AMERICAN MODERNISM'S GOTHIC CHILDREN

by

HANNAH GODWIN

A DISSERTATION

Presented to the Department of English
and the Graduate School of the University of Oregon
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

June 2017

DISSERTATION APPROVAL PAGE

Student: Hannah Godwin

Title: American Modernism's Gothic Children

This dissertation has been accepted and approved in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Doctor of Philosophy degree in the Department of English by:

Mark Whalan	Chairperson
Paul Peppis	Core Member
Mary Wood	Core Member
Ernesto Martinez	Institutional Representative

and

Scott L. Pratt	Dean of the Graduate School

Original approval signatures are on file with the University of Oregon Graduate School.

Degree awarded June 2017

DISSERTATION ABSTRACT

Hannah Godwin

Doctor of Philosophy

Department of English

June 2017

Title: American Modernism's Gothic Children

This dissertation delineates a range of literary endeavors engaging the gothic contours of child life in early to mid-twentieth century America. Drawing fresh attention to fictional representations of the child in modernist narratives, I show how writers such as William Faulkner, Djuna Barnes, Jean Toomer, Eudora Welty, and Katherine Anne Porter turned to childhood as a potent site for negotiating cultural anxieties about physical and cultural reproduction. I reveal the implications of modernist technique for the historical formation of American childhood, demonstrating how these texts intervened in national debates about sexuality, race, and futurity. Each dissertation chapter adopts a comparative approach, indicating a shared investment in a specific formulation of the gothic child. Barnes and Faulkner, in creating the child-woman, appraise how the particular influence of psychoanalysis on childhood innocence irrevocably alters the cultural landscape. Faulkner and Toomer, through the spectral child, evaluate the exclusionary racial politics surrounding interracial intimacy which impact kinship structures in the U.S. South. Welty and Porter, in spotlighting the orphan girl-child, assess the South's gendered social matrix through the child's consciousness. Finally, Faulkner, in addressing children as a readership in his little-known gothic fable, *The Wishing Tree*,

produces a compelling site to examine the relationship between literature written for the child and modernist artistic practice.

CURRICULUM VITAE

NAME OF AUTHOR: Hannah Godwin

GRADUATE AND UNDERGRADUATE SCHOOLS ATTENDED:

University of Oregon, Eugene, OR
Wake Forest University, Winston-Salem, NC

DEGREES AWARDED:

Doctor of Philosophy, English, 2017, University of Oregon
Master of Arts, English, 2008, Wake Forest University
Bachelor of Arts, English, 2004, Wake Forest University

AREAS OF SPECIAL INTEREST:

Modernist Literature and Culture
Gender Studies
Childhood Studies
Southern Studies

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE:

Graduate Teaching Fellow, Department of English, University of Oregon, 2010-2017

GRANTS, AWARDS, AND HONORS:

Sherwood Travel Award, University of Oregon, May 2015

Oregon Humanities Center Graduate Research Support Fellowship, University of Oregon, March 2014

Graduate Research Award, University of Oregon, December 2012

Center for the Study of Women in Society Travel Grant, University of Oregon, October 2012

English Department Conference Travel Award, University of Oregon, June 2012, October 2012, July 2014

Graduate School Travel Award, Wake Forest University, April 2008

Graduate School Richter Grant for Research Abroad, Wake Forest University, Research performed at Oxford University, Wadham College, England, July 2007

Graduate School Summer Research Award, Wake Forest University, June 2007

Medieval Studies Travel Award, Wake Forest University, May 2007

PUBLICATIONS:

" 'Who are you?': Modernism, Childhood, and Historical Consciousness in Faulkner's *The Wishing Tree.*" In *Faulkner and History*. Eds. Jay Watson and James G. Thomas, Jr. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2017.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Many have aided in the completion of this project—advisors and colleagues, friends and family. First, I'd like to express my gratitude to my dissertation chair, Mark Whalan, for his thoughtful and constructive feedback, confidence in my work, and generosity of spirit. I couldn't have asked for a more wonderful advisor. I'd also like to thank Mary Wood and Paul Peppis. Working with them both from my very first moment of arrival at Oregon has been nothing but edifying and delightful. Ernesto Martinez inspired me to think about desire, memory, and the body in new and productive ways. Anne Laskaya has always been a model of kindness and support. Molly Westling has offered southern comfort and fascinating conversations about Eudora Welty. At Wake Forest University, I was fortunate to build both personal and professional relationships with three amazing women—Mary DeShazer, Gillian Overing, and Miriam Jacobson—all of whom ignited my belief in pursuing this path. I am especially thankful to Mary for introducing to me the weird wonders of Djuna Barnes. While at Wake, I was fortunate to earn a Richter Grant to travel to Oxford, England to study early modern witchcraft, an experience forming the beginning of my interest in sexuality studies.

And from one Oxford to another—I would like to thank the Oregon Humanities Center at the University of Oregon for granting me a Graduate Dissertation Research Support Fellowship to attend the 2014 Faulkner and Yoknapatawpha Conference in Oxford, Mississippi. The rich conversations there nurtured my thinking on childhood and southern studies and revived my spirit. Forrest Galey and the staff at the Mississippi Department of Archives and History deserve my appreciation for their meticulous

assistance as I worked with Welty's papers. My dear friends at Oregon —Anna Carroll, Diana Martinez, Francesca Gentile, Amanda Bartenstein, Paul Bellew, Bill Fogarty, Matt Hannah—have provided a special community. Thanks, friends, for often indulging my need for ping pong, champagne, and concerts at the Wow. Thanks, too, to Jenny Noyce and Rachel Bash for their thoughtful comments on the beginning stages of my work during our writing group. I'd also like to express deep gratitude for my students, in literature and writing courses here at Oregon, and at the Charter School of San Diego and the Jeff Griffith Youth Center in Los Angeles, for inspiring and rewarding me in ways I could never have anticipated. Much love to my best girls spread across the country–- Lauren and Maryann in North Carolina, Kati in Kentucky, and Linsey in California. Finally, I could not have completed this work without the love and support of my family, both human and animal. Love y'all: Mom, Dad, Pittman, Tucker, Yoshi, and Harliss.

To my grandparents, who would have loved to see this work come to fruition.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

"A CREATURE MADE AFRESH": CREATING THE GOTHIC CHILD

"People are mostly layers of tenderness and violence–-wrapped like bulbs" (Welty, *Delta Wedding* 42)

"All futures are rough!" (James, *The Turn of the Screw* 18)

"Child, what art thou?" implores an impassioned Hester Prynne to her daughter Pearl in Nathaniel Hawthorne's gothic romance *The Scarlet Letter* (1850). Deceptively simplistic, the child's response, "I am your little Pearl!" (68), becomes complicated when considering her accompanying bodily movements, for "while she said it, Pearl laughed and began to dance up and down, with the humorsome gesticulations of a little imp, whose next freak might be to fly up the chimney" (66). Teasing her mother's ardent inquiry, three year-old Pearl's answer and exertions only heighten her mother's distress. And sensing maternal upset, Pearl seeks to amplify Hester's confusion. Her mother's earnest question and Pearl's frank yet discomfiting answer gestures toward her position as one of the most estranging children in all of American literature. Consistently characterized as both devilish imp and innocent sprite, Hawthorne's Pearl emblematizes the conflicting cultural impulses surrounding adult thinking on childhood. This exchange between child and adult establishes Pearl's peculiarity and discloses the unusual power dynamics between mother and child. Little Pearl, result of an illicit union, possesses a preternatural knowingness and capacity to provoke adult unease. As embodied product of

sin and a furtive history, Pearl's inauspicious origin troubles her mother. Hawthorne's text focuses on the "narrative concerns of a secret history" (Reid xxix), but this history goes beyond the personal or familial and accumulates resonances on a national scale. Rebecca Mark, in *Ersatz History*, suggests that as Hawthorne composes *The Scarlet Letter*, the meaning of the American nation is central in the writer's mind. Further, these national concerns, Mark expresses, can be symbolized in Hester's badge of sin, in that scrap of cloth, red-hot, for what it symbolizes— "the alphabet of dead women, enslaved Africans, Indians deceived" (189). In this way, familial dynamics function as a microcosm of national consciousness for these hidden crimes and "the guilt of America becomes the conventionalized guilt of one woman's adultery" (Mark 189). Mark critiques Hawthorne's failure to adequately expose or address these crimes, and at the same time gestures toward the text's latent gothic potential to invoke these buried histories of oppression, these dark secrets repressed.

But this potential, I argue, can be located most potently not through the 'scrap of red cloth,' but through the actions of the curious child who functions in the text to demand attention, disclosure, and redress for these unseen crimes. Indeed, Pearl emerges as an agent who forces culpability and prompts action—she brings the truth to light. Pearl's presence activates the novel's gothic contours and unveils the suppressed realities subsumed in the process of building a coherent and harmonious story, both familial and national. And the problem of the child in *The Scarlet Letter* speaks to these national concerns around familial dynamics that continue to trouble American writers well into the twentieth century. In creating something entirely new, "a creature made afresh" (93),

Hawthorne taps into the child's import for thinking through cultural anxieties around generation, innocence, and futurity, thereby forging a precursor for the deep complexities of modernist representations of childhood to come, and initiating the trajectory of the gothic child in American literature.

Before delving into Pearl's singularity, though, I'd like to briefly establish context for the broader gothic tradition in which Hawthorne was operating. In crafting *The Scarlet Letter*, Hawthorne builds upon the works of earlier novelists, predecessors such as Hector St. Jean de Crèvecoeur and Charles Brockden Brown, who concentrate on the specific contexts of American life while developing fictional innovations of narrative unreliability and psychic ambiguity.[1] Despite these writers' differing formulations and responses to the gothic, they remain distinctly attuned to the nation's history and the violence it tries to hide. It is true that American gothic texts often reveal and share a preoccupation with narrative instability, haunting, spectrality, madness, familial bloodlines and secrets, and wilderness spaces. Yet rather than frame the American gothic as a set of particular conventions, I would articulate it, as Eric Savoy does, as an impulse,

---

[1] Charles Crow points to how de Crèvecouer, writing just prior to the American Revolution, poses the question of what it means to be an American. In his *Letters from an American Farmer* (1752), the first letters are full of celebratory language and the creed of American optimism and exceptionalism, which turns to horror in his resolution that: "We certainly are not that class of beings which we believe ourselves to be" (qtd. in Crow 24). Brockden Brown, the first master of the American gothic, in the introduction to his novel *Edgar Huntly* (1799), "wrote of the need to abandon the conventions of European gothic and to find appropriate American settings for engaging the sympathies of readers" (Crow 25). In Brockden Brown's words: 'Puerile superstition and exploded manners; Gothic castles and chimeras, are the materials usually employed for this end. The incidents of Indian hostility, and the perils of the western wilderness, are far more suitable...' (qtd. in Crow 25). In Brockden Brown's novels *Wieland* (1798) and *Edgar Huntly*, Crow argues, he deploys the "Gothic as an engine of technical innovation in American literature, and especially in fiction. Brown's experiments in ambiguity and narrative unreliability would be extended by Hawthorne, and later by Henry James. They anticipate some of the devices of modernism in the twentieth century" (Crow 25).

a "fluid tendency [or movement] rather than a discrete literary mode."[2] Teresa Goddu, too, aptly points to the difficulties of classifying the gothic, as it depends "less on the particular set of conventions it establishes than on those it disrupts" (4). Troubling the borders of generic classification and the boundaries between self and other, the American gothic relies on an expression of psychological states while it also reveals historical haunting. This combination of the psychological and the historical allows for a model of gothic complexity, a malleability and plasticity of form that works to reveal cultural anxieties and bring repressed histories to light. Resisting positioning the gothic as an anti-historical or an escapist mode, I argue that the American gothic responds to historical trauma and exposes the dark impulses of a nation founded on ideals of ambition and accord. Goddu elucidates that "gothic stories are intimately connected to the culture that produces them," and like Goddu, I read the gothic narratives in my project as "an integral part of a network of historical representation," fictions that are intensely engaged with historical concerns and which register their culture's contradictions (2). Hawthorne, specifically, fully realized the possibilities of resonance between the gothic tradition and the American past, the darker notes of the nation's optimistic surfaces.

However, Hawthorne seemingly denies the potential for uncovering imaginative material in his nation's history. He writes in the Preface to *The Marble Faun* (1860):

---

[2] Savoy articulates his approach to defining the gothic in his introduction to *American Gothic: New Interventions in a National Narrative*, 6. Scholars of American gothic are often assigned the task of defining the term, and some of the most effective, thorough, and distinct considerations of American gothic literature include George Haggerty's *Queer Gothic*; Charles Crow's *American Gothic* in The History of the Gothic Series; Teresa Goddu's *Gothic America*; the aforementioned Eric Savoy's and Robert Martin's *American Gothic*; and Donald Ringe's *American Gothic: Imagination and Reason in 19th Century Fiction*. A selection of excellent broader handbooks of the gothic include David Punter's *The New Gothic Companion*, and *The Encyclopedia of the Gothic*.

> No author, without a trial, can conceive of the difficulty of writing a romance about a country where there is no shadow, no antiquity, no mystery, no picturesque and gloomy wrong, nor anything but a commonplace prosperity, in broad and simple daylight, as is happily the case with my dear native land...Romance and poetry, ivy, lichens, and wallflowers need ruin to make them grow (qtd. in Crow 10-11)

Yet Hawthorne's words belie the inspiration he locates in America's Puritan legacy, a tradition still exerting its effects on mid-nineteenth century American life, particularly through its harsh delineations between good and evil. In *The Scarlet Letter*, set between 1642-49, the legends of seventeenth-century witchcraft and the trials in Salem provide his spark, events which retain a personal resonance for the author. Hawthorne resurrects this history, both national and personal, through the gothic trope of the Custom House frame narrative. The young narrator-as-Hawthorne discovers an old manuscript, along with the cloth A, a material artifact worn on the body, and experiences a burning need to make this story known. As Crow proposes, "His pledge to tell Hester's story is an act of defiance against his Puritan ancestors, the Salem witchcraft judges (John and William Hathorne), whose legacy apparently haunted the author all his life" (49). In disclosing Hester's tale, Hawthorne does not just engage with history, but also develops a heightened psychological intensity by exposing the Puritan culture's larger systemic anxieties. In presenting them as the original haunted Americans, his approach eschews the gothic trope of the imprisoned structure, or castle, in favor of delineating how the Puritans create an internalizing prison within themselves. It is amidst this Puritan context, and this careful attention to melding the psychological and the historical, the personal and the national, that Hawthorne situates his new gothic heroine—a child who both embodies and resists the beliefs of her culture.

Pearl not only functions as embodied signifier of a secret familial history, but she also draws out the conflicts between the Puritan ideology of childhood and the Romantic view—a tension occupying nineteenth century America's cultural imagination. By the end of the eighteenth century, and exerting their influence well into the nineteenth, Romantic conceptions of child innocence were matched by persisting evangelical declarations that the child was a creature of original sin (Shuttleworth 353). Hawthorne taps into this contradictory impulse in his construction of Pearl. Hawthorne's own son, Julian, in his review of *The Scarlet Letter* in *The Atlantic* (April 1886) homes in on Pearl's significance to Hawthorne's writing: "the contrast or, perhaps it is more correct to say, mingling, of the opposite poles of being, sin and innocence, in Pearl's nature is an extraordinary achievement" (qtd. in Schober 44). Consistently in the novel adult perceptions of her vacillate, as Pearl becomes caught somewhere between mischievous and perverse imp or lovely and free child of nature. That Pearl bears out these 'opposite poles of being' intensifies her inscrutability; yet attention to this convergence reveals her gothic agency.

Hawthorne's Puritan community advances historically accurate views of the child; in the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, influenced by the Christian doctrine of original sin, Puritan ideology emphasized the child's inherent wickedness, its need of restraint and correction. For the Puritans, "discipline and education were a process of beating out the moral blackness in the child, breaking its will as it were, until it actively resisted its evil nature" (Schober 1). Pearl, due to her dubious origins, emerges as even more of a threatening figure, as the Puritan community members believe she in league

with the devil, claiming her a "demon offspring" (69) and determining "the little baggage hath witchcraft in her" (80). The narrator, though, carefully delineates that this is how the Puritans *perceive* her, when he explains, "nor was Pearl the only child to whom this inauspicious origin was assigned, among the New England Puritans" (69), thereby pointing toward the propensity to ascribe witchcraft as a source of depravity. However, not only do the community members apprehend the child as dangerous, but her mother, too, cannot help but be influenced by this theology and almost seems to seek evil in Pearl. Hester, peering in her child's eyes, "fancied that she beheld, not her own miniature portrait, but another face in the small black mirror of Pearl's eye. It was a face, fiend-like, full of smiling malice" (67). To further compound Pearl's complexity, her behavior at times endorses these views of her as implicitly malevolent: "with other children "she resembled...an infant pestilence..whose mission was to punish the sins of the rising generation" (71). Pearl seems to intuit that she incites adult foreboding and works to heighten their disquietude in her presence.

While Hawthorne clearly draws upon (still influential) Puritan beliefs about children's innate wickedness in his representation of Pearl, he also invests in equally compelling Romantic constructions of child innocence, virtue, purity, and goodness.[3] By the late eighteenth century, according to Rousseau and the Romantics, the child was born

[3] Critics have also noted that Hawthorne's characterization of Pearl bears some resemblance with an actual child, his daughter, Una (Sánchez-Eppler, *Dependent States* 58). In early reviews of *The Scarlet Letter*, critics complain that Pearl wasn't a real child, but Hawthorne's representation of her was drawn from notebook observations of his daughter's behavior, focusing on her imaginative capacities. Hawthorne demonstrates evidence for harboring fundamentally Romantic views about childhood, and also writes what he termed his 'baby tales' for a child audience, texts such as *Twice-Told Tales* (1837), *A Wonder-Book for Girls and Boys* (1851)*, Tanglewood Tales* (1853), among others.

good.[4] Texts such as William Wordsworth's "Ode: Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood" (1807) and *The Prelude* (1850), and William Blake's *Songs of Innocence* (1789) "stressed the original virtue and innocence of the child and its inevitable entry into experience, as well as its affinity with nature" (Schober 5). For Rousseau, in his *Emile* (1762) as exemplar, the child was innocent until corrupted by civilization and culture, stating, "the first impulses of nature are always right; there is no original sin in the human heart" (56). Rousseau contends that education should be directed to nurturing a child's unspoiled nature, its innate interests and capacities. Striking parallels persist between Rousseau's child of nature and Hawthorne's Pearl; the narrator marks her affinity with nature in which "the "the mother-forest, and these wild things which it nourished, all recognized a kindred wildness in human child" (139). Even the animals and flowers seem to sense a gentleness to her spirit; in the woods she becomes a "nymph-child, or an infant dryad, or whatever else was in closest sympathy with the antique wood" (139-40). For the Puritans, the forest and wilderness signifies a place of peril and the unknown, but Pearl feels most at home here outside the bounds of civilization. Moreover, the Puritan community correlates Pearl's wildness with a savageness, a dangerous affinity with nature, whereas, for the narrator, her wildness aligns her with innocent nature.

---

[4] See Judith Plotz's *Romanticism and the Vocation of Childhood* and Ann Wierda Rowland's *Romanticism and Childhood* for resources on the creation and influence of the Romantic child, which will continue to inform modernist representations of childhood. Rowland aptly delineates how the "idea of the Romantic child' does more than refer back to and embody ideas of childhood developed over the course of the eighteenth century; it also gestures ahead to the ideas of childhood that will dominate Western culture well into the twentieth century. The 'Romantic child' earns its sobriquet because it is essentially an idealized, nostalgic, sentimentalized figure of childhood, one characterized by innocence, imagination, nature and primitivism, qualities associated with Romanticism that survive today in very few cultural figures, the child being one of the most enduring" (9).

And though Pearl exemplifies the tensions between these competing ideologies of childhood, exerting evidence for both, perhaps what marks her as most unprecedented in literary representations of childhood remains her acute perceptive qualities. Her preternatural depth of consciousness unsettles adults around her, causes her mother pain, and confuses adult assumptions of childhood. As Susan Honeyman observes, "She is critical and subversive and challenges adults and authority around her and what they expect of children" (134). The child seems to intrinsically comprehend her mother's secret, but refuses to admit this awareness. She repeatedly questions her mother about the scarlet letter's meaning, though she seems to know it: "Pearl's tendency to hover about the enigma of the scarlet letter seemed an innate quality of her being. From the earliest epoch of her conscious life, she had entered upon this as her appointed mission" (123). Pearl seems to take pleasure in discomfiting her mother, taunting her, later forcing Hester to reassume the letter in order for the child to acknowledge her; this act registers the child's potential cruelty and calls into question assumptions of her innocence. Likewise, she questions Dimmesdale over and over as to when he will join child and mother on the town scaffold, pushing for his accountability. Dimmesdale, gleaning the child's perceptive power, admits he "has been afraid of little Pearl" (138). The question troubling Hester and Dimmesdale both becomes: What does Pearl know? In this way, she functions as the text's "living hieroglyphic" (140), not only for embodying the secret Hester and Dimmesdale sought to repress, but also for her enigmatic nature. Yet Pearl ultimately cannot survive in this Puritan culture. Hawthorne marks her futurity as existing elsewhere, or not at all: "If still alive, she must now be in the flush and bloom of early

womanhood. None knew...whether the elf-child had gone thus untimely to a maiden grave" (176). Pearl, as first gothic child in American literature, profoundly and provocatively sets the stage for further complications of the child figure. Pearl retains power through her psychological complexity and mystery, but she also holds the capacity to engender resolution and redress. As simultaneously unknowable but prompting others to feel uneasy as to what secrets she harbors, Pearl works as an inspiration for Henry James's even more psychologically complex and darker portraits of childhood on the horizon. Pearl draws together the concerns of this project—with generation, innocence, and futurity—concerns which Henry James further develops in his gothic novella, *The Turn of the Screw* (1898).

"Will you think me bad?": James's assault on innocence

Hawthorne's work exerted a great influence upon James, beginning with the young writer becoming captivated with the dreary landscape of *The Scarlet Letter*. And James acknowledges his debt to Hawthorne as a powerful force over his writing, crafting his *Hawthorne* (1879) as the first extended study of any American writer (McCall 1). However, the older James critiques Hawthorne's approach, chastising his heavy use of symbolism. James deemed *The Scarlet Letter* as the "finest piece of imaginative writing yet put forth in the country," but at the same time, he claimed, "there is a great deal of symbolism; there is, I think, too much. It is overdone at times, and becomes mechanical; it ceases to be impressive, and grazes triviality" (qtd. in McCall 1). Instead, in his own work, James maintains a commitment to narrative ambiguity resonant with the gothic, but foregoes romance in favor of developing his own strain of psychological realism. Forging

psychological realism as a narrative strategy, he focuses on interior characterization as a factor in generating the text's external action, thereby working as a precursor to the modernist preoccupation with subjectivity and interest in inner experience. James's *The Turn of the Screw* magnificently deploys gothic effects in its representation of childhood, creating a chilling narrative of moral and psychological ambiguity, which has generated its own extensive body of criticism.[5] In this work, James builds upon Hawthorne's singular creation of Pearl as compelling and strange gothic agent, while simultaneously offering an even darker portrait of childhood. I now wish to turn to little Miles and Flora to elucidate how James continues and further complicates the development of American literature's gothic children. In particular, through his treatment of innocence, James negotiates a shifting set of cultural beliefs about childhood at the turn of the twentieth century, the same ones at play for later modernists.

As the unnamed governess travels to Bly to care for these orphan children, whose uncle refuses to spend time with them, she becomes immediately enamored with little Flora, whom she deems the most beautiful child, "divine little angel" (8). From the outset, the governess' effusive declarations over Flora betray her indebtedness Romantic conceptualizations of childhood. She imagines the child "know[s] nothing in the world but love--sweetness of innocence, fragrance of purity" (13). Though the governess' pleasant and affirming interactions with the girl at first coincide with her Romantic

---

[5] This text has inspired a tremendous body of criticism. Those most pertinent to James's use of the gothic in his representation of childhood include: Kevin Ohi's *Innocence and Rapture*; Muriel Shine's *The Fictional Children of Henry James*; and Eric Haralson's *Henry James and Queer Modernity.* Many monographs focused on the history of evil or possessed children in literature also include an assessment of James's children in *The Turn of the Screw*. A few noteworthy considerations are Adrian Schober's *Possessed Child Narratives in Literature* and Ellen Pifer's *Demon or Doll*.

ideals, these ideals soon fall under threat. She begins her life at Bly educating Flora, yet becomes disturbed in learning of the mysterious circumstances surrounding the prior governess, Miss Jessel's, demise. This morbid curiosity centered on her predecessor increases as her affection for little Flora deepens. As a marker of her own dominion over the child, she becomes increasingly fixated on Flora's relationship *with* Miss Jessel. Moreover, her possessiveness over the child indicates a refusal to recognize the child as a complex being, with her own history, emotions, and needs. Her fervent focus upon the dead governess coincides with a marked strangeness in Flora's behavior. The governess finds Flora in the garden and spies an apparition watching both her and the child; though she is certain Flora must see it, the child does not react. This incident introduces the creeping possibility that the child is aware of the dark spirit, is colluding with it, holding a secret relationship with *her*. The governess, in initially trying to reconcile how the child fails to react, imagines that surely if the child had glimpsed the apparition, "some sudden innocent sign either of interest or alarm, would tell [her]" (29). In processing the encounter she explains what she's witnessed to Mrs. Grose. The two women discuss the incident:

> "Dear, dear–-we must keep our heads! And after all, if she doesn't mind it–-!" She even tried a grim joke. "Perhaps she likes it!" "Likes *such* things—a scrap of an infant!" "Isn't it just proof of her blest innocence?" my friend bravely enquired. She brought me, for the instant almost round. "Oh we must clutch at *that*–-we must cling to it! If it isn't a proof of what you say, it's a proof of–-God knows what!" (30-1)

Significantly, both women turn to the notion of innocence as the focal point for understanding the occurrence. The governess desperately wants to believe that the child would react with terror at the apparition, and would come to her for safety and

reassurance. She turns away from acknowledging the child may be capable of withholding from her or even worse, feigning innocence. She needs to feel the child remains incapable of surreptitious behavior. Mrs. Grose, after halfheartedly surmising that the child may *like* such things, determines that Flora's inability to see the spirit is only evidence of her purity, her innocence, that she cannot understand the impending harm. And the governess' response is to clutch at this idea of innocence; for her, if Flora's behavior isn't proof of this, it's evidence of something much more sinister—that the child is *performing* innocence or unawareness of the apparition. This incident permanently arouses the question in the governess' mind: *Does the child know something she won't tell?* What does Flora know? What does she see? Her seeming refusal to be forthright about what she's witnessed only heightens the governess' confusion and anxiety until she confronts the child outright about Miss Jessel. The governess, certain again of her predecessor's visible presence, presses Flora to admit she sees her, too. The child reacts: "I don't know what you mean. I see nobody. I see nothing. I never *have*. I think you're cruel. I don't like you!" (70). This interaction, in the governess' mind, transforms Flora from "little girl into a figure portentous" (69).

While the governess' relationship with Flora turns from one of fawning affection to an abrupt ending by the pond with Mrs. Grose coming to the distraught child's rescue, her relationship with young Miles takes on an even more troubling cast. Miles returns to Bly from boarding school under cryptic circumstances. He has done something 'very bad'; this act remains shrouded in mystery, which amplifies the governess' desire to know its details. She simply cannot imagine that this 'little creature' could be capable of bad

behavior, but his refusal to disclose his wrongdoing only augments her fervent curiosity. The governess is thus, as Sally Shuttleworth explains, "seduced by vision of darker, animalistic childhood, but clinging on to constructions of childhood innocence" (217). And like Hawthorne's little Pearl, Miles toys with his protectress, recognizing this yearning in her and refusing to reveal his secret. Yet despite his withholding, she consistently refers to Miles as "an extraordinary little gentleman" (63), reinforcing her need to believe in his childish goodness and maintain her Romantic ideology of childhood. She grasps to her beliefs with such force that they become an imposition, an assault upon the children, which they demonstrate to her by reacting—little Flora with explosive anger and Miles with quietly begging her to see his 'badness, even declaring, "when I'm bad I *am* bad" (46). Even though the children attempt to reveal themselves to her as complex beings, she continues to resist seeing them in this way. Through the governess' need to ascribe innocence to the children, as Kevin Ohi demonstrates, James shows how attributing and expecting innocence of the child becomes a violence in itself (125). The governess' dawning realization (which she still desires to repress) that the children are more capacious than she wants to admit, begins to fracture her Romantic ideals. But this only draws her to them further, augments her possessiveness. This tension manifests in how her relationship with Miles takes on an erotic quality. Her longing to know Miles' secret 'badness,' coupled with her belief that he understands something of the sexual relationship between Peter Quint, 'the hound,' and Miss Jessel—something children shouldn't know—reveal how Miles evidences innocence and sensuality in one character. Miles seems to perceive her fervency over him and tempts her to see this

delinquency with teasing manipulations: ”you know what a boy wants” (61). In his portrayal of Miles, James becomes “the first writer to put the eroticized child at the center of the gothic novel” (Hanson 109-10). By tackling how the complex nexus of innocence accrues meaning across multiple registers–-the erotic, an absence of personal history, an inability for understanding evil—James highlights its significance for adult security and control.

Because the governess’ desire to believe the children, and especially Miles, should have had “nothing to call even an infinitesimal history” and “ begin[s] anew each day” (19) speaks to her deep need for them to be facile and interpretable. The attribution of innocence stems from an adult urge to see them as vacuous containers with no history or motives of their own. In the face of evidence otherwise, as she begins to recognize they live rich interior lives, that they are not easily readable but rather deeply conscious individuals, and might even be capable of evil, she becomes even more attracted to them; she must uncover the secrets they hold. This recognition dawns upon her when “she had walked into a world of their invention” (28). She finds most disturbing their capability to exclude her: “their more than earthly beauty, their sweetness. It’s a policy and a fraud. They haven’t been good they’ve only been absent. It’ s been easy to live with them because they’re leading a life of their own. They’re not mine and they’re not ours. They’re his and they’re hers” (47). The governess’ admission here discloses her own intense possessiveness and her residual attachments to Romantic ideals of childhood. She still cannot admit that the children act on their own; instead their behavior must be explained by the dubious influence of Quint and Miss Jessel. But Miles and Flora do

misbehave, escape into the night, act strangely, and then when they become caught, they claim they were just playfully provoking their governess. They retain the power to make her doubt own sanity under cover of innocence because they *recognize* her attachment to the ideal. In this way, James reveals that both parties suffer under this burden and it has the ability to determine their relationships to one another. But where Flora denies her knowledge and *perhaps* performs innocence, Miles taunts the governess with his 'badness' and teases her that one day he will admit everything, defying her to maintain belief of his innocence. The governess' dogged pursuit of what Miles knows takes an even more sinister turn. While Pearl absconds to Europe and Flora abandons Bly, their futurity existing elsewhere, little Miles meets his ultimate demise under the suffocating pressure of the governess when she finally apprehends that "his little heart, dispossessed, had stopped" (85).

"The Century of The Child": Modernist Debates on Childhood

Like Pearl, Flora and Miles are pictures of psychological depth heretofore absent from literary representations of childhood; as Dan McCall argues, "they all have extraordinary ESP" (129). Pearl causes her mother's anguish, much as these children drive the governess mad because although they exhibit an acute awareness, they cannot be known. Flora and Miles seem to comprehend and manipulate adult desire for them, exercising their power to confound and tantalize. Like Pearl, these children are agents, and drive the action of the narrative. But why, in this moment, does James turn to the child, forging a richer, more complex and potentially sinister vision of childhood? The answer to this question lies in examining the key debates happening around childhood at

the turn of the twentieth century, dialogues which modernist writers, too, come to engage. In outlining a few of the most influential debates impacting cultural beliefs about the child in this moment, I will demonstrate how interactions between burgeoning scientific developments and pervasive ideologies of childhood create a reciprocal exchange. Shuttleworth explicates that by the close of the eighteenth century, "Romantic conceptions about childhood were matched by evangelical declarations that the child was a creature of original sin" (353), a conflict which Hawthorne dramatizes in *The Scarlet Letter*. But over the next century, the child accrues a stronger symbolic value as Romantic ideology exerts greater purchase. For Victorians the response to this ideal that "took hold in the early nineteenth century would manifest itself in Victorian culture's fathomless fascination with the sentimental child whose beauty and fragility wrung hearts and evoked tears, and was used in the social-scientific child-saving movements of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries" (Duane 3). James's gothic novella appeals to and attacks this version of the child, highlighting that beneath the veneer of heightened fragility and purity lurks a threatening complexity, thereby intimating the dangers in facile beliefs about the child.

By the close of the nineteenth century, the stage has been set for the 'century of the child.'[6] The dawn of the twentieth century gives rise to a host of disciplines which position the child as a focal point. The influence of evolutionary psychology and child development, theories of recapitulation, and psychoanalysis, in particular, offer dissonant

---

[6] In Ellen Keys's 1900 treatise, *The Century of the Child*, the "feminist and socialist [...] railed against the use of corporal punishment, factory work for both women and children, and the 'idiotic' model of public school education..." (Phillips, *Representations* 2). Michelle Phillips demonstrates how, for Keys, the child became a vital figure for engendering political and social reform.

views on the child which both draw upon and dismantle the still-prevalent Romantic ideal. Accordingly, modernist artists inherit and revise these competing and evolving discourses around childhood at this historical moment, and their artistic efforts bear out these conflicting appraisals in their various representations of childhood. As Adrian Gavin explains, "modernism's portrayal of the child is marked by ambivalence; innocence is still a common trope but fissured by darker psychological and sexual portraits" (11).

One of the most instrumental campaigns responsible for the continued resonance of the Romantic ideal is the Child Study Movement. The American Child Study Movement in America, begun in the 1890s, and led by G. Stanley Hall, "should be analyzed as a complex network of disciplinary and discursive activities, encompassing the various forms of science adumbrated by Hall, but also extending outward into further literary, educational, and domestic fields" (Shuttleworth 270). Shuttleworth rightly gestures toward the interactive relationship between the movement and American culture. Given the movement's power to shape American culture, Hall's central interest in deciphering the child's mind, which coincides with an emerging scientific interest in child development, creates a profound impact on the the child's valence. Alexander Chamberlain, Hall's protege, writes in his *The Child: A Study in the Evolution of Man* (1900):

> the child, in all the helpless infancy of his early years, in his later activity of play, in his naievete and genius, in his repetitions and recapitulations of the race's history, in his wonderful variety and manifoldness, in his atavisms and his prophecies, in his brutish and in his divine characteristics, is the evolutionary being of our species, he in whom the useless past tends to be suppressed and the beneficial future to be foretold. In a sense, he is all (qtd. in Shuttleworth 267)

Shuttleworth points out, here, "at once atavism and prophecy, the child, in this *fin de siècle* projection, becomes the bearer of all future hope....in the yearning nostalgia of the image, the child becomes the key to self-understanding, to a realm of a lost past, and also the guarantee of a more positive future" (267). Chamberlain, a protégé of Hall, indicates an unmistakably Romantic view, passionate in his rendering. Michelle Phillips contends that Hall's work on childhood also takes a decidedly Romantic tack, and that he extends this view, "moving beyond the merely conceptual, aesthetic, or theoretical into practical applications for education" (*Representations* 14). But this interplay between a deepening interest in the child as complex key to the past and future and to the human self and subjectivity also becomes bound up with theories of recapitulation, thus creating an impossible tension between constructions of the child both savage and Romantic.

Because within Hall's findings, at the same time the Romantic ideal accrues resonance even amidst scientific applications, it is also conjoined with an elaboration of recapitulation theory: "the belief that the development of each individual mirrors the evolution of the species from savagery to civilization."[7] Indeed, this interest in recapitulation theory as a generative model for emerging American psychological theories of child development, begins with Hall's *The Contents of Children's Minds* (1883) (Levander, *Cradle* 137). As early studies of child development draw upon recapitulation theory, this seizure produces significant racial implications for the lives of American children. Anna Mae Duane expresses that "as these medical and scientific movements developed, they evolved in cultural conversation with contemporary cultural

[7] Mintz 190. Mintz elaborates upon how Hall's work was greatly influenced by Charles Darwin's sketch of his son Dodd, and by Darwin's theory of evolution. See pages 188-190 of *Huck's Raft*.

and literary narratives that rendered childhood a battleground for racial supremacy" (3). For example, Hall's argument that one could "look to the growth of children to trace the development of racial types from the supposedly primitive races to the pinnacle of evolution—the white race" (Duane 3), infiltrates American culture. These racial biases give rise to hereditary sciences, like eugenics, focused on breeding 'strong' children. Moreover, these racial prejudices buttress the enactment of political exclusions which become played out on the child's body. Modernist artists, I argue, respond to the material effects of positing the unfitness of certain children based upon race. African American writers, in particular, reveal how black children remain excluded from the Romantic association of child innocence, an ideal which exerts very real protections.

At the same time that sciences of child development engender an unlikely yoking of Romantic ideals with recapitulation theory, the modernist fascination with primitivism emerges as an artistic response. Tapping into the nexus of innocence, nostalgia, and a savagery often delineated along racial lines, modernist artists respond to the child's precarious position as caught between past and future. The modernist fascination with primitivism unfolds by relying upon the Romantic child for its "idealized focus for projections of creativity, originality and imagination but [this child] is also burdened with a somatic and psychological inheritance" (Shuttleworth 353). Out of this tension develops the paradoxical modernist belief that rectitude is likely to be located among those commonly disregarded as savage or primitive. This fixation upon a redemptive primitivism connects recapitulation theory with Sigmund Freud's theory of the unconscious. Phillips speaks to this confluence when she delineates Freud's notion of the

unconscious as an "iteration of a post-Romantic treatment of childhood that imagined the child's central psychosocial role as [...] offering adults healing, reform, spiritual closeness, and artistic beauty" (*Representations* 19).

Amidst the flux of discourses around child development and psychiatry circulating in the first few decades of the twentieth century, Freud's contributions occupy a pivotal spot. Responsible for elevating the child's cultural significance, he contributes to the child's primacy as locus of the self while singlehandedly blasting apart the Romantic construction of childhood innocence. With the period from 1895-1920 witnessing the burgeoning of psychoanalysis, Freud's theories draw upon and enter into conversation with evolutionary child study. But before his destruction of the myth of innocence and his attention to children themselves, he first turned to adult memories of childhood rather than actual children. Conceptualizing childhood as a "cluster of desires, happenings, experiences, assaults, and traumas," Freud was first "brought up against the unconscious when asking how we remember ourselves as a child" (Steedman 88). Linking childhood with his theory of the unconscious in *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1899), Freud posits that childhood, though something lost and gone, leaves behind memories and traces (Steedman 77). But this post-Romantic positioning of childhood as salvific accrues a darker cast when Freud identifies the child as a point of origin for theories of individual sexual desire.

Though Freud participates in positioning the child as the lynchpin to comprehending the inception and evolution of the self, and contributes to the child's identification with redemptive qualities, he initiates a focused attack on the association

between innocence and childhood. In *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* (1905), his "Infantile Sexuality" especially homes in on the myth of childhood sexual innocence. Jessica Wolfe, in explicating the significance of Freud's assault on innocence for modernist configurations of intimacy, proposes that his theories represent a post-Romantic turn to a darker view of human nature, particularly through his emphasis on infantile capacities for sexual attachment, jealousy, and hatred (61). Wolfe further delineates: "Freud saw the defeat of the notion of 'innocence' as one of the great achievements of psychoanalysis. He attacked the idea repeatedly and directly. He sometimes put the term in scare quotes, with derisive intent" (68). This concerted assailment of innocence creates a cascade of cultural ramifications which modernist artists engage. And as Phillips rightly identifies, though his "theory of infantile sexuality posed a significant challenge to society's romance with the Edenic child, he nonetheless cemented even further the importance of childhood to adult, social, and cultural evolution" (*Representations* 15). Thus, within the context of the early twentieth century, the child becomes the primary locus for a range of scientific findings about human subjectivity. And literary representations reflect this shifting and diverse scope of beliefs about the child, insinuating its vital position at the forefront of America's cultural imagination.

Through competing discourses in emerging and developing fields such as psychoanalysis, evolutionary psychology, and child development and education, the early twentieth century initiates widespread alterations to the child's cultural import, which modernist writers and visual artists aptly engage. The child retains its conceptual force

because it remains so open to diverse claims, and at the turn of the twentieth century, as a product of these tensions and discordances, a more-sophisticated treatment of the child emerges. Although modernist artists draw on the Romantic reverence for the child as transcendent and inspirational, the cultural landscape has been irrevocably altered by the psychoanalytic assault on childhood innocence. Thus, modernist artists tap into the Romantics' celebration of the child but change its emphasis.[8] Covering a vast array of fields of artistic production ranging from the Italian Futurists' explosive technocentric infantilist rhetoric to visual artists popularizing conceptions of the artist as child to a fascination with primitivism as an outlet for accessing authentic experience, the twentieth century heralds the century of the child. As the child becomes a model for avant-garde art, an interest in representing child consciousness develops as a central innovation. Indicative of the shift in narrative emphasis from attention to external phenomena to an interest in inner experience, the child becomes a vessel of consciousness to be plumbed in depth. Fascinated with the instinctual, intense perceptions of childhood, modernist artists turn to the child in order to free themselves from past ways of surveying, experiencing, and representing the world.

Despite the vibrant nexus of modernism and childhood flourishing in this historical moment, there still persists a relative dearth of scholarship on this confluence. But scholars in recent years have begun to address this gap across a variety of academic

---

[8] See Jonathan Fineberg, ed.'s, *Discovering Child Art: Essays on Childhood, Primitivism, and Modernism* for helpful discussions of the modernist employment of childish perspective in the visual arts. John Carlin's essay "From Wonder to Blunder: The Child Is Mother to the Man" is particularly useful for its exploration of how the "modernists took the romantics' use of the child as a metaphor of pure vision to its logical conclusion by using it to undermine the form of traditional art and not just the content" (245).

disciplines, forging an interdisciplinary connection between modernist studies and the developing field of childhood studies. Broader historical considerations of the child's significance in American history include Steven Mintz's *Huck's Raft: A History of American Childhood*, David Macleod's *The Age of the Child: Children in America, 1890-1920*, and Caroline Levander and Carol Singley's edited collection, *The American Child: A Cultural Studies Reader*. Carolyn Steedman's *Strange Dislocations: Childhood and the Idea of Human Interiority, 1780–1930* unveils how childhood became the foundation for investigations into human interiority, and Sally Shuttleworth's *The Mind of the Child: Child Development in Literature, Science, and Medicine, 1840–1900* demonstrates how an interest in childhood interiority and development gave rise to the child's cultural prominence in the twentieth century. Michelle Phillips's *Representations of Childhood in American Modernism* is the first monograph of its kind to adopt as its sole focus the child figure in American modernist literary works. Excellent work on nineteenth and twentieth century constructions of childhood and race has been completed by Robin Bernstein in *Racial Innocence: Performing American Childhood from Slavery to Civil Rights,* Jennifer Ritterhouse in *Growing Up Jim Crow: How Black and White Southern Children Learned Race*, Caroline Levander in *Cradle of Liberty: Race, the Child, and National Belonging from Thomas Jefferson to W.E.B. DuBois*, and Daylanne English in *Unnatural Selections: Eugenics in American Modernism and the Harlem Renaissance*. Kate Capshaw Smith's *Children's Literature of the Harlem Renaissance* investigates how this movement gave rise to a flourishing of African American modernist children's literature. Kimberley Reynolds, in *Radical Children's Literature: Future*

Visions and Aesthetic Transformations in Juvenile Fiction builds upon the findings of Juliet Dusinberre, in *Alice Through the Looking Glass: Children's Books and Radical Experiments in Art* by focusing on the transformative power writing children's literature held for modernist artists. My project considers the range of these contributions that disclose the potent relationship between childhood and modernism across the intersection of race, gender, and class. Though I mention these texts here, each chapter delves into conversation with these arguments and delineates how they intersect with my own. My project seeks to contribute to these conversations, and in its methodology draws upon the strategies of modernist studies and childhood studies in order to deepen and disclose the connections between literary texts and cultural formations.

Childhood studies, a growing and inherently interdisciplinary field, deploys disciplinary methods across the humanities to offer a dynamic approach to understanding childhood from a range of scholarly perspectives. In defining the field of childhood studies and its relevance to the humanities, Anna Mae Duane, on the back cover of *The Children's Table,* succinctly explains:

> The figure we now recognize as a child was created in tandem with forms of modernity that the Enlightenment generated and that the humanities are now working to rethink. Thus the growth of childhood studies allows for new approaches to some of the most important and provocative issues in humanities scholarship: the viability of the social contract, the definition of agency, the performance of identity, and the construction of gender, sexuality, and race. Because defining childhood is a means of defining and distributing power and obligation, studying childhood requires a radically altered approach to what constitutes knowledge about the human subject

Following Duane's focus on the capacity of childhood studies to expand knowledge across a variety of fields, I seek to reveal how modernist writers, in turning to the gothic

child, generate fresh insights into childhood's centrality in shaping early twentieth century American culture. I am, of course, centrally focused on how children and childhood are represented in literary texts and in presenting interpretations as to their import. But literature is not distinct from life, and I propose to show how these literary portrayals were influenced by attitudes toward childhood in the early twentieth century and also indicated cultural patterns and areas of interest at the moment of their creation. Moreover, these literary depictions of childhood retain the power to shape life.

"What is this being?": The Modernist Gothic Child

Thus, my dissertation intervenes at the intersection of modernist studies and childhood studies, and contributes to this developing area of inquiry by offering a new angle on the child's role in modernist creative outputs. I propose that writers William Faulkner, Djuna Barnes, Jean Toomer, Eudora Welty, and Katherine Anne Porter, through attention to the child, reinvigorate the gothic as a future-oriented mode. As I've suggested, the gothic conjoins a focus with psychic ambivalence and narrative ambiguity with an attention to historical phenomena. The modernist interest in narrative experimentation, disjunction, and interiority coincide with the child's position as *figure par excellence* for investigating these concerns as it rises to cultural prominence. My work positions the gothic child as a potent vessel of consciousness, a figure which generates experiments in narrative perception and form, while also exposing its capacity as agent of culture and maker of history. Reading competing theories of child development, race, and sexuality at the *fin de siècle* alongside modernist literary texts reveals the gothic child as a complex locus for negotiating cultural preoccupations about

futurity, sexuality, and physical and cultural reproduction. Elucidating the relationship between literary form and historical contexts, my project evinces how engaging the child offers a dynamic site for writers to challenge entrenched cultural attitudes around race, sexuality, and gender in early twentieth century America. In deploying a methodology that relies upon the interdisciplinary richness of a childhood studies approach, coupled with what Richard Godden has deemed 'slow reading,' or "close reading that is aware of the link between formal constructions and political content in a literary work" (qtd. in Waid 300), my project reveals the gothic child as an undertheorized locus which draws attention to shifting power dynamics at both the familial and national level. These writers, I argue, demonstrate that there is no one version of the modernist child, thereby breaking down beliefs about childhood's universality and redemptive qualities, and instead reveal the burdens children face when they are held responsible for representing these ideals. At the same time, these artists work against assumptions of the child as powerless to adult appeals and desires and depict the child as independent historical agent. Because there is no one version of the modernist child, and indeed, no one version of the modernist *gothic* child, I ask a set of related but distinct questions in each chapter. And, each chapter adopts a comparative approach, pairing texts from different authors to indicate a shared investment in a specific formulation of the gothic child. And though my apparatus and set of questions vary slightly by chapter, my argument remains consistent: these modernist writers demonstrate how cultural concerns about generation, innocence, and futurity become invoked and contested through the figure of the gothic child.

My first chapter evaluates Barnes's *Nightwood* and Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury*, contending that these writers develop an especially peculiar version of the gothic child—the child-woman. The mode of arrested growth illuminates a repressive, even pathological, nostalgia imposed on these figures to stand in for an imagined idyllic past. In this way, Faulkner and Barnes respond most directly to how the inheritance of the Romantic child impacts the modernist moment. Situated amidst cultures witnessing the decline of aristocracies—the U.S. South and post-WW1 Europe—male characters impose upon these child-women an impossible innocence at once nostalgic and sexually pure. As others cling to constructions of Romantic innocence no longer feasible, Caddy Compson and Robin Vote become infantilized, rendered frozen, as objects of obsession, the loss of whom generates the narratives. Thus, Barnes and Faulkner, in creating the child-woman, appraise how the particular influence of psychoanalysis on childhood innocence transforms the cultural landscape.

My second chapter pairs Toomer's *Cane* and Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom!,* texts which manifest the spectral child. Through the medium of haunting, Toomer and Faulkner elucidate the processes by which the South's mixed-race children become excluded from national and familial narratives of citizenship and belonging. Faulkner and Toomer, through the spectral child, evaluate the exclusionary racial politics surrounding interracial intimacy which impact kinship structures in the U.S. South. By divulging how innocence—that quality most firmly attached to constructions of childhood—has categorically been raced white, these writers spotlight the children whom this ideal disempowers and abuses. In particular, Faulkner and Toomer draw attention to how

narratives of white innocence intersect with aristocratic social formations that cut across racial and class lines. As a result of these aristocratic attachments, familial and other interpersonal relationships succumb to violent collisions and expressions of love become impossible. Yet *Cane*'s and *Absalom*'s spectral children, prohibited from protection and denied familial and national inclusion, are not powerless victims. Reading these texts against the grain—for they have often been interpreted as portraying doomed and decaying social and physical landscapes and as indicative of possibilities foreclosed—I propose that attunement to their neglected children opens up a map for regeneration and ethical redress.

In my third chapter, I turn to how Porter's 'Miranda stories' in *The Leaning Tower* and Welty's novel *Delta Wedding* present the southern orphan girl-child as gothic agent. Through the rubric of the everyday gothic, a quieter but no less powerful iteration of gothic modernism, these writers revisit and revise the southern gothic tradition but invest it with feminist implications. In texts focused on the domestic arena, Welty's and Porter's deployment of the everyday gothic unveils the disturbing ripples underneath the facade of aristocratic familial coherence. These revelations emerge from the child's consciousness, thereby initiating a fresh angle of vision on the power structures undergirding plantation life. These girl-children, often ignored by adults as powerless within this system, develop keen insights into how the myth of white female innocence and the fantasy of southern bellehood induct young women into the plantation order. But this fantasy, they learn, exercises very real ramifications. Through absorbing the stories of their white female elders and African American caretakers and servants, these children begin to discern how

accepting the role of belle necessitates their participation in acts of oppression and may ultimately determine their own reproductive futures.

Finally, the dissertation's coda thinks through what changes when we examine children's literature written by a modernist author. Faulkner, in addressing children as a readership in his little-known gothic fable, *The Wishing Tree*, produces a compelling site to examine the relationship between literature written for the child and modernist artistic practice. In a text rife with gothic undertones, the author does not shy away from referencing the trauma of the Great War in shaping the conflicts between adult characters. Faulkner thus imbues the child reader and his child protagonist both with a sense of historical consciousness, thereby complicating the child's onus in symbolizing futurity.

* This dissertation's coda contains work that was published in *Faulkner and History*. Eds. Jay Watson and James G. Thomas, Jr. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2017.

CHAPTER II

"TWO WORLDS—MEET OF CHILD AND DESPERADO": GOTHIC CHILD-WOMEN IN BARNES'S *NIGHTWOOD* AND FAULKNER'S *THE SOUND AND THE FURY*

"No myth is safely broken" (Barnes*, Nightwood* 140)

"Blameless and foredoomed as they were" (James, *The Turn of the Screw* 37)

"The modern child has nothing left to hold to, or, to put it better, he has nothing to hold with" (40), laments Felix Volkbein, false baron of Djuna Barnes's 1936 modernist masterwork, *Nightwood*. Invoking the modern child's unanchored and precarious condition, Felix expresses his wish for a son, for, according to him, "to pay homage to our past is the only gesture that also includes the future" (39). Seeking contact with the past and with the future through a son's birth, Felix's aspiration highlights the novel's larger preoccupation with exposing the modern child's predicament. Emblematic of physical and cultural reproduction, the child's body functions as a dynamic symbolic locus with irrevocable ties both to the past and to the future. Though Barnes subverts Felix's desires for posterity by exposing his claims to nobility as a sham and by having his son, Guido, born to "holy decay" (107), Felix's hope, brought to fruition through the birth of a child, points to the potential for collapse when the child fails to carry the responsibility of this double burden. "Linked nostalgically with the past, but also proleptically with an increasingly mechanized future" (Higonnet 90), the symbolic modern child operates as a powerful cipher, able to absorb and accrue meaning ascribed

by adults. Intensely malleable yet incredibly potent, the child becomes a complex interpretive site for depositing and negotiating a culture's fears and anxieties. The child has long been a vessel for the projection of a contradictory assemblage of thoughts, but insofar as the child is historically and socially constructed, the child at the modernist moment bears its own particular set of cultural resonances and concomitant burdens.

Despite the varied employments of the child in the service of modernist artistic efforts at the dawn of the 'century of the child,'[9] the modernist fascination with the child often resonates with an idealized version of the Wordsworthian Romantic child, a figure indicative of pure potentiality and spontaneous creative spirit. Drawing on Wordsworth's celebration of the child's limitless imagination and closeness to nature for artistic inspiration, modernist artists, reacting to the Victorian notion of the child as either vacuous innocent or wicked creature, find the Romantic child ripe for stimulating creative insight. And though the allure of the Romantic child exerts incredible force, as Sally Shuttleworth contends, in the modernist moment "recapitulation theory is forcibly yoked to Romantic conceptions of the child in nature" (268). While the innocent Romantic ideal remains pervasive, turn of the century scientific discourses highlight the child's significance as recapitulated figure. In the preface to *Adolescence* (1904), G. Stanley Hall, leader of the American child study movement, suggests "that the boy is father of the man in a new sense in that his qualities are indefinitely older and existed [...] untold ages before the more distinctly human attributes were developed" (qtd. in

---

[9] Juliet Kinchin and Aidan O'Connor, "Century of the Child: Growing by Design, 1900-2000." 2012. The Museum of Modern Art. 2 August 2013. This exhibit "tracks the confluence of modern design and modern childhood," taking its title and inspiration from Swedish design reformer and social theorist Ellen Key's 1900 book. It offers an intriguing interactive look at the various cultural fields centering on the growth and development of the child.

Shuttleworth 267). Hall's findings "dr[ew] upon evolutionary models of human culture as a sequence of ascending stages [...], [as he] maintained that children recapitulated as instinctual drives those modes of action that proved useful for survival during each successive cultural epoch" (Macleod 24). Recapitulation theory posits that the child then reflects an earlier stage of adult evolution—the savage. Thus, in this cultural moment, the child becomes emblematic of the recapitulated savage as well as indicative of promise.

Responsible for providing a link to the human past and for embodying hope for the future, the modernist child becomes invoked by a host of various and often incompatible discourses. Yet, arguably, the psychoanalytic assault on childhood innocence serves as the most powerful revisionary resource for modernist conceptions of the child. The particular influence of Freudian psychoanalysis on childhood innocence transfigures the cultural landscape. Freud posits a sexual child by asserting the infant's polymorphous sexuality, thus challenging the idea of childhood innocence while further augmenting its cultural eminence. And though he attacks the notion of childhood innocence through his acknowledgement of infantile sexuality, his "theory of latency allowed him to transport the child's sexuality back into an absent and unconscious space until its more socially expressible acceptable expression later during puberty" (Egan, "Imperiled and Perilous" 358). In his ongoing work in *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* (1905), Freud's motivation was "primarily directed towards avoiding the development of adult neuroses that threatened successful maturation of the sexual instinct to adult (hetero)sexuality" (Egan, "Developing the Sexual Child" 451). Thus, while Freud "naturalized the inherent sexual capacity in the child, he did so in the interests of

attaining psychical health of the child-as adult" (Egan, "Developing the Sexual Child" 452). Freud's concerted attack on childhood innocence retains powerful cultural valence. James Kincaid, in his seminal work on the cultural power of childhood innocence, *Erotic Innocence: The Culture of Child Molesting*, claims that "the constructions of modern "woman" and modern "child" are very largely evacuations [...] Correspondingly, the instructions we receive on what to regard as sexually arousing tell us to look for (and often create) this emptiness, to discover the erotic in that which is most susceptible to inscription, the blank page" (15). Still resonant with cloying associations of innocence while also clearly attached to notions of savagery, the child becomes a perfect symbolic medium for modernist writers to negotiate and critique the incongruous forces which shape cultural ideals surrounding futurity and sexuality.

Writing against the allure of the Romantic child, Barnes and Faulkner instead invoke the gothic to explore the darker currents of the child's symbolic nature. Interested in revealing the danger and violence inherent in cultural attachments to the myth of childhood innocence, Barnes and Faulkner critique the Romantic child's position as problematically ungendered and asexual. For them, relinquishing the investment in the Romantic child will engender the exploration of more fluid sexualities and open up possibilities for a more profound social critique that the myth of innocence inhibits. Rather, unsettling, intensely sensual and sexually aware children, serve as precisely the figures Barnes and Faulkner are interested in representing. These figures are decidedly uninnocent and threatening; their disruptive existence reverberates outward from the gothic home and seeps into the culture at large. Yet these figures become cast out,

excluded by their families and by the cultural frameworks not yet ready to surrender devotion to innocence. Shaping these children by injecting modernist narrative experimentation with recourse to the gothic, Barnes and Faulkner freeze their child figures both formally and thematically to highlight the modern child's impossible position. Barnes and Faulkner are thus invested in a shared project that exposes the dark undercurrents of a culture under stress, and undermines a modernist preoccupation with unhindered and utopian futurity, of which the child is a vital cultural symbol. As the modernist moment looks to the future and celebrates forward movement, Faulkner and Barnes work against this impulse, instead engaging the gothic to bring the past's instabilities uncomfortably into the present. "The acceleration of history in the modernist moment is characterized by a perpetual return" (Seitler 229), and this looking back, this persistent engagement with how the past shapes the present and will modify the future as a function of the gothic, remains a central feature of Barnes's and Faulkner's modernism.

In *Feeling Backward*: *Loss and the Politics of Queer History*, Heather Love avers, "the idea of modernity—with its suggestions of progress, rationality, and technological advance—is intimately bound up with backwardness" (5). Love maintains, "even when modernist authors are making it new, they are inevitably grappling with the old: backwardness is a feature of even the most forward-looking modernist literature" (6). Appeals to the gothic, which require a negotiation with history, allow Barnes and Faulkner to marry their curiously backward looking modernism with narrative experimentation. Though the child becomes emblematic of futurity, in gothic texts, which require a reckoning with the past and with the spectral forces of history, the child

becomes rendered strange, disconcerting. The modernist gothic child embodies a conceptual knot: resonant with a troubled past and herald of an uncertain future, he/she problematizes notions of the child as bearer of utopian futurity and makes visible the violence of attributing innocence to the child. As the gothic works to provoke unease, and to bring us up against the boundaries of the civilized, Barnes's and Faulkner's work illuminates the collision of powerful and often competing ideas centered on the child, and confronts the violence done to the child when it must carry the weight of these social expectations. Instead of participating in the creative fascination with the innocent Romantic child, Barnes and Faulkner construct a particular version of the gothic child that dramatizes the incoherences in broader cultural views about sexuality and futurity, especially as played out in familial relations: the eroticized child-woman, who exists in a frozen space, an impossible place, caught between childhood and adulthood, innocence and experience. These uninnocent gothic child-women work as threatening yet fascinating antidotes to modernist utopian futurity. Through the gothic, Barnes and Faulkner invoke a tenebrous strain in culture, one which resists forward movement and circles back to contend with the forces of the past and deal with "history as a feature of psychic life" (Fujie 121).

In describing *Nightwood*'s "dynamic, restless discourse, which proliferates indefinitely the process of naming things, [but which] is predicated on lack, or the absence of meaning," Monica Kaup draws comparisons to Faulkner's "horror of the void, which leads to the baroque habit of leaving no empty spaces" (101). Indeed, striking affinities abound between the prose stylings of recalcitrant modernist, Barnes, and lauded

modernist innovator, Faulkner; these include rhetorical and syntactical density, elliptical narration, and employment of structural principles such as memory and repetition. Though Kaup identifies a shared neobaroque quality to their prose, these resonances emerge, perhaps more powerfully, under the rubric of the gothic. Resisting closure and frustrating readerly attempts at deciphering meaning, *Nightwood* and *The Sound and the Fury* potently demonstrate gothic narrative excess through obsessive and circular patterns and thinking, and explorations of psychological states coupled with highly wrought emotional eruptions. Not only do compelling resonances arise between the density, difficulty, and formal innovation of Barnes's and Faulkner's prose styles, but there persists a confluence in their gothic thematic preoccupations: madness, obsession, incest, pollution and contagion, bloodlines, and perverse familial dynamics.

An often denigrated genre, "associated with the hackneyed, the popular, and the feminine" (Goddu 5), the gothic has been perceived as persistently lacking high cultural status. Yet, the feature at the heart of the gothic's critical denigration—its formulaic nature—perhaps leaves it more open for interpretation and manipulation to modernist narrative experimentation. The gothic's intensely mutable capabilities permit it to seep into other modes, and Barnes's and Faulkner's revivification of the American gothic demonstrates that it is not incompatible with modernist aesthetics.[10] Though the gothic has long been associated with the exploration of psychological states, gothic texts, too, solicit mediation with history. Teresa Goddu argues that "American gothic literature criticizes America's national myth of new-world innocence by voicing cultural

[10] Goddu offers an astute discussion of how "the critical desire for generic classification and clarity signals a fear of contagion: the law of genre depends upon the principle of impurity" (5).

contradictions that undermine the nation's claim to purity and equality" (10). Though Barnes's mobile cosmopolitan gothic impulses may seem at odds with Faulkner's deeply rooted southern gothicism, both writers are indebted to the American gothic tradition in their dark works that interrogate the child's vulnerable yet vital import in the American cultural psyche. While Faulkner's reputation as master of southern gothic as a regional form has been well documented by a range of scholars—from Elizabeth Kerr's *William Faulkner's Gothic Domain* (1979) to recent panels on the gothic at the annual Yoknapatawpha conference— noticeably less attention has been bestowed upon Barnes's gothic interests. However, Julie Taylor aptly notes *Nightwood*'s incorporation of gothic and romantic tropes, and contends that Barnes "does not avoid an appeal to feelings" (136). Flirting with accusations of sentimentality, Barnes courts these outré associations, and works them into her fiercely difficult high modernist aesthetic. Daniela Caselli, too, identifies Barnes's appeals to outmoded traditions, tropes, and forms to create her bewildering modernism (4). Though much of *Nightwood* is set in 1920s Paris, Barnes's version of the labyrinthine Parisian underworld is a gothic anachronistic representation of Paris as "it functions as a remainder of what modernity sought to eradicate" (Taylor 138). Often set in the southern past, Faulkner's texts, too, recall a temporal belatedness, not unrelated to attributions of the South as a cultural backwater. Thus, amidst the myriad modernist injunctions to "make it new" and expunge the past, these artists resurrect the gothic in focusing on the home and familial networks as sites of particular unease. And though gothic texts often center on strange familial relationships

and haunted domestic structures, Barnes's and Faulkner's modernism works to complicate more centrally the figure of the gothic child.

Although a peculiar lack persists in comprehensive studies on modernism and the child, both Barnes and Faulkner scholars note the significance of the child in their respective bodies of work.[11] Faulkner's critics often home in on his southern clans as they reckon with their troubled familial pasts, and move uncertainly, falteringly, into the future. Noel Polk's *Children of the Dark House* investigates the "emotional and psychic baggage" that Faulkner's dark houses create for his fictional "children to carry with them the rest of their lives" (31). Emerging from a short story entitled "Twilight," *The Sound and the Fury*, "began as the opening of a narrative space for the voices of children" (Morris 404). Acknowledging the genesis of the text centered around a beautiful, lost little girl, David Minter claims "in Caddy [Faulkner] had created the sister he had wanted but never had and the daughter he was fated to lose" (351). Faulkner's perhaps more benevolent treatment of the child stands in contrast to Barnes's sustained ambivalence towards the child throughout her corpus. Caselli proposes that in Barnes's oeuvre, "the child often refers to adolescents or adult women, since the texts question the apparently comforting category of childhood by opening it up to its contraries" (124). Robin Vote persists as just such a figure; one that confounds the lines between child and adult.

---

[11] Caselli's forthcoming monograph tentatively titled *Littleness: The Child in Modernism* will address questions of littleness and affect in modernist literature. Michelle Phillips's recent *Representations of Childhood in American Modernism* takes up the relationship between modernist aesthetics and child interiority.

The mutability and temporal queerness of Barnes's textual children highlight the repressive Romantic impulse to see the child as a field of limitless creative potentiality. Rather, she exposes the violence done to the child when it is saddled with the burden of signifying innocence and unlimited potential. Her children reveal more about adult desires and investments than concrete truths about childhood normativity. Positioning these child-women as absent narrative centers, who are always being sought and lost, figures which corrupt the domestic and refuse the circuits of heterosexual generation, Faulkner and Barnes elucidate the painful result when discourses of primitivism and recapitulation are coupled with an insistence on innocence; these gothic child-women make manifest the burden of bearing these conflicting cultural investments. It is not my objective to argue that Caddy and Robin always work in the same ways or demonstrate the same functions—they are distinct figures working in different narrative contexts—but rather to suggest that the powerful resonances between them reveal a shared interest in rendering visible the modern child's impossible position.

" What else can I think about what else have I thought about": Absent Centers, Innocence, and the Erotics of Loss

Caddy Compson and Robin Vote, the images around which the narratives revolve, remain overwhelmingly absent from the texts' action. Despite their insistent itineracy—both women are given to wandering—they remain simultaneously frozen and static, as they are recalled consistently through the memories of those who love them. These child-women, denied voice, are accessed through the refracted and obsessive recollections of others. They serve as anchoring points to which the narratives always return, as other

characters endlessly rehearse the events leading up to the loss of these figures. Thus, repetition acts as a structural narrative principle; these texts exhibit an aversion toward forward movement, a prominent function of gothic narrative. By always regressing, turning backward to rehearse the past, trying unsuccessfully to comprehend the loss of these figures, the narratives refuse progression or fulfillment, and the obsessive, circular, patterns of the narratives mirror the workings of the characters' minds. These gothic child-women work as focal points of order as the centers around which the narratives cohere and also as instruments of chaos, simultaneously structuring and destructing the narrative. As other characters work to recapture these lost beloveds, to preserve them, Robin and Caddy are insistently imagined as childlike, their innocence insisted upon. This absorption with bestowing upon them a belated innocence refuses to acknowledge or accept that they were uninnocent from the start. Framing innocence in terms of lack of sexual experience, others attempt to return to a time before they lost these women to sexual contact with others, and in so doing, keep them in a state of arrested growth. This pathological insistence on rendering these women childlike in an attempt to retroactively recover their forfeited sexual innocence keeps them in perpetual arrears, as caught between childhood and adulthood. This quest, this fervent and impossible desire, drives the narrative but prevents the child-women from inhabiting the present.

Invested in Romantic perceptions of the child's captivating and artless innocence, those who seek to recapture this innocence through contact with these child-women reveal more about their own investments in returning to an idealized former time—a process undergone to compensate for their feelings of powerlessness and alienation

amidst the forces of modernity. Thus, Barnes and Faulkner demonstrate the violence done to the child when these expectations of innocence freeze the child from growing up and entering into experience; this regressive impulse reveals more about adult investments in the construction of the child's sexual innocence than any innate childlike quality or essence possessed by the child itself. By creating a version of the gothic child, frozen between childhood and adulthood, not allowed to grow up because of other's attachments to innocence, Faulkner and Barnes make visible the burden the modern child suffers when others remain invested in the powerful allure of Romantic idealizations of the child which are no longer feasible under modern conditions.

Arranged in four sections, three narrated by a Compson brother, and the final section being Dilsey's, the children's African American caretaker, *The Sound and the Fury*'s action occurs over four discrete, but not chronological days, and the sections do not progress linearly, as each narrator interrupts the action with disjointed recollections. The brothers' sections are penetrated by distorted memories of their absconded and often beloved sister, Caddy. Their familial home emerges as a gothic site, a hotbed of sexual conflict rife with the strains of a domestic arrangement under duress. The narrative opens with Benjy's section, the Compson brother who retains the mental faculties of a child. For him, Caddy is evoked primarily through sensations: haptic, aural, and olfactory; she "smells like leaves or trees" (5), her face "cold and bright" (6) against his. She takes on the role of sister and mother for Benjy, her body a comforting and nurturing presence, as he enjoys the sweet warmth of her skin nestled against his at night. Benjy only feels a gaping, inexpressible, formless loss once Caddy leaves the familial home; his memories

cohere around her, and his world is bleaker without her. Jason, the youngest son, bitterly bearing the brunt of familial responsibility after Caddy's departure and Quentin's self-actuated demise, remembers her caustically, and lives out his resentful life blaming her for his family's decline and for the small life he now lives.

But for Quentin, Caddy persists as love object until his death, which too, centers on his lost sister. Caddy grows up, marries, departs the familial home, has a child; the family remains unaware of her whereabouts and she essentially disappears from their lives and from the text's present, only to be recalled primarily through her brothers' memories. It is Quentin's relationship with Caddy, the ceaseless and obsessive workings of his restless mind, that position her most powerfully as gothic child-woman. Endlessly rehearsing memories of his childhood, Quentin fails to cope with being alive and his "obsession with the past is a repudiation of the future" (Brooks 291). Or, without Caddy, he has no future worth realizing. In his recollections, Quentin imagines Caddy, not as the adult woman she now must be, but as a fearless and admirable little girl, one who "never was a queen or a fairy she was always a king or a giant or a general" (109). Consistently remembering her as a beautiful, brave child, Quentin seeks to hold onto this time, to connect with this moment before Caddy's sexual initiation. He desperately wants to remember her this way, before she failed him (both by having sex and by leaving). Associating her innocence with sexual purity, Quentin positions his sister as emblematic of Southern womanhood, and when Caddy begins her departures into the night and into the arms of young men, Quentin registers her actions as spoiling the familial name. His

failure to protect her serves as the trauma he attempts to negotiate by returning to some originary childhood moment before Caddy relinquishes her sexual innocence.

But what Quentin fails to recognize or accept is Caddy's *corruption* from the start. Faulkner presents her as a gothic version of the sexual child, one who has not yet learned to feel shame, but one whose body registers the burden of signifying innocence even when it remains no longer possible. Caddy signifies the impossible position of the modern child; a figure now irrevocably sexualized but that still inescapably evokes correlations with innocence, which is equated with sexual purity. Quentin's retroactive preservation attempts through infantilizing his sister prove futile; he divorces her physical body into some derealized abstraction, so that Caddy becomes just a name, so that she can't hurt him, so that he can "isolate her out of the loud world" (112). By consistently reimagining her in childhood in an attempt to sever her from sexual experience, Quentin fails to permit her to have a present and freezes her between childhood and adulthood. Though the novel revolves around her, Caddy is denied voice; represented from a variety of angles, each clouding the next, the picture of her remains fragmentary, hallucinatory, incomplete. Because of her intense sensuality, her primal nature, she remains threatening and precipitates the gothic breakdown of familial life.

Barnes, seven years later, offers another manifestation of the gothic child-woman through the nebulous figure of Robin Vote. Though set primarily in urban Europe's cosmopolitan centers, locales seemingly counterposed to the remote and rural American South, *Nightwood,* too, settles on the perversion of familial dynamics, engendered by the movements of an arresting child-woman. The novel's narrative force proceeds from

Robin's wanderings, as she continually essays her escapes from the confines of bourgeois family life and seeks release from the grasp of those who seek to possess her and hold her still. Though perpetually in motion, Robin, paradoxically, becomes static, as she incites others to try and regain her within the space of their imaginations. Robin, as the image around which the narrative unfolds, inspires all characters to operate according to her strange appeal. And though others are inexplicably drawn to her, she exhibits no remorse for the emotional destruction she leaves in her wake. Because of her inability to hold still, her elusiveness, "thinking of her, visualizing her, was an extreme act of the will" (41), and thus she becomes refracted through the memories of those who have loved her and lost her. And though several characters, Felix and Jenny Petherbridge among them, love her and lose her, these recollections emerge most powerfully from her lover, Nora Flood. The narrative becomes a consistent rehearsal of the aftermath of Robin's persistent wanderings, and the obsessive workings of Nora's mind mirrors the devolution of the narrative itself. Robin, then, operates as the narrative's genesis and also its disintegration.

Referring to the novel's design, Teresa de Lauretis claims that the text's "syntactical and rhetorical density through kaleidoscopic storytelling embedded in elliptical narration frustrates both narrative and referential expectations" (244). Indeed, as the narrative is organized around the effects of Robin's seemingly aimless wanderings and rehearses the same events through perspectival shifts, the novel offers extreme close-ups, moments of interpretive poignancy, and just when the reader might surmise meaning, the text pulls away, the narrative unravels, and the resultant distortion precludes

even the most tenacious attempts at deciphering meaning. *Nightwood*'s often remarked *difficulty* is part of Barnes's singular aesthetic, but her commitment to opacity proceeds not out of a wish for obscurity per se, but rather works to expose the genealogical impurity of all forms of representation.[12] Reveling in dense and frequent intertextual allusions and resolute defiance of generic boundaries, *Nightwood*'s particular indebtedness to the gothic, often discounted or overlooked by critics, poignantly manifests in the construction of Barnes's queer child-woman.

Robin's chapter, the novel's second, entitled "La Somnambule," adumbrates her essence, her being elsewhere, not entirely of this world. Robin's curious mixture of stasis and kinesis emerges in the often-quoted scene in which she first appears:

> About her head there was an effulgence as of phosphorus glowing about the circumference of a body of water—as if her life lay through her in ungainly luminous deteriorations—the troubling structure of the born somnambule, who lives in two worlds—meet of child and desperado. Like a painting by the *douanier* Rousseau, she seemed to lie in a jungle trapped in a drawing room (34-5)

This introduction to Robin, which also serves as the moment Felix first encounters his future bride, illuminates her singular position as both innocent and villain; in her exists the merging of two diametric halves, resulting in her essential in-betweenness, her unknowability. As a born somnambule, Robin moves through life as if in a waking dream; this improbable mode of being generates her unusual appeal, and as Felix sees in her something he wishes to possess, he attempts to comprehend her perplexing essence:

---

[12] Caselli claims that Barnes's consistent intertextual appeals and noted obscurity that make her work so impenetrable "exempt[s] no text and no one," and that Barnes's employment of outmoded tropes and genres works to "challeng[e] writing and reading as forms of ideological appropriation" (3). Though Caselli mentions Barnes's interest in the gothic, she does not fully explore Barnes's indebtedness to the mode.

> he felt that he was looking upon a figurehead in a museum, which though static, no longer roosting on its cutwater, seemed yet to be going against the wind; as if this girl were the converging halves of a broken fate, setting face, in sleep, toward itself in time, as an image and its reflection in a lake seem parted only by the hesitation in the hour. (38)

This impulse, this feeling that overcomes Felix, belies Robin's peculiar position as simultaneously static yet also in motion, so that she becomes an object for contemplation; she persists as an image or sensation ingrained in his mind that slips away, that he will continuously fail to remember, yet that reminds him of something lost he desperately wants to recapture.

And although Nora has not yet encountered Robin, this textual moment resonates with the ineluctable power Robin holds over her, too. Robin functions in this way throughout the text; on the move, always out of reach, but also static, offering herself up as an image, an ideal to be contemplated. In her, others seek contact with their own pasts—personal, familial, and historical—as they attempt to move backwards to a time before their present, a time lost. This always reaching back not only obviates the narrative from progressing but prevents Robin herself from growing up, instead keeping her in an impossible in-between state. The lost child, who will "age only under the blows of perpetual childhood" (134) inspires obsession in those she comes into contact with as they attempt to reconnect with their own innocence lost, to compensate for their own feelings of dislocation and estrangement. But as she will always escape, and leave destruction in her wake, contact with Robin will be ephemeral, and Nora must attempt to capture her in the space of her mind. Others become invested in and obsessed with constructing Robin's innocence, with infantilizing her, as they refuse to let her grow up,

but, like Caddy, she was corrupt, uninnocent, and threatening from the start. Barnes's version of the gothic child-woman, functioning as the narrative center, reifies and subverts the violence of persistent subscription to ideals of childhood sexual innocence. Barnes demonstrates how attachments to childhood innocence offer a way for the adult to connect with and idealize their own personal pasts.

Stripped of voice and denied depth of interiority, Caddy and Robin operate as mostly silent focal points around which theses narratives cohere and also unravel. This lack of voice correlates with the modern child's silence as adults construct their meaning; they are seen as nascent subjects and denied sufficient interiority. Predominantly absented from the texts' action or presents, these child-women's actions drive the narratives forward, as others reach back into the past to rehearse the loss of them. Caddy becomes felt or realized only as loss, only a name, as she and her body (the idea of her) stands for a time before the present, an idealized moment in the mind of her family, before her defection initiated their familial decline and stood for the broader deterioration of the planter aristocracy. Obsessively reaching back into the past to recover Caddy at the moment of her imagined childhood innocence (before sexual contact) refuses narrative progression and closure. Caddy is thus not allowed to grow up or to have a future, but must instead persist as a memory, a faltering image, unable to exist in the present. Robin, too, becomes a cipher, a figure who remains important only for what others see in her; she functions as a metonym for an ancient and nostalgic past, a past which others seek connection with. Robin obliterates time, as she operates outside of it, being of two

worlds. By freezing these figures in childhood they are able to be contemplated, kept at a distance; and by not permitting them to grow up, their threatening nature is contained.

Nora and Quentin make their beloveds into monuments to the past in order to keep them safe, though they were always dirty and lost. In an effort to compensate for their own corporeal desire for these figures, those obsessed with them work to divorce them from physicality and preserve them mentally. Barnes and Faulkner thus highlight the powerful appeal of the Romantic child as a safeguard against the feelings of estrangement brought on by the forces of modernity, while pointing to the problematic elision of sexuality from this vision of the child. Unable to reconcile their Romantic attachments to childhood innocence with the intensely sexual nature of these child-women, Nora and Quentin close down possibilities for establishing reciprocity with these figures. Constructing these child-women as the centers of narratives that refuse closure and linearity, and instead obsessively rehearse the past, Faulkner and Barnes employ the gothic to offer a different type of futurity, one generated by the erotics of loss, a refusal of fulfillment.

Caddy and Robin possess some cryptic charm, some indescribable power that incites others to possess them, and causes them to become objects of obsession. That they insistently avoid being possessed or held still only augments their appeal. The chase, the duel, the hunt for satiation and fulfillment continuously postponed, desire for these figures builds and remains in circulation. Because they refuse capture, they are felt as loss, but it is their loss that fuels narrative production. Arguing that *Nightwood*'s "narrative shapes itself around a blank space" (194), Victoria Smith contends that the

text's rhetorical extravagance becomes necessary for performing loss (195). Smith aptly engages the Freudian notion of melancholia to theorize *Nightwood*'s poetics of loss; she suggests that the loss is not simply of a lover, Robin, but that the "text's enunciations of loss call attention to who and what loses, as well as to what is lost—whether it is a woman, a history, or something less definable" (195-6). Smith's intimation of this "something less definable" suggests that Robin's loss stands in for a broader, more nebulous and elastic loss. Smith's use of *something* points to the potential for mutability as this loss transforms depending upon what Robin symbolizes for those figures who feel her loss. If Robin, as Smith argues, functions as a "metonym for memory and history" (198), then she operates multiply as a cipher, like the child, retaining changeable meaning that others impose upon her. Indeed, narrative excess and dissimulation demonstrate that loss is not simply the loss of a lover, or of a child, but may be more capacious, more mutable; perhaps a loss of access to an idealized past, an abstracted moment, a time of projected innocence, a loss of one's own connection to childhood.

Faulkner's narrative, too, engages the generative properties of melancholia, as his verbal abundance compensates for the horror of Caddy's debilitating loss. In *The Psychic Life of Power*, Judith Butler elucidates the Freudian account of melancholia:

> melancholia describes a process by which an originally external object is lost, or an ideal is lost, and the refusal to break the attachment to such an object or ideal leads to a withdrawal of the object into the ego, the replacement of the object by the ego, and the setting up of an inner world in which a critical agency is split off from the ego and proceeds to take the ego as its object...Thus, the ego absorbs both love and rage against the object...The effect of melancholia, then, appears to be the loss of the social world, the substitution of psychic parts and antagonisms for external relations among social actors (179)

Melancholia's usefulness in understanding loss in these texts is threefold: that by obsessively speaking about the loss of these child-women, that loss becomes generative in that it produces narratives and incites creation. Secondly, it calls attention to the speaker, in these novels primarily Nora or Quentin, and that the loss of the objects themselves, Robin or Caddy, becomes less important than what "desires the speaker has deposited in the object" (Smith 203). This is why these child-women operate as the absent centers of these texts founded on loss. They function as empty but vital containers that hold and accrue changeable meaning, dependent upon what desires others project onto them. The investment in rendering them childlike, infantilizing them, illustrates how the child serves as a vessel for the projection of adult desires, and suggests why innocence remains such a vacuous yet culturally valued concept, because its emptiness allows for this projection. Thus, Caddy comes to symbolize the decline of her family and its failure, and Robin offers contact with the past, both historical and personal. These figures share an insuperable association with sexuality, a certain dirtiness from their position as sexual children, that provokes others to preserve them in their memories, thus protracting their innocence. Associating their growth with initiation into sexual experience, others infantilize them, preserve them as childlike within the safe space of memory. Because these figures are lost physically, along with the ideals they represent to those who miss them—childhood innocence—others are invested in perfecting them, returning them to a childlike state, through the processes of memory. Memory then becomes a way for these characters to cope with loss, thus transferring physical erotic energy into the presumably safe and sanitized space of the mind.

Though the impact of Caddy's defection is absorbed by all Compson family members, Quentin most keenly feels this loss. Quentin's section palpates with painful and frenetic irruptions, hallucinatory snatches of conversations, moments remembered, all centering on the loss of his beloved and damned sister. His frenzied recollections renegotiate those pivotal childhood moments where he believes he could have reversed Caddy's path of destruction. By endlessly reliving the past, Quentin refuses to forgive Caddy for leaving and himself for failing to keep her safe. Quentin mourns not only the physical loss of his sister through her absence, but also what she symbolizes to him. Indeed, Caddy's loss is also a loss of his familial honor and a time before corruption and decline. Unable to imagine a future without her, through the melancholic process of incorporation, a psychic form of preserving the object, Quentin obviates Caddy's complete loss. But he does not seek to remember her as she now must exist, as a grown woman, but rather as a child, evocative of a moment resonant with perceived innocence. He refuses to let her grow up; she remains suspended in childhood, frozen in the past and resigned to temporal disjointedness.

Quentin's desire to live in the past causes him to construct Caddy as a child-woman; he knows that she is now grown older, but he continually imagines her as a little girl in order to keep her safe within his imagination and to recover her sexual innocence, in the hope of returning to a time before her defection engendered his family's decline. Thus, Quentin laments not only the loss of his sister and her supposed innocence, but the idea of a way of life no longer sustainable, an idealized time. Equating her sexual initiation with his family's ruin, remembering her as an innocent child allows him to

connect with an unspoiled past, and cope with his own feelings of estrangement and sexual disgust. Because he is repulsed by the corporeal, and perhaps by his own bodily, erotic desires for his sister, he discards her physical body so that she may persist, abstractly, within his mind's realm. Thus, Caddy becomes an ideal, a child perfected in memory, rather than a fully realized, adult physical body that he must confront. Remembering her as the brave child is his attempt to sever her from sexual initiation and thus retain contact with his own glorified childhood. Yet despite his insistence on preserving her in (innocent) childhood, her image becomes infected in debilitating ways, as thoughts of her intense sensuality come to haunt him; Caddy, despite his efforts to sanitize her in memory, catalyzes his unbearable mental distress. Quentin's desire to alter the past, to recover Caddy's sexual innocence, is an empty one, for Caddy, the primal, sexual child, was always uninnocent and impure from the start. Arguably, the most potent image in the novel remains the sight of Caddy climbing the pear tree to look in on her grandmother's funeral as her brothers, Frony, T.P., and Versh look up at her "muddy drawers" (25). The resonance of this childhood moment, where others register her body as dirty, shapes Caddy's position as a threat to the integrity of the purity of Southern white womanhood. Doomed from the start, a victim of her culture, Caddy, as the focal point whose loss produces the narrative, and who remains important for what she means to others, illustrates the emptiness and impossibility of innocence, and the violence done to the child when it must retain that association.

Robin's loss, like Caddy's, generates the narrative force of the text; in her, others locate the potential to connect with the past and harbor hope for the future. Robin's

persistent perambulations, or rather the effects of her nocturnal itineracy, engender the dialogue that produces the narrative. But the circular, looping, digressions of those who contemplate her wanderings obviate action, remaining stuck on attempting to resolve her appeal and the meaning behind her movements. Always in the process of being lost, Robin makes her inevitable escapes from those who love her and wish to hold her still. From the outset of the novel, Robin is constructed as an object of inexplicable obsession; those who encounter her become enamored with her and overcome with the desire to possess her. And though her brief union with Felix inspires him to seek an answer to why she abandoned him, it is Nora Flood who feels Robin's loss most sharply. Nora's passionate and unfailing love at first appears a safety and comfort to Robin, but Nora begins to infantilize Robin in a desperate attempt to keep her contained within their home. Feeling that Robin needs protection, seeing her "always like a tall child who had grown up the length of the infant's gown" (145), Nora becomes the obsessive nightwatcher, further agitating Robin's nightly decampments into the arms of other women. Robin's vacillations between home and the nightworld only amplify Nora's mental distress. Like Quentin, Nora attempts, through the melancholic process of incorporation, to keep Robin close to her; unable to retain Robin physically, she attempts to preserve her psychically.

Amalgamating psychic and physical boundaries, she implores to the doctor: "She is myself. What am I to do?" (127). The narrator further describes Nora's experience: "Robin's absence, as the night drew on, became a physical removal, insupportable and irreparable. As an amputated hand cannot be disowned [...] so Robin was an amputation

that Nora could not renounce" (59). Thus, Robin, now irreparably conjoined to Nora's sense of self, so complete is her incorporation, points to Nora's immeasurable mental pain at Robin's absence. Feeling Robin's loss as the loss of a part of her own body, Nora further construes her lover, Robin, as her child, thus creating a bizarre perversion of familial dynamics. Infantilizing Robin, rendering her childlike and thus in need of adult protection, bestows Nora permission to smother her lover. Like a petulant child, Robin reacts to Nora's mothering efforts by returning to the domestic space occasionally for repose, but she always departs again into the nightworld. And because Robin's loss will never be complete–-she always returns to Nora— the desire for Robin is never entirely sated. Thus, Nora, after losing physical contact with Robin, tries to save her beloved by preserving her in the space of the mind. By remembering Robin as childlike, thus attempting to perfect her in memory and *forcefully* render her innocent, Nora keeps her safe. When Nora seeks Dr. O'Connor's knowledge of the night to better understand her wayward lover, Matthew corroborates Nora's infantilizing impulse, declaring, "you [...] should have had a thousand children and Robin [...] should have been all of them" (101). Robin's loss, for Nora, signifies more than the loss of her lover, because in Robin she seeks fulfillment of her desire for a child; thus, in Robin, Nora seeks attainment of all familial connections, and Robin, as empty center, persists as significant for the value others locate in her.

The divestment of these cryptic figures engenders debilitating effects for those who lose them, yet this dispossession produces the narrative force of these elusive texts. The erotics of these losses, "central to the formation of subjectivity in gothic

fiction" (Haggerty 24), reveals the emptiness of desire–-the innocence sought in these child-women never existed at all. Barnes and Faulkner remain invested in obliterating the myth of childhood innocence through an acknowledgment of the child's sexuality, but they demonstrate the powerful cultural resistance to renouncing this myth through their child-women's suffering. In rendering these evasive figures childlike, by incessantly reaching back into the past to recover a time of projected innocence, these figures are stuck in a hopeless place. This infantilization illustrates the stultifying effects inflicted upon children when we hold them responsible for signifying innocence. Faulkner and Barnes thus demonstrate how children function as empty containers, available for depositing a culture's fears and desires. Yet, the impossibility of severing conceptions of innocence—construed as lack of sexual experience—with conceptions of childhood, produces even more mental tumult when these child-women persist as objects of sexual desire.

This unassailable association illustrates that innocence remains an erotically charged quality, and makes visible the connections between child and female sexuality. Through their innocence, their vacuousness, these child-women serve as apt ciphers for projecting adult desires, and thus the loss of these figures reveals more about the mourners than the child-women themselves. Dealing with the loss of these evasive figures freezes any movement as the child becomes a fixed object beyond reach, an object for contemplation, perfected in memory. This way, others work to contain the threat these figures pose, as primal figures, sexual children. Quentin and Nora exude an obsession with purity and even turn to thoughts of death in order to keep their beloveds

from further corruption. After failing to protect and preserve the innocence and sanctity of the physical body, Nora and Quentin, unable to relinquish their belief in innocence as equated with sexual purity, begin to associate these child-women, who were sexual from the start, with inherent corruption; this affiliation emerges through discourses of contagion that pervade both texts.

"Such a woman is the infected carrier of the past": Bad Blood, Aristocracy, and Modernist Futures

Loss of these child-women not only means loss of a lover, a sister, a child, but also loss of connection with the past and hope for the future. Troubling the borders between child and adult, innocence and experience, past and future, these child-women—temporally out-of-joint and refused a present—illuminate the modern child's burden as being held responsible for offering access to the past and for signifying the future. The gothic, a contagious genre which seeps into other literary modes and exposes the dark undercurrents of a nation's fears and anxieties, becomes a particularly "apt terrain for uncanny encounters between nation and myth or repressed past" (Norman 1). Contagion implies contiguity, touching, brushing up against, but also insinuates pollution and infection, tainting; and representations of these gothic child-women bear out this polysemy. Though contact with these child-women establishes reciprocity with the past, it also inspires an infection of the mind, an ensuing madness, borne out in these psychologically fragmented gothic narratives. The persistent metaphors of infection, pollution, and contagion that suffuse these texts demonstrate the ways in which the past surges up to impact the present and inform the future through communion with the gothic

child-woman, a figure who threatens to corrupt the domestic, notions of childhood (sexual) innocence, and hopes for utopian futurity located in the child's body.

As both Caddy and Robin function as kinetic centers around which the narratives unfold, and consistently reject their suffocating domestic spaces through wandering, paradoxically, their nightly peregrinations further solidify them as the loci of the domestic for others. Their departures inspire chaos within the home, mirroring a broader breakdown of the modern family's psychosexual relations. Refusing to suffer entrapment within their homes, these child-women choose escape by entering into the nightworld. Twilight, the onset of darkness, comes to indicate the impending exits of these women from their domestic spaces and their inevitable entry into the fearful unknown, as those who love them know not what betrayals these women partake in under cover of night. Caddy will slip into erotic embraces, "hot hidden furious in the dark woods" (59), and for Quentin, the approach of twilight, coupled with the odor of honeysuckle, "c[omes] to symbolize night and unrest" (107). For Nora, Robin's fervent nightwatch, who visits Dr. O'Connor to learn of the night, "the very constitution of twilight is a fabulous reconstruction of fear" (80). In an excised section from an early draft version of *Nightwood*, Felix, too, gives his thoughts on the nature of twilight: "it is always twilight to the nobly born; nobility is the permission to go, in one's own time, back into the forgotten" (qtd. in Faltejskova 65-6). Although this eventually extirpated line appears in Barnes's text, its resonance for *The Sound and the Fury* proves salient. Both texts evince a preoccupation with preserving noble bloodlines, perpetuated through Felix and Quentin, who remain invested in maintaining the purity of their lineages. The succession of an

aristocratic familial line is sought through the bodies of these child-women; yet, these figures refuse the burden of ensuring genealogical purity by escaping into the nightworld and demonstrating carelessness in their choice of sexual partners. Thus, they become positioned by those invested in their purity as corrupt and contagious; they are shamed, made to feel dirty, as a disciplinary technique to control their wandering/erotic impulses. Robin's and Caddy's position bears out the discordant notion that women remain valued for possessing innocence (equated with sexual purity), a quality shared with children (which also increases their erotic appeal), but also remain responsible for producing children to ensure the future. Yet these child-women demonstrate the impossibility of this ideal; as Dr. O Connor elucidates, "man was born damned and innocent from the start" (121). This conundrum points to the broader uncomfortable persistence of competing ideologies centered on the child in the modernist moment. The sexual child, threatening, powerful, and alluring, infects the pervasive Romantic conception of childhood innocence, and Barnes and Faulkner illustrate the incommensurability of attempts to retain investments in childhood sexual innocence. Thus, their child-women reveal the problematic effects of the modernist conjoining of the Romantic ideal with the sexual child.

But despite their associations with sexual impurity or pollution, these child-women still retain the burden of securing the future through heterosexual reproduction. And though Caddy and Robin do produce children, these children fail to continue lines of aristocratic superiority, but manifest the transmission of shame, degeneration, decline. Under the cultural onus these child-women must bear, they do temporarily abide by the

societal pressures to reproduce, but the product crumbles under the weight, remains distorted, open to decay. These child-women, bearing children of bad blood, refuse the burden of signifying utopian futurity saddled upon them through the processes of heterosexual reproduction. Rather, through these disappointing children, Guido and Quentin, Barnes and Faulkner signal the end of the line; the hopes for futurity located in the child's body devastated. These gothic children thereby signify that the future is not be located in them, but rather in gothic narrative itself.

Caddy's threatening body, as the gothic locus of familial conflict, emerges as the site upon which the broader breakdown of entrenched aristocratic structures becomes registered. Michael Millgate points to twilight as signifying the "decay of the Compson family caught at the moment when the dimmed glory of its eminent past is about to fade into ultimate extinction" (297). Twilight,"as a condition of light and a moment of time" (Millgate 297), remains inextricably intertwined with images of Caddy; for Benjy the twilight hour brings about Caddy's application of perfume and her impending absence, and for Quentin, in particular, twilight engenders manic confusion, for it is at the onset of darkness that Caddy ventures out into the night and into sexual experience. Twilight, as a powerful organizing metaphor, signifies not only one family's gothic decline, but also portends a culture in transition—the crumbling aristocratic socio-historical structures of a once thriving Old South fade into obscurity, and the distortion of once stable categories becomes located in the female body. Caddy's sexual choices provoke this instability and bring on the darkness, as she refuses to be neatly circumscribed within the domestic space, and the loss of control over her body, no longer

safely contained and intact, signifies the patriarchal dispossession of white womanhood and female sexuality. Quentin locates in his sister's body "some concept of Compson honor precariously and (he knew well) only temporarily supported by the minute fragile membrane of her maidenhead as a miniature replica of the whole vast globy earth may be poised on the nose of a trained seal" (*Appendix* 207). Registering the precariousness of his family's position and acknowledging their descent into ignominy, Quentin understands this decline as an effect of his sister's sexual choices, thereby positioning her virginity as the obliterated symbol of Compson familial honor.

Caddy fails the proscriptions of Southern white womanhood by easily relinquishing her virginity: "the frail physical stricture. . . to her was no more than a hangnail would have been" (*Appendix* 208). Caddy's disavowal of the constraining model of Southern white womanhood, her utter disregard for preserving her sexual purity, for Quentin, signifies a broader corruption of the edicts and order of the Old South—an idealized time where men retained authority over female bodies, the Compson name remained glorified, and Southern masculine identity endured intact. Quentin constructs Caddy's body as threatening and foul because she refuses to value her virginity; driven mad by her night wandering and indiscriminate promiscuity, he shames his sister through recourse to race in an attempt to civilize her and control her impulses: "Why must you do it like nigger women do in the pasture the ditches" (58). Caddy's body becomes, for Quentin, the locus of pollution— a source of filth, messy, and impossible to contain. This manner of conceptualizing her body emanates from the novel's central trauma, the potent image of "the muddy bottom of her drawers" (25). Caddy becomes construed as the

source of contagion, which infects her family with the stain of her sexual shame. Quentin deems her "sick," and Caddy comes to believe there is "something terrible in [her] sometimes at night" (71). Thus, the "contamination proceeds from within the female body, and not without" (Fujie 122). Interpreting Caddy's body as an inherent source of pollution, as something vile within her that she then spreads through sexual contact, Quentin laments that she permits the breaching of bodily boundaries and opens up circuits of contact with the outside world. Caddy's body becomes a site of transmission that spoils the sanctity of Quentin's aristocratic worldview and threatens the purity of the Compson line.

Faulkner registers Quentin's positioning of Caddy as corrupt as a microcosm for how broader cultural anxieties about changing ideals of female sexuality and the body as a source of pollution become displaced onto the body of a child, a site that presumably can be regulated, unlike larger cultural transformations. As Danielle Egan explains, "The child symbolized a site of potential management that could be controlled, shaped, and trained, thereby shifting uncertainty and concern into something else: a pure and civilized future" ("Producing the Prurient" 456). Therefore, Quentin's impulse to police Caddy's sexuality substitutes for his failed attempt to prevent the collapse of the Old South's regulatory systems for managing relationships between bodies.[13] By curtailing his sister's sexual impulses, Quentin seeks to preserve a way of life under attack by

---

[13] Although the novel vibrates with racial tensions, the volatile potential of race remains veiled by a more overt anxiety over the maintenance of white female sexuality. As Kristin Fujie explains, "menstruation, not miscegenation" informs the anxiety of contaminated blood in *The Sound and the Fury* (120). This, of course, changes in Faulkner's later texts, and the specter of contaminated blood in relation to the threat of miscegenation will occupy a central place in my consideration of *Absalom, Absalom!* in my second chapter.

modernity's myriad forces altering his cultural landscape. Caddy's female sexuality functions as a menace to male congruity, and masculinity for Quentin, associated with control, logic, order, and the chronological order of time, becomes irreparably disrupted by her heedless and threatening mobility. In order to regain control, to stop the ceaseless flow of time, he seeks to apprehend Caddy's growth, to keep her childlike, to recede backward to a moment of projected innocence, wholeness, and integrity, before she forfeits her virginity.

His "sense of Southern masculine identity in shambles" (Duvall 1), Quentin, in an attempt to rescue his aristocratic familial name and restore order, resorts to outmoded and ineffective feudal concepts of chivalric honor, such as dueling with Dalton Ames, his sister's lover. In the face of widespread economic and technological changes altering the South's cultural landscape, the resultant psychological dislocation of Southern culture is carried out first within the home, as the breakdown of domestic structures mirrors a broader disintegration of the "Old South's patriarchal privileging of white male planters" (Weinstein, *Unknowing* 231). Unable to protect his sister's virginity and thus his familial honor, Quentin yearns for a lost feudal past, impossible to recuperate, a time when his family remained powerful, and women remained chaste and under male control. Yet, in abiding by this chivalric code of honor, Quentin remains "trapped in a historical value system now obsolete" (Singal 128). By deriving the source of his family's demise in his sister's body, Quentin attempts to cope with these cultural changes that are beyond his individual control. The crisis of Southern identity demonstrated by the Compson's familial decline, traced back and attempted to be safely located in Caddy's defection,

resonates powerfully with the concept of bad blood as an organizing textual principle–-that corruption begins *within* the female body.

Caddy, though gone, leaves a piece of her behind in the form of an illegitimate daughter, who functions as an embodied "sign of the pasts's devious capacity to persist" (Matthews 392). Named after her beloved brother, Caddy's daughter, Quentin, whose father remains unknown, emerges as a physical reminder of the family's shame. Though Caddy does temporarily abide by the pressures to marry and reproduce, she produces a child who fails the familial line. Doomed to repeat her mother's mistakes, young Quentin, who inhabits Damuddy's former bedroom, seeks egress from the rotting house, and escapes from her brutal uncle and into the arms of men. In identifying the reason for Quentin's proclivities, Caroline Bascomb confirms, "it's in her blood" (145). Thus, Quentin becomes resigned to her own internal corruption, which can be traced back through the logic of blood to her mother. A child born with no future, the potential stripped from her to create any identity of her own, she realizes she is "bad and going to hell" (119). Jason claims, "you cant do anything with a woman like that, if she's got it in her. If it's in her blood, you cant do anything with her. The only thing you can do is get rid of her, let her go on and live with her own sort" (146). While Caddy was guarded fiercely within the home, now that Jason remains the source of patriarchal authority, he has given up on Quentin. Gone are the past chivalric southern ideals of white womanhood, and in its place are corrosive rejoinders of women's responsibility for the destruction of the Old South, located as emanating from within Caddy's body. Caddy's daughter, evidence of her halfhearted recapitulation to the reproductive imperative and

effort to continue the Compson line, ultimately fails a gesture of return. The old aristocratic structures crumble, the lines rupture, and children refuse the burden of signifying futurity.

Quentin disappears with the carnival pitchman, like her mother escapes before her, and for Jason the loss of these women is consolatory, except that Caddy persists through fragmentary and insubstantial evidence of her existence elsewhere. Caddy's appearance in Faulkner's controversial 1945 appendix to the text, which he described as "the key to the whole novel" (*Appendix* 203), links her to racial and class conflict seemingly removed from the Southern landscape, and imposes another layer of obscurity in her representation. After delineating that Caddy vanishes in "Paris with the German occupation, 1940" (*Appendix* 208), she emerges in a faded photograph from a magazine presented to Jason by distraught Jefferson librarian, Melissa Meeks: "a picture filled with luxury and money and sunlight [...] the woman's face hatless between a rich scarf and a seal coat, ageless and beautiful, cold serene and damned; beside her a handsome lean man of middleage in the ribbons and tabs of a German staffgeneral" (*Appendix* 209-10). Yet Jason refuses to clarify whether or not he recognizes this woman in the photo as his sister, for, according to him, "this bitch aint thirty yet. The other one's fifty now" (*Appendix* 210). If, as Faulkner claims, each section of the novel after the first served as another attempt to clarify Caddy, it seems strange that even in the explicatory appendix, the key to the novel proper, Caddy remains indeterminate, out of focus. However, Meeks's assurance that this woman is Caddy Compson and that she needs saving inspires her to seek those who might confirm the identity of the woman in the photograph. But no one

will acknowledge this woman as Caddy, even Dilsey and Frony, and Meeks then determines that "Caddy doesn't want to be saved hasn't anything anymore worth being saved for nothing worth being lost that she can lose" (*Appendix* 212).

If Faulkner's novel represents his attempts to "make [him]self a beautiful and tragic little girl" (*Introduction* 228), to portray her through the oblique perspectives of what she means to others, it is perhaps most significant that even in this clarifying appendix she remains indicted and shunned by those who once loved her but who have since cast her out. Even now, Caddy remains important in what she reveals about others. She emerges, however hazily, at the site of violent conflict and social upheaval. Perhaps Faulkner associates her with Nazism to further cement her status as a victim of her culture, a move that powerfully links together associations of Southern structures of authoritarian control with European totalitarianism. Conversely, her belated association with Nazism may result as a recuperative move to absolve her failure to maintain the pure lines of aristocratic blood privilege at home in the South. Either way, Faulkner's addition revises our vision of the text and allows us to see the potential resonances between repressive Southern tenets and Fascist ideology. Thus, as Southern aristocracy falters and breaks apart, ever new and increasing forms of bodily management and surveillance occupy its place, and the links between the South's system of racial segregation and "American racism becomes seen through the palimpsest of Nazi oppression" (Brinkmeyer, *The Fourth Ghost* 19). Faulkner's move to render Caddy at the site of devastating global conflict confers her victim status and reinforces the debilitating

costs of circumscribing the responsibility for maintaining racial purity onto the female body.

This gothic preoccupation with aristocratic genealogy (and with Fascist ideology) persists across geographic borders from the comparably isolated American South to Europe's cosmopolitan centers, ripe contact zones for the blending of cultures and races. Although the American South and Europe each possess a culturally located set of established racial, sexual, and familial configurations under pressure, both spaces locate the genesis of this disruption in reference to the figure of the gothic child-woman. Filtered through the rubric of aristocracy, the shared concerns become apparent between Quentin, defender of the Old South's indebtedness to an outmoded feudal code, who cannot survive the swift currents of modernity, and *Nightwood*'s Felix, a Jew pretending to be an Austrian baron, who obsequiously bows to his idea of the great past. These men function as stewards of patriarchal authority and blame women for the corruption of their lines. Felix and Quentin seek to gain footing in the unstable present by turning to aristocracy as offering a concrete link to a better past, a time where racial and class hierarchies were clearly upheld, and where bodies could be easily read. But the system will not hold.

Barnes foregrounds *Nightwood*'s engagement with the complex nexus of nobility, blood, race, and birth/death from the outset. The novel's first chapter, "Bow Down," opens in late 1880s Vienna with Felix's birth; his mother "a Viennese woman of great strength and military beauty, [...] named him Felix, thrust him from her, and died" (1). His father, Guido Volkbein, a "Jew of Italian descent" who demonstrates a "remorseless

homage to nobility" which makes him, "as it was to make his son, heavy with impermissible blood" (2-3). Feeling shamed by his Jewish descent, "in life [Guido] had done everything to span the impossible gap; the saddest and most futile gesture of all had been his pretence to a baronry" (3). Guido claims be an "Austrian of an old, almost extinct line, producing [...] a list of progenitors [...] who had never existed" (3). Guido exhibits two portraits that serve as his claim to father and mother, when in truth these are "reproductions of two intrepid and ancient actors" (7), and he purchases them "when he had been sure that he would need an alibi for the blood" (7). Barnes's careful delineation of Felix's genealogy and his father's fears highlights how "at this point exact history stopped for Felix who, thirty years later, turned up in the world with these facts, the two portraits and nothing more" (7). Felix inherits his father's blood anxiety; that his specific and personal childhood experiences, his life as an orphan, remain obscured, further incites his desire to connect with the past through recourse to genealogy: "His embarrassment took the form of an obsession for what he termed "Old Europe": aristocracy, nobility, loyalty [...] he felt that the great past might mend a little if he bowed low enough, if he succumbed and gave homage" (9). To facilitate recompense for his "diversity of bloods" (8), Felix satisfies his obsession with nobility in the pageantry of the circus and the theatre. So indebted is he to positioning others within an aristocratic framework that he imagines Dr. O'Connor's manner as "that of a servant of a defunct noble family" (30). Feeling himself "disqualified" (9) because he possesses no secure genealogical link to a noble past, Felix determines to rectify the mistake through the birth of a child.

Felix's intense feelings of 'disqualification' bear particular historical resonance.[14] In *Thinking Fascism*, Erin Carlston argues that "after World War I, anti-semitic and racist themes gained in intensity, and the Jew became the focus of wide-ranging anxieties about the integrity of culture and the stability of the nation" (23). Barnes's representation of Felix, who self-identifies as excluded from Austrian culture, bears out the observation that, "Jews, not having a fixed location, were reduced to imitation of other cultures, to artifice" (Carlston 23). The rise of fascist thought in interwar Europe augments Felix's feelings of alienation, and he seeks refuge from obliteration in fostering an embodied link to his imagined aristocratic past. Yet Felix's desire for connection with an aristocratic past places the burden squarely on the child for securing the future, and Barnes remains invested in demonstrating how Felix perpetuates the very structures which damn him.

Len Platt identifies the collapse of the aristocracy "as one of the most profound economic and psychological changes of the modernist period 1880-1920" (2). *Nightwood* is set in Paris in 1920, just after the fall of the Austro-Hungarian empire, when noble families are displaced, monarchies are dissolved, and the centuries old structures of aristocratic privilege are crumbling. Titles can be bought without blood claims, and "the decline of established codes of social differentiation and the effort to consolidate the diverse European nations provoked a growing concern with the human body as the site and marker of difference–-difference of gender, race, class, nationality, and the newly

---

[14] Cheryl Plumb articulates in her introduction to the revised version of *Nightwood* that through disqualification Barnes referred to "a suggestion that individuals who incurred public dismissal or scrutiny suffered because of what had happened to them or what they were, that is, Jewish, homosexual, or alienated from the values of a dominant culture" (xviii).

created category of sexuality" (Carlston 20). And though *Nightwood* flaunts the destabilization of bodily boundaries, Barnes employs the problematic logic of blood as a sinister undercurrent in the text. As the usual demarcations of hierarchical racial and class distinctions dissipate, society comes up with ever more invasive and cruel ways to manage, mark, and contain bodies; this is accomplished with an inward turn to blood, to locating the threat within, and thus the preoccupation with preserving racial purity becomes increasingly pronounced.

Nightwood demonstrates that racial and class prejudices are reconfigured in more insidious ways after the blasting apart of old structures. Barnes's Parisian nightworld, populated by circus performers, drunks, and wanderers, certainly centers the marginalized, but it also vibrates with the potential for imminent destruction when European society reaches ever more violently to reinstate ways of maintaining and controlling purity along racial lines. This reconfiguration, unsurprisingly, positions the female reproductive body as the locus for where anxieties about the future occur, and positions women as responsible for the maintenance of (pure) bloodlines. As Dana Seitler argues, "there is a long history in which women, represented as diseased and contagious, are made to signify national crisis" (189). Felix's encounter with Robin awakens in him a wish for a son, and he chooses her because "with an American anything can be done" (39). Identifying his attraction to Robin in her curious "density of youth" (119), Felix admits that the "quality of one sole condition" drew him to Robin, that through her he would "be free to choose [his] own kind" (112). In creating a son with her, Felix seeks to remake the past, to rectify his disqualification and to achieve immortality. Robin's

apparent childishness, which Felix equates with innocence/purity, belies her existence as "an infected carrier of the past" (37). She incites the impulse to "eat her, she who is eaten death returning, for only then do we put our faces close to the blood on the lips of our forefathers" (37); this desire to consume her "is a self-reflexive attempt to access [his] own personal history" (Warren 129). Through employing her body, her blood, to produce a child, Felix seeks connection with his own obscured past, yet Robin's connotation of infection denotes sickness and impurity, and serves as a reminder that the past often surges up in unpredictable and dangerous ways. Robin is "contaminated by the past, which returns in her as a lethal kind of affection, threatening to spread impure and archaic traumas, memories, and ecstasies with her every move" (Seitler 117-8). And though Robin temporarily gives in to the pressure to reproduce, Guido, named for Felix's father, the son she bears remains sickly, strange, "an addict to death" (107). Robin corrupts the line of descent and exposes the frailty of obedience to notions of aristocracy, recalling Dr. O'Connor's prescient warning, " the last muscle of an aristocracy is madness–-remember that–-the last child born to an aristocracy is often an idiot, out of respect, we go up, but we come down" (40). Felix's desperate attempts to perpetuate his lineage through the child are disappointed, and his child evidences the decline of which he was so fearful. Going down, a movement repeatedly referenced in the novel—in Guido and Felix's bowing to their false aristocratic past, in Nora falling to her knees upon witnessing Robin embracing another woman, in Robin dropping to all fours on the floor of Nora's decaying chapel— emerges as a powerful thematic function in tension with the novel's narrative structure. As the text spans outward and retracts on a horizontal plane with temporal

disjunctions and dilations, this lateral movement butts up against the novel's thematic preoccupation with descent, decline, downward movement. This contentious formulation highlights the disjunctive nature of Felix's locating his hope for the future, for ascent, in the very structures which engender his downfall. As he strains toward the future, he remains bound to the past; for it is through contact with Robin that Felix discovers that what he thought of as security is instead only "formless loss" (112). Felix finally accedes to his mistake: "my son –-the central point toward which life and death are spinning—meeting of which my final design will be composed" (117), thus acknowledging the inevitable end of his line, and thus, for him, abolishing hope for the future.

CHAPTER III

"SOMETHING HIDDEN": SPECTRAL CHILDREN IN FAULKNER'S *ABSALOM, ABSALOM!* AND TOOMER'S *CANE*

"Spectrality...is what makes the present waver" (Jameson, "Marx's Purloined Letter" 85)

"Only modernism seeks to envelop its reader within a potentially self-altering structure of guilt, call, and responsibility" (Weinstein, *Unknowing* 259)

"Maybe nothing ever happens once and is finished" (*Absalom* 261) muses Quentin Compson, one of William Faulkner's bewildering gothic opus' several narrators. Quentin's thought speaks to the potential for an event or an encounter to possess an afterlife, to attain resonance beyond the present, to gesture towards haunting. Faulkner's labyrinthine narrative itself seems haunted, as multiple voices build and unravel layers of clarity. These voices emerge as besieged by the trauma of the Civil War, by the brutal systematic dehumanization of chattel slavery, by the violent and intimate encounters between bodies and the subsequent breaking apart of human lives as a result of these interactions. And though moments for potentially authentic and loving connection between humans mostly remain unfulfilled within the world of the text, perhaps the most poignant and haunting failure in this novel materializes through Thomas Sutpen's ruthless denial of his child, Charles Bon. Similarly, Jean Toomer's hybrid and genre-bending text, *Cane*, relies on an aesthetics of haunting; his blood-soaked and beautiful southern landscape becomes littered with unrealized possibilities for reciprocity between humans, missed opportunities for recognition and connection. Persisting on the text's peripheries, seemingly overshadowed by a more overt focus on bad mothers and absent fathers,

Cane's ghostly, unacknowledged children haunt a textual terrain clearly charged with domestic and familial strife. Pairing Faulkner's notoriously obtuse narrative of acute historical consciousness, *Absalom, Absalom!* with Toomer's *Cane*, a singular Harlem Renaissance masterwork, reveals both texts as careful blends of myth and history, and unveils a shared investment in the spectral mixed-race child, a potent manifestation of the modernist gothic child. Yet, spectrality does not connote ghostly absence; rather, these spectral children function as *active* presences which *work* on other characters and demand to be *dealt with* in the narrative. This chapter, then, centers on the spectral mixed-race child; a figure which haunts these gothic modernist experimental narratives and demands recognition in the present for the injuries of the past.

Faulkner and Toomer are thus invested in a shared project that invokes the spectral mixed-race child as a powerful response to dominant constructions of the middle class white child. If the child's symbolic power resides in its associations with purity, innocence, and futurity, these spectral children invoke the resounding echo of these conceptual frameworks—corruption, uninnocence, the past—thus bringing into relief the inherent class and race-based biases in these ascriptions to the figure of the child. These gothic children, refused the safety and protection granted the middle class white child, remain actively denied, cast out or abandoned by the family and the nation. Haunting the familial and national landscape, these unwanted children function as tragic reminders of illicit bodily contact, and of the fragile nature of cultural proscriptions governing the codes of human sexuality. These children are often the result of violent sexual encounters, and both Toomer and Faulkner employ these disruptive spectral children in narratives

centered on a critique of the patriarchal family. Denied familial, and more broadly, national inclusion, these children retain power through haunting; they work to expose the blindness of future-oriented rhetoric in the modernist moment and unveil how the mixed-race child remains excluded from visions of national futurity.

Mariá Blanco's lucid formulation of ghosts and haunting "not simply as useful metaphors for enduring and difficult memories of things past, but as commentaries on how subjects conceive present and evolving spaces and localities" (6), helps frame how these spectral children emerge not as buried secrets unsuccessfully repressed, but rather how they invoke the explosive nexus and colliding temporalities of past, present, and future. Haunting, then, manifests not just as a thematic preoccupation, but also as a problem of textual representation. To become attuned to the narrative function of these ghostly children requires de-centering the more explicit focus on fathers—whether omnipresent in the case of Sutpen, or absent, in the case of Karintha's child and Kabnis. Moreover, this neglect or abandonment of the child within the world of these texts is also reflected in a relative dearth of scholarly attention to the modernist child.

I conceive of spectrality in these texts less as supernatural presence and more as a particular condition of temporality, helpfully articulated by Jeffrey Weinstock: "to be spectral is to be ghostlike, which, in turn, is to be out of place and time, neither fully present nor absent, neither living nor dead" (5). Weinstock's invocation of a particular temporal queerness associated with spectrality, a lingering shadowiness, speaks to the disqualification of Faulkner's and Toomer's gothic children. These children, either absent, dead, abandoned, or unacknowledged, are fragmented and incomplete bodies.

Denied the security of belonging to a familial network, these unwanted children unravel the myth of racial purity so intrinsic to Southern conceptions of the integrity of the essentialized self. Though blocked entry into the family, they still retain the power to disrupt and destroy the patriarchal family through haunting and to reveal the exclusionary politics of national futurity and the deep dimensions of fraught racial relations in the modernist historical moment. As Weinstock articulates, "ghostly manifestations are always constructions embedded within specific historical contexts and invoked for more or less explicit political purposes" (8). Toomer's and Faulkner's spectral children, "who roam like phantoms of a hidden history to make themselves whole" (Walter 497), seek redress for their exclusion. Carefully attuned to the child's affective power and position at the center of debates about the future of the nation, Toomer and Faulkner reveal the complex layers of history and memory played out on the bodies of these rejected children. Theorizing the ghost as "a social figure," Avery Gordon's claim that "investigating [the ghost] can lead to that dense site where history and subjectivity make social life" (8), demonstrates how thoughtful attention to haunting may engender transformative recognition of how spectrality permits a particular perceptive power into historical machinations and violences.

Because they never belong, and because they threaten, these spectral children make a powerful affective appeal through haunting to acknowledging, and perhaps to healing, modernity' s wounds. Drawing attention to the mechanisms which exclude them, these children function as dense interpretive sites which require assessment and attention to the past rather than foster unhindered visions of the future. For, according to Gordon,

"analyzing hauntings might lead to a more complex understanding of the generative structures and moving parts of historically embedded social formations" (18). And in the case of Toomer's and Faulkner's spectral children, figures who conjure narrative densities and who make the present shudder with the vibrations of the past, they materialize the particular injuries of the South's fraught racial history. As Gordon articulates, "[the ghost] is pregnant with unfulfilled possibility, with the something to be done that the wavering present is demanding. This something to be done is not a return to the past but a reckoning with its repression in the present, a reckoning with that which we have lost, but never had" (183). This careful attention to a reckoning of the past in the present helps elucidate how these children remain active forces with intense affective potency, and bring into relief the temporal elasticity between past, present, future.

Toomer's and Faulkner's careful attention to the historical particularities and accompanying conciliatory myths of the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century South allow for an especially complex rendering of the southern cultural landscape. The South remains saturated with a painful and violent history, yet is possessed simultaneously of a gorgeous, fecund beauty. Both writers invest in creating a version of the affective South; a South which emerges as a character in its own right, an active presence which exerts force and shapes characters' paths. Even the air signifies this heaviness, a tension, a dynamic weight to mediate: redolent wistaria pervades the atmosphere of Faulkner's Yoknapatawpha County, while pungent smoke and the sickly sweet scent of burning cane and pinesmoke suffuse the air of Toomer's Sempter, Georgia. Much of this friction emerges from how the southern collective memory remains haunted

by the Civil War's attendant traumas; as Weinstein gestures, "the Civil War resists coherent narration and is possessed of its own half-life still disorienting twentieth century narrators" (*Unknowing* 235). Though Toomer's and Faulkner's texts represent the South at distinct historical moments, both narratives respond to how the Civil War's denouement impacts human relations beyond its present. And not only does this event engender residual tremors in the postbellum South, but the South itself comes to haunt the national imaginary, functioning as a warning of what the nation could become. Thus, the South's temporal strangeness works in multiple ways. The South is often imagined as a backward and peripheral space, one behind national time and inhospitable to progress.[15] Both Faulkner and Toomer demonstrate their awareness to this dominant perception of the South; Toomer through engaging associations of African American folk culture as averse to progress, and Faulkner through addressing the conception of white Southern fixation on the past. But these texts also gesture crucially toward hesitant, inchoate, uncertain futures. By interrogating "the unsettling experience of modernity's multiple temporal forms these narratives explore the South's central role in this configuration" (Duck 8). William Ramsey's notion of two Souths—"a temporal South of

---

[15] The idea of southern backwardness and belatedness possesses a long and complex history in literary scholarship on the South. The introduction to Leigh Anne Duck's *The Nation's Region: Southern Modernism, Segregation, and U.S Nationalism* offers a thorough overview of prior scholarship on the South's complex relationship with temporality. Her work focuses on the ways in which southern modernists engaged and contested notions of southern backwardness, mainly through the lens of racial segregation. See also Barbara Ladd's *Resisting History* for a discussion of the relationship between tradition and modernization in Faulkner's works, and see too her "Dismantling the Monolith: Southern Places—Past, Present, and Future." For an account of the trope's persistence across disciplines, see Scott Herring's *Another Country: Queer Anti-Urbanism*, especially chapter three, "Southern Backwardness." Herring links the commonplace characterization of the region "to a temporal backwardness, most prominently expressed in the caricature of the U.S. South as a frozen region outdated by supposedly more progressive spaces across the nation..." (114).

disturbing historical oppression and a despairing lack of progress [...] [and a] transcendent or eternal South, existing above time and social particulars" (76) becomes useful in conceptualizing the South's powerful valence as a gothic modernist locale. A geographic and imaginative space still vibrating from history's horrors, for Toomer and Faulkner, the South becomes a potentially transformative space for spectral encounters. As a space which encourages temporal porousness, which opens up the lines of communication between past, present, and future, between the living and the dead, the South invites haunting; for in the South, the air is thick with ghosts, we need only to become reconciled to their presence.

In both texts, miscegenation persists as a shared component of the southern inheritance, a historical reality made manifest through the spectral figures of these mixed-race children, bodies which break apart myths of racial purity. This dismantling, for Toomer and Faulkner, works two ways: recourse to the gothic exposes the fraught foundations of the South's myths of racial purity, and also complicates the myth of the American child as uncontested symbolic locus of utopian futurity. These myths are denuded, however, through the gothic's careful negotiation of historical particularities, both familial and national, while also remaining attuned to psychological disruptions at the level of narrative; in short, the gothic encourages an acute exploration of the psychological and the social. The gothic thus allows for "hearing voices of dissent that interrupt narratives of national consensus" (Byron and Punter 5). Rather than reading these spectral children as passive victims of familial and historical oppression, their presence, however tenuous or shadowy, points to a potentially generative space for

redressing the wounds of historical violence emerging from racial and class conflicts. As Jennifer Williams avers, "the written narrative of racial history is always already embodied. Reclaiming the past involves remembering the body as a historical text and exploring the tensions that exist between sexual desire and a history of violation" (98). Yet, this reclamation must also include an engagement with the future. Too often the gothic becomes associated primarily with an undesired 'return of the repressed,' with rehearsing past traumas, severed from its potential to account for or look to the future. Although the gothic's versatility as a literary mode may, at times, facilitate its uncritical use or dilute its power, it is my contention that Faulkner and Toomer, by deploying the spectral child—with all of the child's attendant associations with what is to come—reconfigure the gothic's potential as a crucial mode for re-thinking futures. Both *Cane* and *Absalom* explore the faultlines, the sites of rupture, where national myths unravel; and by forcing a reckoning with history's violent denials of humanity, Toomer and Faulkner complicate and question modernity's narratives about national and racial futures. Tellingly, both Toomer and Faulkner invoke, through the spectral mixed-race child, critiques of class relations through an appeal to aristocratic frameworks that transcend racial categories.

"And now... we're going to talk about love": Aristocratic Obstructions

Scholarly assessments of *Cane* and *Absalom* often focus on race at the expense of class, but a more specific consideration of Faulkner's and Toomer's engagement with aristocracy reveals their shared investment in this powerful rubric where class and race coalesce. Though aristocracy in the modernist moment becomes bound up with gothic

decline amidst the emergence of newer forms of class stratification, it arguably retains a longer and more complex sphere of influence in the US South. And while *Cane* and *Absalom* engage distinct historical moments, the aftershocks of the southern white planter aristocracy's apogee (and structuring of relations between human bodies) and then subsequent decline, reverberate across both texts. A closer look at the historical contours of southern aristocratic frameworks exposes a mutual textual preoccupation with how these frameworks produce and corrupt familial networks. The frayed edges of southern myths of white racial and sexual purity divulge "shadow families," and bring to light children denied patrimonial acknowledgement.[16] Calling attention to permeable domestic configurations and disruptions of the rigid black/white southern racial binary, Toomer and Faulkner highlight children who persist in an inhospitable landscape: fatherless, denied civil and familial inclusion. Too often, critical appraisals of *Cane* and *Absalom* pursue a line of inquiry that privileges the *question* of patrimony, that homes in on absent fathers. I am interested in turning to the children; interrogating why and how in these narratives they remain *shadowy, spectral* figures, often relegated to the textual peripheries. This aesthetic choice allows Faulkner and Toomer, I argue, to critique and question the cultural structures in place which consign mixed-race children to endure in a place of non-

[16] Joel Williamson, in *New People: Miscegenation and Mulattoes in the United States*, explains this phenomenon where a "married maverick reared a white family in the front of the house even as he reared a mulatto family in the back. Usually the mistress, the darker of the two mothers in the same household, would be a mulatto maid. This "shadow family" sometimes strikingly mirrored the white family, wife for wife and child for child, all touching a common husband and father" (50-1). See also Williamson 71. For other illuminating sources on shadow families see Diana Rebekkah Paulin's *Imperfect Unions: Staging Miscegenation in U.S. Drama and Fiction*, and Werner Sollors's *Neither Black Nor White Yet Both: Thematic Explorations of Interracial Literature*.

belonging, and to engage with how the lasting effects of white planter aristocratic power dynamics precipitates these children's exclusions.

In the antebellum South, the social hierarchy consisted of a small elite planter class, a modest white middle class, working class whites, and black slaves. The planter class often laid claim to an aristocratic heritage as part of the justification for their superior positions, and relied on paternalistic logic to keep subordinated bodies in their ordered places.[17] As Brannon Costello succinctly delineates, "paternalism encompasses a whole range of racialized social practices stemming from a belief that African Americans are fundamentally inferior, even childlike, and, as such, require the almost parental care and protection of well-to-do whites who claim to have their best interests at heart, though they may in fact be ruthlessly exploiting them" (3-4). At the same time, in "agrarian antebellum behavior, aristocracy was essential for white landowners to validate their identities, and for upwardly mobile whites to separate themselves from white trash" (Costello 2). This clear stratification allowed for virtually no social mobility, but in the postbellum South, as the region moved into a transformative restructuring of this once entrenched system, the dissolution of these confining categories affected all classes. In the face of an unstable present, white southerners sought anchoring in the past, thus "cling[ing] to a mythical vision of Old South aristocracy" (Costello 4). [18] This potent

---

[17] Slaveholders represented only a quarter of the white population of the southern United States. Of this minority, about a quarter owned from one to ten slaves, half owned more than ten but less than fifty, leaving only a quarter to make up the 'planter aristocracy.' This small privileged class of planters, however, conflated their narrow class interests with the welfare of the region (Everett 98).

[18] One facet of how the plantation myth distorts reality emerges from the idea of the 'big house,' when in practice the majority of the South's slaveholders held a small number of slaves. See the introduction to Costello's *Plantation Airs* for a full discussion of the romanticization of plantation life.

surge of plantation nostalgia becomes stoked and fed in part by the growth of plantation literature; a regional genre which mythologizes the planter class, perpetuates fantasies of pure white southern womanhood, and descries the virtues of white supremacy.[19] Faulkner, in particular, inherits the force of plantation nostalgia, as his great-grandfather, Colonel William C. Falkner, wrote wildly popular plantation romances and held slaves in northern Ripley, Mississippi (Kinney 5). Faulkner was bestowed Thomas Dixon's best-selling novel *The Clansman: An Historical Romance of the Ku Klux Klan* (1905) by his first grade teacher, Miss Annie Chandler (Weinstein, *Becoming Faulkner* 46). As Weinstein suggests, "to offer this book—as pedagogical encouragement—to one of her most promising students speaks volumes about racial norms in the early twentieth-century South" (46). Ubiquitous plotlines in plantation fiction served to fuel the white rape-complex and perpetuated cultural beliefs about black sexual degeneracy. Dixon's *The Clansman* portrays a black man raping a white woman with explicitly bestial imagery: "A single tiger-spring, and the black claws of the beast sank into the soft white throat" (304). Racial violence against African Americans was provoked in the name of protecting white womanhood from the threat of black men and served to buttress the *myth* that miscegenation resulted from black men raping white women. As Andrew Leiter elucidates, "the consistent efforts of postbellum southern whites to define white women

[19] A few of this genre's other most prolific writers include Joel Chandler Harris and Thomas Page Nelson. In *The Shadow of The Black Beast*, Andrew Leiter points to how in Dixon's *The Leopard's Spots* Rev. Durham inducts the protagonist and his protégé Charles Gaston into supremacist ideology and activism: "the future American must be an Anglo-Saxon or a Mulatto. We are now deciding which it shall be" (qtd. in Leiter 40). Dixon openly characterized his work as an effort "to maintain the racial absolutism of the Anglo-Saxon in the South, politically, socially, economically" (qtd. in Leiter 41). For more on the cult of Anglo-Saxonism in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries see T.J Lears's *No Place of Grace*, and Richard King's *A Southern Renaissance: The Cultural Awakening of the American South, 1930-1955*.

as victims of black empowerment succeeded in reversing white America's perception of rape in the South and centralizing that new perception for its political gain" (19). As the white planter aristocracy crumbled, coupled with this descent there emerged ever more volatile racial relations, often between working class whites and blacks. In particular, working class whites attempted to grasp at vestiges of white superiority; feeling their (already minimal) class privilege slipping away, they turned to reinforcing their racial superiority over blacks through increased violence.[20] Thus, as once robust aristocratic structures declined, the conceptual power aristocracy holds over the southern consciousness persisted, and was employed for an ever stricter maintenance of the color line. Plantation nostalgia, then, effected very real and vicious impacts; it persisted not just as a cultural fantasy, but was deployed as a potent political strategy to sanction violence against black bodies. The once dominant planter aristocracy thereby transmits its brutality beyond the moment of its apex, and Toomer and Faulkner demonstrate how the inheritance of white adultery continues to disturb racial and sexual relations into the present. In short, Faulkner and Toomer invest in addressing the question: to what extent did aristocracy really lose power?

Miscegenation emerges as the primary nexus through which Toomer and Faulkner engage how the white planter aristocracy's legacy intrudes upon the modernist moment. "The very idea of miscegenation speaks not of the erotic sharing of joy but of the pornographic: of the ways planter patriarchs used sex to capitalize their plantations, of

---

[20] David Roediger points to this phenomenon in *The Wages of Whiteness*, arguing that lower class whites were pointed toward their whiteness by their employers as recompense for their exploitative behavior. He argues that "whiteness can function as wage for workers' status, and privilege conferred by race could be used to make up for alienating and exploitative class relationships by forming the black population as other" (13).

the systematic denial of kinship bonds, and of the systematic repression of the deepest human feelings" (Cartwright 216). In order to satisfy their lusts, and in turn, populate their plantations, planter patriarchs yield mixed-race children who follow the status of their mothers.[21] The practice of miscegenation—between white males and black female slaves—was more tolerated during the conditions of slavery, but emancipation produced heightened anxieties around interracial sexuality and the possible infiltration of blacks across the color line, both in the public sphere and the private realm. These mixed-race offspring of the U.S. South "[became] a caste of shame confronting white males" (Patterson 261). In the face of a threat to coherent white identity, anti-miscegenation laws offered comfort to the white subject, and the legalization of the 'one-drop rule' maintained the subordinate status of those born of an interracial union. Thus, the creation of shadow families gives rise to a sector of children with no claims to inheritance, relegating them to experience a form of civil death. Orlando Patterson, coining the term *social death*, explicates the two phases of the process of social death under the conditions of chattel slavery: first, "the slave is violently uprooted from his milieu [and] he is desocialized and depersonalized; [...] the next phase involves the introduction of the slave into the community of his master, but it involves the paradox of introducing him as a nonbeing" (38). In the aftermath of American slavery, the law can render one dead in life, thus enacting a form of civil death. The severing of bloodlines is

---

[21] The interpersonal/erotic dynamics between human beings under such intense and uneven distributions of power are always incredibly complex. In *Go Down Moses: The Miscegenation of Time,* Arthur Kinney explains that in the antebellum moment many white men conceived shadow families, which they cared for conscientiously, but during the war and afterward this configuration became embarrassing, as the Confederates battled to keep slavery alive and tensions over race escalated (12).

the sin the father visits on children as blood remains crucial to defining a person in civil society. Excluded and unacknowledged by their white fathers, unanchored from family and denied full claims to human citizenship, these children become a form of the living dead.

These mixed-race children persist as shadows, specters; and Toomer and Faulkner employ the shadow in all its potent valences, by connecting these children's textual presences to their potential to make visible the blind and exclusionary rubric under which southern society continues to operate, the region ghosted by what it desires to repress. Blanco powerfully theorizes shadows "as a metonym for that which stands in our way; shadow as a locus of where cartography, an imagined construction of place and national belonging, has become haunted" (149). These spectral mixed-race children indeed stand in the way of a clean and bright vision of white southern futurity; they refuse to lie quiet, to remain hidden, discarded. Rather, haunting is their mode of existence; and interrogating the ways in which they have been excluded encourages a turning away from the question of patrimony, of fathers, and instead might allow for ethical redress. Blanco asks, "how we can use the dynamically haunted form of the shadow to reconfigure how we organize our ideas and ideologies of what constitutes a nation and what does not?" (151). This question opens up a path of inquiry, I think, Toomer and Faulkner were

both interested in plumbing and one in which their artistic explorations affirm personal investments.[22]

Toomer deploys the term *shadow* 15 times in *Cane*: "from odd dangling bits of shadow" (153) to "worlds of shadow planes and solids, silently moving" (100). These selected lines point to the term's resonance in constructing *Cane*'s hallucinatory psychic landscape; across multiple valences *shadow* remains vital in building a collective experience of African American modernity. The term's expansiveness, its possibilities in signifying spectrality, foreboding and lingering darkness, remain linked to slavery-era configurations between bodies—shadow speaks of obscurity, of half-lives. Yet, the concept of the shadow gains potency beyond its association with slavery-era shadow families; it becomes adapted in the modernist moment not only to signify interracial bodies, but also to describe the South itself, as a landscape heavy with a dark history. In *Souls of Black Folk* (1903), Du Bois's chapter "Of the Black Belt" resonates with Toomer's invocation of the southern landscape. Du Bois conjures the South: "that strange land of shadows [...] at which even slaves paled in the past, and whence come now only faint and half-intelligible murmurs to the world beyond [...] how curious a land is this [...] shadowed with a tragic past [...] in younder [*sic*] shadows, the shadow of an old

---

[22] Both Toomer's and Faulkner's personal histories are shaped by miscegenation. Weinstein writes in his biography *Becoming Faulkner*: "he may have heard of a family history different from the normative one passed down from the generations—involving illicit acts of miscegenation and their consequences" (124). Weinstein elaborates, "Faulkner's great-grandfather might have had a shadow family with a former slave named Emeline who gave birth to Fannie Forrest Falkner" (125). Further, Joseph Blotner in *Faulkner: A Biography* claims that Faulkner's wife Estelle Oldham almost broke off an early engagement because Faulkner allegedly had black blood (54). The impact of Toomer's mixed-race ancestry on his creative work has been well-documented by Mark Whalan, Barbara Foley, and Charles Scruggs and Lee VanDemarr, among others. Foley's work, in particular, delves into the psychoanalytic implications of Toomer's familial history and racial ancestry, especially for the production of *Cane*. See chapter four, "All the Dead Generations," in her *Jean Toomer: Race, Repression, and Revolution.*

plantation" (84-91). The South emerges, for Du Bois, much like Toomer's South, as a geographic and imaginative locale pulsing with shadows, with dense ghosts, with a violent history—a site of mourning and conflict, but also a place that one must attempt to wrestle with, to negotiate.[23] Within a broader network of Harlem Renaissance writers, the South persists as a place of ancestral longing, a desired site of identification, but also as one heavy with pain and darkness that some wish to repress.

Shadow, along with being utilized to describe the South, comes to signify interraciality among Harlem Renaissance artists.[24] Writers such as Langston Hughes and Zora Neale Hurston—along with Toomer—render the experience of being dislocated in culture through how the sins of the white father unanchor the child in the present. These artists interrogate what Hortense Spillers describes as the mixed-race individual's lack of historical materiality.[25] And through deploying miscegenation as a key thematic in *Cane*, Toomer, too, is interested in exposing the conditions that produce bodies which must exist in the no–place of the national landscape, as walking shadows. Through attention to aristocracy's persistent conceptual power in practices of miscegenation, and the lingering

---

[23] In *Souls*, Du Bois registers shadow's resonance with the African American subject's experience of modernity. Not only does he employ the term to describe the South, but he uses it to construct a powerful metaphor for racial recognition: the shadow of the veil. Du Bois characterizes this awareness of racial difference: "I had thereafter no desire to tear down that veil, to creep through; I held all beyond it in common contempt, and lived above it in a region of blue sky and great wandering shadows" (*Souls* 8). He continues to develop this metaphor to characterize black modernity in *Darkwater: Voices from Within the Veil* (1920).

[24] Just a few of the noteworthy examples here include Hughes's "Cross," "Mulatto," "Father and Son," and several vignettes in *The Ways of White Folk*s (1934); and Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937). For Toomer, these poems include "Shadows of Heaven, "The Lost Dancer," "Tell Me," and "And Pass" from *The Collected Poems*.

[25] Spillers, in "Notes on an Alternative Model–Neither Nor," assesses the mulatto/a figure in American literature, "Created to provide a middle ground of latitude between 'black' and 'white,' the customary and permissible binary agencies of the national adventure, mulatto being, as a neither/nor proposition, inscribed no historic locus, or materiality, that was other than evasive and shadowy on the national landscape" (301-2).

effects of abuses of white aristocratic privilege in the creation of shadow families, Toomer engages "anxieties over America's mixed-race population [as] part of the national consciousness" (Berzon 117). But before turning to the interracial spectral child, I will first consider how *Cane* foregrounds aristocracy's continued role in forging psychic conditions that foster violence in relationships between bodies across the color line.

Aristocracy remains a particularly complex concept and site of identification for Toomer, given his familial background and connection with Washington, D.C.'s aristocracy of color. Foley articulates that "Toomer's formative experiences among the capital's 'blue-veined' aristocracy of color [...] had a profound impact upon the categories through which he perceived and articulated racial issues in his writings of the early 1920s" ("Blue Veinism" 2). Although in his later works, including autobiographical writings and the 1936 poem "The Blue Meridian," Toomer seems to "identify privilege with intrinsic merit" (Foley, "Blue Veinism" 7) and even appears sympathetic to aristocratic value systems in his forecasted creation of an American mixed-race aristocracy, in *Cane*, he develops a trenchant critique of aristocracy, one which cuts across racial lines. Toomer configures aristocracy as the locus where race and class most powerfully converge; in his essay "Race Problems and Modern Society" (1929) Toomer writes, "never has aristocracy been taken so seriously" (62). In this essay he situates aristocracy at the forefront of the nation's collective consciousness; crucially, though, Toomer positions this concept within the context of heightened national debates about miscegenation, an issue then invigorating critical dialogues around citizenship, kinship networks, and the broader body politic. Directly addressing the cultural preoccupation

with how miscegenation and aristocracy are inextricably bound, Toomer refers to how race may be deployed as a tool to destroy one's political, social, and economic enemies: "occasionally it is somehow discovered that some white family of hitherto high repute has ... a drop of Negro blood—whereon this family is likely to fall below the social level of prosperous Negroes" (69). In critiquing the fervency of racial separatism on both sides of the color line, Toomer avers that "interbreeding and intermarriage, for instance, are becoming as taboo among Negroes as among whites, [...] [meanwhile] there are those who, with greater urgency than ever, are aiming toward an inviolate white aristocracy" (71). Miscegenation, itself a specter on the national consciousness, in *Cane* becomes manifest in the profound ways the sexual economy after slavery still relies on a refusal to relinquish aristocracy's psychic stronghold. In *Cane*, then, there persists a direct engagement with the *afterlife* of the white planter aristocracy's legacy; through the concept's continued deployment to bolster white racial superiority and its ongoing impact on sexual relations across the color line.

Of all *Cane's* vignettes, "Blood Burning Moon" most directly engages the prohibitions around interracial coupling; rather than supporting the notion that miscegenation was a problem of the slavery-era past, it brings into relief aristocracy's continued power in shaping interracial relations. This dangerous perpetuation demonstrates the extent to which aristocracy mobilizes and sanctions forms of violence against black bodies. Yet, Toomer remains committed to exposing the hypocrisy of broader thinking about miscegenation and dismantling the early twentieth century notion that mixed-race encounters happen when black men rape white women. Rather, he

subverts this idea by waging the battle over men's right to access the black female body. It is not that white men should fear the despoiling of white women, but that white men refuse to surrender their access to black women's bodies—the patterns of sexual violence persist. Accordingly, Foley draws attention to Toomer's interest in the "extent to which slavery-era patterns of sexual exploitation continue to shape interactions between men and women in [the] Jim Crow South" *(Race, Repression* 149). The vestigial force of the plantation system still exerts control over southern bodies and shapes interactions, sexual and otherwise, between blacks and whites. "Blood Burning Moon" elucidates this intrinsic link between sex and economics; though the labor landscape has changed from plantation to factory town, Tom Burwell still remains beholden financially to Bob Stone, despite them fighting over the same (black) woman. The battle is fought over the black female body, the same corporeal locus which produces tensions between men during slavery. With the nation looking to the South as the site where race relations prove most intense, "Blood Burning Moon," at the close of *Cane*'s 'southern' section, most clearly exposes the shadowy inheritance of the white planter aristocracy and positions miscegenation as the point of explosive contact between black and white bodies. This vignette perhaps deals most explicitly, in a tenebrous text, with the plantocracy's gothic decline and the resulting brutal reverberations into the fragility of black life—demonstrating just how powerfully the old ways refuse to die.

"Blood Burning Moon" centers on a love triangle between Bob Stone, son of a wealthy planter family now in decline, Tom Burwell, a black man laboring in the fields in Stone's employ, and Louisa, a black woman who works in the Stone family's kitchen.

The narrator recounts the three characters' disparate perspectives into the tangled relationship; and through this filter, the reader is given access to the conscious workings of their minds. This access remains key as Stone's psyche reveals a refusal to relinquish *control* over black bodies. As Louisa worked in his father's home, Bob views his dominion over her as an extension of his would-be former, legal right to her body. Louisa's perspective comes first and is the most cryptic and shortest of the three. Though Bob *loves* her, "by the way the world reckons things, [he] had won her. By measure of that warm glow which came into her mind at thought of him, he had won her" (39). These brief lines get at the impossible crux of sexual relations between the races; Louisa measures love both in terms of emotion and in terms of conquest—and that Stone deserves access to her body by virtue of his social position— gets at the double nature of their relationship. Louisa remains bound to the Stone family by labor, but also by a bond which slips into the messy territory of love. Louisa's also drawn to Tom Burwell (Big Boy), who holds her to the factory town: "His black balanced, and pulled against, the white of Stone, when she thought of them" (39). And she does think of them both, most starkly not as men, but as embodied signifiers of their respective races; this is what separates and defines them as rival lovers. She meets Bob in the cane brake, under cover of darkness and in secret, "[which] was nothing new" (40). Louisa's covert liaisons with Stone transpire in the fields where her family toiled, and where he took slaves in the past, whereas Tom takes her in the open. Her mind unsettled, foretelling the destructive clashing of these two men, senses a stir in the air, takes in the bright, blood colored moon—the southern landscape alive with portents of violence.

Tom's perspective invokes a restlessness, a quickness to anger, a disposition to protect Louisa's name, as he fights with the older black men who gather to gossip about Bob Stone and Louisa. As Tom speaks about love and his desire to wed Louisa, the words fumble across his lips; he will be able to buy her the things Stone now does to show her his love. Yet, Tom's plan for the future betrays that he remains beholden to Stone: "an next year if ole Stone'll trust me, I'll have a farm. My own" (42). This declaration demonstrates that despite the changing postbellum southern economy, black men were *still* beholden to white men in power. Tom still works in the Stone's fields, plowing and picking cotton. And though he understands that Louisa acquires gifts such as silk stockings now, he doesn't want to accept that she's intimate with Stone. Tom tries to appease himself, declaring "white folks ain't up to them tricks much nowadays. Godam better not be" (41); the subtext here, perhaps, is that after the collapse of the slave system, white men are less frequently sexually exploiting black women, as there are now more intense prohibitions surrounding interracial sex. Yet, by referring to rape and sex as 'tricks,' Tom's verbal economy suggests an attempt to diminish the painful reality of sexual brutality against black women. Tom seems, though, not as concerned with Louisa's potential exploitation but with a perceived affront to black masculinity. This insult to his masculinity originates from the painful calculus of slavery-era sexual relations, where black men were forced to relinquish access to black female bodies. His reaction supports black patriarchal ideology and the resultant shame generated around white men's continued access to black female bodies. Tom assumes part of Louisa's incentive to maintain a sexual relationship with Bob Stone arises out of a desire on her

part for material recompense, and he disavows entirely the potential for mutual affection or anything approaching love between the two, based on racial difference. Instead Tom, much like Bob, seems to imagine Louisa's body as territory, as a battlefield over which he will come to blows; Tom would "cut [Stone] jes like [...] [he] cut a nigger" (43) when his territory becomes threatened. Though he proposes that race and social status won't matter if he confirms that Stone is involved with Louisa, Tom will know the consequences of demanding equal claim to Louisa. It never crosses his mind as a possibility that Stone may love Louisa. Vitally, Louisa's body remains positioned as the nexus, the site over which the southern race war is fought, which represents an interesting inversion of the ideology of the purity of white womanhood as potent symbolic capital which shapes and determines race relations. Toomer, then, invests in breaking apart the myth of miscegenation as precipitated by black men raping white women, and instead positions the black female body as the catalyst of racial violence between white and black men, though the black male body must ultimately pay the cost.

The third section belongs to Bob Stone, his very name suggesting intransigence, perhaps a nod to his family history and the immobility of aristocratic power. Stone's perspective permits the most intense glimpse into the white male psyche in all of *Cane*, one fraught with the ramifications of eroded power, the frayed edges of his turbulent mind churning over: *what it means to love a black woman?* Belonging to a once eminent aristocratic southern family, Stone remains as the scion of the family name. Stone is introduced by the white flash of his skin, and "as if to balance this outer change, his mind became consciously a white man's" (44). The following passage details Stone's

tumultuous train of thought as he mulls over his relationship with Louisa; it bears quoting in full:

> He passed the house with its huge open hearth which, in the days of slavery, was the plantation cookery. He saw Louisa bent over that hearth. He went in as a master should and took her. Direct, honest, bold. None of this sneaking that he had to go through now. The contrast was repulsive to him. His family had lost ground. Hell no, his family still owned the niggers, practically. Damned if they did, or he wouldnt have to duck around so. What would they think if they knew? His mother? His sister? He shouldnt mention them, shouldnt think of them in this connection. There in the dusk he blushed at doing so. [...] He was going to see Louisa tonight, and love her. She was lovely—in her way. Nigger way. What way was that? Damned if he knew. Must know. He'd known her long enough to know. Was there something about niggers that you couldnt know? [...] No nigger had ever been with his girl. He'd like to see one try. Some position for him to be in. Him, Bob Stone, of the old Stone family, in a scrap with a nigger over a nigger girl. In the good old days...Ha! Those were the days. His family had lost ground. Not so much, though. Enough for him to have to cut through old Lemon's canefield by way of the woods, that he might meet her. She was worth it. Beautiful nigger gal. Why nigger? Why not, just gal? No, it was because she was nigger that he went to her (45)

This loaded passage vacillates furiously between Bob's feelings of anger at now being compelled to feel shame around his sexual relations with a black woman, where before he would have just 'taken her.' Stone's *feelings* about Louisa are clearly linked with his resentment regarding his family's loss of power; now he must do in secret what was once more accepted and open during slavery. He blushes when thinking of Louisa in connection to his mother and sister, again appealing to the strength of the myth of the purity of white womanhood to support strict maintenance of the color line and intensify prohibitions against interracial sex. That he cannot love Louisa openly—the impossibility of their relationship and the persisting power dynamics between them—demonstrates the lingering inheritance of plantation sexual economies. What lies at the curious crux of this passage is Stone's inner turmoil, his own musings as to why Louisa's color makes her

taboo; because of her race she remains unknowable to him, and almost inhuman in her inscrutability. He wonders why she must be defined by the color of her skin, but alternatively, acknowledges that this is what draws him to her. This paradox is a key point of complexity in Stone's passage and undergirds the emotional and mental turmoil of *loving* a black woman. Both men demonstrate a belief in his own right to access her body, and Stone registers the absurdity that he might fight with a black man over her, 'his gal.' As Scruggs and VanDemarr elucidate, "for each she stands as a kind of trophy by which they try to measure their social position, their honor, even their economic prospects" (155-6). Bob's sexual intimacy with Louisa works here in several ways; as evidence of an unwillingness to surrender the power his family once had over black bodies, his *right* to her, and also as gesturing toward the difficult and messy complications of erotics across the color line in the Jim Crow South.

Finally, this interracial lovers' triangle initiates the inevitable; the violent collision both men intuited as imminent—knives flash and blood flows. Tom holds true to his promise that he will cut Bob Stone 'jes like a nigger,' but the more vulnerable black body will undergo prolonged suffering; "as the 'stone' walls of the ruined factory reverberate to the cries of his killers, he remains dominated to the end by the Stone family made rich through his labors" (Foley, *Race, Repression* 215). Lurking in the factory town shadows, the black community watches on, spectators to the inescapable result of black retaliation against a white man: "a few dark figures, drawn by the sound of the scuffle, stood about them" (46). After witnessing Tom slash Bob's throat, "Negroes who had seen the fight slunk into their homes and blew the lamps out," but the white mob "came together. The

taut hum rose to a low roar. Then nothing could be heard but the flop of their feet in the thick dust of the road [...] It flattened the Negroes beneath it " (47). As the white mob galvanizes with vengeful purpose, the black community's recourse is to recede into the dark safety of their homes. While Tom's body burns at the hand of a frenzied mob, Louisa, paralyzed, wonders who could stop it: "where were they, these people? She'd sing, and perhaps they'd come out and join her" (49). Yet her question hangs in the air, an unanswered call to action.

Louisa's haunting plea reaffirms the structural inequalities in place to secure continued white supremacy and to suppress possibilities for black union. Bob Stone's presumed right to Louisa's body, a psychic vestige of slavery-era relations, gestures toward the conceptual power aristocracy retains to police and restrict relations across the color line. But the unresolved remainder here is the potential *(emotional)* motivation behind the murders. Though I concur with Foley's and Scruggs and VanDemarr's assertion that both men conflate their fervor for Louisa with a desire for land and economic stability,[26] what remains submerged within critical appraisals, and the text itself, is the possibility of love. Is this brutal denouement the result of a rivalry over access to Louisa's body, and all this access represents—economic and social worth—or is there a more elusive force at work? Ultimately, Toomer's text refuses any clear answer to this inquiry and treats love as a suppressed impetus, subsumed by the communally enforced social prohibitions authorizing forms of human connection.

---

[26] Critical consensus positions Louisa as conceived of as property by both men. Foley suggests that both men link their desire for her to desire for land (*Race, Repression* 216). Scruggs and VanDemarr, likewise, assert that access to Louisa's body represents not just a sexual rivalry but economic competition (155).

"I gave him nothing, which is the sum of loving": Aristocratic Impediments

Closing *Cane*'s 'southern section,' "Blood Burning Moon'[s]" violent culmination of an interracial love triangle suggests a continued thematic resonance with aristocracy, one picked up again most poignantly in "Kabnis." As this vignette demonstrates, the intense conceptual power aristocracy possesses over the southern consciousness impacts blacks and whites—and both racial groups denounce sexual relations across the color line. Whereas "Blood Burning Moon" engages the aftereffects of the plantocracy's collapse on race relations in a postbellum landscape, *Absalom* takes up the genesis of the set of problems to which *Cane* responds. For white men, such as Bob Stone and Thomas Sutpen, the idea of aristocracy presumes access to black female bodies, but it can also be dismantled by public exposure of that access; thus, there persists a fragility to the structure. And yet, revelation of miscegenation's presence most painfully impacts the product of these interracial couplings: the shadow child, who must bear the problematic inheritance of white adultery. White aristocratic denial of miscegenation and its effects on the children of interracial relationships is precisely the locus Faulkner engages in *Absalom*. An appeal to shadowy figurations to suggest interraciality unites *Cane* and *Absalom*; for Faulkner, his shadow children become (dis)embodied signifiers of the way aristocracy—as a driving force structuring human relations beyond the antebellum moment—has relegated them to a state of spectral half-life, and also points to white culpability in precipitating these exclusions.

Indeed, aristocracy functions as one of the novel's propulsive thematic currents and undergirds its narrative structure; it initiates Sutpen's design and becomes implicit in

all narrators' desire to understand how and why things are the way they are in the South. Although critical attention often homes in on Sutpen as the central actor of Faulkner's most gothic novel—at times to the exclusion of sufficient focus on other characters—turning briefly to this curiously absent yet omnipresent patriarch's pivotal childhood moment of racial and class recognition elucidates aristocracy's potency as one of the text's animating forces. After spending his early childhood years in the West Virginia foothills, at the age of thirteen or fourteen (he's unsure himself) Sutpen and his family move to Tidewater Virginia.[27] In the West Virginia backcountry "the land belonged to anybody and everybody...he didn't even know there was a country all divided and fixed and neat with a people living on it all divided and fixed and neat because of what color their skins happened to be" (179). In coastal Virginia, he becomes cognizant, however, of racial hierarchies and the intrinsic social value of his white body over those of blacks, as well as develops an emerging class awareness—"a difference between white men and white men" (183). Sent on an errand by his father to Pettibone's plantation, Sutpen experiences a moment of intense disorientation that shapes his life's trajectory.

Approaching the big house, he is met by the planter's black butler who bars him entry through the front door. In explaining the psychic impact of this encounter to Quentin's grandfather, General Compson, "he seemed to kind of dissolve and a part of him turn and rush back through the two years they had lived there ... seeing a dozen things that had happened and he hadn't even seen them before" (186). This flow, an accumulation of discrete occurrences, takes on a sudden intensity of meaning. This

[27] Sutpen is "the boy of either thirteen or fourteen or maybe twelve" (186). Like many other ostensible 'facts' in the novel, Sutpen's age at this moment remains indeterminate.

moment of profound disorientation (and simultaneous clarity) inculcates Sutpen's understanding that by virtue of the '*differences between white men*' certain whites could remain—or at times be treated as—below blacks on the social ladder. This event crystallizes in young Sutpen's mind the intense power *aristocracy* retains to cut across racial lines, to reinforce class stratifications, to differentiate and exclude. Sutpen's class consciousness, formed in this childhood moment, thus becomes profoundly interlocked with race. Once confronted with exclusion, Sutpen reacts with contained fury, but not against the "black balloon face" that prohibited his entry into the big house, but against Pettibone, instrument of the system which rejected him. Retreating into the woods to think, "he knew that something would have to be done about it," (189) [because] "he never even give me a chance to say it" (192). Alone, in a cave in the wild, he plots his revenge, resolves to attain Pettibone's form of power. After recognizing his class position, Sutpen devotes himself to achieving the capacity to exclude or to invite within.

Sutpen thus formulates his dynastic design, to obviate the aristocracy of heritage and devise his own aristocratic claim. He absconds to Haiti, and works as a plantation overseer. Sutpen marries a Haitian woman, Eulalia Bon, who bears him a son; however, upon revelation that his wife possesses black blood, Sutpen denounces his wife and son—he "provided for her and put her aside" (194). After returning to the U.S. South and settling in the wilderness outside of Jefferson, Mississippi, Sutpen again initiates his plan. He approaches the fulfillment of his design through acquiring the necessary trappings: he wrangles a band of "wild Negroes" into building his home, forms a baron and retainer relationship with his plantation overseer Wash Jones, selects a middle class woman, Ellen

Coldfield, as his bride, and has two legitimate children, Henry and Judith, to continue the Sutpen line. Sutpen, thus, positions himself against the South's entrenched aristocracy of heritage, as he is able to fashion himself the biggest cotton planter in Yoknapatawpha County by sheer determination and force of will. And, by affecting the architectural trappings of the planter class, Sutpen exposes the fallacy of class divisions (Crowell 608). He effectively infiltrates the planter aristocracy and delegitimizes the class mechanisms which once excluded him, thus demonstrating the permeability of aristocracy as a social structure. Yet, Sutpen's burgeoning aristocracy of wealth, his ascent, is enabled by the South's rigid racial matrix—one may transcend his class origins as long as he is white.

As *Absalom*'s multiple narrators chart Sutpen's rise and fall, through accretion and distillation of memories, history, lived experience all centering on getting the story told, a picture of Sutpen emerges as ruthless, selfish, demonic, as willing to destroy any who obstruct his path. But I'd like to return to the crux and formation of the design, to the less discussed aspect of its inspiration—the power to include, a deeper and more complex motive than revenge against white aristocrats. The *drive* for Sutpen's aristocratic longings emerges out of his childhood hurt—to eventually retain the ability to welcome the future-child who will knock on his doorstep, in order to somehow rectify his injury. Dirk Kuyk provocatively argues it is not just that Sutpen seeks to ascend to the planter class, but that he is motivated to break the concept of aristocracy open from the inside, to destroy it. Part of the design then is to turn dynastic society against itself, in preparation for the moment when his turn will come for a little boy to knock on his door; he is meant to take him in (Kuyk 204). If Sutpen looks forward to the moment when he has the capacity to

include the child, to invite him inside the home, why then does he fail to do so? He earns just such an opportunity when Bon comes knocking on the door of Sutpen's Hundred. Ultimately, I think, Sutpen's refusal of Bon—when he has the chance to break the system, expose its hypocrisy, air its secrets, by welcoming the interracial excluded son openly into the home—speaks to aristocracy's hold over southern consciousness. Sutpen's tragedy lies in his implication and absorption within the very structure he sought to blast apart; he ends up succumbing to its lines of thinking, maintaining white supremacy and the embedded patterns of denial therein. His subversive goals give way and his capitulation remains a testament to aristocracy's continued psychic sway over the region.

In realizing his aristocratic design, Sutpen, like many planter patriarchs, maintains a shadow family, becoming firmly ensconced in aristocratic kinship structures. But Bon, Charles the 'Good,' refuses to remain hidden; he possesses his own design. Bon surfaces—to gain patrimonial acknowledgement and claim his birthright. His design, inspired in part by his mother's wish to seek revenge upon Sutpen, requires him infiltrating the family; first by befriending Henry at university and then by seeking to marry his half-sister, Judith. Key in descriptions of Bon is a consistent invocation of him as shadowy, as ageless and unknowable. He is introduced as:

> a young man of a worldly elegance and assurance beyond his years, handsome, apparently wealthy and with for background the shadowy figure of a legal guardian rather than any parents—a personage who in the remote Mississippi of that time must have appeared almost phoenix-like, fullsprung from no childhood, born of no woman and impervious to time and vanished, leaving no bones nor dust anywhere—a man with an ease of manner and a swaggering gallant air in comparison with which Sutpen's pompous arrogance was a clumsy bluff and Henry actually a hobble-de-hoy (58)

This depiction proves resonant on multiple levels. Not only does Bon appear mysterious and his origins unknown, but he seems almost phantomlike, and his mannerisms are more *naturally* aristocratic than Sutpen's or Henry's. Bon's initial portrayal accords with Kevin Railey's description of the Jeffersonian natural aristocrat; one based on merit, not on privilege or blood.[28] Bon's 'ease of manner,' when contrasted with Sutpen's hubris and Henry's awkward posturing, brings into relief the inequities inherent within the South's social structure. As Railey argues, "Sutpen defies the static social order and its aristocracy of heritage and claims his right to the opportunity to achieve what he can through his effort" (115). In this way, then, Faulkner leverages a critique of the South's subscription to an aristocracy of heritage, in that Sutpen is able to achieve aristocratic status, all while being represented as essentially savage. However, the South's fixed ideology of race led to compromises within the upper class, and permitted those like Sutpen to succeed and progress while destroying those like Bon. Railey contends that Bon exists for Faulkner as an example of the natural aristocrat figure, but one who cannot survive the South's ideological matrix, whereas Sutpen is able to enter the upper class because of the binary thinking about race (xiii). Throughout the text, Bon's behavior and reception by his peers supports interpretations of his intrinsic merit. As he imparts to Henry, "if you haven't got honor and pride, then nothing matters" (279).

And just as Bon cannot occupy his rightful place as natural aristocrat within southern culture, his lack of a secure position, his in-betweenness, is repeatedly conjoined with his spectrality and absence of a childhood. Bon came "into Jefferson: apparently

---

[28] Kevin Railey's *Natural Aristocracy* offers a sustained and convincing argument for aristocracy's centrality within the worlds of Faulkner's texts. 111-112. See chapters seven and eight for extended readings of aristocracy's significance to *Absalom*.

complete, without background or past or childhood...he seems to hover, shadowy, almost substanceless" (74). Bon's curious disembodiedness puzzles and obsesses Rosa Coldfield: "Yes, shadowy: a myth, a phantom: something which they engendered and created whole themselves; some effluvium of Sutpen blood and character, as though as a man he did not exist at all" (82). Rosa seeks to interpret the conundrum of Bon's body; he is impenetrable, shrouded in mystery. Bon's presence within the text's verbal fabric, as shadowy, phantom-like, accords with his existence as gothic spectral child. Bon's corporeal indeterminacy connotes his position in the social landscape; as denied familial inclusion, unacknowledged. Within the world of the text, he is understood as unwanted son—doomed to a spectral existence for being prevented his birthright, his patrimony. He haunts the narrative, the ghost in the design, threatening to expose Sutpen; his presence "signifies the disembodied presence of the past in the present" (Hurley 69). Bon's relationship to Sutpen exemplifies the threat shadow children pose to their white fathers, but he would give up his quest to marry Judith if Sutpen would only accept him as son, legitimize his existence.

Bon's design emerges from his desire for recognition, so that it will embody him. He seeks to move from spectrality to materiality, a move that the interracial child pursues to rectify its lack of historical materiality. In order to be 'made real' Bon:

> knew exactly what he wanted; it was the just the saying of it—the physical touch even though in secret, hidden—the living touch of that flesh warmed before he was born by the same blood which it had bequeathed to him to warm his own flesh with, to be bequeathed by him in turn to run hot and loud in veins and limbs after that first flesh and then his own were dead (255)

All Bon wants is the 'saying of it,' a poignant resonance reverberating back to the moment when Sutpen was denied the chance to speak at Pettibone's door: "he never even gave me a chance to say it!" (67). Sutpen has the opportunity when "he stood there at his own door, just as he had imagined, planned, designed, and sure enough and after fifty years the forlorn nameless and homeless lost child came to knock at it" (215). So then Sutpen has the chance to rectify his injury, to bring *aristocracy crashing down*, to expose its permeable weaknesses, its brutalities and exclusions, by accepting into his home the rejected son—everything has led up to this moment. But Sutpen has now been fully indoctrinated into the South's racial matrix and has become the very thing he hated. His failure to acknowledge Bon sets into motion his design's destruction.

If this text's tragic nexus focuses on the ways in which investments in aristocratic power structures work to inhibit human relationships, to invoke the way kinship functions as a mediator between the personal and the social, what may be even more tragic is that Bon repeats his father's mistakes. How transmission works in this narrative becomes painfully clear in the figure of Charles Etienne de St. Valery Bon, son of Charles Bon and his octoroon mistress, whom he marries in a morganatic ceremony.[29] Bon replicates the patterns Sutpen establishes with him and takes on a shadow family of his own. After Bon's death, his mistress—whose name remains unrecorded—and son come to live at Sutpen's Hundred. C.E., a "thin delicate child with a smooth ivory sexless face...who...lived all his life in a kind of silken prison," (157) "that strange little lonely boy sitting quietly...with his four names and his sixteenth-part black blood" (158). C.E.'s

[29] Hereafter, Charles Etienne de St. Valery Bon's name will be abbreviated C.E.

spectrality, though, becomes heightened even further than his father's: "this child with a face not old but without age, as if he had had no childhood...but as if he had not been human born but instead created without agency of man or agony of woman and orphaned by no human being" (158). Faulkner takes care to link spectrality and the absence of childhood experience in his interracial characters to intimate their elision within the social fabric. These parents refuse to see their futures embodied in children that cannot realize their potential under current cultural conditions. Like Bon, C.E. remains disembodied, fragile, unanchored from his parents, but even more intensely so, suggesting that the exclusion becomes heightened, does not dissipate with time.

Perhaps, though, the most perplexing and powerful shadow child within the world of the novel is Clytie; curiously, it is she and Judith who make the decision to bring C.E. into Sutpen's home: "Clytie who had never been further from Sutpen's Hundred than Jefferson in her life...made that journey alone to New Orleans and returned with the child" (159). Clytie, like Bon and C.E., appears indeterminate of age, spectral, impenetrable to other characters, but also persists as a point of fascination. "Perverse inscrutable paradox: free, yet incapable of freedom who had never once called herself a slave" (126), Clytie remains the only mixed-race child who seems to find her place within this world. That she is permitted within the familial network, despite her blackness, speaks to the power of primogeniture, and to the gendered social value of bodies, as Clytie does not present a threat to the dynasty. She functions as the point of coherence, the lynchpin who attains the power to destroy and/or protect Sutpen's inheritance.

As dense interpretive sites, Sutpen's interracial children and grandchildren reveal Faulkner's investment in critiquing the exclusionary cultural politics around miscegenation, and how these proscriptions foreclose possibilities for love. For the narrators invested in understanding the story, the whys behind the action, love becomes the nebulous but vital component that eludes them. How, when the social loom prohibits connections between human beings, can love persist? Quentin and Shreve, in grappling with their compulsion to comprehend the actors' motives, turn to love: "we're going to talk about love...since neither of them had been thinking about anything else" (253). Although in their ensuing discussion Shreve and Quentin appear to focus more on sex than love, as they confer, they increasingly approach the emotional essence of their narrative—the potential and evasive element that *may* explain actions and events that cannot be accounted for rationally. And though their pursuit of love helps them affirm the story they have created, in *Absalom*'s love triangle among Bon, Judith, and Henry, like that between Tom, Louisa, and Bob in "Blood Burning Moon," love remains a force overwhelmed by violent collisions between men.

"It's not a bad child, either": Innocence Foreclosed

Aristocracy, a potent conceptual force which impacts relations across the color line, remains connected with the equally dynamic notion of innocence. In one such way, paternalism, which posits the (childlike) slave as benefitting from the ostensible protection of the slaveholder, allows the planter aristocracy to insist upon its own innocence. Thus, not only do these planter patriarchs perpetuate the myth of the innocence and purity of white womanhood, but they descry the innocence of the South's

methods of hierarchically organizing and controlling human bodies. More broadly, innocence may be interpreted in many ways—angelic, pure, inculpable, legitimate, stainless—but despite its multiple potential resonances, innocence remains most firmly linked to childhood. In *Absalom* and *Cane*, Faulkner and Toomer invest in a similar project—to reveal how cultural attachments to childhood innocence exclude the African American child.

In *Racial Innocenc*e, Robin Bernstein argues that the formation of American childhood and its attendant associations with innocence was coterminous with the rise of slavery in the U.S. South. This coalescence irrevocably shaped thinking about race and childhood, impressions which continue to impact our contemporary historical moment. Interpreting mainly visual cultural artifacts, Bernstein convincingly reveals the striking dichotomy between representations of the pure, innocuous, angelic, white child and the wild, corrupt, animalistic, black child. Further, she contends that race, in terms of the black/white binary, gained legibility through nineteenth century childhood (8). Through an in-depth analysis of the figure of the pickaninny, Bernstein shows how the black child becomes interpreted as less than human. Construed as incapable of feeling pain, these children are thus seen as not deserving of protection, of being granted safety. Though Bernstein's work centers on nineteenth century cultural production of race and childhood, her research establishes how slavery-era configurations of childhood bear resonance well into the twentieth century. Indeed, this engagement with radical un-innocence, symbolized and embodied through the racialized child, informs the twentieth century gothic exclusions of these children from the category of childhood itself.

For Faulkner and Toomer, the relationship between childhood, race, and innocence operates as a crucial nexus, ripe for generating a shared critique of American race relations. But this appraisal is not just leveled along racial lines, as both *Absalom* and *Cane* underscore just how intrinsically class and race work in concert to shape views about childhood. Though ascriptions of innocence may sometimes work as constraints for middle class white children, certain black children are denied the opportunity to inhabit this protective space. If innocence demands preservation, means needing to be kept from harm, Toomer and Faulkner demonstrate how some children are not seen as worthy of this effort. Instead, their lives are subjected to violence and precariousness. So psychically potent and damaging are these beliefs that they take on new, twisted, and pernicious forms within an intra-racial context internal to the black community.[30] These are the contorted continuances of slavery's psychic afterlife and the reality of black modernity. In the wake of emancipation, and the ensuing emergence of the black middle class, intra-racial class prejudices take hold and perpetuate further stratifications regarding the foreclosure of innocence for certain black children— namely, the lower class, southern, black child. In "Karintha," especially, Toomer gestures toward this violence, thus initiating a critique not only of white aristocracy, but also of the black middle class. In the drive toward racial uplift espoused in black periodicals, innocence becomes figured as an aspirational quality, achievable through adherence to a set of hygienic principles. Toomer's *Cane* engages how devotion to a 'politics of respectability'

---

[30] See Anne Cheng's *The Melancholy of Race*, and especially chapter one for a discussion of how African American children perceive racial difference. Robin Bernstein, too, in *Racial Innocence*, discusses how the Clark Doll Experiments of the 1930s helped win the argument for desegregation by revealing internalized racism (22). See particularly chapter five, "The Scripts of Black Dolls."

in regards to innocence provokes intra-racial exclusions. Through an appeal to spectrality, Toomer and Faulkner make visible the excruciating brutalities of affiliations between southern racial and class configurations and childhood innocence. That they render certain children in their texts spectral, ghostly, or dead, reinforces the realities experienced by children who are occluded, by virtue of their race, from normative, inclusive citizenship. Bernstein rightly points to the "underanalyzed exclusion of black youth from the category of childhood" (16). Bernstein's formulation helps, perhaps, elucidate the 'lack of childhood' that Bon, C.E., and Karintha face. Some other experience substitutes for childhood for them because they are seen as undeserving of protection; no effort is spent to keep them from experiencing pain. Yet, in extending Bernstein's line of thought, I want to suggest that even more excluded than black youth, those who possess a clear racial identity in a social system which insists on legibility through a stark black/white binary, are the interracial children Toomer and Faulkner represent as spectral. Though Bernstein astutely posits the black child as "non-child" (34), I'd further suggest, that the child in-between, becomes caught in a spectral half-life, unable to claim a (racial) identity in a culture which insists on the visibility of race, and constructs race as a defining category of human identity.

For both African Americans and whites, these children become embodied signifiers of radical un-innocence; of violation and the inheritance of slavery; of a practice both their cultures repress and deny. If innocence is conceptualized as "an active state of purity" (Bernstein 38), then these children can never inhabit this position in a culture fixated on racial purity. How does one understand oneself, form an identity, in a

world which insists on a black/white racial matrix? This is precisely the dilemma C.E. faces in *Absalom*. Faulkner clearly levels his critique through the ways in which Sutpen's adherence to aristocratic configurations and methods of denial prevent his interracial children from achieving innocence. Moreover, through Sutpen's own intense preoccupation with *innocence* and its catalyzing place in his design, Faulkner investigates the moment when a white child infers his class position, but through virtue of his race, is able to transcend his (white trash) origins and achieve his desired class status. The workings of innocence within *Absalom*'s narrative framework lucidly highlights the uneven allocation of this concept along racial lines, while also calling attention to its usefulness as a form of protection for those who may occupy it. Perhaps, the cultural absorption with innocence and childhood induces Judith's and Clytie's desire to impose a form of racial innocence onto C.E. In attempting to protect the child from his racial identity, in order to keep him innocent *(read white)*, these women further precipitate his in-betweenness, as he cannot form a racial identity in a world which demands it.

In a culture highly stratified along racial lines, where both racial groups remain focused on innocence—as either a quality to preserve or one to aspire to—these writers deploy the interracial spectral child to build an intense affective appeal, thus constructing these gothic children as active presences which demand attention. Through the interracial spectral child's fraught relationship with innocence, Toomer and Faulkner interrogate how innocence becomes a politically useful tool across the color line to support and maintain both intra- and inter- racial class-based violences and prohibitions, and also to condemn sexual liaisons across the color line. This is the paradox of interracial

childhood: that the abstract imaginary child is used symbolically as a victim of parent's choices to prohibit miscegenation, but the actual child also must bear the brunt of brutality and racism for representing the embodied signifier of what the nation has wanted to repress. But, through haunting, these children possess the agency to draw attention to the cultural mechanisms which exclude them.

Although the word *innocence* appears only twice in *Cane*—as opposed to seventeen times in just one of *Absalom'*s chapters—its deployment in "Karintha," the text's opening vignette, dramatizes the concept's centrality to *Cane*'s overall formal and thematic structure.[31] Scruggs and VanDemarr point to "Karintha"'s significance in framing the text's abiding preoccupations, intimating that the ghostly presence of miscegenation haunts the text through the lingering question "who gave her that child?" (139). Their thorough attention to *Cane*'s gothic qualities illuminates the potential for white liability, but this focus on paternity grants too much power to the absent father. Perhaps the child is born a result of white sexual violence, but I suggest that Karintha's decision to kill her child emerges as a result of *her* class position. Karintha, a lower class, rural, black child, remains forbidden from the protective realm of innocence. Her decision to murder her own baby, therefore, under further investigation, may have more to do with the complex workings of innocence than previously interrogated.

"Karintha" was occupying Toomer's consciousness before its appearance in *Cane*, as it first emerges, with scant textual differences, in his 1922 (but then

---

[31] I've detected the words innocent/innocence/innocently only twice in Toomer's text. Once in "Karintha" and in "Kabnis," when Layman's face is described as "innocently immobile" (130). In *Absalom* it appears most frequently in chapter seven—seventeen times—which focuses on Quentin's retelling of his grandfather's recollection of Sutpen's account of his childhood.

unpublished) drama, *Natalie Mann*.[32] Toward the close of the play, Nathan Merilh hosts a gathering at his New York City home for young black artists, and upon his audience's prompting, reads for them "Karintha." Accompanying Merilh's recitation, his friend Brown plays the mandolin, thus formulating an adaptation of a Negro spiritual. Given *Natalie Mann*'s broader critique of black middle class culture, "Karintha"'s deployment as performance and entertainment indicates an interest on the part of Merilh's audience with black southern folk culture. Mark Whalan aptly alludes to the fact that "Karintha" first had a "very specific metropolitan audience," and that "this deliberate intertextualization" should not be unheeded (*Race, Manhood* 211). There persists a vitality, a sexual power in Karintha, that this company perhaps finds a compelling counterpoint to middle class mores regarding black female sexuality. Yet, curiously, Toomer does not gauge Merilh's audience's reaction to the reading; instead, Nathan and Natalie next receive a letter detailing their friend Mertis's fragile condition ensuing a botched abortion. This authorial choice on Toomer's part links Karintha's decision to kill her child with Mertis's move to abort her fetus, and, subsequently, with Mertis's later death. This confluence speaks to Toomer's engagement with ongoing debates and cultural concerns regarding black female sexuality and reproduction.

Given "Karintha"'s intertextual primacy, which clearly resonates with dialogues around racial motherhood occurring within African American circles, critics of *Cane*, have, unsurprisingly, centered on "Karintha" as indicative of the text's comprehensive

---

[32] Karintha was first published in *Broom* 4 (January 1923): 83-85. The textual emendations to "Karintha" from *Natalie Mann* to *Cane* exist mainly in the form of added religious references. "The old men secretly prayed for youth" becomes "God grant us youth"; also, "And take my soul away" becomes "and take my soul to Jesus."

investments in female sexuality and black maternity. Whalan gestures toward how Karintha has often been seen as exemplar of "Toomer's southern earth mothers" (*Race, Manhood* 211). Indeed, critics have interpreted Karintha, and *Cane*'s other black southern women—Fern, Carma, Louisa—alternatively as ciphers, bad mothers, and as primal sexual beings intrinsically connected with the southern landscape.[33] *Cane*'s southern women reinforce the northern narrator of "Fern"'s observation that "the sexes were made to mate is the practice of the South. Particularly black folks were made to mate" (22). His assessment conjures the regionally-based and class-inflected concerns about reproduction associated with uplift ideology; namely, that certain members of the race weren't reproducing nearly or quickly enough, as the rural, lower class continued to propagate. Indeed, Foley highlights how Karintha's motherhood contrasts sharply with representations of race-mothers in *The Crisis* (*Race, Repression* 197). And though *Cane* certainly pursues black female sexuality and racial reproduction in its various permutations, a sustained elision in these critical appraisals coalesces around the child and childhood itself. Not only does Karintha's dead child function as an active spectral presence which haunts the text, but the conditions of Karintha's own childhood merit further scrutiny. Scholars such as Foley and Whalan, among others, have carefully elucidated the historical contours of *Cane*'s composition, yet the still underanalyzed

---

[33] For varied interpretations of black female sexuality and racial motherhood with illuminating readings of "Karintha," see Laura Doyle's *Bordering on the Body: The Racial Matrix of Modern Fiction and Culture*; Monica Michlin's "'Karintha': A Textual Analysis" in *Jean Toomer and the Harlem Renaissance*; Jennifer Williams's "Jean Toomer's *Cane* and The Erotics of Mourning"; William Ramsey's "Jean Toomer's Eternal South"; Jessica Hays Baldanzi's "Stillborns, Orphans, and Self-Proclaimed Virgins: Packaging and Policing the Rural Women of *Cane.*"

affiliation between race, innocence, class, and childhood remains ripe for investigation.[34] And, "Karintha"'s position as the initial vignette, further signals a continued resonance throughout *Cane*, simultaneously speaking to the vast conceptual power of innocence while reinforcing its associations with middle class black culture.

Karintha, then, works as a leitmotif for the text as a whole, activating its gothic contours. The disembodied narrator reflects on the interests of the men in the community, thus positioning Karintha as an object of desire: "men had always wanted her, this Karintha, even as a child" (3). Men, both young and old, "wish to ripen a growing thing too soon" (3). A palpable, physical aching for contact with this child centers on male erotic desire. Karintha becomes likened to a natural force, insinuating that her development become**s** accelerated as a result of this fascination. From the outset, childhood play fuses with sexuality, as "old men ride her hobby horse upon their knees," but this interest of the male, "could mean no good for her" (3). Karintha learns erotic play from these men, foreshadowing how she will later find a boy to 'play house.' Karintha's experiences suggest an awareness, even as a child, of her sensual power, her ability to bend men to her will. Although the narrator renders it unclear whether Karintha is sexually violated as a child, her cruelty against helpless animals and other children suggests perhaps that she harms others because she herself was traumatized. The narrator reveals Karintha's vicious predilections; "she stoned the cows, and beat her dog, and fought the other children" (4), releasing her anger and energy in physical form. These descriptions position her as an anomaly among other children; she runs faster, screams

---

[34] See Whalan's *Race, Manhood, and Modernism in America,* especially chapter six; and Foley's *Jean Toomer: Race, Repression, and Revolution,* also, especially chapter six.

louder, “but no one ever thought to make her stop because of it” (3). These behaviors reinforce Karintha’s wildness, her lack of discipline and control, and intimates that adults fail to interpret her outbursts as an appeal for aid because she has been exposed to sexual violence. Although others register Karintha’s behavior as strange, no one takes care to ask her why she acts this way. What is not done, then, the adult failures, this palpable parental and communal absence in monitoring and caring for the child, become more suggestive than what is overtly revealed. But perhaps even more striking than Karintha’s violent actions, though, is the narrator’s revelation that “Even the preacher, who caught her at mischief, told himself that she was as innocently lovely as a November cotton flower” (4), despite her aberrant behavior.

This brief line, I think, holds the crux of understanding Karintha. The preacher catches her at some undisclosed mischief, perhaps sexual, perhaps otherwise; too, this omission works as another ellipses, an interpretive opening, suggesting more by withholding than by disclosure. Regardless, his response to what he witnesses is denial, instead ‘telling himself,’ phrasing which reinforces that he registers strangeness, something problematic, disturbing even, but won’t accept it. Focusing on what, precisely, he ‘tells himself’ divulges even more—Karintha is ‘as innocently lovely...’ (4). When taken in context with the poem “November Cotton Flower,” two selections away from “Karintha,” the affiliation between her (potentially sexual) mischief, denoting play, and the material and economic conditions of her childhood becomes even more apparent. This sonnet invokes both the role of the community, and the tenuous but profound association between Karintha’s body and the land. “November Cotton Flower”’s octave depicts a

degraded landscape, one depleted by death and sterility. But out of this desolate place, beauty emerges, as the sestet introduces unforeseen grace into this world: "old folks were startled, and it soon assumed/ Significance. Superstition saw/ Something it had never seen before:/ Brown eyes that loved without a trace of fear,/ Beauty so sudden for that time of year" (7). The abrupt ingress of beauty into this landscape surprises the community, and takes on an almost supernatural meaning, as beauty can imply loveliness, but also blessing, an omen of future promise. This out-of-season flower, blooming in this hostile environment, and equated with Karintha's body through identification with 'brown eyes,' recalls Karintha's rapid growth, her ripening too soon. These 'brown eyes that loved without a trace of fear' recollects Karintha's fearlessness and vitality emerging from such a place of intense foreclosure. But this vitality will be short-lived as it cannot survive the season, or bear the environmental forces, much as Karintha will not be protected under her material conditions. This blossom is too quick; it can't last for it is all the more fragile for its peculiarity, its growth accelerated, like Karintha's, by external pressures. Given this poetic connection between Karintha's body and the land as 'innocently lovely,' as speaking to being out-of-season, coupled with the preacher 'telling himself,' implies an awareness on his part with this ascription of innocence not quite fitting the child. There persists an awkwardness in the simile; he knows it doesn't cohere. The preacher, attributing innocence to Karintha, even in the face of catching her at mischief, speaks to the cultural power innocence retains in its associations with childhood. Too, the preacher's position as solidly middle class, affirms the significance of innocence to black middle class aspirations. In interrogating this resolute appointment of

innocence to Karintha, even in the face of evidence to the contrary, highlights just how powerful the concept remains.

Contextualizing this designation of innocence within intra-racial class-based politics clarifies Toomer's cultural critique. If we take a closer look at the middle-class commitment to innocence as a politically valent tool to promote racial uplift within the pages of contemporary black periodicals, the preacher's attribution of this quality to Karintha becomes all the more potent. Toomer was clearly engaged with black magazines such as *The Crisis* and *Opportunity*, and was particularly attuned to the writings of Du Bois, editor of the *The Crisis*. Through his editorial role, Du Bois advanced his own intra-racial agenda, one that cannot easily be severed from eugenicist thinking.[35] Foley, in examining the relationship between *Cane* and race representation in black periodicals, aptly proposes how the rural women in *Cane* and their motherhood is contrasted with racialized ideas of motherhood practiced in *The Crisi*s, those which conform to middle-class identity (*Race, Repression* 197). Karintha, then, serves as a counterexample to *The Crisis* representations and signals a critique, one of poor rural women's subjection to unwanted pregnancies (Foley, *Race, Repression* 197). Although I concur with Foley, I would extend her line of inquiry to interpret how Karintha's *childhood* creates the conditions which make this unwanted pregnancy possible, and further, to examine the

---

[35] See English's *Unnatural Selections*, particularly chapter one, "W.E.B. Du Bois's Family Crisis" for a full discussion of Du Bois's deployment of eugenic rhetoric within the project of racial uplift. As English points out, in a 1922 issue of the *The Crisis*, Du Bois writes that the Negro must begin to "train and breed for brains, for efficiency, for beauty" (qtd. in English 38). On the subject of racial motherhood and birth control Du Bois claims, "We in America are becoming sharply divided into the mass who have endless children and the class who through long postponement of marriage have few or none" (qtd. in English 38).

differences between Toomer's representation of black southern childhood in *Cane* and those portrayals which populate the pages of *The Crisis*.

Toomer, in focusing on rural, lower class, unprotected children, reminds us of how intra-racial class politics can also produce exclusions. *The Crisis*, engaged in the project of racial uplift, focused on a solidly middle class striving for white respect. This respect, presumably, was earned through emulating middle-class white mores. Just how central the child becomes in the project of racial uplift and black nationalism should not be overlooked. As Kate Capshaw Smith has demonstrated, this uplift ideology was squarely dependent upon visions of emblematic black childhood, as African American leaders looked to a future where black children were not subjected to the forms of violence and precarious futures experienced in the volatile 1920s.[36] Through engagement with childhood in *The Crisis*, one may see how the rhetoric of innocence becomes deployed in the drive for uplift. Almost every October, from 1912 to 1934, *The Crisis* put together a children's issue; within these pages, visual images of healthy, vital, black babies abound. These children are dressed in the garb of middle class respectability. An editor's note in the October 1912 issue, accompanying a row of such photos, appeals to these "innocent and happy faces," implying that these children are worth protecting (287).[37] The message here is that parents must shield these innocent children from race hatred and teach them to overcome any prejudice they may face in the future. Parents

---

[36] Kate Capshaw Smith's *Children's Literature of the Harlem Renaissance* offers a compelling analysis of the child's importance as an icon of race progress. See also Wilma King's *African American Childhoods*.

[37] Though the *Children's Issue* was meant for a mixed audience of both children and adults, *Brownies' Book (1920-1921),* a separate publication also edited by Du Bois, was created specifically for a readership of black children. See, too, Michelle H. Phillips's excellent article "The Children of Double Consciousness: From The *Souls of Black Folk* to The *Brownies' Book."*

must take responsibility for keeping them safe from harm, by instructing them not to react with violence when violence confronts them. These children, declaimed innocent, are located solidly within a bourgeois middle class visual field. This appeal to innocence, a call to action for African American readers, excludes the kind of children Toomer produces in *Cane*. This attempt to demonstrate that these children need safeguarding ignores children whose class conditions construct a further barrier to them ever inhabiting the type of protective innocence *The Crisis* babies represent. Thus, within the uplift agenda, intra-racial class prejudices persist. The preacher's insistence on Karintha's innocence shows how, locating innocence within a solidly middle class framework, expels her, and children like her.

Karintha is just such a child, one who due to her class position, becomes robbed of a protected childhood. Several critics have touched on Karintha's innocence, though most have interpreted it in sexual terms, thus neglecting the class dynamics at play in the tale. William Ramsey, in explaining Karintha's mischief, proposes that the "narrator considers such behavior spontaneously natural and good because it was learned innocently through her parents' overheard lovemaking. It is simply the way of God" (82-3). He goes on to assert that "November Cotton Flower," placed near this story, "suggests that innocence such as Karintha's is a free, natural force that instinctively resists social repression" (83). Similarly, Karen Ford's reading of "Karintha"'s significance within the broader formal and thematic workings of *Cane*, infers that Karintha "changes from an innocent, vivacious 12 year old to a sexually experienced, contemptuous woman in the course of two paragraphs" (39). So much so, in fact, is the

focus on the loss of Karintha's innocence, that, according to Ford, Karintha's "actual dead baby is ignored in favor of the metaphorical death of Karintha's innocence" (60). Yet, what Ford's and Ramsey's analyses overlook are the interpretive potentialities of innocence itself. Solely locating innocence in sexual terms, as loss, precludes a deeper understanding of Karintha's inability to ever inhabit innocence from the outset, a product of her racial and class position. Foley, elsewhere meticulous in interweaving historical specificities into her textual interpretations, does not push quite far enough in suggesting the role of poverty in "Karintha ['s] move [...] from violated girl to murdering mother" (*Race, Repression* 201). Though I register the validity of assessing Karintha's innocence in sexual terms, eliding the class critique implicit in Toomer's prose forecloses the possibilities for seeing how this appraisal threads throughout *Cane*'s pages.

What the narrator discloses directly after the preacher's enunciation of Karintha's innocence insinuates the salience of class (and sexuality):

> Already, rumors were out about her. Homes in Georgia are most often built on the two-room plan. In one, you cook and eat, in the other you sleep, and there love goes on. Karintha had seen or heard, perhaps she had felt her parents loving. One could but imitate one's parents, for to follow them was the way of God. She played "home" with a small boy who was not afraid to her bidding. That started the whole thing. Old men could no longer ride her hobby-horse upon their knees. But young men counted faster (4)

This description links Karintha's actions, her 'mischief,' with learned childhood behavior, with mirroring her parents. Because she learns sex is love within the closeness of her domestic physical space, Karintha remains unprotected from sexual forces both at home and within the outside world. This vulnerability shapes her life's path; it 'started the whole thing.' The whole thing, presumably, is the shape of her future trajectory, as she

comes to understand how to use men's desire for her to reap material gains, beginning with this young boy who will 'do her bidding.' Karintha determines that men will bring her money to share in her touch, thus linking economics with the physical body, and hearkening back to the connection between corporeality and the land in "November Cotton Flower." Toomer then draws attention to Karintha's class condition, her lack of safety, in that she could never inhabit innocence because her material circumstances occluded this. She was not seen as worthy of protection; not by her parents, not by her community, not by the preacher. The preacher's refusal to see her un-innocence (admit the impossibility of her innocence), constructed by the realities of her childhood existence, perhaps resounds with the neglect practiced by the black middle class in wanting to distance themselves from the conditions and cultural perceptions under which lower class southern blacks lived and labored. In wanting to disassociate from connections with slavery and the rural South, the middle class striving for uplift forgets children like Karintha, perhaps seeing in her representations of black female sexuality they wished to suppress.

Karintha's subjection to sexual violence, to being unprotected, results in her having a child. Though it remains unclear who gave Karintha the baby, some critics, such as Foley, imply that "her determination to murder it means that it may well have been white" (198).[38] This possibility fosters a potent connection back to aristocratic power configurations. That Karintha's child may exist as a product of sexual contact between a white man and a black woman, reinforces the intransigence of these behavioral patterns;

[38] Scruggs and VanDemarr also suggest that Karintha's child was likely white (141).

as with Louisa, pathways which culminate in brutality and death. Karintha decides the child is unwanted; it "fell out of her womb onto a bed of pine-needles in the forest" (4-5), and she buries it on a sawmill pile," though "it is a year before one completely burns" (5). This burn/bear association links "Karintha" with the refrain espoused in "Kabnis," invoking the cyclical nature of birth and death, a comparison which reinforces the fragility of black life. The child's body suffuses the air, mingles with the pine smoke, and introduces the presence of haunting children which pulses throughout the text.

The baby's death is related with aloof, narratorial distance, with a flattening of intensity of affect, suggesting that infanticide is an unremarkable occurrence in Karintha's South. Despite this unimpassioned accounting of a child's death, which reinforces the tenuousness of life, and reading against critics such as Foley who insinuate that the narrator finds "a buried baby, a ruined environment, and a foreclosed future" (*Race, Repression* 199), I would suggest that this child, through its spectrality, retains power at the conceptual center of Toomer's short story cycle. That is, it must die, for its symbolic and affective value to Toomer's aesthetic project.

Karintha may be interpreted as a murdering mother, wanting to rid herself of a child that would serve as an embodied reminder of white sexual trespasses. But might her child's death be interpreted as an act of protection? That choosing not to bring a child into the world in which she lives may be the best way to preserve its innocence, ensuring it the sanctity, through death, that she herself could never obtain. Karintha, possibly, understands that so vulnerable is the baby's body that eternal rest may be a preferable alternative to life. This action, on Karintha's part, links her predicament with slavery-era

conditions and the continued resonance of these cruelties; her choice perhaps becomes all the more resonant if the child is interracial, caught between two worlds. In annihilation it finds innocence, and therein lies the affective impact, the strength of Toomer's appeal. Through its death, then, Toomer remains careful not to simply position Karintha's unnamed, unsexed child as a *victim* of external forces, but rather suggests that it retains agency, however limited; its power resides in the ability to haunt, as it permeates *Cane*'s landscape and forms connections with the text's other spectral children, all of whom share in a violent inheritance.

This is Toomer's message—one which he revisits in Kabnis, a piece which unites the conceptual force of aristocracy and innocence with that of futurity; where Karintha's dead baby becomes reincarnate and reimagined through other disembodied children, not just Mame Lamkins's murdered fetus, but also Esther's dream child, Becky's boys, the white ghost child atop the pines, and finally, the gold-glowing child of Kabnis's dreams. The spectral child becomes not just a harbinger of foreclosed futures, but, perhaps, remains more generative than previously considered, if we interpret its textual presence as an ethical call to action across the color line, to alter the precarious futures which current racial conditions produce. Moreover, that death may be preferable to living with an uncertain racial identity under a social climate which demands racial visibility, is a problem Faulkner engages through the interracial spectral child, C.E. *Absalom* also takes up, perhaps in even more textually explicit, foregrounded ways, how this concept promotes disparities along racial and class-based lines.

"His carcass quit being a baby and became a boy": Innocence Discovered

Whereas Toomer makes visible the twentieth h century racial and class-based exclusions of innocence created by the South's social system, Faulkner takes up this phenomenon at its inception, revealing how nineteenth century constructions of racial legibility emerge within childhood experience. Elucidating the uneven allocation of innocence across racial lines, Faulkner demonstrates its malleable cultural power, especially in interrogating the concept's vital relationship to whiteness. *Absalom* evinces how whiteness enables some to wield innocence as a weapon, and, further, links this deployment with a broader innocence the white South constructs for itself to justify the prevalent social order. Moreover, Faulkner establishes the impossibility of inhabiting innocence for the non-white child; how this designation, even when offered as a safeguard against violence, doesn't cohere, as we will come to see with C.E. Thus, *Absalom*'s invocation of 'racial' innocence as protection is twofold—one self-created and one imposed—though both manifestations end in destruction. In drawing attention to the violence innocence as a shield facilitates, Faulkner exposes the hypocrisy at the heart of the South's racial order, and through the concept's capacity to infiltrate and fracture kinship networks, reveals its human costs.

Sutpen's relationship to innocence conjures how the notion figures in building nineteenth century childhood formations of racial and class consciousness. In chapter seventeen, filtered through multiple narrative perspectives—Quentin enlightening Shreve by recollecting his father's account of his grandfather's memory of a conversation with Sutpen himself—Sutpen's remembrance of his childhood materializes as an extended and

recursive meditation on innocence, as he retroactively searches for the flaw in his design. By positioning the concept as the lynchpin for Sutpen's plan, Faulkner sets up innocence's primacy to the novel's overall structure. The previously discussed scene at Pettibone's 'big house' door catalyzes young Sutpen's 'discovery' of his innocence and induces his obsessive pondering. And, rightly so, critical attention to Sutpen's 'scene of primal recognition' often concentrates on the importance of innocence in shaping his agenda.[39] Though numerous critics have contemplated the significance of innocence to the novel, the notion's relationship to childhood still warrants further assessment. The key, perhaps, rests in the changeable theorizations of innocence within Sutpen's own account, a vacillation which speaks to the quality's plasticity and cultural sway.

John Rodden, in explicating Sutpen's innocence, identifies two distinct levels: the first being a "childlike innocence" in which Sutpen lived until he was fourteen and then he is propelled into a second innocence, "his new utilitarian morality" (26). Rodden suggests that Sutpen first exists in 'a primal innocence,' which is then disrupted by recognition that not all white men have the same access to power; this realization, of course, becomes filtered through the black body. The child's shock and outrage at this comprehension launches him into what Rodden categorizes as a further, disparate type of innocence; one characterized by a "new mind-set in which he operates as an automaton

---

[39] Numerous critics have focused on the significance of innocence to Sutpen's design, beginning with Cleanth Brooks's "*Absalom, Absalom!* The Definition of Innocence." Brooks explains that Sutpen's innocence "comes down finally to a trust in rationality—an overwhelming confidence that things work out—that life is simpler than it is" (556). This approach to innocence, however, positions Sutpen as believing himself as somehow exempt from the history he himself creates. In contrast, rather than reading Sutpen's innocence as a form of ignorance, I argue that Sutpen *is* aware of the personal and political utility of *performing* innocence and *uses* it to realize his design. Other notable discussions of innocence, along with Brooks and Rodden, include Dirk Kuyk in *Sutpen's Design* and Shirley Callen's: "Planter and Poor White in *Absalom, Absalom*!: Wash and the Mind of the South."

with a push-button approach to a set of rigid, unexamined goals" (27), and which helps him validate his choices in securing the type of influence Pettibone possesses. Although I concur with Rodden's premise that Sutpen does attain a second form of innocence, one meant to stave off further emotional injury, I wish to interrogate Rodden's tacit reliance on 'childlike' innocence; the unquestioned assumption that innocence persists as an innate quality of the child. The text, I think, calls for a reassessment of this attribution, and instead, reveals its historical contingencies. By adumbrating the interpretive possibilities of innocence, both in terms of how Sutpen himself understands the concept and how others apprehend his affiliation with it, a different angle on the text surfaces.

Proposing that Sutpen moves from "a noble to a tragic innocence" (qtd. in Rodden 27), Rodden aligns Sutpen with a Rousseauian notion of the child. Positioning him as a naive 'child of nature,' though, is to miss that Faulkner, through Sutpen's formation of race and class consciousness, reveals how the child operates as an agent of culture and maker of history. Shreve and Quentin, compulsively revisiting Sutpen's potential motives, don't accept the 'childlike innocence' script. Quentin's grandfather, speaking of Sutpen, unmasks the screen: "with that frank innocence which we call 'of a child' except that a human child is the only living creature that is never either frank or innocent, the most simple and the most outrageous things" (198). Faulkner, here, illuminates the performative quality of Sutpen's innocence. Instead, the child's latent cunning and deceptive capabilities emerge, all the more insidious, perhaps, when disguised under the cover of innocence. In his childhood moment of coming to class and race awareness, his 'discovery of innocence,' then, Sutpen comprehends its potency. Tapping into the

profound import of this moment allows Sutpen to live in a sort of extended childhood, exercising the child's inherent selfishness, to be able to square the means his self-serving design; for him, "whether it was a good or a bad design is beside the point" (212).

Through this formative childhood event, Sutpen, psychically, remains the affronted child; embarrassed by his exclusion, he channels this hurt to rectify the insult. He identifies innocence with the planter aristocracy, and determines that they use their status to mistreat others, even retaining the capacity to override what Sutpen understood as the primacy of the racial hierarchy. Rodden contends that in leaping to a new form of mechanistic innocence, Sutpen "remains uninformed and unwitting about the way in which society functions" (27). However, I suggest, Sutpen's deployment of innocence demonstrates just the opposite. Thus, against readings of Sutpen's constructed level of innocence as a form of ignorance, thereby inferring that he fails to understand how society operates, I contend that his entire project develops out of discovering how to *use* racial innocence to realize his design. Sutpen perceives African Americans as implements of white aristocratic power, and through this childhood encounter with Pettibone's servant, solidifies his comprehension of the form of 'racial innocence' Bernstein details. Bernstein explains that "innocence is raced white to achieve obliviousness, a holy ignorance, and purity as negation" (4). Innocence, linked with aristocratic insistence on the naturalness of the social order, fosters an unimpeachability that Sutpen discerns he can use to his benefit. Sutpen grasps how aristocracy keeps itself innocent by oppressing others (black and white) and wants to attain that capacity for himself, realizing that he would have to compete with "(the innocence, not the man, the tradition)" (189). In

apprehending that he shares in whiteness with Pettibone, Sutpen registers that, despite his class origins, he may use his whiteness as a weapon, to protect himself and to justify his life's choices. Sutpen becomes determined to use his whiteness to transcend his class status and ascend the social hierarchy, and his utilization of racial innocence to do so exhibits in microcosm how aristocracy subjugates others to keep itself guiltless. Adopting an aristocratic worldview and determining the 'black balloon face' a tool for implementing white desires, permits him to enact violence upon black bodies in his drive for power.

Sutpen's whiteness allows him to build innocence for himself, exposing that it is not some intrinsic quality the child possesses, but rather a conceptual force socially and historically manufactured for its political and personal utility. However, the tragedy lies in that he becomes so invested in obtaining the type of influence he associates with white planters, he becomes irreparably implicated in the very structure he sought to subvert. From the outside, Quentin's grandfather, and others, interpret Sutpen's innocence as "his trouble, his impediment" (188). But it's not that he misunderstands how society works that impedes him, but rather that he succumbs to an insistence on aristocratic configurations and the social construction of race so completely that it destroys his own family. His blindness to owning his part in perpetuating the system (of exclusions) and failing the chance to rectify the mistake through accepting the 'lost and homeless child,' becomes his downfall. Faulkner, thus, shows both the inception of (white) racial innocence and its inheritance. That how to use racial innocence is learned, cultivated in childhood, positions children, rightly, as active agents in historical formations. Sutpen's

childhood mobilization of innocence retains an afterlife, shapes others' lives, as it leads him to relinquish his mixed-race children, fomenting their spectrality. And the legacy of rejection transmits from Bon to C.E., an inheritance which renders this child even more ephemeral, and results in a contortion of racial innocence, further delineating the temporal resonance between slavery-era aristocratic material practices and twentieth century familial networks.

While Sutpen's racial innocence works as a form of protection enabled by his whiteness, Faulkner, too, demonstrates the destructive effects of an imposed racial innocence, one that keeps the child from fully participating in life. Sutpen's grandson, C.E., during his childhood, is kept innocent of his race, his blackness. His caretakers foist a type of racial innocence upon him meant as protection, but this attempt destroys him when the child enters into the social world, as the mixed-race individual cannot survive the South's racial matrix. Upon Bon's death, Clytie, the shadow child Sutpen does shelter, tries to give the most vulnerable child a safe haven, taking it upon herself to rectify the male mistake by rescuing Bon's son and bringing him to the contained world of Sutpen's Hundred.[40] From the outset, the child's presence within the plantation's bounds is marked by strangeness. Mr. Compson narrates C.E.'s tale, delineating his ephemerality, and outsider status; he seems to live in half-life. The child's tiny body, clothed in ostentatious finery, only emphasizes his frail corporeality, gestures to his inherent spectrality: "the delicate and perverse spirit-symbol" (159). This "slight silent child who could not even speak English" (160), as Clytie could speak no French, plucked from a French city, enters

[40] As previously discussed, I interpret one of the text's most tragic threads through the repetition of paternal exclusions. Bon, sadly, will not accept his son with his octoroon mistress because he wishes to live in the white world, though he recognizes "it's not a bad child, either" (246).

into a universe inhabited by two women who possess their own tacit language. He immediately finds himself caught between these two unfamiliar guardians; and, without language, he remains uncommunicative, withdrawn. His position within the domestic realm is reflected spatially as betwixt the women, as he sleeps in "the trundle bed beside Judith's" (160), while Clytie reposes on the pallet floor.

What experience then constitutes childhood for C.E., this child who seemed "as if he had not been human born" (159): isolation, containment. Judith and Clytie keep him secluded within the plantation walls; he has no contact with the outside world, no interactions, no play. How can a child "who had been born and grown up in a padded silken vacuum cell" (161) form an identity, when he receives no information about how to interpret the world, engages no other children through which to measure his notion of self? Perhaps the feedback he does take in from his shadow wards illuminates his medial position. He understands himself as interpolated between these two women, and he also comprehends that his guardians wish to prohibit his contact with black children. Clytie "found him one afternoon playing with a negro boy about his own size in the road outside the gates and cursed the negro child out of sight with level and deadly violence and sent him, the other, back to the house in a voice the very absence from which of vituperation or rage made it seem just that much more deadly and cold" (158). What the child intuits, then, is that somehow blackness is bad. And, at the same time, Clytie "tr[ies] to wash the smooth faint olive tinge from his skin as you might watch a child scrubbing at a wall long after the epithet...had been obliterated" (161). In isolating C.E. and constraining his contact with other children, the women's actions cause the child to internalize this

confusion and wonder even more fervently how to define the self against this burgeoning awareness of an outside, a social world where skin color is the eminent factor of human identity and worth. The child's struggle to delimit the self in these racial terms he begins to discern exist outside Sutpen's Hundred becomes most poignant when after C.E. moves into the garret, further isolating himself, Clytie and Judith find " hidden beneath his mattress the shard of a broken mirror: and who to know what hours of amazed and tearless grief he might have spent before it" (162).

What is the goal, then, in attempting to keep C.E. from knowledge of his racial identity? Or even, while hinting at his (internal, invisible) blackness, raising him as white? I contend, following Thadious Davis, that Clytie and Judith have benevolent intentions toward this vulnerable child.[41] Clytie, mixed-race herself, desires to safeguard him against the prejudicial realities of race-hatred he will face upon others' discovery of his black blood. She wants to prevent him from this pain through denying his black heritage; the child can pass as white and live in the white world. Judith, too, offers to pretend he is Henry's son, so that others will interpret him as white. This form of security these women create, however, is a contortion of racial innocence—a denial that excludes the child from human connection with either side of the racial binary. Instead, they conceal him, monitor his behavior, restrain his contact with others, so intense is their

[41] For an illuminating interpretation of Clytie's role in C.E.'s childhood, see Davis's article, "'The Yoking of "Abstract Conditions": Clytie's Meaning in *Absalom, Absalom!"* Davis interrogates Clytie's fierce protection of C.E., though she argues that Clytie, not Judith, is the child's protector (212). Like Davis, I also gather that the women's actions in keeping C.E. innocent of his racial identity end up psychically damaging him and proving how real social barriers are (206).

instinct to protect.[42] Although these women attempt to ensconce him within their protective world by bestowing him racial innocence (read whiteness), they end up preventing him from forming a racial identity in childhood, leaving him woefully unprepared for entrance into the broader social milieu, a Mississippi world which only sees in black and white. Thus, C.E.'s psychic wound centers on his ambiguous racial identity, as he harbors the conflicting messages he intakes as a child. As a result he doesn't belong in either sphere, the black world which he learns to revile and the severe white world, "which he mistakenly perceives as being peopled by the two stern, shadow women who seem to need only each other" (Davis 213).

Due to his existence in-between, C.E. seeks, like his father before him, to make himself real. He provokes violent contact with other bodies in order to become visible to others; masochism facilitates his move from spectrality to materiality. He initiates this practice with a knife fight at "a negro ball held in a cabin a few miles from Sutpen's Hundred" (164), and continues it throughout his life. He absorbs "blows and slashes...and did not even seem to feel" (164), only reacting with laughter as others brutalize his body. The incident at the negro ball earns C.E. an arrest, and as he sits in resolute silence during his questioning, the justice Hamblett cries out in frustration: "*What are you? Who and where did you come from?*" (165) This potent refrain resonates with C.E.'s inner turmoil, his persistent struggle with how to position himself within the stark, divisive Mississippi world where race determines all. That C.E. himself cannot answer this impassioned query only drives the lingering force of the inquiry home. General Compson, too, tries to

---

[42] C.E.'s hyper-protected childhood contrasts sharply with Karintha's lack of parental supervision, her vulnerability to encounters with community members. In either case, though, Toomer and Faulkner demonstrate how, because these children are non-white, innocence doesn't cohere.

protect him by encouraging him to escape Jefferson, to pass as white and begin anew somewhere else. He does abscond for a year and then returns "with a coal-black and ape-like woman" (166), pregnant, who did not seem to know that he was not white. He rents a dilapidated slave cabin from Judith, disporting his wife's black body in front of anyone he thought would react with viciousness. He moves restlessly, "hunting out situations in order to flaunt and fling the ape-like body of his charcoal companion in the faces of all and any who would retaliate" (167). His wife becomes a decoy, a tool used to provoke the racially motivated physical abuse he craves at the hands of other men. He releases his anger, like Karintha, in bodily form: "driven by what fury which would not let him rest" (167). These events become ritual—his only human interactions are savage collisions with other bodies, hoping the impact will make him real.

C.E. desires to be identified as black, wants others to see the blackness in him, though his body reads as white: "he who had not resented his black blood so much as he had denied the white" (168). C.E. defines himself in opposition to the white world, symbolized, for him, through Clytie's and Judith's oppressive guardianship. He rejects the bonds of kinship they extend to him, preferring instead further remove. When C.E.'s wife bears his son, Judith's answer is to send it away. Judith, in discussing C.E.'s future, prompts him to go north into the cities and live as a white man, leaving the child and his wife behind. She implores, "didn't my own father beget one? and he none the worse for it? (168)"[43] Judith informs him that she will "raise it...it does not need to have any

[43] Judith, here, is thinking about Clytie and not Bon. This fascinating passage reflects Judith's unawareness of Bon as her half-brother, and that she was the just the vessel through which the lost son sought contact with his father. This passage summons the depths of the family secrets and activates the layers of Sutpen's subterfuge. Unlike Sutpen, C.E. will name his child and remain on Sutpen's Hundred.

name" (168). She asks him to replicate the exclusions Sutpen perpetuated, but he refuses. He will not call her Aunt Judith, instead returning to his cabin, "toward the Gethsemane which he had decreed and created for himself, where he had crucified himself" (169).[44] C.E. now elects a self-imposed isolation, he "who consorted with neither black nor white" (169). In his adulthood, he "had become the young man with a young man's potence yet was still that lonely child in his parchment-and-denim hairshirt" (166). C.E., then, like his grandfather, remains forever marked by his childhood experience of racial innocence, allowing it to direct his life's trajectory.

C.E.'s story, occupying a small portion of *Absalom*'s verbal fabric, perhaps becomes even more powerful than his father, Bon's, which garners more critical attention. Bon sought paternal recognition as the path to embodiment, to escape spectrality; his son, C.E., also denied, appears even more spectral than Bon, further demonstrating the fate of the mixed-race individual in a world where black and white occlude all other identity categories. That his mixed-race heritage positions him as an isolate, as in-between two incommensurate worlds, exhibits the brutality of defining human beings by caste and color. General Compson surmises that it would be "better that he were dead, better that he had never lived" (166). This heart-rending assessment brings into relief the interracial child's position within the South's social framework, and resonates with Karintha's decision to offer her child refuge in death. Yet C.E. chooses life; he returns, recursive, circling back to Sutpen's Hundred to reclaim his space. He refuses to pass as white, to deny the black blood in the Sutpen dynasty, and instead seeks

---

[44] The situation of C.E.'s self-willed suffering resonates with that of Joe Christmas in *Light in August,* as he searches out punishment from blacks and whites. However, Christmas's masochism entails sexual pathologies, while C.E.'s seems race-centered.

to make it visible. In raising his son on Sutpen land, he exercises the sole and limited form of agency that he retains.[45] C.E., then, becomes more than the victim of an 'ancient curse' of denied white paternity, but serves as the vehicle for the text's strongest critique of the South's racial system. It is C.E., 'spirit-symbol' of miscegenation that ghosts the text, who exposes the human costs of racial innocence. And it is C.E.'s son, whom, unlike Sutpen, he won't reject, who represents the dynasty's future.

"Ghosts like us": Futures Foreseen

After C.E. passes from yellow fever his son remains on Sutpen's Hundred, occupying the same old slave cabin his father reclaimed. Jim Bond, "*the hulking, slack-mouthed, saddle-colored boy*" (173), who would not speak, signifies a stark transition from C.E.'s and Bon's before him's, delicate corporeality. Bond is intensely material, embodied, resolute. He and Clytie ultimately persist, attached to the land; she tends the decaying home and he works the land. This is Sutpen's legacy—these are the bodies that remain. Returning to Sutpen's original design, along with the desire to "take revenge for all the redneck people against the aristocrat who told him to go around to the back door" (*Faulkner in the University* 214), above all his project was future-oriented, and more specifically, child-centered. His future-looking scheme entailed the capacity not only to repair the affront he suffered at Pettibone's door, but to build a dynasty, to bear

[45] In this sense, C.E.'s situation diverges with Karintha's decision to grant her mixed-race child innocence through death; instead, he chooses life, and to raise his son. Both figures, though, still exercise limited forms of agency within their extant social structures. And, C.E.'s tortured relationship with racial innocence still illustrates the impossibility of the mixed-race child unproblematically inhabiting it as form of protection.

sons to secure his name.[46] Vitally, he doesn't conceive of his future in terms of what he can acquire, his material wealth, but in the ability to produce children, "riven forever free from brutehood" (210). Yet, as discussed earlier, race intercedes to corrupt the plan and Sutpen fails the opportunity for rectification. Instead, demonstrating the temporal force of aristocratic ideology, Sutpen perpetuates the system of exclusions, and his tale of dynastic decline—ultimately embodied through Jim Bond—becomes the object of obsession for Quentin and Shreve in their pursuit to grasp the complex nexus of race, family, and intimacy in the South.

For them both, Sutpen's tragedy evolves into more than a lurid tale of one man's explosive collapse, but transforms into the story of the South–-a narrative about the past, which also involves the future. Shreve, driven by an outsider fascination with the region, becomes both compelled and repelled by 'the demon's' life after prodding Quentin to: "*Tell about the South. What's it like there. What do they do there. Why do they live there. Why do they live at all*" (142). Regardless of the sentences' interrogative structure, Shreve is giving Quentin a directive—he craves a dramatic story that will corroborate his suppositions about life in the South. Quentin's later response to Shreve's incredulity, "you have to be born there" (289), indicates that he has imbibed the Sutpen narrative. As Rosa suggests, it lives inside him: "*you knew it all already, had learned, absorbed it already without the medium of speech somehow from having been born and living beside it, with it, as children will and do"* (160). Quentin, motivated perhaps by his familial

---

[46] Presumably this is why the unnamed female infant, daughter of Milly, Wash Jones's fifteen year old granddaughter, and fathered by Sutpen, was rejected, too. Sutpen, upon seeing the girl-child, remarks, "Well, Milly; too bad you're not a mare too. Then I could give you a decent stall in the stable" (229). This insult culminates in both men's deaths, as well as Milly's and the child's.

circumstances and involvement in the narrative is already a ghost narrator himself: "his very body was an empty hall echoing with sonorous defeated names; he was not a being, an entity, he was a commonwealth...a barracks filled with stubborn back-looking ghosts" (7). As the two young men reconstruct Sutpen's rise and fall, no details of the events remain certain; instead through a dense accumulation of narrative layers, the story emerges as thick with motivations, transforming from a gothic rehearsal of family tragedy incurred by a patriarch's mistakes to acquiring a future-direction itself.

Jim Bond remains, the Sutpen 'scion,' the last child bound to the land, securing that he represents Sutpen's legacy, and it is to him Quentin and Shreve finally turn in their discussion of racial futurity.[47] Shreve reveals:

> I think that in time the Jim Bonds are going to conquer the western hemisphere. Of course it wont be quite in our time and of course as they spread toward the poles they will bleach out again like the rabbits and birds do, so they wont show up so sharp against the snow. But it will still be Jim Bond; and so in a few thousand years, I who regard you will also have sprung from the loins of African kings (302)

According to Shreve, as time passes, the ability to distinguish between the races will become increasingly difficult, as color will no longer be a reliable indicator of race. The scenario Shreve projects here, the invisibility of race, the inability to discern whether an individual is black or white, is a nightmare scenario for whites, (but also what they have

[47] His name cements him to the land, holding Sutpen posthumously accountable to his line of rejected sons. Bond's presence on the Sutpen land works as an exaction of his grandfather (Bon's) right to primogeniture.

created through slavery-era patterns of exploitation.)[48] The disappearance of whiteness (as signifier of innocence, inculpability, purity) would make visible their un-innocence, their transgressions across the color line–-the actions of the past could come back to haunt them, could materialize in the future in embodied form. Shreve pinpoints this fear, positioning Jim Bond as portending the potential trouble: "you dont even always see him...you still hear him at night sometimes" (302). In Shreve's formulation, Quentin, 'you,' stands in for the white South, and Jim Bond, 'him,' becomes the specter of interraciality. Shreve thus bestows Jim Bond, through the language of haunting, the capability to trouble white consciousness.

Jim Bond, then, the narrative's last gothic child, works as a temporal fulcrum, regenerating the formal (and thematic) problem in the text that refuses to disappear or resolve itself; his presence only reactivates the novel's tensions. Sharon Holland, in interpreting the haptic eroticism in Rosa and Clytie's encounter on the staircase, gestures toward the temporal queerness inherent in this moment of interracial collision: "it is the particular legacy (if not the genius) of the Confederacy that it was able to convince an entire nation to look toward the future for events that had already taken place in the past; to believe that emancipation would result in rampant miscegenation" (107). Shreve's positioning of Jim Bond as the figure whereby he and Quentin ponder racial futurity speaks to Holland's point. In their discussion of race, they are contemplating the future of

[48] This fear-invoking dissolution of racial segregation echoes back to C.E's. courtroom scene. Justice Hamblett, when he thinks C.E. is a white man, exhorts him to remain separate from blacks in the name of: "the very future of the South as a place bearable for our women and children to live" (165). This moment is fascinating both for how it binds the child to political futurity, and for how it deploys future-oriented rhetoric to discourage what has already happened. The justice doesn't apprehend that he is speaking to a black man. This moment, I think, powerfully looks forward to Shreve's discussion of racial invisibility at the novel's close, especially given that C.E. is Jim Bond's father.

something that has already happened. Jim Bond, for them, embodies the South's racial past, but, simultaneously, Shreve gives him the capacity to haunt by transmitting him into the future.

Faulkner, in *Absalom*, portrays miscegenation as a troubling specter shaping the horizon of racial futurity, and Toomer's text, too, positions interracial intimacy as the catalyst for present and future violences (but also as genesis of promise and resolution). And through the gothic spectral child, they deploy the affective potency that haunting as a mode generates to reengage the past and to interrogate the future. Yet *Cane*'s (spectral) children, when they do receive critical attention, are seen as indicative of a sterile landscape, a dying folk culture, resolutely unregenerative. Ford points to the "aborted images of renewal in Cane"—"ruined infants...Esther's pink meshbag full of baby toes; the doomed conjunction of death and life in the phrase 'burn, bear black children'" (123). Williams, too, posits that *Cane* "offers no promises of rebirth" (95). Toomer does, of course, punctuate the text with references to dead children, fragmented bodies, incomplete births. Persisting in conjunction with the observation "that the sexes were made to mate is the practice of the South" (22), so too is the frequency of death through eruptions of violence. This duality unsettles Kabnis, but also drives his compulsion to understand life in the South—how the constancy of birth and death coexist in restive but seemingly natural flux. The elemental force, this precariousness of black life, persists as the current which causes Kabnis to intuit that "things are so immediate in Georgia" (115). Kabnis, even though wrenched with terror over the threat of lynching, claims "theres lots of northern exaggeration about the South. Its not half the terror they picture it" (119). His

existence there vibrates with tensions, a state of suspense indicating his pull toward the region and equally robust fear of it. Kabnis locates this internal conflict over his own uncertain future in the South as a product of his mixed-race ancestry.

He comes to Georgia to confront and resolve his racial identity: "If I could feel that I came to the South to face it. If I, the dream (not what is weak and afraid in me) could become the face of the South" (112). What is this immaterial dream Kabnis envisions as potential, the future 'face of the South?' Perhaps Kabnis imagines an idealized self—one at ease with its mixed-race heritage and which even projects itself as the future face of the South. Rife with spiritual anguish, he sojourns to Georgia both to touch his ancestral past and to approach his future-direction. Kabnis, however, retains a strained relationship with his ancestry; though "the whole white South weighs down upon him" (138), at the same time, he professes his "ancestors were Southern blue-bloods" (147).[49] Lewis cajoles Kabnis: "Cant hold them, can you? Master; slave. Soil; and the overarching heavens. Dusk; dawn. They fight and bastardize you... (148). Foley argues that Lewis is an "embodiment of Toomer's new American race," and unlike Kabnis, Lewis embraces his mixed-race ancestry, something Kabnis cannot do (172). Instead, Kabnis understands himself as the embodiment of sin: "I'm what sin is. Does he

---

[49] Kabnis presumably refers to his white ancestors, as he further responds: "aint much difference between blue an black" (148). Foley's work on Toomer's own 'blue-veined' ancestry reveals an interesting angle on this textual moment, especially given Toomer's assertion, "Kabnis is me" (qtd. in Foley, *Race, Repression* 167). Foley and Whalan point to Toomer's "Outline of an Autobiography" for illuminating his absorption with aristocracy. In these autobiographical writings Toomer reveals discomfort with being designated a Negro in that "[his] aristocracy might be invaded; [he] might be called into question by louts, white, black, or any other color" (*Wayward* 93). Though *Cane*, for the most part, levels a critique at the planter aristocracy, and a black class-based exclusion of the lower class child, in Kabnis we perhaps begin to see the struggle with the author's own aristocratic preoccupations, one which looks forward to the type of mixed-race aristocracy he envisions in "The Blue Meridian."

look like me?" (159). He envisions himself as the embodied signifier of what whites want to repress, and determines that the black community interprets him as corporeal reminder of sin against blacks. In internalizing these beliefs, Kabnis wrestles with self-loathing for how he imagines himself perceived on both sides of the color line. Kabnis stews in his victimhood, as sufferer of his white father's violence and abandonment, "the red-nosed profligate God" (113), and he confronts another paternal figure in Father John, one who represents slavery's inheritance. Kabnis must first descend into the dark and suffocating gothic confines of Father John's cellar to emerge able to envision 'the gold-glowing child'—to reconcile both sides of his racial past, to move from victim to agent of the future, to fuse the real and the ideal. By persistently constructing Kabnis as child, as son, as needing to wrestle with paternal figures in order to exorcise the past and be redeemed, Toomer emphasizes the centrality of childhood (experience) in shaping the nascent vision of racial futurity he begins to limn in *Cane*.

Ford argues that Kabnis's relationship to the past, approached through Father John, is "consistently figured as regression" to an "almost infantile passivity" (132), and that Carrie K.'s nurturing touch further implies Kabnis's reversion. But perhaps it is not Carrie K.'s proffered maternal comforts, but Stella's desire "to take Kabnis to some distant pine grove and nurse and mother him" (152) that warrants more sustained critical attention.[50] In this brief connection with "Karintha," I think, lies the crux linking these vignettes—one centered on the child. Kabnis, through his experiences in the South, his

---

[50] Stella relates that her mother was a victim of white violence, "a white man took m mother an it broke the old man's heart" (148). She relates the story just after Kabnis explains his white ancestry and Lewis chastises him for not embracing the black. Stella's revelation links their shared mixed-race ancestry to the historical reality of white men raping black women (Foley, *Race, Repression* 174).

quest to resolve his racial identity and rest comfortably in the present, himself becomes figured as a manifestation of the spectral child through which Toomer begins to envisage racial futurity. Kabnis's struggle to feel at ease inhabiting his body and to reconcile his immaterial dream-self with the stark material reality he must confront, emblematizes his position within the South's social rubric. Feeling displaced but simultaneously at home, Kabnis seeks to reconcile the self within the body as container. Karintha perhaps attempts to spare her child the bitter conflict Kabnis undergoes; an existence where black lives, and especially mixed-race ones, are subjected to continuous threats of violence.

Kabnis's descent into the cellar and his confrontation with Father John, whom he must exorcise as the ghost of slavery, (like Sutpen must be expelled,) leads him to sort of tenuous resolution as he steps out into the morning light, though one not easily interpretable for the reader: "Outside, the sun arises from its cradle in the tree-tops of the forest. Shadows of pines are dreams the sun shakes from its eyes. The sun arises. Gold-glowing child, it steps into the sky and sends a birth-song slanting down gray dust streets and sleepy windows of the southern town" (160).[51] Ford suggests that the lyric strain may cause readers to interpret the ending as "a tale of harmony between the past and present...between blacks and whites, figured in the gold-glowing child; a tale of resolution and renewal" (142), but of course, it's not so simple. *Cane*'s ending, like *Absalom*'s, only regenerates the text's tensions, refusing to posit a uniform or clearly decipherable futurity, (and also looks forward to the author's own ambivalent

[51] Foley claims that Toomer may have added this ending on as a poetic flourish at urging from Lola Ridge, editor of *Broom*, and that this maneuver would be congruous with his compositional practice. However, Foley suggests "that it is arguable that the 'flare of poetry' embodied in the text's closing image is not consistent with much of the preceding text" (*Race, Repression* 186).

predilections about racial futurity, evinced in his later work.) By turning to references to childhood contained within these lines, we can begin to trace the complex and nebulous futurity this birth-song conjures. First, the play on sun/son hearkens back to "Song of the Son," the frequently anthologized poem located in the 'Georgia' section, and recalls the text's broader engagements with familial relationships. The sun, personified as child, registers *Cane*'s multiple deployments of celestial bodies as children. 'The sun aris[ing] from its cradle in the tree-tops of the forest' resonates with earlier language in the prose-drama: "the half-moon is a white child that sleeps upon the tree-tops of the forest" (113). Now, instead of being haunted by the white 'moon-children' (113) at night, symbolizing the threat of death, Kabnis sees sun instead.[52] The line 'shadows of pines are dreams the sun shakes from its eyes' links the birth-song back to "Karintha" and to Kabnis himself. Both Karintha's child and Kabnis must undergo a burial, one literal and one metaphorical, in order to emerge as emblems of promise. Though Karintha's baby remains underground in the dark pine grove, this closing birth-song invokes this child to look toward a future where shadow children can step into the light and *live*. Throughout "Kabnis" all references to children are accompanied by descriptions of their race, but with the text's close, all child-images, black or white, coalesce into one potent figure. With this final image, as Foley points out, "the baby is no longer identified as black or white" (183), but as gold-glowing, illumined with future-promise.

Cane's closing birth-song, then, intimates an incipient though fragile future-hope, and Kabnis's marked ambivalence and anxiety about the future becomes tempered by the

[52] These references to moon/moonlight hearken back to "Blood Burning Moon" in which Tom Burwell's death at the hands of a lynching white mob is Kabnis's nightmare made real.

emergence of this emblem of potential promise. Perhaps, in the gold-glowing child, the mixed-race child may be seen as generative, a harbinger of bright futurity; once the embodied signifier of what the nation wishes to repress now steps into the light, conceived as an answer. And though I interpret *Cane*'s denouement as suggestive of a potentially hopeful future, one realized through the interracial child, one must also consider the incongruity of this auspicious final image with the multiple depictions of child death scattered throughout *Cane*'s pages. As Scruggs and VanDemarr rightly ask: what kind of future does the text's close promise, when qualified by the deaths of so many black children? (203). Indeed, one must reckon with the deaths of so many children within *Cane*'s landscape to arrive at the gold-glowing child. But it is precisely Toomer's aim to draw our attention to these children, to the unprotected nature of their existence. It is significant that what persistently haunts Kabnis—the threat of lynching—becomes conjured through images of dead black children. In linking the repetition of child death with the broader precarious condition of black life in the South, Toomer constructs his appeal; one which remains consistent throughout *Cane* and connects "Kabnis" to "Blood Burning Moon" and "Karintha." In "Kabnis" fears of child death and death by lynching converge. As Scruggs and VanDemarr propose, "Kabnis uses the image of Mame Lamkins' child as the nightmare of lynching that feeds on him" (204). And linking Karintha's infant's death as a potential act of protection with the murder of Mame Lamkins's child as an act of hatred underscores just how vulnerable the black child's body remains—how can the child *live* under these conditions? Herein lies the future-promise, the hope of the gold-glowing child—that those most vulnerable, and in which

Kabnis sees himself, can feel safe and can signify a future where race will no longer define a child's worth. Scruggs and VanDemarr assert that "the close of *Cane* positions the future of blacks with the black masses" (206), and I agree, especially given *Cane*'s positioning of the lower class, excluded black child as forgotten; it is to them we must turn, to include them in visions of national and racial futurity. *Cane* gestures, however tentatively, to this hope.

But even *Cane*'s birth-song acquires a further complicated cast when projected into the future, as perhaps Kabnis's gold-glowing child reveals more about the author's own positioning, his own futurity, in disassociating himself from a black racial identity. The future is very much on Toomer's mind, especially given how he "socially construct [s] his own racial indeterminacy," and comes to wish to distance himself from *Cane*.[53] Though *Cane* may locate the future with the black lower classes, Toomer's later work indicates his rejection of being identified primarily as a Negro artist and as "bright morning star of the Negro race" (Braithwaite 44). After *Cane*, Toomer reveals his (racial) future-vision as one intensely complicated by his own class predilections, and his long poem "The Blue Meridian" (1936) points to his dream of a raceless future, but one based in rulership of America by a mixed-race aristocracy, a line of thought iterated throughout his *Selected Essays*.[54] This epic poem about America and national identity, indebted to

---

[53] In their afterword to *Cane*, Rudolph Byrd and Henry Louis Gates, Jr. point to how Toomer, after *Cane*'s publication, "deconstruct[s] his Negro ancestry" (189). Toomer denounces the one-drop rule and the fixation with racial purity dominating conceptions of race in the early twentieth century.

[54] "The Blue Meridian" was published in abbreviated form as "Brown River, Smile" in *Pagany* (1932) and in its entirety in *The New American Caravan* (1936) (Hawkins 175). Rudolph Byrd and Henry Louis Gates, Jr. note that Toomer's poem "The First Americans" was a forerunner to "The Blue Meridian" (*Afterword* 201). The poem is published the same year as Faulkner's *Absalom* (1936).

Whitman, envisions a future when humans will no longer be defined by "race," and especially by the narrow and occluding categories of black and white. Instead, amalgamation becomes a desired process—a purposeful hybridization and interbreeding to produce the most advanced 'spiritualized' humans.

The mixed-race child, then, becomes symbolic of an utopian futurity, in direct contrast to how it is figured in the national consciousness at the height of Jim Crow. Amidst persistent deployment of organic tropes and metaphors of embodiment and digestion, "The Blue Meridian," too, makes reference to the spectral, to half-lived lives, to "ghosts like us" (223). [55] In order to "move from outlaw to I AM" (223), to approach a brotherhood of 'universal man,' the speaker calls forth the necessity of wrestling with and then letting go of a dark ancestral past: "This is no ark through deluge into the future,/ But wreckage manned by homesick ghosts" (224). Negotiating and then releasing past ways of thinking, ways cultivated through the prism of a (false) racial divide, engenders the process of 'spiritualization.' Critically, Toomer, in theorizing this new American race explains that "the real and main difference between this new American group and the previous groups will be found, necessarily not in blood, but in *consciousness"* ("The Americans," Rusch 110). After denouncing the false rhetoric of blood purity, Toomer employs language that highlights a purity of consciousness that follows from amalgamation and that releases the mind from corporeal matters. He writes, "In America we have a new body. And, having recognized this, let [us] forget it...Let us be born above the body" ("The Americans," Rusch 110). In proposing a rebirth "above the body," a call

[55] All quoted material from "The Blue Meridian" is taken from the version found in *The Wayward and the Seeking*.

echoed and amplified in "The Blue Meridian," Toomer proposes a national transformation, a wholesale shift in consciousness to reflect our *human* reality. In proposing his new American transracial type as a way to transcend racial ideology, Toomer explicates "from the point of view of descent, we are all mixed blooded...but from the point of view of our present perspective, we are all pure blooded" ("The Americans," Rusch 109). This assessment reverberates with Shreve's positioning of Jim Bond at *Absalom*'s close: why do we fear for the future what has already taken place? Toomer reveals the hypocrisy of denouncing racial mixing and attacks the political implementation of the logic of racial purity to maintain divisions between humans. In *Cane*, the mixed-race, gold-glowing child whispers of the future-promise—that those most outcast may represent the future, a future which can then be realized in "The Blue Meridian."

Carla Freccero writes, "spectrality opens us up to permeable pasts and futures suffused with affect and its ethical implications that enable us to mourn and hope... spectrality, then, serves as a mode of historicity that describes the way in which time is out of joint, the way the past or future presses on us with insistence or demand, a demand to which we must somehow respond" (69-70). Toomer and Faulkner, I propose, respond to this call for historical and ethical accountability through their figurations of the modernist gothic child. As their fiction confronts the material world, the child becomes both symbol and reality. Though their overt gothicism may lend itself to readings of these spectral children as indicative of social and familial failures, of pain and preclusion, there is another thread at work–-an appeal to the child's regenerative capacity. Although many

modernist writers subvert constructions of the child as redemptive, Faulkner and Toomer tap into the the child's still-potent connection with an auspicious futurity. Yet they spotlight those children who have been prohibited from this ideal, thereby fracturing assumptions about the child's universality. Working to unveil the multiple levels of exclusion the non-white child endures, they refuse to turn away from the past and insist upon its reckoning to envision a more tenable future.

CHAPTER IV

"SHE MIGHT LEARN EVERYTHING": THE ORPHAN GIRL-CHILD IN WELTY'S *DELTA WEDDING* AND PORTER'S 'MIRANDA CYCLE'

"Childhood's learning is made up of moments. It isn't steady. It's a pulse" (Welty*, One Writer's Beginnings* 9)

All such memories are rayed metal, each shears off in turn
One minute from another, I must lose them all
Unless we make a sheaf of them together ("Bouquet for October," *KAP's Poetry* 93)

In Porter's introduction to Welty's first collection of short stories, *A Curtain of Green* (1941), she infers of Welty, "she gets her right nourishment from the source that is natural to her—her experience so far has been quite enough for her and precisely the right kind. She began writing spontaneously when she was a child..." ("Eudora Welty and *A Curtain of Green*" 583). In assessing Welty's artistic practice, Porter approves of Welty utilizing her own experience as material and inspiration for her fiction, and she swiftly links Welty's art to her childhood creativity.[56] Welty herself, in her later autobiographical work, *One Writer's Beginnings*, reflects on the potent link between childhood perception and artistic practice: "Children, like animals, use all their senses to discover the world. Then artists come along and discover it the same way, all over again. Here and there, it's the same world" (*OWB* 10). Not only do both writers affiliate the power of childhood insight with the practice of writing fiction, but their work, too, evinces the significance of

[56] Porter, too, wrote as a child. Darlene Unrue notes in her introduction to *Katherine Anne Porter's Poetry* that Porter, along with a friend, created a child's version of a novel at about six years old (7). In Porter's autobiographical essay, "The Land That Is Nowhere," she recollects that in this novel she "invented some fearfully bloodthirsty characters" (1015).

childhood *memories* as creative fodder. Porter, deeming "A Memory" one of the finest stories in Welty's debut collection, suggests "there might be something of early personal history in the story of the child on the beach, estranged from the world of adult knowledge by her state of childhood, who hoped to learn the secrets of life by looking at everything..."[57] Porter's words here convey the child's awareness of being severed from the adult world, of feeling herself as other, as being outside looking in. Welty herself later reflects on the autobiographical origins of this story, explaining that as a child she was obsessed with the notion of concealment and the revelation of secrets (*OWB* 88). Although Welty claims to have never written another story like that, she reveals that "that most wonderful interior vision which is memory, [has] gone to make up [her] stories, to form and to project them, to impel them" (*OWB* 89). Porter's interpretation of "A Memory" divulges much about her own thinking on childhood and reveals lines of continuity between these writers—lines centered on a mutual interest in representing child consciousness in their fiction.

Porter's influence on Welty's craft and their reciprocally sustaining friendship indicates shared ideals in creative practices, including a preference for the short story as medium, the power of memory for artistic nourishment, and the import of childhood—in all its varied potencies—in shaping the artist's output. Tapping into the power of their own childhood memories, these writers harness the perceptions and flows of child consciousness to mold their fiction. However, each possessed a distinct point of view in

---

[57] Porter expressed an interest for what she deemed Welty's 'threshold stories'— "where external act and the internal voiceless life of the human imagination almost meet and mingle on the mysterious threshold between dream and waking, one reality refusing to admit or confirm the existence of the other, yet both conspiring toward the same end" ("Eudora Welty and *A Curtain of Green*" 588).

recollecting her own experience of childhood. Welty's *One Writer's Beginnings* expresses a pleasant youth, one where her creativity was nurtured through exposure to music, art, and literature. Porter, however, declares:

> I do not believe childhood is a happy time, it is a time of desperate cureless bitter griefs and pains, of shattering disillusionments, when everything good and evil alike is happening for the first time, and there is no answer to any question. Remembering childhood is like swimming and floating in a sea without land anywhere in sight, with stormy weather now and then and a feeling of drowning ("The Land That Is Nowhere" 1016)

While reflecting on her childhood as an intensely difficult period, Porter registers its potency for shaping her adult self, describing it as "the fiery furnace" in "which she had been melted down to essentials and that essential shaped for good" (qtd. in Unrue, *Life of an Artist* 18). Despite their disparate recollections, this abiding absorption with childhood experience builds vital formal and thematic contours in Porter's and Welty's fiction. In particular, they share a concern with narrating life from the child's perspective; an interest which coalesces around a specific type of consciousness and similar experience—that of the southern white orphan girl-child.[58] Through elucidating their mutual interest in representing white southern girlhood, I argue, Porter and Welty invest in a modernist project which sometimes reinforces, and sometimes exposes and challenges the intensely gendered power structures shaping childhood in the early twentieth century South. Discounted by their status as children and presumed powerless within the domestic milieu, these girls possess a distinct angle of insight into how their

---

[58] Welty's fiction suggests an enduring fascination with orphans: from Gloria Short in *Losing Battles*, to Easter in "Moon Lake," to Laura McRaven in *Delta Wedding*, to Laura McKelva in *The Optimist's Daughter*. In *One Writer's Beginnings*, Welty explains that she was named after her father's mother, but that her grandmother's name had been remembered incorrectly. Welty writes: "It seemed to me to have made her an orphan. That was worse to me than if I had been able to imagine dying" (65).

aristocratic inheritance and the still potent myth of white female innocence intersect to produce violences against others within the plantation order and shape a vision of their own futures they will ultimately reject.

The young protagonist of Welty's first novel, *Delta Wedding*, is described by her Aunt Shannon: "insistently a little messenger or reminder of death, Laura self-consciously struck her pose again and again" (63). Laura's movement through the world is marked by a notable diffidence, a recognition that her presence–-amidst her mother's extended family— evokes her mother's palpable absence. The same might be said of Porter's autobiographical child character, Miranda, whose mother died during Miranda's birth, and who clings to the maternal force of her authoritarian grandmother "in a world that seemed otherwise without fixed authority or refuge" ("The Source" 336). Miranda, too, senses that her presence signifies for others her mother's absence. This shared awareness that they are perceived as different for being without a mother powerfully shapes these girls' conceptions of the self. And though this fact remains instrumental to their identities, Miranda and Laura possess more in common than being motherless—they are white and under the age of ten; they occupy a similar class status; and they must negotiate their places within extended familial networks. In both cases, Welty and Porter invest in exploring the experience of childhood through modernist narration but also within specific historical and material parameters. On the surface, these children appear ensconced in relative privilege as young white females in the early twentieth century South, a culture which protects and values white girlhood. But such a reading obscures their particular gothic agency. Whereas Toomer's and Faulkner's spectral interracial

children are violently excluded from social rubrics, and Barnes's and Faulkner's child-women are cast out and constructed as symbols of an intensely threatening sexuality, these orphan girl-children are bestowed what these other gothic children are not: interiority. From their position of privilege within the social matrix, these children observe and critique the invisible power structures governing familial life. Laura and Miranda are sensitive observers of the world around them, and by constituting these girl-children as the narrative centers of their texts, Porter and Welty interrogate the role of storytelling itself in the fabrication of the gendered self. As Miranda and Laura absorb and assess the stories their family members recount, they begin to intuit darker currents, disturbing ripples underlying the seemingly coherent order of domestic life.

Through investigating the family as the primary social institution in which these children participate, Welty and Porter engage what I term the 'everyday gothic,' a mode no less powerful, though certainly less explosive, than the more overt gothicism of Toomer, Faulkner, and Barnes. Concerned with the domestic realm and concentrated on female-centered activities, this mode exposes the fissures inscribed into relationships, fractures forged through life's daily interactions. Rita Felski points to how "art exists that one may recover the sensation of life...modernism, especially, can inject a sense of strangeness and surprise into its portrayal of the most commonplace phenomena" ("Introduction" 608).[59] Porter and Welty practice this modernist preoccupation with 'strangeness and surprise' in their rendering of the gendered dimensions of daily life, thereby revealing, as Ellen Fairchild of *Delta Wedding* puts it,

---

[59] For further excellent investigations into the relationship between gender, the everyday, and modernism, and which draw upon Felski's theorizations, see Bryony Randall's *Modernism, Daily Time and Everyday Life* and Liesl Olson's *Modernism and The Ordinary*.

"how deep were the complexities of the everyday, of the family, what caves were in the mountains, what blocked chambers, and what crystal rivers that had not yet seen light" (157). Patricia Yaeger, in *Dirt and Desire*, calls for a reevaluation of "the eccentric work that women's writing performs on behalf of the dailiness of southern history" (154). In explicating the relationship between 'history' and daily life, Yaeger argues that "the micro level supports and replenishes the power structure, [but] it is also a source of social change, a thousand daily resistances" (154). Building on Yaeger's theorizations about the possibilities for resistance in the 'everyday,' I suggest that Porter and Welty draw on and revise the southern gothic tradition to account for the feminist implications of the everyday. Critics have, of course, discussed the gothic contexts of both writers' work. Ruth Weston convincingly details the gothic conventions Welty deploys in her narrative strategies, pointing to patterns of enclosure, exposure, and escape in her stories and novels.[60] Though Porter's work perhaps retains a less explicit association with the gothic, some Porter scholars, too, assess her work as possessing gothic effects, often citing the preoccupation with violence and death in much of her fiction.[61] More broadly, though, recent scholarship within the field of southern studies has taken a turn away from the gothic, finding it well-worn critical territory. Scholars such as Tara McPherson, in

---

[60] Weston, and other scholars, note Welty's response to Alice Walker asking her whether she had ever been called a Gothic writer, to which Welty replied, "They better not call me that!" (qtd. in Weston 22). Part of Welty's response, I think, emerges from a desire to distance herself from Faulkner's shadow, as he was so clearly associated with the southern gothic as a regional form. In a 1984 interview Welty explains, "You know his work encompassed so much and so many books and so many generations and so much history, that that was an integral part of it" (qtd. in Yaeger 155).

[61] For insightful interpretations of Porter's relationship to the gothic, see Jay Watson's *Reading the Body*; Yaeger's *Dirt and Desire*; and Darlene Unrue's *Truth and Vision in Katherine Anne Porter's Fiction*, especially chapter one, "The Inner Darkness."

Reconstructing Dixie, urge that we need new ways of thinking about these southern writers, outside of the context of the gothic (249). Yet, it is my contention that the everyday gothic, a mode that has ties to and yet deviates from the southern gothic, offers a fresh angle through which to see these writers anew. Through this approach centered on the feminine and the intimate domestic microeconomies of daily southern life, Welty and Porter generate a new form of modernist gothic heroine, one in the process of becoming attuned to how power operates in the non-epic everyday.

These children come to understand who has power and who doesn't, as they are orientated from a *seemingly* powerless position themselves. And in negotiating the constellation of race, class, and gender operating within their respective homes, Miranda and Laura intuit how these forces shape their own place in the world. Porter and Welty thus critique the patriarchal culture of the early twentieth century South from the vantage point of the female child as she is inculcated into its ideological patterns. These patterns point to how the home, a seemingly benign and secure space, can become a place ripe with micro-oppressions for young girls. That Welty and Porter choose orphans as filters onto these domestic milieus remains significant, especially in regards to the enactment of white femininity. Most characters within the Miranda stories and within *Delta Wedding*, as well as critics themselves, refer to Miranda and Laura as orphans. However, both children do have fathers who are still alive. That their fathers are mostly absent from the texts and are presented as ineffectual speaks to the intensely gendered culture of child-rearing in the early twentieth century South**.** Without a direct maternal conduit, these children become more susceptible to the various expressions of white femininity around

them. And, despite shifting racial and class relations and a changing economic climate, one of the most potent forces informing white girlhood remains the ideology of the southern belle. From older aunts indebted to outmoded mores shaping decorum and hospitality, to younger cousins pushing back against these dictums, other women take it upon themselves to 'teach' these motherless girls both strategies of adherence and resistance to belle ideology. At the same time, and as a result of these conflicting influences, I argue, these children become more adept at perceiving femininity as performance, therefore producing potent insights into the production and instantiation of white femininity. These gothic children function as sites of interpellation and of resistance, as there persists a rift between what they are meant to learn and reproduce and what they end up discovering for themselves. Ultimately, what these children discern about their own place within the social order allows them to envision a future beyond their present constraints, and gestures toward the child's potential to rewrite the narrative of white southern girlhood.

"Who knows why they loved their past?": Aristocratic Faultlines

These texts, in engaging child consciousness, demonstrate how the child learns ideologies and present the child as active participant in the perpetuation (and dismantling) of these psychic orders. Femininity works as the prism through which relationships between race, class, and gender become revealed. And aristocracy, in this novel and these stories, remains intrinsically linked to the construction and performance of white femininity (and the cult of white womanhood), as the concept of the southern belle emerges from the nexus of power relations structuring the southern planter aristocracy.

Though belle ideology gained traction in the post-Civil War South, it still enacted a strong sphere of influence into the early twentieth century.[62] Anne Goodwyn Jones, in delineating the belle ideal's twentieth century afterlife, appeals to Lucian Lamar Knight's words: "the Confederate woman, in her silent influence, in her eternal vigil, still abides. Her gentle spirit is the priceless heritage of her daughters" (qtd. in Jones 4). The characteristics of the belle or plantation mistress include being graceful, silent, and pure; her values must correspond with her primary duties as wife and mother—to keep an orderly home. McPherson points to how the patriarchal culture of the postwar South deployed the image of the southern lady to discipline white women; yet despite the often blatant levels of coercion this disciplining involved, many women were unwilling to question white privilege, instead buying into a return to the pedestal (19). White southern women of both the upper and middle classes were therefore complicit in perpetuating this restrictive ideology, both shaping and being shaped by this ideal. Tantamount to belle psychology, however, is that the belle ideal or the myth of the southern lady exist in most senses as a fantasy, albeit one with real and tangible impacts on how southern women live their lives and measure their sense of self. And this is precisely the node Welty and Porter engage, to demonstrate the conceptual power the ideology of the southern belle retains as a facet of broader aristocratic formations, and to register its role in sustaining the plantation order.

As the figure of the southern lady persists as so tightly melded to the region's identity, it perhaps remains unsurprising that Porter and Welty employ the plantation as

---

[62] For thorough sources on the ideology of the southern belle see Catherine Clinton's *The Plantation Mistress;* Gisele Roberts's *The Confederate Belle;* Betina Entzminger's *The Belle Gone Bad*; and Kathryn Seidel's *The Southern Belle in the American Novel*.

fictional locale. For southern writers, the plantation functions as not only a literal location but also as a potent ideological, psychological, and rhetorical trope, one that relies on the force of the belle ideal to maintain its power. As Elizabeth Russ succinctly details,

> the plantation had long portrayed itself as simultaneously egalitarian and aristocratic, a realm of individual opportunity and a highly structured, hierarchical community that, while supposedly fostering harmonious relationships amongst all of its members, relied on social coercion, racist dogma, and brute physical force to maintain the order necessary for the production of wealth (84)

Under cover of 'family' lies a dark and intricate web of strictly enforced yet almost imperceptible formations and distributions of power generated and distilled across rigid and tightly controlled gender(ed) and racial stratums. In particular, the presentation of African Americans as 'part of the family,' conceals the exploitative labor relations undergirding this paternalistic system. For the plantation mistress, her circumscribed role within the plantation economy necessitates a specific performance of femininity–-a version which, in these texts, reveals how the *whiteness* of southern femininity becomes naturalized. As McPherson explains, "the social construction of white southern womanhood [...] depended on a simultaneous definition of black women as unfeminine and unwomanly" (64). Porter and Welty bring into relief the processes through which the southern lady's articulation of white femininity produces blackness as antithesis. This adherence to belle ideology not only determines domestic relationships in terms of race, but also informs the network of gender within the home. The plantation mistress's enactment of white femininity buttresses her husband's position of dominance, thereby facilitating his own performance of white masculinity, one that requires deference on the part of all household members. Her vital role within the plantation economy generates

wide-ranging effects and aids in supporting the system's façade of naturalness. Despite the presentation of the fixed plantation order as natural, the girl-children within these fictional worlds begin to conceive of it as stifling and deficient, to intuit that it operates as a presiding remainder at odds with the reality of ever-evolving material conditions. But how do these children begin to discern that the fractures emerging within relationships forged within the home relate to the obdurate structure of the plantation economy? How are the racial, class-based, and gendered values inherent within the plantation order transmitted to the female child? Through what means are these children both inculcated as participants that maintain the order and inducted as agents of resistance?

These are questions Porter and Welty take up through plumbing the interiority of Miranda's and Laura's female elders. Though on the surface these women may appear to support and replicate the existing power structure, it is in their memories and relation of their past experiences that they pass on subversive insights to these girl-children, perceptive warnings centered on the hidden violences of the plantation order. Thus, both texts demonstrate the intense power of storytelling in sedimenting the old order, while also gesturing toward the disruptive capabilities these personal narratives possess. One of the primary subjects of these remembrances centers on marriage; at first blush these stories seem to reinforce the presentation of husbands and men as chivalrous providers, guardians of their wives and families, at times even representing them as figural heroes. However, an ominous undercurrent endures in these narratives, one focused on the everyday intricacies of this ritual culmination of the romance plot, and which exposes the real and human costs of the myth of the southern lady. Though belle ideology ostensibly

grants eminence and protection to white women of a certain class, it also obscures her commodity function within the home—to bear children and reproduce the social order. In reality, she exists in a vulnerable position, her body under threat from the enactment of her use value. In these transmissions, female storytellers intimate the precariousness of their lives and unveil the gothic costs of fulfilling their role within the plantation economy—threads that these young listeners apprehend. Although marriage remains the desired future outcome foundational to belle ideology, these women's experiences work to deflate the romance plot, an ethos which conceals the bodily realities women encounter when they strive to embody ideal southern womanhood.

Porter's own complex relationship to aristocracy and her southern heritage offers a study in contradictions. The South as region exerted a powerful force on Porter, as it encapsulated the often troubled dynamics of home, love, family. In the opening sentence of her essay, "Portrait: Old South," Porter professes, "I am the grandchild of a lost War, and I have blood-knowledge of what life can be in a defeated country on the bare bones of privation" (745). Yet despite the economic hardships suffered by her family as a result of the Civil War, her grandmother never faced the truth of the family's economic deprivation because they "had been a good old family of solid wealth and property in Kentucky, Louisiana and Virginia" ("Portrait" 748). This familial reliance on aristocratic heritage to supplant the realities of material struggles forms an indelible impression on Porter's childhood, as she comprehends the immense power of storytelling both to shape or transform outlooks and to reify the 'old order.' These tales of aristocratic ancestors perhaps led to Porter's ensuing "almost consuming passion for genealogy" (Brinkmeyer,

KAP 147), in which she proudly hails Daniel Boone as a forefather (Unrue, *Life* 12-13). Though her grandmother's legends kept her in thrall, these chronicles about the past ultimately could not assuage the experience of subsisting in poverty. Unrue notes the psychic import of the discord between Porter's aristocratic 'white-pillar' ancestry and her actual land-poor motherless upbringing in Indian Creek, Texas (*Life* xxiii). Engaging this contradiction, Porter lays claim to her family's aristocratic background at the same time that she denounces their ways, finding that in her childhood, "The whole effort of the elders was to keep us in total ignorance, so far as they were able, of the actual world we were to live in" ("The Land" 1016). She both expresses an admiration, allegiance, and identification toward the South and its ties to aristocracy and simultaneously resists its traditionalism, demonstrating repugnance, in particular, for the ways in which the plantation order subjugates women.[63]

This internal conflict becomes powerfully illuminated through Porter's relationship to the aristocratic production of the southern belle. Brinkmeyer rightly asserts that Porter fashioned herself out of the belle tradition, which was itself a performance (*KAP* xvi). Further, Joan Givner writes that through styling herself in the image of a belle:

> She transformed herself and her own personal history. In the place of Callie Porter, raised in poverty and obscurity, she created Katherine Anne Porter, an aristocratic daughter of the Old South and a descendent of a long line of distinguished statesmen. In this reincarnation she became one of the most celebrated personalities of the American literary scene... (*KAP, A Life* 18-19)

---

[63] See Brinkmeyer's *Katherine Anne Porter's Artistic Development* and particularly chapter five, "The Southern Heritage," for insights into Porter's conflict "between the modernism of her adult life and what she came to see as the southern traditionalism of her childhood" (118).

Though Porter clearly recognized the belle figure's utility for her own self-fashioning, she also remained attuned to, and in some ways constrained by, the darker constraining facets of belle ideology and the expectations it creates–-especially those involving love, marriage, and woman's role within the domestic economy.[64] Unsurprisingly then, given her personal engagements with the belle tradition and the admittedly autobiographical nature of the Miranda stories, Porter plumbs the psychic infringements of belle ideology on the female child. Centering on the lessons Miranda absorbs from female relatives and caretakers about marriage and love, Porter exposes the role of *storytelling* in unveiling the hidden costs of aristocratic formations that buttress the plantation order.

As Miranda navigates viable models of womanhood in her process of self-fashioning, her paternal grandmother, Sophia Jane, remains the most potent feminine force in her life, and a stolid representative of the old order. Although most critical assessments of the Miranda stories home in on the child character, Sophia Jane and her servants and generational contemporaries occupy center stage in four out of the seven stories within "The Old Order," a section within the collection titled *The Leaning Tower and Other Stories*. As Brinkmeyer notes, the parallels between the character of Sophia Jane and Porter's own grandmother (described in "Portrait: Old South") are compelling; these women adhere to tradition and abide by "a rigid code of conduct and order passed on from one generation to the next" (*KAP* 151). The initial story within the collection titled "The Source" centers on the family's homecoming to Sophia Jane's country house.

---

[64] Porter's biographers often point to her difficulties in love and marriage as potentially inflecting the representation of heterosexual love relationships in her fiction. See in particular Unrue's introduction to *KAP: The Life of an Artist* where Unrue claims that Porter "was disillusioned by her unfulfilled expectations of marriage" (xxvi).

Upon their arrival, Sophia Jane immediately sets to work restoring the order that has lapsed in her absence: "without removing her long veiled widow's bonnet, she would walk straight through the house, observing instantly that everything was out of order; pass out into the yards and gardens, silently glancing, making instant plans for changes" (334). Her surveillance over the property includes not just objects which must be cleaned and returned to their proper positions, but also encompasses "the human beings living on it" (334), the black servants who scurry into place as she alights home. Sophia Jane, responsible for envisioning and then accomplishing order, achieves this transformation without executing the work herself, her role akin to a "tireless, just and efficient slave driver of every creature on the place" (336). Jay Watson astutely elucidates how the story's syntax "works to obscure...the human labor that scrubs the woodwork, hauls down the curtains, beats the rugs, and so on" (220), labor enacted by black bodies, whereby Sophia Jane, the authority, takes on a curious disembodiment, functioning "above all [as] an observing consciousness, an overseer in the most literal sense of the word" (219). "The Source" establishes Grandmother's capability as plantation mistress, as she embodies security and integrity to her grandchildren, but the story also situates her as figurehead of a stringent domestic regime. And though her grandchildren love her, at times "they felt that Grandmother was tyrant, and they wished to be free of her" (336). Yet Sophia Jane's fierce commitment to maintaining the 'old order,' to fulfilling her role as authoritative plantation matriarch, conceals the psychic and physical toll this undertaking has wrought upon her.

Though "The Source" introduces Grandmother as unassailable head of the plantation household, the following story, "The Journey," discloses the costs of this office by delving into her memories—recollections which she imparts to her grandchildren and which offer a fuller scope of woman's role within the plantation order. Though "Grandmother's quaint old-fashioned ways caused them acute discomfort" (338), they listen to her stories about her past, unveiled through intimate reminiscences with Aunt Nannie, their black caretaker and "nurse to [Sophia Jane's] children" (334). These recollections throw into relief the difficulties of both black and white women's positions within the plantation order:

> The Grandmother's rôle was authority; she knew that; it was her duty to portion out activities, to urge or restrain where necessary, to teach morals, manners, and religion, to punish and reward her own household according to a fixed code. Her own doubts and hesitations she concealed, also, she reminded herself, as a matter of duty. Old Nannie had no ideas at all as to her place in the world. It had been assigned to her before birth, and for her daily rule she had all her life obeyed the authority nearest her (340)

This brief assessment distinguishes the tacit edict which governs these women's behavior and determines their relationship to each other, while eliding the external pressures, however disparate, that shape their lives. For Sophia Jane, satisfying her role requires restraining her internal life, a constellation of various emotions and fears which she must keep secret in order to exhibit a competent presentation of self. She must suppress intuitions regarding the limitations of her power. Meanwhile, Nannie's subjection defines her, her life mapped out by Sophia Jane's needs. This affiliation, masked in terms of sisterly affection, forms during their early childhoods, as Sophia Jane's father bestows her with Nannie when she is just five years old. As the women recollect upon a lifetime spent

together, “they were always amused to notice again how the working of their memories differed in such important ways” (340). Despite the diverse operations of their memories, they both recall a bitter past which they feel compelled to sentimentalize.

In order to produce a coherent and palatable version of the past, Sophia Jane must obscure the harsh realities of her lived experience centered around the romance plot. Sophia Jane was inculcated to subscribe to a certain performance of femininity, and taught to desire marriage and motherhood—a fantasy severed from the bodily truths of plantation life. This disjunction between expectation and reality becomes elucidated through a key pattern in her youth. As a young woman, promised in marriage to her second cousin, Stephen, Sophia Jane “was gay and sweet and decorous, full of vanity and incredibly exalted daydreams which threatened now and then to cast her over the edge of some mysterious forbidden frenzy” (347). These recurrent dreams center on the loss of her virginity, “her sole claim to regard, consideration, even to existence, and after frightful moral suffering which masked altogether her physical experience she would wake in a cold sweat, disordered and terrified” (347). Although Sophia Jane encounters the stirrings of sexual gratification, she “misreads her dream of defloration as a moral allegory rather than erotic longing” (Watson 222). Moreover, she conceals her bodily desires from herself and from others and castigates herself for feeling erotic pleasure—“she lived her whole youth so, without once giving herself away” (348). In modeling etherealized white femininity, she becomes practiced in withholding her private life, a propensity which continues apace. As Watson explicates, “Sophia Jane’s youth was one of idealistic disembodiment” (222), where adherence to belle ideology and the romance

plot necessitated a denial of the physical. In this way, the romance script misrepresents what marriage will bring, and this bodily abnegation shatters when the corporeal realities of her marital role intrude. Sophia Jane was unprepared for the succession of misfortunes her marital life would unfold. In her husband she perceived "all the faults she had most abhorred in her older brother" (347), and "in the marriage bed, there also something had failed" (346). Stephen's premature death leaves her to maintain the farm in a period of intense economic uncertainty and decline, thereby shattering the ideals of marriage ensuring her protection. Abandoned with eleven children to raise, she comes to view men as threats and as disappointments: "She could not help it, she despised men. She despised them and was ruled by them" (349).

Grandmother's and Nannie's endless storytelling, replete with countless minute variations to the fabric of their tales, often centers on raising children. For after marriage they both had "then started their grim and terrible race of procreation, a child every sixteen months or so" (346). In carrying out their reproductive roles, these women confront the brutal reality of plantation life; not only are their bodies under physical threat, but they face the specter of child mortality. Both Nannie and Sophia Jane agree that "childhood was a long state of instruction and probation for adult life; which was in turn a long, severe, and undeviating devotion to duty; the largest part of which consisted in bringing up children" (341). Their ideologies of childhood emerge as a product of the sacrifices made for the sake of their offspring; as Nannie avers, "When they are little, they trample on your feet, and when they grow up they trample on your heart" (341). Despite the women's efforts, they interpret their children and grandchildren as selfish and

indifferent to their pains. So why, after all of this adversity, do Nannie and Sophia Jane "love their past?" (339). Why do they insist on "talk[ing] about the past, really—always about the past" (339)? This compulsion to rehearse the past, to romanticize it in retrospect, may serve a regenerative psychic function. As Watson argues, though Nannie and Sophia Jane sentimentalize the past, this process "evokes as it excavates an enormous weight of lived experience that must be repressed, misremembered, or otherwise 'embroidered' before the old order can be properly revered" (221). Therefore, in the process of *telling*, of repetition, their audience, the children, begins to comprehend the covert mechanisms through which the order impels this performance of devotion. For though Nannie and Sophia Jane "had questioned the burdensome rule they lived by every day of their lives, [they did so] without rebellion and without expecting an answer" (339). They quietly "wondered how much suffering and confusion could have been built up and maintained on such a foundation" (339). Although they harbor secret questionings of the plantation order, these women feel obliged to suppress their doubts, and their restraint speaks to the system's reach. For despite Sophia Jane's personal hardships owing to the old order, she still expects her son's wives to fulfill their prescribed roles, and criticizes Miranda's mother, her son Harry's wife, because she perishes in childbirth. At the same time that she reveals her struggles, she upholds the order that induces them. While it mystifies the children that Grandmother and Nannie wish to rehearse their grievous pasts, through these revelations the children begin to discern the coercive properties, the problems and limitations of the 'order,' and to imagine futures free of its grasp.

Although Nannie and Sophia Jane seemingly share a powerful intimacy and long-sustaining friendship, which lends the children to interpret them both as emblems of the old order, Nannie later disrupts this coherence in "The Last Leaf." After Sophia Jane's death and in the absence of her authority, and when Nannie is nearing the end of her life, she departs the family home and settles into a cabin of her own. After leaving the family residence, "she was no more the faithful old servant Nannie, a freed slave; she was an aged Bantu woman of independent means, sitting on the steps, breathing the free air" (361). Nannie's decision surprises and distresses Miranda, Maria, and Paul; they feel their domestic stability slipping out from beneath them because "the children, brought up in an out-of-date sentimental way of thinking, had always complacently believed that Nannie was a real member of the family, perfectly happy with them, and this rebuke, so quietly and firmly administered, chastened them somewhat" (362). With Sophia Jane's authority removed, Nannie shatters the order and the illusion of family the mechanisms of paternalism produces, thereby imparting her own lessons to the children. This recognition that Nannie desired to be free of them, this breaking of paternalistic ties (and slavery-era inheritances), is a revelation to the children which forever alters their conception of family. Nannie's defection ruptures the façade and the children recognize Nannie's own performance—of family, of love, of emotional labor—as part of her role within the system. Even as the children express their affection for her, "She paid no attention; she did not care whether they loved her or not" (360).

Yaeger contends that Nannie refuses "the white culture's domestic order" but that she is permitted to do so because "her body has passed out of usefulness" (221). Though,

as Yaeger insists, Nannie's body is "covered with the stigma of past work" (221), I suggest that her omission from the domestic economy makes clear her centrality to the home's smooth functioning. Because with Nannie away, "they realized how much the old woman had done for them, simply by seeing how, almost immediately after she went, everything slackened, lost tone, went off edge" (362). In withholding her labor, Nannie lays bare its necessity; she exposes to the children precisely how aristocratic formations obscure her work, and the extent to which Grandmother's success at fulfilling her role as plantation mistress depended upon Nannie's invisible industry. Nannie's absence materializes the covert racial dynamics governing the operations of the plantation home and demonstrates how the harmonious presentation of white femininity remains enabled by concealed black labor. Nannie therefore also renders visible the black bodies shrouded in "The Source," and in this way, her lessons retain as much force as Sophia Jane's. She plants the seeds of recognition toward the children understanding that their privilege was founded on the instrumental labor of others. Both Nannie and Sophia Jane offer up their own performances, conduct required by the plantation order and intensely intertwined and sedimented in childhood. And although both women possess doubts about the system, Sophia Jane keeps her misgivings hidden, whereas Nannie openly acts to expose its hidden cruelties. However, she only does so after Sophia Jane's death, a testament to the coercive psychic power of the old order. Through Sophia Jane's and Nannie's remembrances and Nannie's eventual claim to independence, these women's long submerged histories illuminate the gothic contexts of the domestic everyday, impacts absorbed by their young witnesses.

"No gap opened between the living and the dead": Aristocratic Inheritances

Just as Porter draws inspiration from her grandmother's stories of plantation life for *The Old Order*, Welty, too, deploys first-hand accounts of pre-Civil War era lived experience as material for her first novel. Suzanne Marrs details that Welty was inspired to combine her two short stories "Delta Cousins" and "A Little Triumph" into the novel *Delta Wedding* after, in early 1945, reading her close friend John Robinson's great-grandmother, Nancy McDougall Robinson's, diaries of life in the Mississippi Delta.[65] Fascinated by Nancy's account, Welty explains in a letter to John, "what a strange thing to do—to receive in two days and a night by reading, a whole, other, intimate life—it seemed wrong and beautifully revealing" (qtd. in Marrs 128). Welty translates this original portrait of Delta life from a female perspective into material for her first modernist novel—one which manipulates disparate narrative styles, and blends conventions of the plantation and the lyrical novel. At the time of *Delta Wedding*'s genesis, Welty was revisiting Virginia Woolf's work, whose influence, as Kreyling notes, imbues Welty's "novelistic policy on the crucial issues of mimesis or representation, point of view, and plot" (*Author* 109). Eschewing conventional pressures dictating the handling of these facets of fiction-writing, Welty's kaleidoscopic novel instead works by accumulations, by thoughtful repetitions. In creating her fictional world through a sequence of images, she ruptures the progression of chronological time and crafts an expansive landscape of myriad and shifting changes. In juxtaposing several perspectives

[65] Marrs 127-28. *Delta Wedding* was first serialized in *The Atlantic* in four installments from January through April 1946 and was then published in book form by Harcourt Brace in April 1946 (Kreyling, *Author and Agent* 112). For a synopsis of the major revisions between the short story "Delta Cousins" and *Delta Wedding* see Marrs 89-90.

and forging no narrative center, Welty captures the nearly imperceptible tremors in the fabric of family life through conveying psychic sensations, shimmering flashes of insight. Yet some contemporary reviewers found her style too oblique and her plantation setting passé; most famously, Diana Trilling accused Welty of capitulating to "myth and celebrative legend and, in general, to the narcissistic Southern fantasy" and so disclosing herself as "just another if more ingenious dreamer of the Southern past" (105). But, as many Welty scholars note, Trilling's assessment that Welty's first novel presents a seamless celebration of the Delta plantocracy misapprehends the novel's understated yet incisive critique of the plantation regime's latent oppressions. This scrutiny becomes revealed through careful attention to the rendering of individual characters whose insights divulge the tenuousness of human bonds but which may be overlooked because of the text's muted lyrical tones.[66]

Indeed, the text's seeming 'gentleness,' the subtlety of Welty's approach to social critique, has led critics such as Richard King to exclude her—and most all other southern women writers—from his study on the Southern Renaissance because "they do not take the South's traditions as problematic" (qtd. in Devlin 5). However, along with feminist literary scholars and historians, I argue that Welty, through engaging the plantation trope in its multiple valences, develops keen though discreet forms of feminine resistance to the mechanisms of aristocracy. Through conjuring and subverting the traditions of the plantation novel, "what Welty lays bare are the superficial archaism and insularity of the

---

[66] Trilling's review of *Delta Wedding* has become quite infamous in Welty scholarship as an example of a fundamental misreading of the text's layered social critique, as Trilling dismisses Welty's text as following the plantation school of fiction and mounting a defense of the South. For Trilling's full review see "Fiction in Review" in Champion, *Critical Response* 105.

plantation by exposing the conflicts between the rigidity of tradition and the irrepressible dynamism of a wilder, more personal landscape" (Russ 84). Through intense focus on feminine interiority and charting her characters' internal responses as they struggle with the daily micro-oppressions of the plantation regime, Welty elucidates the damaging impacts of belle ideology and reinforces just how challenging it remains to elude the reach of white planter values. Welty's method of appraisal, as Tenley Bank suggests, is that she engages "the damage done to individual lives and presents individual ways of coping with or subverting the oppression her characters face in language that does not alienate even a conservative readership" (60). This approach requires attunement to the dynamics of (aristocratic) social performance, to be able, like Dabney Fairchild, to intuit the presence of repressed knowledge, to understand that "sweetness then could be the visible surface of profound depths–-the surface of all the darkness that might frighten her" (37).

Set in September 1923 in the Mississippi Delta, *Delta Wedding* takes place over the course of little more than a week, and follows the Fairchild family's preparations for the upcoming wedding of their second eldest daughter, Dabney. Welty remarks that she chose this particular month and year because "nothing much was happening then" in the political and historical sense that could overwhelm or infringe upon the rendering of the character of family life (Bunting 49-50). Yet this absence of historical and political drama does not foreclose the social critique that emerges in the delicately transposed individual responses and workings of daily life. Shellmound, the Fairchild plantation, is home to Battle Fairchild, his wife, Ellen, and their eight children, and temporary home for various

child cousins, Laura McRaven among them. Cousin Laura remains the most acute observer of the Fairchild family, for as a visitor she persists as outside of the immediate circle. In characterizing their behavior, she perceives them as an intensely insular and performative clan, hesitant to reveal their true thoughts and natures. She immediately comprehends that perhaps "their kissing of not only you but everybody in a room was a kind of spectacle, an outward thing" (15). Laura could see the "outside did not change but the inside did; an iridescent life was busy within and under each alikeness," and they "made you wonder, are they free?" (15). After musing over whether or not the Fairchilds 'are free,' Laura comes to feel "certain that they were *compelled*—their favorite word" (15). But what compels their performance, this need to preserve the appearance of aristocratic liberty?

When confronting undeniable material change striking into the heart of the self-contained family–via Dabney's cross-class marriage—the Fairchilds cling ever more tightly to imagining themselves as unbreakable. As eldest daughter Shelley puts it, "All together we have a wall, we are self-sufficient against people that come up knocking, we are solid to the outside" (84). Yet in the face of Dabney's impending marriage to Troy Flavin, the plantation overseer, this notion of aristocratic inviolability comes under threat. The Fairchild response to this incursion, though, remains curious. As Russ points out, in "more traditional plantation literature, the marriage of the planter's daughter to the overseer would constitute a threat against the old order [...] [but] here the Fairchilds express gentle disapproval" (84). However, these expressions of 'gentle disapproval,' I argue, mask the potent internal flux this challenge to their self-conception precipitates.

One way in which they work through and resist this fracture to their insularity is through storytelling. The gathering of the extended Fairchild clan offers an opportunity for them to reflect on their shared past, their familial myths and legends, to turn to stories in order to sustain their connection to aristocratic heritage in this moment of change. However, one recent event overwhelms the remembrances of aristocratic glory and possesses an acute centrality in the consciousnesses of the Fairchild family members.

The Yellow Dog, the train which creeps its way through the fertile Delta landscape, is the avenue by which Laura arrives at Shellmound and the location from which she gets her first perspective onto the Delta. The crawling Yellow Dog has provided a familiar backdrop for the Fairchild family until recently, when two weeks prior to Laura's arrival at Shellmound, it accrues a new significance. In the first recounting of the event, Orrin, the oldest son, advises Laura that she has missed out on something terrifying:

> The whole family but Papa and Mama, and ten or twenty Negroes with us, went fishing in Drowning Lake...And so coming home we walked the track. We were tired—we were singing. On the trestle Maureen danced and caught her foot. I've done that, but I know how to get loose. Uncle George kneeled down and went to work on Maureen's foot, and the train came. He hadn't got Maureen's foot loose, so he didn't jump either. The rest of us did jump, and the Dog stopped just before it hit them and ground them all to pieces (19)

Although the episode ends with all present safe, its psychic impact continues to reverberate—through its recursiveness in Welty's narrative the depth of its potency emerges. In each retelling from varied points of view, slight deviations surface. Moreover, in gauging the audience's responses to these repetitions, the gothic undercurrents of their relationships to one another become revealed, disclosing what

remains hidden behind their performance of familial coherence. In this way, the Yellow Dog episode serves as the central lodestar of the text—a touchstone which signals a threat to the Fairchild way of life, and their aristocratic congruity. This integral moment throws into relief the submerged intensities of private thoughts centered around the nexus of love, marriage, and class. As family members try to make sense of Dabney's impending nuptials (and gloat over George's rift with his wife of working-class origins, Robbie Reid), they return to this recent episode, almost as a compulsion, in trying to understand the part each played in the harrowing event which catalyzes the dissolution of one marriage and inspires the genesis of another. For what Orrin elides from his version is that immediately following this near-death experience, Troy asks Dabney to be his bride. The children—Orrin, India, and Roy—relish recounting this tale to any who would listen, but the episode is filtered through the consciousnesses of the text's women: Shelley, Dabney, Ellen, and Robbie Reid.

It is in the psychic processing, through these subjective responses to hearing the tale yet again, that these women's suppressions emerge—their reservations over the domestic order, their fears and doubts about love and marriage. George's role in the Yellow Dog episode incites these reflections. George, favorite Fairchild son, in rescuing his intellectually disabled niece from the tracks, becomes both a hero and a fool, depending upon whom is asked. For the Fairchilds, though, this crisis solidifies George's reputation as the family's chivalric hero. This event exemplifies George's commitment to the Fairchild family, even as they struggle with fathoming that he would risk his own life for the child's sake. His sister Tempe connects George's act with his devotion to his dead

older brother, Denis, Maureen's father, in whose shadow George remains, by declaring, "he did it for Denis" (115). And though George's act of saving the most tenuous Fairchild serves as affirmation of his familial devotion, his choice disrupts his relationship with his wife, who leaves her husband after the Yellow Dog incident. Robbie cannot accept that George would risk his own existence to save the life of "that crazy child" (146). She registers his choice as further evidence of the Fairchild's engulfing influence and intrusion into her happiness. Robbie, as outsider to the Fairchild clan, gleans a distinct insight into their insularity and possessiveness of one another; she proclaims "you're just one plantation" (163) and "you're loving yourselves in each other" (165). Significantly, Robbie connects this possessiveness to the Fairchild's performance of aristocratic coherence, and she picks up on how this desire to make George a hero blinds them to his true nature, for they "were always seeing him by a gusty lamp [...] by the lamp of their own indulgence" (191). Soon after yet another recounting of George's heroics and after she has returned to Shellmound to reclaim her husband from the Fairchilds, Robbie reflects:

> After the Yellow Dog went by, he had turned on her a look that *she* would call the look of having been on a debauch. She could not follow. Sometimes she thought when he was so out of reach, so far away in his mind, that she could blame everything on some old story....For he evidently felt that old stories, family stories, Mississippi stories, were the same as very holy or very passionate, if stories could be those things. He looked out at the world, at her, sometimes, with that essence of the remote, proud, over-innocent Fairchild look that she suspected, as if an old story had taken hold of him–-entered his flesh. And she did not know the story (191)

Robbie's interpretation proves illuminating. It not only exemplifies her outsider status and highlights the Fairchild clan's insularity, but her vision also links this impenetrability

to a crypt of unaccessible knowledge—stories which retain the power to overtake, to infiltrate the body. She measures her emotional distance from her husband through her lack of access to these family histories, for this is the emotional currency in which the Fairchilds trade. Their shared inheritance, forged in stories, buttresses their seeming inviolability. And George's actions have given them yet another family narrative through which to take possession of *her* love. Repetition cements their bonds: "For all of them told happenings like narrations, chronological and careful, as if the ear of the world listened and wished to know surely" (19). Retellings of the Yellow Dog event, evidence of George's commitment to the Fairchilds, resonate as repeated injuries to Robbie which dramatize her exclusion, her not-knowing. Furthermore, Robbie's being prohibited from this vault of secret knowledge remains powerfully linked to her class status.

The Fairchilds are secretly pleased that Robbie Reid abandons George, though they perform surprise and sympathy; they never deemed her worthy of their family hero, believing like Aunt Tempe that a "woman of low birth coarsens the man" (206). Robbie Reid, "Old Man Swanson's granddaughter, who had grown up in the town of Fairchilds to work in Fairchild's store" (24), fails to penetrate their aristocratic closed circle. Costello points to how Robbie and Troy share affinities in the Fairchilds' minds, as Battle connects their working-class origins with "a predilection for imagining gory demises for his future son-in-law, and indeed, of anyone of lower rank who dares to marry into his family" (54). Battle exclaims: "If I weren't tied down! I'd go find little Upstart Reid myself, and kill her. No, I'd set her and Flavin together and feed 'em to each other" (64). And it is with Troy where Robbie finds kinship and affinity. As she openly weeps in

Fairchild's store over her estranged husband, Troy urges Robbie and George's reconciliation by inviting her to his wedding, and comforts her in sharing her conviction that the Fairchilds might be "too close" (141). Robbie "had spent her life hearing Fairchild, Fairchild, Fairchild, and working for Fairchilds and taking from Fairchilds, with gratitude for Shelley's dresses, then to go straight through like parting a shiny curtain and to George" (149). Robbie appears to have imbibed the romance narrative wholesale, to have imagined and suddenly found herself with apparent access to the role of the southern belle. But she underestimates the tenacity with which her husband's family clings to their aristocratic heritage and rejects outsiders. Despite Robbie's criticisms of the Fairchild 'closeness,' and their sway over her husband, she admits, "Once I tried to be like the Fairchilds. I thought I knew how" (165). By constructing "a living room for [George] just like Miss Tempe's," by acquiring the trappings of Fairchild class-status, Robbie attempts to become one of them only to discover their inability to love outside of themselves. Shelley, along with a few of the children, witnesses Robbie's "angry and shameless tears" (138) shed in Fairchild's store over George's Fairchild allegiance. As Robbie turns "an awful face" (138) upon Shelley, this confrontation causes Shelley to flee the store, and insinuates a deeper sedition between the women.

Shelley's reactions to her family members rehearsing the Yellow Dog episode confirm that the incident affects her deeply and reinforce that each repetition unveils another layer of fragility undergirding the Fairchild performance of unity. Upon hearing India's recounting of the tale, in "Shelley's delicate face Ellen could see reflected, as if she felt a physical blow now, the dark, rather brutal colors of the thunderclouded August

landscape" (59). Not only does Shelley cringe at hearing the event repeated, but she refuses to tell it herself. When her father goads her to take a turn narrating the experience, Shelley cries, "Oh, Papa, not me!" (58). But why is Shelley so impacted by the incident, so visibly upset at hearing it recounted and unable to narrate it herself? While the other Fairchilds may laugh at this near-death encounter, it shakes Shelley to her core. Shelley, the novel's artist-figure, who will soon leave the Delta for a trip to Europe with her aunt, most incisively questions the Delta traditions and ways of life. Though Shelley denies to openly recount what occurs on the trestle, she does, in private, reflect on her own role in the distressing sequence of events:

> For the scene on the trestle was so familiar as to be almost indelible in Shelley's head, for her memory arrested the action and let her see it again and again...There were things in that afternoon which gave Shelley an uneasiness she seemed to feel all alone, so that she hoarded the story even more closely to herself, would not tell it, and from night to night hesitated to put it down in her diary (though she looked forward to it all day) (87-8)

As Shelley contemplates her part in the episode, she exposes to the reader what she attempts to withhold from her family, her powerful psychic response to the event and its connection to George's and Dabney's marriages. She takes a sort of perverse pleasure in replaying the incident, in mentally hoarding the event, for it encapsulates an inaccessible secret knowledge, an intuition and feeling in her that she cannot pinpoint, a potent futurity related to love and her own femininity. Shelley feels enmity for Robbie Reid, and wanting to punish her for wearing high heels on a fishing trip, as well as to flaunt her own tomboyishness, Shelley encourages the party to crest the trestle. Though of course Robbie struggles to keep up, Shelley also has difficulty covering the tracks, which not only engenders her realization that "a tomboy was only what she used to be, and wasn't

now, ... but then came Shelley's own shame in not being able to walk the trestle herself. No one would forget that about her, all their lives!" (88). Shelley loads the moment with narrow self-focus; in imbuing her actions with heightened significance, she incurs potent shame and humiliation. Taking pride in her tomboyishness, her rejection of certain expressions of femininity, she attaches inflated magnitude to the moment that discloses her *performance* to others, a failure she believes will be forever etched in their memories. But what causes her the most profound disquiet comes from intuiting "that George and Robbie had hurt each other in a way so deep, so unyielding, that she was unequal to understanding it yet. She hoped to grasp it all, the worst, but fiercely feeling herself a young, unmarried, unengaged girl, she held the more triumphantly to her secret guess" (88). What this event reveals about love—the power of individuals to hurt one another—both disturbs and entrances Shelley, as she puzzles over the burgeoning comprehension that she may want love for herself, but perhaps not within the institution of marriage. Shelley also correlates her role in George and Robbie's fracture with inciting her sister's impending marriage, as Troy immediately gets engaged to Dabney after the train grinds to a halt. Revealing her class-bias, in her diary Shelley compares Robbie and Troy as the "type of people *who want for sure"* (my italics) (85). Even as Shelley critiques her family's possessiveness and insularity, she, like her parents and older relatives, rejects others from infiltrating their clan. She fears for Dabney, who is "walking into something you dread and you cannot speak to her" (85). Shelley, unable to articulate these anxieties over love and marriage, preoccupies herself with this complex mix of fascination and fear. Though she believes that she keeps her distress private, Ellen

perceives her daughter's self-consciousness and "worries that there is something not quite *warm* about Shelley" (212).

Albert Devlin claims that Ellen Fairchild sees the Yellow Dog episode most clearly, finding it emblematic of their possessiveness and insularity, as "the Fairchilds attempt to transform a vivid personal gesture into a communal possession" (113). Indeed, Ellen's filtering of this event for which she was not present opens up her consciousness to her own position in the Fairchild clan; her assessment reveals how, through storytelling, fractures in their aristocratic veneer emerge, breaks which center on marriages:

> No, the family would forever see the stopping of the Yellow Dog entirely after the fact–-as a preposterous diversion of their walk, resulting in lover's complications, for with the fatal chance removed the serious went with it forever, and only the romantic and absurd abided. They would have nothing of the heroic, or the tragic now, thought Ellen, as though now she yielded up a heart's treasure (188)

Ellen's interpretation of the events centralizes and elucidates the Fairchild's preposterous spectacle—how each individual simultaneously makes the event about them while repeating it to solidify their familial connection. Whereas Ellen's understanding, which she keeps secret, as does Shelley, for they both take a certain pleasure in replaying the event privately, pinpoints the nature of their performance and registers the attenuation of Fairchild bonds. Ellen, plantation mistress of Shellmound and mother to nine children, orchestrates the running of the home and facilitates the preparations for Dabney's upcoming wedding. Yet Ellen, though she seems in control of all the Fairchilds in her role as plantation mistress, like Robbie and Troy, also marries into the Fairchild family, and she remains a little apart from them, open to the scrutiny of a cadre of aunts and sisters-in-law. They criticize the shabbiness of her home, constantly referring to the old ways as

models, and never hesitating to point out Ellen's housekeeping deficiencies. Tempe claims that "[Ellen] has never learned what is reprehensible and what is not, in the Delta" (21). Ellen does not *quite* conform to the role of plantation mistress, as "she herself...was an anomaly" partly "for living on a plantation when she was in her original heart, she believed, a town-loving, book-loving young lady of Mitchem Corners" (217). And though Costello claims that Ellen "does not understand the intricate performance required to perpetuate the Fairchild myth" (48), her position both within and without, her inclusion by degree, does foster a special insight. Her own class background, decidedly unaristocratic, continues to shape her point of view of the Fairchild concordance. Ellen, along with Laura, sees through their performances all the better for being slightly outside of the circle, and mounts one of her own, but keeps her doubts, disappointments, and subversions private—which in itself serves as evidence of the plantation order's power to impel.

On the surface Ellen seems to support the romance plot and to desire marriage for her daughters; however, she, like Porter's Sophia Jane, stifles her secret thoughts, her fears and wishes, in favor of cultivating a performance of capability in fulfilling her role as plantation mistress and "mother to them all."[67] And although Ellen sees the Yellow Dog incident most lucidly, her brother-in-law's actions also inspire her to reflect on love. As she muses upon Robbie's fitness for George's affection, Ellen admits to herself that this depends "on other things that she, being mostly mother, and being now tired, did not know" (189). This divulgence reveals much about her own self-perception, her thoughts

[67] In the typescript copy of *Delta Wedding*, in describing Ellen, Welty handwrites in the margins: "mother to them all?/her function" (box 6, series 4, folder 3, page 8).

about love, as she has succumbed to her part within the plantation economy—mother, a role which precludes the realization of her personal needs. She outwardly defends Robbie and George's marriage amidst aspersions to their union, claiming, "They get along beautifully...It's in their faces" (48). She does so even as she quietly comforts herself with the pleasure she finds in the dissolution of George's marriage: "she felt consoled by the loss of Dabney to Troy because of the happiness of the loss of George to Robbie Reid" (25). But more persists to Ellen's concealed solace in George's heartbreak. Sally Wolff elaborates upon the strength of Ellen and Battle's marriage, proposing that their union "has a quality of love that extends through trial and time" (*Dark Rose* 103). However, this enduring accord is not without its ripples. Ellen's private meditations gesture toward a repressed desire for George, but "she would not know in her life, or ask, whether he had found the one" (223). One of the most central consciousnesses in Welty's kaleidoscopic novel, Ellen Fairchild's interiority reveals a succession of suppressed potentialities and intimate desires, all eclipsed by her role as wife and mother. Ellen knows that men and love can disappoint, and will, and she knows her daughter's cross-class marriage will possess its difficulties for: "She loved Dabney too much to see her prospect without its risk, now family-deplored, around it, the happiness covered with danger" (26). And though Ellen believes she keeps her doubts disguised, the young women around her perceive these misgivings about the sacrifices required by the domestic economy.

"It was the way for girls in the world that they should be put off, put off, put off–-and told a little later": Innocence Revealed

What have these female children imbibed from the recursive narratives, the family histories that revere the old order but that also subtly undermine its troubling effects? In mobilizing the child's point of view, Porter and Welty proffer a fresh angle of vision that not only homes in on the methods of inculcation into the plantation order, but that also delineates the child's growing awareness of her own culpability in the system's injustices. They remain particularly interested, I argue, in appraising how this burgeoning comprehension complicates assumptions of childhood innocence. Porter and Welty interrogate the cultural absorption with and deployment of innocence through the child's location within the South's social matrix, and offer flashes of insight into the processes of indoctrination and resistance the child experiences. Indeed, innocence takes on a powerful resonance for these girl-children, especially within the context of belle ideology. Innocence, as a vital facet of this still-potent version of aspirational white femininity, wields the capacity to shape and coerce. Welty and Porter investigate the specific material conditions which produce this particular construction of innocence aligned with the privileged, southern, white girl-child. And though these young women come from a place of economic and social advantage, and certainly in light of other children I analyze in this project, this ascription of innocence, despite granting protection, still imposes constraints. I will first explicate innocence as a paradigm with firm attachments to the myth of white womanhood—that culmination of belle ideology so

foundational to southern culture—and then analyze how the racial, sexual, and class-based dynamics of this ideal intersect to impact Porter's and Welty's child characters.

The paragon of the southern belle and the purity of white womanhood, produced through aristocratic social configurations, relies on an entrenched history rife with contortions and misrepresentations of black sexuality. Catherine Clinton, in her history on the plantation mistress based on diary accounts, contends that the cultural elevation of white female chastity grows out of white planter's guilt in besmirching themselves by their liaisons with slave women. This cultural obsession with white female purity–-read sexual innocence—cannot be separated from vilified black female sexuality, as black women are positioned as sexually rapacious in contrast to white women's presumed virtue. Furthermore, the supposed threat black men pose in their sexual appetite for white women justifies the violent means in quelling threats to the plantation system and enacting black disenfranchisement.[68] Meanwhile, as McPherson explains, "the white southern lady–-as mythologized image of innocence and purity—floats free from the violence for which she was the cover story" (3). At the same time this ideal bestows white women privilege and protection, though, it also restricts and deludes them. Abstractly figured to symbolize the purity and honor of their region, southern women's identity becomes bound up with an impossible ethereality, one which demands abnegation of the corporeal. But in order to enact the fulfillment of belle ideology, to

---

[68] Hazel Carby in *Reconstructing Womanhood* examines how "ideologies of black and white female sexuality only appear to exist in isolation while actually depending on a nexus of figurations that can be explained only in relation to each other" (20). See also Ann DuCille's *The Coupling Convention* for more on the racial dynamics of female sexuality in the nineteenth century. For an insightful interpretation and history of the relationship between white female purity and black male sexuality, see Leiter's *In The Shadow of the Black Beast,* especially chapter one, "Sexual Victims and Black Beasts in the Nineteenth Century."

marry and realize her white womanhood, she must bear children. The pedestal is not what it seems; in lauding these women as transcending the physical, it obscures the reality of their intensely embodied function within the plantation economy. This glorification of innocence benefits the plantation patriarchs because when women buy into the innocence trap it justifies the order's power dynamics. This cultural exaltation of innocence becomes a valuable tool in the domestic economy as it masks the corporeal threats of woman's reproductive future and seemingly severs her from the atrocities perpetrated in the name of her protection.

Moreover, as Watson suggests, "the glamourous image of southern belle as romantic heroine allows the white girl-child to be recruited into order" (232). In this sense, the deployment of innocence functions as an apparatus of social control. White girlhood, especially, as Bernstein affirms, "becomes laminated to the idea of innocence," so that to "invoke [it] was to invoke innocence itself" (163). But what exactly typifies the quality of this innocence? It is at once sexual, racial, shaped by class, and defined by lack. In yoking ingrained assumptions about white female sexual innocence with childhood's presumed naiveté, the white girl-child becomes the focal recipient for absorbing this cultural narrative. What distinguishes Porter's and Welty's texts in how they engage with innocence rests in how they implement the child's perspective into the workings of the plantation system to demonstrate that not only does the child divine more than the adults around them ascertain, but that within the context of the everyday, within their home lives, they intuit what others have tried to shelter them from, in order to preserve their purported innocence. Instead, they begin to perceive *through* these

occluded histories of racial oppression, the foundation upon which the ideal that both shields and constrains them is based, as well as precisely what patriarchal authority figures have in mind for their future. In this sense, they use race as a prism through which both their privilege and their own place in the order becomes clear–-their sexual lives and futures are tied to and depend upon white adults subduing these histories. As Bernstein elucidates, and what these girl-children come to discern, is that sexual and racial innocence remain intrinsically linked.[69] They understand that adults demand performances of sexual innocence within the home (Bernstein 41), and though these girls seemingly conform to this edict, they simultaneously glean the presence of hidden knowledges and experiences, what has been concealed behind their screen of innocence.

The radical contributions of these child-focused narratives, and what other critics have elided, are the specific channels through which Porter and Welty integrate the white girl child's coming to sexual awareness and reproductive future with her revelation of the purposeful suppression of African American experience.[70] Within the domestic arena, these children learn not only from models of white womanhood, but also from the black

---

[69] Bernstein's point here centers on the racial and sexual politics of the cult of true womanhood as a provenance for nineteenth century constructions of childhood racial and sexual innocence. The exclusion of black women and children from inhabiting innocence remains foundational to the postbellum South because racial lines become even more bifurcated. See chapter one, "Tender Angels, Insensate Pickaninnies."

[70] Scholarship on race in Porter's and Welty's corpus has become increasingly more prolific in recent years. Harriet Pollack's edited collection, *Eudora Welty, Whiteness, and Race*, offers the most richly varied interpretations of the author's treatment of race relations in her body of work. In terms of Porter scholarship, Watson's *Reading for the Body*, Unrue's *Truth and Vision,* and Brinkmeyer's *Katherine Anne Porter's Artistic Development* present the most sustained considerations of race in the Miranda cycle.

caretakers and workers laboring in their homes whose exertions enable their privilege.[71] And though their family members repeatedly fail or refuse to *recognize* black experience, these children cultivate a desire for uncovering these secret histories. Regarding Welty's treatment of African American characters, Yaeger asks: "how does a writer dramatize a world dense with unnoticed trauma?" (68-9). One way to approach this potent question, I suggest, lies with the child's perspective. Through the child's vision, readers glimpse what the narrative cannot or refuses to engage explicitly. Of course, though, these revelations vary in approach. In Porter's Miranda cycle, the white children retain a more intimate connection to Nannie and even her husband, Jimbilly, who occupy a more forceful presence in the children's lives and who refuse to stay silent. They both openly narrate their struggles directly to the children to advise them of the plantation order's cruelties. In *Delta Wedding*, however, a robust cast of black characters emerges periodically from the text's background, usually busy with the wedding preparations. Welty's choice to grant these characters no easily accessible interiority signifies a clear narrative strategy. These concealed thoughts and experiences, when contrasted with the Fairchild's endless storytelling, formulate a social critique— that these histories must be suppressed in order to ensure the smooth functioning of the plantation order, to facilitate the continued aristocratic façade. The child, no longer unaware of these shrouded oppressions, instead comes to understand how she herself is implicated in the order; she begins to comprehend that the ideal of innocence which shelters her is produced through

[71] I am not suggesting that the child is inculpable in the mistreatment of African American characters, as they learn these social norms from white adults around them. However, the girls' relatives are so invested in educating them they often miss that the child also learns from the African Americans who work in their homes.

oppression of other bodies within the southern social matrix. And these discoveries, alternatively enlightening and disturbing, highlight the existence of further buried suppressions and illuminate who benefits from silencing these personal narratives.

These girls are left wondering: What other stories have been obscured or misrepresented to keep white men in control? What has to be masked so that they can be presented as heroes, as eventual desirable suitors? Who really gains when women strive to ascend the pedestal? What forces determine the girls' own place in the power structure? These musings, engendering fear and curiosity, bring into relief what these men are capable of from their locus of authority within the plantation order. Although the interiority of the plantation mistresses--Sophia Jane and Ellen—intimates men's deceptions, these women often capitulate to constructing these same men as chivalric heroes. These young women learn, often in terms of witnessing or hearing about violence, a disjunction between expectation and reality, as male characters "share a propensity for violence—physical, psychological, racial" (Kreyling, *Understanding* 102). This unveiling and deflation of patriarchal authority both disturbs and fascinates the girl-children, and this flourishing realization of the darkness and chaos that lies underneath the seemingly smooth surface of the plantation order often corresponds with what Watson has theorized as "difficult embodiment."[72] As these girls dismantle the romance plot and

[72] In Watson's *Reading the Body*, his chapter titled "Difficult Embodiment" "focuses on Porter's use of illness narratives to demystify the reigning cultural fictions of beauty, dependency, and weakness that attended and shaped the maturation process for white girls in the nineteenth- and early twentieth-century South" (26). Although my focus departs from illness narratives and instead centers on how constructions of innocence are deployed to mask patriarchal intents, I share in Watson's desire to engage how bodily weakness, vulnerability, and discomfort often accompanies these girls' revelations of the realities of her place in the southern power structure.

reveal the capacity of men as threats rather than protectors, their lessons provoke bodily discomfort— a grim precedent for their own future-labor in the plantation order.

Welty's focus on sexual initiation and the gothic contours of reproduction coalesces in the shadowy presence of Pinchy, Roxie's young kitchen helper. As is the case with other African American characters in the novel, Pinchy rarely speaks and Welty bestows her no interiority, though she hints at the girl's profound inner life. Pinchy seemingly blends into daily life at Shellmound—for the Fairchilds and the reader. Jan Gretlund rightly notes that Pinchy's story is buried deeply in the story of the Fairchilds, so if the reader does not want to notice it, he does not have to (115). Pinchy's capacity to fade into the text's verbal fabric challenges the reader's own potential unawareness of the complex racial dynamics at work in the novel, and gestures toward the narrative's preoccupation with tropes of vision, blindness, and perspective. Yet upon closer examination, Pinchy's scant appearances in the novel's textual fabric reveal that she emerges at pivotal moments for the Fairchild women and girls, instances when they might approach moments of deep intuition. In this way, Pinchy functions as the lynchpin connecting vital instances of insight these young women experience. Even though the surface story so clearly centers on the perspective of the privileged Fairchild women and girls, Pinchy's occluded interiority, the suppression of her consciousness, recalls the gothic inheritance of stories absorbed by broader narratives. But Pinchy appears, either in physical presence, or by verbal invocation, during moments fraught with tension and revelatory potential for these white women and girls, connecting her buried story, her experience, with their own. However, the preservation of their innocence—and its

privileges and protections— depends upon silencing or forgetting Pinchy, upon not *seeing* her. But what would happen if they truly recognized her? What would this open up, disturb, uncover? As Pinchy wanders out of place in the fields and woods outside of Shellmound, both black workers and the Fairchild family continually make reference to her seeking as a hindrance to the smooth and orderly machinations of plantation life and a disruption to the preparations for Dabney's wedding. Yet, at the same time, Pinchy's ordeal grants her an unassailable mystery, as she is in the process of experiencing *her* own transition, one ambiguously deemed 'coming through.'

What characterizes the nature of Pinchy's coming through? Is it spiritual? Sexual? Might it signify the transition not only into womanhood but also into motherhood? This process is never overtly defined by any of the characters, and Welty herself, when pressed about Pinchy's transformation, hesitated to give a direct response.[73] Perhaps due to Welty's deferral, critics have interpreted Pinchy's seeking in various ways—as a religious conversion, as a sort of sexual initiation, as a transition out of adolescence into womanhood. Most powerfully, though, Gretlund and Bank point to the possibility of Pinchy's pregnancy, suggesting that she undergoes active labor.[74] But if Pinchy is pregnant, then by whom? In an interview with Gretlund, when questioned about Pinchy's possible relationship with the plantation overseer and Dabney's fiance, Troy Flavin,

---

[73] Welty explains Pinchy as "get[ting religion'" (qtd. in Bank 60). Critics such as Entzminger propose that Pinchy "is in the midst of an internal struggle, trying to come through, or to make a religious conversion" ("Playing" 59). Yaeger, too, suggests the spiritual nature of her 'coming through' and sees it as "an emotionally charged conversion experience" (68).

[74] Bank and Gretlund both offer convincing arguments for the possibility of Pinchy's undergoing childbirth. See Bank's "Dark-Purple Faces and Pitiful Whiteness" and also Gretlund's *Eudora Welty's Aesthetics of Place,* especially pages 115-120. In less direct terms, Kreyling too claims Pinchy's transformation is "clearly an initiation in some form that transforms girls into women, women into mothers" (*Understanding* 107).

Welty instead speaks about the term 'coming through,' used at another point in the novel to describe Mary Denis's labor.[75] Gretlund points out that Pinchy can always be seen wherever Troy is, and he asserts how a sexual relationship between Troy and Pinchy "would explain several otherwise baffling passages in the novel" (173-5). If Pinchy is indeed pregnant with Troy's child, the story of her coming through becomes that which must not be recognized for it would make visible the realities of sexual violence and abuses of power beneath the plantation's paternalistic veneer. Though Troy becomes weary of "seeing her everywhere" (149), the Fairchild women and girls have a harder time really seeing her, for what this will demand on their part; acknowledging Pinchy's suffering will require them to face their men's capacity for violence, their own complicity in a brutal order, their own reproductive futures. As Bank proposes, "Welty's textual treatment of Pinchy's pregnancy–-veiling and erasing it until it becomes the thing that *cannot* be spoken–-at once draws perceptive readers into a more intimate understanding of the workings of oppression in the lives of her characters and implicates readers in that very oppression" (Bank 59). But for readers who register Pinchy's travails, she emerges from the text's periphery, and her trial brings into sharp relief the Fairchild girls' cover of innocence.

Pinchy's obscurement and ordeal, the sexual victimization she has suffered, complicates and challenges white female innocence. Scholars such as Entzminger, Pollack, Gretlund, and Bank have pointed to Pinchy's relationship to the white female characters in the novel, but have not approached this affiliation in terms of the

---

[75] Bank makes this point, connecting Pinchy's 'coming through' with language deployed to relay the news of Mary Denis's safe delivery: "Mary Denis Summers Buchanan has come through her ordeal— very well,' said Aunt Jim Allen" (qtd. in Bank 61).

construction of innocence. Entzminger argues that "Though Welty never elaborates on Pinchy's internal struggle, not even to define the phrase 'coming through,' Pinchy interacts with several of the white characters whose thoughts are exposed. Pinchy's struggle, which remains enigmatically in the background, seems to serve as a catalyst for resolutions in the internal conflicts of white characters" ("Playing" 54). Though Entzminger concludes that these encounters fuel the white women's rebellions against patriarchal forces, I question whether these incidents really catalyze rebellions or resolutions, though they do retain such transformative potential. These brushes with Pinchy, I argue, push them to confront their own innocence, to comprehend its constructedness, that it shields and misleads. These moments retain the possibility for the Fairchild girls and women to recognize Pinchy's *labor*, to connect her suppressed tribulations to the unseen labor of black workers enabling their privileged way of life. Pinchy's appearances initiate moments of intense possibility, presenting the opportunity for these women to apprehend the underlying power dynamics shaping their social world, to become open to the buried secrets these African Americans know of their men, dangerous histories of sex, conflict, and violence. If they could truly *see* Pinchy, register her ordeal and her humanity, they would be closer to fathoming their own subjugation within in the order, the truths behind their own reproductive labor, facilitated through the deceptive power of innocence. But will they relinquish the privilege and protections innocence affords them? Though they approach understanding through certain moments of sudden recognition, whether or not the Fairchild women and girls muster the courage to *act* on these flashes of deep insight remains another matter. Even as they grasp the

blinding capacity of innocence, realizing their own complicity in the plantation system, and their own restrictions, they often turn away from these revelations because the sacrifice it will require on their part to relinquish the shelter innocence provides. Instead, they often participate in keeping Pinchy invisible.

The erasure of Pinchy's interiority and experience becomes even more stark when juxtaposed with the novel's presentation of Dabney's transition into womanhood, from belle to bride. As Dabney, with her younger sister India, travels out to The Grove to visit her aunts, the girls observe Troy galloping across the fields far into the distance: "A man on a black horse rode across their path at right angles, down Mound Field. He waved, his arm like a gun against the sky—it was Troy on Isabelle" (30). Upon glimpsing her soon to be husband off in the landscape, Dabney's thoughts pulse with anticipation: "[S] uddenly he was real. She shut her eyes. She saw a blinding light, or else was it a dark cloud–that intensity under her flickering lids [...] She thought of him proudly...a dark thundercloud...his laugh flickering through in bright flashes" (31-2). As Dabney reflects upon Troy's qualities, shutting her eyes against the brilliance of this vision, India, in pushing Dabney to *open her eyes*, exclaims, "There goes Pinchy, trying to come through. Sure enough, there went Pinchy wandering in the cotton rows, Roxie's helper, not speaking at all but giving up every moment to seeking" (32). Frowning, Dabney's response to noticing Pinchy comprises a brief, "I hope she comes through soon" (32). Dabney regards Pinchy's coming through as an impediment to her wedding arrangements, but Pinchy's abrupt appearance, her being out of place, unsettles Dabney on a deeper level. The brevity of Dabney's response when she views Pinchy in the fields

belies the moment's resonance. For in the novel's first offering of Dabney's perspective, her daydreaming about Troy becomes interrupted by Pinchy's presence—a potent invocation on the nature of her relationship. After beholding Pinchy, Dabney once again closes her eyes and resumes her meditations on Troy's character, though now these musings accrue a darker cast: "once he had really hurt her...He had not revealed very much to her yet. He would—that dark shouting rider would throw back the skin of this very time, of this moment....There would be a whole other world, other cotton, even" (33). This contemplation verges, however subtly, on the erotic, as Dabney imagines flesh and the upcoming consummation of her marriage; how different everything will be once she *knows* Troy in this way. Yet, this impression stirs both longing and trepidation, so "[b]lindly and proudly Dabney rode, her eyes shut against what was too bright" (34). As the two girls approach The Grove, her reveries are punctuated once again by the appearance of another out of place black worker, Man-Son, one of Troy's field hands.

Startled by finding Man-Son in the woods when he should be working in the crops, Dabney immediately and powerfully recollects a moment from her childhood, an incident that involved Man-son also in his youth, and that transpired in this very same spot. Entzminger claims that Dabney is terrified by Man-Son after seeing a sexually charged vision of Troy, and she also asserts that Welty never explains Dabney's anxiety, though the clues to explain Dabney's reaction lie in this mingling of fear and desire ("Playing" 55). A young Dabney witnesses two black boys in a knife fight on the bank of the bayou as her uncles George and Denis emerge nude from the water and begin wrestling; they "come out of the bayou, naked, so wet they shone in the sun, wet light

hair hanging over their foreheads just alike,...starting to wrestle and play" (35). George intercedes in the boys' scuffle and grabs the knife, subduing the children, who begin to cry and cling to George as he holds them close and comforts them. She ran screaming into her uncle's arms, and "he hugged her tight against his chest, where sweat and bayou water pressed her mouth" (36). This formative childhood moment ushers a resurgence of complex emotions; Dabney experiences a blend of terror and desire, as she beholds black bodies mingling with naked white ones, a primal display of violence, intimacy, and masculinity. Costello proposes that Dabney finds George's paternal embrace of these two boys incredibly painful for George's actions equate her with them, and as she clasps his naked body "the sweat and bayou water threaten to taint her unsullied whiteness with the contaminants of labor, exertion, and violence" (50). In this moment Dabney registers George's difference from the rest of the family, and his actions blur the racial distinctions which form her understanding. Dabney cannot abide this powerful display of interracial intimacy—she will not speak of it, and neither will George. Though they both suppress the incident, when she comes upon Man-Son in the woods, while she dreams of her sexual future with Troy, this memory comes flooding back.

In reflecting upon this incident of interracial contact, this fusion of eroticism and violence, when George exhibits both tenderness and discipline toward these boys, Dabney, significantly, connects this memory to Troy's role as overseer. In recalling George interrupting the boys' fight, she remembers the bright blood and the knife on the ground illuminated by the blinding sunlight: "it was a big knife–-she was sure it was as big as the one Troy could pull out now" (35). Troy, as the appointed executor of the racial

power structure at Shellmound, functions as intermediary between the black workers and the Fairchilds. Embracing his role as disciplinary agent, he declares to Ellen that the matter of being a Deltan is all in how one "handles his Negroes" (95). Dabney continually links Troy to his position as outsider to the Fairchilds, this difference being part of his appeal, as Dabney considers herself a rebel against tradition for marrying outside of her class. Yet, Troy still remains responsible as overseer for "play[ing] a crucial role in the family myth of organic, unconstructed aristocracy" (Costello 48), in serving as a shield between her and the workers. But with Pinchy wandering in the fields and Man-Son traipsing through the woods, Dabney feels unnerved by Troy's lapse in managing his hands. Though Man-Son does not speak to her first, she exclaims to him, "Man-Son, what do you *mean*? You go get to picking!" [...] She trembled all over, having to speak to him in such a way" (37, emphasis mine). She quickly wishes for him to return to his position in the fields where he can be safely placed. Man-Son serenely responds, "Yes'm, Miss Dabney. Wishin' you'n and Mr. Troy find you happiness" (37). Although Man-Son's wish for her wedded bliss could be interpreted as facile and good-natured, it also may invoke his own knowledge of Mr. Troy—a man whose qualities he likely knows better than Dabney herself— and perhaps a deeper understanding of the difficulty ahead in attaining this happiness.

Kreyling proposes that Dabney, unlike her more circumspect sister, Shelley, lunges headlong into life, pointing toward how "her rush to George's arms mirrors her rush eight years later into marriage with Troy" (*Understanding* 97). Though Kreyling's observation of Dabney's spiritedness rings true, I suggest that her willful blindness

enables this lack of restraint. Though Dabney does perceive "the darkness that might frighten her" (37) lurking beneath the visible surface of life, she chooses to shut her eyes against these depths. Still, though, these moments of insight, facilitated by Pinchy's presence, and Man-Son's, engender bodily discomfort—she frowns, she trembles. Her body betrays her in these encounters, disclosing the fears and hesitancies her revelations produce. But Dabney opts to inhabit her protective skein of innocence, to actively perform it, which allows her to avert her eyes from the trespasses of white men. She refuses to acknowledge her deeper intuition, instead choosing to bury it, like the bones of the bodies in Mound Field. In shutting her eyes from Pinchy's plight, Dabney becomes complicit in the plantation economy, sanctioning Troy's violence. For Troy's potential relationship with Pinchy lies beneath the surface—Pinchy's story, her experience buried, as she remains invisible in the power structure, absorbing its violence.

Ellen Fairchild, also bothered by the effects of Pinchy's coming through, makes her own venture into the forest outside the bounds of Shellmound to bring Partheny, her housemaid, some soup. Her mind preoccupied with Dabney's wedding preparations, and with her dream the previous night of a lost garnet pin from her courting days, a feeling of warning overtakes her. As she traverses the footpaths winding through the ancient bayou woods, Ellen wonders "how many have been here before her" (68); she becomes receptive to the presence of other histories, thinking of the Indians who burned their pottery here in the woods, of the ghost of the Indian maiden her husband believes haunts these woods. But her silent ruminations become interrupted by the startling presence of a young woman. Immediately, Ellen imagines the girl must be Pinchy, "who these days was

coming through and wandering around staring and moaning all day until she would see light" (69). As she approaches the figure, parting ferns laced with spider webs, Ellen glimpses the chimney of the overseer's house looming in the distance, establishing an oblique link between her thoughts of Pinchy and thoughts of Troy. Further, when the girl refuses Ellen's commands to show herself, she interprets the girl as "a dark creature not hiding, but *waiting to be seen*" (70, emphasis mine), a description most poignant for Pinchy's predicament. Given Pinchy's recent seeking, Ellen's belief that she has come upon her in the woods seems natural. But to Ellen's surprise, as the girl calls out and then steps from behind the ferns, Ellen sees "she was white. A whole mystery of life opened up" (70).

Registering the girl's whiteness, and then absorbing the very idea of a white girl wandering unprotected in the woods, shakes Ellen to her core. Welty's careful revisions to this scene reveal its import as a font of embedded signification, one which discloses and dismantles the intertwined class and racial dynamics of white innocence. One passage in particular from this curious convergence demonstrates Ellen's capacity to see anew, and Welty's focus on the striations and minutiae of class and race recognition and acknowledgement. Ellen admits to the wood nymph she felt scared by her presence. The typescript version reads:

> In the beginning I did think I was seeing something in the woods--a spirit (my husband declares one haunts his bayou here)--then I thought it was Pinchy coming through, an ignorant little Negro girl on our place. It was when I saw you were-- were somebody--my heart nearly failed me (66)

The published version reads:

> In the beginning I did think I was seeing something in the woods--a spirit (my husband declares one haunts his bayou here)—then I thought it was Pinchy, an ignorant little Negro girl on our place. It was when I saw you were—were a stranger—my heart nearly failed me, for some reason (72)

These revisions prove resonant on several levels. Welty, earlier in the typescript version, writes "I was too sure of myself, thinking you were a poor little Negro girl" (66). She then crosses this sentence out and eliminates it, moving Ellen's reference to a bit later in the scene. Welty, in this early version, clarifies more specifically that Ellen believes this 'little Negro girl' to be Pinchy, and the girl becomes not 'poor' but 'ignorant,' a change Welty keeps from the typescript version to the published one, and one which suggests Ellen's lack of sympathy for Pinchy. So first, Ellen imagines the girl as anonymous, only identified by her blackness. Welty then decides, more specifically, that it's Pinchy who's on Ellen's mind. But what Welty omits from the typescript version to the published one is reference to Pinchy's 'coming through,' thereby eliding Pinchy's ordeal, the reason for her wandering. What she ultimately retains, however, is reference to Pinchy's ignorance, her insignificance (denoted by 'little'), her blackness, her *belonging* on the Fairchild place; too, Ellen's sense of authority is reinforced by her reference to Battle's ownership of the bayou—*his* bayou. The next telling alteration occurs in the change from *somebody* to *stranger*. First, in deploying 'somebody,' Welty registers Ellen's belief that the girl's whiteness makes her somebody, acknowledging her personhood. Donnie McMahand correctly asserts that "the girl's whiteness alone makes her a person of relevance, worthy of Ellen's time, thought, and feeling" (170). Though the declaration 'somebody' connects the two women in whiteness, Welty's move from 'somebody' to 'stranger' delineates the stark difference in their class status. Ellen's shock and recognition of this girl as a

‘stranger’ divulges her own authority and position. Asserting her privilege and dominion, she expects to recognize this girl meandering through her woods as a “Fairchilds girl or Inverness girl or Round Bayou or Greenwood girl” (71). But when she comprehends the girl as a stranger, she jolts with confusion, her ‘heart nearly fail[ing] her.’ Welty adds ‘for some reason’ to the close of Ellen’s admission of discomposure, signifying Ellen’s uncertainty as to why this girl possesses such power to unnerve her. Welty’s distinct choices in revising Ellen’s words to this wood nymph work to invoke and then displace Pinchy; they denote that Pinchy occupies Ellen’s thoughts, but then suppress her coming through, thereby reinforcing the cryptic nature of this process. At the same time, in having Ellen express surprise that she would find any stranger in these woods, Welty shows Ellen’s attempt to regain control, to reinforce her sovereignty over the land surrounding Shellmound.

Astounded by the girl’s insolence and struck by her beauty, she immediately thinks of her own daughters, who do not possess this type of startling gorgeousness. Feeling united in their whiteness, Ellen attempts to treat the girl in maternal terms; she has to restrain her bodily compulsion to reach out and touch this stranger, “she caught the motion back, feeling a cool breath as if a rabbit had run over her grave, or as if someone had seen her naked. She felt sometimes like a mother to the world, all that was on her! yet she had never felt a mother to a child this lovely” (70). Ellen feels exposed, experiencing the weight of her own maternity—this girl’s presence deeply unsettles and fascinates her. Thus, Ellen, adopting the maternal role so natural to her, attempts to warn this unprotected young woman that mistakes will come upon her out in these woods and that

she "was speaking about good and bad, maybe. I was speaking about men—men, our lives" (70).[76] Ellen's words here connote an affinity with the girl, as she uses the language of *our lives*; despite the difference in class status, they are both vulnerable to men, a warning she does not as openly express to her own daughters. Yet, the young woman responds to Ellen's admonition with a knowing and maternal smile, as if to suggest that *she* possesses a much more intimate knowledge of the perils men can present than Ellen ever could. Though Ellen first attempts to use her position to command the girl to obey her and then gently attempts to warn her, her authority recedes here in the woods, where this astonishing young woman retains a much deeper knowledge of men. This girl brings Ellen's innocence to the forefront, making Tempe's observation that Ellen is "the most innocent woman" (90), ring true. For, despite her whiteness, *she,* unlike Ellen, is not protected by her class status. This intense reversal of roles and power dynamics flouts Ellen's aristocratic authority, and spotlights this girl's capacity to incite Ellen's sudden awareness of her own class-based innocence. As Ellen then urges, "I'm not stopping you, I'm not commanding you," the girl responds, "You couldn't stop me [...] and a half-smile, sweet and incredibly maternal, passed over her face. It made what she said seem teasing and sad, final and familiar, like the advice a mother is bound to give her girls" (71). Weston aptly points to the significance of the maternal dynamics implicit in this meeting, claiming that "Ellen's current pregnancy, indicative of both her inevitable centrality and vulnerability to the process, [...] leads her to hint at the source of danger to the lost girl" (107-8). Ellen implies the danger of male sexuality and acknowledges her own

[76] In this most thoroughly revised scene of the novel, Welty adds the qualifier "about men, our lives" to the final published version of this particular line, moving it up from a later place in the scene in the typescript version. (box 6, series 4, folder 3, page 66.)

bodily defenselessness in pregnancy. At the same time, though, Weston rightly gestures to the girl's unbridled sexuality, stirring a fear in Ellen that perhaps conjoins her with Pinchy as a threat, for she has penetrated the bounds of Shellmound, creating "an inversion of the physics of patriarchal power" (108). As they part ways, "a fleeting resentment that she did not understand flushed [Ellen's] cheeks" (72). Ellen's body registers the import of this encounter, much like Dabney's trembling at Man-Son speaking to her, signifying *his* knowledge of Troy. Ellen, like Dabney, intuits but does not yet fully comprehend what this incident has stirred up about the threats men pose, her own vulnerability— this will require more time. When the girl claims she will travel on to Memphis, "the old Delta synonym for pleasure, trouble, and shame" (72), Ellen does not immediately think of George, who lives there, but perhaps she should.

Later, when Ellen unburdens herself by divulging to George her strange encounter, he abruptly responds that he "took [the girl] to the old Argyle gin and slept with her" (79). Ellen's response to this blunt admission proves curious; she "let[s] go in her whole body," but still takes comfort in George, "still real, still bad, still fleeting and mysterious and hopelessly alluring to her" (80). Ellen experiences an inexplicable sense of relief in absorbing George's truth, that "he had been the one who had caught the girl, as if she had been thrown at them," because Ellen had "fear[ed] for the whole family, somehow, *at a time like this* (being their mother, and the atmosphere heavy with the wedding and festivities hanging over their heads) when this girl, that was at first so ambiguous, and so lovely even to her all dull and tired—when she touched at their life, ran through their woods" (80, emphasis mine). Ellen's internal processing of this

bewildering meeting in the woods powerfully links her consternation over her daughter's future with the weight of her own maternity. Welty's choice in utilizing the phrase 'at a time like this' during Ellen's reflection resonates with the other deployments of this phrase in the novel to signify pregnancy and bodily vulnerability.[77] Ellen's thoughts here reveal her intense worry for her daughter, and that she *does* comprehend the dangers Dabney faces. Because, immediately after George's profession, she cries, "Sometimes I'm so afraid when Dabney marries she won't be happy in her life" (80). Despite Ellen's profound fears for Dabney's connubial future, she resorts to the euphemistic language of happiness to convey her distress—this tactic being a Fairchild habit.[78] This persistent focus on *happiness*, as a cover for the potential existence or eventuality of deep hurts, vulnerabilities, and betrayals, demonstrates Ellen's difficulty in grappling with men's capacity to injure and disappoint. As George touches her arm, she feels that "for a moment she thought she saw how it was" (81). This young woman intruding into their

---

[77] Later in the novel, Ellen faints and we get inside Roxie's head: "Poor Miss Ellen just wasn't strong enough *any longer* for such a trial.... One time before, Miss Ellen fainted away when everybody went off and left her—and she had lost that little baby...Poor Miss Ellen at *this time"*(167). As mentioned previously, the phrase is also used to denote Mary Denis's labor: "For Tempe to leave Mary Denis *at such a time* (99, emphasis mine). Ellen herself again employs the phrase in speaking to Troy as he polishes the wedding goblets, "Pinchy *at this time*" (93, emphasis mine).

[78] This insistence upon and preoccupation with 'happiness' surrounding Dabney's future occurs throughout the text. Soon after Ellen faints under the strain from her pregnancy, Dabney asks her, "Mama, do you *want* me to get married?" Ellen admits to her, "I think about your happiness" (168). Her father, too, asks, "'are you happy, Dabney?' Battle had kept asking her over and over. How strange! Passionate, sensitive, to the point of strain and secrecy, their legend was *happiness*. 'The Fairchilds are the happiest people!' They themselves repeated it to each other" (222). Dabney, when she rides out to Marmion, tells herself, "I will never give up anything!...Never! Never! For I am happy, and to give up nothing will prove it. I will never give up anything, never give up Troy—or *to* Troy!" But she quickly concedes that "Nobody had ever told her anything–-not anything every true or very bad in life" (122). Perhaps most tellingly, Partheny, Dabney's childhood nurse, "surely hopes she be happy wid dat high-ridin' low-born Mr. Troy" (132). Partheny's expression echoes back to Man-Son wishing Dabney and Mr. Troy happiness, and gestures toward what the African American workers might know about Troy.

lives produces Ellen's flash of intense insight, and divulges that even George, the family hero, exercises violence. Despite *seeing him* clearly, Ellen forgives George's transgressions, thereby maintaining his ability to continue to inflict pain.

This moment becomes even more poignant when Troy's arrival interrupts their conversation. Troy's sudden intrusion invokes Dabney's fate; as Troy's mother wishes, she will bear "manly sons and loving daughters" (113); she will silently accept Troy's infidelities. Though Ellen experiences foreboding over Dabney's future, instead of directly discouraging her daughter from trusting in men, as she felt free to do with the girl in the woods, she fails to prevent Dabney from entering into the same tradition she inhabits. As the wedding photographer arrives to take photos, he excitedly announces he has a photo of a train victim killed on the way to Memphis, a "young girl flung off into the blackberry bushes" (218). Though Tempe instructs him quickly to change the subject and the Fairchilds do not dwell on this pronouncement, the brevity of this declaration belies the moment's import.[79] As the Fairchilds endlessly rehearse their own near-death brush with the Yellow Dog, news of this girl's brutal end—the train would not stop for her—gets stifled. Her story won't be heard. This girl, much like Pinchy, Welty grants no interiority; we only see her in relation to how her life intersects with Ellen's and George's. Yet the ephemerality of her presence in the novel does not diminish her impact for Welty's critique of race and class relations. Despite the girl's whiteness, which affiliates her with Ellen, how the gulf in their class status impacts the runaway girl remains tremendous. Yaeger astutely identifies this young woman as a 'throwaway

[79] This succinctness of this announcement parallels with the brief disclosure of Pinchy's ordeal. Tempe responds to the black workers' celebration and cries of hallelujah at the news of Pinchy coming through: "Well, hallelujah, said Aunt Tempe, rather pointedly" (181).

body,' claiming "she is neither recognized nor mourned by the Fairchilds" (58). But Ellen *does recognize* her, she just doesn't speak up, for upon hearing the gruesome news, Ellen thinks to herself, "surely it was the young girl of the bayou woods that was the victim this man had seen" (218). Ellen suppresses this moment of recognition and acknowledgement of the girl's suffering, just as she stifles affirmation of Pinchy's travails.

Though unprotected and vulnerable to violence, taken to wandering in the woods, and ultimately meeting her death, her fleeting encounter with Ellen throws into relief how this young woman's and Pinchy's stories must be quieted to support the plantation order. In this way, the two women become united–-through their mystery, their knowing, their victimhood. Both this doomed girl and Pinchy demonstrate evidence of a deep internal life, which profoundly disturbs Ellen. The runaway girl's sage, maternal smile, suggesting she comprehends more of men's dangers than Ellen ever could, discomfits the Fairchild matriarch. Granted Ellen's understanding of George's involvement with the young woman, she still divulges no feelings of mourning or contrition at report of the girl's demise. Even given that when Ellen meets the runaway girl, she apprehends, "Not long ago she had been laughing or crying. She had been running...[her] little torn skirt [..] almost of itself trembling...the soiled cheek, the leafy hair" (70-1), all physical cues suggesting that she may be a victim in more than one way. If George, whom she reveres, has raped this girl and Troy, whom she mistrusts, has violated Pinchy, what is the difference between men? We must remember that upon learning of George's liaison with the girl, Ellen experiences a sense of relief, feeling "bitterly glad [...] that he had been the one who had caught the girl, as if she had been thrown at them, for now was it not

over?" (80). Somehow, in Ellen's mind, George's confession contains and extinguishes the cryptic threat this girl poses. Ellen, too, finds reprieve in Pinchy's coming through her ordeal, in being able to dispel Pinchy's mystery, to safely place her. For during Pinchy's trial, Ellen, like Dabney, attempts to assuage herself by projecting ignorance and emptiness onto Pinchy. Dabney, on her wedding day, needs to assign Pinchy her role, to curb her. Frowning once again, she commands: "You swat every fly, Pinchy. That's what you're for, now, this whole day" (204). As Pinchy struggles, the Fairchild women feel disconcerted that her "coming through lent her an air of mystery for a few days" (203). But, after the wedding, and Pinchy has come through, Ellen reflects with solace upon how in Pinchy being "back in her relationship on the place, she was without any mystery to move her" (228). But Pinchy's mystery *does remain*; it's there for the reader to tease out. Ellen and Dabney, perturbed by Pinchy's seeking, and eager to return her to her proper place in plantation life, comfort themselves in performing innocence of Pinchy's struggles. Though they may perceive the root of Pinchy's trouble—her labor—they choose to turn away from her distress. And though Dabney imagines herself eschewing tradition in her cross-class marriage with Troy, she follows in Ellen's path, sanctioning male violence and opting for the protection innocence affords. It is Shelley and Laura who may truly resist and break away, who will become open to affirming Pinchy's plight, her experience.

While Dabney practices a purposeful blindness to Troy's infidelities, and tamps down her perceptive powers, and Ellen, too, though she 'sees clearly how things are,' chooses to maintain the order and her own innocence, Shelley opens her eyes and

becomes more receptive to the presence of unsettling secrets. Shelley, who Kreyling observes " sees too much ever to be happy" (*Understanding* 91), possesses a clearer insight into the realities under the seemingly smooth surface of the plantation order; she more willingly relinquishes her protective skein of innocence, and registers how she is implicated in the order, though she fails, too, to *act*. Inherently mistrusting Troy, Shelley feels that he "walk[s] in from the fields to marry Dabney" (212) and that "she [herself] could never love him" (85). She perceives his calculating instincts, his desire to "size things up" (85), concealed behind a practiced slowness. In her diary, Shelley reflects upon how:

> T. is the one who is always thinking of ways in or ways out, and I think he gets the smell of someone studying, as if it were one of the animals in *trouble*. *Trouble* acts up—he puts it down. But I know, *trouble* is not something fresh you never saw before that is coming just the one time, but is old, and your great-aunts not old enough to die yet can remember little hurts for sixty years just like the big hurts you know now, having your sister walk into something you dread and you cannot speak to her (85, emphasis mine)

This glimpse into Shelley's thoughts encapsulates her instincts about Dabney's groom; she portends a limited future for her sister, one where she will experience suppression at the hands of her husband, a man practiced in silencing 'trouble,'—disruptions to the order—thereby perpetuating a deep legacy of gendered domination and abuses of power. Despite Shelley's intense trepidation and ominous intuitions about Troy, she will not openly discourage her sister: "The moment of telling, I cannot bring myself to that" (85). Shelley's poignant words here foreshadow her inability to act even after confronting direct evidence for disrupting her sister's marriage, when she witnesses the most overt display of male violence in the novel.

Though Ellen and Dabney learn about or recall through the force of memory Uncle George's involvement in acts that combine eroticism, race, and violence, thus complicating perceptions of him as figural male hero, Shelley *sees* this confluence for herself. When Dabney sends her off to the overseer's office to bring Troy to the wedding rehearsal supper, Shelley opens the door and nearly steps into the point of a sharp knife. The atmosphere tense and threatening, Troy sits at his desk with a pistol trained upon two black workers. As she runs behind Troy for refuge, Shelley apprehends that these men are angry *with* Troy. When Root M'Hook waves the pick at Troy, portending action, Troy shoots off one of his fingers. Juju, to another worker, then responds, "Pinchy cause *trouble* comin' through" (195). Why might these men be angry *with* Troy? And why is Pinchy coming through the reason for this *trouble*? As Gretlund pointedly asks, "how could Pinchy possibly cause trouble between a black field hand and his overseer in the Delta in 1923?" (116). A potent question indeed, Pinchy surfaces as the cause of conflict— a secret unearthed, by those who *know*. Though Shelley overhears this disclosure, she keeps her composure. And Troy seems to take this spilling of blood in stride, a matter of 'handling his Negroes.' And handle them he does, as he commands another injured laborer, whose backside is full of buckshot, "Pull down your clothes, Big Baby, and get over my knee. Shelley, did you come in to watch me?" (196). As Troy bends Big Baby over his knee, Shelley becomes appalled at the fusion of race, sexuality, and violence in this tableau. Troy challenges Shelley to stay inside while he picks buckshot from Big Baby's body, "bringing together themes of sexual violence, the preservation of white power, and homerotic desire" (Fuller 139). This scene, as Kreyling

asserts, “directly reiterat[es] the one Dabney remembers on the bayou,” but while Dabney’s moment of initiation into white female adulthood carries an aura of mystery, Shelley’s is unmediated; she gets pushed directly into the raw relations of power between the races and the sexes (*Understanding* 98). Troy’s actions also echo the amalgamation of paternalistic care and discipline George exhibits toward a young Man-Son and his foe, through his infantilizing behavior toward Big Baby. The difference perhaps stems in Troy’s refusal to comfort Shelley (as George assuages Dabney), instead unabashedly denying to protect her, even taunting her, daring her to bear witness to this scene, flaunting his position as intermediary between the races. Troy precipitates the prohibited interracial contact, the stripping away of her innocence; he forces it all out in the open. Desirous to escape, Shelley responds, “I can’t get past—there’s blood on the door, [...] her voice like ice” (196). Shelley’s words, she ‘can’t get past,’ resonate with the knowledge that has been confirmed for her in this moment, cementing the connection with Troy as a man with blood on his door (and his hands). Beholding Troy’s culpability in this disturbing scene terrifies Shelley, yet as she leaps over the blood pooled under the threshold, she feels a “sharp, panicky triumph. As though the sky had opened and shown her, she could see the reason why Dabney’s wedding should be prevented” (196). This flooding of shock and elation, I argue, stems from Shelley’s sudden confirmation of how, in this act of Troy ‘putting down trouble,’ his own role in Pinchy’s predicament becomes clear; Juju exposes what Ellen and Dabney surmise.

But even as this scene catalyzes a rush of comprehension for Shelley, and offers affirmation for stopping the wedding, “She would jump as Troy told her, and never tell

anybody, for what was going to happen was going to happen" (196), resounding back to how, earlier in her diary, she admits, "the moment of telling, I cannot bring myself to that"(85). Shelley chooses to keep this episode to herself, just as she hoards the memory of the Yellow Dog incident which she cannot bring herself to repeat, and just as she keeps quiet the knowledge that Robbie Reid openly weeps over George at Fairchilds store. As she runs back home across the bayou, she reflects upon Troy's *performance* as overseer, imagining perhaps "the behavior of all men were actually no more than this—imitation of other men" (196). Troy's performance causes Shelley to meditate upon men's roles within the plantation order, and to conceive with astonishment that her own father, too, might be guilty of imitation, of inauthenticity in performing the role of a "real Delta planter" (196). This sudden awareness that even her beloved father may have secrets and may be culpable in this system of gendered and racial oppression throws into chaos her prior belief in the coherence and infallibility of Fairchild identity. Shelley's response to this realization is to think that "women knew a little better than men, though everything they knew they would have to keep to themselves...oh forever!" (196). Though Shelley seems to confer the feminist superiority of women, she still concludes that women must repress their knowledge. Both Costello and Kreyling suggest that this moment underscores how Shelley fails to question the oppression of African Americans whose labor and lives support myths of aristocratic distinction, but I argue that Shelley does connect this

discovery about white masculinity with Pinchy's subjugation.[80] Though we as readers do not gain access to the viewpoints of the African American men Troy punishes, nor do we get an absolute explanation of the 'trouble' Pinchy causes and Troy 'puts down,' still, through Shelley's perspective, we might glean the process by which these stories stay suppressed, despite her recognition of their presence.

Shelley, most perceptive of all the Fairchild girls, I contend, does *see* the racial and sexual oppression of black women (and men) within the plantation order. She registers Pinchy's suffering and Troy's culpability, if only, ultimately, to link this knowledge back to her own position. Feeling restricted by the gendered power dynamics at Shellmound, Shelley remains too hesitant to upset plantation life on Pinchy's account, or even her sister's. She comprehends how those in power depend upon the structures of racial innocence to buttress the myth of white female sexual innocence. As Bank puts it, "white men's sexual use and abuse of black women in the South lie at the heart of both black and white Southern women's sexual identities, as well as at the core of the plantation economy" (72). Just as Pinchy's suffering must remain invisible within the power structure, white women's vulnerabilities in childbearing must also be suppressed. Steven Fuller proposes that Shelley realizes the options available to Fairchild women are either sterile spinsterhood or to concede their sexualities to expressions within family life, like Ellen (140). Though Fuller rightly identifies these limited models accessible to the

---

[80] Costello points to how observing Troy's performance causes Shelley to see the "falseness of class distinctions so central to life at Shellmound" but that she still views him as an intruder into her family's aristocratic circle (57). Further, Costello proposes that the African American laborers enabling the myths of aristocratic solidity could not be further from Shelley's mind. Kreyling, taking another angle on the incident, points to how Shelley's "take-away is a lesson in the superiority of women, not a lesson in the evils of racial oppression" (*Understanding* 99).

Fairchild girls, he neglects to consider Shelley's intense concerns centering on reproduction. Later in the evening, after Shelley has space and time to ponder in her diary the harrowing event in the overseer's office, she feels "sickeningly afraid of life, life itself, afraid *for* life" (197). Shelley, here, links Pinchy's exploitation to an anxiety for her mother, who is in the throes of her tenth pregnancy.

For Shelley this incident invokes fear and refusal, augmenting her mistrust of men, and though she doesn't *act* in the moment, Pinchy's abuse has opened her up to choose a different path, to reject the reproductive future laid out for her. Before her episode with Troy, Shelley, along with India and Laura, set out to Brunswicktown to question Partheny about Ellen's missing garnet pin. After visiting Partheny, who denies knowing the whereabouts of Ellen's jewelry, the girls visit Laura's mother's grave (and the grave of Battle and Ellen's infant son that came between Little Battle and Ranny) (167). While this visit brings a flood of memories back to Laura, Dr. Murdoch, who delivered both girls, interrupts their meditation. He surmises in a brusque manner about whether there will be room for all of the Fairchilds in the plot, especially with the presumption that the girls will reproduce. He declares to Shelley, "you'll have to consider your own progeny too...Dabney and that fellow she's marrying will have three or four at the least.....You'll marry in a year and probably start a houseful like your mother. Got the bones, though. Tell your mother to call a halt. She'll go here, and Battle here, that's all right—pretty crowded, though" (134-5). The incursion of this male authority figure who presumes comprehensive knowledge about their bodies deeply unsettles the girls. Conjuring the connection between birth and death, Dr. Murdoch simultaneously

announces Ellen's vulnerability in pregnancy as he advises Shelley and Laura to follow in the path of southern womanhood by marrying and quickly reproducing. His prediction sends shockwaves of angst vibrating through Shelley's body: "Shelley stood where she was and rubbed her eye tenderly, like a bruise" (136). She's *seen* too much; in this moment, Shelley (and Laura) declare they will not marry. The girls reject this vision of their future, although Laura's decision (and Shelley's influence over her) will be more fully fleshed out later. And Dr. Murdoch's forecast about her mother's health-threatening pregnancy continues to preoccupy Shelley, especially when the family recounts the story of her own difficult birth. Just as with the Yellow Dog incident, as Woolff suggests, the family uses humor and laughter to diffuse the danger, but Shelley's mood at hearing the story of her birth turns fearful as "she pieces together the social and biological progression; marriage leads to sex, pregnancy, risk in childbirth, and pain" ("How Babies" 262). Once again, Shelley cannot abide the telling and flees the room in tears. But Shelley's reaction becomes justified in light of the very real dangers her mother faces in fulfilling her role. After all, Ellen faints earlier in the novel and, as Partheny recollects, when she loses the child who now lies in the cemetery. This disturbing account remains on Shelley's mind; on Dabney's wedding night, Shelley visits her parents' bedroom to question her father about why he continues to place her mother at risk, how he "could keep getting Mama in this predicament—again and again" (229). But Battle only turns her away, dismissing her concerns. That same evening, Shelley imagines with shock what a marriage to Troy Flavin would be like, the reality of Dabney's future. And, contemplating her own future, "her desire fled [...] to an open place [...] an opening

wood, with weather—with change, beauty...” (220). She sees beyond the bounds of Shellmound, though filled with trepidation and quivering anticipation, to a life outside the plantation order.

Shelley, though she fails to act in substantive ways on Pinchy’s, or on Dabney’s behalf, does undertake small feats of resistance and subversion to the plantation order: questioning her father; openly disapproving of Troy; refusing to help repair George and Robbie’s relationship. She doesn’t prevent Dabney’s union from happening, but her recognitions of the order’s abuses push *her* to break with tradition, to choose a different life for herself. Dabney, Ellen, and Shelley all undergo moments of intense insight, enabled by Pinchy’s presence, into how the order restrains them, but only Shelley truly faces Pinchy’s oppression. The others opt to inhabit the racial and sexual innocence granted to them by the plantation economy. In order to maintain their own protection and privilege, they must give up their insights, pretend not to see the gothic undercurrents of the order, men’s capacity for subterfuge, violence, and abuses of power and their own bodily vulnerability due to reproduction. Ellen, despite her erotic stirrings for George, suppresses her sexual identity within the confines of motherhood. When confronted with the wild runaway girl who mimics her own knowing maternal ways, Ellen registers the gendered power dynamics at play shaping her own life. Yet she fails to warn her daughters of men, instead feeling worn out with the world “running away from her, and she would always be carrying another child to bring into it” (78). Dabney, insistently perturbed by Pinchy, closes her eyes against the threatening intimations of Troy’s sexual relationship with the girl. Quieting her instincts, Dabney accepts that “Nobody had ever

told her anything—not anything very true or very bad in life" (122). She chooses to remain the Delta; all signs point to her following in her mother's path, raising children at Marmion.

Shelley, the only child who witnesses a blatant display of male violence, and knows why her sister's wedding should be called off, still refrains to act, paralyzed with the recognition that all men, even her father, put women in danger, and are performing according to their roles. But perhaps Shelley sees most clearly of all that it is the *system* in which all the Fairchild actors are complicit—not the individuals themselves—that keeps them from acknowledging the humanity and pain in others. Pinchy and the girl in the bayou woods retain the quiet and unsettling power of the text, theirs are the underlying feminine counternarratives to the Fairchild's surface story. The knowledge they retain, as does Man-Son, Roxie, Juju, Partheny and, as will be discussed, Aunt Studney, has the potential to blast apart the protective screen of innocence. Encounters with these girls, ripe with revelatory potential to divulge the secrets, the trouble, beneath the surface of everyday life, could catalyze resistances to the habituated and often invisible practices of racial and gendered oppressions. Though Shelley recognizes that the "Fairchilds simply shied away from trouble as children would do" (159), it is Laura, we will soon see, who perceives the trouble, and who will not falter in her rejection of the order.

<u>"The law of female decorum had teeth in it": Innocence Disclosed</u>

While the Fairchild girls recognize the constructed nature of their gendered innocence, and even are able, momentarily, to register how the oppression and labor of

others enables this privilege, they often fall back and inhabit this innocence instead of acting to relieve others' suffering. They intuit that African American laborers possess deep knowledge regarding their men, but they do not pursue these threads, for truly seeing these workers in all their humanity would require them to abolish their protective privilege. For Porter's Miranda, instead of turning away from these encounters—these moments of deep intuition which demonstrate, in brief clarity, the abuses of the plantation order and her own complicity in it—she evinces a passionate desire to know, to bring the secrets, however disturbing, into the light. Through everyday occurrences, Miranda comes to confront the existence of these buried histories, moments which both form and shock her conception of the world. As with the Fairchild girls, these incidents are often shepherded by African American workers. The difference arises in that Nannie, Jimbilly, and Dicey are not quiet and subdued, their secrets to be teased out by the reader. Instead, Porter more explicitly allows her black characters voice, offering a more overt expression of their experiences and struggles, and a more direct stripping away of the child's protective veneer. As she begins her sexual initiation, and to link others' oppressions to her own, Miranda reacts. In deploying Miranda's point of view, Porter shows in process the child's comprehension of gendered expectations, and also reveals the child's understanding that performing innocence permits her the space to realize and reject her future trajectory within the plantation order.

"The Circus," the first story in the cycle to exercise six year old Miranda's perspective, centers on themes of performance, femininity, and sexuality. Full of excitement for her first circus, Miranda, dubbed Baby by her father and other family

members, arrives chaperoned by her nurse, Dicey. As she enters the bleachers she notices her older cousin, whom she is named after, Miranda Gay, flirting with some boys. Young Miranda admires her cousin's clothes and attractive manners, seeing in her a model version of femininity and bellehood: "a most dashing young lady with crisp silk shirts [...] a lovely perfume and wonderful black curly hair above enormous wild grey eyes [...] Miranda hoped to be exactly like her when she grew up" (356). At the same time she appreciates her cousin's beauty from afar, she apprehends some young boys lurking beneath the bleachers, peeping up the skirts of the ladies sitting above them. When she reciprocates one of the "odd-looking, roughly dressed" boy's open stares, he "returned her a look so peculiar she gazed and gazed, trying to understand it" (356). Yet when Miranda points out the ogling boys to Dicey, her caretaker intimates that the boys are up to no good but she doesn't clarify why. She only advises Miranda,"You jus mind yo' own business and stop throwin' yo' legs around that way" (356). Significant here is that Dicey lets on that these boys possess bad intentions, but her reaction is to curb Miranda's posture, thereby placing the impetus on the child to restrain her body to obvert the gaze. Dicey suggests to Miranda obliquely, then, what the boys might be interested in. Intuiting something threatening and nebulously sexual about these boys under the bleachers, something she's struggling to comprehend, Miranda feels overwhelmed with confusion and curiosity. But before she can process Dicey's advice and solve the riddle of the boys' unabashed leering, the circus band begins and inundates all of her senses: "She jumped, quivered, thrilled blindly almost forgot to breathe as sound and color and smell rushed together and poured through her skin and hair and beat in her head and hands and feet

and pit of her stomach" (356). Before she has a chance to recover, a clown appears, prancing and contorting on a dizzyingly high tightrope. Miranda shrieks, "with real pain, clutching at her stomach with her knees drawn up" as the "man on the wire, hanging by his foot, turned his head like a seal from side to side and blew sneering kisses from his cruel mouth" (357). Why might this spectacle terrify her so? Just as Miranda attempts to process that the young boys pose a sexual threat, their sinister form of looking punctuating her cousin's display of feminine desirability and courting of the male gaze, she must confront the clown's glaring expression of performative sexuality—this is too much. Her body overcome, Miranda begins to absorb the impact of this episode. As Miranda's body shakes with fear and she cries uncontrollably, Dicey must escort her out of the bleachers. Dicey grumbles and pulls the child along, disappointed that she has missed her chance to see the circus, and making Miranda feel foolish for being afraid. Dicey tests the limits of her authority, angry for missing the show; she repeatedly calls the child a "gret big baby," being "vicious but cautious, careful not to cross the line" (358).

Both Dicey and Miranda's father reinforce her childishness and their frustrations at her not being able to handle the show's sights and sounds. Grandmother, though, worries about the effects of the circus on the young and that she and her son might not live to witness them. She declares, "The fruits of their present are in a future so far off, neither of us may live to know whether harm has been done or not. That is the trouble" (359). Sophia Jane has the foresight to predict the circus' profound impact on her granddaughter. Indeed, her point here is telling, as the circus incident foments Miranda's

doubts about the plantation order, her refusal to participate in the spectacle. Though Unrue proposes that Miranda cannot yet integrate the knowledge gained from this experience, I suggest that she has (at least) begun to do so, to reconcile her instinct about the dangers of men with the perils of the performance of femininity within the plantation order's confines.[81] For later that night, as Miranda tries to conjure the pleasant evocations of the circus her family member's share, to see it through their frame, she only has nightmares of "the bitter terrified face of the man in blowsy white falling to his death" (359). But her nightmares are justified. Miranda's visceral reaction to this foreboding episode suggests that she becomes the most perceptive observer of the order—she should be scared of what she sees. Miranda doesn't turn to her father or grandmother for comfort and security; instead she looks to Dicey, who pushes her charge to confront her fears and move beyond innocence. Dicey supervises her through this jolting moment of initiation into the order, urging her to confront the reality of her position. The psychic aftermath of the circus episode pushes Miranda into obedience, altering the power dynamics between child and black caretaker. Although Brinkmeyer contends that "what happens at the circus has little to do with their everyday lives" (*KAP* 160), I suggest the opposite. This episode disrupts the relationships between Dicey, Miranda, her father and grandmother, rearranging forever bonds of trust and affiliation, reshaping formations of power and knowledge. This event reveals the chaos beneath the rigid daily order and habits of plantation life; and Dicey, who guides Miranda through this transformative experience, refuses to maintain the child's innocence.

---

[81] See Unrue, *Truth and Vision* (30-33, 48).

Just as Dicey encourages Miranda to confront the darkness in human nature and what lies beneath the order's facade of decorum, and just as Nannie in "The Last Leaf" breaks the cover of paternalism and reveals the force and necessity of her labor, Jimbilly, Nannie's husband, also invests in openly expressing to the children the cruelties of the order and exposing how their privilege is founded on the labor of others. In "The Witness," Miranda, Maria, and Paul, obsessed with burying dead animals they discover on the farm, plead with Jimbilly to craft tombstones for these creatures. In exchange for his labor, though, he requires the children listen to his stories, as he reaches back into the foundation of the old order and unveils the horrors upon which it was founded. Jimbilly invests in educating them about what lies beneath the tales of their ancestors' glory. In resurrecting these alternative, suppressed memories and legacies, Jimbilly demands close attention to "what the Negroes were always saying" (354). Though Jimbilly's stories "dwelt much on the horrors of slave times" (353), the children felt that he "had got over his slavery very well" (354). Yet, as they begin to more deeply intuit their relatives' roles in these brutalities, the children begin to experience "faint tinglings of embarrassment" (353) and they "wriggled a little and felt guilty" (354). Hearing about these secrets white adults elided from their recollections of slavery-era plantation life causes the children to feel "displaced from their former ease and confidence into embarrassment and guilt, feelings entirely new within the context of their family heritage" (Brinkmeyer, *KAP* 161). Though they all share in fresh feelings of discomfort—Jimbilly's tales eliciting a physical response as they absorb this new knowledge— their individual reactions prove even more telling.

In particular, while Paul moves to change the subject and shift the focus off of the past and Jimbilly's exposure of white cruelty, "Miranda, the little quick one, wanted to know the worst. 'Did they act like that to you, Uncle Jimbilly?'" (354). Six year old Miranda, (the same age as when the circus incident takes place) demonstrates an intense desire to know about these abominations. Refusing to shy away from them, she is especially keen to learn if the horrors happened to Jimbilly himself. Although this passion may emerge from a childish impulse to seek thrills in being terrified, it also resonates with Miranda's hunger to glean the realities of plantation life, a history her family has tried to keep from her. For the children, Jimbilly's recollections resemble ghost stories—"at the end it was impossible to decide whether Uncle Jimbilly himself had seen the ghost, whether it was a real ghost at all, or only another man dressed like one" (353). This uncertainty over the veracity of Jimbilly's narratives highlights the precarious line between entertainment and enlightenment; though the children may wish to ameliorate their tremors of guilt through perceiving his words as ghost stories, their bodies intuit a deeper truth—an awareness that Jimbilly himself remains haunted, the afterlife of slavery. Jimbilly explains that because he worked at the house and not in the rice swamps, they didn't act that way towards *him*, but this does not curb him from relaying the viciousness his fellow slaves experienced. He spares no terrible detail in relaying the terrors perpetuated by their ancestors, summoning the multitude of bodies buried under the earth these children tread upon. In exhuming these crypts of knowledge, he forces the children to become witnesses to their heritage, their legacy of violence forged by the

structure of aristocracy. In this way, Jimbilly deploys his own disruption of the order by corroding their security and innocence.

But Jimbilly's appeal to exaggeration, his delight in terrifying the children, as he makes exorbitant threats about "do[ing] something quite horrible to somebody" such as "skin[ning] somebody alive and nail[ing] the hide on the barn door" (354-55), causes the children to interpret his declarations as empty threats. Moreover, "The reason why Uncle Jimbilly never did any of these things he threatened was, he said, because he never could get round to them. He always had so much work on hand he never seemed to get caught up in it" (355). Though Jimbilly bemoans his incessant chores, the children persist in questioning his work ethic, adopting the inherited idea of African American shiftlessness, a concept first broached in "The Journey," as Sophia Jane's workers jump into action when she arrives at the farm. However, Jimbilly's body, his twisted corporeality, contradicts this inherited assumption that he avoids work. Jimbilly's arthritic body bears the signs of his labor—"he was bent almost double...his hands were closed and stiff...he hobbled on a stick" (352). His body functions as a testament to a beleaguered past, one that young Miranda feels implicated in. Thus, Uncle Jimbilly's contorted form becomes material evidence, (even if they doubt his grisly tales), a tangible reminder of the continued violences of the post-slavery order, and makes visible the labor which belle ideology obscures.[82] It's no surprise, then, "that nothing about Jimbilly suggested any connection with even the nearest future" ("The Last Leaf" 363).

---

[82] Yaeger points to how "stuck in the white child's restless body and invited to share her fascination with Uncle Jimbilly's stiff hands, the reader encounters the irrevocable force of a system of southern labor that, even post-emancipation, failed to heal the sufferings of former slaves. In a lower South that replaced slavery with a predatory system of sharecropping and black tenancy, Uncle Jimbilly's deformities signify an unyielding social violence" (224).

These experiences, at age six, formulate the beginnings of Miranda's countereducation to the plantation order's codes of conduct. The terrifying circus episode exposes the nascent understanding of her sexuality and femininity with performances required by the order, and Jimbilly's stories reveal her ancestors' brutalities previously kept from her, but in one afternoon spent with her older brother, Paul, a now nine year old Miranda more fully unites the link between bellehood and death—through the prism of reproductive labor. Once again the children relish digging in the dirt, playing in opened graves that once held deceased family members. Now that their grandmother and grandfather have passed, their bodies must be moved for the family land has been sold. As the children scrape around in the ground, Miranda uncovers a dove shaped coffin bolt and Paul a gold wedding ring. Upon slipping the wedding ring on her finger, an undeniable wave of feeling passes over the child. She immediately feels uncomfortable in her body, experiences her tomboyish clothes rough against her skin, and wishes to "take a good cold bath, dust herself with plenty of Maria's violet talcum powder...put on the thinnest, most becoming dress she owned, with a big sash, and sit in a wicker chair under the trees" (378), all desires out of character for this tomboyish child. The ring, symbolizing marriage and the endpoint of bellehood, stirs within her dim yearnings to adhere to this model of femininity, one she earlier identifies in her older cousin, Miranda Gay. Watson aptly points to how this vision relays a "scenario of conspicuous consumption—bathing, dusting, dressing up, sitting around, killing time—in which the only valued labor is the fashioning of the self as an etherealized sexual commodity and the body work of reproduction is not even hinted at" (233). Miranda flirts with the

fantasy of the romance plot, the siren call which enlists young girls into the order. But before she can fully absorb the implications of this impulse, male violence disrupts her revery, as Paul guns down a rabbit. While her brother flays the rabbit, Miranda thinks of saving the skins for fur coats for her dolls, "though she never cared much for her dolls she liked seeing them in fur coats" (379). When Paul slits open the scarlet bag, the rabbit's uterus, Miranda experiences a powerful urge to *see*:

> She looked and looked—excited but not frightened...and began to tremble without knowing why. Yet she wanted deeply to see and to know. Having seen, she felt at once as if she had known all along. The very memory of her former ignorance faded, she had always known just this. No one had ever told her anything outright, she had been rather unobservant of the animal life around her because she was so accustomed to animals. They seemed simply disorderly and unaccountably rude in their habits, but altogether natural and not very interesting. Her brother had spoken as if he had known about everything all along. He may have seen this all before. He had never said a word to her, but she knew now a part at least of what he knew. She understood a little of the secret, formless intuitions in her own mind and body, which had been clearing up, taking form, so gradually and so steadily she had not realized that she was learning what she had to know (379-80)

This incident in which she witnesses male violence, and which interrupts her meditation upon femininity, instantiates a powerful moment of recognition for the young girl. She understands that the tiny rabbits were just about to be born "like kittens, like babies" (380). This moment, which blends birth and death, exposes how the mysteries of reproduction reveal themselves to her in the bodies of these tiny animals ripe with destroyed potential. Miranda finally integrates that humans are like animals in this way, apprehending the carnal nature of human experience behind the codes of decorum and propriety. Underscoring the revelatory nature of this episode, Unrue rightly suggests "that the ring's only reliable meaning is of the temporality of the past social and economic orders; its evocations of superficial womanliness, submerged in the basic truths of the

dead rabbits (*Truth and Vision* 151). In this flash of insight, Miranda connects the outcome of bellehood to her own future reproductive labor, that the performance of femininity, the temptations of leisure and the pedestal may end in this–-death, like it did for her mother who perished in childbirth. Porter registers Miranda's knowledge as embodied; this understanding passes through her in visceral and instinctive terms. It was there in her body, accumulating all the while–-'she felt at once that she had known all along, she had always known just this.'

But also paramount to Miranda's revelation is that her brother serves as violent perpetrator and guide for this profound experience. Even as she comes to instantaneous and deep awareness, she positions her knowledge in relation to Paul's presumed expertise. Protected by her gender, Miranda has never been enlightened about how babies were made or born, just as Dabney Fairchild 'had never been told anything very good or very bad in life,' while Paul appears to possess the secret, to have 'seen it all before.' Miranda couches her discovery in the language of secrecy and Paul further shrouds the incident. He coerces her into concealment of the rabbits' death: "Listen now. Now you listen to me, and don't ever forget. Don't you ever tell a living soul that you saw this. Don't tell a soul. Don't tell Dad because I'll get into trouble. He'll say I'm leading you into things you ought not to do. He's always saying that. So now don't you go and forget and blab out sometime the way you're always doing...Now, that's a secret. Don't you tell" (380). Miranda heeds his exhortations and keeps the secret, and it becomes buried under a trove of accrued memories. Twenty years later in a foreign marketplace, that childhood moment comes surging back in Proustian fashion, stimulated by the sight of

"dyed sugar sweets, in the shapes of all kinds of small creatures: birds, baby chicks, baby rabbits, lambs, baby pigs" and the smell of "raw flesh and wilting flowers...like the mingled sweetness and corruption she had smelled that other day in the empty cemetery at home" (380). In this way, her repressed childhood knowledge floods her consciousness, and though she holds this secret over twenty years, it may have inspired her life's trajectory. For though Miranda keeps quiet as a child, protecting her brother and participating in the plantation order's concealment of violence, we see she ultimately chooses differently for herself by departing the order. Dicey, Nannie, Jimbilly, and then Paul, all function as guides to disrupting her innocence—Dicey in showing her the cruel performances of the order, Jimbilly and Nannie, through their stories, revealing the atrocities upon which her privilege is founded, and Paul for exposing his capacity for brutality which shows her the connection between reproduction and death. While Miranda's black caretakers openly elucidate the trouble beneath the surface, Paul requires her to remain silent about his savagery—a pressure which correlates with the Fairchild girls', who fail to speak or act, experience of male violence. Yet Miranda, like Shelley Fairchild, will escape by traveling abroad. These girls learn that *performing innocence* gives one the capacity to map an alternative path. If others perform to hide the destructiveness of the system which oppresses women and African Americans, then these girls can offer up their own performance— one which will allow them the space to harbor their own secrets, and to plan for a divergent future.

"All secrets were being canceled out": A Future Beyond

For both Porter and Welty, the dynamics of futurity associated with their girl characters demonstrate the child's sensitive acumen and attunement to the world around her and to the forces at play in her social world. Eventually, these girls apprehend what will be expected of them; realizing the fullness and terror of their future roles within the plantation order, and the impending vulnerability of their bodies, they learn to shield themselves by keeping secrets of their own. Both Laura and Miranda learn to perform innocence in order to give themselves the space to later subvert their position of relative powerlessness within the system. For both children, this rejection of their reproductive futures within the plantation order, this connection between childbearing and death, becomes bound up with their maternal legacies.[83] These girls ultimately choose alternative models of femininity, moving toward emblems of the New Woman, a model Laura locates in Shelley, and, as we will see, Miranda finds in Great Aunt Eliza. In Porter's case, "The Grave" seems to represent the culmination of the Miranda cycle, coming as it does at the close of *The Old Order* and gesturing overtly into the future toward Miranda as a woman of almost thirty. Unsurprisingly then, most critics cite "The

[83] Several Porter scholars note her preoccupation with childbearing and death, though they often disagree over the nature of her personal history with pregnancy, debating whether Porter's childlessness was due to physical causes of her apprehensions surrounding childbirth. Joan Givner, in her biography *A Life*, proposes that Porter faked a pregnancy and in truth could not bear children (92, 170-76). But other Porter scholars attest to the reality of her pregnancy. Mary Titus notes, based on evidence Porter wrote in an undated letter: "On December second my child was born prematurely and dead, and though I have never been in danger, still it is better in every way to be quiet...My baby was a boy. It was dead for half a day before it was born. There seems to be nothing to say about it" (qtd. in Titus 121). Porter herself was highly secretive about her reproductive health and her feelings about bearing children. On the one hand, it seems she experienced a fear of pregnancy, a fear likely linked to her own mother's death in childbirth. Alternatively, after an hysterectomy in 1926, Porter becomes "emotionally crush[ed], for it represented the deaths of all her future babies" (Unrue, *KAP* 107).

Grave" as the most future-oriented in the story cycle. And Porter herself, as Mary Ann Wimsatt points out, "remarks that "The Grave" represents the first step towards the future out of the past Miranda has lived in all her childhood" (qtd. in Unrue, *Truth and Vision*, 230, note 4). Despite this critical predilection to discuss futurity in terms of "The Grave," instead I wish to turn to "The Fig Tree" as the story which most tellingly engages the dimension of futurity, and which invokes Miranda's preternatural capacity to intuit a path outside of the order. As Brinkmeyer suggests, "The Fig Tree" represents not only the conflict between traditionalism and modernism but also a new way of seeing things (*KAP* 162). Written in the late twenties before the other Miranda stories but not published until 1960 in *The Collected Stories*, "The Fig Tree," I argue, may serve as the poignant genesis of the Miranda cycle, encapsulating the themes of death, reproduction, maternity, secrets, and knowledge that coalesce throughout the texts. Indeed, the cyclical nature of these stories, each underscoring a potent moment in the child's everyday life, turns back to "The Fig Tree."

Miranda's macabre preoccupation with digging in the earth, with burying dead baby creatures, with gleaning how the performance of femininity gilds an animal truth underneath, with the nature of secrets and with what people choose to reveal in their stories, all become powerfully yet subtly linked and underscored in "The Fig Tree." Six year old Miranda and her family must quickly ready for a trip to Cedar Grove, her grandmother's country home. Avoiding the business of the family's preparations, Miranda wanders off alone into the fig grove. Musing over the women in her life, she declares to herself, "Mama was dead. Dead meat gone away forever. Dying was

something that happened all the time, to people and everything else" (366). Startling in its frankness, this glimpse into Miranda's consciousness reveals the primacy of her absorption with motherhood and death, the uniting theme across the story cycle. She copes with her mother's passing by confronting death in various forms; she spends her time digging in the ground with her siblings, playing in graves, pleading with Jimbilly to erect tombstones for the dead animals she finds on the farm, and absorbing stories from her Grandmother, Nannie, and Jimbilly alike about the many slaves and black babies buried underground on this land. But this engrossment with death is also marked by a nurturing quality as well, for she wishes to mother these baby animals she finds. So when Miranda discovers one little chick who fails to move, she carefully and ceremoniously buries it, as she hears cries of her family members calling her back to the wagon to depart for Cedar Grove. This episode conjures a host of haunting echoes, ones which resonate across the cycle. Watson rightly claims that the chick's vulnerable body and the child's, and the chick's tiny grave, allows Porter to evoke the disturbing specter of child mortality on the plantation.[84] In caring for this baby chick and laying it to rest, Miranda's actions recall a multitude of other infant deaths. Indeed, this morbid yet tender episode resurrects the laments of Nannie and Sophia Jane over their dead young, retold in "The Source."

---

[84] Watson points out that Miranda's own body, as well as the chick's, recalls this connection with infant mortality in plantation life, an issue raised in stories like "The Source" (229). As discussed earlier in this chapter, Miranda overhears Nannie and Sophia Jane incessantly recounting their maternal hardships in "The Source." But further, I would suggest, with ten of Nannie's thirteen children perishing in their infancy, Miranda's protected white childhood comes into relief. And though these children Nannie lost hover spectral in the background, Jimbilly's stories of tortured slaves in "The Witness" also recalls the dead he elides—his own children. Miranda's elder sister Maria only realizes Nannie's lost children were Jimbilly's too when Nannie rejects his appeal to join her in her cabin in "The Last Leaf." Their shared experience marked by sorrow and tragedy, "they had stored up no memories that either wished to keep" and "seemed to forget they had children together" (363).

Here, Miranda learns the lesson that "mothering the plantation's young also means burying it—burying the future along with the past" (Watson 228).

But just as Miranda completes the burial rites and flies away to answer her grandmother's impetuous calls, she thinks she hears the tiny creature weeping from beneath the earth. Fraught with worry over the possibility that she may have buried this chick alive, Miranda climbs into the cart with her family members. She attempts to think of the fun she'll have at the farm, but she cannot curb her feelings of anxiety. She experiences intense physical discomfort at recollecting the chick's noise— "her ears buzzed and she had a dull round pain in her just under her front ribs" (369). As Miranda becomes disoriented and begins crying, the adults around her attempt to assuage her and guess at the cause of her tears. She begs to turn back, and her father determines that she must have left her doll behind. This moment is key because Miranda will not reveal the true cause of needing to return, and instead demonstrates an acute awareness that performing what adults need from her will allow her to achieve her aims. Miranda, in order to appease her father, confirms that she is upset over the doll, not over a potential act of violence and her own culpability in it, not that she may have buried a creature alive in an attempt to be nurturing. Having learned the models of white femininity required by the adult world, Miranda mounts a performance of her own, feigning urgent desire for a doll to cover her secret, her rescue plan for the baby chick. Her thoughts betray her subterfuge: "Miranda hated dolls. She never played with them. She always pulled the wigs off and tied them on the kittens, like hats" (370). This plan poignantly demonstrates how this child has absorbed the social cues and expectations of her culture; white

girlhood's acceptable forms of play remain fused to dolls, allowing her to practice being a mother to this inanimate object and fixing her on the path to motherhood. Dolls prepare young girls for their future roles within the plantation economy, but, as Bernstein explains, play can be a space for subversion and influence. She explicates, "Children do not passively receive culture. Rather, children expertly field the co-scripts of narratives and material culture and then collectively forge a third prompt: play itself. The three prompts then entangle to script future play, which continues to change as children collectively exercise agency" (29). In her recreation, Miranda resists the script of white girlhood; instead of mothering her dolls, she pulls apart their hair and alters their bodies, preferring to nurture the live bodies of baby animals. Yet, in this moment, she performs longing for her doll for an audience of adults in order to keep her own secret.

Despite Miranda's pleas, however, the family will not turn the cart around. Haunted by the chick's weeping, Miranda refuses comfort throughout their journey. But once Miranda arrives at the farm another surprise awaits her for Sophia Jane's sister, Great Aunt Eliza, a peculiar and strong-willed spinster, is setting up her telescope to study the stars. Miranda, fascinated with Eliza's unusual behavior, watches her closely "for everything in the world was strange to her and something she had to know about" (371). And Eliza appreciates Miranda's persistent and profound curiosity about the world around her. Inspired by her great-aunt's intriguing behavior and interests, and in particular, her stargazing, "Miranda almost forgot her usual interests, such as kittens and other little animals on the place...anything at all so it was a baby and would let her pet and feed it... for Great-Aunt Eliza's ways and habits kept Miranda following her

about, gazing" (373). In showing Miranda the stars, Eliza opens the child up to new worlds, to the existence of life beyond the plantation, and disrupts her custom of mothering baby animals. After a trip to examine the stars and feeling thrilled with possibility, Miranda's revery becomes interrupted when, crossing through a fig grove much like where she buried the chick at the town home, she hears the familiar cries emerging "from the smothering earth, the grave" (374). Miranda tries to repress her memory of the weeping chick after she arrives at the farm, but in this moment the grove/ grave returns and Miranda must again confront what lies beneath the earth. As Yaeger puts it, "the dead chick's weeping bring Miranda smack dab against this catacomb of unthought knowledge (knowledge that never appears in "The Fig Tree" itself but remains mired in the stories around it and in Miranda's inexplicable preoccupation with burial and dirt)" (277-78). The chick's ghostly whispers from beyond the grave recalls once again the bodies interred on the plantation. Immediately stricken with fear and guilt, Miranda becomes visibly upset, but Eliza locates the source of the noise: "They're not in the ground at all. They are the first tree frogs...when tree frogs shed their skins they pull them off over their heads like little shirts, and they eat them. Can you imagine?" (374). Eliza's rational explanation, though a bit grotesque, comforts the child and assuages her terror. Eliza thereby releases Miranda from her guilt, and eliminates the need for secrets. That this revelation occurs in the fig grove gestures toward the fruit as a symbol of

knowledge.[85] Eliza's scientific explication that ameliorates Miranda's anxiety over the haunting baby chick evokes again her capacity to help the child see the world afresh. Eliza embodies a stark departure from Miranda's other models of femininity, found in her grandmother, her older sister, and her cousin, Miranda Gay. Indeed, Eliza, representative of the New Woman, a figure Sophia Jane identifies as threatening in "The Journey," offers a new version of femininity—one that rejects tradition, marriage, and motherhood altogether in favor of independence and intellectual pursuits.[86] Through contact with Eliza, Miranda imagines a different realm of possibility, and moves toward a future of her own choosing.

Porter's Miranda and Welty's Laura McRaven, marked by the death of their mothers, turn to alternative models of femininity to determine their own futures. They glean the dangers white men present from the storytelling of the plantation mistresses, they absorb the presence of dark secrets from African American caretakers and workers, and they apprehend the dangers of their own reproductive futures within the order. As "The Fig Tree" closes with Great Aunt Eliza, a capable spinster who spends her time gazing at the stars and using science to explain life's mysteries, thereby offering a different path, Cousin Shelley, for Laura, becomes the guide most powerful for creating a trajectory outside of the plantation economy. Shelley, the artist figure who will soon

---

[85] Unrue argues that the "fig tree—a variation of the tree of knowledge—is the story's controlling symbol, in which all meanings merge, and it was apparently an important personal symbol of Porter herself" (*Truth and Vision* 47). Nannie, in trying to comfort Miranda in distress on the journey, offers her figs, "Look, honey, I toted you some nice black figs" (370). And, as Unrue points out, Nannie is identified with figs, for her face "is wrinkled and black and it...[looks] like a fig upside down" (qtd. in Unrue, *Truth and Vision* 47).

[86] Sophia Jane judges Miranda's mother as "altogether too Western, too modern, something like the "new" Woman who was beginning to run wild, asking for the vote, leaving her home and going out in the world to earn her own living..." (345).

depart for Europe, we can surmise, will also refuse to conform to the ideology of the southern belle. Laura shadows Shelley throughout the text, carefully observing her elder cousin's sensitivity to the problems of the plantation tradition. Laura and Shelley share a profound moment of solidarity and influence when Dr. Murdoch infringes upon into their visit to Laura's mother's grave. His abrupt intrusion into their reflective moment reinforces the connection between childbearing and death; as the girls gaze upon Battle and Ellen's infant's grave, the doctor predicts how many children these girls will bear while simultaneously disapproving of the Fairchild's crowded cemetery plot. This encounter leads to a moment of solidarity where both girls attest that they will never marry (and presumably never have children) (136). This incident continues to reverberate for Laura, for Laura shares with Porter's Miranda an interest in determining where babies comes from, and this question becomes inextricably bound up with the shadow of death.[87] Laura, too, notices Shelley's trepidation over her mother's pregnancy, and she stands outside the door of Battle and Ellen's bedroom, overhearing Shelley's desperate pleas to her father not to impregnate her mother again. Thus, Laura perceives the twin forces of childbearing and death, as Miranda discovers in "The Grave," and she, like Miranda, will have her own brush with the mysteries of reproduction.

---

[87] In *One Writer's Beginnings*, Welty recalls, as a child, desperately wanting to know where babies came from. She recounts finding two buffalo nickels nickels in her mother's drawer, and her mother gently explaining about her lost little child and her own ordeal in delivering the baby, and that she herself may have perished in the event. Wetly explains the import of this childhood discovery: "She'd told me the wrong secret—not how babies could come but how they could die...The future story writer in the child I was must have taken unconscious note and stored it away then: one secret is liable to be revealed in the place of another that is harder to tell, and the substitute secret when nakedly exposed is often the more appalling" (17). See also Sally Wolff's article, "How Babies Could Come and How They Could Die" for an analysis regarding how the news of Welty's baby brother's death impacted her and how she explores this relationship between childbirth and death in her fiction (251).

Tellingly, as with Miranda, a young male relative guides Laura's most formative encounter that converges male violence, African American knowledge, and the secret of reproduction. This textual moment stands as one of the most heavily revised in the novel. In Welty's "Delta Cousins," the long story out of which *Delta Wedding* emerges, this Marmion episode occupies a central position, though it retains distinct differences from its treatment in the novel. In "Delta Cousins," the nine year old girl, here named Laura Kimball, traverses the banks of the Sunflower (not Yazoo) River with her cousin India, and the two girls encounter a menacing bee man. As the peculiar stranger invites them into his boat to ferry them down the river, Laura gauges that "he looked as if he might stroke their hair" (26), and when he asks them if they need his help getting into the boat, "what he did do was touch his trousers and a little old fish seemed to come out" (26). Despite his lewd actions, the girls board the boat and he guides them down the river; the girls spy Marmion, here the bee man's home, across the riverbank. Later, as Laura reflects about the bee man she thinks she and her cousin " had failed one another that day" and that "another day he would be successful" (31). In encountering this perverse stranger, Laura realizes the dangers men can present, yet she reduces his threat to a limp, 'little old fish.' This profoundly disturbing threat of sexual assault Welty's agent, Diarmuid Russell, believed should be eliminated from the story. Her friend, Mary Lou Aswell, who frequently offered comments on Welty's writing, also suggested that "some of the digressive interludes could be omitted...the bee man episode, definitely, because it's not an integral part of the story" (qtd. in Kreyling, *Author* 104). Welty listens to their advice, later excising the bee man altogether from *Delta Wedding*. She supplants this

overt sexual threat from an older white man with an even more cryptic encounter that includes an ancient African American woman who refuses to show the Fairchilds deference.

Therefore, under Russell's and Aswell's advisement, Welty makes significant alterations to the Marmion scene while amplifying its potency and mystery. This episode becomes more about the secrecy of reproduction and futurity and Aunt Studney holding the key to Laura's discovery than about threatening sexuality, though it still retains the threat of violence. In "Delta Cousins" the girls only glimpse Marmion from a distance, the bee man's house a place of intense foreboding and entrapment. Yet, in *Delta Wedding*, Marmion becomes the site of Laura's revelation—linking sexuality and reproduction. She shares the experience with her male cousin Roy, eight years old, who proposes the two sneak away together to take a boat ride, and the boy child, not the bee man, ferries her down the Yazoo. The children apprehend Marmion across the river, and though no longer the bee man's home, the home still retains its gothic import. Roy informs Laura that Dabney and Troy will live in the mansion after they marry. But there is much more to Marmion's legacy, a home marked with sadness and death.[88] Though now promised to

---

[88] When Dabney rides out on the morning before her wedding, Welty unveils the gloomy history of her future home: "Marmion had been empty since the same year it was completed, 1890–-when its owner and builder, her grandfather James Fairchild, was killed in the duel he fought with Old Ronald McBane, and his wife Laura Allen died broken-hearted very soon, leaving two poor Civil War-widowed sisters to bring up the eight children. They went back, though it crowded then, to the Grove, Marmion was too heart-breaking. Honor, honor, honor, the aunts drummed into their ears, little Denis and Battle and George, Tempe and Annie Laurie, Rowena, Jim Allen and Primrose. To give up your life because you thought that much of your *cotton*–-where was love, even, in that? *Other* people's cotton. Fine glory!" (120). Though Dabney feels something ominous about moving to Marmion because of the duel, she invests it with the trappings of a fairytale, "the magnificent temple-like, castle-like house, with the pillars springing naked from the ground, and the lookout tower, and twenty-five rooms...the chandelier, chaliced, golden in light, like the stamen in the lily down-hanging" (122). Marmion is named for a gothic novel by Sir Walter Scott (Weston 102).

Dabney upon her marriage to Troy, the home was originally meant for Laura, and then for Cousin Maureen. But Dabney, taking advantage of her intellectually disabled cousin, asks, "Look honey—will you give your house to me?" (31). Battle and Ellen, knowing Maureen will likely not continue the Fairchild line, bestow the home to Dabney because "Virgie Lee, Maureen's mother was not of sound mind and would have none of Marmion" (31). As Naoko Thornton describes: "the acquisition, repossession, and alienation of property will be a continuous source of anxiety, and often injustice, among the family members."[89] Though, in typical Fairchild fashion, they blithely disregard the deep inequity of their choices. Uninhabited for thirty years, the home has begun to be reclaimed by nature, and the children's actions when entering the home prove telling. Roy charges up and down the stairs, taking possession over the house, and decrying his position of omnipotent vision, shouting that he can see the whole Delta from here. Laura meanwhile becomes intensely disoriented, feeling a sense of vertigo and confusion; she even wonders "if this is still the Delta in here?" and continues to ask, "is this Dabney's house?" (175). But the children do not enter the house alone. Another individual has claimed dominion over the long empty mansion.

Like Pinchy and other African American characters in the novel, Aunt Studney—appropriately named for her insistent refrain of "ain't studyin' you"— periodically surfaces in the text, yet her most sustained appearance occurs here. As the children approach Marmion, they notice her, "coal-black, old as the hills, with her foot always in

---

[89] 45. Thornton details that the house originally belonged to Annie Laurie, Laura's mother, who then bestowed it to her brother Denis when she married and left the Delta. When Denis died it should have gone to his wife, Virgie Lee, or her daughter (40). Welty details this history in the novel (145).

the road" (173) circling behind them, muttering to herself and toting her huge sack. Roy, amplifying Studney's mysteriousness, relays to Laura that "even papa is afraid of her" and "nobody knows what she's got in the sack" (173). But Roy discloses his belief that Aunt Studney's sack is where his mother gets her babies. Roy's divulgence incites Laura's curiosity about this woman she had previously ignored and whether or not she might hold the answers for where babies come from. When Laura and Roy enter the decaying mansion, Aunt Studney holds her ground in the center of the room; her presence unsettles Laura. While the children chase one another round and round the room, Aunt Studney increases Laura's delirium, as she "did not move at all except to turn herself in place around and around, arms bent and hovering, like an old bird over her one egg" (175). Roy shouts at the silent old woman, enacting his authority over the home. Suddenly, Aunt Studney "makes a cry high and threatening like the first note of a song at a ceremony, a wedding or a funeral, and like the bark of a dog too, somehow" (176) and the place swarms with bees. Laura becomes transfixed: "All at once a bee flew out at her—out of the piano? Out of Aunt Studney's sack? Everywhere! Why, there were bees inside everything, inside the piano, inside the walls. The place was alive. She wanted to cry out herself. She heard a hum everywhere, in everything. She stood electrified–-and indignant" (176). Before Laura has an opportunity to gather her composure, Roy again screams at Aunt Studney, echoing his imperious refrain:

> "Why have you let bees in *my* house? Why have you let bees in *my* house?' and his laughter would come breaking down on them again. But Aunt Studney only said, as if it were for the first time, 'Ain't studyin' you,' and held the mouth of her sack. It occurred to Laura that Aunt Studney was not on the lookout for things to put in, but was watching to keep things from getting out" (176-77, my emphasis)

This instant contains a multitude—the young boy performing masculine authority over his bewildered female cousin and exercising cruelty toward this old woman; Laura's agitation over being inside the home once destined to be her own; her desire to know the contents of the sack and her hope that Studney may let her peer in; Studney's absolute refusal to subscribe to the demands of the children (and adult Fairchilds). What can Laura learn from Studney's refrain of 'ain't studyin' you,' from her bees? Studney incites the genesis of Laura's transformation through her rejection of those who have social power over her, through guarding her secrets. Aunt Studney's call to the bees, which Russ delineates are "traditionally associated with parthogenesis, female purity, and self-regeneration, [and] which are impenetrable and penetrating" (93), signifies a different type of futurity.[90] For though Roy insists on his ownership of Marmion, even in play, demanding that she reveal the substance of her sack, Aunt Studney escorts them out of the house: "Aunt Studney watched him swagger out, both hands squeezing on her sack...Outdoors it was silent, a green rank world instead of a playhouse. 'I'm stung,' said Roy calmly" (177). Aunt Studney opens Laura up to the knowledge that has been gathering in her body all along.

---

[90] Russ also proposes that Aunt Studney's sack "functions...like a symbol of reticence that is at once sexual, racial and historical" (93). After Studney ushers the children outdoors, the masculine space of Marmion becomes subsumed by the intensely feminine 'green, rank world.' In regards to parthogenesis, it is also worth noting that Partheny persists as another black female character with intense power and mystery. She and Aunt Studney, though both work for the Fairchilds, retain an air of resolute independence. Partheny escorts the Fairchild women out of Dabney's bedroom so she may dress the bride; she crafts the aphrodisiac patticake that Pinchy, Troy, and Robbie consume; she oversees the births of Ellen's many children. Louise Westling points out that Partheny "is a formidable old black woman of magic powers, and we should note that her name comes from the Greek word for virgin and suggests independent female fertility (parthogenesis)" (86-7).

On the children's way down to the riverbank, they discover "a treasure...a jewel" (177), Aunt Ellen's beautiful missing pin, a symbol of her courtship days. Laura instinctively knows it should "be worn here—putting her forefinger to her small, bony chest" (177), this same pin Ellen searches for when she encounters the runaway girl in the bayou woods. Westling describes the pin's significance: "it had been Battle Fairchild's courtship gift to the virginal Ellen, now appropriately rediscovered by her niece who is on the brink of puberty" (90). Laura's finding the pin, as Miranda's unearthing the wedding ring in her grandparents' grave, "inspired her and made her clever" (177); she teases Roy with a playful possessiveness over the object. But Laura will not hold the pin long. When Roy dunks her in the Yazoo, in an act of impulsive meanness, she surrenders the jewel. It is symbolically significant that Laura recovers Ellen's pin, a symbol of her bellehood, but then loses it in the depths of the Yazoo River, foretelling her severance from the traditions her aunt has followed that led her down the path to motherhood. Just because Roy wants to see if girls could float, he presents himself as a threat who, like Miranda's brother Paul, swears her to secrecy about their adventure. In those brief seconds underwater, Laura not only relinquishes the pin, but also thinks she apprehends the interior of Aunt Studney's womblike sack: "like a whale's mouth, Laura opening her eyes head down saw its insides all around her–-dark water and fearful fishes" (178). Roy's violent play shocks her vision; she undulates between fear of the unknown and deep intuition. McMahand indicates that this moment retains the "rich play between blindness and foresight, but that though Laura tries, she cannot yet see" (228). Although McMahand claims she is incapable of processing her own prejudice toward Aunt Studney, I suggest that Laura, like Shelley,

begins to comprehend problematic male violence and chooses a different path; these black women, Pinchy and Studney, open these white girls up to this knowledge. For after her encounter at Marmion, Laura shows more signs of understanding that she needs to keep her own secrets in order to protect herself.

Laura's experience at Marmion reverberates with the implications of her own future, intertwined with her mother's legacy—and there is another Marmion to think of. As the cousins escort her to Shellmound just after she arrives on the Yellow Dog, Orrin waves off down a track and expresses that Marmion lies in the distance. But to Laura, as she exclaims, Marmion is her dolly which has traveled with her, suspended in its own little suitcase. Orrin won't listen, though, and professes she knows nothing. Laura decides "there's no use talking any more about what anything was" (6). Though Marmion often accompanies her on her mini-adventures at Shellmound, Laura's memory turns to the doll and to her mother just after she and Shelley visit the cemetery. Laura clutches the doll, still redolent with the smells of the Jackson air, stirring her memory from a previous summer before her mother's death. The family had just returned home after a visit to Shellmound, and in her excitement before an impending thunderstorm, Laura impulsively demands her mother fashion her a rag doll: "she had not even known, herself, that she wanted Marmion before that moment when she had implored to her mother, 'Make me a doll!" (233). Her mother named it, and now Laura reflects upon her choice: "Had she wanted to do something else, first thing on getting home–-something of her own? She spoke almost grudgingly, as if everything, everything in that whole day's fund of life had gone into the making of the doll and it was too much to be asked for a name too" (232).

Had Marmion been on her mother's mind? Just after their trip to Shellmound, had she been thinking of her daughter's inheritance, her future? Laura begins to ponder these questions, but regrets that "never more would she have this, the instant answer to a wish, for her mother was dead" (233). Though her mother may not be there to give an immediate resolution to Laura's musings, she has provided a path. Annie Laurie chose differently for her daughter; she moved away from the Delta for city life, she bestowed Marmion to Denis, and then to Maureen, not to her own daughter, so that Laura perhaps would not become, like Dabney, a Delta bride, who Aunt Tempe so astutely observes, "all look dead, to [her] very observant eye, or like rag dolls—poor things. Dabney is no more herself than any of them" (214).

Laura must be careful not to get swallowed up in the crush of Fairchild love, their patterns of possessiveness, their traditions, for "it was as if they had considered her mother all the time as belonging, in her life and in her death (for they took Laura and *let* her see the grave), as belonging here; they considered Shellmound the important part of life and death too" (134). She begins to comprehend the nature of the Fairchild's coerciveness, as she transforms from a little girl who willingly seeks out their love, who desperately needs it, to a young woman who perceives, in startling clarity, the annihilating weight of their influence, and *their* idea of *her* future. Perhaps her mother understood this and essayed her escape. Laura's relationship to Marmion— to the house, to her doll— encourages this awakening. When Ellen and Battle decide they would like to keep Laura at Shellmound, her uncle invokes her reproductive future, promising that "one day Marmion will be hers for her and her chillen" (237). But Laura's response here

rings profound: she performs, she pretends that she will acquiesce, that she will remain at Shellmound, when she knows that "in the end she would go—go from all this, go back to her father. She would hold that secret, and kiss Uncle Battle now" (237). In keeping her own secret, like the Fairchilds have been doing all along, Laura offers up her own performance while choosing something different for her future. As the text draws to a close, it is appropriate that the wedding party departs for a night picnic at Marmion, the site of Laura's revelation. India and Laura conspiratorially whisper to one another and share their secrets. India's is that she's "going to have another little brother before very long, and his name shall be Denis Fairchild" and Laura's secret is "I've been in Marmion afore ye. I've seen it all afore. It's all happened afore" (242). She will not tell Aunt Ellen about discovering and then losing her garnet pin, she will appease her uncle and withhold from him her plan to return to Jackson, all to give herself the future capacity to choose a life outside the order and one free of their grasp. As the clan gazes out upon the stars, Laura sees a shooting star, gesturing toward the world beyond.

Laura and Miranda, feeling in childhood the full weight of their family histories, will reject its pressures. The plantation domestic economy, though still operational, is experiencing shifts that will eventually render it obsolete. As the forces of modernity forge an upheaval in the system, the children witness the signs—the Yellow Dog as an encroaching harbinger of economic change; the wickedness of nearby cityscapes; the dissolution of marriages; the forging of once prohibited cross-class bonds; the loss of ancestral property; the influence of women who refuse the belle ideal. Though the adults in these narratives often cling to the old patterns and expect the children to preserve their

ways of life, these girls see past the facade. Through the stories repeated by their female elders, whom, on the surface, seem to support the order's machinations, the children apprehend fissures in the veneer and instead glean restrictions and suffering. Though the myth of white southern womanhood and the ideology of the southern belle persist in the culture as a romantic fantasy where women are protected and venerated, the girls perceive the bodily risks and limitations a life of motherhood and incessant childbearing promises. The African Americans who live and labor on the plantations often slip into the background for white adults, but for these children they offer a source of mystery and revelation with their own stories to uncover, tales that disclose violence perpetrated at the hands of white men. With futures delineated by the ideals of others, these girls have been inculcated into standards of behavior befitting a future belle, one who will carry on the traditions of those before her. But Miranda and Laura understand that mounting a performance of their own—enacting innocence, that quality so foundational to white southern girlhood—will open up the space to carve out a different trajectory. Welty's and Porter's projects, then, through the feminist contours of the everyday gothic, unveil a new nexus of power and prescience in the consciousness of the girl-child.

CHAPTER V

CODA

"WHO ARE YOU?": MODERNISM, CHILDHOOD, AND HISTORICAL CONSCIOUSNESS IN FAULKNER'S *THE WISHING TREE*

"Childhood... disappears as it materializes" (Bernstein*, Racial Innocence* 132)

*This work was published in: *Faulkner and History*. Eds. Jay Watson and James G. Thomas, Jr. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2017.

The intersection of American modernism and childhood studies proves a dynamic confluence, ripe with possibilities for attaining new understandings of childhood's centrality to the modernist enterprise. Faulkner's work, perhaps unsurprisingly, plays a vital role in this undertaking, and while researching for chapters on *The Sound and the Fury* and *Absalom, Absalom!*, I encountered in the scholarship, often in the footnotes or indexes, reference to a Faulkner text new to me: *The Wishing Tree*. My curiosity piqued. Faulkner wrote a children's book? With great determination and not a small amount of effort, I tracked this text down. That procuring this book—and even learning of its existence—took quite some digging and perseverance on my part, testifies to *The Wishing Tree*'s exclusion, its existence on the periphery of Faulkner's corpus. I recount this personal narrative by way of posing this coda's aim: to gesture towards an understanding of why this strange and intriguing text receives such scant scholarly attention and to make a case for its critical reevaluation. *The Wishing Tree* emerges as a compelling site for those interested in the relationship between modernism and children's

literature and modernism and childhood studies, and for those struck by Faulkner's investments in children and childhood, both fictional and real.

As Karin Westman helpfully articulates, the predominant conceptualization of children's literature in terms of genre (fables, fairy tales, picture books, etc.) renders it "particularly susceptible to losing its historical grounding" ("Children's Literature" 284). Westman identifies a problem with using genre as an "organizing principle" when intended audience is the primary measure of classification, as is the case with children's literature ("Beyond Periodization" 465). Genre, then, can potentially obstruct the generation and apprehension of meaning, which prompts the question: what is gained when we read children's literature into literary history? The case of modernism and children's literature is a particularly complicated one, as Kimberley Reynolds asserts: "The relationship between children's literature and modernism is convoluted and contradictory . . . given modernism's indebtedness to the idea of the child and early play of language, on the one hand, and, on the other, the (mis)perception that modernism's formal play and complex themes could not find a home in texts written for children."[91] Thus, modernism and children's literature persist in uneasy yet potentially fruitful confluence, perceived as at odds with one another due to modernist valorizations of opacity, though modernist experimentations in narrative and poetics remain indebted to explorations of language formation in childhood and to the child's presumed freshness of perspective. However, as Westman notes, for scholars working at the intersection of modernism and children's literature, the "new modernisms" model of periodization and

91. Quoted in Westman, "Beyond Periodization," 466–67.

expansion of canon parameters has bestowed upon children's literature a little more critical influence: "Here, children's literature benefits primarily from the 'vertical' expansion of modernism's defining boundaries: 'low' texts for children, produced for a mass audience on a range of themes, are resituated within or help reconfigure a modernist frame" ("Beyond Periodization" 467). By examining works written for children by modernist authors, scholars, particularly those invested in childhood as a field of inquiry, will have a more extensive and complex range for contextualization. Given that modernist experimentation flourished in a period that saw the blossoming of children's literature, I am interested in how childhood was perceived as a keen source for exploring different modes of consciousness and perception, and also in how modernist children's literature reveals how the child was conceived of in this historical moment. After all, claims literary scholar Karen Sánchez-Eppler, "Books written for children remain one of the best gauges we have for a particular society's views of childhood" (37).

Although, as I've previously discussed, a curious dearth persists in comprehensive studies on modernism and the child, Faulkner scholars often note the significance of the child in his body of work, homing in on his southern clans as they reckon with their troubled familial pasts and move, often falteringly, into uncertain futures. Noel Polk investigates the "emotional and psychic baggage" that Faulkner's dark houses create for his fictional "children to carry with them for the rest of their lives" (31). And of course *The Sound and the Fury*, emerging out of the short story "Twilight," begins "as the opening of a narrative space for the voices of children" (Morris 404). Childhood in Faulkner's texts is often figured as trauma, as powerlessness, rendered so in

labyrinthine narratives that explore the child's fragility, its vulnerability to forces beyond its control.[92] I'm thinking of Joe Christmas, of Vardaman, of Quentin and Caddy, and of Bon. Given Faulkner's established interest in the child as a source of artistic inspiration in his experimental modernist masterworks, what changes or becomes illuminated when he not only represents fictional children but also addresses children as a readership? *The Wishing Tree* offers us the opportunity to engage this question.

Previous scholarship on *The Wishing Tree* traces its complex and fascinating textual history,[93] identifies its potential merits and utility in the contemporary classroom,[94] and acknowledges its significance as a testing ground for thematic preoccupations that Faulkner later explores in his radically innovative modernist works.[95] *The Wishing Tree*'s textual history is itself an engrossing subject, the accuracy of which remains open to debate. Louis Brodsky's explication in *Studies in Bibliography* remains the most sustained and detailed explanation to date. Brodsky notes that the text was originally given to Estelle Franklin's daughter, Victoria, on the occasion of her eighth birthday, February 5, 1927, and then a different version of the text was gifted to a dear friend's terminally ill child, Margaret Brown, just six days later (330-31). Writing against most critical opinions concerning *The Wishing Tree*'s convoluted textual history, Brodsky

---

92. Faulkner scholars have noted his preoccupation with childhood experienced as trauma, as his fictional children labor under the weight of troubled familial, national, and racial pasts. In addition to Polk, see David Vanderwerken, *Faulkner's Literary Children* for a reading of Faulkner as a "poet of crippled childhood" (20).

93. See Louis Brodsky, "A Textual History of William Faulkner's "*The Wishing-tree*" and "*The Wishing Tree."*

94. See Nancy Hargrove, "Faulkner's *The Wishing Tree* as Children's Literature."

95. See John Ditsky, "William Faulkner's *The Wishing Tree*: Maturity's First Draft."

claims that the Brown version was constructed first and that the Victoria version serves as a refinement of the Brown text. To support his argument, he proposes that the Victoria version remains consistent with Faulkner's revision practices. Brodsky painstakingly notes the differences and discrepancies between the Victoria version and the Brown version, and details the salient revision techniques he argues Faulkner employed to improve the Victoria version—paring away of dialect, decreasing the number of "figurative and literary allusions," diminishing the roles of lesser characters, "reducing the quantity of dialogue and improving the quality of the dialect" of the black nurse, Alice, and her husband, Exodus (339-41). These alterations, for Brodsky, remain indicative of Faulkner's desire to improve upon the Brown version, yet Faulkner himself does nothing to clear up the confusion over which text came first. Victoria's copy bears the dedication that he wrote it specifically for her birthday, but when opposing Mrs. Brown's wish to publish Margaret's copy, Faulkner claims that he wrote it explicitly for her, "as a gesture of pity and compassion for a doomed child" (qtd. in Blotner, *Selected Letters* 421). Regardless, however, of which version came first—and this is likely to remain unresolved— each remains distinct.[96] *The Wishing Tree* remained unknown to the general public, as Brodsky explains, until its appearance in the April 8, 1967, issue of the *Saturday Evening Post*, which was then followed three days later by the Random House first trade printing as a novella. (Random House first published five hundred copies of a

---

96. The two versions possess distinct titles. The text presented to Margaret Brown is called *The Wishing-Tree*, and the Victoria version, with one exception, is referred to as *The Wishing Tree*. One of the most striking differences between the texts is that the young female protagonist has different names: in the Brown version, she is called Daphne; in the Victoria version she is referred to as Dulcie (Brodsky 338). In addition, The Brown version contains 11,100 words and the Victoria version consists of 9,858 words (Brodsky 339). As discussed earlier in-text, Brodsky attributes this variation in length to Faulkner's revision efforts to distill and refine his prose style.

numbered limited edition in 1964.) Brodsky contends that the Random House trade edition is a distinct version of the "Victoria" text, with which the anonymous editor takes too many editorial liberties (335-36). For the purposes of this essay, however, I have chosen to employ the Random House edition, as this still remains the version most accessible to the reading public.[97]

The Wishing Tree's plot has a dream-vision framework: in brief, a strange boy with golden eyes visits a young girl, Dulcie, on her birthday and leads her on a fantastic journey to find the mythical wishing tree. Initially consisting of her little brother, Dicky, her neighbor George, and Alice, Dulcie's traveling cohort expands to include an old man, Egbert, and Alice's long-lost husband, Exodus, who had never returned home from fighting in the Great War. Along the way the group is able to make individual wishes on the leaves of a mellomax tree, and though some of these wishes prove delightful, others harbor potentially dangerous consequences. Presumably composed quite soon before the inception of *The Sound and the Fury*, although it is impossible to ascertain an exact time frame for the text's incubation and revisionary process, *The Wishing Tree* shares some thematic preoccupations with Faulkner's revered modernist tour de force. John Ditsky claims that Faulkner rediscovers the fictional potential of his native soil in *The Wishing Tree* and that this text helps release the creative energies that precipitate the astounding innovation of *The Sound and the Fury* (59). Parallels between the two narratives include

---

97. William Faulkner, *The Wishing Tree* (New York: Random House, 1967). All further references to this edition will be cited parenthetically in the text by page number. Brodsky does make a compelling case for the potential problems with the Random House edition, claiming that it presents an adulterated text edited with a 1960s audience in mind, one acutely susceptible to the derogatory racial language common in the 1920s South (342). Regrettably, it is not within the scope of my essay to engage fully with the differences between the Brown and Victoria versions, though I can imagine an alternative project that thinks through how these changes reflect the author's awareness of the particular child subject for whom he was writing.

significant affinities between Dulcie and Caddy: both climb out of windows, both are brave, and both look after their younger brothers. Indeed, Dulcie may well function as what James Ferguson calls "a kind of first draft of Faulkner's 'heart's darling.'"[98] Though this text serves, to an extent, as a site that resonates with conceptualizations of childhood explored more explosively in *The Sound and the Fury*, *The Wishing Tree* reveals how, in writing for a child, Faulkner taps into his creative potential at a pivotal point in his career. As Reynolds suggests, "Writing for children releases visionary potential during periods of upheaval and uncertainty" (*Radical* 14). The estranging experience that results from writing for children and from a childish perspective, from thinking about childhood and the desires of the child reader, gives children's literature a transformative power that fosters the exploration of defamiliarizing perspectives and encourages radical experimentation in art.

Indeed, *The Wishing Tree*'s experiments with childish perspective make the text a worthy locus for investigating a burgeoning modernist's indebtedness to childhood as a source of artistic inspiration. *The Wishing Tree* functions as a textual hotbed of fantasy, dreams, innovation, and the imaginary that helps Faulkner develop his modernist craft, and he demonstrates an astute understanding of what will appeal to the child's imagination.[99] Faulkner employs the dream motif, a common one in children's literature,

---

98. James Ferguson, *Faulkner's Short Fiction*, 27. Ferguson, like Ditsky, notes the interesting relationship between *The Wishing Tree* and works dealing with the Compsons, particularly *The Sound and the Fury* and "That Evening Sun."

99. Faulkner's biographers have often noted his affection for children. Philip Weinstein, in *Becoming Faulkner* observes that Faulkner's "tenderness toward children was notable his entire life" (44), and references Faulkner's service as scoutmaster for a local Boy Scout troop. See also Dean Faulkner Wells, *The Ghosts of Rowan Oak* for a delightful recounting of the ghost tales that Faulkner shared with the children of Oxford.

which, according to Reynolds, "reflects the modernist concern with the inner world of the self and the operations of the psyche, at the same time gesturing towards such typical interests of literary modernism as the potential of narrative to convey the subjective and shifting experience of time passing" (*Radical* 25-6). In addition to employing the dream-vision framework, *The Wishing Tree* revolves around wish-fulfillment. The text, then, seemingly owes a debt of inspiration to Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*. Juliet Dusinberre explains that writers at the forefront of literary modernism were from the generation that grew up reading *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and that their concerns with "mastery over language, structure, vision, morals, characters and readers" are based in part upon that childhood reading.[100] Although Dusinberre does not explicitly reference *The Wishing Tree* in her book-length study of how children's literature prepares the way for modernism, Faulkner's text bolsters her argument. The central alignment between these two texts revolves around wish-fulfillment and questions of desire. Alice, like Dulcie, witnesses her wishes actualized and discovers their implications. This fulfillment sometimes proves disconcerting, dangerous even, which disrupts predominant assumptions about the simplicity, security, and pleasure of childhood. *The Wishing Tree*, a fecund site for developing the author's imaginative capabilities, demonstrates that childhood is not so facile or safe as it seems on the

---

100. Qtd. in Kimberley Reynolds, "Modernism" in *Keywords for Children's Literature*, 153. It is also fascinating to note here that Faulkner was given Thomas Dixon's *The Clansman: An Historical Romance of the Ku Klux Klan* (1905) by his first-grade teacher, Miss Annie Chandler. As Weinstein suggests, "to offer this book—as pedagogical encouragement—to one of her most promising students speaks volumes about racial norms in the early twentieth-century South" (*Becoming* 46), and perhaps, too, speaks to Faulkner's awareness of the southern child's historical burden.

surface. There are hints of a darkness to come, a heaviness that will shroud most of Faulkner's work that engages childhood.

Indeed, there persists a weight, "an air of fatality," as Ditsky puts it, about this text that incites the reader to wonder: is this children's literature? (60) Philip Weinstein, in evaluating Faulkner's interest in narrating childhood as the genesis of *The Sound and the Fury*, writes in his biography *Becoming Faulkner* that "childhood wrought upon [Faulkner] feelings of incapacity, of being among others who were big" and that "to narrate [the] experience of childhood would require an unconventional sense of how things occurred," an awareness that "what namelessly assaults the child, in the moment of now, has its nameable roots in what occurred earlier, before the child was born" (48). Though the Compson children succumb in precisely this way to the weight of historical and familial forces beyond their control, and though Faulkner brilliantly reveals their awareness of their disempowered status, in *The Wishing Tree*, he seemingly creates a narrative space where children retain a sense of power, where wishes are fulfilled in equal fashion for children and for adults. Yet though Faulkner develops a narrative space in which imaginative fantasy allows for a temporary invalidation of adult power over children, he tempers this fantasy with history's heft, exerting the pressure of adult choices that impact children's lives, forces beyond the child's control. Like the Compson children to come, the children of *The Wishing Tree* must confront the consequences of adult mistakes. Even in a text written for a child audience, Faulkner does not depart from the dense historical awareness that saturates his literary output. Despite *The Wishing Tree*'s powerful sense of fantasy, replete with imaginary creatures like the gillypus and human

bodies shrinking and growing depending on what they wish for—a clear nod to *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*—Faulkner punctuates the narrative's imaginative dream structure with key invocations of the historical crises of the Civil War and World War I, events that retain poignant psychic resonance for his characters.

The text's specific references to the Great War and the Civil War offer a point of connection between two male characters who exist on the social margins of 1920s southern society. In a profound exchange, Egbert, the old man whom Alice repeatedly deems white trash, and Alice's newly returned husband, Exodus, reflect on their shared war experiences. As the two men compare war stories, they concur that "they're all about alike" (46) but acknowledge that they must have fought in different wars. Egbert claims, "They came right down in my pappy's pasture and fought the war I went to. . . . And there was another war I went to. It was at a place named Seven Pines" (47). Exodus fights his war "across the big up and down water. . . . I don't know how in the world folks ever dammed up a pond that big. Nor what they can do with it. That water 'ud hol' all the excursion boats in the rentire world" (46–47). When Dulcie asks Egbert, "Who won the war you were in?" (47), he replies, "I don't know, ma'am. . . . I didn't" (48), whereupon Exodus rejoins, "That's right, too. . . . I never seed a soldier yet that ever won anything in a war." Ultimately, Egbert and Exodus conclude that all wars are the same and commiserate over a mutual sense of powerlessness that becomes resonant in light of the fact that *The Wishing Tree*'s entire cast of adult characters retains only marginal social power based on their race and class positions. Alice, Egbert, and Exodus, like the children, Dulcie, Dicky, and George, find common ground in their experience of

powerlessness. In this way, they are all positioned to level a critique at those in power who have controlled history's course and made violent and often selfish choices that impact the future. Despite this war critique, though, Exodus and Egbert engage in exaggerated reminiscences about their heroic exploits. Egbert exclaims, "I bet I wouldn't be scared of a hundred enemies. . . . I bet I'd just ride right into 'em and slice 'em in two with a sword like this" (52). Egbert's verbal bravado, however, possesses dangerous consequences, as his posturing inspires Dicky, the youngest of the crew, to wish for a weapon of his own, which he then employs to slice Egbert's gillypus in two. Dicky's violent actions cause him to shrink down to a size "no bigger than a lead soldier" (59), and his traveling companions shrink as well in a gesture of solidarity and to offer him protection. Egbert's temporary glorification of masculinist fantasies thus endangers the entire group by influencing a child not yet old enough to understand the implications of his actions.

By infusing his text with war criticism, Faulkner perhaps meant his child readers to see through the heroic illusion of war, offering them a place of presumed simplicity from which to critique adult relations and impart a lesson about abuses of power. If so, *The Wishing Tree* confounds assumptions about good children's literature as ahistorical; the text instead demands attention to its historicity, to its intense involvement in the moment of its cultural production. Why this blend of fantasy and historical reality? Why this invocation of war and violence in a book written for a child? Faulkner's text works to imbue the child reader with a sense of historical consciousness, to acknowledge the

child's vulnerability to historical machinations precipitated by adults but also to recognize that the child bears the promise and the weight of a more hopeful future.

Faulkner remains acutely attuned to how the child exists implicated in a complex web of historical forces. In *The Wishing Tree*, he refuses to generate children's literature that serves as an escape from the pressures of modernity, instead immersing the child subject in history's import. This text, crafted for specific southern child subjects, engages the region's historical burden, its psychic inheritance, through references to war. Not even the child—or perhaps, especially not the child—can elude the infringements of this burden, its intrusions upon the present. Faulkner seems particularly mindful of the child's susceptibility to forces beyond its control, yet he simultaneously accords children awareness of how the past continues to reverberate. Interestingly, Faulkner imparts this sense of historical consciousness to the child to demonstrate that the child is not a pure, clean slate, symbolic of unhindered futurity, but rather a subject impacted by the choices of those who came before it. In this way, Faulkner participates in shattering the myth of childhood innocence, a myth being addressed across multiple registers in the early twentieth century. He recognizes all too keenly the child's social and symbolic burden—the ascription of innocence—and its fraught position suspended between past, present, future.

Though Faulkner demonstrates an unusual sensitivity to the child's position as harbinger of utopian futurity, this awareness doesn't alter the fact that his text possesses a future orientation, one with personal implications. Faulkner clearly links a sense of historical consciousness to the transmission of values; in short, the text is meant to

instruct. *The Wishing Tree* is not simply a wish-fulfillment fantasy in which characters realize their desires; rather, Faulkner constructs a fable wherein the consequences of the characters' wishes shape a path for future behavior in readers. This distinction becomes crucial when considering the ultimate message this slim book imparts: "People who care for and protect helpless things cannot have selfish wishes" (77). The question Dulcie poses to the golden-eyed Maurice at the outset of the tale—"Who are you?" (6)—is one that the author seems to be simultaneously posing to the child reader. Despite gesturing toward the inescapable unevenness in power dynamics between children and adults, Faulkner's fable encourages the child reader to fashion herself into the person she wishes to be by learning from adult corruption.

Significantly, this message is directed toward a specific child, one whom the author hopes to include in his family, to make his stepdaughter, to become implicated in his own future. *The Wishing Tree* thus emerges as a fascinating site of desire—one rich not only with national and regional implications but with ramifications familial and personal. The text reveals further multiplicities, depths, and resonances when it's imagined as addressed to two audiences: the child herself, Victoria, and Estelle, whom Faulkner was again courting at the time of the text's composition.[101] Seen in this dual light, the text takes on another layer of complexity, as it may have been meant to aid in securing a desired future for the author.[102] *The Wishing Tree*, then, produces a powerful example of cross-writing, a crucial concept in childhood studies theorized by U. C.

---

101. I would like to thank Jay Watson for bringing this point of interest to my attention at the "Faulkner and History" conference.

102. See Judith Sensibar's *Faulkner and Love* for an expansive and illuminating biographical portrait of Estelle Faulkner.

Knoepflmacher and Mitzi Myers as "any text that activates a traffic between phases of life we persist in regarding as opposites" (viii). Cross-written texts contain "a dialogic mix of older and younger voices" and often address both children and adults (vii). Addressing both audiences, *The Wishing Tree* additionally offers a polyphony of adult and child voices. What message, then, might the fable impart to Estelle, if she persists as the shadow audience, the covert adult behind the text? Posing this question, though, only raises the related issue of Faulkner's motive in writing for a child: if power dynamics are always at the crux of relations between children and adults, is this text a seduction of sorts, captivating both the child and her mother?

As *The Wishing Tree* draws to a close, Dulcie awakens safe in her bed to her mother's caress, full of anticipation for her birthday spoils and the promise of another year. The mother in the text appears shadowy and ethereal, carefully waking her child: "Dulcie's mother was beautiful, so slim and tall, with her grave unhappy eyes changeable as seawater and her slender hands that came so softly about you when you were sick" (81). This representation aligns with Estelle's physical appearance and mannerisms; Dulcie's mother, clearly preoccupied with worrisome thoughts, evokes the personal circumstances that attended Estelle's upcoming divorce from Cornell Franklin. Notable, too, is that the text makes no reference to a father. Despite her "grave unhappy eyes," however, Dulcie's mother offers a nurturing and comforting presence. Through its reference to maternal hands "that came so softly about you when you were sick," the fable reflects Victoria's experience of being sick on her birthday (Sensibar 460). If Estelle was meant to see herself in Dulcie's mother, she would find a favorable comparison.

Through feeling her mother's presence, the child departs the dreamworld and reenters reality securely ensconced in her bed. *The Wishing Tree*, like many other narratives written for children, thus follows the pattern of home, and indeed (bed)room, as point of origin and return. Ultimately, home is portrayed as a safe space, a place of comfort and respite, a place the author himself seeks to occupy.

Reconsidering *The Wishing Tree*'s unique contributions to both modernist writing and children's literature ultimately allows for a more capacious understanding of the potentially generative space between them. By reshaping how we think about Faulkner's investments in children and childhood, the text—his only tale written explicitly for a child audience—becomes crucial not just for Faulkner scholars but for scholars of childhood studies, too. What can we learn from neglected children's books by modernist authors? What can we surmise about childhood in the early twentieth century? Or childhood in the South at that historical moment? One of our greatest American writers shed important light on these questions in a text that breaks down universalist attitudes toward childhood by engaging a specific biological and historical child—not an imagined one—as its audience, a child with whom the author retains personal ties. What sets *The Wishing Tree* apart is not only that it critiques adult power dynamics (through its references to war) but also that it proposes to the child reader that children are not simply powerless and prey to an adult world. Rather, they are active agents and participants in culture-making—a position not often gleaned from the works that Faulkner directed toward an adult audience. *The Wishing Tree* deserves our critical attention for its

remarkable potential to foster cross-disciplinary dialogue between modernist studies, childhood and children's literature studies, and Faulkner studies alike.

REFERENCES CITED

Baldanzi, Jessica Hays. "Stillborns, Orphans, and Self-Proclaimed Virgins: Packaging and Policing the Rural Women of *Cane*." *Genders Online Journal* 42 (August 2005). Web. 3 Jan. 2014.

Bank, Tenley. "Dark-Purple Faces and Pitiful Whiteness: Maternity and Coming Through in *Delta Wedding*." *Mississippi Quarterly* Supplement (2009): 59-79. Project Muse. Web. 16 Feb. 2016.

Barnes, Djuna. *Nightwood*. 1936. New York: New Directions, 1961. Print.
---. *Nightwood: The Original Version and Related Drafts.* 1936. Ed. Cheryl Plumb. Normal, Illinois: Dalkey Archive Press, 2007. Print.

Bernstein, Robin. *Racial Innocence: Performing American Childhood from Slavery to Civil Rights*. New York: NYU Press, 2011. Print.

Berzon, Judith. *Neither White Nor Black: The Mulatto Character in American Fiction*. New York: NYU Press, 1978. Print.

Blanco, Maria. *Ghost-watching American Modernity: Haunting, Landscape, and the Hemispheric Imagination*. New York: Fordham University Press, 2012. Print.

Blotner, Joseph. *Faulkner: A Biography*. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2005. Print.
---. and Frederick Landis Gwynn, eds. *Faulkner in the University*. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1995. Print.
---. *Selected Letters of William Faulkner.* New York: Random House, 1977. Print.

Braithwaite, William Stanley. "The Negro in American Literature." In *The New Negro: Voices of the Harlem Renaissance*. Ed. Alain Locke. 1925. New York: Touchstone, 1997. 29-44. Print.

Brinkmeyer, Robert. *Katherine Anne Porter's Artistic Development: Primitivism, Traditionalism, and Totalitarianism*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1993. Print.
---. *The Fourth Ghost: White Southern Writers and European Fascism, 1930-1950*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2009. Print.

Brodsky, Louis. "A Textual History of William Faulkner's "*The Wishing-tree*" and "*The Wishing Tree.*" *Studies in Bibliography* 38 (1985): 330–374. JSTOR. Web. 3 Apr. 2013.

Brooks, Cleanth. "*Absalom, Absalom:* The Definition of Innocence." *Sewanee Review* 59 (Autumn 1951): 543-558. JSTOR. Web. 3 Mar. 2014.

---. "Man, Time, and Eternity." In William Faulkner. *The Sound and the Fury: An Authoritative Text, Backgrounds and Contexts, Criticism*. Ed. David Minter. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1994. 289-296. Print.

Brown, Charles Brockden. *Edgar Huntly; or, Memoirs of a Sleepwalker*. 1799. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Co., 2006. Print.

---. *Wieland; or, The Transformation of an American Tale*. 1798. New York: Dover, 2010. Print.

Butler, Judith. *The Psychic Life of Power: Theories in Subjection.* Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997. Print.

Byrd, Rudolph P. and Henry Louis Gates, Jr. Afterword. *Cane*. By Jean Toomer. New York: Liveright, 2011. 161-245. Print.

Byron, Glennis, and David Punter. *Spectral Readings: Towards a Gothic Geography*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999. Print.

Callen, Shirley. "Planter and Poor White in *Absalom, Absalom*!: Wash and the Mind of the South." *South Central Bulletin* 23 (1963): 24-33. JSTOR. Web. 7 Jul. 2014.

Carby, Hazel. *Reconstructing Womanhood: The Emergence of the Afro-American Woman Novelist.* New York: Oxford University Press, 1987. Print.

Carlin, John. "From Wonder to Blunder: Child as Mother to the Man." *Discovering Child Art*: *Essays on Childhood, Primitivism*, *and Modernism.* Ed. Jonathan Fineberg. New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1998. 242-262. Print.

Carlston, Erin. *Thinking Fascism: Sapphic Modernism and Fascist Modernity*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998. Print.

Cartwright, Keith. *Reading Africa into American Literature: Epics, Fables, and Gothic Tales*. Lexington, Kentucky: University Press of Kentucky, 2002. Print.

Caselli, Daniela. *Improper Modernism: Djuna Barnes's Bewildering Corpus*. Surrey, England: Ashgate, 2009. Print.

Chamberlain, Alexander. *The Child: A Study in the Evolution of Man*. New York: Scribner's, 1900. Print.

Cheng, Anne. *The Melancholy of Race: Psychoanalysis, Assimilation, and Hidden Grief*. Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 2001. Print.

Clinton, Catherine. *The Plantation Mistress: Woman's World in the Old South*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1982. Print.

Copeland, David. "The Innocent Children of Nightwood and Hayford Hall." *Hayford Hall: Hangovers, Erotics, and Modernist Aesthetics*. Eds. Elizabeth Podnicks and Sandra Chait. Carbondale: Southern Illinois Press, 2005. 116-132. Print.

Costello, Brannon. *Plantation Airs: Racial Paternalism and the Transformations of Class in Southern Fiction, 1945-1971*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2007. Print.

Crow, Charles. *American Gothic*. Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2009. Print.

Crowell, Ellen. "The Picture of Charles Bon: Oscar Wilde's Trip through Faulkner's Yoknapatawpha." *Modern Fiction Studies* 50.3 (Fall 2004): 595-631. Project Muse. Web. 7 Jun. 2015.

Davis, Thadious. "The Yoking of Abstract Conditions: Clytie's Meaning in *Absalom, Absalom!*" *Studies in American Fiction* 7.2 (Autumn 1979): 209-219. Project Muse. Web. 15 Aug. 2015.

de Crevecouer, Hector St. Jean. *Letters from an American Farmer*. 1782. New York: Fox, Duffield, and Co., 1904. Print.

de Lauretis, Teresa. "Queer Texts, Bad Habits, and the Issue of a Future." *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 17.2-3 (2011): 243-263. Web. 2 Feb. 2012.

Devlin, Albert. *Eudora Welty's Chronicle: A Story of Mississippi Life*. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1983. Print.

Ditsky, John. "William Faulkner's *The Wishing Tree*: Maturity's First Draft." *The Lion and the Unicorn* 2.1 (1978): 56–64. Project Muse. Web. 3 Apr. 2013.

Dixon, Thomas. *The Clansman: A Historical Romance of the Ku Klux Klan*. New York: Grosset and Dunlap, 1905. Print.

Doyle, Laura. *Bordering on the Body: The Racial Matrix of Modern Fiction and Culture*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1994. Print.

Duane, Anna Mae, ed. *The Children's Table: Childhood Studies and the Humanities*. Athens, Ga.: University of Georgia Press, 2013. Print.

Du Bois, W.E.B. *Darkwater: Voices from Within the Veil*. 1920. Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 2007. Print.
---. *The Brownies' Book.* 1920-21. Print.
---. *The Crisis.* Oct. 1912. Print.
---. *The Souls of Black Folk*. 1903. New York: Literary Classics, 2009. Print.

duCille, Ann. *The Coupling Convention: Sex, Text, and Tradition in Black Women's Fiction*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1993. Print.

Duck, Leigh Anne. *The Nation's Region: Southern Modernism, Segregation, and U.S. Nationalism*. Athens, Ga.: University of Georgia Press, 2009. Print.

Dusinberre, Juliet. *Alice to the Lighthouse: Children's Books and Radical Experiments in Art*. London: Macmillan Press, 1987. Print.

Duvall, John. *Race and White Identity in Southern Fiction: From Faulkner to Morrison*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008. Print.

Egan, R. Danielle, and Gail L. Hawkes. "Developing the Sexual Child." *Journal of Historical Sociology* 21.4 (December 2008): 443–465. Wiley Online Library. Web. 2 Feb. 2013.
---. "Perilous and Imperiled: Exploring the History of Childhood Sexuality." *Journal of Historical Sociology* 21.4 (December 2008): 355–367. Wiley Online Library. Web. 2 Feb. 2013.
---. "Producing the Prurient through the Pedagogy of Purity: Childhood Sexuality and the Social Purity Movement." *Journal of Historical Sociology* 20.4 (December 2007): 443–461. Wiley Online Library. Web. 2 Feb. 2013.

English, Daylanne K. *Unnatural Selections: Eugenics in American Modernism and the Harlem Renaissance*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004. Print.

Entzminger, Betina. "Playing in the Dark with Welty: The Symbolic Role of African Americans in *Delta Wedding*." *College Literature* 30.3 (Summer 2003): 52-67. Project Muse. Web. 18 July 2016.
---. *The Belle Gone Bad: White Southern Women Writers and The Dark Seductress*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2002. Print.

Everett, Susanne. *History of Slavery: An Illustrated History of the Monstrous Evil*. Edison, NJ: Chartwell Books, 1996. Print.

Faltjeskova, Monica. *Djuna Barnes, T.S. Eliot and the Gender Dynamics of Modernism: Tracing Nightwood*. New York: Routledge, 2010. Print.

Faulkner, William. *Absalom, Absalom!: The Corrected Text*. 1936. New York: Vintage International, 1990. Print.

---. Appendix. *The Sound the the Fury: An Authoritative Text, Backgrounds and Contexts, Criticism***.** By Faulkner. Ed. David Minter. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1994. 203-215. Print.

---. Introduction. *The Sound and the Fury: An Authoritative Text, Backgrounds and Contexts, Criticism*. By Faulkner. Ed. David Minter. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1994. 225-228. Print.

---. *Light in August: The Corrected Text*. 1932. New York: Modern Library, 2002. Print.

---. *The Sound and the Fury: An Authoritative Text, Backgrounds and Contexts, Criticism*. 1929. Ed. David Minter. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1994. Print.

---. *The Wishing Tree*. New York: Random House, 1967. Print.

Felski, Rita. "Introduction." *New Literary History* 33.4 (Autumn 2002): 607-622. Project Muse. Web. 20 Jun. 2016.

Ferguson, James. *Faulkner's Short Fiction*. Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1991. Print.

Fineberg, Jonathan. *Discovering Child Art*: *Essays on Childhood, Primitivism*, *and Modernism.* New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1998. Print.

Foley, Barbara. *Jean Toomer: Race, Repression, and Revolution*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2014. Print.

---. "Jean Toomer's Washington and the Politics of Class: from Blue Veins to Seventh-street Rebels." *Modern Fiction Studies* 42.2 (1996): 289-321. Project Muse. Web. 17 Sep. 2014.

Ford, Karen. *Split-Gut Song: Jean Toomer and the Poetics of Modernity*. Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 2005. Print.

Freccero, Carla. "Queer Spectrality." *Queer/Early/Modern.* Durham: Duke University Press, 2006. 69-105. Print.

Freud, Sigmund, James Strachey, Anna Freud, and Angela Richards. *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*. London: Hogarth Press, 1966. Print.

Fujie, Kristin. "All Mixed Up: Female Sexuality and Race in *The Sound and the Fur*y." *Faulkner's Sexualities*. Eds. Annette Trefzer and Ann J. Abadie. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2010. 115-130. Print.

Fuller, Stephen. *Eudora Welty and Surrealism*. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2013. Print.

Gavin, Adrienne, ed. *The Child in British Literature*: *Literary Constructions of Childhood, Medieval to Contemporary.* New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012. Print.

Givner, Joan. *Katherine Anne Porter: A Life*. Athens, Ga.: University of Georgia Press, 1991. Print.

Goddu, Teresa. *Gothic America: Narrative, History, and Nation*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1997. Print.

Goodwyn Jones, Anne. *Tomorrow is Another Day: The Woman Writer in the South, 1859-1936*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1981. Print.

Gordon, Avery. *Haunting and the Sociological Imagination*. 1997. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008. Print.

Gretlund, Jan Nordby. *Eudora Welty's Aesthetics of Place*. Denmark: Odense University Press, 1994. Print.

Haggerty, George. *Queer Gothic*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2006. Print.

Hall, G. Stanley. *Adolescence, its Psychology and its Relations to Physiology, Anthropology, Sociology, Sex, Crime, Religion and Education*. 2 vols. New York: D. Appleton and Co., 1904. Print.

---. "The Contents of Children's Minds". 1883. repr. in Wayne Dennis, ed. *Historical Readings in Developmental Psychology*. New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1972. 119-137. Print.

Hanson, Ellis. "Knowing Children: Desire and Interpretation in *The Exorcist*." In Bruhm and Hurley. *Curioser: On the Queerness of Children*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004. 107-136. Print.

Haralson, Eric. *Henry James and Queer Modernity*. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 2003. Print.

Hargrove, Nancy. "Faulkner's *The Wishing Tree* as Children's Literature." *Children's Literature Association Quarterly* (1991): 132–140. Project Muse. Web. 14 Apr. 2013.

Hawkins, Stephanie. "Building the 'Blue Race': Miscegenation, Mysticism, and the Language of Cognitive Evolution in Jean Toomer's "The Blue Meridian." *Texas Studies in Language and Literature* 46.2 (Summer 2004): 149-180. Project Muse. Web. 3 May 2015.

Hawthorne, Nathaniel. *A Wonder Book; And, Tanglewood Tales*. New York: E.P. Dutton & Co., 1906. Print.

---. *The Marble Faun: Or, The Romance of Monte Beni*. 1860. Ed. Susan Manning. Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 2002. Print.

---. *The Scarlet Letter: An Authoritative Text, Essays in Criticism and Scholarship.* Ed. Seymour Lee Gross. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1988. Print.

---. *The Snow-Image and Other Twice-Told Tales*. Boston: Ticknor, Reed, and Fields, 1851. Print.

Herring, Scott. *Another Country: Queer Anti-Urbanism.* New York: NYU Press, 2010. Print.

Higonnet, Margaret. "Modernism and Childhood: Violence and Renovation." *The Comparatist* 33 (2009): 86-108. Project Muse. Web. 18 Mar. 2014.

Holland, Sharon. *The Erotic Life of Racism*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2012. Print.

Honeyman, Susan. *Elusive Childhood: Impossible Representations in Modern Fiction*. Columbus, Ohio: The Ohio State University Press, 2005. Print.

Hughes, Langston. *The Collected Poems of Langston Hughes*. Eds. Arnold Rampersad and David Roessel. New York: Vintage Classics, 1995. Print.

---. *The Ways of White Folks*. New York: Vintage Classics, 1990. Print.

Hughes, William, David Punter, and Andrew Smith, eds. *Encyclopedia of the Gothic*. West Sussex, England: John Wiley and Sons, 2015. Print.

Hurley, Jessica. "Ghostwritten: Kinship and History in *Absalom, Absalom!*." *The Faulkner Journal* 26.2 (Fall 2012): 61-79. Academic Search Premier. Web. 3 Apr. 2015.

Hurston, Zora Neale. *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. 1937. New York: Harper Collins, 2000. Print.

James, Henry. *The Turn of the Screw: Authoritative Text, Contexts, Criticism*. 1898. New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1998. Print.
---. *Hawthorne.* 1879. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1979. Print.

Jameson, Frederic. "Marx's Purloined Letter." *New Left Review* I/209 (January-February 1995): 75-109. Web. 7 July 2015.

Kaup, Monica. *Neobaroque in the Americas: Alternative Modernities in Literature, Visual Art, and Film*. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2012. Print.

Kerr, Elizabeth M. *William Faulkner's Gothic Domain*. Port Washington, N.Y: Kennikat Press, 1979. Print.

Key, Ellen. *The Century of the Child*. New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1909. Print.

Kincaid, James. *Erotic Innocence: The Culture of Child Molesting*. Durham: Duke University Press, 1998. Print.

Kinchin, Juliet and Aidan O'Connor. *Century of the Child: Growing by Design: 1900-2000*. New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2012. Print.

King, Richard. *A Southern Renaissance*: *The Cultural Awakening of the American South, 1930-1955*. Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 1980. Print.

King, Wilma. *African American Childhoods: Historical Perspectives from Slavery to Civil Rights*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005. Print.

Kinney, Arthur. *Go Down Moses: The Miscegenation of Time.* Twayne Publishers, 1996. Print.

Knoepflmacher, U.C. and Mitzi Myers. "From the Editors: 'Cross-Writing' and the Reconceptualizing of Children's Literary Studies." *Children's Literature* 25 (1997): vii-xvii. Project Muse. Web. 5 May 2013.

Kreyling, Michael. *Author and Agent: Eudora Welty and Diarmuid Russell*. New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1991. Print.
---. *Understanding Eudora Welty*. Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1999. Print.

Kuyk, Dirk. *Sutpen's Design: Interpreting Faulkner's Absalom, Absalom!.* Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1990. Print.

Ladd, Barbara. "Dismantling the Monolith: Southern Places–-Past, Present, and Future." In Suzanne W. Jones and Sharon Monteith, eds. *South to a New Place: Region, Literature, Culture.* Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2002. Print.

---. *Resisting History: Gender, Modernity, and Authorship in William Faulkner, Zora Neale Hurston, and Eudora Welty.* Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2007. Print.

Lears, T.J. *No Place of Grace: Antimodernism and the Transformation of American Culture, 1880-1920*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1981. Print.

Leiter, Andrew. *In the Shadow of the Black Beast: African American Masculinity in the Harlem and Southern Renaissances*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2010. Print.

Levander, Caroline. *Cradle of Liberty: Race, The Child and National Belonging from Thomas Jefferson to W.E.B. Du Bois*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2006. Print.

Levander, Caroline F, and Carol J. Singley, eds. *The American Child: A Cultural Studies Reader*. New Brunswick, N.J: Rutgers University Press, 2003. Print.

Love, Heather. *Feeling Backward: Loss and the Politics of Queer History.* Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2007. Print.

Macleod, David. *The Age of the Child: Children in America, 1890-1920*. New York: Twayne Publishers, 1998. Print.

Mark, Rebecca. *Ersatz History: Hidden Traces, Graphic Texts, and the Mending of Democracy.* Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2014. Print.

Marrs, Suzanne. *One Writer's Imagination: The Fiction of Eudora Welty*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2002. Print.

Martin, Robert K., and Eric Savoy. *American Gothic: New Interventions in a National Narrative*. Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1998. Print.

Matthews, John T. "The Discovery of Loss in *The Sound and the Fury*." In William Faulkner. *The Sound and the Fury: An Authoritative Text, Backgrounds and Contexts, Criticism*. Ed. David Minter. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1994. 370-392. Print.

McCall, Dan. *Citizens of Somewhere Else: Nathaniel Hawthorne and Henry James*. Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1999. Print.

McMahand, Donnie. "Bodies on the Brink: Vision, Violence, and Self-Destruction in *Delta Wedding*." In *Eudora Welty, Whiteness, and Race*. Ed. Harriet Pollack. Athens, Ga.: University of Georgia Press, 2013. Print.

McPherson, Tara. *Reconstructing Dixie: Race, Gender, and Nostalgia in the Imagined South*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2003. Print.

Michlin, Monica. "'Karintha': A Textual Analysis." In *Jean Toomer and the Harlem Renaissance.* Eds. Genevieve Fabre and Michel Feith. New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2001. 96-108. Print.

Millgate, Michael. "*The Sound and the Fury*: [Story and Novel]." In William Faulkner. *The Sound and the Fury: An Authoritative Text, Backgrounds and Contexts, Criticism*. Ed. David Minter. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1994. 297-309. Print.

Minter, David. "Faulkner, Childhood, and the Making of The Sound and the Fury." In William Faulkner. *The Sound and the Fury: An Authoritative Text, Backgrounds and Contexts, Criticism*. Ed. David Minter. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1994. 343-357. Print.

Mintz, Steven. *Huck's Raft: A History of American Childhood*. Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2004. Print.

Morris, Wesley and Barbara Alverson Morris. "A Writing Lesson: The Recovery of Antigone." In William Faulkner. *The Sound and the Fury: An Authoritative Text, Backgrounds and Contexts, Criticism*. Ed. David Minter. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1994. 397-404. Print.

Norman, Brian. *Dead Women Talking: Figures of Injustice in American Literature*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2013. Print.

Ohi, Kevin. *Innocence and Rapture: The Erotic Child in Pater, Wilde, James, and Nabokov*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005. Print.

Olson, Liesl. *Modernism and the Ordinary*. Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 2009. Print.

Patterson, Orlando. *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1985. Print.

Paulin, Diana Rebekkah. *Imperfect Unions: Staging Miscegenation in U.S. Drama and Fiction*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012. Print.

Phillips, Michelle H. *Representations of Childhood in American Modernism*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016. Print.

---. "The Children of Double Consciousness: From *The Souls of Black Folk* to *The Brownies' Book*." *PMLA* 128.3 (May 2013): 590-607. Project Muse. Web. 2 Jan. 2015.

Pifer, Ellen. *Demon or Doll: Images of the Child in Contemporary Writing and Culture*. Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 2000. Print.

Platt, Len. *Aristocracies of Fiction: The Idea of Aristocracy in Late-Nineteenth-Century and Early-Twentieth-Century Culture*. Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 2001. Print.

Plotz, Judith. *Romanticism and the Vocation of Childhood*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2001. Print.

Polk, Noel. *Children of the Dark House: Text and Context in Faulkner.* Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1996. Print.

Porter, Katherine Anne. *Collected Stories and Other Writings*. New York: Modern Library, 2008. Print.

---. *Katherine Anne Porter's Poetry*. Ed. Darlene Harbour Unrue. Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1996. Print.

---. *Uncollected Early Prose of Katherine Anne Porter*. Eds. Ruth M. Alvarez and Thomas F. Walsh. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1993. Print.

Punter, David. *A New Companion to the Gothic*. Hoboken: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012. Print.

Railey, Kevin. *Natural Aristocracy: History, Ideology, and the Production of William Faulkner*. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1999. Print.

Ramsey, William. "Jean Toomer's Eternal South." *The Southern Literary Journal* 36.1 (Fall 2003): 74-89. Project Muse. Web. 14 Sep. 2015.

Randall, Bryony. *Modernism, Daily Time and Everyday Life*. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 2007. Print.

Reid, Margaret. *Cultural Secrets As Narrative Form: Storytelling in Nineteenth-Century America*. Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2004. Print.

Reynolds, Kimberley. "Modernism." In *Keywords for Children's Literature*. Eds. Philip Nel and Lissa Paul. New York: NYU Press, 2011. 151-154. Print.
---. *Radical Children's Literature: Future Visions and Aesthetic Transformations in Juvenile Fiction.* New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007. Print.

Ringe, Donald. *American Gothic: Imagination and Reason in Nineteenth-Century Fiction*. Lexington, Ky: University Press of Kentucky, 1982. Print.

Ritterhouse, Jennifer. *Growing up Jim Crow: How Black and White Southern Children Learned Race*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2006. Print.

Roberts, Giselle. *The Confederate Belle*. Columbia: The University of Missouri Press, 2003. Print.

Rodden, John. "'The Faithful Gravedigger': The Role of 'Innocent' Wash Jones and the Invisible 'White Trash' in Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom!*" *The Southern Literary Journal* 43.1 (Fall 2010): 23-38. Project Muse. Web. 13 Apr. 2014.

Roediger, David. *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and The Making of the American Working Class*. London: Verso, 1991. Print.

Rowland, Ann Wierda. *Romanticism and Childhood: The Infantilization of British Literary Culture*. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 2012. Print.

Russ, Elizabeth. *The Plantation in the Postslavery Imagination*. Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 2009. Print.

Sánchez-Eppler, Karen. "Childhood." In *Keywords for Children's Literature*. Eds. Philip Nel and Lissa Paul. New York: New York University Press, 2011. 35-42. Print.
---. *Dependent States*: *The Child's Part in Nineteenth-Century American Culture*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2005. Print.

Savoy, Eric. Introduction. *American Gothic: New Interventions in a National Narrative*. Eds. Robert K. Martin and Eric Savoy. Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1998. Print.

Schober, Adrian. *Possessed Child Narratives in Literature and Film: Contrary States*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004. Print.

Scruggs, Charles, and Lee VanDemarr. *Jean Toomer and the Terrors of American History*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1998. Print.

Seidel, Kathryn. *The Southern Belle in the American Novel*. Tampa: The University of South Florida Press, 1985. Print.

Seitler, Dana. *Atavistic Tendencies: The Culture of Science in American Modernity*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008. Print.

Sensibar, Judith. *Faulkner and Love: The Women Who Shaped His Art*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009. Print.

Shine, Muriel. *The Fictional Children of Henry James*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1969. Print.

Shuttleworth, Sally. *The Mind of the Child: Child Development in Literature, Science, and Medicine, 1840-1900*. Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 2010. Print.

Singal, Daniel J. *William Faulkner: The Making of a Modernist*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997. Print.

Smith, Andrew, and Jeff Wallace, eds. *Gothic Modernisms*. New York: Palgrave, 2001. Print.

Smith, Kate Capshaw. *Children's Literature of the Harlem Renaissance*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004. Print.

Smith, Victoria. "A Story beside(s) Itself: The Language of Loss in Djuna Barnes' *Nightwood*." *PMLA* 114. 2 (March 1999): 194-206. JSTOR. Web. 2 Jan. 2013.

Spillers, Hortense. "Notes on an Alternative Model—Neither Nor." *Black, White, and in Color: Essays on American Literature and Culture*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003. 301-318. Print.

Sollors, Werner. *Neither Black nor White yet Both: Thematic Explorations of Interracial Literature*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1997. Print.

Steedman, Carolyn. *Strange Dislocations: Childhood and the Idea of Human Interiority, 1780-1930*. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1995. Print.

Taylor, Julie. *Djuna Barnes and Affective Modernism.* Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012. Print.

Thornton, Naoko F. *Strange Felicity: Eudora Welty's Subtexts on Fiction and Society*. Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 2003. Print.

Titus, Mary. *The Ambivalent Art of Katherine Anne Porter*. Athens, Ga.: University of Georgia Press, 2005. Print.

Toomer, Jean. *Cane*. 1923. New York: Liveright, 2011. Print.
---. *Natalie Mann*. In *The Wayward and the Seeking: A Collection of Writings by Jean Toomer*. Ed. Darwin T. Turner. Washington, D.C.: Howard University Press, 1982. 243-326. Print.
---. "Outline of an Autobiography." In *The Wayward and the Seeking: A Collection of Writings by Jean Toomer*. Ed. Darwin T. Turner. Washington, D.C.: Howard University Press, 1982. 84-98. Print.
---. "Race Problems and Modern Society." In *Jean Toomer:Selected Essays and Literary Criticism*. Ed. Robert B. Jones. Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1996. 61-75. Print.
---. "The Americans." In *A Jean Toomer Reader: Selected Unpublished Writings*. Ed. Frederick L. Rusch. New York: Oxford University Press, 1993. 106-110. Print.
---. "The Blue Meridian." In *The Wayward and the Seeking: A Collection of Writings by Jean Toomer*. Ed. Darwin T. Turner. Washington, D.C.: Howard University Press, 1982. 214-236. Print.
---. The *Collected Poems of Jean Toomer*. Eds. Robert B. Jones and Margery Toomer Latimer. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988. Print.

Trilling, Diana. "Fiction in Review." In *The Critical Response to Eudora Welty's Fiction*. Ed. Laurie Champion. Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1994. Print.

Unrue, Darlene, H., ed. *Critical Essays on Katherine Anne Porter*. New York: G.K. Hall & Co, 1997. Print.
---. *Katherine Anne Porter: The Life of an Artist.* Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2005. Print.
---. *Truth and Vision in Katherine Anne Porter's Fiction*. Athens, Ga.: University of Georgia Press, 1985. Print.

Vanderwerken, David. *Faulkner's Literary Children: Patterns of Development*. New York: Peter Lang, 1997. Print.

Waid, Candace. *The Signifying Eye: Seeing Faulkner's Art*. Athens, Ga.: The University of Georgia Press, 2013. Print.

Walter, David Michael. "Strange Attractions: Sibling Love Triangles in Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom!* and Balzac's *La Fille aux yeux d'or*." *Comparative Literature Studies*. 44.4 (2007): 454-506. Project Muse. Web. 19 Jul. 2014.

Warren, Diane. *Djuna Barnes' Consuming Fictions*. Aldershot, England: Ashgate, 2008. Print.

Watson, Jay. *Reading for the Body: The Recalcitrant Materiality of Southern Fiction, 1893-1985*. Athens, Ga.: The University of Georgia Press, 2012. Print.

Weinstein, Philip. *Becoming Faulkner: The Art and Life of William Faulkner*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2010. Print.
---. *Unknowing: The Work of Modernist Fiction*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005. Print.

Weinstock, Jeffrey A. *Spectral America: Phantoms and the National Imagination*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press/Popular Press, 2004. Print.

Wells, Dean Faulkner. *The Ghosts of Rowan Oak: William Faulkner's Ghost Stories for Children*. Oxford, Miss.: Yoknapatawpha Press, 1980. Print.

Welty, Eudora. *Collected Stories*. San Diego: Harcourt Brace, 1982. Print.
---. *Complete Novels: The Robber Bridegroom; Delta Wedding; the Ponder Heart; Losing Battles; the Optimist's Daughter*. New York: Literary Classics of the United States, 1998. Print.
---. "Delta Cousins." 1943. TS. Mississippi Dept. of Archives and History, Jackson.
---. *Delta Wedding*. 1945. TS. Mississippi Dept. of Archives and History, Jackson.
---. *Delta Wedding*. 1946. San Diego: Harcourt Brace, 1976. Print.
---. *One Writer's Beginnings*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1995. Print.

Westling, Louise. *Sacred Groves and Ravaged Gardens: The Fiction of Eudora Welty, Carson McCullers, and Flannery O'Connor*. Athens, Ga.: The University of Georgia Press, 1985. Print.

Westman, Karin. "Beyond Periodization: Children's Literature, Genre, and Remediating Literary History." *Children's Literature Association Quarterly* 38.4 (Winter 2013): 464-469. Project Muse. Web. 28 Mar. 2014.
---. "Children's Literature and Modernism: The Space Between." *Children's Literature Association Quarterly* 32.4 (Winter 2007) 283-286. Project Muse. Web. 28 Mar. 2014.

Weston, Ruth D. *Gothic Traditions and Narrative Techniques in the Fiction of Eudora Welty*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1994. Print.

Whalan, Mark. *Race, Manhood, and Modernism in America: The Short Story Cycles of Sherwood Anderson and Jean Toomer.* Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2007. Print.
---. *The Letters of Jean Toomer, 1919-1924*. Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2006. Print.

Williams, Jennifer. “Jean Toomer’s *Cane* and the Erotics of Mourning.” *The Southern Literary Journal* 40.2 (Spring 2008): 87-101. JSTOR. Web. 12 Jul. 2014.

Williamson, Joel. *New People: Miscegenation and Mulattoes in the United States*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1995. Print.

Wimsatt, Mary Anne.“The Old Order Undermined: Daughters, Mothers, and Grandmothers in Katherine Anne Porter’s Miranda Tales.” In *Southern Mothers: Fact and Fictions in Southern Women’s Writing*. Eds. Nagueyalti Warren and Sally Woolf. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1999. 81-99. Print.

Wolfe, Jessica. *Bloomsbury, Modernism, and the Reinvention of Intimacy*. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 2011. Print.

Wolff, Sally. *A Dark Rose: Love in Eudora Welty’s Stories and Novels*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2015. Print.

---. “‘How Babies Could Come’ and ‘How They Could Die’: Eudora Welty’s Children of the Dark Cradle.” *Mississippi Quarterly* 56.2 (Spring 2003): 251-267. Print.

Yaeger, Patricia. *Dirt and Desire : Reconstructing Southern Women's Writing, 1930-1990*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000. Print.