

# UVM ScholarWorks

## The Past Isn't Dead: Faulkner's Postcolonialism

Item Type	thesis;article
Authors	Heeren, Travis Roy
Download date	2026-06-09 21:04:23
Link to Item	<a href="https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.14849/4526">https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.14849/4526</a>

THE PAST ISN'T DEAD:  
FAULKNER'S POSTCOLONIALISM

A Thesis Presented

by

Travis Roy Heeren

to

The Faculty of the Graduate College

of

The University of Vermont

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
for the Degree of Master of Arts  
Specializing in English Literature

May, 2016

Defense Date: April 4, 2016  
Thsis Examination Committee:

Lokangaka Losambe, Ph.D., Advisor  
John Waldron, Ph.D., Chairperson  
Valerie Rohy, Ph.D.  
Cynthia J. Forehand, Ph.D., Dean of the Graduate College

## **ABSTRACT**

While William Faulkner preceded the formalized movement of postcolonialism, he anticipated a great many of its tenets and wrote them in into the early works of his career. As the theoretical conversation within postcolonialism has expanded in recent years to include notions of the new empire and post-hybridity, this thesis explores the ways in which Faulkner's narrative elements of encounter, fissure, and cycle may allow us to consider the postcolonial narrative more expansively, and to read William Faulkner as a postcolonial author.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my appreciation to all the members of my thesis committee who have been instrumental in my completion of this project: to Loka, who teaches and lives the gravity and joy of literature, to Val whose kind encouragement gave direction to my academic pursuits, and to John who helped me to understand which direction is the correct one.

I would like to thank my family – love and support and all that.

I would also like to thank Matt and Sara ('C') for their friendship, and just Matt for his co-habiting.

## DEDICATION

*“Dead since 1865 and peopled with garrulous outraged baffled ghosts, listening, having to listen, to one of the ghosts which had refused to lie still even longer than most had, telling him about old ghost-times; and Quentin Compson who was still too young to deserve yet to be a ghost but nevertheless having to be one...”*

-William Faulkner

*“The definition of a hero: someone who may be betrayed with impunity.”*

-Jacques Lacan

*“Ya’ll have a good time out there. We try to keep this town nice and clean and tidy for ya.”*

-John Mango

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	ii
DEDICATION.....	iii
INTRODUCTION.....	1
CHAPTER 1: FAULKNER, CENTAURS, AND THE COLONIAL NARRATIVE.....	10
CHAPTER 2: HYBRIDITY BETWEEN THE TWO DEATHS.....	22
CHAPTER 3: POST-HYBRIDITY IN YOKNAPATAWPHA COUNTY: BEYOND NATIONALISM, BEYOND CYCLE.....	40
WORKS CITED.....	52

## INTRODUCTION

*“I give it to you not that you may remember time, but that you might forget it now and then for a moment and not spend all your breath trying to conquer it. Because no battle is ever won...They are not even fought. The field only reveals to man his own folly and despair, and victory is an illusion of philosophers and fools.”*

I find Faulkner’s words here from *The Sound and the Fury* striking in their ability to both stake out the parameters of this project, and to introduce the tools with which it is to be explored. Under the theoretical purview of postcolonialism, there are important battles being fought, and being fought in a manner in which winning is only manifest in the continuous fighting itself. For canonical literature, Edward Said’s application of the *contrapuntal* reading and its accession of the “simultaneous awareness” (Culture and Imperialism, 51) of cultures, peoples, and histories that are undermined or elided in the normative, hegemonic narrative of the colonizers foundationally changed the way we may read. Like the point of access into the unconscious, it is at the fissures, stumbles, and voids of this narrative that we find the subjugated and marginalized figure who is always already at center. With respect to this colonized or postcolonial figure, theorists who preceded Said’s formalized practice differentially constructed this figure’s identity as “hybrid” – they have an authority over a culturally, ethnically, or endemically distinctive history as well as the modern world that now greets them. To be considered “postcolonial” is, of course, not to imply a triumph over the imperialists of the past, for the same hegemonic order lies latent in all manner of contemporary institutions, and manners of discourse irrespective of achievements of national independence. As a pertinent example, theorist and playwright Ngugi wa Thiong’o famously called for the abolition of the English department for, “It was fiction that first gave us a theory of the colonial situation,” but given that this fiction being taught in African

schools was still the canonical work that carried the indelible attitudes of Europeans, Thiong'o follows Said to assert that, for literature, "It depends how we read it, and what baggage we bring to it" (Globelectics, 15, 60). Foundational and revolutionary as such corrective readings and identification of the power structures inherent therein may be, we now have a more globally interconnected world, a more pronounced divide of have's and have-not's, and more variegated, diasporic claimants to this hybridity<sup>1</sup> – and that's to say nothing about whether Faulkner and our relevant theorists believe we can or should "conquer" this past. Famously, of course, we cannot, for "it's not even past." We may, then, ask new questions: are the citizens of the postcolonial world *only* hybrid? When Sartre portended more than half a century ago that "The time is coming, I am convinced, when we<sup>2</sup> shall join the ranks of those who are making [history]" (Wretched of the Earth, lxii), do we believe that this has since come to pass – that the devalorization of discrepant colonial experiences<sup>3</sup> galvanizes a broader and more revolutionary community of postcolonial subjects more so than it allows a class of once-colonizers to conveniently appropriate a past of resistance and suffering?

To the first question, Said points out that a rather rigid conception of hybridity (Gaelic and Negritude movements serving as apt examples) tends to present similarly to out and out nationalism, which "was revealed to be...crucial, but only as a first step" (Culture and Imperialism, 224). This notion is quite directly pulling from Fanon, who first outlined not only

---

<sup>1</sup> We may look to Latin Americanist Alberto Morieras' chapter on "Hybridity and Double-Consciousness" here for a more expansive consideration of hybridities, for this notion is not limited to traditionally notions of race and discrete histories ; beyond racial and national notions discussed here, Morieras also considers gender, culture, border-consciousness (*The Exhaustion of Difference*, 265).

<sup>2</sup> I am speaking here of colonial Europeans.

<sup>3</sup> Said *qua* Gramsci (Culture and Imperialism, 31)

the insufficiency of an arrested hybrid identity for those seeking to overthrow colonial regimes, but the inherent danger of remaining there: “The people then realize that national independence brings to light multiple realities which in some cases are divergent and conflicting” and “if nationalism is not explained, enriched, and deepened, if it does not quickly turn into a social and political consciousness, into humanism, then it leads to a dead end” (Wretched of the Earth, 93, 144). In his critique of Negritude, playwright Wole Soyinka denounced such an overreliance upon a singular aspect of identity when stating, “A tiger does not proclaim his tigritude, he pounces,” and Fanon pleads for one’s nationalistic identity to be a mercurial and transitional one for if it becomes a permanent fixture: “people discover that the iniquitous phenomenon of exploitation can assume a black or Arab face” (94). Whether it is presenting as philosophical movement a or liberatory one, a postcolonial subject who conceives of their identity as a closed, monolithic hybridity renders themselves either inert or vulnerable.

Paul Gilroy, speaking from our contemporary perspective concurs that we are not to attempt to conquer the past<sup>4</sup>, and to avoid the reductive and potentially dangerous snares of imbuing postcolonial subjects with a fixed hybridity, that the collection of distinctive hybridities must be viewed with the conjunctive potential that they, indeed, possess. We must avoid the “error of imagining that postcolonial people are...without any substantive historical, political, or cultural *connections to the collective life of their fellow subjects* [emphasis mine]” (Postcolonial Melancholia, 90). Shown through his diversity of the phrases themselves– “irreducible value within sameness” or “...the slightly different” (67, 79) – Gilroy reinterprets Fanon’s critique of a

---

<sup>4</sup> Gilroy argues just the opposite, in fact: “I contend that frank exposure to the grim and brutal details of my country’s colonial past should be made useful” (Postcolonial Melancholia, 3).

people's claim to ownership over disparate, singular pasts in a contemporary setting through the notion of *conviviality*. In short, Gilroy does not simply contend that a postcolonial subject's identity can be anything less than an eternal return of "and...and..." but that this *conjunctive consciousness* inherently results from interaction with fellow subjects, actively or otherwise. In this conviviality, a contemporary space in which diffusion and multiculturalism are the new normal so much so that that "it introduces a measure of distance from the pivotal term 'identity,'" (Postcolonial Melancholia, xv) the leap Sartre considered for the euro-centric, once-imperialist class to "join the ranks" now, perhaps, seems a more modest one. If the sanctity of a singular identity can and must be challenged, is there not more value placed upon a *transmission* of culture, history, and cause than an *ownership* thereof? Without outpacing or undermining identity politics – a deserving inquiry rather out of scope here – we may respond to this question in the affirmative: mankind is moving ever closer to, in Sartre's words, an "infinite unity of...reciprocities" (Wretched of the Earth, lix).

We may speak, then, about what we are against – a rigid hybrid identity, "an internal homogeneity"<sup>5</sup>, a "multitude" being turned into a nationalistic "people"<sup>6</sup> – but, in Gilroy's words, "we cannot say what we are *for* with the same degree of clarity and conviction" (*Postcolonial Melancholia*, 54). Sartre's "unity of reciprocities" that comes to the fore in Gilroy's contemporary "conviviality" connotes a more inclusive, collectivist approach in seeking an equitable space, but in order to fully articulate how and why transmission must dethrone ownership, we need not re-tread what we are against, but what we are *up against*.

---

<sup>5</sup> (Empire, 103)

<sup>6</sup> (Empire, 103)

Inexactly located in Fanon's time when the last European colonies were either gaining independence or moving swiftly in that direction was a "magical moment" that theorists Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri define as the epiphanic time in history when "humanity appeared to be...united by a common desire for liberation and...seemed to catch a glimpse of the future when the modern mechanisms of domination would once and for all be destroyed" (Empire 42). Indeed, imperialism was letting out its last breath, and there was the contingent belief that the cyclical capitalist mode would soon be brought to its knees. This confidence was placed on the shoulders of the nascent, global community Hardt and Negri refer to as the "multitude" – a people with "an open set of relations, which is not homogenous or identical with itself and bears an indistinct, inclusive relation to those outside of it" (103). This multitude at this moment which resisted the safety of "identity and homogeneity internally while posing its difference from and excluding what remains outside of it" (103) brought revolution to colonial rule and to suppressed rights on an interconnected, international scale. While the multitude undoubtedly won the day, this sweeping success elicited a similar globally coordinated response from the bruised and bloodied imperialists. From what was, in the past, an epoch of European (and later, American) nations discretely colonizing peoples under their own respective flags, we now have a hegemonic order that has re-surfaced from somewhere even more deeply in the past: Empire. With Rome serving as the most recent example, Hardt and Negri argue that we now have a world order "that exhausts historical time suspends history, and summons the past and future under its own ethical order" (Empire, 11). Hardt and Negri contend that it was, perversely, the foundational efforts of

the multitude – relaxing their reliance upon their discrete and specific histories – that brought about a new form of rule that emulates this very triumph<sup>7</sup>.

For our purposes, the question of whether or not the deconstructionist notion that the multitude, itself, begot the new world order for it to fight is turtles all the way down; globalism is observable in a new and dominant way, and thusly, re-imagined paths towards resistance are required to confront this new Empire. In a manner similar to postcolonial subjects' early constructions of hybridity we discussed earlier, conscious strategies for protest and resistance took on the form of a *localization of struggles* or *place-based movements*; logically, the all-enveloping container of Empire with its increasingly homogenous economic and discursive forms of power ought to be susceptible to exposure where we find local outcroppings of difference. With Žižek's elucidating definition of ideology in mind – “that which seeks to obfuscate its own impossibility” (Supreme Object of Ideology, 56) – one can imagine how a collection of endemic movements, distinct from both Empire and from one another, could explosively lay bare the purposeful functioning of centralized global power. The authors of Empire warn that in practice, however, this stratagem does not only prove ineffective, but self-destructive. Hardt and Negri state that, “local identities are not autonomous or self-determining but actually feed into and support the development of the capitalist imperial machine” (45). Restated, Empire can function all the more ubiquitously when there is a perception that active forms of protest are flourishing. In fact, these local protests are “always already old, outdated,

---

<sup>7</sup> (Empire, 43)

anachronistic” because the Empire expects, and in a sense requires their presence: “Imperial power whispers the names of the struggles in order to charm them into passivity” (58-59).

Again, analogous to the path charted towards post-hybridity by the postcolonial subject, the multitude’s task to ably confront Empire must relinquish the desire to prioritize a local, myopic struggle (*ownership* of a fixed, hybrid identity) and instead, strive to communicate between localities across the breadth of Empire (*transmission* of identity). Conceptually, this requires a great deal of nuance, and it first requires an understanding that there is no longer an “outside” in which to work or from which to expect resistance or imposition. In the age of discrete imperialist power, Karl Marx imagined a mole that could burrow underground, bide its time, and resurface when and where class conflict arose and demanded its presence. Hardt and Negri expect that Marx’s old mole has finally died for “the depths of the modern world and its subterranean passageways have in postmodernity all become superficial” (57). Marx’s mole is conceived upon suppositions that local struggles are not only important in and of themselves, but that, during the in-between, there was an outside for a retreat, and an inside to serve as platform for emergence. “The affirmation of hybridities and the free play of differences across boundaries...is liberatory only where power poses hierarchy exclusively through essential identities, binary divisions, and stable oppositions” and without this stable hierarchy to look to and attack, “postmodernist politics of difference not only is ineffective against but can even coincide with and support the functions and practices of imperialist rule” (142).

Whether politically applied or built into the world of an individual work of literature, we must read for the exhibition of power with this understanding that there is nothing outside the “container” of Empire, but is there something outside of those who fill this container? Theorist

Jacques Ranciere is in accord with Hardt and Negri with respect to Empire and the multitude's mirrored ubiquity, but if the multitude is going to pose a serious threat to the former, Ranciere argues, we must be prepared to consider it in slightly different terms: if the multitude similarly lacks an outside, its real threat to Empire is its possession of, so to speak, an underside. Ranciere states that "The concept of the multitudes manifests a phobia of the negative, of any politics that defines itself as 'against'" (*Dissensus*, 86). Naturally, it is hard to conceive of a community bound together by shared constellations of identities and goals if internal discord is to be constitutive of itself as a community, but Ranciere argues that "in order [for the multitudes] not to constitute itself in reactive, oppositional terms, it holds that the principle and *telos* of politics has to be drawn from something *other than itself* [emphasis mine]" (86). In other words, it demands an outside – one that it does not have. Instead, Ranciere suggests that this notion of multitude include a void or a supplement, a contingency he defines as a "disensus" or "a part of no part" which may then adequately stand in opposition to Empire which, on its organizing principle, denies the existence of this supplement<sup>8</sup>. Ranciere contends that "there is always a point at which affirmativeness is...a refusal" and that "the multitudes can be conceived either as a process of political subjectivation, giving rise to the problem...or the very name for the power that invigorates the whole" (90). In order to imbue the multitude with this "gap" in constitution and goals, that which Empire and its hegemonic ideology constitutionally lack, there can be no hand-picking of who the multitudes are, what they seek to refuse, and *how* the communication of singularities transpires. A realistically conceived multitude indeed threatens Empire, but with

---

<sup>8</sup> I am here applying Ranciere's notion of "politics" and "police" to that of Hardt and Negri's "multitude" and "Empire" respectively (*Dissensus*, 36).

void and dissensus on its side, it must also be conceived as a threat to itself. While Ranciere puts forth this qualification to Hardt and Negri's consideration of multitude and the new Empire, we are still left to wonder if it goes far enough to fully capture the unrepresentable supplement necessary to differentiate multitude from Empire, and if such a constitutional dissensus offers a path by which resistance to hegemony may be put into action.

Within the postcolonial conversation, I argue that that we have reached a point where globalized forces of power, the movement of people, and the end of the imperialist era (among a number of myriad factors) have rendered us all postcolonial, post-hybrid. In following the shadow cast by a more expansive notion of postcolonialism, I will argue that William Faulkner's project is a powerful and relevant challenge to the contemporary hegemonic structure, and further, it is a postcolonial one. In the first chapter I discuss how Faulkner works within the Modernist genre to challenge the presentation of the normative colonial encounter. Next, in the second chapter, I compare how Faulkner's construction of hybrid identities in his characters is complicated and galvanized when read through the Lacanian notion of the second death. Finally, in the third chapter I speak to how Fanon's moment of national consciousness and Spivak's cycling subalternity is exhibited in Faulkner's narrative, and how his fiction is pivotally important for our time.

## CHAPTER 1: FAULKNER, CENTAURS, AND THE COLONIAL NARRATIVE

I now turn to William Faulkner who is at the center of this investigation. Broadly, I will wager that his project as an author anticipated this struggle for identity and resistance against the newly (re-)emerging Empire, and ultimately sought to articulate a response to our question implicitly posed by Paul Gilroy of, “what is it that we’re for?” Edward Said in his famously redemptive reading of Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*, felt that “Conrad [was] different from the other colonial writers who were his contemporaries” for, per our discussion, “neither Conrad nor Marlow gives us a full view of what is *outside* the world-conquering attitudes embodied by Kurtz” (Culture and Imperialism, 24, 25). When Said goes on to say that “[Conrad] allows us simultaneously to realize after all that imperialism, far from swallowing up its own history, was taking place in and was circumscribed by a larger history,” He is not offering an apologist reading for the inscribed racist images and attitudes rightfully decried by many postcolonial critics, nor is he building a case that Conrad has personally placed himself as an author at a sufficiently ironic distance so as to exonerate him from any wrongdoing – these types of readings, increasingly so, are reductive if not empty. Instead, Said argues that Conrad was not falling victim to an imperialist zeitgeist of Orientalizing and essentializing images of Africa and its people, but intentionally writing these aspects into his works in an attempt to elucidate how multi-tiered, how insidious, and how limitlessly present the forces of imperialist power really were. Chinua Achebe described a telling interaction speaking to this point: “A Conrad student informed me in Scotland that Africa is merely a setting for the disintegration of the mind of Mr. Kurtz. Which is partly the point. Africa as setting and backdrop which eliminates the African as

human factor” (“Image of Africa,” 1790). Achebe’s critique is incisive and correct – a contrapuntal reading that Said, himself, would later formalize. Following Said’s reading of Conrad within *Culture and Imperialism*, however, is there not yet another turn of the screw to be seen where the student’s Eurocentric understanding of the novel – one that pointedly refused to provide an outside to eurocentrism – is the fault of the student rather than the work? Isn’t *that* partly the point? Conrad, I would argue, anticipated this misreading into his own work; this “misreading” was that the European colonizers of his own epoch failed to observe the distinct and endemic histories imperialism consumed and ignored. To address this, Said suggested that Conrad forced readers to place “your self-consciousness as an outsider [which] can allow you actively to comprehend how the machine works” (25). The failure here, following Said’s assertion that Conrad’s treatment of the colonial encounter – which was different in kind because “he was so self-conscious about what he did” (23) – is located outside the work on the part of the student who failed to see the same problem with the “background” that Achebe astutely identified: that the colonial subjects placed in a narrative more ably serve as components of setting than they hold up as individual figures. In essence, cementing the need for this work to remain a centrally discussed work of “permanent literature”<sup>9</sup> in Achebe’s words need not be debated with a consideration of Conrad’s artistic contribution simply winning out over regrettable politics and representations, but because his work remains critically relevant a full century later in a world where readers still struggle to place themselves “outside the machine.”

I will begin by conducting a reading of a few of William Faulkner’s early sketches and published works – those that have not received a great deal of critical attention. The prevailing

---

<sup>9</sup> (“Image of Africa,” 1784)

critical opinion connected with most of William Faulkner's early short fiction is that they are largely unsuccessful or exploratory attempts by an author to find his voice and project. From a purely aesthetic point of view, this is certainly the case: Faulkner's prototypical style of prose and structure found in his celebrated works appears only in fits and starts, and Yoknapatawpha County has yet to be born. I contend, however, that Faulkner is not only building out his own aesthetics, but grappling with his location as a privileged figure in a postcolonial site. Building upon Said's endorsement of Conrad's angle in his work, I contend that Faulkner's early admiration and consciousness of Conrad's work lends to, indeed, a very definable early project of his own. In seeking out how and where points of resistance to hegemony can be built within his work, Faulkner, from the very beginning, is pulling from Conrad's critical exploration of the colonial narrative.

While only published for a wide readership in the later volume of the *Uncollected Stories*, Faulkner as a figure and writer was intimately tied to the New Orleans area, and focused on the Caribbean in the early part of his career. One story that is particularly helpful for this discussion is titled, "Once about the Lugger (I)" which was rejected for publication in *Scribner's Magazine* when Faulkner submitted it in 1928. The short story features a young protagonist aboard a rum-running boat out of prohibition-era New Orleans. The lugger's crew is comprised of four men with a young white male protagonist and a black cook being the two most important characters. As they approach the island from which they are to excavate and load a cache of rum onboard, we're introduced to a darkness and otherness quite distinct from the mainland, and rather reminiscent of a Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*: "At each invisible stroke...milky serpentine seethed alongside, mooned with bubbled fire, in the nothingness which bore

us...beneath the keel with whispering, caressing shocks as of soft and secret palms...wild-eyed and anonymous horned beasts glared at us from their forelegs" (*Uncollected Stories*, 354). Quite immediately, Faulkner invokes a number of Orientalizing concerns: we have the placement of an exoticism in the new land that is attributed to demonic imagery and imperceptible difference, a "nothingness" which exists before the white explorer arrives, and a secret that has yet to be unearthed. Once the crewmembers arrive on the island, however, this notion of the authorial "gaze" quickly becomes highly complicated if not challenged. After discovering the "wild eyed beasts" to be simply wild cattle – a very underwhelming secret, indeed – the white protagonist asks his fellow black crew member what they're doing on this small island to which this man responds, "I don't know, I don't know what anything want here...listening to that wind in them trees," (355). Here, the boy's projection of the secret knowledge onto the mysterious other in the black man is immediately proven wrong: this man is also flummoxed by the secret behind the presence of the cattle, and further, finds the island to be as equally haunting and forlorn as the boy. Following the same trajectory, the boy notices that his fellow crew member is not getting bitten by the mosquitos nearly as badly as he, and he asks why. The man responds that he has a medicinal charm, taken to signify some connection with voodoo practiced in nearby Haiti, and in more general terms, those of African lineage on the mainland. The boy again asks the wrong questions: "Nothing [can bother you] from the land, eh? How about the water?" The man responds, "They ain't no water charm...I don't know, Man got to die someday," (356). Again, the boy assumes the man has a secret knowledge that he lacks – and further – assumes that this man shares his general hope for a sort of immortality; not only does the man lack "the secret" the

all-world protection the boy thinks he should have, he is also revealed to have an entirely different perception and value system associated with his own mortality.

In this early piece, one that has its nuts and bolts gathered together in an even earlier sketch, “Yo ho and Two Bottles of Rum,”<sup>10</sup> is striking in its direct commentary on the colonial narrative’s need for what Gayatri Spivak terms the “native informant” which can be defined as a “European male author foreclosed the ‘native informant’ in order to establish the...European subject as ‘the same’” (*Critique of Postcolonial Reason*, 113). Beyond the obvious problems with this manifestation of power in narrative and, following Achebe, the more subtle insidiousness of this “native” being utilized as a narrative device more than he is being depicted as a human figure, we broadly have a Hegelian master and slave dialectic in this narrative where one cannot imagine a satisfying “encounter” with a new world without this “informant.” To address this, Spivak writes, “against all straws in the wind, one must write in the hope that it is not a done deal forever that it is possible to resist from within” (113). Following Conrad *qua* Said’s conscious attempt to demand that the reader place their consciousness “outside,”<sup>11</sup> Faulkner was already interested in challenging the colonial encounter narrative internally. Our “native informant” in the black cook invokes a non-European spiritual practice, reveals no existential difference and offers no calming or elucidating secrets of the exotic land while aligning his fears alongside the white protagonist instead. The narrative still functions, the reader is still forced to place his consciousness outside to gain an understanding of how the

---

<sup>10</sup> Later collected in a volume titled *The New Orleans Sketches* mostly written in the year 1925. This early piece was a more proper “colonial encounter” and a more obvious echo of Conrad’s “Falk: A Reminiscence” in dealing with themes of violence and cannibalism.

<sup>11</sup> Locally implicating Spivak, this “outside” isn’t to be considered properly outside when considering the deconstructionist notion of there being “nothing outside the text.”

imperialist machine is working, and most importantly, all the action progresses without this native informant properly playing his inscribed role.

While there isn't a great deal said about this piece within the critical conversation, Edmund Loris Volpe's relevant passage within *A Reader's Guide to William Faulkner: The Short Stories* lends the closest eye by evaluating Faulkner's aesthetic technique within the story where he suggests, "the tropical setting overstimulates Faulkner's poetic sensibilities" and that "the writing effectively evokes a dramatic encounter of the senses with nature, but to what purpose is not at all clear" (Volpe, 73). While Volpe quite correctly considered this piece an exploratory one that would later manifest itself in his second novel, *Mosquitoes*, I believe that Faulkner's aesthetic construction of the piece was hardly rudderless as Volpe suggests. Eduardo Glissant notes a general quality of Faulkner's oeuvre that speaks to our local concerns of native informant as setting: "The landscape is diffused into the text connected to the people who speak...The whole book is wilderness. This way of treating the subject ensures that the landscape truly becomes one – a landscape – a subject and a person rather than just an acquiescent door" (Faulkner, Mississippi, 157). Running counter to Achebe's critique of Conrad, Glissant suggests that Faulkner's technique of "not [describing] but [diffusing] the landscape" (156) allows place or landscape to become a figure in and of itself. Most importantly, this technique elevates the native informant or a colonized figure liable to be buried in the colonizing narrative's depiction of place to be, instead, reintroduced as full human figure. Within this same chapter, however, Glissant is puzzled as to why "Faulkner never devoted any decisive passages to a river" (153). Glissant credits Faulkner with this lack of "a single sequence longer than twenty lines that solely depicts the landscape and can be pulled from the whole like a

decoration” as resistance to the provision of an exoticized world for the reader to ease into like the colonizer would “in calm and placidity,” (156) but given the myriad ways in which the river serves as Faulkner’s world, as the universal one, as integral to the Creole community who must rise from setting to figure in their representation<sup>12</sup>, the river falls mysteriously into the background. Glissant offers a reading about why this could be the case as an open admission that he may have passed over an example; one such exception grows as a scion from “Once Aboard the Lugger” to be found in *Mosquitoes*:

Amid the rich overripe odors of the ends of the earth – coffee and resin and tow and fruit, he walked, surrounded by ghosts, passing on...The unseen river continued a ceaseless sounds against the hull, lulling it with a simulation of the sea, and about the piles of the wharf. The shore and the river curved away like the bodies of two dark sleepers embracing, curved one to another in slumber; and far away opposite the Point, banked lights flickered like a pile of yet living ashes in a wind.” (Mosquitoes, 45-46)

Here, we can find this river’s flowing outwards towards the universal, itself as a river is a “simulation of the sea,” a part of something even greater, but we also see the local and the singular: here in the imperialist port, the odors and products and their contingent ghosts are shipped in and out. In a work so chiefly concerned with an exploration of the development and role played by the young artist, we don’t find a Stephen Daedalus hashing out the “ineluctable modalities” in the building out of his own aesthetic, but a protagonist who stands before

---

<sup>12</sup> Faulkner, Mississippi (153-157)

Faulkner's rarely seen river seeing "dark sleepers" and feeling the "yet living ashes" of those unseen and unheard figures being carried past him on the wind. When the protagonist – a young figure rather modeled after Faulkner himself at that time in his life – allows visitors into his art studio, his sculpture and other works elicit but muted replies for the guests are most preoccupied with him, and perhaps that which he is conscious of, and privy to: "Her hand, as it if were a separate organism, reached out slowly, stroking the marble. 'Why are you so black?' she asked. 'Black?' 'Not your hair and beard. I like your red hair and beard. But you. You are black. I mean...' her voice fell and he suggested... 'I don't know what it is,' she stated quietly" (*Mosquitoes*, 22). Here, in New Orleans beside the Faulkner's Mississippi river, we have a setting that asserts its presence as a figure to such an extent that it bleeds into the protagonist himself – a striking and more nuanced challenge to the native informant's subservient role where, here, the white protagonist at narrative center is frequently enveloped by the figure-in-setting around him. What's more, the other white characters now look to the protagonist to fill the native informant's role, placing the burden of the alterity on the artist instead of that which he seeks to represent. Long before Faulkner's aesthetic fully matured, perhaps this consideration of *where* the artist ought to develop his aesthetics *from* was a necessary first step in his project.

Returning to *Mosquitos'* diminutive ancestor, I feel that Louis Volpe's broader dismissal of "Once Aboard a Lugger" may be further readdressed on the basis of his rather cursory investigation of Faulkner's direct references to one of Conrad's short stories. At the very end of "Once Aboard A Lugger (I)," Faulkner writes, "I thought of Conrad's centaur, the half man half tugboat, charging up and down the river in the same higheared myopic haste, purposeful but without destination, a dire and violent menace" (*Uncollected Stories*, 358). Volpe notes the

reference to Conrad's "Falk: A Reminiscence" but considers the reference to be functioning to do very little else: "A Coast Guard vessel is certainly relevant to a story about rum runners, but the relevance of Conrad's story or the centaur image mystifies, except perhaps that Faulkner was invading Conrad's fictional milieu to pay tribute to a novelist that he obviously admired" (Volpe, 74). I would argue that this reference serves as a great deal more than an homage to Conrad, and unintentional as it may have been, Volpe's choice of the word "invade" is key. Conrad's story focuses upon a pair of ship captains and their concern with the local tugboat operator, Falk, and his unpalatable practices. Considering Falk's depiction as a centaur – "half man half boat" – is an astute description considering the numerous binary positions Falk occupies within the story: taboos of vegetarianism and cannibalism, cyclical positions of power and subjugation, and most relevant for its placement in the short story, is the leveling factor economic necessity – one becomes half man, half manifest occupation. Faulkner, perhaps, shared this reading of Conrad's work where it is very much embodied in his reference: a colonial encounter that is constitutionally hybrid due to the emergence of an Empire that, in Faulkner's own time, resembles Conrad's with one major exception: it is centerless, wholly inescapable, and can be felt only more so through economic means. Conrad's protagonist laments that "Everything in this world, I reflected, even the command of a nice little barque, may be made in a delusion and a snare for the unwary spirit of pride in man" (Conrad, 9). With a centerless expanse of Empire, our rum runners about the lugger feel this "myopic haste" and no longer expect to find a "nothing" or a singular native in their encounters with alterity; they must expect to find centaurs, for that is how they are forced to see themselves.

If we may breathe new life into a number of Faulkner's early short fictions by reading within them an aesthetic exploration that inculcates a cognizance of the colonial, hegemonic narrative, we may also take step further and consider how Faulkner builds upon Conrad's exploration of the encounter. At the very end of *Soldier's Pay*, Faulkner's first full novel, we see two of the three central figures come upon a church service at night in rural Mississippi.

“They are holding services. Negros,” the rector explained. They walked on in the dust, passing neat and tidy houses, dark with slumber. An occasional group of Negros passed them bearing lighted lanterns that jetted vain little flames futilely into the moonlight. “No one knows why they do that,” the divine replied to Gilligan's question. “Perhaps it is to light their churches with.” The singing grew nearer and nearer...and from it welled the crooning submerged passion of the dark race. It was nothing, it was everything. (*Soldier's Pay*, 220-221)

Save perhaps for the main female character of Mrs. Powers – a “passing” figure who oscillates between black and white based upon the other characters' perceptions – Glissant quite correctly points out that this is the novel's only focused consideration of race<sup>13</sup>, and it arrives on the very last pages of the novel. While the novel's central figure is a white man, I would still read this novel in a manner that seriously deals with the paralysis experienced by marginalized figures, but even then there is little context for such a denouncement. Interestingly enough, Glissant recalls this scene with its reference to Creole culture and the Caribbean despite the fact that this novel – while bookended by other works expressly situated in a Caribbean milieu – takes place

---

<sup>13</sup> Donald Mahon's exchange with his former housekeeping staff is a notable exception (*Soldier's Pay*, 116).

in landlocked Mississippi, a case study for Yoknapatawpha County perhaps. Again, it is here where there is a place made either for black figures to announce themselves as equal and present, or to fill an “occupying” background role a la Conrad to demand the reader’s outside position. Caribbean scholar Elizabeth DeLoughrey drawing from Glissant’s notion that the “island embodies openness” extrapolates about how we may read Caribbean literature in a fundamentally different way: “This ‘openness’ reflects a tidalectic between route and roots” where drawing the relativistic distinction between the Caribbean figure’s conception of “home” and the Eurocentric vision of “trade routes,” but simultaneously complicates this dialectic with the truth of the matter that “Every species of tree, plant, and animal on an island has crossed the beach” (*Roots and Routes*,4;9). While this “encounter” is neither at sea nor an expressly postcolonial one, perhaps Glissant invokes this absent setting because it *feels* like it ought to be taking place there. The two white figures don’t claim to know the practices of the black community they’ve stumbled upon, but their not-knowing embodies an openness and a confidence that their practices are not fundamentally “other” from their own. Like landing upon a new island, they know they have not found inaccessible “natives,” but only other travelers.

While there was and still is an urgently needed practice of evaluating the gaze of canonical authors who deal with the discursive structures of the power, Faulkner seems to be something of a temporal aberration in his consciousness of this. Evident here in even his earliest works, he seems to have tapped into what Said later stated as a sort of treatise on postcolonialism’s goals: “To re-chart then occupy the place in imperial cultural forms reserved for subordination, to occupy it self-consciously, fighting for it on the very same territory once ruled by a consciousness that assumed the subordination of a designated inferior Other”

(Orientalism 210). Here, at the earliest stage of Faulkner's professional writing career, he sets the stage in a seemingly uncanny way for multiple derivative protagonists' gazes and discursive assumptions about the Caribbean, about Voodoo, about what the Other must know and have – and they are proven wrong piece by piece. There is no longer an outside or an entirely endemic problem as now all the rumrunners and pirates and tugboat captains are together, “floating in flux” (DeLoughrey, *Roots and Routes* 226) and seeing eye to eye as the centaurs they are.

## CHAPTER 2: HYBRIDITY BETWEEN THE TWO DEATHS

If we are convinced of Faulkner's attempts to challenge the normative colonial narrative and encounter, to anticipate imperialism's segue into what we may term the new empire, we may now ask how does Faulkner conceive of his characters' identities? Is he conscious of imbuing them with a kind of hybrid identity we see expressly applied in later postcolonial writers, and if so, what does this hybridity look like? Ralph Ellison writes, "The artist is no freer than the society in which he lives," (*Black Mask of Humanity*, 227) and Faulkner's society – the American South between the World Wars – constitutes conflictual and intersecting "third spaces" for a number of communities. As such, the starting place for one's "identity" – white, black, or Native American – requires an active and purposeful decision to portray characters more nuanced than a dialectical split between "colonizer" and "colonized" or "imperium" and "indigenous"; a monolithic construction of hybridity is rendered impossible in this space, and Conrad's oeuvre no longer ably serves as a model for Faulkner's American South.

For example, we may examine the communities of Yoknapatawpha County of *Absalom, Absalom!* where the narrative spans a full century, and – most notably for purposes of this discussion – its stance widely straddles the American Civil War. In this temporal expanse, we are shown the age in which a Thomas Sutpen could travel to the Caribbean in search of power and slaves, and, too, when a Quentin Compson can travel to Cambridge early in the twentieth century with confounding narratives and haunting questions of the past generations in tow. We are, over

this epoch, provided with four distinct groups with perspectives that can ably be considered marginalized or subaltern.

The first two are rather obvious in reading this work from a contemporary perspective: Haitians after the revolution for its independence, and freed slaves in the post-bellum American South. These two groups are both similarly situated following the end of their legal subjugation in slave-holding societies. However, for the analysis of this text, the Haitian-born characters can be differentiated on the following terms: they had won their freedom nearly 60 years earlier than did slaves in the American South as the Haitian revolution was completed in 1804<sup>14</sup>, and they are, more or less, *willingly* living in a diasporic context when arriving in Yoknapatawpha county. Additionally, the description of Haiti – and by extension, New Orleans and the diasporic community of Haitians populating the city – is left in something of a fog with the narrative confined to the Sutpen, to General Compson site of initial exchange. With a great many details forgotten or omitted in Sutpen’s re-telling, Said’s method of utilizing a contrapuntal reading in “examining not only how Haiti [and New Orleans] is represented, but also how it is not represented” (Stanchich 606) allows for rich interpretation in this instance. In either case, there is scantily an argument needed to designate these two communities as subaltern in either real time or in their representation within the novel.

Third, the women found in this narrative comprise an additional subaltern identity. Critic Maritza Stanchich correctly notes that the “‘legitimate’ white caretakers of history” – Rosa Coldfield being one of them – are the only ones given the opportunity to narrate and hypothesize

---

<sup>14</sup> Faulkner incorrectly dates revolution and independence in Haiti in this novel – to be discussed in Chapter 3.

(608). Rosa Coldfield is a woman who is, indeed, given the narrative agency to “speak” – something those with black ancestry are serially denied – but long before Quentin is summoned to her hot, suffocating office to listen to her story, there is little evidence to suggest that she has been “heard” for the better part of her existence. Her father tabbed her from the very beginning to be his caretaker following his refusal to go to war (a fate proving arguably more unfulfilling, even, than being married off). Sutpen conditionally proposes to her as a back-up plan following Ellen’s death and laments the fact that he could guarantee her better accommodations had she been a horse, and Mr. Compson (of a younger generation, even) concludes that women lead “lives not only divorced from, but irrevocably excommunicated from all reality” (Faulkner 156). Rosa is, in this sense, quite self-aware of her unfortunate position: “I was drafted by circumstance at too young an age into a pinch-penny housewifery which might have existed just as well upon a lighthouse rock” (Faulkner 125). This all-fronts onslaught comes from one of the novel’s central characters, a narrator, even; we can, therefore, comfortably say that the women, both white and black, are in no better shape. Spivak has worked to set the parameters on how the “muted subject of the subaltern woman” does and does not qualify as a “true” subaltern (Spivak 2121-22), but in this novel by and large, we see the female characters do little other than be selected for and rejected from designs of reputable progeny, care for family members when they are unable or unworthy to participate in the former task, and order expensive gravestones for the dead.

The fourth group, elucidated by critic Anna Hartnell, is the position held by whites in the South after the fall of the Confederacy. One of Edward Said’s distinguishing features of the “Other” – he who was made subaltern by past colonial domination – is stated thusly: “For the

native, the history of colonial servitude is inaugurated by the loss of locality to the outsider; its geographical identity must thereafter be searched for and somehow recovered” (Said 271). With this prerequisite in mind, however counterintuitive or, albeit, rather transitory in comparison to earlier mentioned instances, Hartnell astutely points out that “Thus in the face of defeat in the Civil War, the white Southerner could claim with a certain ‘literalness’ to embody this ‘native’ status, one that entailed painful exile from a locality lost to a Northern foe” (523). This status of subjugation is not to be compared with that of freed slaves in a manner of false equivalency, but if we can sympathetically approach Quentin’s struggles, especially considering his fate in *The Sound and The Fury*, then the white Southerner as subaltern can serve as a provocative frame of reference as well. In broad strokes, hybridity as construction of place, people and time is part and parcel of Faulkner’s world, but given the heterogeneity of alterity present, his project is forced to become a world unto itself.

Ellison, still speaking to the “freedom of the time,” continues on to say what is thusly demanded of Faulkner as a result: “Most of the relationships between the Negro [and other subjugated communities] and contemporary writing come into focus: the social and the personal, the moral and the technical, the nineteenth-century emphasis upon morality and the modern accent upon the personal myth...he has been more willing perhaps than any other artist to start with the stereotype, accept it as true, and then seek out the human truth which it hides” (277-278). We may find echoes of our earlier discussion on Conrad here where the construction of the unabashed stereotype is an intentional one so the reader may “view the machine,” but in Faulkner’s setting and milieu, we may have a machine so complex and multifaceted that the structural impetus to simply view it from the outside may yield little of its internal workings, or,

perhaps, view an incorrectly simplistic one. Faulkner begins by constructing his characters with the stereotype per the essentializing demands of his time, and it is through this statisticity, this paralysis, that he constructs his own brand of hybridity that *recognizes itself as paralyzing*, which, following Ellison, may yield a type of truth behind it.

To explore this notion, I will begin by returning once more to Faulkner's first novel, *Soldier's Pay* where we may evaluate how this paralysis presents itself, and what it is functioning to do. This novel follows a young couple who meet on a train and take it upon themselves to assist a blinded and badly injured soldier, Donald Mahon, to return home following the end of World War I. It is made clear from the very beginning of the novel that, despite the absence of any concrete description of Mahon's injury, he is imminently dying and there is nothing anyone can do for him save for bringing him home, and accepting Mahon's signified "burden" perhaps. He fades in and out of consciousness, and it is not until the middle of the novel that he musters dialogue of any consequence, but in this scene, immediately following a visit from his servant from before he left for the war, Mahon participates in this striking exchange:

"Joe." "Whatcher say, Loot [Mahon]?" "When am I going to get out?" "Out of what, loot?" But he was silent, and Gillian [Joe] and Mrs. Powers stared at each other tensely. At last he spoke again: "I've got to go home, Joe." He raised his hand, fumbling, striking his glasses as they fell from his face. Gilligan replaced them...but he had lost his thought: "Who was that talking, Joe?"... "Carry on, Joe." (118-119)

We may, of course, read this excerpt as the tragic moment when we bear witness to others' fleeting awareness of their own confusion, but given Mahon's functional role in this novel, the embodied burden known to be dying from the very outset, it seems that here Faulkner is exploring the power of a character's occupation of this moment more than he is mining associated pathos this position affords. Mahon was symbolically dead from the very beginning of the novel – his betrothed and his father along with the local townspeople have accepted this fact – but he has simply remained biologically alive beyond this social consensus. The reader is left to wonder what Mahon wants to get out of and, again, notions of “pain” and torment are the low hanging fruits. It seems no coincidence that it is his actual homecoming that prompts the second question wondering about when he will actually arrive, because, surely, his current state of affairs is quite unhomely indeed<sup>15</sup>. I would hesitate to place too much importance on a single scene were it endemic to solely this early novel, but Faulkner continually returns his characters to this existential moment, this state of being “in between deaths.”

In Jacques Lacan's reading of Sophocles' *Antigone*, Lacan focuses on the moment Antigone stubbornly (heroically?) chooses to defy Creon's objection to her brother Polynices' proper funeral. Antigone recognizes that her brother has warred against the state, a fact legally barring him from such a privilege, but she contends that her brother is her brother, and there is no edict that could possibly compel her to change her position regardless of the consequences Creon vows to bring about. To borrow a phrase from Lacan, “The race is run,” but for the purposes of *Antigone* as a play where inalterable and conflictual decisions are made, “it's over, or in other

---

<sup>15</sup> I am speaking here to Freud's consideration of the uncanny through his definitional readings “homely and unhomely” (heimlich, unheimlich) (*Interpretation of Dreams*, 132) as well as Hardt and Negri's “unhomely” as it pertains to diasporic figures feeling lost upon returning home (*Empire*, 145).

words, things are about to begin” (Seminar VII, 266). Lacan translates the Greek word *Ate* as “limit,” and with its close correspondence to “atrocious,” he reads it as “the limit human life can only briefly cross...beyond this *Ate* one can only spend a brief period of time and that’s where Antigone wants to go” (VII, 262-263). More specifically, Antigone’s defense of Polynices’ position (and her own, by association) is based upon her wish to be the guardian of her (criminal) brother irrespective of his past wrongdoings, for she “represents the radical limit that affirms the unique value of his being without reference to any content” (279). It is at this point where Antigone is “between the deaths” for she has chosen to end her life among the living symbolic order, renouncing “the gods from below” that determine the laws. After doing so, she has not yet died in the physical sense, but in the sense that annihilates the legal and symbolic safeguards against her desire. This moment brings about two different salient modes of being: firstly, “the emergent signifier freezes [Antigone’s societal/symbolic status] like a fixed object in spite of a flood of possible transformations” (279) as she comes to the “realization of something that might be called the pure and simple desire of death as such. She incarnates that desire” (282). Restated, it is at this point that Antigone may most closely “not give way on her desires” and how, with death having fully encroached on life, Freud’s conception of the death drive and her indifference to the symbolic existence<sup>16</sup>, Antigone is “unassailable” in her perseverance.

---

<sup>16</sup> For particular importance to this chapter, Freud’s notion of the death drive – that which he generally defines as a desire for “the restoration of an earlier state of things” (SE 18: 37) – should not be misread as a singular, suicidal bend in pursuit of primordial loss. Joan Copjec argues that, rather, “there is no single, complete drive, only partial drives, and thus no realizable to destruction” and that, encroaching on the notion of sublimation, “the death drive achieves its satisfaction by *not* achieving its aim...as part of the very *activity* of the drive itself” (Imagine There is no Woman, 30;34)

To further illustrate, Faulkner writes this “between the deaths” moment in a short story that predates *Soldier’s Pay*, another piece found in the *Uncollected Stories* volume entitled, “Miss Zilphia Gant.” In this story, a circular one woven around a seemingly clean and tidy reaction-formation, a female protagonist grows up cloistered away from the world by the hand of her mother, an older woman at the outset abandoned and disrespected by her husband. In her attempt to keep such a cruel world away from her young Zilphia, she catastrophically stunts her daughter’s development before the story ends in the same fashion at which it began: Zilphia raising an only daughter of her own in the same fashion. Of note for our purposes are two separate instances that occur over the course of this structural return. Due to an oversight from her Mother, Zilphia jumps at the opportunity to fall in love with a young, male painter, but her mother catches wind of the engagement and guards the house by sitting on the porch with a shotgun for three days straight. The painter, hiding in the bushes and waiting for his opportunity to collect Zilphia, eventually gives up and leaves town, unaware that at some point over the previous days “Mrs. Gant died, erect and fully dressed in the chair” (378). More than I read this obverse<sup>17</sup> of the “between the deaths” moment to be freshly imagined, I interpret its presence to announce Faulkner’s exploration of this space at this early point in his career, and to lend more credence to a like-interpretation to the denouncement of the story. Here, after Zilphia has discovered the painter’s eventual marriage to another woman through newspaper clippings and unforwarded letters, her station and identity become curiously intertwined with their lives:

Zilphia Gant and her husband [the painter] were quite like dolls, furious and tragic but quite dead...She knew when they quarreled and felt exultation; she knew

---

<sup>17</sup> Here, the physical death precedes the symbolic death.

when they were reconciled and felt raging and impotent despair. Sometimes at night she would become one of the two of them, entering their bodies in turn and crucified anew by her ubiquity. (379-380)

Gleaned from the interspersed exchanges between the faceless townspeople – ably serving as the chorus in this case – we once again have community consensus where Zilphia Gant is, indeed, “furious and tragic but quite dead.” Even while Zilphia was still very young, passersby would comment on how regrettably obvious it was that she was doomed to sheltered spinsterhood, and following her very public failure to fall in love and elope with the painter, her role amidst the symbolic order was all but annihilated entirely. In this space between deaths while Zilphia is entombed as an adult woman in her own sewing shop, she no longer waits for her lover or imagines herself as his wife, but becomes them, becomes ubiquitous in her freezing of the signifier, her giving no quarter to her desire. Much like Antigone, this has everything to do with love.

Joan Copjec distills Lacan’s reading of *Antigone* by contextualizing its break from past philosophical modes, and by defining psychoanalysis’ conception of love. To reimagine Antigone’s intransigent “my brother is my brother” stance, Copjec considers the work of artist Jasper Johns who features standard-issue hangers one would receive from the dry cleaners in a number of his important works. When asked why he liked the hangers enough to use in his work, Johns responded, “but that’s what I like about them, that they come that way” (*Imagine There’s No Woman*, 39). Love, for Antigone, “does not depend on any of [Polynices’] qualities” if we read in her stance Lacan’s notion that, “I love in you something more than you,” or in Copjec’s own words: “love is that which renders what the other is lovable” (43). Though much is left to

speculation, Zilphia ends up with the deceased painter's daughter to raise as her own, and whether or not we conceive of her as, thereby, being resurrected from her first (symbolic) death, we find her indestructibility<sup>18</sup> while still in this space to have lead for a demand for the impossible: love and a child because it comes that way. Between the deaths, she need not recognize her own role in the manifestation of this love. This moment of unmediated desire within the psychoanalytic sphere is an impossible one to reach without having first having suffered a symbolic death, and as such Ismene issues the requisite warning to Antigone: "It is better not to hunt the impossible at all" (41).

What does this have to do with hybridity? It would be a tempting notion to imagine how marginalized figures suffering from an even more pronounced variation of Zilphia's "raging and impotent despair" could make use of this moment of unassailability within a narrative to demand something of a repressive, subjugating community while remaining impervious (on a non-biological level) to its reprisals. Indeed, Faulkner makes use of the second death in more focused applications in his later works, but not for so direct a reason. Copjec offers this warning against such a convenient misreading: "Some readers of Lacan may be tempted to turn Antigone's stance into a demand for a certain type of community, one in which 'the otherness of the Other' would be respected, differences tolerated, a community of 'singularities' where by 'singularity' is meant that which cannot make itself public, that which is a retreat from publicity and thus inaccessible to others." (42) Lacan would not support this reading, however, for "the singularity of [the figure in question] is not in doubt...that Antigone does not give reasons for her love does not imply that her brother is unfathomable to her, but that she is...autonomous. She gives herself

---

<sup>18</sup> Freud (from seminar XII)

her own law and does not seek validation from any other authority” (42). Restated, “it is not on the otherness but on the non-existence of the Other on which Lacan’s interpretation turns” (42).

It is so for Faulkner’s conception of hybrid identity as well. Early and often Faulkner returns to explore this moment between the deaths if not because if he is skeptical of one community’s singularity to be wholly “fathomable” to another, perhaps he does so because the sheer number and complication of singularities of his own time and space renders them so. If we are convinced that at some level of his fiction Faulkner has accepted the responsibility of bringing the treatment and subjugation of different singular communities to the fore “because they are Black with their own singular history and culture...because they are Native American...because they are Creole...because they are women...because they are the defeated Confederacy” at a certain point is it not a more powerful humanism to simply state “because they come that way”? What Ellison finds so compelling about Faulkner’s legacy was not his attempt to explore the “unplummable otherness of the Other” (*Imagine There is No Woman*, 42) but that he is “willing...to start with the stereotype, accept it as true, and then seek out the human truth which it hides.”

Edouard Glissant brings our attention to a particularly impactful example of Faulkner’s explication of the second death in what is, all on its own, one of the most memorable scenes in all of Faulkner’s writing: when young Thomas Sutpen of *Absalom, Absalom!* is turned away from the front door. Whether or not we consider Sutpen’s first death to have been this moment of humiliation when he is asked to use the servant’s entrance or when he discovered the threat of his illegitimate, mixed race son, Glissant reads Sutpen at this *Ate*, this limit, from thereafter for “He is ready to whatever it takes to outlive his dream...an irreversible adventure in which two

lines of descendants are, Black and White, are already coming extinct” (*Faulkner, Mississippi*, 110-111). Here, Faulkner has placed a character between the deaths for the lion’s share of the work, and there, he explores a number of the ways in which, following Ellison once again, truth and resistance emerge from stereotype.

Thomas Sutpen began his life expressly without much of a past: “he didn’t know where his father had come from,” (*Absalom, Absalom!*, 181) his grandfather “did not know within a year on either side just how old he was” (184) and once his family had left his boyhood home in the mountains to stop at an arbitrary plantation, “He knew neither where he had come from nor where he was nor why” (184). All this put together paints young Thomas Sutpen as something of a *tabula rasa*, a figure without any firm connection to or understanding of the past, one who can be profoundly molded by his surroundings. As a consequence the word – one both recurrent and apt – that is found throughout Quentin’s interpretation of his grandfather’s interactions with Sutpen, then, is innocence. What’s interesting about the appropriation of this word as it applies to Sutpen’s life is its arc of applications and contingent modifiers. Quentin contends that, while Sutpen was still bound to the family cabin in the Virginia mountains, his primary “trouble was innocence” (178). The “trouble” here seems to compound: “he discovered...what he just had to do” and if he failed, he would have to endure “all the dead ones waiting and watching to see if he was going to do it right...so that he would be able to look in the face not only the old dead ones but all the living ones that would come after him when he would be one of the dead” (178). While Quentin is thinking about Sutpen’s design resulting from his pivotal interaction of being turned away from the front door, he certainly keys on an aspect of Sutpen’s innocence that could rightfully cause him some “trouble.” Sutpen feels the weight of expectation from his ancestors

of the past and his progeny of the future, only, he doesn't know who any of them are; the word "ones" is more befitting these figures than even the non-descript "ancestors" since all they are, really, is societal expectations of success incarnated in societal expectations of ancestry: "living ones and dead ones" demanding that he "do it right." Based upon the phrasing "come after him when he would be one of the dead," we aren't sure whether Sutpen fears that failure will haunt the future generations of his family, or that *they* will – quite literally – haunt *him* after his death.

In either case, before evaluating the societal situation in which he'd been placed and resultant design he crafted to escape it, Quentin notes that Sutpen "didn't even know he was innocent" (185). This is something of a given needed to avoid an oxymoronic sentiment as innocence cannot be a self-identified affliction, if an affliction at all. For Sutpen, though, it seems that it can be: Quentin suggests that until Sutpen realized "his impediment...was innocence...he would not be able to realize [his design] until he got it straight" (188). Getting it straight, for him, meant that his innocence was something "he just discovered that he had" (189). Beyond challenging traditional notions of innocence, this suggests something peculiar about Sutpen's course of development; placed beside a traditional bildungsroman journey from innocence to understanding, how are we to interpret the journey from innocence to understanding and then back an arrested state of innocence?

Perhaps this discovered innocence is a powerful state of being in which Sutpen must necessarily remain while he works through the component parts of his design. As an example, just prior to the slave uprising in Haiti, Sutpen finds a voodoo warning sign left in front of his door. Critic John Matthews contends that "Sutpen does not even see it as a sign" because for him, "to look is to overlook" (238). As stated in the text, Sutpen engaged in an act of "overseeing

what he oversaw and not knowing what he oversaw” (*Absalom, Absalom!*, 203). Sutpen even manages to harness this manner of overlooking to apply to himself: “Sutpen speaks Creole, as do all the planters in Haiti and Guadeloupe. This represents the very thing he wants to kill in himself” (*Faulkner, Mississippi*, 84). While living in Haiti, the acquisition of the Creole language becomes absolutely necessary to acquire money, slaves and who he thinks at the time to be his answer to legitimate procreation in Eulalia, but he overlooks this gained linguistic skill as it only places him with another subaltern group. Employing Said’s contrapuntal strategy, there is a substantiating quality to this reading when considering why Sutpen chose to omit this detail in re-telling the story to General Compson, even going so far as to avoid mentioning Eulalia’s name. Outside of the conflation with his role as an overseer on the plantation, this phrase, “to look is to overlook” seems to go hand in hand with Quentin’s phrase of “discovered innocence”; together, they suggest that Sutpen actively seeks to comprehend all that is absolutely necessary to gaining power and perceived legitimacy in society, and similarly chooses to overlook everything else.

Remaining on the topic of Sutpen in Haiti, there is an additional aspect of this marriage between character and place that could offer rationale for Sutpen doubling back on his “coming of age story”: Faulkner’s purposefully incorrect dating of the Haitian revolution. There is very little convincing critical suggestion, given Faulkner’s personal familiarity with the Caribbean that he included this anachronistic dating in error<sup>19</sup>, and so Sutpen’s confrontations with slave

---

<sup>19</sup> Haiti was fearfully seen as a symbol for slave revolt from the 1790’s on through its gained independence in 1804, and was heavily referenced in rhetoric surrounding the Civil War. Faulkner scholar Richard Godden is confident Faulkner would have been aware of this inconsistency (Godden “Faulkner’s Erroneous Dating...”) (Godden “Haiti and Labor...” 34-36).

rebellions in 1827, 23 years after Haiti had become an independent country in reality, raised some eyebrows and has spurred a number of critical interpretations of late<sup>20</sup>. An additional rationale for this erroneous dating that I'd like to offer, novel in form but likely in concert with other critical readings in function, is that we are to read Sutpen's brand of discovered innocence as something so indomitable that it can "overlook" the historical reality. From the manner in which Sutpen shares this part of his life with General Compson, a narrative punctuated by the pursuit of the French architect –another figure who historically ought not to be a slave – we are to understand that this part of Sutpen's life, like all the others before the war, was one where Sutpen's arrested state of innocence, once the root cause of his trouble in executing his design, can now be seen as his most powerful asset – one that can challenge the very historicity of his own existence.

Finally, there is an additional reason why Sutpen's journey towards discovered innocence is more correctly totalizing than, say "selective application of innocence." In order for Sutpen to carry out his design of escaping his marginalized role as "poor white trash" in favor of becoming a land-owning, slave-owning, patriarch, it would seem a foregone conclusion that this process could only operate with Sutpen's endorsement of the prevailing racial hierarchy and class distinctions. There's little to suggest that Sutpen takes issue with these societal norms per se; he's just unaccepting of his place in it. Still, when he eventually does become the plantation owner, complete with offspring and slaves, he doesn't quite get it right. To return once more to young Sutpen and his pre-discovered innocence, he supposedly shares with General Compson

---

<sup>20</sup> Outlined in Matthews' essay, such interpretations have been that Haiti, as an independent black republic because a feared signifier of racial amalgamation, a reminder of the U.S. occupation that was occur from 1915-1934, or that it signified the "colonialist gaze" unwilling to recognize the country's independence (Matthews 258).

some attitudes he holds which seem shockingly irreconcilable knowing the indomitable brutality that define his actions later in life. Sutpen describes the place of his upbringing as follows:

the land belonged to anybody and everybody and so the man that would go to the trouble and work to fence off a piece of it and say, 'This is mine,' was crazy; and as for objects, nobody had any more of them than you did...and only that crazy man would go to trouble to take or even want more than he could swap for powder and whiskey. (*Absalom, Absalom!*, 179)

Later, Sutpen's ideas on societal position are stated thusly: "He still thought that it was just a matter of where you were spawned and how; lucky and not lucky; and that the lucky ones could be even slower and lother than the unlucky" (183). With these two commentaries in mind, can we believe that a character so dismissive of rights to ownership, so non-materialistic, so *humanistic* to believe that power is but a matter of chance that he could indefatigably seek opulence and enslave other human beings unluckily born black?

Obviously the answer turns out to be yes, but not for an ethic that runs so diametrically counter to Sutpen's initially stated beliefs. Slavery, as presented in Sutpen's antebellum era is also presented in a way that challenges the once 'naturalized' racial hierarchy that reinforced the system in the United States. As well documented and highly problematic as it was, the "romantic primitivism" earlier discussed in Achebe's critical evaluation of Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* is the same quality identified by critic Sean Latham in *Absalom, Absalom!* only, here, he argues it to be doing something positive. Latham suggests that this primitivism "posits at least a potential equation between black and white identities" whereas "the hierarchical, ideology of

race...produces the black body as a signifier of fully objectified difference” (Latham “Jim Bond” 456). Sutpen’s multiple deviations from the this hierarchy – Sutpen’s capture of the white French Architect, his slaves being described as ‘wild’ and unable to speak English, his sparring with his slaves, and his frequently described ambiguously hybrid physical appearance collectively align with an earlier understanding of primitivism. Latham describes Sutpen’s racism as “an explicitly imperial one, in which ownership and identity devolve not from God or nature but from the violent and self-conscious exercise of a will-to-power” (456). Faulkner’s construction of Sutpen as one expressly as “primitive” as his slaves “[imagines] racial relationships...through the lenses of imperialism and primitivism that [pose] a distinct challenge to the American system of slavery” (Latham 460). Sutpen is not excused, but just the opposite: his evils and violence in pursuit of dominating land and people are bound out of an ideology more expressly imperialistic, entirely divorced from a culturally and religiously reinforced rationalization for slavery found in the American South. This is not just a challenge to the naturalized structures of slavery in the United States, but rather, it lays bare the imperialistic quest for domination.

Faulkner’s construction of his own brand of hybridity hinges upon his occupation of the space between deaths insofar as it humanizes and makes communicable the “other” by constructing the moment in which this Other ceases to exist. Broadly, we may consider his creation of Yoknapatawpha County a macrocosmic tool to accomplish the same ends. Glissant phrased this strategy as follows: “To maintain the county at a distance from the world, in order to signify the whole world” (*Faulkner, Mississippi*, 31). Given the impact this imagined space – a place suspended between the symbolic and the real – had on a great many of his followers, it

may be confidently stated that hybridity resistant to discrete singularities contains within it the dialectical impossibility which Empire cannot bear.

### CHAPTER 3:

## POST-HYBRIDITY IN YOKNAPATAWPHA COUNTY: BEYOND NATIONALISM, BEYOND CYCLE

*“Rupture, split, the stroke of the opening makes absence emerge – just as the cry does not stand out against a background of silence, but on the contrary makes the silence emerge as silence.”*  
(Seminar XI, 26).

Lacan is speaking here of the negative qualities and the gap that mercurially appears to grant access into the unconscious, though this line may also prove a practical guide to the postcolonial mood more broadly. Following our discussions in the preceding chapters, it may be said that Faulkner’s challenge brought to the colonial narrative and the static conceptions of hybridity grafted onto his cast of characters does not spell out the methodology by which hegemony may be challenged and curtailed, but rather allows the hegemony to emerge as hegemony. If Faulkner is to be more universally considered as a postcolonial author commensurate with the theoretical move towards a more expansive conception of post-hybridity and conjunctive consciousness – that which I hope to speak to here – we can likely consider that a mere pronouncement of the hegemony present in his time is too dated or insufficient in and of itself. While there may yet be a more fruitful historicist conversation to be had about the degree to which Faulkner anticipated power structures and corrective readings long before such a theoretical context existed, this discovery may yield more inert conversations about how William Faulkner was “ahead of his time” than it offers new insights per the consideration of power

structures in our contemporary world. I would argue, though, that the exploration need not end here, for beyond his conception of the space of the postcolonial encounter and the figures who occupy it, facets of Faulkner's technique extend beyond those of the high modernist cannon. Chronological fracture, reticence toward promulgation of a clean and tidy ethic, and a somber examination of what we were to contend with following the turn of the century are certainly formal qualities inextricable from Faulkner's oeuvre (and from modernism more generally) but has application of these modes (and others) may be, indeed, be read as intentional challenge to the hegemony of the new Empire, not merely a reaction to the older "weak echo of modern imperialism" (*Empire*, 146).

For context, it will prove helpful to begin with examining an out and out guide to colonial resistance in Frantz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth*. Among the many phases Fanon considers in the revolutionary process by which the colonized seek freedom and independence, he continually returns to one particular moment:

The task of the political commissioner is to nuance their position and make them aware that certain segments of the population have their own specific interests which do not always coincide with the national interest...At this exact moment in the struggle clarification is crucial as it leads the people to replace an overall undifferentiated nationalism with a social and economic consciousness. (*The Wretched of the Earth*, 93)

Fanon focuses on this precarious time in the life cycle of a revolution for, if the once unifying nationalism is not expanded, the systemic "primitive Manicheanism of the colonizer – Black

versus White, Arab versus Infidel” will immediately return to the newly independent state with the only change being the individual players involved. What’s more, there is a tremendous challenge in communicating this “nuanced” replacement of nationalism with a more humanist “social and economic consciousness” for Fanon contends that “there is a brutality and contempt for subtleties” and “if this pure, total brutality is not immediately contained it will, without fail, bring down the movement within a few weeks” (95). A great deal, then, must (not) occur at this one particular moment if a movement is to mature into a genuine resistance to power structures if it is to avoid merely relapsing into but a new incarnation of the same hegemonic order.

Like Faulkner’s conception of hybridity, Hardt and Negri read Fanon as follows: “The dialectical construction demonstrates that there is nothing essential about the identities in the struggle. The White and the Black...the colonizer and the colonized are all representations that function only in relation to each other” (*Empire*, 129). Here, we once again encounter a premium placed upon the transmission of identity rather than elucidating discrete singularities because, following Lacan, there is in this moment no Other at all. Hardt and Negri interpret Fanon’s prescription for revolution to be “grounded in a violent struggle that must be continually renewed,” but even when individual struggles prove unsuccessful, “the failed dialectic suggests the possibility of a proper dialectic that through negativity will move history forward” (129). The notion of a continually renewed struggle that succeeds in its response to its own local failures swings us back into the deconstructionist mode, and utilizing Gayatri Spivak’s notion of “cyclical subalternity” as a guide, we may return to *Absalom, Absalom!* once again to evaluate how this process is being carried out in Faulkner’s narrative.

Following our discussion about the diversely populated third space in *Absalom*, *Absalom!*, we may state that this is a work that contains four distinct groups – and perambulates with each one at narrative center – that can each be functionally deemed subaltern by their positioning in the novel. Spivak warns against an overreach in this respect, however, for “simply by being postcolonial or the member of an ethnic minority, [one] are not ‘subaltern.’ That word is reserved for the sheer heterogeneity of decolonized space” (Spivak 2125). What is required beyond meeting postcolonial criteria *prima facie*, is establishing a group’s connection to and its occupation of a decolonized space. If the preceding discussion is satisfactory in both identifying marginalized voices and pairing them to respective “third spaces” lost in time, we may begin with Gayatri Spivak’s comments on the goals of postcolonialism more broadly:

When a line of communication is established between a member of subaltern groups and the circuits of citizenship or institutionality, the subaltern has been inserted into the long road to hegemony. Unless we want to be romantic purists or primitivists about ‘preserving subalternity’ – a contradiction in terms – this is absolutely to be desired.” (Spivak 2125)

In essence, what is to be practicably hoped for is not a static moment in time reached when all groups are to be seen as equals in terms of power and position, but that previously subjugated peoples are constantly being pulled onto a path that eventuates in their opportunity to become a hegemonic power, themselves. With a finite number of peoples, cultures, and places in the world (however many there are that appear in this work) there is implicit in this statement the need for the colonizing powers of the past to be subjugated by new, rising hegemonies. The narrative of

*Absalom, Absalom!*, spanning a full century, actually allots a sufficient passage of time to render this transference of power observable.

This direct exchange – framed by the biblical theme of ‘the return’ that underscores this novel – is made prominent and visible through of the Exodus narrative. Originally, drawn from the Bible where Moses leads the Hebrews out of slavery in Egypt, this narrative is an oft-used touchstone in Judeo-Christian cultures. Anna Hartnell points out that “American patriots have mined the resources of this story to tell of their own nation’s birth in flight from imperial suppression” and this narrative permeates the popular formation of the American identity even today. While Hartnell also considers Exodus to be an important narrative to the African American consciousness, it is “hardly surprising that in most...renditions of the national story, America is not the promised land of the Exodus vision, but rather the site of Egyptian oppression” (Hartnell 522). Instead, it is Emancipation following the Civil War that serves as the example. Beyond this distinction, there is a further complicating factor in the coopting of this myth, and it again concerns the defeated – and thereby subaltern – Southern whites after the Civil War. Curiously, this historical moment allows for a sort of place-switching: recently freed slaves join the Union Army, and the previously oppressed are now the colonizers of their oppressors. The larger claim Hartnell makes here is that “the Exodus narrative is potentially cyclic as opposed to linear, suggesting that the acquisition of a form of mastery...is the consequence of a freedom from slavery” (523). The Exodus narrative, considered in these terms, is one that embodies an aspect implicit in Spivak’s prescription for the progress made in a post-colonial world: the process of subaltern groups rising to oppress their oppressors is not a linear

trajectory, but a cyclical one. In essence, progress looks like an endless loop of enfranchisement and disenfranchisement where everyone gets a turn.

The cyclical movement of power found in this novel is not limited to the Biblical overlay; it is also found in character, narrative development, and the text's relationship to historical events. Glissant contends that "Faulkner 'suspends his judgment'" within his works as "an emphatic statement about the 'decadence' of the South would have interrupted forever the itinerary of disclosure," that "Literature matters more than making testimonies or taking sides" (64). Perhaps the frequent and diversely applied aspects of cyclical movement within this novel allow Faulkner to carefully walk this line (this loop?) between maintaining the "pitiless impartiality" (Glissant 65) necessary in composing literature while simultaneously highlighting the injustices of the time and suggesting the changes that are soon to come. This cyclical movement as it pertains to character development is most clearly seen, in trajectories both upwards and downwards, in the novel's central figure.

Microcosmically, we may also consider our Thomas Sutpen's trajectory in this regard, for we are able to observe Sutpen's character in both contexts of social progression, and of stagnation and failure. Sutpen matures with an astute understanding of social world in which he lives, and he undeniably manages to rise through the ranks of white society despite his subjugated beginnings. Upon his return from the Civil War, however, he greets his return to subalternity and monumentally fails to progress as a result: his primitivistic domination over other human beings does him no good after slavery is abolished, his intolerance for miscegenation and vile treatment of women end his bid for lasting progeny, and he is eventually slain by his mirror image of years' past in Walsh Jones – a poor, white man of low social

standing. The cycle of hegemony has run its full course, and Thomas Sutpen, were he not killed, would be right back where he started.

In observing the cyclical paths of development in this novel, it feels worth returning to the four identified subaltern groups to evaluate the degree to which they've been afforded the opportunity as Spivak advocates, "to be inserted into the long road towards hegemony." To consider this novel an affirming one, a progressive one within a postcolonial context is not to require out and out equal treatment or even a clear explication of the text that encapsulates the wrongdoing of society, but what we do need to see is movement. Conversely, an ill-defined and static subaltern individual or group cannot "speak" and cannot progress because, by definition, the dominant power du jour does not even notice they're there.

For the black figures in this novel, Americans and diasporic Haitians alike, there is a lack of narrative agency, a confirmation of discursive stereotypes found in dialogue, and a plethora of primitivistic physical descriptions. However, as earlier noted in relation to Sutpen's character, Faulkner does some serious work to blur the black and white binary through the very use of primitivism: Sutpen is completely indistinguishable from his slaves in both his mud-caked appearance and his engagement in the hard labor of constructing the mansion, he invites physicality and is frequently victorious during the wrestling matches with his slaves, and he shares the description of his "coffee colored" complexion with Charles Bon's son and his daughter Clytie – both of whom are relatives, and more importantly, both are mixed race characters. Even the depiction of Charles Bon, the unspeaking subaltern figure incarnate "who has no identity independent of [the other characters'] projections" (Ladd 535) is able to win the hearts of both Henry and Judith before Henry is finally driven to "stop him." Arguably these

facets serve well to complicate and challenge the “race question” as it was contemporaneously being framed in the South, but Glissant contends that “Faulkner’s oeuvre will [only] be complete when it is revisited and made vital by African-Americans” because, as much as there are multiple progressive readings to be had, Glissant finds in the brutally racist exchanges between Faulkner’s characters “the kind of offhand remarks that leave you numb” (54, 66). Within *Absalom, Absalom!* specifically, is there the kind of evidence of cycle and movement for the black characters that warrants a serious re-visitation? Perhaps there are two.

Firstly, there is Clytie. Glissant notes that, a general feature of black servant characters in Faulkner’s work is that they have “neither power nor mastery over events,” and that “they are instinctively close to the fatalistic and confused reasoning that derive from the...burdensome past” (62). Once, twice, Clytie assumes this very role as she tries to stop Rosa Coldfield from going up the stairs, accepting the role of doomed perpetrator, not coerced victim: “whatever he done, me and Judith and him have paid it out” (Faulkner 296). Sitting silently in the darkness of Sutpen’s ruined mansion with her dying half-brother lying upstairs, Clytie seems resigned to have little power or mastery over anything at all, but then something happens: she burns the house down. She lay in wait, “watching...out of the upstairs window for three months” to set the house on fire when Rosa and the authorities approached, and, to boot, was dragged from the house “clawing and scratching and biting and the two men who held her” (299, 300). As Clytie can certainly be allowed to wear two hats at this moment, there is a heartening example of female agency to be found here as well. Like the sudden conflagration of the mansion, Clytie assumes an incredible amount of agency in an explosive flash. Glissant notes that Clytie serves as a resounding exception to his observed trend of black figures who “cannot contaminate

anyone or make any decisions for change”; after Clytie is pushed aside and the bottom of the stairs for the second time, she, and she alone brings forth an “apocalyptic destruction,” and “ordains the end of the story” (*Faulkner, Mississippi*, 63).

The events of the story, though, do not exactly end with the burning of the mansion; they end with Jim’s howling. Jim Bond, as a character himself, does not inspire progress in a manner similar to Clytie: he is a mentally handicapped figure that is terrorized by the flames of the burning house and runs howling into the forest. As a signifier, though, Jim Bond’s role is a significant one. In the closing conversation between Shreve and Quentin, Shreve bows out with an unsettling prognosis: “The Jim Bonds are going to conquer the western hemisphere. Of course it won’t be in our time and of course as they spread toward the poles they will bleach out again like the rabbits and the birds do...but it will still be Jim Bond; and so in a thousand years, I who regard you will also have sprung from the loins of African kings” (Faulkner 302). For the purposes of our discussion, the first oddity worthy of explication is Shreve’s deployment of evolutionary biology. While it’s tempting to equate Spivak’s “long road” with the requisite thousands of years needed for evolution to enact phenotypic change upon humans as it does upon the rabbits, I think Spivak would determine that road to be rather too long. To be sure, we’re supposed to assume Shreve delivers this passage ironically – tabbing the most evolutionarily limited character in the narrative as the descendant of African kings. Oddly enough, however, that while he balks at the notion that he, too, will someday fall asunder to the “fitness” of Africans, he is likely unaware that this derisive prophesy has already happened, that he is addressing Quentin as descendant of “African kings” right there as he speaks. From triumph to failure to triumph again in explicating this passage, we should recognize another odd aspect of

Shreve's truth-telling: that this prophesy turned past turned reality is the one that has allowed for the very racist subjugation that is at issue. There's something encouraging to be gleaned from the presence of yet another cyclical element of the narrative from a postcolonial perspective, but there's also something else going on here.

Returning to the subject of Shreve's passage on Jim Bond, critic Barbara Ladd suggests one final turn of the screw in relation to the interpretation of the novel's ending. Ladd states, "In *Absalom, Absalom!* unlike so much of the earlier literature, there is not even the illusion of a happy ending – no marriage, no dynasty, no legitimate offspring" (535). This occurs – so long as we adopt the most accepted reading that Henry kills Bon due to his intolerance for miscegenation – as a direct result of prevailing radical racist ideology. Ladd points out that this goal of preserving the purity of the race is successfully carried out, yet it fails to lay the "foundations for a sunny future" and instead causes "the segregationist dream [to be] subverted into its own nightmare. Instead of progress, redemption from the sins of the fathers, and transcendence of history, we are left with denegation, damnation, and submergence into history" (547). Jim Bond's tragic, directionless howling from the forest is the signifier of the curse, the sound that cannot be pursued, or coaxed into submission.

A dominant ideology functions best when substantiated by a number of rather intuitive prerequisites – it serves the major stakeholders' interests, for example – but it also requires the perception that it is both objective and static; Faulkner's narrative style could be better described as anything but. Far more challenging than a hermeneutic fracture in chronology, this work is comprised of multiple voices across three generations that are often speaking in second person narration with either false, dubious, or purposefully fictitious substantiation. Characters share

names, are conflated with identical physical descriptions, and repeat lines of others' dialogue. If this text's "dominant ideology" is bound up in the explication of major conflicts found in the narrative, it's impossible to say with complete certainty what that ideology would even be. The remarkable feature of this work as it applies to a theoretical resistance of imperialism is the continual narrative re-visitation of images, words, and previously conceived truths. The "man-horse-demon" (Faulkner 4) Quentin conjures before speaking to Rosa at the novel's outset is the very same specter of Sutpen, the same "galloping hooves...black stallion and the rider" (290) Quentin fears just before the novel's denouement. The greatest resistance to the imposition of an imperialistic consciousness is the unremitting practice of returning to the past to challenge, affirm, and contextualize its endemic truths. If the dominant ideology operated like Faulkner's narration, the Others, the subalterns, would not be so easily silenced when they're being continually re-introduced at narrative center.

Returning more specifically to the notion of Empire, we can see that Hardt and Negri are in accordance with the resistance through this cyclical movement affords for "the modern dialectic of inside and outside has been replaced by degrees and intensities, of hybridity and artificiality" – certainly something to be read a vote of confidence for Spivak's prescription for discrete subaltern communities' resistance and reintegration into something like the multitude – but they, too, offer a word of caution: "Other authors, however, seem to undervalue the difference of our situation and lead the analysis back to the categories of a cyclical understanding of historical evolution. What we are living in today, in their view, would merely be another phase in the regularly repeating cycles of the forms of economic development or forms of government" (*Empire*, 237). In essence, what is being elided in any practice combating

hegemony with circularity is the specific, contemporary state of affairs. Given Hardt and Negri's contention that Empire is born from multitude, it follows that Empire could imitate the circularity of one multitude or another if this resistance sufficiently matures. For Faulkner's fiction in particular, it seems necessary to consider Fanon's moment of national consciousness. For the life of Thomas Sutpen, "You couldn't call it a period because as he remembered it...it didn't have a definite beginning or a definite ending" (Faulkner 182). We aren't to see in Sutpen a man who inspires any hope for social progress, but we do see in him a life lived and remembered and spoken about in endless cycles, a circularity that inspires a kind of hope in mankind wherein the subjugated can rise, the powerful can fall, the evil can be cursed, and oppressed will always be visible, always be heard howling from a distance and waiting for their turn.

## WORKS CITED

- Copjec, Joan. *Imagine There is No Woman: Ethics and Sublimation*. Cambridge: MIT Press, 2002.
- Conrad, Joseph. *Falk: A Reminiscence*. South Australia: University of Adelaide Library, 2014. Web.
- DeLoughrey, Elizabeth M. *Routes and Roots: Navigating Caribbean and Pacific Island Literatures*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2007. Print.
- Fanon, Frantz. *The Wretched of the Earth*. New York: Grove Press, 2004 Print.
- Faulkner, William. *Absalom, Absalom!*. New York: Vintage International, 1990. Print.
- . *Absalom, Absalom!*. New York: Vintage International, 1990. Print.
- . *Mosquitoes*. New York: Boni & Liveright, 1927. Print.
- . *Soldier's Pay*. New York, Boni & Liveright, 1926. Print.
- . *The Sound and The Fury*. New York: Vintage International, 1990. Print.
- . *The Uncollected Stories*. New York: Vintage International, 1990. Print.
- . *Requiem for a Nun*. New York: Vintage International, 1990. Print.
- Gilroy, Paul. *Postcolonial Melancholia*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2005. Print.
- Glissant, Edouard. *Faulkner, Mississippi*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1996. Print.
- Godden, Richard. "Absalom, Absalom! and Faulkner's erroneous dating of the Haitian Revolution." *Mississippi Quarterly*, 47 (Summer 1994). 489-495. Web.
- . "Absalom, Absalom!; Haiti and labor history: reading unreadable revolutions." *ELH* 61.3 (1994), 685+. Web.
- Gramsci, Antonio and David Farkas (Translator). *An Antonio Gramsci Reader: Selected Writings: 1916-1935*. New York: Schocken Books, 1989. Print.
- Hardt, Michael and Antonio Negri, *Empire*. London; Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000. Print.
- Hartnell, Anna. "W.E.B. Du Bois, William Faulkner, and the Dialectic of Black and White: In Search of Exodus for a Postcolonial American South." *Callaloo*, 33 (Spring 2010). Web. 521-536.

- Lacan, Jacques. *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis, 1959-1960; the seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book VIII*. London; New York: Routledge, 2008. Print.
- . *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis; the seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XI*. London; New York: Routledge, 2008. Print.
- Ladd, Barbara. "The Direction of the Howling: Nationalism and the Color Line in *Absalom, Absalom!*." *American Literature*, 66 (September 1994). Web.
- Latham, Sean. "Jim Bond's America: Denaturalizing the Logic of Slavery in *Absalom, Absalom!*." *Mississippi Quarterly*, 51 (Summer 1998) 453-464. Web.
- . "An Impossible Resignation: William Faulkner's Post-Colonial Imagination." *A Companion to William Faulkner*. Ed. Richard C. Moreland. Malden, MA: Blackwell 2007. Print. Web.
- Matthews, John T. "Recalling the West Indies: From Yoknapatawpha to Haiti and Back." *American Literary History*, 16 (Summer, 2004). 238-262. Web.
- Morieras, Alberto. *The Exhaustion of Difference: The Politics of Latin American Cultural Studies*. Durham & London: Duke University Press, 2001. Print.
- Ranci re, Jacques and Steven Corcoran (Translator). *Dissensus: On Politics and Aesthetics*. New York: Continuum, 2010.
- Said, Edward W. *Culture and Imperialism*. New York: A.A. Knopf: Distributed by Random House, 1993.
- . *Orientalism*. New York: Vintage Books, 1979.
- Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Toward a History of the Vanishing Present*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999. Print.
- Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty & Donna Landry & Gerald McLean, eds. *The Spivak Reader: Selected Works of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak*. New York: Routledge, 1996. Print.
- Stanchich, Maritza. "The Hidden Caribbean 'Other' in William Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom!*: An Ideological Ancestry of U.S. Imperialism." *The Mississippi Quarterly*, 51 (Winter 1997-1998), 603-617. Web.
- Thiong'o, Ngugi wa. *Globalectics*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2012. Print.
- Volpe, Edmond L. *A Reader's Guide to William Faulkner: The Short Stories*. Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2004. Print.

Zizek, Slavoj. *Absolute Recoil: Towards a New Foundation of Dialectical Materialism*. London; New York: Verso, 2014. Print.