable and that it was in everybody's best interests, blacks and whites, North and South, for Southern whites themselves both to effect that change and to learn to live with new social and political conditions. (140-1)

Furthermore, just as Faulkner's comments about Emmet Till demonstrate a concern for individual situations, Polk restructures the argument out of "generalizations about race that could be construed as racist," declaring, that Faulkner was more concerned with individuals, whether black or white, as well as the need for actions rather than words. For instance, "His chief concern during the crisis at the University of Alabama was for the life of Autherine Lucy, whom he feared would be killed if she tried to enroll there" (141). Moreover, while many fellow moderates were declaring that "blacks needed more

education to be worthy of equality, he took a good part of his Nobel Prize money to establish a scholarship fund for needy and worthy black students who otherwise would not have a chance at an education” (ibid). Quoting Malcolm Cowley, Polk also points out that “Faulkner’s farm was run by ‘three Negro tenant families.... He lets them have the profits, if any, because—he said, speaking very softly—“The Negroes don’t always get a square deal in Mississippi.’” (ibid). That was obviously putting the situation mildly.

Putting him on the record in terms race relations gives us a frame of reference for Faulkner the man apart from Faulkner the novelist. In the novels, we find, generally, liberal stances on race relations. When we examine the arc of his career, despite horrendous quotes about shooting Negroes in the streets or Richard Wright being too concerned with being a Negro first and a writer second, Faulkner’s fiction does tend much more toward the liberal end of the spectrum—or at least less toward the stereotypically recalcitrant white Southerner. In his earlier works, he very much seems to pander to Southern white racist audiences, as Baker suggests he does explicitly with *Light in August* (“Traveling” 16). The unnamed narrator of *Flags in the Dust* (originally published in condensed form as *Sartoris* in 1929) employs racial stereotypes almost as readily as Miss Jenny Dupre, matriarch of the ill-fated Sartoris clan. Ten years later, in *The Wild Palms*, we find a narrative voice that prefers the word “negro” even though the characters themselves use the word “nigger.” In fact, when Harry and Charlotte arrive at the Utah mining camp, we find the characters using pretty much every racial slur for the various groups of non-white miners (though as Toni Morrison points out in *Playing in the Dark*, some of these non-white ethnic groups—Polish and Italians—are considered white in present-day America even if they weren’t then). By the time Faulkner reaches his final

novel, *The Reivers*, we find Lucius Priest, as he narrates his picaresque tale of a boyhood adventure to his present day grandchildren, favorably comparing Uncle Parsham, an elderly black man, to his Southern gentleman grandfather Boss Priest, noting similar table manners and sleeping habits. Further, in *Reivers*, Faulkner uses the word “nigger” to help delineate between the good guys and the bad guys, particularly the villainous Sheriff Butch Lovemaiden. Despite his public statements sometimes to the contrary, we can at least discern a racial progressivism from the earlier stages of his career to the last stages as we measure Faulkner the novelist, even if Faulkner the public figure periodically falls short of the racial sensibilities of his latter-day audiences.

Nevertheless, in terms of African-American mobility and the railroad, the most remarkable trends to note in his fiction is a definitive lack thereof, despite the contradictory representations we may find in his contemporary authors or the historical record. This absence of black mobility in Faulkner mirrors Houston Baker’s criticism of theories of modernism that tend toward the Anglo-centric, featuring a civilization that is characterized as white and male and generally ignores the fates of nonwhites (Baker *Modernism* 4). I have amply demonstrated ways that Faulkner uses railroad-tinged mobility to nostalgically question narratives of progress or to illustrate avant garde attitudes toward sexuality and gender, but all the characters discussed thus far have been white by and large. In spite of the aforementioned progressivism we discern in his novels, mobility remains closely linked to whiteness where the railroad is concerned—though in *The Reivers*, the African American Ned McCaslin and the allegedly-partially-Native-American Boon Hoggenbeck do attain mobility by means of an automobile stolen from their highly mobile employer. Given his ambiguous stance on race relations as a public

figure and as a novelist, it is no surprise, then, his writing of non-whites (generally speaking, African Americans) and their relationships to the railroad are particularly muddy waters to wade through; nevertheless, three particular novels—*Flags in the Dust*, *The Sound and the Fury*, and *The Unvanquished*—provide the clearest examples of Faulkner discussing non-white railroad mobility.

### **Homecoming: Railroad Mobility and Jefferson's Returning Veterans**

Before we ever learn about the centrality of John Sartoris's railroad to the history of Yoknapatawpha, we are alerted to his ghost hanging over the town in the opening pages of *Flags in the Dust* when Old Man Falls brings him into the bank. The mere presence of Sartoris's railroad in Yoknapatawpha denotes a curtailment of black mobility. As the novel opens, Falls regales (Old) Bayard, not for the first time, with his recollections of John and his railroad, and a few pages later, Aunt Jenny picks up the tale, mentioning the "the Scottish engineer whom John Sartoris had met in Mexico in '45" who helped him build it (12). Whether or not this was Faulkner's intent or whether or not he'd recognize the significance, this Scotsman is the first instance we find in the annals of Yoknapatawpha of the curtailment of African American mobility.

The Scottishness of the nameless engineer isn't necessarily relevant but rather the time and place of his introduction to John Sartoris. Their meeting in Mexico in 1845 denotes the Old Colonel's participation in the Mexican-American war (1846-48), a war remembered in popular culture (when it is remembered at all) as an effort to liberate the Republic of Texas from an apparently evil Mexican regime who slaughtered valiant American heroes at the Alamo in 1836. The actual history of the war is, of course, much more complicated, one of the root causes of U.S. involvement in Texas/Mexico was the

issue of slavery. Notably, Mexico had abolished slavery in 1829, though slavery still existed in Texas. In 1845, the U.S. annexed Texas (whose declaration of independence in 1836 had never been recognized by Mexico) for a variety of economic reasons, and one of these was adding another slave state to the balance.

The precise reason for the engineer's presence in Mexico is never elaborated upon, but presumably he was there to support the war efforts of the Americans. Regardless, we can readily conclude that Colonel Sartoris, not yet a colonel in 1845 and perhaps not yet even a plantation owner, was in attendance to defend the right of the Texian settlers to keep slaves. The status of Texas as not only a state but also a slave state was of paramount importance to the slave owners of the U.S. South, and at this moment in American history, slavery and dark skin were all but synonymous. Thus, Faulkner's allusion to Mexico and 1845 is necessarily an allusion to control of black bodies, a control that, as we will see throughout the novel, includes stifling African American access to mobility.

While it is dangerous (from a literary critical perspective) to attach too much importance to a writer's biography, Millichap's biographical examination of *Flags* (and the subsequent *Unvanquished*—which we'll examine later in this chapter) is enlightening. Before Faulkner ever wrote about John Sartoris as the Old Colonel, he grew up being regaled with stories of his great grandfather William Clark Falkner, who brought the railroad to North Mississippi (partially enabled in his efforts by convict leasing, a latter-day form of slavery). The Sartoris railroad, though this is not emphasized specifically in *Flags* or *Unvanquished* themselves, is itself a signifier of curtailed mobility for African Americans. It was built using "convict" labor in order to serve the



economic interests of white landowners—plantation owners like Colonel Sartoris or Major De Spain and even diversified financiers like Boss Priest.

Running contrary to the narratives found in Faulkner's novels, historically, the railroad of the twentieth century served the varied purposes of black mobility, providing both employment opportunities as well as escape from sharecropping and Jim Crow in the South. While we do find black rail workers in multiple of Faulkner's novels, including *Flags*, their presence is scarce. Furthermore, outside of a few hints in *Go Down, Moses*, we don't witness African Americans using the railroad to migrate north. *Flags* in particular fuels a counternarrative of black immobility, as we see when we examine the Yoknapatawpha homecoming of various Great War veterans.

*Flags*, similar to numerous novels of the inter-war modernist period, prominently features World War One veterans struggling to readjust to the new realities of American life in the aftermath global conflict. Each of the three vets has a return experience chronicled by the narrator, and while each one returns on the railroad, only the two white veterans have railroad-related return experiences. Horace Benbow (the third of trio) has the most chronicled return experience. Bayard, scion of the powerful but waning Sartoris family, returns home on the railroad, yet makes every effort to eschew railroad mobility. Finally, rather than focus on the railroad for Caspey Strother, the African American veteran, Faulkner utilizes Caspey as wish fulfillment for white supremacist readers and an admonishment for Southern African Americans to stay in their white-prescribed places.

Caspey is the first veteran to arrive home, but Young Bayard (as opposed to his grandfather, who will be referred to as "Old Bayard") is the first of the trio we learn

about. Unlike Horace, the last to return, Faulkner presents Bayard's return third hand through African American rail workers. Simon, Old Bayard's valet, describes his return home as he heard it: "He got offen de two oclock train,' he continued. 'Jumped off de wrong side and lit out th'ough de woods. Section hand seed 'im'" (*Flags* 7). To clarify, a section hand is railroad employee given the dangerous and backbreaking task of maintaining the alignment of the railroad tracks. This, as with most of the manual labor jobs on the railway, was a job supervised by whites but performed by black men. When Horace returns midway through the novel, we note this same arrangement with other railroad employees. The white clerk (recognizable in *Flags* by his lack of dialect) outranks the black porters who do the heavy lifting. While it obviously stands to reason (and is historical fact) that African Americans utilized the railroad to move about the country, this mobility is all but invisible in the novel as white character after white character uses the train to leave and return to Yoknapatawpha while only Caspey is ever directly linked to railroad mobility.

In contrast to Bayard who gets half a page and Horace who gets a few pages, Caspey's arrival back in Jefferson is chronicled in a single half-line sentence. When Miss Jenny notices Isom, his nephew, strutting around in a military uniform, she learns that the uniform in fact belongs to Caspey. She asks if he has come back home, to which Isom replies simply, "Yessum. He got in las' night on de nine-thirty'" (*Flags* 49). Faulkner only needs half of a line to physically return Caspey to Yoknapatawpha, but his social return to the white-run Southern community is a few weeks off yet. His return event is presaged by Miss Jenny's next comment to Isom: "Well, let him sleep this morning.

Give him one day to get over the war” (*Flags* 49). For Caspey, getting over the war is less about trauma and more about having learned a new mindset in his travels abroad.

Early on, the narrator paints Caspey as a shiftless lost cause, a status that follows him to the war where the draft sends him “to France and the St. Sulpice docks as one of a labor battalion, where he did what work corporals and sergeants managed to slough off onto his unmilitary shoulders and that white officers could devise for him and which he could not evade” (*Flags* 57). After this, he “returned to his native land a total loss, sociologically speaking, with a definite disinclination toward labor, honest or otherwise” (*ibid*). Thus, mobility to the war and back has ruined Caspey as per the white supremacist system that demands he work hard, keep his head down, and stay in one place (like a cog in a machine). From this perspective, the only worse outcome would be if he were to infect others with his mindset. It may be difficult to keep him down on the farm now that he’s seen the lights of gay Paris, but it must be done to maintain order, and as patriarch of the first family of Jefferson, this reintroduction to the ways of Yoknapatawpha falls to Old Bayard.

In regaling his family with his war experiences, Caspey declares new rights and privileges for himself and, essentially, for all African Americans. He declares that he no longer takes “nothin’ offen no white man no mo’, lootenant ner captain ner M.P.” (*Flags* 61). His boldness is the direct result of his experience overseas, for the Great War has taught him ““de white folks dey can’t git along widout de cullud man.... And now de cullud race gwine reap de benefits of de war, and dat soon” (*ibid*). In the 1920s, Faulkner already knew that sentiment to be untrue. Interestingly, in his article “On Fear” alluded to earlier, Faulkner addresses this very issue, saying that economic fears prevent

not only social equality but educational equality regardless of sacrifices made by African Americans in the wars of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century: He notes, “the Negro can gain our country’s highest decoration for valor beyond all call of duty for saving or defending or preserving white lives on foreign battlefields, yet the Southern white man dares not let that Negro’s children learn their ABC’s in the same classroom with the children of the white lives he saved or defended” (“On Fear”). While the valor of black soldiers was nominally influential in the integration of the armed forces after World War II, a significant step in the fight for civil rights, it still counted for little on the southern home front. From a historical perspective, Caspey’s position echoes numerous post-World War I African American writers, thinkers, and activists who advocated for equal treatment after the war.

Such responses to black men’s service in the war from Faulkner’s contemporaries echo earlier writers like Paul Laurence Dunbar, who wrote poetry advocating for the rights of black men since they fought and died for America in the Civil War, the so-called Indian Wars, and the Spanish American War. While there’s no reason to believe that Simon, Caspey’s father, is overly literary (or even literate), he’s been around long enough to have heard his fellow African Americans make similar declarations before. Thus, while listening to Caspey’s stories and revolutionary ideas, his father’s response is brief: “‘Sho’ murmured Simon” (*Flags* 58). From past experience, Simon knows exactly what’s coming for Caspey, especially if he talks too much and too loudly about having gotten his “white in France” (i.e. sex with white women) and his plans to get it back home in Jefferson. Simon, at times portrayed as trickster and at times as Uncle Tom, attempts to put Caspey back on track, regardless of whether we interpret that as the track of survival or the track of usefulness to his benevolent white master: “‘Lemme tell you somethin’,

nigger,' Simon said. 'De good Lawd done took keer of you fer a long time now, but He aint gwine bother wid you always'" (*Flags* 62). In other words, keep your mouth shut and your head down if you know what's good for you.

True to his word, Caspey decides that he will not take orders from whites, or anyone else. When Miss Jenny calls out to him as he's leaving the Sartoris plantation, he ignores her:

"You, Caspey!" Miss Jenny repeated, raising her voice. But he went steadily on down the drive, insolent and slouching and unhurried. "He heard me," she said ominously. "We'll see about this when he comes back. Who was the fool anyway, who thought of putting niggers into the same uniform as white men? Mr. Vardaman knew better; he told those fools at Washington at the time that it wouldn't do." (*Flags* 62)

Here, Jenny is the voice of white supremacy, demanding obedience and ominously promising recompense for his insolence. Further, she praises "Mr. Vardaman," namesake of *As I Lay Dying*'s child narrator. Vardaman, onetime governor of Mississippi, and staunch white supremacist. Jenny's statement praising Vardaman is eerily prescient of Trent Lott's assertion seventy years later at Strom Thurmond's hundredth birthday party, "I want to say this about my state: When Strom Thurmond ran for president, we voted for him. We're proud of it. And if the rest of country had followed our lead, we wouldn't have had all these problems over all these years, either" (qtd. in "Frist Assumes"). In 2002, this earned Lott enough backlash that he was forced to resign from his post as Senate Majority Leader. In 1929, however, calling on Vardaman's good name would

endear Miss Jenny/Faulkner to a Southern white audience eager to maintain the status quo.

Fortunately (if that is the appropriate word) for Caspey, Old Bayard puts him back in his societally mandated place before the consequences grow too dire for him. A week after disrespecting Miss Jenny, Caspey returns to the plantation to have breakfast with his family. Bayard approaches Caspey and specifically demands that he (as opposed to Simon or Isom who are seated with Caspey) saddle his horse. At first, Caspey doesn't acknowledge Bayard, refusing audibly but "just beneath Bayard's deafness" (*Flags* 80). Elnora, his sister, desperately implores him to cooperate, and finally "with sullen insolence" he complies (*ibid*). As he is exiting the kitchen, "Bayard reached a stick of stove wood from the box at his hand and knocked Caspey through the opening door and down the steps at his father's feet" (*ibid*). As he helps Caspey up, Simon says, "'I kep' tellin' you dem new-fangled war notions of yo'n wa'nt gwine ter work on dis place'" (*Flags* 81). The words "dis place" are specifically referring to the Sartoris plantation, but it is not unreasonable to extrapolate "dis place" to mean "the South" or even white patriarchal America. Through the traditional means of white violence against black flesh, Bayard restores the status quo. From this point onward, whenever we find Caspey, he is on his best behavior acting as a model citizen. He is even rewarded for his newfound tractability when Young Bayard, much less a vocal proponent of white supremacy but no less a beneficiary, teaches him to drive the tractor, thus allowing him mobility across the limited space of the plantation. For the most part, however, this encounter with Old Bayard midway through the novel is the end of Caspey's story. We see him once more later in the novel as he handles the hunting dogs while Young Bayard and Narcissa go

fox hunting. In other words, speaking of a Faulkner pandering to paternalistic Southern whites in his early work, the interesting part of Caspey's story is over once Old Bayard puts him back in his place—the hunting trip (which doesn't leave the Sartoris plantation) demonstrates that Old Bayard's course correction has stuck and, therefore, Caspey's story is over.

Ending this section on an ironic note, despite Caspey being turned into a racist caricature of a soldier who has returned from the war with uppity notions of increased civil rights who is in need to be beaten back into his place, it is Caspey's postwar experience that matches up with Faulkner's own. Faulkner famously came back to Oxford sporting a cape and wearing an officer's uniform and usually remembering to limp from the imaginary war wound he never received because he wasn't able to serve before the war ended [Blottner]. Similarly, Caspey, who spent the war loading and unloading ships, regales his family with stories of daring-do and machine-gunning Germans, carrying around as proof of his deeds, "a florid plated medal of Porto Rican origin" (*Flags* 59). While Caspey was indeed in France, all of his stories about his exploits are as false as Faulkner's were.

In *Flags*, trains are repeatedly used to illustrate the mobility (and rootlessness) of the younger modern characters, such as Dr. Peabody's son (also a doctor named Peabody), whose own schedule is dictated by the train's schedule (*Flags* 400). Moreover, Horace Benbow's two lovers—Belle and her sister Joan—use the train to liberate themselves from the era's prescribed performances of womanhood—that is, they use the train to find and leave husbands and lovers. Clearly, then, as the novel unfolds, the railroad proves integral to the development of the various young moderns, but again, this mobility is

limited to white characters. One has to scratch through Faulkner's oeuvre to find other instances of African Americans with this sort of mobility.

The end of *Flags* presents us with this racial disparity as Young Bayard decides to flee Yoknapatawpha after accidentally killing his grandfather—Old Bayard had a heart attack while riding in his grandson's sportscar, a death we find him actively courting if Miss Jenny is to be believed. Bayard's final exit from Mississippi alights from a small train station eight miles south of Yoknapatawpha, and in the process, we see a final but unsubtle method used to help curtail African American mobility—discomfort. Faulkner describes the white and "colored" waiting rooms as Bayard paces outside in the December cold, feeling too isolated to join either room (unlike the rest of his family, he has by this point already spent time drinking and otherwise associating with African American characters, so it wouldn't have been out of character to enter the colored waiting room). Twice the white waiting room is described: "In the waiting room a stove glowed red hot and about the room stood cheerful groups, in sleek furs and overcoats..." and again "the waiting room where the groups in their furs and overcoats gesticulated with festive... animation" (*Flags* 369). Next he looks "into the colored waiting room, whose occupants sat patiently and murmurously about the stove in the dingy light" (*ibid*). The "waiting room" (there's no need for Faulkner to call it the "white waiting room" since it is understood in the Jim Crow South) is "cheerful" and "festive" with a red hot stove to keep the white travelers warm (in addition to their furs and overcoats). On the other hand, the colored waiting room is characterized by poverty. There's a stove, but it's not red hot; there are surely coats of some sort, but not furs. The African American passengers wait calmly and quietly even though it is Christmas day. While the narrator



does not describe the trains the passengers enter at the end of the chapter, we know that the white passengers had access to much nicer accommodations while black passengers were restricted to inferior Jim Crow cars. Thus, Young Bayard Sartoris, the central figure of Faulkner's first Yoknapatawpha novel, exits the novel amidst a backdrop of enabled white mobility and restricted black mobility.

### **Race and Railroad Mobility in *The Sound and the Fury***

If we encounter a train somewhere in *The Sound and the Fury*, more than likely we are reading Quentin Compson's narrative, roughly ¼ of the novel. Within the entirety of the novel, Faulkner uses the word "train" seventeen times. Of these, twelve appear in the chapter "June Second, 1910," narrated by Quentin. In addition, of the 33 uses of the word "car" as shorthand for rail, train, or trolley car, 24 of these are in Quentin's section (which also contains three mentions of "interurban" as a type of train). From a logistics perspective, this disparity can be ignored since the other three narratives are set in a later time period when automobiles were much more plentiful, and those three are set in the small town of Jefferson and revolve around characters who don't need to travel the way Quentin has traveled. However, to ignore this aspect of Quentin's narrative likewise ignores the ways Faulkner uses transportation to develop characters: For instance, Jason Compson is repeatedly associated with automobiles, and Benjy refuses to travel in anything that's not a horse-drawn carriage (and when Luster drives him the wrong way around the square, Benjy howls in distress). The mentally deficient Benjy is stuck in the 1890s; Jason, a Snopes in all but name, looks to benefit from the more modern technology—he feels that he looks successful in his automobile. Then there's Quentin. As I have previously discussed, Louis D. Rubin explains that even in the railroad's glory

days of the 1920s and 1930s, it was clear that the age of passenger trains was coming to a close. Thus, Faulkner chooses to associate the doomed Quentin, who is ill-equipped to negotiate the demands of an ever modernizing world, with a form of transportation that was likewise being outmoded by new technology.

Regardless, we see Quentin Compson as a man who is obsessed with mobility; as we proceed through the novel, it seems that mobility itself is killing him. Just as he cannot control the forces of modernization (they have proven as unstoppable as his grandfather's watch), he cannot control his sister or her sexuality. Similarly, just as he cannot control his flesh and blood sister, he cannot control the mobility of the young non-white immigrant he calls "sister." When he first encounters her with her complexion like "weak coffee," he muses that America is now "Land of the kike home of the wop" (*SF* 125), a statement nowhere near as relevant to 1910 as it would be to the nativist rhetoric of the 1920s which saw to the passage of America's first limitations on immigration to combat the continuous waves of non-Anglo Saxon immigrants (particularly from southern and eastern Europe). Quentin repeatedly tries to command his new sister to stay put (as if she were a puppy), at one point even trying to run away from her. Nevertheless, she's beyond his control, which is in keeping with the overwhelming arc of his narrative. He cannot arrest motion, and he cannot stop the clock. He cannot reverse the past, nor can he forestall the inevitable end of the Compsons' way of life. In the words of Archibald MacLeish's "You, Andrew Marvell" (1926), Quentin certainly feels "how swift how secretly / The shadow of the night comes on..." (35-36), an appropriate poem to associate with the Compsons considering its depiction of the fall of once-powerful empires (further, Faulkner was very likely familiar with the piece, though there's no

evidence it was any conscious influence on his writing). Around noon on June 2nd [conveniently, MacLeish's poem opens "...here, upon the earth's noonward height" (2)], Quentin boards the interurban train bound for an unnamed hamlet near Cambridge, MA to find a nice place to die. Though it is not explicitly stated at the end of his narrative, Quentin commits suicide, exerting the one form of control available to him, by jumping into the Charles River, laden down with two six-pound flat irons he has bought earlier in the chapter.

As he wanders through the afternoon, we see his mind cycling amongst a non-discrete (mathematically speaking) set of obsessions. Foremost among these is his sister Caddy (and his family in general). Quentin's obsession with her and his desire to control her and/or her sexuality gets the most attention from literary critics, rightfully so, since she is the central focus of each of the narrators and the central image that set Faulkner on the path of writing the novel (Weinstein 33). Furthermore, numerous critics have commented upon his obsession with time. For instance, Matthews notes, Quentin "can't open his eyes in the morning without checking the march of time's shadow across his bedroom wall" (89). Furthermore, his first action on his last day is to attempt to stop the infernal ticking of his grandfather's watch (he fails). Wherever he goes on campus, in Cambridge, or in the unnamed town, he is constantly aware of clocks, watches, and the time of day, whether it be his grandfather's watch, "the mausoleum of all hope and desire" (*SF* 76) or "the white cupola, the round stupid assertion of the clock" (*SF* 124). Furthermore, he is obsessed with race, which has also been discussed by other critics before me. For instance, Thadious Davis points out that Quentin spends a great deal of his narrative discussing how he doesn't really think about blacks; nevertheless, he

constantly dwells upon them, and thus “irony lies in the discrepancy between what he believes about himself, and his world, and what his thoughts and actions reveal” (Davis 94). Two plot points in particular that demonstrate this obsession are his interactions with Deacon/the Deacon at Harvard and the “nigger on a mule” (*SF* 86) he encounters in Virginia. While these two components of Quentin’s narrative have been examined by previous critics, what I intend to add here is a fourth obsession, meshing with time and race, which is mobility, particularly as tied to trains. Within Quentin’s narrative segment of the novel, he demonstrates a fixation on non-white mobility, particularly that of African Americans in contrast to his position as a white Southerner.

In terms of the mobility of African Americans, the character who is most unsettling to Quentin’s worldview is Deacon, or alternately the Deacon (the two are used interchangeably). As Quentin begins making preparations for his final exit, he heads to the post office to mail a letter to his father and looks for Deacon (though we are not yet told why). Quentin remembers that he had last seen Deacon “on Decoration Day, in a G.A.R. uniform, in the middle of the parade,” adding, “If you waited long enough on any corner you would see him in whatever parade came along” (*SF* 82). In a previous parade, for instance, Quentin spotted him in “the Street Sweepers’ section, in a stovepipe hat, carrying a two inch Italian flag, smoking a cigar among the brooms and scoops” (*ibid*). Through this description, Faulkner is able to connect other facets of the narrative. Having him carry a small Italian flag connects him to the small Italian girl who will trail after Quentin just like the ticking of General Compson’s watch. Further, as Quentin grills Deacon about marching “on that Wop holiday,” he responds that he is trying to help his son-in-law who “aims to get a job on the city *forces*. Street cleaner” (*SF* 98, italics

added). For race-obsessed Quentin, non-white immigrants and native blacks, particularly those in the North, are becoming monolithic—that is, joining forces. Later in the chapter, one of these immigrants will assault Quentin, and as the case goes before the local magistrate, he forces Quentin to pay for his assaulter's lost time at work.

When Shreve, Quentin's roommate, sees Deacon walking in his G.A.R. uniform—"G.A.R." is short for Grand Army of the Republic, a fraternal organization comprised of Union Civil War veterans—he declares, "'Just look at what your grandpa did to that poor old nigger,' to which Quentin responds, "'Now he can spend day after day marching in parades. If it hadn't been for my grandfather, he'd have to work like whitefolks'" (*SF* 82). Quentin, presaging his more overtly racist brother Jason, seems to believe that African Americans do no work, regardless of his own class's dependence on black labor. As far as Faulkner reveals, Deacon is indeed jobless, subsisting on a variety of hustles; however, we note that Quentin's social class is likewise unemployed, living on wealth inherited from previous generations who made their money on the backs of exploited slave labor. When we look at the larger picture of the novel, we see that Deacon is far more adept at surviving without a day job than the Compsons, who have mismanaged the family's estate (case in point, selling land to send Quentin to Harvard for just one year; even if he hadn't killed himself, the money for his education would have run out before he had completed any degree). Further, by the 1920s, the younger Jason Compson not only must work, but will make a big deal of telling everyone how hard he has to work so that he can "feed a whole dam kitchen full of niggers" (*SF* 186), a phrase he repeats five times throughout his narrative. He likewise believes in the idea that blacks simply leech their well-being off of whites without doing any work. Regardless, in the

case of Deacon, Quentin shows clear resentment over his social situation. As a Canadian, Shreve should be relatively free of Northern and Southern prejudices about the Civil War; here, he has found a sarcastic middle ground, recognizing that the South's enslavement of blacks led to an alleged persistent shiftlessness amongst American blacks while the efforts of the Union army whose uniform Deacon is wearing helped bring about the end of slavery, allowing Deacon the freedom to spend his days marching in parades. Again, when Quentin breaks the hands off of his grandfather's watch, this proves to be a gesture that neither stops the march of time nor the watch's own ticking. Shreve connects Deacon's apparent freedom from labor to his grandfather's slave owning and failed defense of slavery, thus Faulkner establishes a connection between African American freedom (and mobility) with the incessant march of time that dogs Quentin throughout his narrative, whether this be hearing his watch, recognizing time of day by his hunger, seeing clock towers, or noting the train schedules. Deacon, who literally marches in all the parades, likewise represents the unflagging persistence of time. Quentin cannot help but recognize that Deacon is a figure quite different from the blacks he knew back home in Jefferson. Here in the North, civil rights are more plentiful for African Americans. Obviously, it would be folly to confuse "more plentiful" civil rights with anything approximating equal rights, but it is clear that Deacon is better off in Massachusetts than he would be in Jim Crow's Mississippi.

Deacon's marching (and his absence from the post office where Quentin expects to find him) helps demonstrate his mobility, but the connection between Deacon and trains is made explicit just after Quentin's rumination over that marching. Quentin finally locates Deacon so that he can give him a letter to give to Shreve (presumably something

of a suicide note) on the following day. Before he shares his conversation with Deacon, he provides a little background for his audience, describing the man almost as a vampire: According to Harvard legend, Deacon “hadn’t missed a train at the beginning of school in forty years, and [...] he could pick out a Southerner with one glance. He never missed, and once he had heard you speak, he could name your state” (*SF* 97). Deacon would meet incoming freshmen at the train station and use their expectations of blackness to endear himself to them, beginning with the clothes he would wear to the station: “He had a regular uniform he met trains in, a sort of Uncle Tom’s cabin outfit, patches and all” and would refer to himself as “de old nigger” (*SF* 97). Between the outfit and his heavy use of dialect—such as “Yes, suh. Right dis way, young marster, hyer we is”—as he collected the students’ luggage, he would find out students’ names and room numbers so that he could drop by their rooms and “[bleed] you until you began to learn better” (*ibid*). All the while Deacon’s “manner moved gradually northward” so that before long “he was calling you Quentin or whatever, and when you saw him next he’d be wearing a cast-off Brooks suit...” (*ibid*). Quentin adds that someone had started a rumor that Deacon was a graduate of the divinity school, and when Deacon learned of it, he began to spread the rumor himself as part of his projected image—“that self he had long since taught himself to wear in the world’s eye, pompous, spurious, not quite gross” (*SF* 99-100). Deacon is adept at presenting himself as the person who white people want him to be so that he can exploit their prejudices. Reading Paul Laurence Dunbar’s “We Wear the Mask” (1896), we know that fashioning this image is part and parcel of African American existence in America. Deacon, it would seem, has used the mask not just to survive but to thrive (after a fashion) in a world, a town, and a school dominated by rich whites.

Quentin's feelings about the Deacon initially appear negative, but ultimately, prove to be ambivalent. Though Quentin describes him as a predator of sorts, making his living (somehow) by extracting money from naïve freshmen as he slowly reveals his true nature, Quentin does ultimately decide that "he had been guide mentor and friend to unnumbered crops of innocent and lonely freshmen, and I suppose that with all his petty chicanery and hypocrisy he stank no higher in heaven's nostrils than any other" (*SF* 98). For a moment, he can see something of Roskus, Dilsey's husband, in Deacon. He likes Deacon, so he wants to fit him into the familiar mold of the blacks he had experienced back home. As is, he is an independent actor who is not intimidated or controlled by whiteness and its various threats. As Richard Godden has pointed out, Quentin's experiences with Deacon "culminate in an encounter during which the black tactfully demands that Quentin appreciate, through him, the political fullness of black experience as it transcends white definition" (32). Thus, Quentin is not quite sure how to handle him. Deacon, as well as the handful of black passengers Quentin encounters throughout his final day as he boards a multitude of northern trains, represents an impending change in race relations in the South, and while Quentin has a grudging respect for Deacon despite his own racist upbringing, Deacon is representative of the shifts of modernity, a collapse of the old world of the Compsons wherein nonwhites (not to mention the virtue of women such as his sister) could be controlled. He ultimately wishes the best for Deacon, telling him he's a "good fellow" (as opposed to a "good nigger") and hoping for him to continue befriending young men coming to Harvard (*SF* 100).

Overall, his interactions with Deacon over the past year have clearly unsettled Quentin's notions about black mobility. Deacon, like the other black characters Quentin



rides around with on his final day, treats him merely as another person, not showing the deference to which he had grown accustomed back home in the South. However, earlier in Quentin's narrative, Faulkner illustrates African American mobility that is well within Quentin's comfort zone—that is, more in keeping with Roskus, into whose mold he would like to fit Deacon. One of the most revealing of Quentin's musings recounts a moment when he was traveling home from Cambridge to Jefferson to spend Christmas with his family, and he encounters the aforementioned “nigger on a mule” who fills him with tidings of comfort and joy. While I am certainly not the first to comment on this scene (which is to say that nearly every discussion of Quentin's narrative finds a place for it), if we examine this scene in the light of mobility studies, this will help us gain a new insight into Quentin's personality and will give us a slightly better understanding of his ultimate decision to end his own life.

Quentin relates this particular story in order to discuss his realization that he genuinely does miss the Gibsons [“Roskus and Dilsey and them” (*SF* 86)], the family of black servants who care for (or attempt to, at least) the white Compson family. While that seems to be his motive in discussing this anecdote, the substance of Quentin's story denotes more paternalistic feelings about the family retainers who support the Compson family's lifestyle. As he describes the situation, his train had stopped in Virginia, meaning that he was finally back in the South after spending his first semester in Cambridge. He notes that “The car was blocking a road crossing,” which proves to be important, for when he lifts the shade and peers out the window, he sees “a nigger on a mule...waiting for the train to move” (*SF* 86). Quentin's train is literally preventing the black man from continuing on his way. Quentin adds: “How long he had been there I

didn't know, but he sat straddle of the mule, his head wrapped in a piece of blanket, as if they had been built there with the fence and the road, or with the hill carved out of the hill itself, like a sign put there saying "You are home again" (*SF* 86-7). To be home, then, means that he is back in a place where black immobility is natural. To be an African American in the South, for Quentin at least, is to be still, as if carved from the earth. We can see this as a stark contrast to the Deacon and other blacks he has encountered in the north who are highly mobile, whether physically, socially, or both.

Further, as this passage demonstrates, to be black in the world of Jim Crow meant always being subject to the caprice of any whites they may encounter. Of course, we are never given entrance into the black character's thought processes; he seems to just be minding his own business as he waits for the train to move. However, in order to revel in the familiar feelings of being southern and white again, Quentin engages him in a game of "Christmas Gift." When he initiates the game, the black man responds the way he has to, which is by calling him "boss" and "young marster" (*SF* 87). The upshot for the black man is that he gets a quarter (a more significant amount in 1910, though not particularly sizeable) and that he keeps the peace (in Quentin's telling, there is no danger, but considering historical reality, there's no way the man could be certain of this). The upshot for Quentin is much more valuable than the quarter he tosses out the train window. As Thadious Davis explains, "The Negro and mule standing 'motionless and unimpatient' is a metaphor characterizing Jefferson and home, the way Quentin would like them to be. This scene of 'static serenity' provides Quentin with a comforting image of a familiar, fixed world" (Davis 100-1). Richard Godden notes that this memory "of 'a nigger on a mule' [...] seen from a standing train in Virginia, reassures him by providing an image of

time-honored black deference” (31). Godden further discusses how Quentin is able to reinscribe the color line: “For the price of a quarter thrown from the train, Quentin buys back a secure image of the Negro as ‘childlike,’ given to ‘reliability’ and ‘tolerance’ (ibid). We are never told why the train had even stopped; perhaps this was an ultra-typical stop for water or fuel (coal), but we do know that when the powerful locomotive with its Pullman cars carrying white passengers (with black porters to attend to their needs) was ready to move, only then does the black character get to regain his mobility on an insufficient mule that Quentin has repeatedly described in deprecating terms, such as “gaunt rabbit of a mule” (ibid).

Soon both man and mule have passed “smoothly from sight” (ibid), and this particular wording is also indicative of white mobility. From Quentin’s white subject position, passing through the South is quite smooth. We can readily contrast this experience with that of Dr. William Miller from Charles Chesnutt’s *The Marrow of Tradition*, written partially as a response to the Plessy v. Ferguson decision. As his train enters the South, he must change cars (perhaps Quentin’s train had stopped for similar reasons) despite being well-to-do, well-educated, and in the company of a white friend. While Dr. Miller is forced onto the Jim Crow car to ruminate over the injustice of his situation, Quentin is allowed to wistfully ponder the perceived character of Southern blacks, seeing them as an undifferentiated and interchangeable mass who are possessed of a “childlike and ready incompetence” melded with a “paradoxical reliability” (Godden 31). Extrapolating from the mule riding Virginian and the black servants from his household, he describes a “quality about them of shabby and timeless patience, of static serenity” that is likewise combined with an innate tendency to “rob” their benefactors

while evading “responsibility and obligations by means too barefaced to be called subterfuge” (ibid). Such a characterization might bring to mind Simon from *Flags* or Ned from *Reivers* who are able to get their employers, Colonel Sartoris and Boss Priest respectively, to pay off the sizeable debts they incur through their extracurricular activities. In light of Quentin’s thought processes, it would appear that the man on his mule was immobile not because the train owned and ridden by white people was in his way and he had no choice but to wait, but rather, he was intentionally waiting for a benevolent white person out of whom he might good-naturedly wheedle a quarter. And if that is the case, Quentin is fine with it because blacks possess a “fond and unflinching tolerance for whitefolks’ vagaries like that of a grandparent for unpredictable and troublesome children” (*SF* 87-8). He is unwilling to contemplate that the vagaries of whitefolks have established and maintained this pattern of interactions and that, more importantly, African Americans had to play along and use such terms as “boss” and “young marster” not out of fondness but out of self-preservation.

By the end of his retelling of this incident, Quentin has connected his obsession with blackness to his obsession with time. All throughout the rest of the train ride, he says, “I thought of home, of the bleak station and the mud and the niggers and country folks thronging slowly about the square...and my insides would move like they used to do in school when the bell rang” (*SF* 88). He claims that he misses Dilsey and the rest of the Gibson family, but it is clear that what he truly misses is a way of life he sees slipping away as time passes and the world becomes more modern. His time at Harvard began with an apparently subservient Deacon, but as time passed Deacon proved to be as uncontrollable as either of his sisters. Furthermore, Quentin has had the example of white

Kentuckian Gerald Bland (and Gerald's enabling mother), ostensibly from the same social caste as himself, whose affectations have revealed the hollowness of his own identity as a white Southern aristocrat, thus causing Quentin to physically attack him without provocation hours before committing suicide. Enabled by a fatalism and self-destructive tendencies inherited from his father, Quentin opts to proactively take his life rather than live a life dogged by his various obsessions, including time, race, sexuality, and his sister. To be sure, black mobility, like that of Deacon, is by no means the sole or even primary reason Quentin decides to kill himself. Nevertheless, we see that, for Quentin, black mobility is indicative of the changes wrought by modernity and modernization that Quentin refuses to live with.

### **Ringo Vanishes: African-American Mobility in *The Unvanquished***

While it appears in only two chapters, William Faulkner's *Unvanquished*, in many respects, is a novel about the railroad, detailing some of Colonel John Sartoris' efforts to survive the war and build his railroad. But mostly, it's a coming-of-age tale about Bayard, John's son, and his companion Marengo Strother (Ringo), a slave at the beginning of the story who, in his words "gets abolished" (199) during the Civil War. Bayard and Ringo are inseparable throughout much of the novel. They resist the Yankees together, despite Ringo's slave status (in the lost-cause mentality, Ringo might be characterized as "one of the good ones"—that is, in the Southern memory of a plantation economy that was an idyllic system wherein master and slave provided for one another's peace and happiness, the good slaves did their part to maintain said system).<sup>1</sup> As they

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<sup>1</sup> A closer reading of Ringo's character reveals him to be not unlike the prototypical "bluesman" in Baker's conception of the term, skillfully playing his hand to his best advantage in a white man's world (Baker, *Blues*).

come of age, they run a confidence scheme with Ab Snopes and Bayard's grandmother Rosa Millard wherein the Yankee occupiers are sold back their own stolen mules, and later, when she is murdered by the low-down bushwhacker Grumby, they track him down together, kill him together, and hang his decapitated hand on Granny Millard's grave together. And yet, when it comes to the railroad, the two are separated. Specifically, the chapters "Raid" and "An Odor of Verbena" demonstrate this separation.

In "Raid," we find Bayard, Ringo, and Granny traveling to the Alabama-Tennessee border to retrieve the Sartoris family's stolen silver from Colonel Dick and his encamped Union forces. As they travel, Bayard and Ringo eagerly await getting a glimpse of the railroad at Hawkhurst. In his childlike way, Bayard enjoys his advantage over Ringo, for he has seen the railroad before, yet Faulkner's phrasing of Bayard's recollection is quite significant:

That's how Ringo and I were. We were almost the same age, and Father always said that Ringo was a little smarter than I was, but that didn't count with us, anymore than the difference in the color of our skins counted. What counted was, what one of us had done or seen that the other had not, and ever since that Christmas I had been ahead of Ringo because I had seen a railroad, a locomotive. (81)

There are a few key points to emphasize here. This is Bayard's recollection of his childhood, and it is told from such a perspective; however, it is being told from the perspective of a grown man (he is 24 by end of the novel (224)). It may be reasonable to believe that fourteen-year-old Bayard truly feels/felt this way about Ringo—that the color of their skins doesn't matter. This is undercut, however, by Bayard's constant use, along

with everyone else around him, of the word “nigger” to refer to anyone with dark skin. As Matthews notes, throughout the novel, Bayard “continues to see negro freedom in the terms of his class interest and conditioning” (222). In addition, we witness insecurity in this quote: Colonel Sartoris, Bayard’s father and embodiment of Southern ideals, has declared that Ringo is more intelligent. Proof of Ringo’s smarts is found in this very chapter, when he begins using subterfuge to acquire extra mules and even horses from the Yankee soldiers; between this chapter and the next, they will begin selling these animals back to the Union. For now, Bayard can count himself ahead because he has seen a train and Ringo hasn’t. If we try to envision the story from Ringo’s more savvy perspective, we must wonder how he truly feels about their arrangement and what “counts” between them. From Bayard’s descriptions, he genuinely does seem to feel that he and his childhood companion are equals of a sort, yet the cunning Ringo displays in the novel suggests that Ringo is smart enough to know better.

Regardless, in the next sentence, we find that Bayard had some recognition, however nascent, of Ringo’s otherness: Bayard, speaking from a more learned perspective, says, “I know now it was more than that with Ringo, though neither of us was to see the proof of that for some time yet” (81). He surmises that Ringo felt “that the railroad, the rushing locomotive which he hoped to see symbolized it—the motion, the impulse to move which had already seethed to a head among his people” (ibid). Bayard is referring to the countless escaped slaves, seen and unseen, who the trio passes on their way to Hawkhurst, who are on their way to freedom, even if they don’t quite even know what that is in Bayard’s telling—“a bright shape which they could not know since there was nothing in their heritage” (ibid). This yearning, Bayard tells us, has caused them to

“leave all security and familiarity of earth” (ibid). We find a conflict of perspective in this recollection. We have an acknowledgement that the “heritage” of Southern blacks was one in which mobility was denied them. On the other hand, we find Bayard and/or Faulkner participating, perhaps unwittingly, in the Lost Cause narrative. It’s as if Bayard is saying the runaway slaves are seeking, maybe foolishly, a brighter day, but everything back home on the plantation was really just fine; white Southerners are a benevolent people, after all. For instance, on their journey they encounter a runaway slave and her infant who have been left behind by the group with whom she had been fleeing (including her husband). Granny disapproves of slaves running away from the people who they “belong to” (84)—largely because it’s foolish in her eyes; nonetheless, the benevolent slave owner gives the girl a ride to catch up with the others and gives her some food. There is no recognition on Bayard’s part of the evils of slavery (as opposed to the more sophisticated perspectives Faulkner attributes to characters in *Absalom, Absalom!* or *Go Down, Moses*).

As the chapter unfolds, we ultimately see the experience of the railroad, and its attendant mobility, being denied to Ringo, thus preserving the status quo where Bayard is “ahead.” Ringo, who says ““Seem like I been waiting on hit all my life”” will have to wait even longer to see a railroad because the federal soldiers have destroyed it (86). Bayard, seeing Hawkhurst’s burned down plantation house, reasons that “if the house was gone, they would have taken the railroad too, since anybody would rather have a railroad than a house” (ibid). When Bayard was last at the Hawkhurst plantation, he witnessed as the train “came roaring up and went past” leaving the landscape “all full of smoke and noise and sparks and jumping brass” (88). Now, however, the same area was littered with



“something that looked like piles of black straws heaped up every few yards” (ibid). Gazing at the trees, “it looked like four or five men had taken each rail and tied it around a tree like you knot a green cornstalk around a wagon stake” (ibid). Though Faulkner doesn’t use the term, these were colloquially labeled “Sherman’s neckties”—union soldiers would use the fires of burning crossties to heat the rails so that they could be twisted around nearby trees. Ringo has to wait even longer before he can even hear about the destruction of the tracks because Bayard and his cousin are eager to hear about the movements of the escaped slaves (“niggers,” as they call them). He protests, “I been having to hear about niggers all my life... I got to hear about that railroad” (91). Seemingly a line of comic relief, yet his lament is very consistent with Bayard’s previous discussion about “his people” and their yearning for freedom. Throughout his life, Ringo has had to hear himself referred to as decidedly less-than; what he yearns for, whether or not he recognizes it as the racial imperative that Bayard suggests, is for the freedom of mobility promised by the railroad. Finally, later that night, Ringo at least gets to hear about how the tracks were destroyed, and he and Bayard are united in wondering “*Where could we have been at that moment? What could we have been doing, even a hundred miles away, not to have sensed, felt this?*” (94, italics original). They share what Bayard describes as “a boy’s affinity for smoke and fury and thunder and speed” (93) as well as a common desire to “slip into the roundhouse at dark, to caress the wheels and pistons and iron flanks, to whisper to it in the darkness like lover to mistress” (97). Drusilla tells the boys about a fabulous railroad chase that had preceded the Union army’s destruction of the tracks, and for Bayard, the railroad in this story and what it stands for—principle, honor, and courage (98)—are what the war is all about, and the Yankees tore up the

tracks because the Southern train was too fantastic. Not to be completely denied, Ringo declares after hearing Drusilla's thrilling story, "I heard. And I reckon they aint gonter git that away from me, neither" (99). Ringo is declaring equality of experience with Bayard, so that they are "even" now, but essentially this equality is an equality of lack since each boy's mobility is curtailed. As we see in later chapters, however, this equality is temporary.

The curtailment of Ringo's mobility is crystalized in the final chapter of *The Unvanquished*, "An Odor of Verbena." As noted by A. James Memmot, the experiences of the war had allowed Ringo a limited amount of freedom and equality despite his enslaved status. For instance, we see this during the con game that Ringo carries out with Granny and Bayard. Yet after the war's conclusion, "even though he is technically no longer a slave, he must revert to the slave stereotype; once again he plays the role of the attendant black" (Memmot 384).<sup>2</sup> In terms of the railroad, experiencing Drusilla's telling of the locomotive chase and subsequent destruction of the tracks had previously been cited by Ringo to make him and Bayard equals, yet by the end of the final chapter, Ringo is transformed from aspiring partner in vengeance to mere manservant. Ben Redmond, after enduring the thousand injuries of his erstwhile friend and business partner John Sartoris as best he could, finally murders him, and it is up to Bayard, as a gentleman, to seek revenge. It is Ringo who delivers the message, who has gone away to college, walking into the house where Bayard is staying, and declaring, "They shot Colonel Sartoris this morning. Tell him I will be waiting in the kitchen" (213). The pair ride

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<sup>2</sup>Memmot parallels Ringo's postwar experience with Drusilla, who had been allowed to live as a man and ride with Colonel Sartoris during the war. After the war, she (and the Colonel) is pressured by her family and womenfolk of Jefferson to marry and settle down.

through the night back to Sartoris (the plantation). As he describes his exit from the university, we read an apparent compliment from Bayard, who notes that Ringo has made preparations for their midnight ride as opposed to if Loosh had come to fetch him. Loosh would have “told his news and then sat down and let me take charge from then on. But not Ringo” (214). Despite his certainty about Ringo’s qualities, we see Bayard doubting his own, wondering “*At least this will be my chance to find out if I am what I think I am*” (215, italics original). This is important. While Bayard never verbalizes it as such, he recognizes his friend’s superiority. Ringo is ambitious, resourceful, and intelligent, and if it weren’t for a double-accident of birth—being born black and a slave—it could be Ringo who was the scion of the family. In fact, Stephen Hahn, echoing Walter Taylor, suggests that there’s reason to believe that Ringo, despite nominally being the son of Simon Strother, may in fact be Bayard’s half-brother just as Elnora, Ringo’s sister, is explicitly revealed to be in the short story “There Was a Queen.” Upon initial reading, “But not Ringo” appears complimentary, but reading more deeply, we see that Ringo is a threat. Bayard knew then that “no matter what might happen to either of us, I would never be The Sartoris to him... Maybe it was he had outgrown me” (*Unvanquished* 215-6). After they arrive back at Sartoris, Drusilla hands Bayard two dueling pistols. As life had gone before, that’s one pistol each for Bayard and for Ringo to take down Redmond (though admittedly, Drusilla is intending for Bayard to use both himself).

However, the next morning, Bayard will neither need his father’s pistols nor his friend’s assistance. Ringo accompanies him to Redmond’s office, ready to help avenge the Colonel’s murder. “I’m going with you,” Ringo declares, to which John responds “No you aint” (246). To be sure, it is not only Ringo’s help who he declines; George

Wyatt, one of a mass of former comrades-in-arms from the war who are also trying to insert themselves, is likewise rebuffed. While he is denying his father's way of life—shooting his way out of any particular situation—Bayard is nonetheless ensuring that his father's intent—that Bayard take over the railroad, his life's work—is still carried out. Bayard does not, in fact, kill Redmond, for he can understand that his father, essentially, got due recompense for living as he did; moreover, he seeks to avoid supporting a narrative of violence. Instead, Bayard approaches unarmed and stands stoically as Redmond fires off two nervous shots before taking his coat and hat and walking “to the station where the south-bound train was just in and got on it with no baggage, nothing, and went away from Jefferson and from Mississippi and never came back” (249-50). Notably, Redmond, a business and political rival of John Sartoris is awarded something denied to Ringo: An exit—and one afforded by railroad mobility even. We likewise find that Drusilla is able to utilize such mobility: Aunt Jenny says, ““She took the evening train. She has gone to Montgomery”” (253). Ringo rejoins Bayard as they ride back home, stops as they take a nap in a field, brings Bayard water when he wakes crying to wash his face before heading into the house, and... Nothing. That's it. (Technically, Ringo does reappear once more in “My Grandmother Millard and General Bedford Forrest and the Battle of Harrykin Creek,” yet this short piece is set before *The Unvanquished*.)

Ringo's exclusion from Bayard's non-act of revenge might easily be explained away: Bayard, as scion of the Sartoris clan, is bound by duty to avenge his father's murder, and, of course, it would be unchivalrous to ambush Redmond two-to-one (Ringo does offer this as an option though he knows it will be rejected). However, there are two

primary problems with these explanations. As noted before, Ringo is quite possibly John's son. As such, revenge for his own father's murder is his birthright, but in the white supremacist system wherein miscegenation is to be feared, Ringo must be denied this birthright and erased, for it would be an acknowledgement of the unspoken practices underpinning the system. Moreover, exacting vengeance upon Redmond is not like taking vengeance upon Grumby. Granny Millard's murderer. In that scenario, Ringo was a full partner in the mule scheme (it was actually even his idea) and was thus owed a full share of vengeance when his co-conspirator is murdered. Unlike then, this new act of vengeance (or non-act, as the case may be) established Bayard as the sole owner of the Sartoris railroad—not some illicit scheme to make money, but a legally-recognized ownership of an underpinning component of the commodity exchange system. Because this is the South, because Ringo is black, because he may well be the product of his master's right to female property, Ringo must be suppressed. He must disappear. His participation, like that of Wyatt, might insinuate some form of ownership share, some claim upon his former master, some acknowledgement that aristocratic white wealth and authority was predicated on black labor. Ringo's mobility around Jefferson is never exactly conscripted, for he does have his connections to white benefactors, yet while the railroad may run right up through the middle of Jefferson, it is not of Jefferson. It is a national construct that provides movement throughout the region and the nation. To allow black ownership would upset a national plantational system wherein white capitalists own the trains and tracks, middle class whites work as engineers and in supervisory capacities, and poor whites and blacks do the actual labor. Thus, just as young Ringo was denied his opportunity to ride the railroad earlier in "Raid" due to the Union Army's

policy of destroying Southern infrastructure in hopes of gaining a strategic advantage, older Ringo is likewise denied railroad mobility. That is, neither the allegedly more progressive Northerners nor the more overtly racist Southerners, in this novel at least, are overly sympathetic to black mobility.

To reiterate, then, *The Unvanquished*, a novel about the railroad in which the railroad is generally absent, presents black mobility specifically curtailed, which is consistent with Faulkner's other works. Bayard and Ringo are raised together, play together, and shoot at Yankee's together, yet Ringo, Bayard's black double, fades from the picture when it is time for Bayard to become "The Sartoris," to take ownership of the railroad. Obviously, it would be unrealistic to imagine that Ringo would share in any sort of ownership since he is a family retainer and former slave, yet this is Bayard's first adventure in which Ringo isn't allowed to participate, and it is the adventure wherein Bayard inherits control of mobility. Ringo is not at his side as the faithful servant—faithful servant in a novel of the "moonlight and magnolia" tradition wherein African Americans essentially come in two stripes, obsequious helper or ungrateful traitor to white goodness (such as Ringo's Uncle Loosh, who helps the Yankees confiscate the Sartoris' silver). Instead Ringo has been entirely pushed aside rather than be associated with mobility. He simply vanishes, never to return to the pages of Yoknapatawpha history.

If we went searching for a real-life analogue to Marengo Strother, we might land upon Wallace Saunders. Though Saunders does not share in any of Ringo's biographical details, with the exception of blackness, he is subjected to a similar disappearing act. In the preceding chapter, I discussed Faulkner's ambiguous responses to 20<sup>th</sup>-century

narratives of progress, particularly as illustrated through railroad mobility. Though Faulkner's novels make no reference to him, one cultural icon who exemplifies the dubious progress of the railroad enterprise is Casey Jones, famed railroad engineer who went out in a blaze of glory trying in 1900 to ensure that the mail arrived on time—less than 150 miles away from Faulkner's hometown. Though he never appears in Faulkner's novels, Casey Jones is perhaps the most famous railroad employee in American history, and this fame is partially due to the efforts of Wallace Saunders, an African American railroad employee who is believed to have written the original "The Ballad of Casey Jones." Saunders, however, never received any share of the profits made by the insanely popular song; instead, white musicians took the credit. His lack of profit from his efforts mirrors the experience of the "invisible" people of color—African Americans, Chinese, Irish, and Eastern Europeans—who did much of the actual labor of building the nation's railroads (at the time Irish and Eastern Europeans were not considered "white").

In so many respects, Faulkner tends to turn a blind eye to non-white mobility. As Larry Tye discusses, despite the tremendous impact of the railroad on creating a black middle class (thus making them more able to enjoy mobility and commodities), white passengers tended to see African American railroad workers (generally, porters) as part of the furniture; they could not quite fathom their humanity. Faulkner's novels repeat this objectification. Nevertheless, railroad employment was essential to the emergence of the black middle class in America (Tye). Like American history in general, the history of the railroad in America has a troubled racial past. In the eastern states, the railroad was built largely with black labor, much of it non-voluntary; Faulkner's great grandfather himself used leased convicts, most of them African American, to bring the railroad to northern

Mississippi (Millichap). In the west, black and non-white immigrant labor was used to construct railroads. Nevertheless, (legal) railroad mobility was initially the province of whites, and railroad ownership was exclusively white. Furthermore, in 1896, the Supreme Court's *Plessy v. Ferguson* decision laid the groundwork for legalized Jim Crow segregation, extending the power of the railroad—as an entity of modernization, not as a business—into society beyond mere trains and tracks. Control and regulation of nonwhite railroad mobility was simply another tool of white supremacy.

With a few notable exceptions, Faulkner whitewashes the railroad, barely presenting any non-white interaction with railroad networks. For instance, Faulkner's narrators are quite aware of Jim Crow restrictions on mobility—we see off-hand reference to Jim Crow smoker cars, for instance—yet never take on the subject directly. White characters, male and female, rich and poor, are allowed an enhanced freedom of mobility that is denied to the black characters. This is anachronistic because of the tremendous impact of the railroad in shaping black culture between Reconstruction and World War I (*Giggie*, *Tye*).

As I have demonstrated throughout this study, Faulkner includes numerous characters who have parlayed their railroad experiences into enhanced mobility (with mixed results). By and large, however, these characters have been white. When we set out to examine the interplay of race and the railroad in Faulkner's fiction, we repeatedly see mobility as the province of white characters. Moreover, we find a number of racial rail experiences that are missing, such as Caspey's return or that of any black veterans in *Soldier's Pay*. We never learn anything else about the black Virginian on his insufficient mule. Rather than any sort of chronicle of the Great Migration, we get Henry Wilbourne



and Charlotte Rittenmeyer traveling north by train. With an examination of Faulkner's novels, these absences become quite conspicuous. It may not have been the author's plan to exclude black mobility, but this exclusion meshes well with American and Southern white supremacist tendencies.

## **Conclusion: The End of the Line? Final Thoughts on Mobility, the Railroad, and American Culture and Literature**

In 1971, Amtrak was formed as the result of the Congressional Rail Passenger Service Act, which consolidated the U.S.'s existing 20 privately-held passenger railroads into one publicly held entity ("How Amtrak"). In its nearly fifty-year history, the company has yet to turn a profit. Allegedly, it was on track to do just that in 2020, according to CEO Richard Anderson (Hobson and Hagan), but economic damage associated with the Covid-19 pandemic will likely prevent this—especially due to the number of cancelled trains in the Northwest corridor between Boston and Washington D.C., the most (actually, the only) profitable sector for the company. Some might choose to look at the founding of Amtrak as the end of the passenger rail era in America.

Conversely, I would posit a different date/event: Twenty years earlier, in March 1951 in Memphis, TN, producer Sam Phillips recorded "Rocket '88," performed by Jackie Brenston and His Delta Cats (aka Ike Turner and His Kings of Rhythm), a record often held up by music historians (with the expected amount of quibbling) as the first rock song ("Mississippi Blues"). Biographer and frequent *Rolling Stone* contributor Nick Tosches<sup>3</sup> asserts that "Rocket '88" "was possessed of a sound and a fury the sheer, utter newness of which set it apart from what had come before" (139). The promiscuously suggestive lyrics of Brenston's song serve as a tribute to his Oldsmobile Rocket 88. Eisenhower's interstate system was yet to be approved, but the post-war culture of America's youth had apparently moved on from trains.

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<sup>3</sup> In the interest of full disclosure, Tosches did not consider "Rocket '88" to be the first rock and roll song because he didn't believe in the concept of a first rock and roll song, having written numerous books and articles about the evolution of rock, R&B, and country music.

Faulkner's death in 1962 falls almost precisely in the middle of these two events, both of which represent seminal moments in the evolving story of America's mobility culture. By this time, passenger rail travel in the U.S. was already in decline. In the fictional Jefferson, MS, mirroring real-life Oxford, MS, rail travel was no longer possible, as we find in his final novel when Lucius assures his contemporary grandchildren, "Oh yes, Jefferson had passenger trains then, enough of them so they had to number them to keep them separate" (*Reivers* 43). Abandoning the railroad, contemporary writers had begun trading in train tracks for tire tracks. Very useful in demonstrating this point is Patricia Highsmith, who followed up her debut novel *Strangers on a Train* (1950) with *The Price of Salt* (1952). Published thirteen years after Faulkner's *The Wild Palms*, Highsmith's second novel (that would fit very nicely into my Ch. 1 if not for its lack of railroads) details a scandalous (for the times) love affair between a middle class wife and her female lover that is enabled by mobility—except that these two lovers run away in a convertible rather than on a train. More famously, Vladimir Nabokov's *Lolita* (1955) likewise features an illicit inter-state love affair enabled by automobiles and open roads, this time between the middle-aged Humbert and his barely-post-pubescent step-daughter, Delores (or as he calls her, "Lolita"). While the novel is primarily known for its controversial sexuality, their affair is enacted during a set of cross-country road trips (after Delores' mother is killed by a car). Two years later, while Faulkner's *The Town* was questioning American narratives of progress, Jack Kerouac did likewise in his bro-mantic love letter to mobility with *On the Road* (1957). Like America's economy and music, American literary culture was moving on from trains as well.

While the average middle-class adult today can likely look back on road trips in the family station wagon or remember watching in theatres as young Kevin McCallister's family accidentally left him home alone when they flew to Paris for Christmas, neither individual American's narratives nor cultural productions feature train trips any longer. By no means, of course, does this mean trains are gone, even if their influence is oftentimes overlooked.

First, in terms of American commercial progress, we should note that rail freight traffic never disappeared. Today, freight trains move 40% of U.S. freight (Webber). This is down from the 72% of freight moved by rail during World War II but still very significant (Weingroff). Moreover, though the number of track-miles in the U.S has been shrinking for a century, profits on rail freight have actually increased steadily over the last several decades (Webber). Commuter rail in the Northeastern corridor of the U.S. (D.C. to Boston) has remained strong due its practicality, yet the heyday of intercontinental rail travel is over. Writing an article for *Collier's* magazine in 1956, Theodore White explained that if the government's proposed interstate system were to go through, the trucking industry would "gnaw away as successfully at the railways' long-haul freight business as the airlines have at the railway's long-haul passenger business, and the commuters' automobiles at their suburban passenger business" (qtd. in Weingroff). For the most part, history has proven him correct.

Undoubtedly, though, the railroad has left a lasting impact on the American experience, even when it is not readily acknowledged. Novels such as those by Highsmith, Nabokov, and Kerouac that feature mobility borne of automobiles have their roots in the rail-infused mobility of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. When

we look back at the history of American movement—from the Mayflower’s pilgrimage to our “Manifest Destiny” of westward expansion to forced relocations of native populations to the transcontinental railroad, ultimately a precursor to the system of highways and interstates crisscrossing the nation—it becomes abundantly clear we are a nation built upon and with mobility. Furthermore, control over who can move and where they can move has been in the foreground of American culture for centuries. Just as suffrage was restricted to white males in the early stages of our nation’s existence, so too was freedom of movement; and just as with suffrage, non-whites and women have had to agitate continually to obtain full mobility. The ultimate manifestation of mobility restrictions in America was the Jim Crow “smoker” cars of the 19<sup>th</sup>- and early-20<sup>th</sup> century. Non-whites (namely, African Americans) were confined to these cars, and white women were confined to white-only cars. On the other hand, white men, particularly wealthy white men, gave themselves free reign to move about cars at will. The label “Colored Only” had no effect on wealthy white men, who were free to enter the Jim Crow car to enjoy a cigar. While custom dictated that it was unseemly to smoke in front of white women, no such restrictions were placed on puffing smoke in the face of nonwhite women in the Jim Crow cars. Also of note, these cars were positioned at the front so that white passengers would not be inundated with the engine’s smoke and cinders that would fly into the windows. And yet, there also exists a long tradition of resistance to these train-borne mobility restrictions: clandestine mobility. Prior to the Civil War, the metaphorical Underground Railroad provided real movement from southern captivity to freedom in the north. Later in the Gilded Age and beyond with the advent of sprawling American railroads, clandestine mobility took the form of hopping

trains, a countercultural (or at least counter-capitalistic) activity providing freedom of movement to the non-wealthy, regardless of race or gender.

In the current age, control over mobility is one of the most powerful forces in the world, and it is central to many of our political debates. The ability to control others' movements or the ability to move oneself have proven increasingly relevant to American life in 2020 as the Covid-19 pandemic ravages a country built on freedom of movement. Despite health experts warnings that people are safer at home, April and May of 2020 have given rise to numerous protests of state and municipal stay-at-home orders. While debates have revolved around public health, economic well-being, and allegedly tyrannical governments, most of these can be reduced to questions of mobility. To what extent can curtailed mobility protect public health? What degree of public mobility will optimize relief efforts while preventing total economic collapse? To what degree can our citizens be trusted to use their mobility wisely in order to prevent the spread of disease? Heavily rebroadcasted scenes from beaches and protests would suggest not at all. To what degree should we allow governments to curtail mobility? The aforementioned protestors of these stay-at-home statutes would likewise declare "not at all." Regardless, all these questions reduce to issues of power, whether that be power to enforce immobility or to flout mobility restrictions. Furthermore, these current questions about exercise of power relate directly the question touched upon in this study. For instance, following after my discussion in Ch. 2, the economic consequences of the pandemic have raised questions about the validity of America's self-image as the richest country in the world when a cratering economy has proven that most families are just a few missed paychecks away from financial ruin. In the context of Ch. 3, as with the railroad mobility

of yesteryear, racial disparities persist in these exercises of power. If nothing else, this can be seen in the disparity between law enforcement's responses (or lack thereof) to heavily armed white protestors amassing in public spaces as well as documented disparities in the death tolls between whites and nonwhites (which are inextricably linked to systemic issues of poverty and racism).

The railroad, particularly between the Civil War and the Cold War, brought unprecedented mobility to America along with tremendous industrial and economic growth. Airplanes and automobiles further exploded American mobility and resultant industrial and economic might (while also ensuring continued political and military involvement in petroleum-producing regions of the world so as to protect that mobility). Furthermore, just because a story or a song doesn't feature a train, this doesn't mean it isn't strongly influenced by the railroad. Railroad culture is more than just the railroad. As noted above and in my introduction, the existence of suburbs, time zones, and fast-food chains began with the railroad, though these entities exist independently today. Railroads and their successors (automobiles, particularly) facilitated cultural transmission as Americans continue to move around the country for work, family, school, leisure, and whim.

As I wind down this examination of the train in Faulkner's novels, I will do so by pondering potential further steps in my lines of inquiry. As should have become apparent from reading this dissertation, within Faulkner studies, trains are only one facet of the mobility concerns that are omnipresent throughout his works. For instance, *Pylon* (1935)—as yet unmentioned in this project—revolves around barnstorming pilots and their unconventional loves and lifestyles. And of course, cars are at the heart of many of

the novels, including the first automobile in Jefferson in *The Reivers*, Bayard Sartoris's or Manfred DeSpain's sportscars in *Flags in the Dust and The Town*, respectively, or even the German convertible Caddy Compson is photographed in riding around with her Nazi officer at the end of *The Sound and the Fury*. Is Faulkner using these other forms of mobility to make the same demonstrations as noted in my study, or do they serve other purposes?

Beyond Faulkner studies, perhaps the most intriguing question to ponder next is, what has become of trains in literature in what we might term "The Amtrak Era"? In what novel ways have authors (as well as musicians, filmmakers, and other artists) utilized trains and railroad mobility in the last 40-50 years now that, beyond having to wait at crossings for long, ponderous passing locomotives, the train doesn't so viscerally affect everyday existence as it did in the century before World War II? What authors are utilizing railroad mobility and to what ends? Faulkner is a natural starting point for analyzing the railroad in American literature since it is integral to his oeuvre, but by no means does he have a monopoly on it. For instance, in *Sula* (1973), Toni Morrison, an avid reader and also a critic of Faulkner, uses a pair of traumatic railroad experiences to develop two of the novel's primary characters: Eva, Sula's grandmother, who intentionally gets her leg amputated by a train in order to get money to raise her children, and Nel, Sula's best friend, who is forced to acknowledge her racial position on a train trip to New Orleans. Later, in painting her picture of 1920's Harlem in *Jazz* (1992), Morrison acknowledges the centrality of the railroad in bringing African Americans to Harlem at that pivotal moment of the Harlem Renaissance. In assembling posthumous studies of her career in the wake of her 2019 passing, there is definitely ample room for



discussion of both Faulkner's influence on her work but also her uses of the railroad and depictions of mobility and its effects.

Apart from devotees of Faulkner, of course, trains play key roles in the works of numerous other writers of contemporary fiction, and these works of fiction continue to raise the questions about mobility and its ties to gender, sexuality, progress, inequality, and race that I examined in my chapters. Fannie Flagg's bestselling *Fried Green Tomatoes at the Whistle Stop Café* (1987)—later adapted to film in 1991—chronicles the exploits of Idgie (Imogene Threadgoode), who skillfully utilizes trains in her battles against systemic racism, systemic poverty, and gender/sexual norms in Depression-era Alabama. Readers also witness Idgie's nephew "Stumpy" as he overcomes disability after having his arm ripped off by a speeding train. The Depression-era events of the novel are told retrospectively by Idgie's now-aged foster-sister, helping the present day (1980s) protagonist Evelyn Couch, middle-aged suburban housewife, in her battles with depression and a loveless marriage. A question we might readily ask of the novel is, in what ways does it use railroad mobility of yesteryear to provide ammunition—especially for female audiences of the 1980s—in existentialist battles against anxiety, depression, and societal expectations? Furthermore, what kind of norms is the novel in conflict with and what kind of new norms does it seek to create? Now, read in the light of the Black Lives Matter movement, we can also ask in what ways is Idgie's battle against Southern racists of yesteryear helpful to the movement, and in what ways does it let white audiences off the hook for their unwitting participation in systemic racism?

Another novel to consider is Jonathan Franzen's *The Corrections* (2001), featuring suburban family patriarch Alfred Lambert, a retired train engineer who has used

his position as breadwinner for the family to maintain dominance. In order to gain a fuller understanding of this novel chronicling American culture at the millennium, a necessary step is to examine the influence of America's railroad past on the present day existence of the Lambert family. How has the chief mode of transportation before the Baby Boom managed to influence family dynamics of Cold War America and beyond?

The list of authors, titles, and questions could go on and on, but one final author of note here is Colson Whitehead, author of *John Henry Days* (2001) and *The Underground Railroad* (2016). The 2001 novel's protagonist J. Sutter, a denizen of 1990s .com-America's culture of hyperconsumption, is sent to West Virginia to report on the release of a commemorative John Henry postage stamp and attend the inaugural John Henry Days festival. Throughout the novel, Whitehead weaves back and forth between the lives and experiences of Sutter and Henry. Readers are compelled to compare the railroad-era experience of Henry as a counterbalance to empty, profligate lifestyle of Sutter and his fellow journalists ("junketeers") without heavy-handed moralizing or directives. Notably, Franzen, writing for the *New York Times Book Review*, provides a generally favorable review of *John Henry Days*, declaring it to be descended from *Moby Dick* and *Ulysses*, which is well-deserved praise. Nevertheless, we could also place Whitehead in a line of succession from Charles Chesnutt (*The Marrow of Tradition*—1901) to James Weldon Johnson (*The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man*—1912), Jean Toomer (*Cane*—1923), Zora Neale Hurston (*Jonah's Gourd Vine*—1934), Ralph Ellison (*Invisible Man*—1952), and Toni Morrison (see above), all luminary African American novelists who, since the U.S. Supreme Court's *Plessy v. Ferguson* decision onward, have been utilizing the railroad to illuminate and protest the nation's attachment

to white supremacy and the damage it has wrought (to put the situation mildly), a condition that, obviously, did not disappear when the *Plessy* decision was overturned with *Brown v. The Board of Education of Topeka Kansas*. As such, an obvious line of inquiry to trace though the novel is to find the connections between Whitehead and these other novelists while also examining the ways Whitehead portrays mobility, particularly in the lifestyle of J. Sutter, whose utter rootlessness impedes any efforts to develop meaningful relationships, romantic and otherwise. A second novel that serves as an example of Whitehead using the railroad in this fashion is *The Underground Railroad*. Here, Whitehead presents a fantastical narrative featuring an actual underground train system that runaway slaves use to obtain freedom. Throughout the book, readers find implied comparisons between American slavery and the Nazis' persecutions of Jews. Cora, an escaped slave, utilizes the Underground Railroad's mobility to escape both her white persecutors and her self-interested fellow African Americans, opening up for readers a keen insight into the struggle for connection, whether between races, genders, or even just between individuals. As with *John Henry Days*, another facet of mobility to be investigated within Whitehead's work is the effect of ever-increasing mobility in forcing a tradeoff of roots for routes in modernity and the contemporary world. It is in his depictions of hypermobility that Whitehead's works avail themselves to be a logical next stop on my line of inquiry.

Even after this lengthy study, there is still more of Faulkner's use of trains that could be examined, still more of his depictions of mobility—rail related and otherwise—to be picked apart and pieced together. Just as with America's mobility infrastructures themselves, in applying mobility studies to the Faulkner canon, there's always another

track or another train to ride, explore, dig up, or build. However, for the time being at least, we have reached the end of the line.

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